

(b) **Figures of thought**, which consist in some peculiarity of the thoughts, independently of any special mode of expression.

We shall treat: 1. Of *tropes*; 2. Of *figures of words*; 3. Of *figures of thought*.

156. It is well to remark, for the sake of avoiding confusion, that **the ancients** did not include tropes under the head of figures (*figura, σχήματα*), while we do, with moderns generally. Still, like the ancients (Quintilian, ix. 1), we consider tropes as neither figures of words nor figures of thought, but as a distinct kind of figures, subject to special laws, and therefore requiring special treatment.

CHAPTER I.

TROPES.

157. **Tropes may be thus defined:** "Figures in which words are turned or changed from their literal meaning"; or, "Words used in meanings not their own, with a peculiarly happy effect." Thus when Thomson writes:

"But yonder comes the powerful king of day,
Rejoicing in the East, . . ."

he uses "king of day" for "sun"; and no one can fail to notice the happy effect produced.

158. **The pleasure arising from the use of figures** is due to two principal causes:

1. **One cause is the play of our imagination.** For as children, by a wise dispensation of Providence, rejoice in running and jumping, and other bodily exercises conducive to their health and physical development, so all men find delight in the play of their fancy or imagination; the exercise of which faculty, if properly directed by reason, becomes a source of great mental development.

159. 2. **The second cause** of pleasure is the introduction into the composition of such **new images** as add special strength or beauty. Thus, in the example quoted, not only the sun is presented to our minds, but also the image of a powerful king. From the consideration of these two sources of pleasure we readily infer that the following rules must direct the use of tropes.

160. **Rule 1.**—The new images introduced must be really suited to add strength or beauty. Hence we should not

refer to low or mean objects, as they are offensive to good taste; but the images selected must be beautiful or dignified.

Burlesque compositions form an exception to this rule: their aim is to render undignified what in itself is noble or grand. Notice the contrast between these two descriptions of morning:

“The saffron morn, with early blushes spread,
Now rose refulgent from Tithonus' bed,
With new-born day to gladden mortal sight,
And gild the courts of heaven with sacred light.”

—*Pope's Homer.*

“The sun had long since in the lap
Of Thetis taken out his nap;
And, like a lobster boiled, the morn
From black to red began to turn.”

—*Butler's Hudibras.*

161. *Rule 2.*—Figures should not be drawn from **objects insufficiently known** to the reader, for they would thus present no distinct image to the imagination. This rule is violated by Dryden when he writes:

“From harmony to harmony
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,
The *diapason* closing full in man.”

162. *Rule 3.*—They should not be drawn from **objects too remotely connected** with the literal meaning; else there is no play, but a painful straining of the imagination. Some one has called ‘dewdrops’ “the tears of the day for the loss of the sun”; this is forced, far-fetched.

163. *Rule 4.*—Nor should the connection be **too close**, the analogy too great; else the play of the fancy is too insignificant. Thus a poet may be said to paint a scene to the eye, comparing his art to that of the painter; but it would not do to compare the art of the sculptor to that

of the painter, the two being too much alike; we should not say ‘a sculptor paints to the eye.’

164. *Rule 5.*—The figures should not be **trite**—that is, too familiar on account of frequent use; the imagination finds no more pleasure in these; they are like faded flowers. Such expressions as ‘the mantle of charity,’ ‘a storm of passion,’ ‘frantic rage,’ ‘a howling wilderness,’ etc., may be used as plain language, but not as ornaments.

165. *Rule 6.*—Tropes should not be so **crowded** together as to confuse the mind: Mr. James Russell Lowell is often regardless of this rule. His style is brilliant, but very different from what classic taste admires. He writes:

“It cannot be denied that in Wordsworth the very highest powers of the poetic mind were associated with a certain tendency to the diffuse and commonplace. It is in the understanding (always prosaic) that the great golden veins of his imagination are embedded. He wrote too much to write always well; for it is not a great Xerxes-army of words, but a compact Greek ten thousand, that march safely down to posterity. He set tasks to his divine faculty, which is much the same as trying to make Jove's eagle do the service of a clucking hen. Throughout ‘The Prelude’ and ‘The Excursion’ he seems striving to bind the wizard Imagination with the sand-ropes of dry disquisition, and to have forgotten the potent spell-word which would make the particles cohere. There is an arenaeous quality in the style which makes progress wearisome. Yet with what splendors as of mountain-sunsets are we rewarded! what golden rounds of verse do we not see stretching heavenward, with angels ascending and descending! what haunting harmonies hover around us, deep and eternal like the undying baritone of the sea! And if we are compelled to fare through sands and desert wildernesses, how often do we not hear airy shapes that syllable our names with a startling personal appeal to our highest consciousness and our noblest aspiration, such as we wait for in vain in any other poet!”

166. *Rule 7.*—Tropes must be **true to nature**. To express the thought that “wisdom is gathered from adversity rather than prosperity,” some one has written: “We

gather the honey of earthly wisdom not from flowers but from thorns." This would be correct if any kind of thorns yielded honey.

167. *Rule 8.*—Tropes should be **suited** to the nature of the composition. Many figures appropriate in poetry are inappropriate in prose; many admissible in oratory are excluded from didactic writings. They should not unduly elevate the subject, nor sink it below its proper dignity. Some persons display very bad taste by frequently violating this rule. They cannot tell a simple story or propose a plain argument without rambling through "earth and sky and ocean's wide abyss" for images and figures. Some one said of a bill presented in Parliament: "At length it floated through both houses on the tide of a great majority, and steered into the safe harbor of royal approbation."

168. It is a violation of this same rule to clothe serious thoughts in **figures taken from mythology** and other unrealities; this practice was well enough among the ancients, who believed in such follies.

169. That one object expressed may recall another object not expressed, **there must be some connection** between those two objects, some relation so obvious that as soon as one object is conceived the other is sure to be suggested to the mind. Consider the words—

"But yonder comes the powerful king of day,
Rejoicing in the East."

As the king is the most conspicuous, most majestic, and most powerful person in a kingdom, so the sun is the most conspicuous, most majestic, and most powerful body in the heavens. In this case the relation of 'king' with 'sun' is one of *resemblance*: the figure is called a *metaphor*. Thus there is in every trope some relation between what is ex-

pressed and what is really meant; and the figures receive different names from the different relations on which they are founded. **All tropes then agree** in this, that they *turn* (*τρέπω*, to turn) a word from its proper meaning, so that a term expressing one idea is put for another idea, owing to some relation existing between those two ideas; and **they differ in kind** from one another, according to the various *relations* that underlie them. We shall next consider the different kinds.

ARTICLE I. METAPHOR.

170. **A Metaphor** is a trope founded on the relation of *resemblance*. Thus Shakspeare calls a good name "the jewel of the soul"; the sun, "the beauteous eye of heaven." What a good name does for the soul resembles what a jewel does for the body: it adorns or honors it; here the resemblance is *between the two effects*. Again, as the eyes are the brightest and noblest portion of the human countenance, so the sun is the brightest and noblest object on the face of heaven; here the resemblance is *between the objects themselves*. In each instance the word expressing resemblance is omitted: every metaphor is thus an abridged comparison, in which the words, 'like,' 'as,' 'similar to,' etc., are omitted. Metaphors enable us to **condense** much beautiful thought into few words, as a jewel presents much beauty in a small compass: we may well call the metaphor a jewel of literature. No wonder, then, that Poetry loves to deck herself with such jewels. Prose is plainer in her attire; still she, too, loves to adorn herself with the more modest species of metaphors, and even, at times, with the more brilliant kinds, when the occasion invites her to walk forth in all her splendor.

171. A marked **effect of metaphors** is that they spread life and light over all creation. In particular;

1. They **clothe abstract conceptions** and invisible beings in sensible and striking forms: anger is said to 'burn,' remorse to 'gnaw the heart,' baseness to 'shrink from the light,' pride to 'swell,' and modesty to 'retire from notice'; good thoughts become the 'music of the soul,' chastity the 'pearl among the virtues,' the 'garb that angels wear'; etc.

172. 2. **Sensible objects exchange qualities**, putting on more striking or more pleasing forms: the earth is said 'to pour forth its treasures,' the ocean 'roars,' the cataract 'thunders'; a brave man is a 'lion,' a gentle one a 'lamb,' a pure and simple heart a 'dove.' Attila is 'the Scourge of God,' the Scipios are called by Virgil 'duo fulmina belli'—'two thunderbolts of war'; etc.

173. Besides the five rules above given for all tropes, the following rules apply to metaphors in particular:

Rule 1.—The **figurative and the plain meanings** must not be **inconsistently mixed**, as is done in these verses of Pope:

" Now from my fond embrace by tempest torn
Our other column of the state is borne,
Nor took a kind adieu, nor sought consent."

Telemachus is here figuratively called a 'column of the state,' and is said to have been borne off without 'taking leave' of his mother, Penelope: he is at once a 'column' and a 'man.' A late copy of a newspaper contained, printed in large capitals, "Three boys drowned in the Father of the Waters."

174. *Rule 2.*—**Two inconsistent tropes** should not be blended together, as is done by Shakspeare when he says, "To take up arms against a sea of trouble," meaning 'to resist adversity.' Aubrey de Vere says, of Alexander:

" He flung,
Nighing the shore, his spear, that shook for gladness,
Rooted in Asia's soil."

It is a very poetic conception that makes the spear by which Alexander took possession of Asia 'exult for gladness,' like a person; but a person is not 'rooted in the soil,' like a plant. But there is no objection to **different metaphors succeeding one another**, each presenting a separate image. Thus the martyr-poet Robert Southwell, S. J., describes the martyr-Queen of Scots as saying:

" Rue not my death, rejoice at my repose;
It was not death to me, but to my woe:
The bud was opened to let out the rose;
The chains unloosed to let the captive go."

The same poet writes:

" Not always fall of leaf, nor ever spring,
Not endless night, nor yet eternal day;
The saddest birds a season find to sing,
The roughest storm a calm may soon allay.
Thus, with succeeding turns, God tempereth all,
That man may hope to rise, yet fear to fall."

175. *Rule 3.*—When the metaphors are of more than usual length, they should **grow in beauty** and dignity as they proceed, not descend into lesser details. Young says beautifully:

" Walk thoughtful on the solemn, silent shore
Of that vast ocean it must sail so soon."

But he fails to keep up this elevation of thoughts when he adds:

" And put good works on board, and wait the wind
That shortly blows us into worlds unknown."

176. **Exercise 1.**—Point out the metaphors contained in the extracts from Goldsmith's "Deserted Village" quoted under Object-Lessons (Nos. 7 and 8), also in Southey's "Cataract of Lodore" (No. 15); and examine with care whether any of the rules just given are violated in any of those metaphors.

177. *Note.*—The rules for metaphors most frequently violated, and often the most difficult to apply, are the first and second—namely, those regarding the *mixing of literal and figurative* language, and the blending of *inconsistent metaphors*. The difficulty arises from the fact that it is often not clear whether the meaning given to a word should be considered as literal or figurative. All discourse abounds in words that are not taken in their original or primitive meaning. Even in common conversation we constantly borrow the names of sensible objects or qualities to denote what is insensible. Thus we speak of a ‘piercing judgment,’ ‘a clear head,’ ‘a soft or hard heart,’ ‘a rough or smooth behavior.’ In these expressions the adjectives ‘piercing,’ ‘clear,’ ‘soft,’ ‘hard,’ ‘rough,’ and ‘smooth’ primarily belong to sensible qualities; and the substantive ‘head’ stands for mind, ‘heart’ for moral affections. Still, we do not call such expressions *tropes*; for by constant use these meanings have become the literal meanings of the words. It may be laid down as a *rule* that a given meaning may be considered as literal if it is much used by good writers without any regard to the original meaning of the same word; for the practice of good writers is the rule of language. Still, the practice is not always easy to ascertain. There is a multitude of words that are in a state of transition between the figure and the letter. “Literal and figurative expressions,” says J. Q. Adams in his *Lectures on Rhetoric* (Lect. xxxii.), “are so blended together in the practice of speech that the boundaries between them are imperceptible: like the colors of the rainbow, of which the dullest eye can perceive the varieties, while the keenest cannot catch the precise point at which every separate tint is parted from its neighboring hue.” In such cases, and in many analogous difficulties, it is the task of a delicate and correct taste to discriminate.

Though it is impossible to lay down an exact rule by which literal can always be distinguished from figurative language, practically it is not so difficult in most instances to determine whether a given sentence is faulty or not. Take this sentence: “In this error we see a capital violation of the most obvious rules of policy and prudence.” ‘Error’ originally means a wandering—it regards the feet; ‘capital’ regards the head; ‘violation’ suggests violence; ‘obvious’ refers to a meeting of two persons; ‘rules’ are lines, etc. Here is a strange medley of images, if these words really suggested the things which they primarily signified; but they do not,

and this sentence of Junius is correct. But it is different with the following sentence of Dr. Johnson: “Barbarous or impure words and expressions may be branded with some note of infamy, as they are carefully to be eradicated, whenever they occur; and they occur too frequently even in the best writers.” To ‘eradicate,’ not only primarily in Latin, but also as used in its English form, means to pull up by the roots, and we cannot think of any object that can be ‘branded with infamy’ and is at the same time capable of being rooted up.

178. **Exercise 2.**—Let the pupil criticise the following figures:

“The colonies were not yet ripe to bid adieu to British connection.” “E’en wit’s a burden when it talks too long.” “There is not a single vein of human nature that is not sufficient to extinguish the seeds of pride.” “Up to the stars the sprawling mastiffs fly, and add new monsters to the frightened sky.” “No human happiness is so serene as not to contain some alloy.” “Hope, the balm of life, darts a ray of light through the thickest gloom.” “These are the first-fruits of my unfledged eloquence, of which thou hast often complained that it was buried in the shade.” “The wheels of the spiritual ocean have been exerting themselves with perpetual motion.” “Her cheeks were blooming with roses and health.” “Come, sealing night, and scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day.” “He is fairly launched upon the road of preferment.”

“And there, with eyes that goad me yet,
The ghost of my Ideal stands.”

ARTICLE II. ALLEGORY.

179. An **Allegory** (*ἀλληγορία*) is the treatment or description of one thing under the image of another. It is, therefore, an extended metaphor. When Moore addresses the poetry of Ireland as “Dear Harp of my country!” he uses a metaphor; when he continues to describe that poetry under the same image of a harp, he writes a beautiful allegory: