The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Arthur Quinn's *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase.*

We have been building up our understanding of arguments from the foundations, through the fundamental building blocks of structure and logic, and into the completed rhetorical edifice. In the previous lecture, we discussed how every successful argument needs to have the right balance of logos, ethos, and pathos. Now we are moving beyond the basics into virtuosity, looking at what writers can do *beyond* the basics to enhance their writing. So we will now examine figures of speech.

The Purpose of Figures of Speech

Analysis of figures does two things for us. First, it allows us to classify and explain the various effects that writers are able to create so that we can understand them ourselves and duplicate them when we want to. Second, figures of speech demonstrate ways that writers and speakers have already solved difficult rhetorical problems. It is useful to look at these successful solutions so that we can steal good ideas and use shortcuts that other people have found. You can, of course, use figures just for their own sake or to show that you know how to use figures. But more importantly, you use figures to get you somewhere you need to go, the same way you might use a particular technique that someone has already figured out in carpentry or cooking. Originality is important, but there is also accumulated wisdom for you to draw upon.

A figure of speech is really any kind of nonstandard usage, but that is a pretty broad definition. A simple form might be, "if you notice it, it is a figure of speech," which makes sense, but also suggests that there *is* such a thing as nonfigural speech, which some scholars of linguistics would deny—they believe that all speech is figurative or conventional once you dig down deep enough into it. I am not really sure who is existentially right, but for our purposes, it is enough to say that most people in a culture can tell you what is standard and what is unusual, and the unusual things are very often figures.

Schemes and Tropes

The major medieval text on figures is *de Schematibus et Tropis*, by the Venerable Bede, and traditionally, scholars of rhetoric have divided all figures into two types: schemes and tropes. A figure of speech is defined as a "scheme" when a writer uses words in a nonstandard order; it is a "trope" when a word is used in a nonstandard way, such as a pun or a metaphor.

Some Renaissance writers were able to classify nearly two hundred figures of speech, with about twice as many schemes as tropes. On that path madness lies, because if you end up with too many categories and Greek or Latin

names for them, you quickly reach "analysis paralysis" and end up arguing over trivial things and missing the point of how figures of speech help to make rhetoric more convincing.

Not all rhetoric textbooks would agree, and this is in fact my own theory (so you can "take it with a grain of salt," which is a rhetorical figure), but I believe that figures make speeches and writings more rhetorically effective because they make them more memorable, because they apply preestablished solutions to difficult problems, and because they access cultural authority. The link between memorability, figures of speech, and cultural authority is part of my own technical research, which is not officially on rhetoric but is in medieval studies. However, you can learn more about how ideas are transmitted and remembered and modified in my book *How Tradition Works*, particularly chapters 1, 2, and 3 for the theory and then chapter 5 for some application of rhetorical analysis. Much shorter, but on some of the same material, is my essay "Tolkien's Prose Style: Some Literary and Rhetorical Effects," which is published in volume one of the journal *Tolkien Studies*.

Schemes

Obviously, I could expand on the theory here, but I believe that it is more effective to analyze specific figures, both schemes and tropes, so that we can see how they might contribute to rhetorical effectiveness. We will begin here with schemes, and in the next lecture we will take up tropes. Remember that schemes are the use of nonstandard patterns of organization or word order; tropes focus on individual words or short phrases.

Anaphora. This is probably the most frequently used figure in contemporary political rhetoric.

Anaphora is the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive sentences. Probably the most famous example of anaphora is Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream* speech, in which he says:

> "And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.
>
> And so let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.
>
> Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.
>
> Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.
>
> Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.
>
> Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.
>
> But not only that:
>
> Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.
>
> Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.
>
> Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi.
>
> From every mountainside, let freedom ring."

Anaphora is effective for several reasons. First, what is easy to remember is what is rhetorically effective. Anaphora reduces the effort required to remember something (because you only have to remember the repeated phrase

once). Second, repetition makes things easier to remember. And finally, repetition, when done right, can be aesthetically pleasing because the hearer or reader gets the pleasure of repetition mixed with the pleasure of novelty in a nice proportion.

If we look at Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*, we note:

> "But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract."

Lincoln's use of anaphora (on *we cannot*) is different than King's in one sense: King is leading his reader to one particular goal, continually developing the idea of what "let freedom ring" means. Lincoln is performing a quick switch on his readers. He is saying that we cannot do certain things—which must have seemed strange to his hearers, since they were there for the purpose of consecrating a battlefield—but then, at the last instant, after the repetition has built up and after the audience is already expecting what comes next, he *shifts* and says "they have already done so." Very effective.

Epistrophe. Lincoln also uses the opposite of anaphora in the *Gettysburg Address.* Epistrophe is the repetition of words at the *end* of a sentence or clause.

Lincoln says:

> ". . . that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth."

The repetition of "people" at the end adds enormous emphasis to Lincoln's speech and works to further his rhetorical aims, which were to unify the Union after a great and bloody battle. Lincoln is asking, Who are "we"? We are the people, the people, the people. It is a profoundly democratic ending to the speech.

Anastrophe is the inversion of normal word order.

I used it when I wrote "on that path madness lies," and the reason I did so was to give more emphasis to the word "madness" (and to make an allusion to Shakespeare). A speaker or writer can use anastrophe to make a single word stand out. President Eisenhower said in his farewell speech:

> "Crises there will continue to be. In meeting them, whether foreign or domestic, great or small, there is a recurring temptation to feel that some spectacular and costly action could become the miraculous solution to all current difficulties."

Putting "crises" first emphasizes this word and also gives the passage a semi-biblical flavor: Crises will always be; they are like a natural phenomenon that will recur regardless of what we do. And just as they recur, we will continue to meet them.

Antithesis is the juxtaposition of two opposite or contrasting ideas.

Speakers use antithesis to communicate the idea that they are encompassing all possibilities. In his *I Have a Dream* speech, King uses antithesis at the end:

> "And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when *all* of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:
>
> *Free at last! Free at last!*
>
> *Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!*"

Since black and white, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics are usually considered opposites, King's usage in this case further develops his idea of *all* people. He is not just saying the word "all"; he is illustrating it.

Allusion. Lincoln and King are also masters of the use of allusion in their rhetoric (note that some authorities would classify allusion as a trope, but for our purposes it is a scheme).

Lincoln and King bring in subtle reference to other works without actually naming them, as King does with "let freedom ring" (which is a direct allusion to "My Country 'Tis of Thee"). Lincoln is a little more subtle, as his "of the people, by the people, for the people" refers obliquely to the Preamble to the Constitution. And, in one of those interesting circles of influence that so fascinate literature professors, King alludes to Lincoln's speech: "Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation." The allusion is done by the use of the old-fashioned, even biblically styled word "score." And the point of allusion, rather than simple reference, is that it enables a writer to bring in the authority of another work without having to stop and say "as X says" (blatant reference is usually the mark of an insecure speaker or writer). Allusion also allows the person making the allusion to use those words as his or her own while still adopting a previously discovered solution to a rhetorical problem (i.e., how do I convince people of this, whatever it is), and it is a kind of a wink to the audience, saying "you and I know what this is, so we're together on this one." Such an approach helps to reshape the audience into what the speaker or writer needs, which, as we discussed in lecture three, is a very useful technique for generating agreement.

Those are just a few schemes, mostly beginning with "A." There are obviously many, many more, which you can find in any handbook of rhetoric. The important point to note is that it is not necessary to memorize all of the Latin names for all of the schemes, but it is very useful to examine schemes and see how they work and how they might be adopted in various rhetorical contexts. Let me conclude with one last important scheme.

Polysyndeton is the repetition of conjunctions when normally a writer might try to vary them.

Thus:

> "Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds."

You probably know this as the motto of the United States Postal Service, but in fact it is an adaptation of some lines by the Greek historian Herodotus that were carved onto the General Post Office building in New York City. Polysyndeton is nearly as common as anaphora in political discourse, and you will often see it used to try to make an unappealing laundry list of topics seem a little more interesting. The flaw in polysyndeton is that it can cause a speaker to rush through a list without much understanding, and, mnemonically, lists arranged only by polysyndeton are not particularly effective. Polysyndeton *is* effective, however, in giving the impression of an exhaustive list: both in the Postal Service's pseudo motto and in any given State of the Union speech, the point of the figure is to attempt to show that nothing has been overlooked.

We have just scratched the surface of the use of schemes, but I think you now have enough analysis to see how they are useful in rhetoric. In the next lecture we will examine tropes, where individual words or phrases are used in unusual ways to gain attention, cause agreement, and ornament rhetoric.

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Questions

1. What are the two types of figures of speech?
2. Why is anaphora effective?

Suggested Reading

Quinn, Arthur. *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995.

Other Books of Interest

Drout, Michael D.C. *How Tradition Works: A Meme-Based Poetics of the Anglo-Saxon Tenth Century.* Tempe, AZ: Arizona Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 2006.

———. "Tolkien's Prose Style and Its Literary and Rhetorical Effects." *Tolkien Studies* 1 (2004): 139–63.

Lanham, Richard A. *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

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