

claim to be true about the world, and that they thereby relate the fictional narrative to the factual and moral world of actual experience. See John Hospers, "Implied Truths in Literature" (1960), reprinted in W. E. Kennick, ed., *Art and Philosophy* (rev. 1979).

A much-discussed topic, related to the question of an author's assertions and truth-claims in narrative fiction, concerns the part played by the **beliefs** of the reader. The problem raised is the extent to which a reader's own moral, religious, and social convictions, as they coincide with or diverge from those asserted or implied in a work, determine the interpretation, acceptability, and evaluation of that work by the reader. For the history and discussions of this problem in literary criticism, see William Joseph Rooney, *The Problem of "Poetry and Belief" in Contemporary Criticism* (1949); M. H. Abrams, editor and contributor, *Literature and Belief* (1957); Walter Benn Michaels, "Saving the Text: Reference and Belief," *Modern Language Notes* 93 (1978). Many discussions of the role of belief in fiction cite S. T. Coleridge's description of the reader's attitude as a "willing suspension of disbelief."

A review of theories concerning the relevance of the criterion of truth to fiction is Monroe C. Beardsley's *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (1958), pp. 409–19. For an analysis and critique of theories of emotive language see Max Black, "Questions about Emotive Meaning," in *Language and Philosophy* (1949), chapter 9. Gerald Graff defends the claim for propositional truth in poetry in *Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma* (1970), chapter 6. In the writings of Jacques Derrida and his followers in literary criticism, the *binary* opposition truth/falsity is one of the metaphysical presuppositions of Western thought that they put to question; see *deconstruction*. For a detailed treatment of the relationships of fictions to the real world, including a survey of the diverse views about this problem, see Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective* (1994).

#### figural interpretation: 162.

**figurative language:** Figurative language is a conspicuous departure from what competent users of a language apprehend as the standard meaning of words, or else the standard order of words, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect. Figures are sometimes described as primarily poetic, but they are integral to the functioning of language and indispensable to all modes of discourse.

Most modern classifications and analyses are based on the treatment of figurative language by Aristotle and later classical rhetoricians; the fullest and most influential treatment is in the Roman Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory* (first century AD), Books VIII and IX. Since that time, figurative language has often been divided into two classes: (1) **Figures of thought**, or **tropes** (meaning "turns," "conversions"), in which words or phrases are used in a way that effects a conspicuous change in what we take to be their standard meaning. The standard meaning, as opposed to its meaning in the figurative use, is called the **literal meaning**.

(2) **Figures of speech**, or "form", in which the meaning of the words, but distinction is not a sharp convenience of exposition, however, and the most common *rhetorical figures*. For the literal and the figurative, see

In a **simile**, a comparison indicated by the word "like": "love's like a red, red rose." "The Rime of the Ancient Icebergs are similar to emerald

And ice, r  
As green a

For highly elaborated types

In a **metaphor**, a word or thing is applied to a distinct person or thing. For example, if Burns utters, technically speaking, a complex instance from the poetic phoric terms to the eye as if

Eye, gazel  
Drinker of

For the distinction between

It should be noted that the metaphorical term and the literal term. I. A. Richards introduced the altered line from Burns, and the metaphorical term itself "drinker," and "drinker" in Spenser's poem, but only implied. "That reed was too frail to stand the verbal context of the term tenor, a human being, which tenor, "sorrows." Those aspects which, in a given context, of a metaphor. (See I. A. Richards)

All the metaphoric terms and parts of speech may also be found in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*

<sup>3</sup>Lines from "Not palaces, an era's crown, renewed 1962 by Stephen Spender. Reprinted

(2) **Figures of speech**, or “rhetorical figures,” or **schemes** (from the Greek word for “form”), in which the departure from standard usage is not primarily in the meaning of the words, but in the order or syntactical pattern of the words. This distinction is not a sharp one, nor do all critics agree on its application. For convenience of exposition, however, the most commonly identified tropes are treated here, and the most commonly identified figures of speech are collected in the article *rhetorical figures*. For recent opposition to the basic distinction between the literal and the figurative, see *metaphor, theories of*.

In a **simile**, a comparison between two distinctly different things is explicitly indicated by the word “like” or “as.” A simple example is Robert Burns, “O my love’s like a red, red rose.” The following simile from Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” also specifies the feature (“green”) in which icebergs are similar to emerald:

And ice, mast-high, came floating by,  
As green as emerald.

For highly elaborated types of simile, see *conceit* and *epic simile*.

In a **metaphor**, a word or expression that in literal usage denotes one kind of thing is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing, without asserting a comparison. For example, if Burns had said “O my love is a red, red rose” he would have uttered, technically speaking, a metaphor instead of a simile. Here is a more complex instance from the poet Stephen Spender, in which he applies several metaphoric terms to the eye as it scans a landscape:

Eye, gazelle, delicate wanderer,  
Drinker of horizon’s fluid line.<sup>3</sup>

For the distinction between metaphor and symbol, see *symbol*.

It should be noted that in these examples we can distinguish two elements, the metaphorical term and the subject to which it is applied. In a widely adopted usage, I. A. Richards introduced the name **tenor** for the subject (“my love” in the altered line from Burns, and “eye” in Spender’s lines), and the name **vehicle** for the metaphorical term itself (“rose” in Burns, and the three words “gazelle,” “wanderer,” and “drinker” in Spender). In an **implicit metaphor**, the tenor is not itself specified, but only implied. If one were to say, while discussing someone’s death, “That reed was too frail to survive the storm of its sorrows,” the situational and verbal context of the term “reed” indicates that it is the vehicle for an implicit tenor, a human being, while “storm” is the vehicle for an aspect of a specified tenor, “sorrows.” Those aspects, properties, or common associations of a vehicle which, in a given context, apply to a tenor are called by Richards the **grounds** of a metaphor. (See I. A. Richards, *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 1936, chapters 5–6.)

All the metaphoric terms, or vehicles, cited so far have been nouns, but other parts of speech may also be used metaphorically. The metaphoric use of a verb occurs in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, V. i. 54, “How sweet the moonlight

<sup>3</sup>Lines from “Not palaces, an era’s crown,” from *Collected Poems, 1928–1953*, by Stephen Spender. Copyright © 1934 and renewed 1962 by Stephen Spender. Reprinted by permission.

sleeps upon this bank"; and the metaphoric use of an adjective occurs in Andrew Marvell's "The Garden" (1681):

Annihilating all that's made  
To a *green* thought in a green shade.

A **mixed metaphor** conjoins two or more obviously diverse metaphoric vehicles. When used inadvertently, without sensitivity to the possible incongruity of the vehicles, the effect can be ludicrous: "Girding up his loins, the chairman plowed through the mountainous agenda." Densely figurative poets such as Shakespeare, however, often mix metaphors in a functional way. One example is Hamlet's expression of his troubled state of mind in his *soliloquy* (III. i. 59–60), "to take arms against a sea of troubles, / And by opposing end them"; another is the complex involvement of vehicle within vehicle, applied to the process of aging, in Shakespeare's Sonnet 65:

O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out  
Against the wrackful siege of battering days?

A **dead metaphor** is one which, like "the leg of a table" or "the heart of the matter," has been used so long and become so common that we have ceased to be aware of the discrepancy between vehicle and tenor. Many dead metaphors, however, are only moribund and can be brought back to life. Someone asked Groucho Marx, "Are you a man or a mouse?" He answered, "Throw me a piece of cheese and you'll find out." The recorded history of language indicates that a great many words that we now take to be literal were, in the distant past, metaphors.

Metaphors are essential to the functioning of language and have been the subject of copious analyses, and sharp disagreements, by rhetoricians, linguists, literary critics, and philosophers of language. For a discussion of diverse views, see the entry *metaphor, theories of*.

Some tropes, sometimes classified as species of metaphor, are more frequently and usefully given names of their own:

In **metonymy** (Greek for "a change of name") the literal term for one thing is applied to another with which it has become closely associated because of a recurrent relation in common experience. Thus "the crown" or "the scepter" can be used to stand for a king and "Hollywood" for the film industry; "Milton" can signify the writings of Milton ("I have read all of Milton"); and typical attire can signify the male and female sexes: "doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to petticoat" (Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, II. iv. 6). (For the influential distinction by the linguist Roman Jakobson between the metaphoric, or "vertical," and the metonymic, or "horizontal," dimension, in application to many aspects of the functioning of language, see under *linguistics in literary criticism*.)

In **synecdoche** (Greek for "taking together"), a part of something is used to signify the whole, or (more rarely) the whole is used to signify a part. We use the term "ten *hands*" for ten workers, or "a hundred *sails*" for ships and, in current slang, "wheels" to stand for an automobile. By a bold use of the figure, Milton describes the corrupt and greedy clergy in "Lycidas" as "blind *mouths*."