Rhetoric, Structuralism, and Figurative Discourse: Gérard Genette's Concept of Rhetoric
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Rhetoric, Structuralism, and Figurative Discourse: Gérard Genette's Concept of Rhetoric

Christopher Harlos

Within the various humanistic disciplines, the French intellectual community has been the source of one of the more noticable trends to surface in the past several years, with labels like "structuralism," "post-structuralism," and "deconstruction" finding themselves in a variety of contexts and conversations. One pivotal publication for this trend has been the French journal *Communications*, which has featured various articles and even entire issues devoted to rhetoric and its place in contemporary thought.[1] Two prominent French scholars in this community, Roland Barthes and Gérard Genette, are often identified as "rhetoricians," yet for many on this side of the Atlantic, what makes them so is somewhat left in question. Dudley Andrew writes in 1984, "Unfortunately American rhetoricians have in the main neglected or ignored the expanded notion of rhetoric developed by structuralists like Barthes, Todorov, and Genette."[2] Similarly, in his review of Genette's *Narrative Discourse,* Robert L. Scott shows some mild interest yet claims "what 'narratologists' are writing now will not suffice for our tasks, but they can show us some directions along which we might start work."[3]

Scott's use of the word "narratologists" and subsequent discussion in the review reminds us of the division that exists between Anglo-American rhetorical study with its traditional focus on oratory and argumentation, and this branch of Continental rhetorical research, which is largely literary. The focus of this essay, Genette's structuralist view of rhetoric, is clearly within the domain of literary rhetoric, and deals primarily with tropes and figures. Two of the articles appearing in *Figures,* his collected essays which present his view of rhetoric, are titled "Figures"[4] and "Rhétorique Restriente"[5] (translated as "Rhetoric Restrained"). In "Figures" Genette defines rhetoric as "a *system* of figures," articulating the structuralist position. In "Rhetoric Restrained,"

which I will deal with first in this article, Genette takes rhetoric in more traditional terms to be a "treatise on figures," and argues that the once vast figurative and tropological field has been gradually subsumed by the queen-trope, metaphor.

<div align="center">I</div>

Genette's argument for why rhetoric is or needs to be "restrained" is as follows: three publications between 1969 and 1970 on the French rhetorical scene contain in their title the notion of rhetoric being *generalized,* and are here mentioned not so much for their content but their *attitude.* They are (1) *Rhétorique généralé,*[6] from the Liège group in Brussels, which describes itself as a few scholars interested in a "recently despised" discipline that was "rediscovered by structural linguistics," presenting a work that is essentially a synthesis of Aristotle and Jakobson; (2) "Vers Une Theorie De La Figure Généralisée,"[7] by Michel Déguy, a modern "critique" of the most recent edition of Pierre Fontanier's *Commentaire raisonné des tropes* (1818), edited by Genette himself; and (3) "La Métaphor Généralisée,"[8] by Jacques Sojcher, a discussion of metaphor as *the* trope. The third is perhaps the most significant in terms of Genette's thesis, which is that from Aristotle's *Rhetoric,* which was more or less "general" in that the issue of figures plays only a small role, to these most recent publications, which are in fact anything but general, there has been a trend among French rhetoricians to "restrict" the rhetorical field, beginning with a theory of figures, then considering only metaphor and metonymy, and finally lifting metaphor to the position of *master* troupe. "Nowadays, we call rhetoric what was is fact a treatise on figures," Genette claims, declaring in the footnote that he includes himself in the reproach, and adds, "from Corax to our own day, the history of rhetoric has been that of a *generalized restriction.*"[9] Critics in America like Jonathan Culler are equally aware of this reduction:

> In the days when rhetoric was, as Aristotle called it, a "counterpart" of dialectic or logic, or when it encompassed, as in Cicero's account, invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery, then metaphor was one prominent stylistic device, one of the many categories defined by rhetorical theory. Today, however, it is scarely an exaggeration to say that metaphor is more respectable than rhetoric.[10]

By the end of the nineteenth century, irony was excluded, synec-doche was subsumed under metonymy, leaving it and metaphor as the "irreplaceable bookends of modern rhetoric." It would then only be a short time until the Russian Formalists and Jakobson would reinforce this "restriction" by including metaphor and metonymy within the linguistic lexicon. Genette claims that this latter move of the twentieth century had the result of privileging metaphor, which "tends increasingly to cover the whole of the analogical field."[11] What is particularly restrictive about this kind of thinking is that it removes some of the precision in the rhetorical enterprise as a system of classification. As a result, in one final restrictive move, " 'metaphor' was one of the rare terms to survive the shipwreck of rhetoric," and became in a sense the focus of French rhetoric for the past several decades. The "shipwreck of rhetoric" gives some indication of how Genette feels about the status of rhetoric. A few sentences later, the reader is provided with a glimpse of Genette's view of part of the poetic field in general: "It seems to me in fact that the profound desire of a whole modern poetics is to suppress the divisions and to establish the absolute, undivided *rule of metaphor*" (italics mine).

This statement, from *Figures III,* which appeared in 1972, did not go unnoticed. In 1975, Paul Ricoeur published a book with the English title *The Rule of Metaphor* (*La Métaphore Vive*). Though the similarity of the two translations seems coincidental (Genette's original word for "rule" is *régne*), the dialectic be-tween Ricoeur and Genette is explicit. In the second chapter, titled "The decline of rhetoric: tropology, "whichs bears the epi-graph, *For Gérard Genette,* Ricoeur responds to Genette's com-plaint, clarifying the position concerning the desire of a "whole modern poetics."

> As I see it, the reduction of the domain of rhetoric is not the decisive factor. This is not to deny that an extremely significant cultural phenomenon is involved, and that we are warned thereby against overrating metaphor. But even this warning cannot be put to good use, unless one lays bare a deeper root that the neo-rhetoricians might not be prepared to recognize. The problem is not to restore the original domain of rhetoric—in any case, this may be beyond doing, for ineluctable cultural reasons—rather, it is to understand in a new way the very workings of tropes, and, based on this, eventually to restate in new terms the question of the aim and purpose of rhetoric.[12]

II

Though Ricoeur's call to understand the "very workings of tropes," and "to restate in new terms the question of the aim and purpose of rhetoric" appeared in 1975, Genette had already approached this restatement by 1966 in *Figures I*. In his essay entitled "Figures" Genette provides the following statement, which introduces the third and perhaps most significant of these perspectives on rhetoric he held: "rhetoric is a *system* of figures." Like most definitions of rhetoric this statement takes one only a short step toward understanding the concept. In this case, "a *system* of figures" would likely provoke four corollary questions: (1) What exactly is a figure? (2) Is it to be understood as including what are often called "tropes"? (3) How does a *system* of figures operate? (4) What does the italicization of the word "system" signify?

Figures vs. Tropes

In her introduction to Genette's *Figures of Literary Discourse,* editor Marie-Rose Logan directs the reader to Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* for an explanation of the term "figure," citing Book IX, 1.5: "a figure . . . as is clear from the name itself, is the term employed when we give our language a conformation other than the obvious and ordinary."[13] Quintilian, however, provides another definition of "figure" a few pages later: "We shall take a figure then to mean a form of expression to which a new aspect is given by art."[14] The first definition is provided in Quintilian's trope figure distinction and in its entirety reads:

> The name of *trope* is applied to the transference of expressions from their natural and principal significance to another, with a view to the embellishment of style, or as the majority of grammarians define it, the transference of words and phrases from the place which is strictly theirs to another to which they do not properly belong. A *figure* on the other hand, as is clear from the name itself, is the term employed when we give our language a conformation other than the obvious and ordinary.[15]

"Figure," like its equivalents *schema* in Greek and *conformatio* in Quintilian's Latin, implies that the language has a certain "form" that is somehow remarkable, although the actual mean-

ing of the word or phrase does not change. For example, a simple rhymed couplet ending with "house" and "mouse" would share the same figure (homoteleuton), though the sense of each word would be unaffected. Quintilian is aware of a problem in understanding the difference between tropes and figures when he writes, "the resemblance between the two is so close that it is not easy to distinguish between them" (IX.1.3). It is the notion of "form" that distinguishes figures from tropes, to which Quintilian also gives a second definition: "By a trope is meant the artistic alteration of a word or phrase from its proper meaning to another" (VIII.6.1). Among the common tropes listed by Quintilian, and then later to be called the "Four Master Tropes" by Kenneth Burke, are: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony.[16] Quintilian treats irony among figures, but considers some irony a trope (IX.1.7, IX.2.44). Quintilian's discussion of figures is somewhat more complicated than that of tropes in that they are divided into two categories, figures of thought (IX. 1), and figures of words (IX.2). Examples of figures of thought include illustration, amplification, and comparison, and examples of figures of words include things like emphasis or antithesis. All of this precision, however, is rather discounted by Quintilian's desire to avoid fussy distinctions when he states, "For just as men remain the same, even though they adopt a new name, so these artifices will produce exactly the same effect, whether they are styled *tropes* or *figures,* since their value lies not in their names, but in their effect."[17]

Genette uses the term figure as the general label for both tropes and figures. In "Figures" for example, he writes: "The most obvious classification is based on forms affected: figures of words regarded from the point of view of their signification, or *tropes;* figures of words regarded from the point of view of their form, or figures of diction. . . ."[18]

Later in the same essay he asks: "why does the figure signify more than the literal expression?" (which by implication would contradict Quintilian's definition), but then answers the question by giving the "sail" for "ship" example, which is a synecdoche and therefore a trope. In terms of the distinctions put forth by Quintilian, Genette's concerns are clearly tropological. There is no mention of figures like onomatopoeia or alliteration which have "form" but take on no extraordinary significance. For Ge-

nette, the term "figure" ultimately is concerned only with changes in meaning and connotation and is thus central to his concept of rhetoric: "The spirit of rhetoric is entirely contained in this awareness of a possible hiatus between real language (that of a poet) and virtual language (that which would have been used by 'simple expression'), which must only be reestablished by thought in order to delimit a space of a figure."[19]

This concept of the "hiatus" between two language systems seems crucial to Genette's definition of rhetoric because it creates the possibility for two types of figures. On the one hand, the "space" of the figure contains a word or phrase that *means* something else. For a famous example, in Eliot's "Prufrock" the reader is offered a synecdoche-metaphor combination: "I should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floor of silent seas." Here we find a trope, and one which might carry a rhetorical translation such as, "I should have been more aggressive," or "I should have been less rational," or even more simply, "I should have been *different*."

On the other hand, Genette also admits the possibility of what he calls the *zero-degree* figure which is "a sign defined by the absence of sign." This type of figure, because it functions within a larger system, "saturated with figures," gets its meaning by being a deliberate deviation from the system of connotation. Genette borrows the term "zero-degree" from Roland Barthes, who used it to describe the writing typical of the post-war existential movement, where language is used in its most minimal or economical form.[20] In essence, this style rejects the use of figures by virtue of the fact that it refuses to participate in a system of connotative language so ingrained that it often goes unnoticed. A zero-degree figure, therefore, is one that has no connotation, and gains its significance because it is so conspicuous in a piece of writing or a mode of discourse where the reader *expects* connotation. An example of a zero-degree figure appears in "Prufrock" when the speaker asks, "Do I dare eat a peach?" which has proven to be a troublesome line for many literature classes, and thus steps away from the mode of figuration seen in the previous example of the claws, to a more modern "rejection" of rhetoric. This rejection stems from a common over-familiarity with figurative discourse and serves to *defamiliarize* the reader and restore to language its possibility for connotation. As a result, the zero-

degree figure becomes in a sense a *reversal* of figurative language because in a system where everything means something other than itself, the absence of this "other" meaning is conspicuous.

Structuralism and System

With this sense of what a figure is, one can now look at what Genette has in mind in regard to its *system,* and the particular significance of its italicization of that word. It is here that Genette fuses the old task of literary rhetorics, the collection and explanation of figures, with the comparatively new task of understanding language systems, which is the domain of semiotics and structuralism.

> Thus rhetoric concerns itself very little with the originality or novelty of figures, which are qualities of individual speech (*parole*) and which, as such, do not concern it. What does concern rhetoric is the clarity and universality of the poetic signs; its task is to rediscover at the secondary level of this system—literature—the transparency and rigor that already characterizes the first — language (*langue*).[21]

Within this short passage we are made aware of at least three systems. One consists of the system of figures, the "poetic signs" operating in the larger system of literature which in turn is part of an even larger system of language. At one point in "The Obverse of Signs" Genette identifies literature as the "language of connotation *par excellence.*" Later, he claims that "rhetorical form is a *surface,* delimited by the two lines of the present signifier and absent signifier" and in so doing, he describes rhetoric in the taxonomy of semiotics and structuralism. Genette assumes a degree of familiarity on the part of his reader with semiotic terms like "sign," "signifier," "*langue,*" "*parole,*" and the general language of structuralism. On a basic level, *parole* is the individual meaning unit of a semiotic system, where *langue* is the system taken in its entirety with particular concern for the rules that make meaning possible. Thus rhetoric, in Genette's view, is the study of the system by which figures of speech are given signification. Although Genette connects "structuralism and literary criticism" in the essay by the same name in *Figures I,* and criticism and rhetoric in "L'envers de signes" in the same volume, the
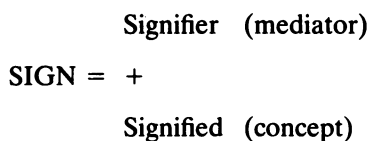
relationship between structuralism and rhetoric is left implied. It may be useful to attempt to bridge the two more fully in order to understand exactly how a "system of figures" might operate.

Both structuralism and semiotics find their foundations in linguistics, semiotics being the study of signs stemming largely from Ferdinand de Saussure's 1916 *Course in General Linguistics,* and structuralism being the study of verbal and non-verbal systems with Claude Lévi-Strauss's 1945 article, "Structural Analysis in Linguistics and Anthropology," as the seminal work. For practical purposes, structuralism, identified with a particular school of French scholars interested in language systems, is only one aspect of the semiological enterprise which concerns itself with diverse systems, both verbal and non-verbal, ranging from highway markers, to clothing, to music. The structuralists point out, though, that the important sign-systems necessarily involve language, particularly myth and common narratives. Structural anthropologists were at first interested in the myths and narratives of "uncivilized" cultures; however, it eventually became evident that literature as we know it also carries "systems" analogous to those of primitive cultures and thus would be fertile ground for study.

Though in this sense one might consider semiotics the genus and structuralism the species, and historically argue the latter as dependent on the former, this differentiation remains only superficial and does not account for the mutual dependency of the two perspectives. Jonathan Culler writes in *Structuralist Poetics* that "one might try to distinguish semiology and structuralism — but in fact the two are inseparable, for in studying signs one must investigate the system of relations that enables meaning to be produced and, reciprocally, one can only determine what are the pertinent relations among items by considering them as signs."[22]

From a logical standpoint, if the business of structuralism is the investigation of sign-systems, and rhetoric is a system of figures, then one might rightly assume that figures are in some way signs themselves. The question that emerges at this point, then, is *how* does a rhetorical figure become a sign?

For Saussure, a sign is a complex whole made up of the signifier, which for our purposes could be any figure (e.g., a pair of ragged claws either in words or as a picture), and the signified, or the thing that we think of when we hear or read "a pair of ragged claws."

$$\text{SIGN} = \begin{array}{l} \text{Signifier} \quad \text{(mediator)} \\ + \\ \text{Signified} \quad \text{(concept)} \end{array}$$
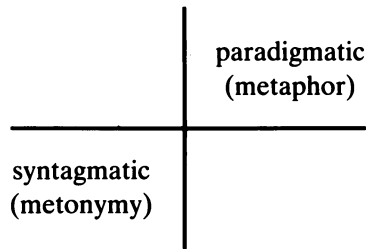
An important notion in this process is that there is no mention of the real thing, that is, the pair of ragged claws as such, because the relationship between the object and the sign is purely arbitrary. This is why the system of signs is uneffected by translations from one language to another. The diagram above, however, is describing language on only a denotative level; the process becomes more complex when one moves into a language of connotation, like rhetorical figures, because the "ragged claws" really stand for something else, despite the fact that their foundation rests in the primary denotative system. Genette gives the classic example of the signifier "sail" which is often a synecdoche for the signified "ship," and claims that the very presence of the figure itself signifies "a poetic state of discourse," or a language of connotation. This secondary level of signification is rhetoric. At this point, one might tentatively expand the definition of rhetoric from a "*system* of figures," to "a secondary system of signification in which figures are the signifiers."

To clarify, we are confronted with two signifying systems which are composed of signs, signifiers, and signifieds. The first, which might be called the primary system, functions on a denotative level with a purely arbitrary relation between signifier and signified. Of greater concern for the moment is the second *system* (thus the italics), which functions on a connotative level, where the relation between signifier and signified is *not* arbitrary. For example, the relation "a big white piece of cloth that when filled with air propels sea vessels" and "sail" is arbitrary. By contrast, the substitution of "sail" for "ship" is not at all arbitrary, because the sail is perhaps the most salient feature of a ship at a distance. As a result the second system, though dependent upon the first for its material, operates on a level quite distinct. To explain this non-arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified, it is necessary to introduce the next person influential in the formulation of structuralist poetics, the linguist Roman Jakobson,[23] from whom Genette draws the substance of his theoretical model.

Jakobson is particularly important in connecting structuralism to rhetoric because in his studies concerning language acquisition

and aphasiacs he perceived that language disorders could be di-
vided into a bi-polar system corresponding to two basic tropes:
metaphor and metonymy. Disorders involving word selection are
represented on a vertical axis and referred to as being *paradig-
matic*. Disorders involving combination or syntax are placed on a
horizontal axis and are thus *syntagmatic*. In *Fundamentals of
Language*, Jakobson emphasizes the importance of the meta-
phoric and metonymic poles as the "two aspects of language,"
stating "the dichotomy here discussed appears to be of primal
significance and consequence for all verbal behavior and for hu-
man behavior in general."[24]

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                              |
                              |    paradigmatic
                              |     (metaphor)
        _____|_____
                              |
          syntagmatic         |
          (metonymy)          |
                              |
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For example, if one wanted to make a paradigmatic selection
for the word ship, one could say "car of the water," or "floating
fortress," and make the metaphoric substitution by transportative
function in one case, and by military function in the other. Like-
wise, in our standard example of "sail" for ship, the selection is
associative, though one might have equally chosen for the meto-
nymy, "mast," "galley," or even "head." There is in the formu-
lation of a figure, a certain reliance on "the treasury of subjects
and forms that constitute the common wealth of tradition and
culture," nonetheless, the creative worth of the poet as *maker* is
often measured by his or her ability to compose the original
figure, and, to quote Ezra Pound, "make it new." To bring this
discussion of Genette's definition of rhetoric as a "*system* of fig-
ures" to a close, one is left with the conclusion that rhetoric is a
semiotic system distinct from other semiotic systems because of
the non-arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified in
the creation of the sign. In this *system,* rhetorical figures have a
dual purpose; (1) *as signifiers* they refer to a *second,* connoted
signified, and (2) *as signs* they communicate the presence of "a
poetic state of discourse," which implies at least the potential for
deviation from denotative meaning.
    If one can accept this explanation of Genette's definition of

rhetoric, an explanation trying to show as much fairness as possible to the theorist, further investigation into his entire concept of rhetoric is now appropriate.

"Meaning at the Heart of the Structural Method"

The first issue one might raise concerns the role of meaning in Genette's explanation of tropes. In "Structuralism and Literary Criticism" Genette comments on Jakobson's use of tropes: "Tropes, as we know, are figures of signification, and in adopting metaphor and metonymy as poles in his typology of language and literature, Jakobson not only pays homage to ancient rhetoric: he places the categories of meaning at the heart of the structural method."[25]

What is particularly interesting about this statement is not Jakobson's homage to ancient rhetoric, which seems reasonable enough, but the second statement, about "placing the categories of meaning at the heart of the structural method," which raises some questions. First, how can one be sure that that was what Jakobson had in mind? If "the categories of meaning" are the metaphoric and metonymic poles, one might argue that Jakobson was only describing an *idea,* using the two tropes as a metaphoric figure or device, so to speak, to clarify perceived phenomena in human interaction. A similar example can be found in Hayden White's *Metahistory,* which uses the notion of tropes as the vehicle to uncover certain presuppositions in the writing of nineteenth-century European history. On the other hand, if one accepts Genette's claim that Jakobson did in fact "place meaning at the heart of the structural method," how did he do it? The poet's choice of metaphor certainly colors the intent of the figure and is thereby rhetorical; if the speaker in "Prufrock" had rather been a pair of ragged trousers, the meaning would certainly change. Conversely, though, the same cannot be said for metonymy. Substitutions on the syntagmatic axis seem somehow less severe; when news reports comment on the President's activities it makes little difference in meaning if it was the "White House" or the "Oval Office" that metonymically (or even synecdochically) "made the statement." Jakobson himself was aware of this disparity between metaphor and metonymy: "Consequently, when constructing a metalanguage to interpret tropes, the researcher possesses more homogeneous means to handle metaphor, whereas metonymy, based on a different prin-

ciple, easily defies interpretation. Therefore nothing comparable
to the rich literature on metaphor can be cited for the theory of
metonymy."[26]

If there are two kinds of meaning, that of *langue* and *parole,* it
seems that Jakobson, while trying to understand the system of
langue, was looking to *parole,* particularly in terms of the some-
times vast difference between metaphor and metonymy. By con-
trast, Genette, true to his structuralist orientation, focuses on
langue, under the presupposition that metonymy and metaphor
are equal in kind. The question to be asked is, "Does the paradigm-
atic axis of metaphor possess greater rhetorical potential than
does the syntagmatic axis of metonymy?"

Before addressing that question, however, it would be useful
first to consider how meaning might function "at the heart of the
structural method." The problem with this statement is as much
in its accuracy as in its implication. Genette, in "The Obverse of
Signs," cites Roland Barthes' position on the function of a critical
semiology that "has the effect not of bringing out the 'meaning'
of a work," but of "reconstituting the rules and constraints gov-
erning the elaboration of this meaning, in other words its tech-
nique of signification." Likewise other theorists, like Jonathan
Culler, claim that structuralism "does not discover what a se-
quence means or produce a new interpretation of it but tries to
determine the nature of the system underlying the event."[27] Both
Barthes and Culler seem to be saying that meaning in terms of
parole seems less important to the structuralist method than does
the system of *langue* as the system that makes meaning possible.
It seems, though, that Jakobson had the "*interpretation*" of
tropes in mind as part of his overall linguistic system, so it would
be an apparent contradiction to say that he [Jakobson] "placed
meaning at the heart of the structural method." This situation is
compounded by Jakobson's awareness of the disparity between
metaphor and metonyomy in terms of meaning, and thus suggests
that the relationship between the two tropes might be more com-
plex than one might have originally suspected.

This suspicion is most fully articulated in an article entitled
"Semiology and Rhetoric," by Paul de Man, who challenges the
structuralist position:

> One of the most striking characteristics of literary semiology as it
> is practiced today, in France and elsewhere, is the use of gram-

matical (especially syntactic) structures conjointly with rhetorical
structures, without apparent awareness of a possible discrepancy
between them. In their literary analyses, Barthes, Genette, Todo-
rov, Greimas, and their disciples all simplify and regress from
Jakobson in letting grammar and rhetoric function in perfect conti-
nuity, and in passing from grammatical to rhetorical structures
without difficulty or interruption.[28]

The problem, as de Man sees it, is that Genette's study of
Proustian metonymy in *Figures III,* "shows the combined
presence . . . of paradigmatic, metaphorical figures with syn-
tagmatic, metonymic structures . . . treated descriptively and
nondialectically without suggesting the possibility of logical
tension." For de Man, the study of tropes and figures has
become "a mere extension" of grammatical models, thus strip-
ping rhetoric of its "vertiginous possibilities of referential aber-
ration." Crucial to his argument arc the inevitable differences
in the fundamental epistemologies of grammar and rhetoric,
which de Man sees as an obstacle to the structuralist approach.
Citing Burke and Pierce, who both were conscious of the *de-
flection* or "subversion" between sign and meaning that is pos-
sible within a grammatical construct, de Man tries to show that
"only if the sign engendered meaning in the same way the
object engenders the sign—that is, by representation—would
there be no need to distinguish between grammar and rhe-
toric." In other words, the non-arbitrary nature of the rhetori-
cal figure as sign undermines the formulation of a semiotic
system where it is handled on the same level with syntactic
paradigms composed of arbitrary signs.
    One example provided is from the last line of Yeats's poem
"Among School Children," which asks the question, "How can
we know the dancer from the dance?" The problem is that a
grammatically sound sentence can have two mutually exclusive
meanings either of which radically alter the sense of the poem.
On the one hand, the speaker could be asking to know what the
specific features of the dancer and the dance might be, so that
one might distinguish them. On the other hand, the speaker
might be asking a "rhetorical" question or even be making a
rhetorical statement in the form of a question, communicating
that the difference between the dancer and the dance is either too
small to matter or impossible to know. The distinction between
the two meanings is not that one is literal and the other figura-

tive, but that the logic of the sentence, expressed through its grammar, is temporarily "suspended," because of its rhetoric. Genette is certainly correct when he states that "rhetoric is bound up in this duplicity of language, however, de Man's challenge seems justified—enough at least to warrant a reconsideration of the parity between the paradigmatic/metaphoric axis and the syntagmatic/metonymic axis. It seems that metaphor is somehow more rhetorical than metonymy.

Conclusion

In the case of rhetoric as a "system of figures," or, for that matter, "tropes," the question raised by de Man concerning the equal treatment of metonymy and metaphor clearly demonstrates the problems one faces in trying to explain the complexities of figurative language. To answer Ricoeur's call for understanding the "very workings of tropes" means an inevitable journey out of the realm of rhetoric and into the realm of linguistics and philosophy of language, which by necessity results in a highly technical and theoretical model that demands as much background as insight to comprehend. By contrast, a cursory account of the process of figuration affords one freedom from such a redoubtable task, and relies instead on a basic, perhaps even common intuition about the nature and possibilities of connotation which expresses itself in what Genette calls "the classic formula: More figures are made in one day in the marketplace than in a month in the university." This kind of universal understanding of connotation is what makes figurative language possible, and where describing the phenomenon or even analyzing it critically might be quite interesting, trying to *explain* it through some sort of scientific demystification is altogether different. A perfect example of this kind of practical economy appears in the essay "Figures," where Genette asks "Why does the figure signify more than the literal expression?" and then proceeds to answer in two brief paragraphs, repeating the "sail/ship" example.[29] Although Genette's explanation might, in fact, be correct, it describes the process of figuration in its broadest terms, and thus tells only part of a very complex story.[30]

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Notes

1. Volumes *8* and *16* are of particular rhetorical interest.

2. Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984), 7.

3. Robert L. Scott, "Narrative Theory and Communication Research," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 204.

4. Gérard Genette, *Figures* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 205–22.

5. Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972) 21–40.

6. Liège Groupe, *Rhétorique géneralé* (Paris: Larousse, 1970).

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