example, is the best way to express inexpressibility by enacting it does not mean that it is always the best choice for that purpose; there may be situations where an announcement of intentional inexpressibility ("I cannot/will not say what he read in that letter") is a wiser rhetorical choice. But the speaker making this point with an aposiopesis is not entering a land of linguistic oddities. Once and for all the figures should come out of the cabinet of curiosities.

A view of the figures as examined territory on a continuum of possibilities explains why there has never been and never can be a fixed number of the figures. As Cicero explained in his *Topica*, while the number of types of issue is fixed in rhetoric, the number of figures of style and thought are not, for "there is no limit to this subject" (1949, 407). One can have more or fewer depending on one's patience and interest. To their great benefit, scholars in the early modern period had a great deal of such patience and interest, compiling figure catalogs of hundreds of functions and forms. The co-occurrence of such interest with the magnificence of the literary output of the time is not coincidental.

Thinking of the figures as better but not unique ways to achieve certain discourse functions also solves the considerable definitional problems they have always posed. It explains why there has never been a satisfactory definition of figurative language that rigorously separates it from an unfigured domain of usage. There never can be such a definition. The minority view that Quintilian set aside was right. Furthermore, it is not really necessary to reconcile the various definitions of the figures that have been offered because they cannot disagree. The figures may be at once acceptable usage and statistically atypical usage as well as carriers of emotion and vividness and force. They can be said to "add distinction" or other virtues in the sense that the text with appropriate figures has used the most effective linguistic means possible to do its work. Even the mechanism of substitution can be retained, so long as it means reaching into the same bag for different choices, not into an opposite sort of bag. None of these descriptions is incompatible with a more precise characterization of the figures as the formal embodiments of certain ideational or persuasive functions.

The Figures as Epitomes of Lines of Reasoning

A more useful view of the figures shifts the emphasis from what the figures are to what it is they do particularly well, what it is they express iconically. The traditional association of some of the figures with certain emotions has already been explored. In a parallel impulse, a handful of other figures can be identified with certain forms of argument or reasoning, and it is a small group of these devices that will be scrutinized in the chapters to follow. Associating certain verbal figures with general lines of reasoning, called "topics" in the rhetorical tradition, also assumes that it is possible to define these lines or arguments in the first place, a notion that for contemporary readers with no exposure to rhetoric may seem as odd as the figures themselves. While most people have a practical lexicon of the emotions that can be expressed by certain figures, they do not have a corresponding lexicon for lines of argument. When distinguishing among particular lines of argument or topics ceased
to be an educational goal, it is not surprising that the cognate notion of the figures as epitomes of those lines was lost as well. A repertoire of lines of argument is also part of the material of rhetoric and of its sister art of practical reasoning, dialectic. Cicero’s *Topica*, meant to be an improvement over Aristotle’s *Topics*, for example, lists 17 all-purpose arguments to stimulate the construction of particular cases. Such an enterprise of cataloging or listing types of arguments and using such a prefabricated, one-size-fits-all list as an invention resource is completely antithetical to contemporary notions of, on the one hand, the spontaneity of invention and its resources in inaccessible psychological processes, and, on the other hand, the rootedness of invention in the precise material under scrutiny. For someone to say that they are driven or inspired by general topics or lines of argument rather than by personal insight or by the evidence at hand would probably seem absurd to most people.

That is not to say that general standards or procedures of method and argument do not exist. They do. But these days they are confined to certain professions, materials, types of argument, or situations: the law, quality control management, laboratory procedure, casework in the social services, for example. The only technology of reasoning currently available that is meant to hold across many fields is the discipline of statistics, which does indeed offer a good analogy for the prestige, the aura of rigor, that topical invention and knowledge of the figures once had among the educated. Though there have been some attempts to regain a place for generic skills of argumentation, invention heuristics have nothing like the credibility they once had in the Western tradition. But understanding the figures as epitomes of certain lines of argument or reasoning does require also reinstating these durable, completely general lines. The fact that scholars have long recognized metaphor as an epitome of analogical reasoning makes the point. One need only accept that human reasoning exploits more than analogy, and that, therefore, more figures than metaphor are linked to corresponding modes of reasoning.

What does it mean to say that a verbal figure epitomizes a line of reasoning? An epitome, from the Greek verb meaning “to cut short or cut upon,” is in one sense a summary, an abstract containing all the essential parts of a larger work or text, and, in a slightly different sense, it is a representative or exemplary selection from and then substitution for something longer. The figure, then, is a verbal summary that epitomizes a line of reasoning. It is a condensed or even diagram-like rendering of the relationship among a set of terms, a relationship that constitutes the argument and that could be expressed at greater length.

**Antimetabole: Illustrating the figure/topic relationship**

A good example of an epitomizing figure, one discussed further in chapter 4, is the *antimetabole* defined as a figure (sometimes of diction, sometimes of amplification) that reverses the relative positions of a pair of key terms in parallel phrases. A perfect example comes from a 1950s ad for the then-new wonder packaging material cellophane: “Protects what it shows/Shows what it protects.” In the ad’s picture, these two phrases occupy balloons coming from the mouths of a mother holding a loaf of cellophane-wrapped bread and a daughter eating a sandwich, so
the meaning is also iconographically reinforced. This one example could be the subject of extensive analysis, but, briefly, the reversal in relative position of the two key words, “protects” and “shows,” expresses succinctly the argument that the ad is making about cellophane. The new material has two interchangeable and simultaneous properties and functions; it is both transparent and nonporous, making a food product both visible and yet safe from contamination at the same time. Such a verbal figure may be, and in fact often is, used along with an expanded restatement of the argument, providing reinforcing details for the central claim. In the presence of more text, it could be said, as the old manuals would put it, that the precise phrasing of this figure adds force or vividness to the whole argument. But it also is the argument itself in the most compressed form possible. If the text were to be reduced to one sentence, that one sentence, emblematic of the whole, would be the figure.

Ad writers earn enormous sums to craft memorable phrases, and the antimetabole has had a particularly vibrant run in such copy. But the same form appeared in a very different context, in the justification given by a murderer who turned himself in many years after committing his crimes and hiding successfully under an alias. As he explained his surrender, “I would rather have my body locked up and my mind free, than living as I was, with another identity, with my mind locked up and my body free” (McFadden 1994, B4). The essence of the murderer’s argument with himself is again epitomized by an antimetabole, a reversal of the syntactic positions and semantic roles of two key terms. This time, however, the terms that change places (mind and body) attach themselves in the process to different predicates (locked up and free) that maintain their relative positions. Both of these pairs, mind/body and locked up/free, express opposed or antithetical notions, adding another figure (the antithesis) and hence another argument in this instance. But it is the inversion that carries the causal argument in this case, presenting as plausible the changing of one’s behavior to correct the relative state of one’s body and mind.

Still another example of an argument from inversion or reciprocity perfectly epitomized in an antimetabole comes from another field and another century. In 1691, John Ray assembled the best arguments for a “natural theology,” a belief, as the title of his work proclaims, that all of God’s creations—the sun, moon and stars, the earth and its rivers and seas, and all the animals and plants—manifest His wisdom and beneficence. Ray’s book is filled with instances of what would later be called “adaptation”: sea plants grow flat and fan-like to bend with the currents (Ray 1977, 85); camels have sacks for storing water before desert crossings (344), rain falls down gradually rather than in destructive streams (88–89), and some birds have short legs for swimming but long necks for getting their food from the bottom of ponds, “For Nature makes not a long Neck to no purpose” (159). Ray is aware of the main rebuttal to his arguments.

To elude or evade the Force of all these Instances, and innumerable others, which might be produced, to demonstrate, that the Bodies of Men and all other Animals were the Effects of the Wisdom and Power of an intelligent and almighty Agent, and the several Parts and Members of them designed to the Uses to which they now serve, the Atheist hath one Subterfuge, in which he most confides, viz. That all these Uses
of Parts are no more than what is necessary to the very Existence of the Things to whom they belong: *And that Things made Uses, and not Uses Things.* (Ray 1977, 357; italics added)

In *elegant compression*, Ray uses the antimetabole in a form that it frequently takes: one side as the correction of the other. The Atheists’ inversion, that the animals parts determine their function and not their function those parts, will reappear 100 years later in arguments summarized by Lamarck (see chapter 4).

The arguments epitomized by antimetaboles in these three passages are not identical any more than the analogies epitomized by different metaphors are identical. The ad uses an antimetabole to express an indifference in ordering two terms and hence properties that are paradoxically simultaneous, the murderer uses an antimetabole to present a convincing motive for changing one’s behavior in order to change the relationship between two sets of antithetical terms, and John Ray uses an antimetabole to express succinctly the incompatibility between two views of adaptation. Yet these arguments share a family resemblance by virtue of the fact that they can all be succinctly expressed by an antimetabole. This type of argument by reversal was identified in the rhetorical tradition almost 2500 years ago as was the durable verbal device called the antimetabole that epitomizes it, an argumentative scheme that persists across centuries and situations. There is a long tradition, especially powerful in the text-based side of rhetorical studies, of emphasis on such formal techniques and on the argumentative strategies they can express.

*Recapturing an older view*

There have certainly been indications of a form/function rationale for the figures in the canonical texts of the tradition, especially in what is, at least from a twentieth-century perspective, *the* canonical text, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. Though scholarly consensus maintains that Aristotle has neither a theory of figuration nor even a general term for figures of speech (Kennedy 1991, 242, 248), Book III of the *Rhetoric*, devoted to style, does introduce a handful of verbal devices formally recognizable across instances, including metaphor, antithesis, asyndeton, and simile. At no place in Book III does Aristotle claim that these devices serve an ornamental or emotional function or that they are in any way epiphenomenal. Instead, Aristotle’s somewhat dispersed discussion suggests that certain devices are compelling because they map function onto form or perfectly epitomize certain patterns of thought or argument. A case in point is his account of asyndeton, the elimination of connectives from a series, and its “opposite” in chapter 12: “Furthermore, asyndeta have a special characteristic; many things seem to be said at the same time; for the connective makes many things seem one, so that if it is taken away, clearly the opposite results: one thing will be many (256).” In other words, a series without connectives seems to Aristotle to express the separateness and therefore the multiplicity of the items mentioned; as he says of his offered example, “‘I came; I spoke; I besought,’ (these things seem many)” (256). Thus the special verbal device here, the elimination of the expected connective, expresses a specific meaning in itself, passing on the impression of many distinct objects, actions or notions. The form delivers this meaning regardless of the actual items in the series. Conversely, Aristotle believes
that adding connectives can join items into a unity; a version like "I came and I spoke and I besought," seems to emphasize the connectedness or combination of these three separate actions. The version with asyndeton says, "I did three separate things"; the version with polysyndeton (connectives between each item) says, "I did all three of these things," a slight but potentially significant difference in the course of building an argument. By contrast, the Ad Herennium says only of asyndeton that it "has animation and great force, and is suited to concision" ([Cicero] 1954, 331), concision because words are removed; otherwise, the author of the Ad Herennium, claiming only the general dignitas achieved through ornamentation, pays no attention to the specific ideational work of the figure.

In chapter 10 of Book III, Aristotle singles out three devices for special attention because they are useful for creating "urbane" or smart expressions that are "well liked" (Kennedy 1991, 245). These three are metaphor, antithesis, and energeia, or "bringing before the eyes." Here it might seem that Aristotle is indeed dealing with devices that add glamor or spin to a text. But the claims he makes about these three do not sustain that interpretation. Though his pupil Theophrastus presumably added ornamentation to the three virtues of style that Aristotle does discuss—perspicuity, correctness, and appropriateness—Aristotle himself does not offer "value-added" rationales for his three special verbal devices. Instead, his comments suggest that these devices are compelling because they are perfect formal embodiments of the speaker's meanings and intentions. Even metaphor, as it is described in the Rhetoric, is a substitution serving some functional end. The speaker, Aristotle advises, should avoid far-fetched metaphors (226) and select only those that create "quick learning" in an audience (245). Urbanities, especially those achieved through metaphorical choices that are neither banal nor too far-fetched, make clear to a listener "that he learned something different from what he believed, and his mind seems to say, 'How true, and I was wrong!'" (250). In other words, rhetorical metaphors, and indeed other lexical substitutions like epithets, are not chosen simply because they are strange and elevating but because they express perfectly, efficiently, and unobtrusively the precise idea the speaker is trying to convey. Depending on whether the speaker's purpose is blame or praise, mules are half-asses or the daughters of storm-footed mares (225).

What is true of metaphor and asyndeton in Aristotle's account is also true of the other two sources of asteia, antithesis and energeia; each accesses conviction or creates insight in a uniquely efficient way. Hence Aristotle's frequent emphasis on "learning" or imparting knowledge as the result of effective presentation of ideas and arguments, in turn the result of making the best possible verbal choices (Kennedy 1991, 242, 244, 245, 250, 252). This repeated emphasis in Book III on learning from effective presentation has to be puzzling from the later perspective that sets the figures apart as merely ornamental, which leads to a division into levels of style based in part on the extent of such ornamentation. Aristotle has no such theory of levels of prose style (like three fixed dial settings, low, middle, and high), because he has a theory of continuously tunable appropriateness based on functionally selected forms suitable to the subject, speaker, and occasion. There is, then, to reestablish the implicit connection between his theory of functional verbal devices in Book III and the opening definition of rhetoric in Book
I, a best available means or choice of lexis in every particular case (see also 225). Aristotle also seems to recognize that a theory of functionally efficient forms is dangerous, for he observes that if the “proper lexis also makes the matter credible,” it becomes possible to fake the credible with the proper lexis. The speaker who can master this art can lead the listener “to draw a false inference of the truth” (235) merely because of the successful manner of presentation. His own antithesis, as demonstrated in chapter 2, is one of the most successful forms for this kind of linguistic strong-arming.

Cicero was cited above as the eloquent spokesperson for the dominant view of the figures as ornaments to a text. But a closer scrutiny of Cicero’s wording in the passage quoted above (see p. 18) suggests that his theory of the figures may also be closer to a stronger functional view of what the figures can accomplish. For what the translator H. M. Hubbell renders as “embellishment,” Cicero consistently describes in terms of light and illumination [lumina/illuminae]. To embellish something is to add to its surface, but to illuminate can mean to shine through as well as on something, to make it bright from within, in effect bringing out or expressing its inherent nature. Cicero actually makes this distinction himself in the Brutus, the rhetorical treatise he devoted to the criticism of other orators. In praising Demosthenes, and through him Antonius, he observes that the ἀρχήματα [schemas] are the greatest ornaments of oratory, not in giving weight because they paint on words, but because they illuminate the thought [“maxime ornant oratorem eaque non tam in verbis pingendis habent pondus quam in illuminandis sententiis”] (Cicero 1988, 123–125). Again the sense Cicero seems to be after is stylistic choice that is not added as an afterthought to a text, as color is applied to a surface, but stylistic choice that shines through and therefore expresses the speaker’s meaning and intention. The translator has replaced Cicero’s terms with later words that represent the specifically literary understanding of the figures as epiphenomenal additions that create the aesthetic dimension of a text.

A text from the second century C.E., Hermogenes’ On Types of Style, also provides an understanding of the functional place of figures in rhetorical stylistics within 300 years of the appearance of the first catalog in the Rhetorica ad Herennium and 100 years of Quintilian’s careful analysis. In the tradition of Longinus’ On Sublimity, Hermogenes analyzes not one but seven main types of style and 20 substyles in all, named generally from their overall effect: clarity, grandeur, beauty, solemnity, vehemence, and so forth. Each is described by the thoughts or content it usually expresses, the approaches that are appropriate, and the style it displays, including the characteristic word choices, figures of speech, kinds of clauses, word order, cadences, and rhythm.

Two features of Hermogenes’ treatment contradict the usual understanding of the figures as after-the-fact embellishment. First is the tight continuity Hermogenes establishes between what the speaker is trying to accomplish and the best stylistic means to do it. The subject matter of the vehement speaker, for example, is the indictment of a target that the audience is pleased to have criticized, and to accomplish such an indictment, the vehement speaker should coin harsh words and use questions, direct address, pointed expressions, and pauses (Hermogenes 1987, 30–31). Second, the devices that Hermogenes identifies as figures of speech show
that the category is very broad in his thinking. “The figure that is most characteristic of Purity,” for example, “is the use of a straightforward construction with the noun in the nominative case” (10); in other words, Hermogenes identifies normal subject-noun predication as a figure. Another effect, sincerity, is communicated by direct address and questions, long identified as figures, but also by pointing expressions using “this” and “that” (95). Only in the case of the stylistic elements that aim at Beauty does Hermogenes speak of adornment in something like the later literary meanings of the term: “The figures that create Beauty are those that call attention to their ornamental nature and show clearly that the style has been embellished” (56). Yet, according to Hermogenes, even Demosthenes, his exemplar of the perfect practical orator, uses these devices in persuasion, and Beauty is even valuable “where there is a need for close argument and careful reasoning” (110). Overall then, Hermogenes’ rationale for the figures extends beyond accreted adornment that draws attention to itself to a constitutive functionality, and his notion of a functional figure is broad enough to include ordinary sentence patterns.

Further historical support for a view of the figures as intimately linked to the argument or work of a text comes from Thomas Conley’s well-documented interrogation of the competing meanings of the term enthymeme. In rhetorical theory derived from Aristotle, an enthymeme is sometimes defined as a “truncated” syllogism that leaves unexpressed a premise the audience supplies from its storehouse of beliefs. An argument like “We should elect X because she has moderate views” rests on the assumption that moderate views are a good or election-deserving quality; that is the missing premise or assumption that presumably makes the link between the explicitly offered premise (because she has moderate views) and the conclusion (we should elect X) possible. The brief two-part form of the enthymeme could be expanded into a full syllogism, though doing so invites an application, or more often a misapplication, of the standards of formal logic that might declare invalid all kinds of perfectly convincing enthymematic arguments. But Conley demonstrates that rhetoricians before and after Aristotle, and even some passages in the Rhetoric itself, express a different definition of the enthymeme.

According to one alternate view, the term enthymeme refers to an expression, usually brief and contained within a period, which functions as the stylistic “capper” of an argument. Conley’s investigation of Isocrates’ uses of the term, before Aristotle, demonstrates this more stylistic meaning, though such passages from Isocrates, Conley points out, have been translated in a way that conflates with the later understanding of the term. Rather than drawing on the audience’s system of beliefs, an enthymeme in this second sense summarizes and re-expresses material already explicit in the speeches the audience is hearing. As described in an anonymous Byzantine commentary on Hermogenes’ On Invention, an enthymeme derives its force “from its ability to draw together a large body of material and assertions and compress it in a particularly striking way” (Conley 1984, 173; the quotation is a paraphrase, not a translation from the source). Even the examples Aristotle cites of lines of argument or “enthymematic topoi” suggest, according to Conley, that enthymemes are “nicely turned sentences or questions raised at cli-
mactic points in the course of a speech” (171). In other sources, Conley finds the enthymeme similarly defined as a “finishing off” (176), a “pungent” expression that drives home a point forcefully (178).

There is then, in many rhetorical texts from the fourth century B.C.E. to the end of the Byzantine Empire, some now rarely read, perhaps because they represent a lost understanding, an “ambiguity—perhaps a confusion—about the line that divides argumentation from style” (Conley 1984, 176). But this is only a confusion from the perspective that insists on a radical disjunction between style and argument. As Conley himself goes on to suggest:

In viewing argumentation from this perspective, we can see how the notion of *enthymema* as a finely wrought “cap,” which we encountered in our survey, could have a kind of legitimacy. Such a “cap,” whether comprised of thoughts which link themselves together in the manner of a syllogism or thoughts which are linked only by means of the devices of style . . . can very well have legitimate argumentative force. Its force, however, could never be appreciated (or even perceived) outside of the context in which it occurs. (182)

This recovered definition of the “other” enthymeme, the “stylistic capper,” surely restores a common-sense notion about how arguments work textually. Keeping in mind their linear dimension, the fact that arguments are experienced, whether heard or read, in time, it makes sense to think of them as ebbing and surging, now at a “lower” point of restatement or elaboration and now at a “higher” point of succinct and epitomizing summation, giving the gist of the longer passage. A stylistic enthymeme is thus that moment in a text when the argument is most directly and emphatically expressed by the syntax and word choice. An arguer works to achieve this high point, and there should not be, as Aristotle, Quintilian, and others rightly observe, too many of these high points in immediate succession. But there is no need for the dismissive “only” in Conley’s text. This enthymeme as-stylistic-capper can take the form of a figure of speech exactly epitomizing the line of argument employed. It was probably the recognition of this summative potential that allowed Aristotle, picking up on the older, diffuse meaning of the term, to emphasize the argumentative power of the enthymeme as he subtly redefined the term.10

The great sixteenth-century rhetorician and reformer, Philip Melancthon, also testifies to the constitutive power of the figures that Conley traced in the older texts and to their essential connection with the construction of arguments. After introducing a third type of scheme, the figures of amplification, Melancthon generalizes about all the figures:

The zealous reader will observe that all the figures, especially those that enhance a speech, have their origin in dialectical expressions, and if one has practical knowledge to associate them, he will be able to evaluate very many in cases subtly and keenly and better perceive the distinct divisions of the work. For the same expressions, when applied for the purpose of confirming or confuting, are bases for argument and the sinews, as they are called. When applied for the purpose of adorning, they are called rhetorical ornaments. And very many not only have been adapted to give a show of battle, but to add weight to the arguments. (263–264)
Melancthon, as the author of both rhetorical and dialectical treatises, was in a unique position to appreciate the link between forms of argument and forms of expression and hence of the constitutive power of the figures in argument.

Reasons for the figure/topic separation

A different reading through key texts in the rhetorical tradition certainly warrants a more functional view of the figures and a closer link between them and the lines of argument identified as the topics. How is it then that the two systems became separated or separable? One answer requires an appreciation of the traditional partitioning of discourse skills in classical rhetoric. The canonical division known as the parts of rhetoric separates invention, the recovery or discovery of potential premises; from disposition, the optimal arrangement of these premises given the arguer’s immediate situation; and from elocutio, the expression of those arguments in appropriate and effective language. This division of the subject matter of rhetoric translates too easily into a chronological sequence so that it is assumed to represent steps in the process of composition. One thinks up material, arranges it to suit the occasion, and then finds a suitable means of expressing it (let alone, in oral situations, committing it to memory and finding an appropriate mode of delivery). But there has always been an undertow working against the separation of invention and style, and it is even possible to discover arguments stylistically, as the following chapters demonstrate, by using the figures generatively, allowing the form to find the content.

Another explanation for the traditional separation of the figures and the topics comes from the accidents of history. In the centuries of its greatest development, the separate parts of rhetoric became the objects of attention in separate treatises. The youthful Cicero, for example, intended to write a separate work on each of the five parts, though only his treatise on the first part, De Inventione, remains. In the second century C.E., Hermogenes did produce influential separate treatises on style, the stases (a part of invention), and other elaborations that have not survived. Quintilian cites a bewildering number of treatises on separate rhetorical issues, including a work devoted exclusively to the sound $s$, and one of the most famous treatises remaining from antiquity, Longinus’s Sublimity, is in this tradition of elaborating on a small part of a well known larger system. When, however, only some of these treatises survive and the entire system of which they were a part disintegrates, it becomes difficult to appreciate the connections among what remains. It is as though some scholar a thousand years from now came upon the “shuffle-toe-stomp” directions for a tap dance and a tape recording of the song “Blue Skies Smiling at Me” and had no idea that they were meant to be performed together. The parts of rhetoric, and particularly invention and style, were meant to be learned together and performed together, one as the expression of the other.

Curiously, methods of teaching also influenced the dismemberment of rhetoric and the isolation of the figures from argumentation. Pedagogical practice from antiquity through the Renaissance was typically divided between the work of the grammaticus teaching younger students the “language arts” and the teacher of rhetoric. The grammaticus, a teacher of Latin and Greek in the schools of Rome
and a teacher primarily of Latin in the schools of medieval Europe, typically introduced students to the prestige language with the parsing of literary texts (Percival 1983, 305), a parsing that consisted not only of a word-for-word construal for meaning and grammatical case but also a rigorous identification of the figures. Medieval and early modern grammar texts typically included, along with the parts of speech and the rules of agreement, a discussion of figures, especially the syntactic figures or schemes. The precedent for this inclusion was the much used Latin grammar (Ars Maior) of Donatus. Thus students learned the tropes and other figures as part of the rudiments of their mastery of Latin texts and Latin composition, so that when they moved on to the study of Cicero’s speeches and the drafting and delivery of suasoriae, persuasive speeches, they came to these tasks with a significant stylistic repertoire. Though it was only, once again, the earlier parts of a complete system of education, the study of literary texts like Homer and Virgil and the identification of figures were wedded together in school practice and to some extent they have been ever since.

Essentially the same system of education was still in place through the eighteenth century and into the beginning of the nineteenth century. The practice of partitioning the curriculum eventually produced an analogous partitioning in the figures so that, for example, when Pierre Fontanier wrote his treatise on the figures in the early nineteenth century, a treatise based on his criticism of Du Marsais’ exclusive attention to the tropes, he nevertheless also wrote his text in two parts, the first a Manuel classique pour l’étude des Tropes (1821, with further editions in 1822, 1825, and 1830) and the second a study of Figures autres que les tropes [Figures other than the tropes] (1827). This division, as Gérard Genette explains in his introduction to Fontanier, was necessitated by the fact that Fontanier’s first text on the tropes was used for the “second” class while the study of the non-tropes was reserved for the subsequent rhetorical class (Fontanier 1977, 5, n. 1). So, at least in France, the ancient division between the grammaticus and the teacher of rhetoric was mapped onto the figures themselves. When in 1870 the French went to a system of national education, they retained the study of belles lettres but dropped rhetoric from the curriculum and, as a consequence, figures that were not tropes were dropped as well.

Scholarly restorations

The teaching of the figures as functional in everyday argument and reasoning has long since disappeared from language curricula in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, if the connection is warranted, it would be amazing if it had gone unnoticed, especially in the gradual recovery of rhetoric that has been taking place since World War II. In fact, twentieth-century historians of rhetoric have been aware of the intimate connection between the figures and the topics or lines of argument. In an article published in 1990, James J. Murphy set the issue of this relationship explicitly by asking “whether the Greek topoi may in fact be the sources of the Roman figura” (Murphy 1990, 244). And almost twenty years ago A. Kibidi Varga called for an explication of the resulting inherently hierarchical structure of rhetoric, an elaboration of its levels of explanation that are traditionally stratified in the
different parts of the art (invention, arrangement, style). In Varga’s heroic recasting, “Every phenomenon should be defined at its own level but it should also be comprehended at each higher level. Every figure should be defined as part of elocution, but at the same time it should be mentioned in relation to the topic within which it usually appears and functions, in the chapter on invention” (Varga 1983, 86). For a rhetorical theory that is less a “pedagogical method for teaching and learning eloquence” than a “semiotic-pragmatic method for analyzing discourse,” Varga envisions a hierarchy of explanatory levels ascending from grammar through elocution, the topics, the three appeals (ethos, logos, pathos), the stases, and the genera dicendi (the types of speeches), though the direction of explanation would always be from the higher level down. Of all these potentially interrelated levels, Varga believes that the connection between the figures and the topics has in fact received the most attention (87).

Much of the credit for that attention is, as Varga justly observes, due to a work published in 1947 by the Renaissance scholar Sister Miriam Joseph. As background to her extensive study of Shakespeare’s Use of the Arts of Language, Sister Joseph’s review of late sixteenth-century rhetorical treatises led her to several conclusions:

first that the general theory of composition and of reading current in Shakespeare’s England is to be found in one form in the contemporary works on logic and rhetoric combined; second, that it is to be found in another form in the work of the figurists which, surprisingly, treats of approximately the same matter as do the logic and rhetoric texts combined; third, that these two forms, though outwardly different, are fundamentally alike. (4)

In the almost 200 figures of speech identified in the Renaissance figure manuals there was ample scope, Sister Joseph observes, for redefining virtually every aspect of rhetorical theory in terms of verbal equivalents and memorizable exempla (17–18). To bring out the similarity in coverage between the full treatises on rhetoric and the figure manuals, she recategorized the figures into those dealing with “the aesthetic aspects of grammar” (34) and those delivering the three appeals (36). Particularly valuable is her categorization of the figures under logos according to the 17 Ciceronian topics, a categorization that will be drawn on in the following chapters. Sister Joseph’s insight was reaffirmed for scholars in speech communication by J. Donald Ragsdale in an article which, based on an examination of seventeenth and eighteenth-century rhetorics, also categorizes the figures according to the three appeals. Furthermore, Ragsdale points out that, given this relationship between the figures and the appeals, it is a mistake to claim that the style manuals ignored invention (Ragsdale 1965, 164, 167). That Sister Joseph’s study has received less attention than it deserves from rhetoricians is perhaps due to her dedicating her theorizing solely to the service of Shakespearean exegesis in a relentless listing (here is one of these, there is one of those) that equates less with more important forms and that consequently downplays the power of any single figure to carry an argument.11 The net result of her prodigious scholarship is that the figures remain firmly within the tradition of belles lettres and are distanced both historically and statistically from everyday usage. They are something that literary geniuses used a long time ago.
In a work written a few years after Sister Joseph’s study, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969b), Kenneth Burke, operating outside of the traditional academic partitioning of types of discourse and the valorizing of the literary, saw to the heart of the ability of the figures to express a particular line of argument and simultaneously to induce an audience to participate in that argument simply by virtue of their form. Burke’s theory of rhetoric hinges on his principle of identification, the consubstantial unifying of speaker and audience through the devices of rhetoric. One of an arguer’s ways of inducing such identification is to offer formal patterns that invite the audience’s participation because they awaken an attitude of collaborative expectancy in us. For instance, imagine a passage built about a set of oppositions (“we do this, but they on the other hand do that; we stay here, but they go there; we look up, but they look down,” etc.). Once you grasp the trend of the form, it invites participation regardless of the subject matter. Formally, you find yourself swinging along with the succession of antitheses, even though you may not agree with the proposition that is being presented in this form. Or it may even be an opponent’s proposition which you resent—but for the duration of that statement itself you might “help him out” to the extent of yielding to the formal development, surrendering to its symmetry as such. Of course, the more violent your original resistance to the proposition, the weaker will be your degree of “surrender” by “collaborating” with the form. But in cases where a decision is still to be reached, a yielding to the form prepares for assent to the matter identified with it. Thus, you are drawn to the form, not in your capacity as a partisan, but because of some “universal” appeal in it. And this attitude of assent may then be transferred to the matter which happens to be associated with the form. (58)

Burke believed that the formal appeal of some of the figures was stronger than that of others, but he had no interest in an analysis beyond that provided in a few pages on the antithesis and the gradatio, nor does he specify the lines of argument embodied in these formal devices. But he believed that he had identified the signs of a general psychological and aesthetic principle of formal persuasion whose range of applicability could easily be extended beyond his brief discussion. It was extended in what is arguably the most important rhetorical treatise of the twentieth century, the monumental *La Nouvelle Rhetorique*, written by the Belgians Chaim Perelman (by training, a philosopher of jurisprudence) and Lucie Olbrecth-Tyteca (by training, a sociologist). Although the title of their work suggests a point of departure, it is in many ways a revival of the lost traditions of rhetoric and dialectic, a revival more necessary from a European than an American perspective. But *The New Rhetoric* does have some notable newnesses in matter and emphasis from other historically important rhetorical treatises, in particular its treatment of style in relation to argument. Rather than separating the discussion of style, and especially the figures, from the discussion of invention, Perelman and Olbrecth-Tyteca reestablish the essential link between the two, and they recognize that when that link is broken and “the argumentative role of figures is disregarded, their study will soon seem to be a useless pastime, a search for strange names for rather farfetched and affected turns of speech” (1969, 167), precisely the disenchantment that has afflicted many commentators.
As part of their rethinking of the relation between style and argument, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca necessarily explore definitions of the figures of speech. They find the same two characteristics that have been featured, either singly or together, in most definitions of the figures: an identifiable formal feature and a use “different from the normal manner of expression” (169, 168). They recognize, however, the potential problems in these two parts of the definition of the figures: “In order that a structure be a possible object of study, it must be possible to isolate it, to recognize it as a structure; it is also necessary to know in what respect a use must be regarded as unusual” (168). Thus they realize that the \textit{\'ecart} definition of the figures has a trap door through which many figures will “fall” if they cease to be recognized as departures from ordinary usage; the rhetorical question, for example, is traditionally identified as a figure, but in what sense is its use abnormal? The structural or formal definition has its weak spot as well. It might be possible for anything formally identifiable to become a figure. “Theoretically,” as the Belgians point out, “there is no structure incapable of becoming a figure by the way it is used” (169). The twin constraints of formal identifiability and uncommonness led some rhetoricians to reserve the label “figure” for the recognizable but deliberately artificial and by implication insincere uses of these devices. In other words, if a speaker intends the form, it is a figure, but if it is used without intention, it is not a figure. According to this view, an “Oh damn!” uttered when one stubs a toe is not a figure; an “Oh damn!” planned for the peroration of a speech is one.

To overcome these problems, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca introduce a new twist in the definition of the figures, a dissociation of their own into two new classes. Putting aside the traditional division between the figures of speech and thought that they find obscuring (169, 172), they place the dissociation, not in the speaker’s intention, but in the audience’s response. A traditional figure “occurs” when a hearer or reader notices it, distinguishing or dissociating its form from its substance in the process (169). But this temporary noticing can be overcome when the listener or reader perceives a justifying argumentative use of the figure: “The whole of the argumentative significance of figures arises at the moment when this distinction, which was immediately noticed, is dissolved through the effect produced by the speech” (169). “Forms which seem at first to be used in an unusual manner may come to appear normal if their use is justified by the speech taken as a whole” (169). For Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, this possibility creates a new class of specifically argumentative figures.

We consider a figure to be argumentative, if it brings about a change of perspective, and its use seems normal in relation to this new situation. If, on the other hand, the speech does not bring about the adherence of the hearer to this argumentative form, the figure will be considered an embellishment, a figure of style. It can excite admiration, but this will be on the aesthetic plane, or in recognition of the speaker’s originality.

It is apparent, then, that it is impossible to decide in advance if a given structure is or is not to be regarded as a figure, or if it will be an argumentative or a stylistic figure. The best one can do is to point out some structures that are liable to become figures. (169–170)
The New Rhetoric's redefinition of the figures has received little scholarly engagement, but it seems obvious from the start that it is highly problematic to the extent that it links the figures to an untraceable psychological experience, a perceptual moment in which a reader or listener becomes aware of a word or phrase as a word or phrase and then presumably accepts it because of its effectiveness in an argument, or because the text establishes its own norm and vis-à-vis this norm, the figure belongs. It also seems less than useful to deprive the figures of argumentative force in proportion to their obviousness, though this point is tied to the general observation, made elsewhere in The New Rhetoric, that any awareness of technique on the audience's part can diminish the effectiveness of an argument. In addition to the doubtfulness of this double psycholinguistic moment of perceiving and then ignoring a device, the variability in such an awareness among consumers of the same text must be enormous. The ability to notice a figure as a figure, for example, though not necessarily the ability to notice an anomalous usage (and many figures are not anomalous), is surely tied to one's previous exposure to the figures, an exposure that was once a given for every educated person in the Western tradition, but that certainly no longer is.

Whether or not their overall definition of argumentative versus stylistic figures holds, the Belgians were innovative in tying figures to functions. They intertwine the two, dispersing figures among the techniques of argumentation identified in the book's extensive anatomy.

Instead of embarking on an exhaustive examination of all the traditional figures, we shall inquire, in the context of a given argumentative procedure or scheme, if certain figures are of such a nature as to fulfil the function we have attributed to this procedure, if they can be regarded as one of its manifestations. This approach involves a sort of dismembering of the figures. For not only will figures range over different chapters of our study, but examples of a particular figure may occur in more than one chapter. We feel that it is this dismembering itself that best conveys the argumentative significance of the figures. (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 172)

This promise is fulfilled after an initial section (#42) devoted to what the Belgians call figures of "choice, presence, and communion," stylistic devices that accomplish a rhetor's selection of material (e.g., metonymy), or the emphasis of that material (e.g., anaphora), or the establishment of a rapport with an audience (e.g., rhetorical question). These are useful functional categories for the figures in the spirit of Henry Peacham, but more important are the figures dispersed throughout the text and tied to the specific strategies of argument. The figure antitmetabole [as "commutation"], for example, employed in several examples cited above, is connected in The New Rhetoric with the general technique of dissociation as in the prizing apart of the senses of a term (428, 444). Thus the famous antitmetabole "We should not live to eat but eat to live" really effects a separation, according to The New Rhetoric, between two different senses of "live," and perhaps of "eat" as well, by its reversal of the relationship between living and eating (428). With analyses like these, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca have made the strongest technical case for an appreciation of the argumentative power of certain verbal forms.