

## Ploche, Überscheme

*Words, words, words.*

—William Shakespeare  
Hamlet (to Polonius), *Hamlet* 2.2

### 0.0 Argument

Metaphor, we all know, is ubiquitous—not just the metaphorical instances in all varieties of all languages, but the concept itself in all disciplines of the humanities. It is *The Master Trope*. Sometimes, there are Four Master Tropes, as in Ramus and Burke. Sometimes, there are three, as in Foucault (1970, 110-11; 113-4) or Bredin (1992:72<sup>1</sup>); sometimes two, as in Jakobson (1956); but all of those configurations include metaphor, and often, it is the only one, especially in later twentieth century and into our own new century—notable in works such as Ricoeur 1977; Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1993; and Ortony 1979, 1993, which sometimes recognize a constituency of other tropes, but acknowledge only one Master. Ricoeur's title, recall, is *The Rule of Metaphor*.

There is good reason that, no matter the number, metaphor is always included, and is always head of the class. Analogy is a deep cognitive affinity, and metaphor is its most efficient expression. It is, without dispute, the übertrope.

Schemes have been utterly neglected in linguistics, philosophy of mind, and psychology, the domains where metaphor and occasionally a few other tropes have been preoccupations for about half a century now, and objects of attention from long before that. Rhetoricians haven't treated them much better. But schemes are equally ubiquitous, equally reflective of cognitive structure, and equally central to the rational, aesthetic, and argumentative domains that have been the concerns of metaphor scholars.

One scheme in particular has a call on the attention of scholars of language and mind at least as strong as that of metaphor, ploce: brute lexical repetition. Repetition, I say, of the lexical variety, is called *ploce*. You say a word more than once, you have committed ploce. We all do it all the time, at least as often as we traffic in metaphors. (Other terms for this scheme include *conduplicatio*, *diaphora*, and *the doubler*; it also shows up in the alternate spellings, *ploche* and *ploke*.)

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<sup>1</sup> Bredin is somewhat tricky here. He names "four main instances, perhaps [the] only instances" of his "type of semantic figure" (effectively, tropes), substituting "symbol" for irony, with the other usual suspects (metonymy and synecdoche), but then he conflates symbol with metaphor (Bredin 1992:74); in effect, so far from eliminating metaphor in altering the core tropes, he doubles it up.

<sup>2</sup>The proposed schemes were ploce, zeugma, acervatio, and hyperbaton. See <http://www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/~raha/cv/documents/Harris-CSSR-15.pdf>

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My argument, then, is Aristotle's familiar A:B::C:D, ploce is to schemes as metaphor is to tropes. The argument has three related components:

1. a) Metaphor's ubiquity relies in large part on its grounding in cognition; in particular, on the cognitive affinity of similitude;  
  
b) Ploce has an equally deep grounding in cognition—indeed, in *neurocognition*, for we see physiological correlates, not 'just' mental correlates—in the neurocognitive affinity of repetition.
2. a) Metaphor is not a single trope, so much as a name for array of closely related, more specific tropes;  
  
b) Ploce is not a single scheme, though that is how the rhetorical tradition has treated it; it is an array of schemes.
3. a) Conversely, since similitude is a cognitive affinity, metaphor is also part of a suite of similarity figures;  
  
b) Ploce is part of a suite of repetition figures.

So, that's the A:B::C:D, ploce is to schemes as metaphor is to tropes. But there is an overarching A:B::C:B as well, where A and C are still ploce and metaphor, but the B ranges over cognition, reason, argumentation, thought, suasion, and aesthetics, and related notions.

## 1.0 Four Master Schemes?

In a 2015 paper for CSSR I argued, rather tepidly, for Four Master Schemes.<sup>2</sup> I wasn't tepid about the need for recognizing the importance of schemes or for finding an organizing framework for the schemes that complements the Four Master Tropes. I just wasn't entirely sure what the four might be, or if four was a sensible number (I believe the proposal I submitted was on the Five Master Schemes, but by the time the conference came round I found a way to whittled them down to four).

But I was the opposite of tepid on one question. Despite its very modest history in the rhetorical tradition, ploce had to be first among equals whatever the number and constitution of the Master Schemes turned out to be. I called it the *Überscheme*.

I am here this year to justify that designation.

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## 2.0 A definition of *ploce*

Ploce is lexical repetition; that's it. Aside from the caveat that *lexical* here means words with some semantic freight, so that the repetition of articles, modal verbs, and so on, doesn't 'count,' that's it. You repeat a word, you've committed ploce.

*Ploce* comes—don't act too surprised—from Greek, the Greek verb, *plekein*, 'to plait,' so we can think of ploce as that figure in which repeated words interlace through texts (a word which comes from a Latin term in the same conceptual domain, *texere*, 'to weave'). But, in fact, the way the term is used, *ploce* usually means something more like 'splattering a text' than 'plaiting a text:' the same word shows up more than once without any defining constraint—except, implicitly, proximity; the words have to show up closely enough to each other that the presence of the iteration(s) calls to mind the prior use. There are lots of figures of lexical repetition that *are* constrained, by relative or structural location. Towit:

**Epizeuxis** is when a word or word string is repeated immediately after its first occurrence:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (Psalms 22:1)

**Andiplosis** is when a word or word string that occurs close to the end of a phrase or clause is repeated close to the beginning of the following phrase or clause:

Exercise dissipates tension, and tension is the enemy of serenity. (Mandela, 1994: 490)

**Epanaphora** is when a word or word string is repeated at the beginnings of subsequent phrases or clauses:

I bless you, all living things, I bless you in the endless past, I bless you in the endless present, I bless you in the endless future, amen. (Kerouac, 1976 [1958]:123)

**Epistrophe** is when a word or word string is repeated at the ends of subsequent phrases or clauses:

Then came the digging. Oh god the digging. (Weir 2014:374)

**Mesodiplosis** is when a word or word string is repeated in the middle of subsequent phrases or clauses:

He don't know nothin' about bein' a father and I don't know nothin' about bein' a son.  
Kind makes us even, I figure. (Wagamese 2014:121)

**Epanalepsis** is when a word or word string that appears at the beginning of a phrase or clause is repeated at the end of that same phrase or clause:

In times like these, it's helpful to remember that there have always been times like these.  
(Paul Harvey, as quoted in Lipp 1986:291)

**Symploce** is when a word or word string is repeated at the beginnings of subsequent phrases or clauses and another word or word string is repeated at the ends of subsequent phrases or clauses (i.e., it is the pairing of epanaphora and epistrophe):

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. (1  
Corinthian 13:11)

Ploce is usually defined in a way that is independent of these other figures—in some sense, even, in opposition to these other figures: 'lexical repetition which is not epizeuxis, anadiplosis, epistrophe, and so on.'

I think it makes much more sense to see ploce as the general phenomenon of lexical repetition, and these other figures as types of ploce, exactly the way we define metaphor as the general phenomenon of cross-domain predications, with personification, reification, anthropomorphism, zoomorphism, topification, and so on, as types of metaphor.

If we make this move, we can define ploce, simply, as 'lexical repetition' and go no further, rather than as 'lexical repetition (when it's not epizeuxis, anadiplosis, ...),' which is the implicit definition elsewhere.

What we are after, of course, is a general theory of rhetoric, not one theory for metaphor and another theory for ploce, another for topoi, another for arrangement, and so on; or, worse, a 'theory' that just piles up haphazardly individual figures and operations and moves, ignoring commonalities and systematic variations.

By putting metaphor and ploce cheek-by-jowl like this, my argument adopts a generalizing stance. I hope to borrow for ploce some of the prestige metaphor has acquired—you surely see that—but more importantly I want to show that form is as cognitively and argumentatively (and, therefore, rhetorically) important as concept.<sup>3</sup>

"A GENERAL theory of rhetoric," Sperber and Wilson argue, in an unjustly forgotten paper on rhetoric and pragmatics, "should be concerned with basic psychological and interpretative mechanisms which remain invariant from culture to culture" (Sperber and Wilson 1981:297). I would go a bit further and say that it should also be concerned with the parameters along which those cultural variations proceed. But they are certainly right that the big mission concerns psychology and reason.

With a notion of General Rhetoric, we move into the A:B::C:B part of my argument. I will take up the two important Bs, cognition and argumentation as the topics of our next two sections.

### 3.0 Ploce in cognition

Apostle John's (1.1), "In the beginning was the Word," might be right about cosmology, but John needs to be amended if we apply him to developmental psychology: In the beginning were the words. The first words we say, we say again, immediately.<sup>4</sup> We begin our experience with

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<sup>3</sup> I also want to debunk some of metaphor's prestige along the way as well, which is based on an absurd semantic distension of *metaphor*, at the expense of *conceit*, *analogy*, *model*, *simile*, *allegory*—even, in fact, of *metaphor*, which has lost much precision.

<sup>4</sup> More accurately, we would have to say in the beginning was the syllable; that is, the syllables. Before infants start making sound-clumps that adults categorize as words or proto-words, they go through a stage of "reduplicative babbling," making charming sound strings like the famous "gaga" (which usually go on for more than two syllables). But these sounds may not belong to

words as ploce machines, starting with that species of ploce called *epizeuxis*, immediate lexical repetition, with no intervening material. Infants will grab hold of a word like a terrier, and repeat it remorselessly. For good reason: they are practicing. Practicing is repetition. Practicing words is *ploce*.

(Later in life, of course, they use repetition to harass their siblings, but that's a different story.)

Repetition is so fully enmeshed in moment-to-moment cognition that its importance is virtually self-evident, and thoroughly embodied. Want to develop a great wrist shot, or inside fastball, or jeté? Repeat the moves over and over and over. Practice. Want to remember a phone number or an address? Repeat it over and over to yourself. Want to learn the times tables? The alphabet? The sequence of months? You practice an inside fastball until you can do it effortlessly. You can turn your motor cortex and your muscles loose. You practice 'knowing' a phone number, recalling it with ease because, via *epizeuxis*, it is still fresh, until you know a phone number.

All discussion of brain activity must start in some way with repetition. Brains operate on a basal substrate of repetition. It is notoriously difficult to link most cognitive processes or inclinations to the wetware that enables them. Certainly this is problematic for metaphor. Whatever its state of grace in cognitive studies, there is nothing beyond the most speculative guesswork to explain its neural foundations. We know—and have known since at least Aristotle—that the *mind* has an affinity for similitude. But where is it in the *brain*? The linkage problem is so acute that some cognitive scientists even talk of an “incommensurability between the languages of neuroscience and psychology” (Kagan and Baird 2004: 100).

But repetition bridges that gap.

Neurons fire repetitively. Neural pathways build up through repetitions of the same firing patterns. Saying words over and over, as children do, builds up the motor cortex patterns and the form/meaning association patterns necessary to say, as well as to understand, a word.

The most elemental stuff of cognition is brain rhythms; that is, highly repetitive neuronal firing patterns. The brain repeats, endlessly, cyclically, elementally, even in sleep or coma; when it doesn't repeat, it is not a brain any longer, not a live one. The mind, similarly, repeats inherently. We return to themes, terms, images, faces, perspectives. We think.

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'language' per se, any more whistles and scat singing do, in that infants seem to be making noises for the fun of making noises, not attempting to do anything semiotic. Certainly they are giving their articulators and motor cortex a good work out for when communicative intent—and, hence, language—enters the picture. But I confess that it might be just as reasonable to say that in the beginning (of language) was the sentence (sentences), since we really don't know what the infant's conceptions are and an utterance that looks like a word, such as *mama*, might code a propositional meaning like "I want my mama," rather than simply naming a maternal thing in the child's environment. It's all too puzzling for me, so I've just made the claim that best fits the data to my argument. Sue me.

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Repetition is a cognitive affinity of even greater provenance than similarity. So ploce has, if anything, a greater call on the attention of psychologists and philosophers of mind than their figurative darling, metaphor.<sup>5</sup>

Metaphor has a place at the centre of a suite of similarity figures, including simile and conceit, as well as moves and genres, like analogy and allegory. Indeed, I think we can talk figures like assonance, consonance, and rhyme as effecting a formal similarity among terms.

Ploce has a place at the centre of a suite of repetition figures, including rhyme, alliteration, and homoioteleuton at the phonological level, isocolon at the prosodic level, polyptoton and homoiopoton at the morphological level, parison at the syntactic level, synonymia at the semantic level, and large-scale discourse modes, like argument and narrative would be impossible without repetitions of names, critical terms, settings, and so on.

As I just hinted, I think there is an important way to bring repetition and similarity together, since repetition depends on identity and similarity is 'partial identity.'

One way of looking at the relation between metaphor and ploce is that they differ in degrees of resemblance. With ploce, the degree must be very high. It can't be 100%, of course, since, like snowflakes and fingerprints, no two utterances are exactly the same—which is true of print and digital images as well. And even inflectional variations, like the presence of number or person or tense morphology, are still in ploce's range.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, metaphor requires a relatively low degree of resemblance to do its work. The most celebrated metaphors, the "novel" and "creative" ones, in fact work because the metaphor itself forces resemblances to consciousness that are not immediately apparent. In some ways, the metaphor forges the resemblance. But, when it has done its work, there *is* a resemblance.

But we need a slightly different order of resemblance, marking a different sort of commonality between ploce and metaphor, for my argument to go through here. Another figure can help us see this relation more clearly, onomatopoeia, the figure in which a form resembles the concept it evokes. Bredin defines it as "the relation between signifier and signified in which the signifier is motivated, in part, by its sound" (Bredin 1996:562), a motivational urge which he argues is a "universal human disposition" (568). Bolinger calls this an "underlying iconic drive to make sound conform to sense" (1975:258).

In fact, Cognitive Linguists have taken to calling this phenomenon *iconicity*, after Pierce's semiotic principle, and they have extended it beyond sound to include such signifier potentialities as quantity and sequence.<sup>7</sup> Fahnestock gets at this for ploce saying that "[w]hen a

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<sup>5</sup> Most of this section shamelessly cannibalizes part of my 2015 CSSR presentation on the Four Master Schemes.

<sup>6</sup> Only derivational morphology pushes lexical repetition into another figure, polyptoton (so, *farm* and *farms* are in a relationship of ploce; *farm* and *farmer* are not).

<sup>7</sup> The concept goes back at least as far as the medieval Modistae, but contemporary linguists who have argued for the importance of iconicity include Bolinger (1975), Givón (1985), and Haiman (1985). The phenomenon is nicely articulated in Haiman's brief encyclopedia article.

term is repeated with some frequency in the confines of a short passage, it inevitably acquires a certain force" (Fahnestock 2011:133). That is, it gains 'force' as it gains iterations. There is at least a loose correlation between the amount of times a word is said and the amount of 'force' it has. We can see that in familiar ploces like these two (the first is epizeuxis):

He was large. Very, very large. She was nice. Very, very nice. (Hemingway 2014 [1926]:43)

'Tis I preach while the hour-glass runs and runs! (Browning 1895 [1869]:586)

In short, there is a relation of similitude between the form of ploce and 'force' of the word that is repeated: more repetitions, more force.

#### 4.0 Ploce in argumentation and reason

Figures serve functions. One of the functions of ploce is to increase force. This can take a more expressly argumentative turn in an example like this example of symploce, from our old friend John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1.1).

We have a double ploce here (indeed, triple ploce if we count *was*), of *Word* and *God*, and the argumentative purpose is to amalgamate conceptually the domains of language and God. The restatement of the words tightens the bonds of amalgamation.

But the principle argumentative function of ploce is maintaining identity of reference:

[T]he argumentative intent of repetition may just as well be to keep the same signification from instance to instance as a common thread, maintaining consistency of concepts in consistency of terms, a notion inherent in the original Greek name for the figure, *πλοχη*, emphasizing braided interconnections, the tying together achieved by the repetition of something. (Fahnestock 1999:159)

Nothing could be more important for narrative, for argumentation, for coherence in any discourse mode, than consistency in signification, but one famous argument form, the syllogism, the epitome of reason, is inconceivable without identity of reference. The syllogism is inconceivable without ploce:

All humans are mortal.

C. Jan Swearingen is human.

Therefore, C. Jan Swearingen is mortal.

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An example of sequence iconicity would be a sentence like "Stop, drop, and roll," which syntactically is just a list of actions but pragmatically is a sequence of actions, mirrored by the sequence of the verbs; or "Don't drink and drive," which is not just a pair of injunctions, one against drinking (alcohol), the other against driving, but an injunction against the sequence of first doing the one and then doing the other, a sequence mirrored by the order of the verbs.

Ask yourself, "how could this argument be made without ploce?"

This argument is not accidentally repetitive. Ploce is not here as a by-product. There are four ploce, equally crucial. Without the ploce of *human*, we do not get the class in relation to its crucial attribute, mortality, nor to the crucial element of that class, C. Jan Swearingen. Without the ploce of *mortal*, we don't get the attribute of the class that is transitively predicated of C. Jan Swearingen, nor the transitive predication. Without the ploce of *C. Jan Swearingen*, we don't get the element of the class, nor the predication. Without the ploce of *be*, we don't get any of these relations at all.

We say similar things about metaphor and analogy, of course, and the parallels are very close indeed, but there is a fundamental and pervasive confusion across the humanities that an analogy *is* a metaphor, a confusion which has contributed to the exaltation of metaphor. I don't have time to combat the error here, but the comparison with ploce should at least help expose it: a syllogism is an argument built on ploce; an analogy is an argument built on metaphors. An analogy is no more a metaphor than a syllogism is a ploce.<sup>8</sup>

Ploche is also relevant for tautology, as in this example we heard earlier today (an epanalepsis):

Women know women. (Dignam, in Clair and Dignam 1939:19)

Dignam is using the tautology to build a particular expertise that her male counterparts cannot possibly match.

We also have plenty of examples in doxa, like these:

Boys will be boys.

Business is business.

A promise is a promise.

The phenomenon is a bit more subtle than in mathematics or formal logic, or in the Dignam example, since the expressions are always used to emphasize some specific property of the term, but their argumentative function depends on those properties being present on both sides of the predication.

## 5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, I have drawn out a long comparison between a trope and a scheme in terms of their psychological and rational dimensions, their relation to other figures and to neurocognitive affinities, and their intriguing interconnections. It was, from the beginning, an uphill battle. The

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<sup>8</sup> I'm overstating the tightness of the specific figure-type/argument-type mapping a bit, of course. Analogies might be prosecuted through similes, for instance, and almost always implicate conceits. Similarly, syllogisms might be prosecuted through polyptotons, maybe even homioptotons, though not without convolution. Syllogisms almost always implicate locational figures, though they will differ with respect to the order typology of the language. For English, epanaphora is crucial. For a VOS language, epistrophe would be more important for syllogisms.

Queen of Tropes compared to the Forgotten Step-child of Schemes, the critically and theoretically ubiquitous metaphor to the neglected and forlorn ploce.

Those of you who bet on the Queen are laughing up your sleeves, no doubt. The entire argument is, if not exactly a metaphor (though some benighted people might call it that), then certainly an exercise that depends on metaphor and gets its suasive force from the cognitive affinity that gives rise to metaphor, similitude.

But, not so fast.

The step-child actually has this argument going away. Metaphor lost the argument the minute I used the word *metaphor* a second time (and in the end, I used it 48 times; let's make it an even 50 with another epanalepsis: metaphor will be metaphors). There could be no analogy between *x* and *y*, no argument of any kind involving *x* and *y*, without repetition of *x* and *y* throughout.

Ploce, for the überwin!

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