Seductive Academic Writing

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For my parents

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WHY WRITING WITHOUT FIGURES OF SPEECH IS LIKE COOKING BLINDFOLDED

CHAPTER ONE

A CORONER INVESTIGATES

> But away with these figures of speech: they are troublesome to manage, and have been worn to rags. Unhappily, there is no such thing as speaking—nor even thinking—without such figures.
> —Jeremy Bentham

> When you hear grammatical terms such as metonymy, metaphor and allegory do they not seem to refer to some rare, exotic tongue? Yet they are categories which apply to the chatter of your chambermaid.
> —Montaigne

Dead Academic Writer

Some years ago, a corpse wearing the toe tag D.A.W was trolleyed into a morgue. The coroner investigated. From acquaintances of the deceased, the coroner determined D.A.W was the person they nicknamed Dead Academic Writer. From his doctor, the coroner discovered D.A.W had suffered from the degenerative disease "academese".

"What are its symptoms?" asked the coroner. The doctor motioned toward a solemn shelf of medical handbooks. "The disease has many complications. Eventually patients arrive at hospital displaying no vital signs. The body of a dead academic writer shuffles like a zombie. It's conscious but has no pulse, no rosy cheeks, no warm touch. Its voice makes sounds but speaks no sense. Its limbs move but lack gait, purpose and direction. The dead academic writer's story is like Dorian Gray's. He spent his youth reading and telling beautiful stories, but then he learned academic writing at university. At first imperceptibly, then sedulously in print, he learns and applies the bad moral habits of academese. To behold his portrait in the attic is to see the horrors of academese. Relatives of terminal academese patients often request DNR—do not resuscitate", concluded the doctor.

The coroner summoned many experts to testify at an inquest. Doctors James (1899, 1920), Mencken (2010) and Orwell (2002) agreed the

disease of academese was first diagnosed as the nineteenth century turned to the twentieth. Next the coroner questioned Living Academic Writers. She wondered why these L.A.Ws developed immunity to academese. Doctor Howard Becker (2007) attributed his good writer's health to his practice of writing like a speaking person and to pouring into his prose an elixir called "creativity". The coroner couldn't trick him into revealing the potion's mystery ingredients but, in an unguarded moment, he let slip that all good writing campaigns against cliché (Amis, 2002). Mr. William Zinsser (1995) attributed his writer's health to his belief that although writers work in institutions, they resist the bad writing disease by refusing to write like institutions. "You mean L.A.Ws write like living people?" asked the coroner. Zinsser agreed. Orwell agreed. The witnesses all agreed.

"Is it a reasonable conjecture to which you might assent that a writing style that is more, shall we say, 'literary' rather than one to which the name 'academic' is put could, when used appropriately, enable the vaccination of writers against academese?" mused the coroner to the witnesses. This time they disagreed. But only after pausing to translate the question into plain English. Some eminent linguists and like-minds testified they had prescribed a more literary academic writing medicine for years (Carter, 2004, 2014; Carter & Nash, 1990; Lanham, 2007; Wilbers, 2014). But their medicines were mocked by other eminent linguists and like-minds. When pressed, the dissenters conceded *Dorian Gray* was a splendid novel, but they insisted literariness belongs in literature, not in linguistics and certainly not in academic writing (Fowler, 1989; Fowler, 1971; Strunk & White, 2000). They maintained academic writing is about content and not flowery, literary stuff like style. "Facts! Facts! Facts!" contested a cantankerous witness called Mr. Gradgrind (Dickens, 1983).

Experts on academese next took the witness stand. Professors Sword, Pinker and Billig agreed academese was now in epidemic and vouched for the heartiness of the medications they had prescribed for it. Controversially, they claimed academese was not a degenerative disease, but curable. "Is it heretofore the categorical contention of your testimonials that your medications have the efficacy in the fullness of time for the restoration of the patient D.A.W to his former youthful vigour?" enquired the coroner. Would that the professors had only nodded. Instead, cursed by their learning, they dissected the coroner's question. "Legalese. Too many nouns and too few verbs. Too many polysyllabics. Too wordy. Too pompous", they were heard to mumble.

Rallying to rescue her reputation, the coroner challenged their claim that academese was curable. "Did you not write that academic writing

'stinks'?" (2014b) she demanded of Professor Pinker. "Did you not write that stylish academic writing is an 'oxymoron'?" (2012a, p. vii) she demanded of Professor Sword. "Did you not write that the likelihood of social scientists writing stylishly has all the momentum of 'whispers in the wind'?" (2013, p. 211) she demanded of Professor Billig. But before they could reply, the coroner rose and announced the inquest would convene tomorrow.

The final session of an inquest begins with a summing up of evidence, but this coroner began otherwise. The inquest had determined D.A.W died of complications of academese, but every coroner prefers an exact cause of death. The coroner wondered if she had overlooked any causes. So, atypically, she addressed the open court: "If anyone here assembled has the capability to offer testimony for the demonstration of just other cause of explanation for the decease of D.A.W let him or her identify himself or herself to the court at the present moment so that they may produce witness testimony before the judgment of the coroner is to be delivered". Pinker winced at the coroner's grammar gaffes. Sword grimaced at her verbosity. Billig frowned at the jargon, but they held their tongues this time. Silence descended. Then the coroner spotted a raised arm.

A snowy haired gentleman shuffled forward to present himself. Everyone stared. Some snickered. He looked as ancient as a Roman bust and dressed like one, too. Clutching his toga to his chest with a marbled and splintered hand, he hastened on in his leather sandals, making good time for a polycentenarian. Beckoned, at last, into the witness stand, the coroner's clerk asked him to identify himself. "Please call me Doctor Q", he requested in a voice that filled the court with a familiar yet forgotten accent. A stickler for decorum, the clerk insisted the witness state his full name, address and business. "I am Marcus Fabius Quintilianus from Hispania, which I believe you call Spain". He coughed and went on. "And I wish to speak of style". He coughed again. "Would you like us to give you a glass of water?" solicited the coroner. "No, I would like you to listen to a point of rhetoric", riposted Doctor Q, "since I see none of you has read my book" (Quintilian, 1920).

Thinking that the testimony of this superannuated eccentric might lighten the load of the inquest, the coroner consented. "True it is D.A.W suffered from academese", announced Doctor Q. "But he could have lived long and prospered", he added, recalling a catchy phrase from a TV series featuring a wise elder statesman in a blue nylon one-piece with a bad wig, who made weird hand gestures. The coroner asked: "So is it heretofore and moreover the contention of your testimony that…" but broke off, catching the professors rolling their eyes again. "I mean, you believe academese is

curable?" corrected the coroner. "All bad communications are curable", contended Doctor Q. "I show it in my book, but sadly history remembers only those who write things first. We Romans don't much care for the Greeks", he added, "but, boy, that guy Aristotle knew a thing or two about seduction…and logic and philosophy and poetics and biology and linguistics and physics and rhetoric and aesthetics—damn that smartass Aristotle!"

"Why has the inquest not heard from this Aristotle?" asked the coroner of the other experts. Buttocks clenched seats. Mouths became dry. Perspiration trickled itchily down sticky spines. The experts had all heard of Aristotle, but few had read his most persuasive book (1926). And none had read Doctor Q's book. Doctor Q continued: "Academese thrives because academic writers aren't trained in the art of persuasion, the rhetoric of argument, the canon of style—seduction, in a word". "New age quackery!" yelled Mr. Gradgrind. "Charlatan!" shouted a corpus linguist. "Mountebank!" shouted a systemic functional linguist.

"The witness will be heard!" commanded the coroner. Leaning closer to her favourite healing crystal, she invited Doctor Q to say more about seduction. He went on: "Whatever the communicative act—television shows about people boldly going where no man has gone before or academic writing about camel dung consistency—all communicators must seduce. Content and style are not separate, but yin and yang" (Blanshard, 1954)—Doctor Q liked this modern Chinese philosophy. "The patient D.A.W died from lack of yang. He never cared for his readers so he never attended to the art of seduction, perhaps because he never studied it. Or perhaps he did but thought it didn't matter. Or perhaps his teachers told him it was soppy literary stuff. Or perhaps he couldn't be bothered. He neglected his readers and so he died of neglect. I wish I could have cured him—and got to him before Aristotle".

Now the coroner took interest. Moving still closer to her healing crystal, and regretting having left at home her essential oils, she requested Doctor Q demonstrate seductive academic writing. "Consider a topic that bores you but interests its writers", suggested Doctor Q. "Maths!", volunteered the coroner. "Very well", he replied. "Now my task is to make you feel my enthusiasm for maths. I'll start by writing about it as a human being and not as a maths textbook". "Hear! Hear!" shouted Mr. Zinsser. "I'll also write with freshness and creativity". "I concur", shouted Doctor Becker—he, too, was a Trekkie. "But most of all", concluded Doctor Q, stretching a cliff-hanging silence—these classically trained orators knew how to suspend an audience—"I'll use figures of speech to make my prose more seductive, to help you feel what I feel, to help you see what I see, to

help you hear the music of my voice, to please and amuse you, to show I care for and respect you".

Now absorption gripped the coroner. "Demonstration!" she demanded again. "Here's one I prepared earlier", said Doctor Q—he also liked daytime cookery shows. He recited the following (Kasner & Newman, 1949, pp. 27-28).

> To grasp the meaning and importance of mathematics, to appreciate its beauty and its value, arithmetic must first be understood, for mostly, since its beginning, mathematics has been arithmetic in simple or elaborate attire. Arithmetic has been the queen and the handmaiden of the sciences from the days of the astrologers of Chaldea and the high priests of Egypt to the present days of relativity, quanta and the adding machine. Historians may dispute the meaning of the ancient papyri, theologians may wrangle over the exegesis of scripture, philosophers may debate over Pythagorean doctrine, but all will concede that the numbers in the papyri, in the scriptures, and in the writings of Pythagoras are the same as the numbers of today. As arithmetic, mathematics has helped man to cast horoscopes, to make calendars, to predict the rising of the Nile, to measure fields and the height of the pyramids, to measure the speed of a stone as it fell from a tower in Pisa, the speed of an apple as it fell from a tree in Woolsthorpe, to weigh the stars and the atoms, to mark the passage of time, to find the curvature of space. And although mathematics is also the calculus, the theory of probability, the matrix algebra, the science of the infinite, it is still the heart of counting.

When his recitation ended, the court roared approval. "It sounds beautiful!" said one. "I can see and feel maths!" said another. "Suddenly I want to read about maths", said the coroner, "but I don't know why". Doctor Q smiled and explained: "It's because the mathematicians took the time to learn to write with figures of speech—I counted at least seven of them. Anyone who takes this trouble can write seductively, too. But sadly, too few academic writers do".

About this Book

This is not another handbook on how to write good academic prose by writing clearly, concisely and coherently. It's a book about how to write seductive academic prose by using figures of speech, because academic writers, particularly those outside of the arts, seldom write with them or understand why they should write with them. The figures rarely enter handbooks on writing, and almost never enter handbooks on good academic writing and yet writing with the figures inoculates prose against

symptoms of academese. Figures of speech alone cannot cure writers of academese, but writers cannot seduce without the figures. The allegory I began with contains figures and schemes like alliteration, analogy, anaphora, apposition, assonance, asyndeton, dialogismus, epiplexis, hypallage, hyperbaton, irony, isocolon, metaphor, paradox, parallelism, parenthesis, ridicule.

It matters little if you don't know or care to know the names of the figures. But it matters much that you write with the figures to show you care for your readers. To write seductively is to write with figures of speech. Strictly speaking, not all the "figures" above are figures. But all matter and I differentiate them only when required.

If you accept that much academic writing stinks, you may wish to skip the next chapter and explore the four chapters showing which figures academic writers can and should use and why. But if you think academese is not a disease, you may wish to read the next chapter first. And if you think academese is necessary or untreatable because the academy is stricken with it, you may wish to read the last chapter first.

This book presents around thirty figures of speech academic writers can use to write more seductively. I group the figures into four sections covering rhetorical imperatives of good writing: Imperatives to write musically, to show similarity and difference, to expand and contract, and to make play and mischief. I chose these figures because seductive academic writers use them. I show how and why academic writers should use them with examples from seductive academic writing.

A website supports this book: http://www.vernaculardiscourse.com/. There you can learn more about the figures in this book and also about other figures. I made the website to show why everyone should use the figures where they can. But the website serves the general speaker and writer while this book better serves the academic writer. Whether you're an undergraduate or graduate student, an early or mature career academic or anyone who writes scholarly works, I hope you will discover in these pages the care, benefit and pleasure of putting figures of speech into thinking, speaking and writing.

CHAPTER TWO

WITHER AND WHITHER THE FIGURES?

> There is no satisfactory explanation of style, no infallible guide to good writing, no assurance that a person who thinks clearly will be able to write clearly, no key that unlocks the door, no inflexible rule by which the young writer may shape his course. He will often find himself steering by stars that are disturbingly in motion.
> —Strunk and White

Three Tales

A Paradox, a Problem and an Oxymoron walk into a bar. If only we could step upon the problems of academese so lightly. Academese is no barroom joke restoring liquids can balm. It's a hangover that throbs in the soles of academic foot soldiers, beats in the batons of their drill instructors and jars through the dead limbs, numb heads, flatline pulses, scholarly journals, and academic tombstones that pullulate with its barely sentient prose. The academese disease presents a nerve jangling, jarring spectrum of toxic symptoms and odour of decay. Let us explore pedagogic reasons why much academic writing stinks through the tales of a Paradox, a Problem and an Oxymoron.

A Paradox

Paradox dreamed of writing seductive academic prose so she studied the style handbooks. She began with Strunk and White, for she admired their style of prose and their definition of style that begins this chapter. She quickly learned and steadily practised their rules and saw her prose become simpler, leaner and clearer, but still not seductive. Paradox asked her English teacher, "Why can I still not write as seductively as Strunk and White?" Miss Proper examined her prose and said, "You write clearly, concisely and coherently. You need do nothing more". But Paradox thought her prose still lacked something. Then one day she realized Strunk and White were centenarians. Inspiration shouted to her: "Read the modern style handbooks!"

Paradox read these all the next week. Strunk and White said she would find no "key that unlocks the door" to seduction, but she hoped at least to enter an unvisited room in the library of style. The handbooks on the linguistics shelves pushed ajar the door to reveal some secrets. But not enough to get inside and practise them—the applied linguists prefer analyzing style to teaching it, which they call "stylistics" or "poetics" (Toolan, 2014). Still, their secrets absorbed her, and she wondered why her academic writing courses said little or nothing about style as choosing to engage readers, using literary techniques, writing vividly, originally and creatively (Carter & Nash, 1990; Leech & Short, 1984; Simpson, 2004).

Next Paradox read style handbooks for broader audiences, which chorused Strunk and White's advice (Casagrande, 2010; Landon, 2008; Lanham, 2007; Williams & Colomb, 2010; Zinsser, 1995). But a handful opened the door to seduction further and in more ways the academic writing handbooks were mute about. Paradox learned seductive writers wrote music and their personality into their prose with familiar instruments like varied sentence lengths and unfamiliar instruments like scheme, trope and figure of speech. These unfamiliar instruments usually concluded the handbooks in sections called "advanced" or "special effects" (for example, Cioffi, 2005; Clark, 2006; Wilbers, 2000, 2014).

Paradox yearned to study these advanced techniques more so she next searched the humanities handbooks. These arty-farty writers would surely teach the figures of speech, she reasoned. But Paradox found just two handbooks (Hayot, 2014; Pyne, 2009) with brief sections recommending the figures. But they covered only familiar figures like metaphor, simile and analogy, and cautioned against overusing such "literary" techniques.

Then Paradox stumbled upon a musty shelf titled "rhetoric" from among whose cobwebbed volumes she found one titled *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (Lanham, 1991). Here she discovered the figures numbered in the many dozens and took many syllables and many Greek and Latin names. Examples from exemplary stylists illustrated the figures. They, too, seduced like Strunk and White. At last, paradox saw what her prose lacked: the figures of speech that seduce.

Paradox now understood why Strunk and White's prose seduced: Their "style" definition contained common figures of speech found in only one or two style handbooks but also uncommon and untaught figures like phrase and syllable symmetries and forward repetitions. Paradox realized the figures were no mere literary flourishes or page decorations, because to remove them was to see the sentences lose not only their beauty but also their rhythm, symmetries and fastenings. The figures were more than stylish clothes dressing the sentence mannequins; they were the spine and

the limbs, the stance and the gait, the posture and the personality of the prose.

Open almost all the stylish writing handbooks and you will find—if you look carefully—the tale of the Paradox. Their authors salt and pepper their prose with figures of speech, but their stylish writing recipes omit them. They assume writers know how to use them, or they consider them trifles or special effects (see Fahnestock, 2005) or they caution against them. Strunk and White (2000) caution against them, Williams and Colomb (2010) caution against them, Pyne (2009) cautions against them, but all expertly season their prose with them. Hence the paradox. To write seductively is to write with figures of speech, but how can writers learn to write seductively if style handbooks will not teach the figures of speech that seduce?

We shall return to the tale of the Paradox, but next comes the tale of the Problem. Why do so few *academic* writers salt and pepper their prose with figures of speech? Academese writers use no figures. Writing handbooks for graduate students make almost no mention of the figures. And stylish academic writing handbooks teach no figures. This leads to the tale of the Problem.

A Problem

Problem dreamed of becoming a professor. He scored high grades in high school, wrote engaging essays and edited the school magazine. Later he went to university to study psychology, where his problems began. At school his prose had energy and agency and vividness and personality. But the psychology papers he read lacked personality and vividness and agency and energy. These absences, he learned from his instructors, constitute "the academic style" (Bennett, 2009). So he learned to deenergize his prose with nominalizations and passive and insipid verbs. He learned to bury and hide agency and voice with more nominalizations and more passive and insipid verbs. He learned to put big subordinate clauses at the start of long sentences. He learned to put the big idea at the end of long sentences. He learned to obfuscate with concepts, jargon and abstractions. Sedulously he mastered writing prose that tells no stories and lacks a guiding, interesting and comforting storyteller. Academics wrote like this (Andreski, 1972; Billig, 2013; Blanshard, 1954; Limerick, 1993; Sword, 2012a) therefore he should write like this therefore he could one day sit in a professor's chair and convert the next generation of storytelling highschoolers into zombie graduate writers.

Problem shows us something terrible happens to student writing at university. At high school we write about ourselves, our place in the world, how we relate to the world and vice versa. We write as participants, so we write to interest, to engage, to tell stories. But in university classrooms we shift from writing as participants in the world to observers of the world, where we learn the distanced, objective, abstracted style. The participant—observer thermometer can detect the first foul symptoms of academic writing instruction that, untreated, produces student prose with full-blown academese. Good writing describes vividly and immediately, sounds like people speaking, and tells stories with personalities, dialogue and a storyteller. Academese stinks because its authors have withdrawn from participating in the worlds they write about; stinks because its authors tell no stories like high-schoolers; stinks because its authors write not as personalities with opinions, character and humour.

The stench of a constipated and flatulent academic writing style was detected more than a century ago (James, 1899), but it reeks with an older mustiness, of malodorous and superfatted prose that revolts the senses with its impenetrability—the clever prose of power and institutions designed to awe uninitiates and admit only their own. In fresher but fouler developments, the applied linguists, largely, have smelled the vapours and raised academic writing instruction into teaching the art of the stench (for example, Bailey, 2011; Joyner, 2013; Soles, 2010; Swales & Feak, 2012a). Handbooks like these, and the university writing pedagogies they direct, tend to recommend passives and abstractions and concepts and other academese stinkers. They prescribe an academic style stylish academic writers honour more in the breach than in practice. These handbooks speak not of interesting the reader or of telling stories or of writing creatively and figuratively and musically and with personality and with passion. They circumscribe or prohibit creativity and originality, particularly by reducing style to the singular—*the* academic style (for example, Hayot, 2014; Joyner, 2013). But stylish academic writing dresses in as many styles as does good fiction, good food and good music.

High-schoolers do not speak or write the language of academese. Ask your teenage daughter what she learned in class today and, barring the hormones being in moody revolt, she might reply, "More boring civics. The teacher told us some boring stuff about our duties and how we talk about them. So boring!" This passes not the prescriptions of precise academic prose, but it passes for energy, agency and understandability. Here's Professor Academese struggling to say something similar but passing not the tests for energy, agency and understandability.

> The postulate or common understanding involved in speech is certainly co-extensive, in the obligation it carries, with the social organism of which language is the instrument, and the ends of which it is an effort to subserve (Martineau, 1891).

Why is it so hard to grab the meaning of so much academic prose as it comes off the bat? Do you not keep company with legions—from high-schoolers to pedagogues—who carol, "What the hell are you talking about?" when you read clever prose like this that lacks the cleverness and humanity to communicate clearly and engagingly? Universities create academese writers by design in undergraduate education (Hayot, 2014; Starfield, 2004) and by neglect in graduate education (Billig, 2013; Kamler & Thompson, 2006; Mullen, 2001; Sword, 2017).

Lest one think academics write much better today than a distant century ago, consider another example, from a 2016 book I reviewed for a journal. I withhold the author's name because I know them personally and know they *speak* clearly and persuasively. But when the voice travels down the arms, into the fingers and through the keyboard that speaks it in print, something terrible so often happens to so many academic voices in prose.

> While what makes particular actions possible at different sites of engagement is more a matter contextualization, the way these actions get linked with other actions in historical trajectories is more a matter of entextualization (Bauman and Briggs, 1990). It is the affordances that language and other technologies of talk make available for transforming actions into discourse so that they can be recontextualized into other sites of engagement that create historical trajectories.

The only comprehension trajectory these sentences make possible is to churl readers' minds into slow, spinning, sickening roundabouts of jargon off which they stagger back to earth with nausea. Only cheering irony can comfort us. In this book that views discourse as action, why did the author put to sleep the actions of speaking and doing with comatose abstractions and replace the speaking voice with the monotone moan of academese? Something terrible happens to writers and writing at university.

> The irony here is that the quality of scholarly writing is widely bemoaned, both outside and inside the academy (e.g. Limerick, 1993; Rankin, 1998), yet we seem to do little to address the quality of writing in a systematic way at the very point where scholarly style and identity is being shaped (Rose & McClafferty, 2001, p. 27).

University students do not want to write academese. They do it to please their writing instructors and graduate advisers. "My professor says I must use passive". "I must use abstractions and nominalizations". "Rhetorical questions are disallowed". "I may not use *I*". "Metaphors and similes and analogies and alliteration belong in literature". "I'm writing academic prose, so storytelling and creativity and creating interest are irrelevant". Graduate students speak half-truths and whole myths like these (see Sword, 2012a, pp. 26-27) when they take stylish academic writing workshops at my university. Something terrible happens to writers and writing at university. Its name is academese teaching.

Fresh from the dunghill of academese teaching and practice, hopeful green shoots have lately sprung forth. Three academics—all writers or researchers of language—wrote three books alerting professors to the stench coming off their prose. First came Helen Sword's (2012a) *Stylish Academic Writing*, then Michael Billig's (2013) problem-defining *Learn to write badly: How to succeed in the social sciences*, and then Steven Pinker's (2014a) *The Sense of Style*. But like most style books by most linguists, these tend to research, define and analyze academese more than teach its remedies. What recommendations they offer tend toward the general. They say: write creatively, borrow literary techniques, emulate good writers, make jokes, tell stories—good advice all, but academic writers like graduate students need more specific "how to" handbooks. The pedagogy of academic writing instruction needs remaking to address the unhappy endings in the tales of the Problem and the Paradox.

When she was searching the shelves of the style library, Paradox found no academic writing handbook with a pedagogy of storytelling (but see Thody, 2006); no academic writing handbook teaching how to write music into prose even though we know good prose sings songs (Blanshard, 1954; Quintilian, 1920; Wilbers, 2014); no academic writing handbook teaching creative writing techniques and why these matter; no academic writing handbook teaching how and why to use the figures of speech. Seductive academic writers apparently learn these things for themselves since academic writing pedagogies overlook or reject them. As Sword (2012a, p. 167) observes, academic training teaches critical thinking, not its creative expression.

Paradox had found just one lay handbook with a chapter on the figures (Cioffi, 2005), so she looked for them in the recent stylish academic writing handbooks. Disappointment followed again. Pinker and Sword sometimes notice common figures in the stylish prose they examine, but nowhere do they teach or champion the figures. And yet any rhetorician will tell you:

> The absence or scarcity of figurative language can have a deadening effect on style (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 367).

The general disinterest linguistics pays to the figures matches its general disinterest in and disrespect for the discipline that began the comprehensive study and teaching of language and persuasion: rhetoric. Characteristically, Pinker (p. 11) and Sword (p. 81) mislabel the "tricks" rhetoric plays. I applaud linguists for alerting us to the stench the house of academe gives off and for campaigning for sweeter prose. But this cannot happen until the pedagogy of academic writing invites the figures into the classroom to lecture on their special subject of seduction. The figures belong to the canon of style in the lonely castle of rhetoric that few linguists ever visit because their discipline thinks it haunted only by Greek and Roman ghosts. As rhetorician Brian Vickers (1988) observes, when linguists speak of "rhetoric", they often debase, winnow or hijack it, but seldom explore or advance it. Now we shall pass on the argument baton to another, in the final tale.

An Oxymoron

The tale of the Oxymoron explains why "stylish" and "academic" sit as incompanionably in prose as Bette Davis and Joan Crawford on a movie set. The academy majors in academese teaching and writing thus "stylish academic writing" seems an oxymoron (Sword, 2012a, p. vii). When I told a colleague I was writing about seductive academic writing, she guffawed and riposted, "You mean there is such a thing?" Yes, but not much of it. Yes, "seductive academic writing" seems oxymoronic, but only by its scarcity. Another scarcity testifies to this scarcity. Consider what the dust jackets say about the academic books they dress. All praise the content, but few praise the author's style. Those that do, praise the author not for writing clear, coherent and concise prose but for unusually and sedulously caring enough to write to please their readers.

The dust jacket test offers only a yardstick on style—one publishers bend with their blurbs—but a reliable yardstick, nevertheless. The dust jackets of books excerpted often in this book (Dawkins, 1987, 2009; Kasner & Newman, 1949; Lin, 1936, 1937) praise the wit, charm, humour, passion, storytelling, enthusiasm of the authors. They praise their prose styles for being wry, beguiling, beautiful, fascinating, easily readable, like quicksilver. They sometimes even praise the figures of speech which serve these ideals and which this book teaches. Reviewers praise the analogies, metaphors and anecdotes of Richard Dawkins because they help tell the story, make it clearer, more immediate, more engaging.

We know from the tales of the Paradox and the Problem that this aesthetic sense of "style" the dust jackets praise remains an estranged cousin or stranger or enemy to the academic style the academic writing pedagogies teach. Stylish academic writing will thus remain rare and seem oxymoronic unless we reform those pedagogies. This endeavour exceeds the effort this book can exert, but one thing we must do is to teach the figures that seduce. Seductive academic writers season every page of their prose with the figures. And yet we have seen that the spice cupboards in the academic writing handbooks and the stylish academic writing handbooks and the university course book recipes for successful academic writing are bereft of the spice the figures season into seductive prose. Writing without the figures is like cooking blindfolded (Forsyth, 2013).

The figures have so withered by neglect in education you might ask, "Whither the figures?" Shakespeare, P.G. Wodehouse, Lin Yutang, Kasner & Newman and Richard Dawkins stand as great stylists because they season their prose with the figures. Alone among these stylists, Shakespeare studied the figures in an age when schools formally taught them. But then the scientific age elbowed rhetoric and the figures out of the classroom (Vickers, 1988). Those who write figures into their prose today most likely self-studied them or took creative writing courses that most academics will never take. We need not invade the land of literature to learn to write seductively. We need not storm the lonely castle of rhetoric and bother the ghosts of Aristotle, Quintilian and Cicero to memorize the figures. We need not fear the figures, for they are simple things only with complex names. To write seductively we need only enter the borderlands of literature and rhetoric, conduct raiding parties and plunder and press into service their most seductive weapons, the figures of speech and literary techniques.

Seductive Academic Writing

The tales of the Paradox, the Problem and the Oxymoron deliver the conclusion that to write seductively is to write with figures of speech. Should you still think otherwise, consider another conclusion, the final paragraph from Kasner & Newman's *Mathematics and the Imagination*, where we find, depending on your counting method, nine figures, some repeated: tricolon, analogy, anaphora, parallelism, isocolon, personification, metaphor, paradox, alliteration.

> Mathematics is an activity governed by the same rules imposed upon the symphonies of Beethoven, the paintings of Da Vinci, and the poetry of Homer. Just as scales, as the laws of perspective, as the rules of metre

> seem to lack fire, the formal rules of mathematics may appear to be without lustre. Yet ultimately, mathematics reaches pinnacles as high as those attained by the imagination in its most daring reconnoiters. And this conceals, perhaps, the ultimate paradox of science. For in their prosaic plodding both logic and mathematics often outstrip their advance guard and show that the world of pure reason is stranger than the world of pure fancy (1949, p. 362).

Seductive academic writing bustles with abundant figures. I shall define "seductive" no further since the style bookshelves are stacked enough already with style handbooks and style definitions and because rhetoricians understand seduction is what the figures do. The space this book makes for itself on the bookshelves is not to restore the figures to prominence in formal education, though this book wishes that, because the figures have their own popularizers and champions (Corbett & Connors, 1999; Forsyth, 2013; Harris, 2003; Leith, 2012; Romm, 2012). The space this book makes for itself is to reveal figures of speech academic writers use that mark them out as seductive writers. But this is not a stylistics book because the style bookshelves are also stacked enough with analyses of the figures in poetry and prose and even science (Fahnestock, 1999). This book instead offers a rhetorical stylistics approach to the figures (Fahnestock, 2005), a why and a how-to academic writer's guide to writing with the figures, illustrated with examples from seductive academic writing.

Another distinguished mathematician, and philosopher of education, Alfred North Whitehead, called style "the last acquirement of the educated mind" and its "ultimate morality" (1929, p. 12). He was bang on the numbers. Good style *is* the last thing academic writers acquire, but many acquire only academese style. Others rise higher but their style seldom ascends above the blue skies of clarity and concision for reasons our tales have told. To write seductively is to soar still higher and touch the angels of seduction, to write with figures of speech. Style *is* the writer's ultimate morality because writing begins with the moral practice of choosing to care or not to care about your readers (Lanham, 2007). Seductive writers care enough to interest, engage and amuse their readers, imperatives the figures can serve.

The following chapters teach and illustrate around thirty figures I found often in seductive academic writing. The slippery figures wriggle through the classifier's net so I group them into four rhetorical imperatives often advocated by the style handbooks that paradoxically ignore the figures. First come figures of music and repetition because good writing sounds like music and the human voice. Next come figures of similarity

and difference because academic texts define, describe and classify, and avoiding academese means doing these vividly, immediately and familiarly. Then come figures of expansion and contraction because seductive writers tell stories, talk to their readers and write as personalities. Finally come figures of play and mischief because seductive academic writers know even serious prose readers like, need and deserve to laugh now and then.

PART II:

FIGURES OF SPEECH FOR SEDUCTIVE ACADEMIC WRITING