FIGURATIVELY SPEAKING

ROBERT J. FOGELIN

REVISED EDITION

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BY ROBERT J. FOGELIN

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For Florence Fogelin

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Preface to the First Edition

Though they appear first, prefaces are always written last, often in a make-believe future tense. This preface is backward looking: It is intended to thank those who have helped bring this work to completion.

Since various parts of this essay have been presented in different stages of development to a number of audiences, it is not possible to acknowledge all my debts. I have learned a great deal from discussions that have followed these presentations, as I have from conversations with my colleagues in the Dartmouth Philosophy Department.

Throughout this work I have tried to test my ideas concerning figurative language against rich and complex literary texts, and in doing so I have come to appreciate the possibilities for alternative readings of these texts. Here I have profited particularly from conversations with Stanley Eveling and Florence Fogelin.

Ted Cohen, someone I have met only once, and then only briefly, read the complete manuscript with sympathy and care

and made important suggestions for its improvement. At various points I have tried to acknowledge his contributions, but some of his most important suggestions must remain unacknowledged since we do not have a convention for thanking people for things they have persuaded us not to say.

I also wish to thank Jane Taylor and Judith Calvert for their help in copyediting the text, and Jeanne Ferris of Yale University Press for her support in bringing this slim volume into print.

Publication of this work was supported by grants from the Faculty Research Committee and the Dean of the Faculty Office of Dartmouth College.

Preface to the Revised Edition

This work is a revised edition of *Figuratively Speaking*, published in 1988. The central theme in these two editions is essentially the same: In the face of a great deal of contemporary opposition, I offer and defend a modern restatement of the traditional account of figurative language found, for example, in the works of Aristotle.

In the process of revision, I have made some useful deletions and, I hope, a number of useful additions. Because the account of figurative language that I promote relies heavily on the works of Paul Grice (aka H. P. Grice), I have offered a brief, informal summary of his notions of conversational maxims and the conversational implicatures that are based on them.

Chapter 7 has been considerably expanded. It now contains an examination of synecdoche, a trope strangely ignored in the original edition. It also applies the notion of figurative comparisons to fables and satires. Given my amateur status as a literary critic, this is risky. It is, however, important for my

purposes to show that the approach I adopt with regard to figurative language goes beyond hackneyed examples ("Sally is a block of ice.") and has direct application to rich literary works.

Since its publication, *Figuratively Speaking* has faced various criticisms. Because the targets of these criticisms remain essentially unchanged, it seemed prudent to address them. William Lycan has produced what I take to be the most probing criticisms, so I have responded directly to them. In the process I think I have implicitly responded to objections raised by others.

Though the program pursued in the original edition of *Figuratively Speaking* remains essentially unchanged, when I got the text back in my hands I could not resist making stylistic changes throughout. Bad habits formed in writing a doctoral dissertation and publishing for tenure are not easy to overcome.

I have received institutional support for this project from the Faculty Research Fund at Dartmouth College and from a generous Emeritus Grant from the Mellon Foundation. I would also like to thank Peter Ohlin of the Oxford University Press for his encouragement and support. As before, I wish to thank Florence Fogelin and Jane Taylor for their insightful suggestions and for their skill and patience in dealing with my gaffes.

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Introduction

The central theme of this work is that figures of speech—at least those that I will consider—involve departures from the rules that govern the literal use of language. This approach, however, is limited. It has no obvious application to *hyperbation* or any of those other figures (*anaphora, symploce*, et cetera) that concern word order, patterns of repetition, and the like. Their use, for example, in the speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., shows their lasting power, and it would be interesting to know how these syntactical, seemingly mechanical figures achieve this. I will not, however, discuss them here because they are not connected with meaning in the way that interests me.

Using current critical vocabulary, I might say that I am interested in tropes as opposed to schemes (figures of thought as opposed to figures of sound), but this could prove misleading as well. Richard Lanham describes current critical usage of the notion of a trope in this way:

> Such consensus as there is wants trope to mean a Figure that changes the meaning of a word or words, rather than

> simply arranging them in a pattern of some sort. (Lanham 1991, 154–55)

Over against this, I will argue, as others have, that in most figures traditionally called tropes, literal meaning is preserved rather than altered. Generally—and the exceptions are interesting and will be examined in detail—I am primarily concerned with those figures of speech that relate to meaning in a way that bears upon the truth of what is asserted.

Irony presents a clear example of a figure that functions in the way that concerns me. Reflecting on his government's tendency to develop oppressive institutions opposite in character from the communist ideals they were supposed to establish, a Romanian intellectual remarked, "We would have done better to seek a fascist state." It is clear what he is getting at, and he is certainly not expressing a preference for fascism. If asked bluntly "Do you really believe that?" he would probably blink in disbelief at the naiveté of the question, but still, the answer to it would be no.

Generally speaking, we are not supposed to make assertions that we take to be false, for this often amounts to lying. Yet ironic statements are often—perhaps usually—utterances that the speaker takes to be false. Why aren't they treated as lies? Borrowing (and much simplifying) ideas developed by Paul Grice, the following is a first approximation of how ironic utterances work:

> *A* says something to *B* that she (*A*) takes to be false under the assumption that *B* will recognize it to be false, and, beyond this, also recognize that *A* intends *B* to recognize that this was her intention.

At first sight, this formula may seem intimidating, but it becomes intelligible if we see how it distinguishes speaking ironically from lying. In lying: