

From Aristotle's *Poetics*, translated by Ingram Bywater (translation free of copyright)

Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on grounds of analogy. That from genus to species is exemplified in "Here stands my ship"; for lying at anchor is a sort of standing. That from species to genus in "Truly ten thousand good deeds has Ulysses wrought", where "ten thousand", which is a particular large number, is put in place of the generic "a large number". That from species to species in "Drawing the life with the bronze," and in "Severing with the enduring bronze"; where the poet uses "draw" in the sense of "sever" and "sever" in that of "draw", both words meaning to "take away" something. That from analogy is possible whenever there are four terms so related that the second is to the first, as the fourth to the third; for one may then put the fourth in place of the second, and the second in place of the fourth. Now and then, too, they qualify the metaphor by adding on to it that to which the word it supplants is relative. Thus a cup is in relation to Dionysus what a shield is to Ares. The cup accordingly will be described as the "shield of Dionysus" and the shield as the "cup of Ares". Or to take another instance: As old age is to life, so is evening to day. One will accordingly describe evening as the "old age of the day"--or by the Empedoclean equivalent; and old age as the "evening" or "sunset of life". It may be that some of the terms thus related have no special name of their own, but for all that they will be described in just the same way. Thus to cast forth seed-corn is called "sowing"; but to cast forth its flame, as said of the sun, has no special name. This nameless act, however, stands in just the same relation to its object, sunlight, as sowing to the seed-corn. Hence the expression in the poet, "sowing around a god-created flame". [A common example today would be the "shedding of light", by analogy with the shedding of leaves.] There is also another form of qualified metaphor. Having given the thing the alien name, one may by a negative addition deny of it one of the attributes naturally associated with its new name. An instance of this would be to call the shield not the "cup of Ares", as in the former case, but a "cup that holds no wine"

The excellence of diction is for it to be at once clear and not mean. The clearest indeed is that made up of the ordinary words for things, but it is mean, as is shown by the poetry of Cleophon and Sthenelus. On the other hand the diction becomes distinguished and non-prosaic by the use of unfamiliar terms, i.e. strange words, metaphors, lengthened forms, and everything that deviates from the ordinary modes of speech. But a whole statement in such terms will be either a riddle or a barbarism, a riddle, if made up of metaphors, a barbarism, if made up of strange words. The very nature indeed of a riddle is this, to describe a fact in an impossible combination of words (which cannot be done with a combination of other names, but can be done with a combination of metaphors); e.g. "I saw a man glue brass on another with fire", and the like. The corresponding use of strange words results in a barbarism. A certain admixture, accordingly, of unfamiliar terms is necessary. These, the strange word (the metaphor, the ornamental equivalent, etc.) will save the language from seeming mean and prosaic, while the ordinary words in it will secure the requisite clearness. What helps most, however, to render the diction at once clear and non-prosaic is the use of the lengthened, curtailed, and altered forms of words. Their deviation from the ordinary words will give it a non-prosaic appearance, by making the language unlike that in general use; and their having much in common with the words in general use will give it the quality of clearness. It is not right, then, to condemn these modes of speech, and ridicule the poet for using them, as some have done; e.g. the elder Euclid, who said it was easy to make poetry if one were to be allowed to lengthen words as much as one likes. . . .

It is a great thing, indeed, to make a proper use of these poetical forms, as also of compounds and strange words. But the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that

cannot be learned from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars.