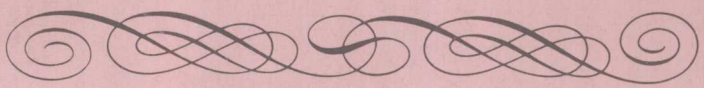
POWER IN VERSE

Metaphor and Metonymy in the Renaissance Lyric



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Metaphor and Metonymy
in the
Renaissance Lyric

Those numbers wherewith heaven and earth are mov'd,
Show, weakness speaks in prose, but power in verse.

—Samuel Daniel, "Musophilus"

In Memory of

Harold Roy Turner
1906–1986

Margaret Jane Elizabeth Turner
1908–1974

Preface and Acknowledgments

I have a double purpose here: to map the history of the English lyric from Wyatt to Donne into consecutive stylistic phases, and to put Roman Jakobson's theory of language to work in a systematic way. Ever since I first encountered his essay on "Two Aspects of Language" ten years ago, the poetry I know best has been helping me to make sense of Jakobson's central notions, while they in turn have clarified the stylistic features of the poetry. I hope I have succeeded, to some degree, in re-creating that two-way process for the readers of this book.

Several people have read the manuscript of this study at different stages of its development and given me helpful suggestions: Joseph Kramer, Barbara Turner, Kim Benston, Carol Bernstein, Robert Burlin, Ulrich Langer, A. C. Hamilton, Margaret Ferguson, Annabel Patterson, Laurence Stapleton, Marjorie Sherwood, Arthur Kinney, and Donald Cheney. Even where I have not followed their advice, it has helped me to clarify my own goals, and this is a better book than it could have been without their help. Sandra Berwind, my dearest friend and best critic, has read every draft and every version with unfailing enthusiasm for what I was trying to do and a gimlet eye for trouble spots and inconsistencies in my argument. She has been so close to this project that I find myself unwilling to indemnify her in the usual way against any liability for its shortcomings, but I will admit to having neglected, once or twice, to act on a suggestion of hers.

Through the process of readying this book for publication, I have been fortunate to have the tactful, alert guidance of Philip Winsor, along with his conscientious editorial staff.

Sabina Sawhney, my editorial assistant, has labored intelligently, and always cheerfully, to verify quotations and rectify inconsistencies in the

Notes. Pennie Mueller has retyped the manuscript more times than she probably cares to remember, with unfailing accuracy and good humor.

I wish to thank the American Association of University Women for a fellowship that enabled me to begin working on this project in 1980–81, and the Trustees of Bryn Mawr College for a junior faculty leave in that same year. Mary Patterson McPherson, president of Bryn Mawr College, has steadily befriended and supported my work.

From the beginning of this project, I had Margaret Temeles to turn to for sympathetic encouragement and practical advice. Without her there are many times when I would, like Diana's unfortunate nymph, have "sat down to rest in middest of the race," and never got up again. I would like also to thank Stephen Salkever for helping me to stay convinced, every day of our life together, that it is a great privilege to be making our living teaching and learning.

My father died just a few months too soon to share my pride and relief at finishing this book, but he always knew that I would. My mother, whom I lost even longer ago, would have mightily enjoyed coming to terms with its argument for herself and going over my prose with a fine-tooth comb. I wish to dedicate the book to both of them, in memory of their having "begot me, bred me, loved me."

A Note on Texts

The spelling and punctuation of all Renaissance texts that are quoted in this study have been modernized, with the exception of Spenser's poetry, which thereby retains the antique flavor Spenser built into it for his own contemporaries. (I will discuss this aspect of Spenser's poetics in chapter 5.) The decision to modernize cannot be taken lightly: there are philosophical considerations to be weighed, as well as practical difficulties. A modernized rendering that claims to stop short of translation and keep the original wording intact must cope somehow with puns, obsolete words that have no modern spelling, and words whose meaning has shifted. In poetry, where words have their acoustic and semantic potentialities more fully enlisted than in prose, these are especially tricky problems, and so is punctuation, because of the special contribution it makes in poems to phrasing and rhythm. Lately also it has begun to be argued—most notably in my own area by Anne Ferry and Thomas Greene—not just that modernization is hard to bring off, but that it is in principle a bad thing to do. It behooves us, these scholars suggest, to keep alert to the distance that divides us from the literary works we seek to interpret and from their cultural context: modernization promotes misunderstanding of how hard it is to recover the past.

My own working assumption is the reverse of this, really: it is that English literature of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century is not less but more accessible to us emotionally, socially, and stylistically than it seems at first to be, and that the strangeness of its authors' habits of spelling and punctuation (they spelled and punctuated both differently *and* less consistently than we do) is estranging only in a superficial way, which may nevertheless discourage us from seeking to know this poetry really well. John Williams, in whose anthology, *English Renaissance Poetry*, I first encountered several of the

poems I will work with here, suggests in his preface that "the old, irregular spelling and punctuation give a spurious archaism to poems that were modern in their time, and that are best read today as if they were poems rather than literary specimens." This seems all the truer as we reflect on what is involved and what it is like to read a verbal text "as if it were a poem"—how actively a poem requires to be read, not only in the sense of decoding but also in the sense of performance. Uniform modernization is perhaps the only way to enlist for the reading of Gascoigne's or Ralegh's or even Sidney's poems the same active, confident engagement we have with Shakespeare's poetry—*for all its strangeness*, which we do not thereby fail to notice—whereas we have mostly come to know Shakespeare in texts that have persuaded us, from childhood, of his invincible modernity.

Where I could, I have taken advantage of recent, modernized editions, as follows: for Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, Stephen Booth's edition (New Haven: Yale, 1977); for Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*, Jan Van Dorsten's edition (*A Defence of Poetry*, Oxford University, 1966); Joost Daalder's edition of Wyatt's *Collected Poems* Oxford, 1975); Theodore Redpath's second, revised edition of Donne's *Songs and Sonets* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983); and for Ben Jonson, George Parfitt's Yale University press edition of 1975. Where there was no modernized text available, I have worked from an old-spelling edition and made the necessary adjustments myself. Old-spelling editions differ among themselves, of course—not only as to the caliber of the scholarly work that has gone into them but also in terms of adjustments that stop short of modernization but do enhance readability. In his conservative Clarendon edition of Sidney's poetry, William Ringler has made a number of orthographic adjustments (*u* to *v* and so on) and has modernized the punctuation; this makes for a much more readable text than, for example, Agnes Latham's *Ralegh* (Houghton Mifflin, 1929, repr. Harvard University, 1951, 1985), which adheres more closely to the text of Ralegh's poems as Latham found them in sixteenth-century manuscripts and published anthologies.

For my own purposes, which so often involve comparison of single poems by different poets, it has seemed best to give all quoted texts a comparably modern rendition. Thus, for example, I have modernized Surrey's poems in taking them from F. M. Padelford's edition (University of Washington, revised 1928), to bring them into line with Daalder's Wyatt. Surrey's poems are stiffer-jointed than Wyatt's, and to see why, it is necessary to get beyond the superficial quaintness and stiltedness projected by old spellings and conventions of punctuation, to the more crucial stiltedness of Surrey's syntax. I am indebted to John Williams's anthology for assistance in arriving at modernized versions of some of Surrey's, Gascoigne's and Googe's poems, although I have not always reproduced Williams's version exactly.

Apart from Spenser, the only poet I have taken to be something of a

special case is Shakespeare, in the *Sonnets*. I am convinced by Stephen Booth's argument that punctuation of these poems should allow as much as possible for the energy and the ambiguity of their language, and so I defer to his compromise with the Quarto punctuation, which often looks or "sounds" a bit strange as compared with the more thoroughly modernized versions of other editors.

I am also indebted to Robert Durling's wonderfully precise translation of Petrarch's *Lyric Poems* into modern English (Harvard, 1976; Copyright 1976 by Robert M. Durling), which has enabled me to use Wyatt's and Surrey's Petrarchan imitations as a point of departure for my discussion of the phases of English Petrarchism in chapter 6.

Contents

1 Metaphor and Metonymy: Theoretical Groundwork

English lyric poetry from Wyatt to Donne falls into three consecutive stylistic phases. *Tottel's Miscellany* presided over the first, making the lyrics of Wyatt and Surrey available for imitation by lesser mid-century poets like Googe, Turberville, and Gascoigne. *The Shepheardes Calender* and Sidney's *Defense of Poesy* ushered in the second, the Elizabethan or "Golden" phase of the 1580s and 1590s. Then, with the turn of the century, John Donne's poetry set a new fashion, the so-called "Metaphysical" mode; meanwhile, Ben Jonson, of the same generation as Donne, reacted in different terms against the stylistic orientation of the Elizabethan poets. Lyric poetry was a courtly prerogative throughout this whole period,[1] and each of these phases is the product of a different moment in the history of the English aristocracy. Wyatt and Surrey were attached to the court of King Henry VIII; Gascoigne, Googe, and Turberville were country gentry whose poetry helped to advertise their aristocratic breeding. In the Elizabethan phase, poetry became an important part of England's national identity and of the ideological apparatus that helped to establish a strong central government. Even the lyric, the least pretentious and least public of literary kinds, became involved in the Elizabethan ideological program. Donne and Jonson began to write their lyrics as the fragile coherence of the Elizabethan regime was beginning to break down, and during the reign of Elizabeth's successor, James I. They are anti-Elizabethan, both in style and stance.

The differences between these three phases are obvious, but they have never been mapped out in a systematic way. C. S. Lewis's classic account of "Drab," "Golden," and "Metaphysical" poetry has scarcely been improved upon, even though Lewis's ideological bias has been challenged and his critical vocabulary is out of date.[2] Partly, the problem has been that "Drab" and "Golden" poetry are different in all kinds of ways whose interrelatedness

is not easy to demonstrate. The same is true of the lyrics of Jonson and Donne, who belong to the same stylistic phase. We have not had a linguistic or a literary theory that would enable us to conceive of all these differences, within and between generations, as interrelated features of the same stylistic profile.

I propose to generate stylistic profiles for these three successive phases of English lyric poetry from the semiotic theory of Roman Jakobson. According to Jakobson, all verbal and indeed all symbolic behavior is derived from two interactive processes: selection and substitution; combination and contexture. These processes find their most condensed expression, he explains, as metaphor and metonymy, respectively. The bias of a single piece of writing, of a single writer's oeuvre, or of a literary movement such as Romanticism or Realism, can always be specified in terms of the relative primacy of one or the other process. A metaphoric or metonymic bias will be expressed as stance or outlook, and as style or figurative strategy, both at once. Stylistic innovation occurs whenever a writer or a group of writers privileges the process that had been underplayed or deemphasized by already prevailing canons of representation.

Jakobson based his model of linguistic behavior on Saussurean linguistics and the semiotic theory of C. S. Peirce, in conjunction with clinical research into language acquisition and language loss. He laid it out and briefly illustrated its possible applications in "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," in a monograph that was published by Mouton in 1956.[3] This was a fundamental contribution to semiotic studies, which has by now made an impact in many different areas, including anthropology, film studies, and psychoanalysis.[4] In literary studies, the metaphor-metonymy opposition has gradually become a commonplace of practical criticism.[5] So far, however, the only attempt to use it as the basis for mapping out consecutive phases in the history of literary style is David Lodge's study of modern prose fiction, *The Modes of Modern Writing* (1977).

I have found Lodge's book very helpful, but working with the lyric has brought me to a different understanding from Lodge of some of Jakobson's theoretical principles. I have also found it necessary to push beyond Lodge's notion of what constitutes an adequate history of collective shifts from one of these two poles to the other. I will propose that early Tudor poetry is metonymic, that the collective orientation of Spenser and Sidney and their Elizabethan contemporaries is metaphoric, and that Donne's and Jonson's lyrics bring metonymy once again to the fore. But whereas Donne's and Jonson's relation to precursor poets can be explained in terms of reactive oscillation from one pole to the other, the earlier shift requires a different kind of explanation altogether.

In the next few pages I will set out what are, for my purposes, the bare

essentials of Jakobson's theory. These include his definition of "the poetic function of language," from a paper that is even better known than the "aphasia" paper to literary critics in America: "Linguistics and Poetics," originally delivered as the closing address to an interdisciplinary conference on Style at the University of Indiana, whose proceedings were published in 1960.[6] Then I will briefly demonstrate how the theory can be used to map the differences between metaphoric and metonymic writing. Finally, I will address its limitations as an instrument of literary history: these must be squarely faced, if they are to be successfully overcome.

Verbal behavior is governed by two interactive functions: selection and combination. In composing verbal messages, we *select* units from the code and *combine* them into larger wholes: distinctive features into phonemes, phonemes into words, words into sentences, sentences into discourses and conversations. To understand a verbal message of someone else's, we refer each of its constituents simultaneously to the code from which it has been selected and to the context in which it has actually figured. The relation that comes into play as we refer to the code is similarity/difference; the relation that holds contexts together is contiguity.[7] Where oral communication is concerned, what we mean by "context" is the situation in which the message is spoken and heard. If I say, "Have a look at this table, would you—I think there's still something the matter with it," you will understand me to mean one thing by "table" if you are a carpenter and we are standing in my dining room, and something else if you are a statistician helping me to publish a piece of social science research. Meanwhile we share a linguistic code in which "table" has a certain set of possible meanings, one of which the context activates. Where published written discourse is concerned, there is no immediate situation to refer to: the context available to the reader is the rest of the discourse in which the linguistic unit has figured.

The basis of this way of explaining how language works is Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale*, but it was Jakobson who demonstrated the explanatory power of the Saussurean model of language. He used it to explain some notorious special cases of signification within the domain of ordinary language—shifters and proper names[8]—and also to initiate the systematic study of extraordinary verbal behavior: the speech of aphasic patients, whose linguistic competence has been impaired by brain damage; and verbal art, where the linguistic medium calls attention to itself as a distinctive configuration of signs.

Aphasia blocks one of the two basic functions, entirely or partly, and thereby exposes the domain of the other. In "Two Aspects of Language" Jakobson cites, for example, the behavior of an aphasic patient whose selection function, her capacity to perform linguistic operations based on similar-

ity, had been impaired. "When asked to list a few names of animals, [she] disposed them in the same order in which she had seen them in the zoo; similarly, despite instructions to arrange certain objects according to color, size, and shape, she classified them on the basis of their spatial contiguity as home things, office materials, etc." (p. 249). This patient had lost the ability to relate words to other words in terms of their encoded meanings. She no longer knew what words meant out of context.

Jakobson explains that even a person whose speech is unimpaired will tend to favor one or the other function: either selection or combination. When asked to free-associate with some ordinary noun (Jakobson's example is "hut"), some respondents tend to produce a synonym or antonym or metaphoric substitution ("A hut is a poor little house"); and some refer instead to the contexts in which the word most commonly occurs (thereby producing responses like "burnt out," or "thatch," or "poverty"). In ordinary practical communication, where there is necessarily full cooperation between the two functions, we are not free to express a pronounced bias in favor of one or the other. But in verbal art a writer has greater freedom to control the development of a discourse and to choose its stance.

A piece of writing will be either "metonymic" or "metaphoric," depending on whether the writer has privileged the contiguity or the similarity relation:

> The development of a discourse may take place along two different semantic lines: one topic may lead to another either through their similarity or through their contiguity. The metaphoric way would be the most appropriate term for the first and the metonymic way for the second, since they find their most condensed expression in metaphor and metonymy respectively. (p. 254)

This correlation of metaphor and metonymy with the complementary axes of the Saussurean model of language is Jakobson's most important contribution to literary stylistics. Handbook definitions of metaphor and metonymy are usually taxonomic rather than functional. They enable us to recognize the figure where it occurs, but not to account for its intelligibility or generalize about what it can be used to do. In the case of metonymy, we are told that the name of an attribute or adjunct of a thing is being used to designate the thing itself: "sail" designates "ship," "the crown" refers to "the kingship." Taking Jakobson's approach, we can explain that metonymy enlists the contiguity-relation to situate the explicitly designated object in a larger context or field of objects. The mariner calls out "a sail! a sail!" and if he is at sea rather than in a warehouse, he is understood to have sighted a ship. The sail leads to the ship along the path of contiguity: this is what Jakobson means by defining metonymy as the condensation of a discursive procedure. He would

call a piece of writing "metonymic" even if it seems not to require the reader to go beyond the given details—even if the ship is specified along with the sail—provided that it moves from topic to topic on the strength of the contiguity-relation.

Jakobson's object in broadening the traditional scope of the term "metonymy" in this way is to make a theoretical point: namely, that metonymy is the figure which will tend to predominate in a discourse that privileges the contiguity-relation. Nineteenth-century realism is a "metonymic" mode of writing, in this sense, and Jakobson points out that in *War and Peace*, for example, Tolstoy uses metonymy for shorthand references to minor characters after the scene in which each is first described in detail: "hair on the upper lip," "bare shoulders" (p. 255).

Metaphor effects a discursive condensation in terms of the axis of selection/substitution: one word refers simultaneously to two topics and asserts their likeness to one another. The metaphor does not take their similarity for granted but asserts it, often in the face of a difference so great as to make that assertion surprising or bizarre. There has been some disagreement among rhetoricians as to whether simile, whose terms are explicitly compared using "like" or "as," is a special case of metaphor, or metaphor of simile. Taking Jakobson's approach, simile and metaphor fall into place as more and less condensed versions of "the metaphoric way." The most condensed is the most exclusively or purely metaphoric, because it dispenses entirely with the syntagma, whereas similes syntagmatize the assertion of similarity, bringing the axis of combination into play.[9]

Metaphor and metonymy are antithetical figures, in the sense that each runs interference with the function on whose operation the other depends for its intelligibility. Metonymy uses x to say xY on the strength of the contiguity of x and Y, be it spatial or temporal, either in some specific presupposed situation or else in our habitual experience of the world. Metaphor proposes that X be taken for Y, whereas in language and experience they usually belong to different spheres of activity or being. If, then, a metaphor occurs in a discourse whose procedure is according to the axis of combination, it will rupture the fabric of contiguities that discourse is weaving, by importing an element from out of context. Realist writing is not devoid of metaphor, as David Lodge has pointed out,[10] but the realist writer will keep that kind of disruption to a minimum by taking his or her metaphoric vehicles, as well as their tenors, from the descriptive context.

By the same token, the more thoroughly "metaphoric" a piece of fiction is, the less stability the fictional world will be apt to have in terms of ordinary chronology and scenic locale. Whereas metonymic writing is "set toward the context," and metonymic fictions often claim to be true history, metaphoric fictions are "self-focused" by repetitions and recurring motifs, or by paradig-