

# **METAPHOR**

Terence Hawkes

THE CRITICAL IDIOM  
REISSUED



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Volume 24

METAPHOR

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# Metaphor/ *Terence Hawkes*

Methuen & Co Ltd

to ANN



## *General Editor's Preface*

This volume is one of a series of short studies, each dealing with a single key item, or a group of two or three key items, in our critical vocabulary. The purpose of the series differs from that served by the standard glossaries of literary terms. Many terms are adequately defined for the needs of students by the brief entries in these glossaries, and such terms will not be the subjects of studies in the present series. But there are other terms which cannot be made familiar by means of compact definitions. Students need to grow accustomed to them through simple and straightforward but reasonably full discussions of them. The purpose of this series is to provide such discussions.

Some of the terms in question refer to literary movements (e.g., 'Romanticism', 'Aestheticism', etc.), others to literary kinds (e.g., 'Comedy', 'Epic', etc.), and still others to stylistic features (e.g., 'Irony', 'The Conceit', etc.). Because of this diversity of subject matter, no attempt has been made to impose a uniform pattern upon the studies. But all authors have tried to provide as full illustrative quotation as possible, to make reference whenever appropriate to more than one literature, and to compose their studies in such a way as to guide readers towards the short bibliographies in which they have made suggestions for further reading.

John D. Jump

*University of Manchester*

## *Acknowledgements*

I should like to thank Professor John D. Jump for his encouragement over a long period. Also several of my colleagues at University College, Cardiff kindly listened to or read sections of this material and made extremely helpful comments on it: in particular Nick Fisher of the Department of Classics, and G. Ingli James, Peter Garside and Robin Moffat of the Department of English. They will know that I am grateful to them.

A large portion of this book was written whilst I was in the United States in the summer of 1971, as a visiting professor at Rutgers University. My thanks must go to Professor Maurice Charney and his wife Hanna, whose kindly acumen and dazzling hospitality deserve a better relic, and to Professor Daniel Howard whose benevolence made my trip possible. The friendship of Louis and Joan Slovinsky and of Bob and Arlene Trudell proved powerfully sustaining. My greatest debt of gratitude remains, as ever, to my wife.

Finally, I must thank my argumentative students who will be the first to recognize the extent to which, over the years, I have become the vehicle to their tenor.

T.H.

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# I

## *Metaphor and Figurative Language*

The degrees of metaphor. The absolute object  
slightly turned is a metaphor of the object  
(Wallace Stevens)

The word *metaphor* comes from the Greek word *metaphora* derived from *meta* meaning 'over', and *pherein*, 'to carry'. It refers to a particular set of linguistic processes whereby aspects of one object are 'carried over' or transferred to another object, so that the second object is spoken of as if it were the first. There are various types of metaphor, and the number of 'objects' involved can vary, but the general procedure of 'transference' remains the same:

Awake! for Morning in the Bowl of Night  
Has flung the stone that puts the stars to flight.  
(Edward FitzGerald, *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*)

L'homme n'a point de port, le temps n'a point de rive:  
Il coule, et nous passons!  
(Alphonse de Lamartine, *Le Lac*)

It's what's under the bonnet that counts!  
(Car advertisement)

Metaphor is traditionally taken to be the most fundamental form of figurative language.

*Figurative language* is language which doesn't mean what it says. Cars do not wear bonnets. Men are not ships. Time is not a



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river. Night is not a bowl of water, and Morning does not throw stones into it.

Language which means (or intends to mean) what it says, and which uses words in their 'standard' sense, derived from the common practice of ordinary speakers of the language, is said to be *literal*. Figurative language deliberately *interferes* with the system of literal usage by its assumption that terms literally connected with one object can be transferred to another object. The *interference* takes the form of *transference*, or 'carrying over', with the aim of achieving a new, wider, 'special' or more precise meaning.

Inevitably, figurative language is usually descriptive, and the transferences involved result in what seem to be 'pictures' or 'images':

An aged man is but a paltry thing,  
A tattered coat upon a stick . . .

(W. B. Yeats, *Sailing to Byzantium*)

However, the term 'imagery' is essentially misleading when it is used to refer to figurative language, because it presupposes that its primary appeal is to the eye. This is not the case. The appeal of figurative language may include the visual sense, as the above metaphor certainly shows, but its essential mode is *linguistic* and as a result its appeal goes much further. In this case an extensive non-visual response involving myth and symbol in terms of the relationship of birds and scarecrows is required.

The various forms of 'transference' are called *figures of speech* or *tropes*; that is, 'turnings' of language away from literal meanings and towards figurative meanings. Metaphor is generally considered to manifest the basic pattern of transference involved and so can be thought of as the fundamental 'figure' of speech. The other figures tend to be versions of metaphor's prototype, particularly the three main traditional categories:

(a) *Simile*. Where metaphor assumes that the transference is