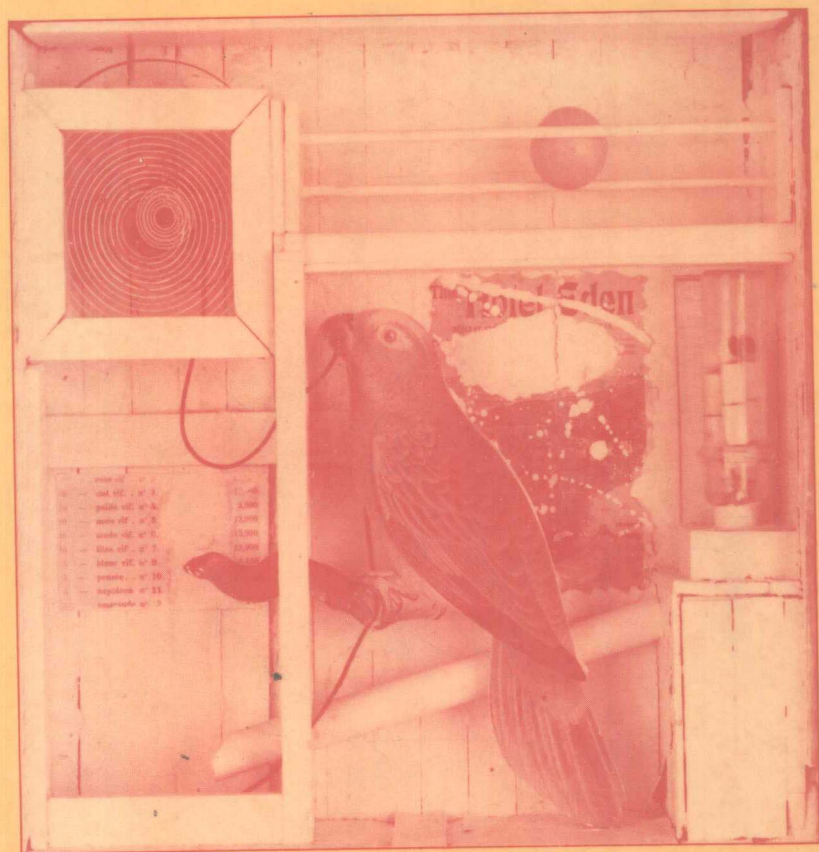


SHAKESPEARE

Meaning & Metaphor



ANN & JOHN O.
~THOMPSON~

I561.073

T468

SHAKESPEARE

Meaning & Metaphor

Ann Thompson

Senior Lecturer in English, University of Liverpool

and John O. Thompson

Lecturer in Communication Studies, University of Liverpool



THE HARVESTER PRESS

First published in Great Britain in 1987 by
THE HARVESTER PRESS LIMITED

Publisher: John Spiers

16 Ship Street, Brighton, Sussex

© Ann Thompson and John O. Thompson, 1987

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Shakespeare: meaning and metaphor.

1. Shakespeare, William—Criticism and interpretation

I. Thompson, Ann II. Thompson, John O.
822.3'3 PR2995

ISBN 0-7108-0623-X

Phototypeset in Garamond ITC by Quality Phototypesetting Limited, Bristol

Printed in Great Britain by
Mackays of Chatham Ltd., Kent.

All Rights Reserved

THE HARVESTER PRESS PUBLISHING GROUP

The Harvester Group comprises Harvester Press Ltd (chiefly publishing literature, fiction, philosophy, psychology, and science and trade books); Harvester Press Microform Publications Ltd (publishing in microform previously unpublished archives, scarce printed sources, and indexes to these collections); and Wheatsheaf Books Ltd (chiefly publishing in economics, international politics, sociology, women's studies and related social sciences).

This book is dedicated to the memory of our grandmothers,
Frances Ellen Harris and Winifred Ross

Acknowledgements

None of this material has been published previously. We have however given related papers to groups of scholars at the Universities of Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester and at Birmingham Polytechnic. We have also addressed the Renaissance Society of America in Southern California and the International Shakespeare Association in West Berlin. We would like to thank those who invited us to speak and those who contributed to the discussions on these occasions.

We have also subjected our students at Liverpool to more discussions on metaphor than they might have anticipated, and we are particularly grateful to those who took the Renaissance Literature MA course in the English Department and those who took the Symbolism course in Communication Studies in recent years for helping us to develop our ideas.

A number of individuals have read and commented on chapters, answered queries and generally contributed criticisms and suggestions. Specifically, we would like to acknowledge the assistance of Tony Barley, Philip Edwards, Lynette Hunter, Arthur Kinney, Kenneth Muir and Richard Proudfoot. Philip Edwards kindly allowed us to make use of his edition of *Hamlet* in proof stage and Richard Proudfoot directed us towards an investigation of printing metaphors.

We have worked on this book in a number of places and have enjoyed the library facilities at the Henry E. Huntington Library in California, the University of California at Los Angeles and the University of Hawaii, in addition to our regular use of the University Libraries in Liverpool and London and the British Library, whose Inter-Library Loan service is becoming increasingly

Acknowledgements

important as the funding of University libraries declines. We are also grateful to the following individuals for providing us with very pleasant houses in which to work: Michael and Alessandra Griffiths of Lucignano in Tuscany, David and Helen Laird of San Gabriel, California, David Callies and Valerie Wayne of Honolulu.

The transition from manuscript to print has been made possible by the considerable and much appreciated labours of the Liverpool English Department secretaries, Catherine Rees and Tina Benson, and, in a different way, by the staff of Harvester Press, especially their former editor Simon Pettifar who commissioned the book and current editor Sue Roe who saw it through to completion.

Shakespeare Editions

Shakespeare quotations and line references are from G. Blakemore Evans (ed.), *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1974). Variants in early editions are discussed when relevant, as are editorial emendations. The Riverside, which is a modern (American) spelling edition, preserves what seems to us to be an arbitrary sprinkling of archaic spellings. Consequently we have modernized as follows: in Chapter 1, 'vile' for Riverside's 'vild' on p. 30 (*Troilus and Cressida*, 1.3.340); in Chapter 2, 'mongrel' for Riverside's 'mungrel', 'mungril' and 'mongril' on pp. 56 and 70 (*King Lear* 1.4.49, 2.2.22 and 3.6.68), 'vile' for 'vild' again on p. 76 (*King Lear*, 4.2.45) and 'flay' for 'flea' on p. 79 (*King Lear*, 1.4.308); in Chapter 3, 'split' for 'spleet' on p. 103 (*Hamlet*, 3.2.10) and 'ribbon' for 'riband' on p. 124 (*Hamlet*, 4.7.77); in Chapter 5, 'quote' for 'cote' on p. 168 and p. 169 (*The Rape of Lucrece*, 812 and *Love's Labour's Lost*, 2.1.246), 'margin' for 'margent' on p. 168, and p. 169 (*The Rape of Lucrece*, 102, *Love's Labour's Lost*, 2.1.246 and *Romeo and Juliet*, 1.3.86), 'sixth' for 'sixt' on p. 189 (*Cymbeline*, 5.4.20) and 'agate' for 'agot' on p. 191 (*Love's Labour's Lost*, 2.1.236). We have retained modern American spellings.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Shakespeare Editions</i>	xi
Introduction	1
1. Time Metaphors in <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, <i>Metaphors We Live By</i>	13
2. Animal Metaphors in <i>King Lear</i> Eva Kittay and Adrienne Lehrer, 'Semantic Fields and the Structure of Metaphor'	47
3. Metaphors of the Human Body and its Parts in <i>Hamlet</i> Group μ : <i>Rhétorique générale</i>	89
4. Making Sense in Sonnet 63 J. F. Ross, <i>Portraying Analogy</i>	132
5. Meaning, 'Seeing', Printing Donald Davidson, 'What Metaphors Mean'	163
Afterword	207
<i>Bibliography of Works Cited</i>	216
<i>Index</i>	223

Introduction

The recent explosion of interest in metaphor within the fields of linguistics, psychology, anthropology and philosophy has as yet made little impact on English literary studies, where a confused and impressionistic notion of 'imagery' still reigns, despite frequent expressions of dissatisfaction with its lack of methodology and its inappropriateness to some sorts of texts. Our intention in this book is to effect a meeting, or rather a series of meetings, between a powerfully metaphorical text, the Shakespearean canon, and a number of the most notable 'extra-literary' theories of metaphor, and to report on the results.

We believe that these meetings can be productive: the theoretical approaches can illuminate Shakespearean usage and the Shakespearean examples can in their turn illuminate the theories. Since most of the extra-literary discussions of metaphor have concentrated on everyday metaphors expressed in comparatively simple sentences ('Man is a wolf', 'The chairman ploughed through the discussion'), it can be salutary to test them against the linguistic and syntactic complexity of Shakespeare. At the same time, considerable new knowledge about the micro-level of the language of the plays and poems can result from examining them in the light of the theoretical work.

We had better say at the outset that we do not claim to have found any theory of metaphor sufficiently comprehensive to account fully for Shakespearean usage. Indeed we would be extremely sceptical about any such claim. Rather, we proceed by way of a series of relatively self-contained and free-standing studies, taking, in most cases, a single example of a theoretical approach and matching it with an appropriate body of Shakespearean metaphor. The five

studies that make up this book, then, are attempts to bring some current work originating mainly in linguistics and philosophy to bear on the Shakespearean text, considered at a certain level. We shall try to make clear at this point what that level is, and what sort of use of our theoretical sources the reader can expect.

Shakespeare is no doubt sufficiently 'valued' in our time; the quotation marks we have just put around 'valued' reflect our appreciation of the oddity of his position as cultural talisman and saleable commodity, but our potential cynicism about his commercial status has to be set against our sense of good fortune in living in an era in which encountering exciting productions of the plays is not a rare experience. Perhaps a revered Great Dramatist whom no one ever really performed or read might conceivably have been sustained by the Anglo-Saxon world culture industry if it had been necessary. In fact, though, these texts, nearly four hundred years on, still work for non-specialist audiences and readers.

If you were asked what sort of language, in general, would have that sort of capacity for communicating over time, across cultural and linguistic changes of some magnitude, you might very well predict that it would need to be relatively clear, simple, unadorned. Taking, by today's standards, an unusually optimistic view of the cognitive abilities of the average audience, you might relax the plainness requirement, but the sort of decoration or heightening which would be likely to retain an ability to get across would surely itself be characterized by clarity. Your notion of an author apt to survive as stageable would perhaps be someone rather like Racine.

The facts about Shakespearean language are, however, quite otherwise. These texts, which work in the theatre and on the cinema or television screen for wide audiences, are so intricate in detail that it is not at all easy for final-year specialist university students to produce an accurate paraphrase of a short passage in an examination. Our interest in investigating the micro-level of the Shakespearean text has been fuelled by our increasing awareness of this as a puzzle: the point is not to insist that such a rich and complex text should be valued (such an insistence would be superfluous), but to account for how it can be that such a strange, fluid, peculiar text *is* so valued, is still capable of giving pleasure so widely.

Traditionally, literary criticism has felt obliged to argue for the unity, within the 'organic whole' of a play or an authorial canon, of

the linguistic micro-level of the text and the macro-level(s) on which character and narrative unfold. Now it may very well be the case that Shakespeare's continuing communicability is largely a function of macro-level skills, of what would not be lost in translation. (This is strongly suggested by the viability and success not only of foreign-language stage and screen productions of Shakespeare but even silent screen versions.) We would not hesitate to contemplate a Shakespeare who was theatrically 'alive' despite rather than because of the detailed wording of the text. Indeed, thinking about this possibility is good practice for liberating oneself from the circularity and mysticism of the 'organic unity' picture. However, we have what is in our view strong experiential evidence of the contribution of the linguistic micro-level to the current life of the plays. This consists in the invariable awfulness of productions in which the actors try to get through the play without themselves quite understanding the lines. By contrast, intelligence of delivery at the verbal level seems capable of sustaining productions which in other respects may be very modest or even actively ill-conceived.

So far we have been writing as if the puzzle of the power of the text at the micro-level is fundamentally authorial: how is it that Shakespeare survives while others don't? But it is our experience that, when actually given a serious chance on the stage, the drama of the period as a whole shares this capacity to communicate to a surprising (and unfortunately not yet widely recognized) extent. So an interest in how Shakespearean modes of textual elaboration work has wider implications for figurative language in Renaissance drama generally—and perhaps even for drama in other periods too.

Many people who write about Shakespeare's works do so without paying very much explicit attention to the micro-level of language. There is a widespread if tacit assumption that language as a focus of interest comes rather low in the pecking order in which it is preceded by such topics as character, theme and plot. Of course this hierarchy has been shuffled from time to time and language has sometimes seemed nearer to the top of the pack—one could see the popularity of imagery studies in the 1930s and 1940s as a reaction to an overemphasis on character in the previous generation—but by and large it has maintained a low profile. Anyone who has taught Shakespeare will be aware of the reluctance of students to write about questions of language, and the undergraduate essay which

inserts a dutiful paragraph or two on 'the language of the play' after everything else has been 'covered' is not without its parallels at the professional level.

We presume that a major reason for the unpopularity of language studies is that they often run the risk of seeming overly narrow and specialist. This is particularly true of what one might describe as the rhetorical tradition in Shakespeare criticism, meaning studies which are primarily historical and theoretical in their approach, applying the terminology and structures of Renaissance rhetorical theory to Shakespeare's practice. Obviously it is important to establish that Shakespeare acquired, probably at Stratford grammar school, a much more comprehensive grounding in rhetorical theory than most of us have today,¹ and that the plays contain abundant evidence of his competence to deploy all the tropes and schemes identified by contemporary rhetoricians;² but it is hard to convince a modern reader or playgoer that these pedantic not to say mechanical skills contribute very largely to the effect of the play as a whole. At worst, the rhetorical tradition comes down to a mere listing and labelling of linguistic 'tricks' which, if anything, get between us and the 'real meaning' of the play.

Recent critics who draw on this tradition have attempted to revivify it in a number of ways. Jane Donawerth, for example, in *Shakespeare and the Sixteenth-Century Study of Language*,³ broadens her canvas by considering not just individual examples of language use but 'ideas *about* language' in the plays in relation to the commonplaces and controversies of the time. This enables her to move into more congenial areas of theme and character as she discusses questions such as the reliability of language and the relative virtues of self-expression and restraint. In a very different (and more ambitious) way, Marion Trousedale escapes the limitations of traditional rhetorical analysis in *Shakespeare and the Rhetoricians*⁴ by arguing that the particular views of language and language-learning held in Shakespeare's time entailed a view of literary composition, not just at the level of individual sentences and speeches, but at the higher level of the dramatic structure as a whole.

Both Donawerth and Trousedale draw heavily on the work of Renaissance rhetoricians and make almost no use of twentieth-century theoretical approaches, though Trousedale has some interesting remarks at the very beginning and again at the very end

of her book on the differences between modern structuralism and what she calls 'Elizabethan methodism'—meaning a belief in the importance of theory and the efficacy of rules. More relevant to our own project is the work of Keir Elam in *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse*⁵ which consistently makes use of modern authorities (mainly linguists and semioticians) alongside Renaissance ones. His application of speech-act theory to the dialogue of Shakespearean comedy raises interesting questions about the extent to which the highly stylized exchanges of the stage are governed by the same rules and conventions as everyday conversation. He does not however have very much to say about metaphor, mainly because he feels it has already received more than its share of attention for obvious reasons:

Metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony have achieved a general academic respectability that one can scarcely imagine being accorded to epistrophe or chiasmus or hendiadys. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Shakespearean stylistic criticism: 'imagery'—i.e. tropical language, and especially metaphor—has been the staple of a critical industry that has given only token acknowledgement to 'sound patterns' as potential objects of analysis. And the poetic or dramaturgic principle behind this choice is not so far to seek: the trope is deemed capable of participating fully in the thematic development of the drama . . . while the scheme remains a more or less inert mode of verbal *appliqué*, able at best to provide an attractive formal framework to the drama proper. (243-4)

Elam's discussion of anaphora, chiasmus, hyperbole and other schemes is anything but inert. His point about the attractions of metaphor for literary critics seems an important one and we have ourselves felt the pressure of its assumptions. Many readers become impatient with rhetorical or stylistic analysis and will not accept that it has any validity or interest for its own sake: they demand to know how one's findings affect 'the meaning of the play'—how, in Elam's words, the tropes 'participate fully in the thematic development of the drama'. An extreme form of this approach can be seen in a book such as Ralph Berry's *The Shakespearean Metaphor*⁶ where metaphor is treated as something which can control or organize an entire play: notions of acting are seen to dominate *Richard II*, for example, and 'the idea of the Chorus' governs both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry V*. This

inflation of the significance of metaphor can lead, paradoxically, to a situation in which the actual verbal detail of individual examples is under-discussed. At the same time, a recent approach which does explore the verbal detail, George T. Wright's 'Hendiadys and *Hamlet*'⁷ (an article Elam might well see as a rare and gallant attempt to confer academic respectability on an unfashionable scheme) feels obliged to make the move into thematic analysis by finding in the very structure of the scheme ('They drank from cups and gold' is a classic example) a reflection of the play's obsession with doubleness and disjunction, misleading parallels and false relationships.

The insistence on the thematic implications of figurative language has however, as Elam says, been most influential in studies of 'imagery', which we would take to be the main alternative to studies of rhetoric, and an approach which has proved far more popular for this reason as well as because of its greater accessibility to those (such as most undergraduate students) who do not have a background in Renaissance rhetoric. From the very beginning, in the pioneering work of Caroline Spurgeon and Wolfgang Clemen,⁸ there has been a drive from particular images to 'running' or 'dominating' images and an assumption that the most interesting and important images are those which 'add up' in some sense, contributing either to the overall meaning of an individual play or, if added up across several plays, to a biographical impression of the author. Either way, we are back with the notion of 'organic unity'. It seems to us, as to other critics of the imagery approach,⁹ that while images *may* be studied in these ways it is arbitrary to limit our interest in them to their possible thematic or biographical implications. It is far too easy to neglect images which do not fit in with our preconceptions of 'what the play is about' and to impose overly narrow definitions on what is acceptable as an image in the first place. We shall take up this question again in Chapter 5, but we should stress here the importance for us of the analysis of images being a two-stage process in which due care and attention can be paid to the first stage—the examination of the immediate linguistic detail in its own right—without the obligation to hurry on and subordinate them into a larger (and usually more predictable) thematic or biographical pattern. Our emphasis in this book will be less on ultimate meanings and more on immediate

ones: we shall be asking not so much 'What does this metaphor mean'? but 'How does it come to mean what it means'?

We cannot here attempt a comprehensive sketch of the range of non-literary approaches to metaphor analysis that have been developed over the last few years. Fortunately, the interested reader can acquire a good sense of recent activity in the field by turning to several excellent collections of articles,¹⁰ as well as to Paul Ricoeur's extensive review of the tradition in *The Rule of Metaphor*.¹¹ One broad tendency in the field must be described, however, if our selection and use of specific theoretical initiatives in the following pages is to be understood.

Encountering a metaphor, a listener or reader has to do two things: he or she must recognize that the utterance in question *is* metaphorical, and he or she must understand it or grasp its point. These may not in practice be successive, discrete operations,¹² but their conceptual distinctness from one another is plain. While it is the mechanisms of the second of these operations that primarily interest us, the recognition question has bulked large in linguistic and philosophical treatments of the phenomenon, and this has had its effect on the orientation of much of the work on the comprehension question.

When metaphor came onto the agenda of linguists working in a generative grammar framework (where the aim of the exercise is the formulation of a set of rules capable of generating all, and only, the grammatical sentences of a language), the easiest conclusion to draw was that a metaphor is recognized as such because it is grammatically deviant in some particular way: 'The stone died' is a classic example. The listener's task was seen as the translation of the metaphorical expression into another, non-deviant expression ('The stone-like individual died') which is presumably—since listeners agree on the interpretation of metaphors—related to the original expression in a rule-governed way.¹³ However, it was soon noticed that whole sentences which are in no way grammatically deviant can be used metaphorically: consider, for example, 'The rock is becoming brittle with age' in the context of (1) a group of people on a geology expedition, and (2) a group of students discussing a senior professor.¹⁴

A similar sort of problem for a simple deviance model for metaphor-recognition arose in the philosophical literature. There,

the temptation was to make not ungrammaticality but literal falsity the trigger mechanism for detecting metaphor: consider 'Juliet is the sun'. But counter-examples were quickly found here as well: consider any metaphor expressed negatively, such as 'No man is an island'. Such examples were christened 'twice-true metaphors'.¹⁵ Furthermore, to insist on literal falsity as the hallmark of metaphor opens up an intuitively unacceptable chasm between metaphors and similes, since the latter are usually literally true: 'Juliet is *like* the sun' is perfectly acceptable.¹⁶

It is now widely felt that deviance accounts of metaphor can be saved, and the linguistic-philosophical split on the nature of deviance resolved, by situating the problem within the wider field of 'conversational implicature' as proposed in an influential article by H.P. Grice.¹⁷ The basic idea is that, faced with any sort of intentional, and intended-to-be-noticed, violation of one or more of the broad maxims that govern normal conversation (Be as informative as possible; Be truthful; Be relevant; Be clear), the listener takes the speaker to be implying something more, or other, than has actually been uttered. Falsity, tautology, semantic deviance within the sentence, and discontinuities over large units of discourse are all capable of triggering inferential processes whereby the listener tries to see the violation as having a point. Metaphorical interpretation is one of these inferential routes.

The approach to metaphor *via* notions of deviance (whether from grammar or from truth) seems to us to have both positive and negative aspects when we turn to an elaborated literary text. The advantages, to the literary critic, of such a reorientation seem at least twofold. First, as in a 'What's-wrong-with-this-picture'? children's game, the search for exactly which elements in an expression operate to distinguish it from the semantically unanomalous and the literally true develops one's eye for detail in a way which ultimately enriches the reading experience considerably. Secondly, although 'with the term "deviant" purified of derogatory connotations in the theoretical vocabulary of generative grammar'¹⁸ there ought not to be any implication that deviant expressions are to be deplored, none the less the approach seems to carry with it a demythologizing aura which is liberating when so revered a figure as Shakespeare is concerned: to approach a passage asking not 'Why is this so wonderful?' but 'How is this

peculiar'? can unblock reflection on the actual verbal arrangement of the text in a helpful fashion.

However, at a certain point any surreptitious privileging of plain sense-making over deviance does raise problems when the question of consistently heightened literary language must be addressed. It is hard to escape a picture of language in which the smooth unrolling of non-deviant sentences is suddenly broken by the appearance of an anomalous expression triggering metaphoric interpretation. But what if a high level of rhetorical elaboration is normal rather than exceptional, whether in the literature of a particular period or even more broadly in educated writing and speech? What if, as Stern points out, in dealing with 'metaphors whose setting is poetry or literature', we are 'independently cued by their context to interpret them metaphorically'?¹⁹

Various as the approaches we discuss in the following chapters are, they share in our view a potential for moving beyond the unrealistic aspects of the metaphor-as-deviation picture.

Our strategy in the five chapters which follow is strictly selective, both in terms of the theoretical frameworks and the Shakespearean examples. In Chapter 1 we apply a seminal work on everyday metaphor, *Metaphors We Live By* by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (a linguist and a philosopher respectively) to a consideration of some of the time metaphors in *Troilus and Cressida*. In Chapter 2 we take an article by Eva Kittay and Adrienne Lehrer, 'Semantic Fields in the Structure of Metaphor', as representative of how I.A. Richards' tenor-vehicle distinction can be elaborated in the light of a particular linguistic approach, and study some of the animal metaphors in *King Lear* in terms suggested by their account of semantic field analysis. Chapter 3 continues the exploration of linguistic/rhetorical theories of metaphor by examining the startling claim of Group μ in their *Rhétorique générale* that 'metaphor is the product of two synecdoches, as in a different way is metonymy'. We discuss the relationships between metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche, selecting our Shakespearean examples from the many references to the human body and its parts in *Hamlet*. In Chapter 4 we move away from linguistic approaches to one based disciplinarily in philosophy, though linguistically knowledgeable—J.F. Ross's *Portraying Analogy*. Here we restrict our exemplification to a