

RALPH BERRY

— The —
Shakespearean
— Metaphor —



THE SHAKESPEAREAN METAPHOR

Studies in Language and Form

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>Introduction</i>	1
1 <i>Richard III</i> : Player and King	9
2 <i>King John</i> : Some Bastards Too	26
3 <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> : The Sonnet-World of Verona	37
4 <i>Henry V</i> : The Reason Why	48
5 'To say one' : An essay on <i>Hamlet</i>	61
6 <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> : Tempus edax rerum	74
7 Sexual Imagery in <i>Coriolanus</i>	88
8 <i>The Tempest</i>	101
<i>Notes</i>	117
<i>Index</i>	127

Introduction

This book is a study of some ways in which Shakespeare exploits the possibilities of metaphor. Clearly, the terrain is too vast to permit of general or definitive coverage; and I present, therefore, a series of case-histories, from the early and mature Shakespeare. The play itself is in each case the sole area of investigation. My prime interest is in metaphor as a controlling structure, and my aim in each play is to detect the extent to which a certain metaphoric idea informs and organises the drama.

The 'controlling metaphor' is a way of identifying the dramatic object which it is the critic's business to describe. It is perhaps most easily visible in some of the early plays. In *King John* the bastardy/legitimacy idea is energised by the major acting part. There is a kind of formal priority here to the metaphor I describe. Similarly, the Chorus/Sonnet of *Romeo and Juliet* and the Chorus/Authorised Version of *Henry V* make their own claims for special consideration. But generally, exclusive priority cannot be claimed for a metaphoric formation. That is because different metaphoric ideas co-exist easily within the same play. Metaphors do not eject each other in the way that physical entities do: it is perfectly possible to see *Richard III* as founded on the idea of the play, or to pursue the implications of the tree/garden/seasonal imagery. And the mature Shakespeare finds ways of building more and more patterns of approximately equal status into his dramatic structures. So one can scarcely hope to identify more than a major organising principle. The play is always subject to other formulations.

Still, to select a metaphoric formation is always a critical act of some promise. One holds the play up to the light, and views it via that single angle of incidence. To see *Troilus and Cressida*, say, as stemming from the association that Ovid phrases as 'tempus edax rerum' is to account for much within that marvellous structure. I argue, simply, for a sustained act of perception from a single angle, for the description that allows me best to account for the drama.

In these matters the relation of metaphor to symbol is a recurring issue. In the most general sense, we can postulate a common origin to meta-

2 The Shakespearean Metaphor

phor and symbol : perception of association. But the two seem to work in opposed directions. A symbol generates associations, while a metaphor grasps towards analogy. There is an element of passivity about the perception of symbol, whereas metaphor is an active attempt to grapple with reality. Metaphors are, or should be, striking. Symbols are, or should be, satisfying and inevitable. Metaphors are irritable, appetent : they seek an ever-elusive fruition, a state of definition. Symbols imply content, an acceptance of a provisional codification of reality. They rest on the awareness of meanings that are reflected back from the object. Thus, Marvell's 'Upon Appleton House' is based on a sequence of symbolic perceptions :

And see how Chance's better Wit
Could with a Mask my studies hit!
(LXXIV)

These include the recognition of the Mowers as the adversaries in the Civil Wars, and the flooded field as a type of chaos. Similarly, the old Churchill, gazing into a log fire : 'I know what it's like to be a log : reluctant to be consumed but yielding in the end to persuasion.'¹ These distinctions are convenient for discourse; but a Shakespeare play is constantly casting doubt on their absolute utility. Let me cite a few instances. The banished Duke in *As You Like It* finds 'sermons in stones', that is, reads symbolic values into his immediate environment. These values are transferred directly into terms that we conventionally regard as metaphors. 'The poor dappled fools, / Being native burghers of the desert city' is the Duke's account of the deer. Jacques independently perceives the same association and elaborates it into a string of conceits : 'Sweep on, you fat and greasy citizens; / 'Tis just the fashion : wherefore do you look / Upon that poor and broken bankrupt there?' The play hereabouts presents the Forest as a symbol of human society, and the individual metaphors take up the idea in verbally striking form. Again, Polixenes' address to Perdita poses the same problem :

You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race : this is an art
Which does mend nature, change it rather, but
The art itself is nature.

(*The Winter's Tale*, iv, 4, 92-7)

Polixenes believes himself to be using a metaphor : the human term of 'gentler scion' is applied to a plant. But his own son, the 'gentler

scion' Florizel, is wooing the shepherdess Perdita. The metaphor therefore picks up an actuality of the drama. Moreover, the play poses a larger question: if 'gentler scion' is a metaphor for a plant, may not a plant be a metaphor for human life? The axes of *The Winter's Tale* are spring/winter, youth/age, birth/rebirth: flowers and humanity have essentially equal status in the drama. I think, then, that strict metaphor/symbol distinctions are helpful in purely local contexts only. Overall, in the total play, one employs a different mode of judgment. Here the collective force of associative patterns (established by recurrence) is everything. A symbol may be perceived by an individual in a play, passively. A group of such symbols does not simply happen to congregate in a play. Plays are not written passively. One needs a means of identifying the associations that are projected: and 'metaphor' I use not only for a local grasping after associative likeness, but the playwright's central impulse in bringing together numerous perceptions of association to organise and express a dramatic action.

It would be convenient to assert that with 'metaphor' one could confine oneself to figurative language. But one cannot safely do so. It follows naturally from the difficulties of distinguishing between symbol and metaphor that there is a similarly blurred frontier between literal and figurative. A symbol will often be a literal fact, and referred to locally in non-figurative language. When Henry VI says 'Yea, man and birds are fain of climbing high' he is stating a fact that springs directly from his observation of the falcon-hunt. It is nonetheless a perception of association. One has to be on one's guard against assuming an absolute divergence between literal and figurative in Shakespeare. Formal comparisons aside, let us take a single instance, Ulysses' 'No trumpet answers' (*Troilus and Cressida*, iv, 5, 11). By all conventional standards, this is unarguably a literal statement of a literal fact. But the three words are the play. The chivalric trumpet has sounded and silence, heavy, deflating, mocking descends. A gesture founded on a certain value-system has been made, and receives a negative answer. The silence that follows the trumpet invests with a special weight the meaning of the situation, and in breaking the silence Ulysses interprets it, states it, realises it. It is an easy judgement, then, to say that the trumpet (together with the style of Ajax's admonition to the trumpeter) and the subsequent silence symbolise the play; for the total action does indeed accord with this single moment of inflation and deflation.² But once we speak of a single event 'symbolising', or 'representing' the play, we are examining the foundations of literal language (in a poetic, completely unified drama, that is). So one is forced back upon the position that *all* the language of a Shakespeare play is a vehicle to express meaning: and the customary distinctions between figurative and literal

4 *The Shakespearean Metaphor*

statements merely locate what one notices most easily, the rocks thrusting up from the surfaces of language. They are not, however, in all cases the most reliable of guides to contours of the land. And this explains the variable quality of so many image-studies, beginning with Caroline Spurgeon's classic *Shakespeare's Imagery*. With certain plays, an image analysis immediately picks up vital concerns. I instance the picture/idol images in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the clothing images in *Macbeth*, the food images in *Troilus and Cressida*. In other plays (say, *Much Ado About Nothing*), the method fails. It assumes a readily detectable, formal distinction between metaphoric and non-metaphoric that does not correspond to the realities of the drama. The positive results of an image investigation are often striking and valid, the negative conclusions very dubious. The critic's imperative, then, is to maintain a sense of the multitude of relations between literal and figurative language, and to keep his categories fluid and provisional. It is important to detect the accumulation of 'right' in *King John*, to perceive the drift of the sexual metaphors energised by the Bastard, and to make the necessary connections. In talking about 'metaphor' one is committed, simply, to talking about as much 'literal' language as one needs.

Could we proceed a long step further, and abandon as useless to our purposes all category-distinctions that separate literal from metaphoric, at least in the context of poetic drama? That would be supremely rash. A. D. Nuttall makes the point neatly :

... the claim that all discourse is metaphorical, if granted, does not destroy my thesis only. It also destroys itself. To say that all discourse is metaphorical is to empty the word 'metaphorical' of all content. The concept 'metaphorical', in fact, presupposes the concept 'literal'. We say that a word is metaphorical when we perceive that it has been transferred from its proper, literal, application. If we claim that there is no such thing as a 'proper, literal, application', we shall find it hard to explain how people ever arrived at the conception of a 'transferred term'. The concept 'borrow' has no meaning for the man who lacks the concept of property. We may assert, if we wish, that 'style' is a metaphor drawn from a physical object, a pen, but we make the modern term metaphorical only by allowing a literal sense to its etymological ancestor. If 'pen' was never the literal meaning of 'style', then the modern use can scarcely be described as a metaphor drawn from the world of physical objects. If 'pen' is no more the literal meaning of 'style' than is 'manner of writing', then it is impossible to say that one is a metaphor from the other. We

are left with a mere series of meanings, which is not at all the same thing as a series of metaphors.³

There is a fundamental philosophic problem in admitting 'metaphoric' save in relation to 'literal'; but more than that, Shakespeare has an exceptional sense of the dynamic relations between the two, hence of the impress of language upon the human mind. Everyone is familiar with the idea that a single word may express multiple possibilities. So indeed it may, but at the heart of this is Shakespeare's sense of the ineradicable dualism of language, the reciprocity of metaphor and literal. To state the matter crudely (but, I think, necessarily): Shakespeare's language advances two propositions: 'This is *like*', and 'this *is*'. The first proposition is that of metaphor and figurative, the second that of symbol and literal. Neither statement exists independently of the other. We consider each statement in relation to the other, within a single context: the play.

Even within the local context, this dualism is readily perceived. Take Buckingham's 'Had you not come upon your cue, my lord, / William Lord Hastings had pronounc'd your part' (*Richard III*, iii, 4, 27-8). 'Cue' might be a dead or moribund metaphor, meaning no more than 'signal' and thus close to literal; 'part', similarly, is sufficiently camouflaged as literal to merge with its landscape. But of course we assume Buckingham's ironic awareness of the implications. 'Cue-part' is then more than a trope, a mere witticism; it may express the psychological reality (for both Buckingham and Richard) that they are acting as on a stage. We need both possibilities, not because one or other has to be selected but because the mental reality (for the speaker, and for us) is a state that grasps both possibilities. But how can we characterise this state? We might conceive of Buckingham's mind here as maintaining an equilibrium consisting of oscillation between the two major possibilities, 'this is *like*' and 'this *is*'. As a more advanced example, take Prospero's 'Our revels now are ended' speech. The core of this is association between mortality and the stage. But which part is mortality, which the theatre? As I argue later (pp. 112-13) the syntax of this passage defies a consistent reading. Every time we accept one provisionally, the major alternative displaces it. As with syntax, so with the core metaphor: the formal difficulty of reading the passage destroys our sense of the conventional tenor-vehicle distinction. The mind shifts from one frame to the other, from 'globe' (earth) to 'Globe' (theatre). The mental process resembles that of a trick drawing in which we move from one interpretation to another.⁴

These instances are small-scale models of what the total play may do to us. The overall experience can be that of a shift from our sense of the literal to the metaphoric. Thus in *The Merchant of Venice*,

6 The Shakespearean Metaphor

'venture' starts out as a purely commercial undertaking, with a restricted technical sense, and mutates (via Portia's 'Before you venture for me') into a figure for human gain.⁵ The blindness-seeing imagery in *King Lear*, together with the actualities of the drama, form a central vehicle for knowledge. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, 'Egypt-Rome' becomes a way of coding two complexes of values. Geographic location supplies a referent of values, in addition to identifying the simplest of physical facts. The essence of the matter is repetition and recall: a word retained in a new context receives new meanings, and retroactively affects the old. I emphasise that a multiplicity of possibilities emerges from these complex phenomena: but I put it, that Shakespeare's principle of organisation permits him always to relate these possibilities to the central dualism of metaphor and literal.

The studies here turn constantly to the relations between literal and metaphoric. *Player* is the metaphor for self in *Richard III*, and it becomes an organising principle, the play's two movements being the actor's immersion in role-playing and confrontation with reality. In *King John* the controlling metaphor for the issues of right and authority is bastardy and legitimacy, and the metaphor is incarnate in Faulconbridge. These early plays advance relatively direct, schematic ways of using a central metaphor to order the drama. Thereafter Shakespeare evolves subtler, more diffuse strategies. I regard both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry V* as being dominated by the idea of the Chorus. The Chorus in *Romeo and Juliet*, the incarnation of the sonnet, introduces a play whose inhabitants cannot break out of the mental limitations of the sonnet. They live, speak, and die in a sonnet world. Here, the Chorus is the play, or at least the society of the play. In *Henry V* the Chorus is the spokesman of the Official Version of the campaign, which the main events of the play do not precisely corroborate. He is an emblem of public rhetoric that is not entirely self-justifying. This central discrepancy between Chorus and play is coded in the succession of 'therefores', the collective hinge to the play's dubious logic.

Hamlet will not yield to any simple schema, and the prime metaphors of the play—corruption and death, acting, fighting—have often been analysed. I propose a term that is strictly not metaphoric at all, but which Shakespeare uses as the binding agent: *one*. 'To say one. . .' is Hamlet's understanding of the equipoise between self and situation, the moment when metaphor becomes actuality. The uppermost metaphor in Hamlet's mind, from the beginning of Act Five, Scene Two on, is that of the duellist. Hence the final passages are a realisation of the self as duellist; and of the self in other metaphoric formulations. Hamlet is fated to enact his own metaphors.

The two following studies revert to a more conventional treatment of

image formations. *Troilus and Cressida* is well known for its accumulation of food images, but it is their connection with Time that I stress here. The sexual images in *Coriolanus* (read in conjunction with the images of acting) supply an interpretation of the entire play, but most especially a verdict on its hero. These images too must be related to certain non-metaphoric references to sexual congress.

The Tempest is the hardest of Shakespeare's plays to think about. It is nonetheless the conclusion to his work, and in effect as near to a conclusion as this book can arrive at. Any schema that one offers will look especially crass, a cave drawing of an exceptionally complex object. I suggest that we think of the play's dramatic essence as the experience of half-perceiving, half-grasping for truth. The relationship between metaphor and symbol is in fact the experience of *The Tempest*, with its progression of half-heard sounds, half-glimpsed vistas, half-understood correspondences. The play comes to us, and as we reach out for its meaning it eludes us. In dialectical terms, we can think of the play as a constant alternation between vision and reality. And this alternation touches on all the metaphoric motifs that occur in the play. I have analysed *The Tempest* in terms of power and possession, since this appears to me the dominant metaphoric motif. It leads up to the definition of self in terms of possession and surrender, and the point at which Shakespeare stops the play is our final clue to the priority of issues and motifs. The last word in the canon, for most of us, is 'free': and the word's status remains equivocal and provisional. *Free* is the final instance of the recurring tension in Shakespeare between metaphor and actuality. It is perhaps the pulse of his drama.

I *Richard III*: Player and King

A major organising metaphor for *Richard III* is the actor, together with play/audience. Obviously, the actor metaphor covers the manoeuvrings of the central figure. More than that, it structures the play. *Richard III* has two movements, the caesura occurring at Richard's achievement of the crown; it is thus entirely satisfactory to account for the play, as does A. P. Rossiter, as a two-part structure of irony, 'the basic pattern of retributive justice.'¹ I want here to relate this account to the actor concept: the first half of *Richard III* describes an actor immersed in role-playing, the second half shows him confronting the realities from which his playing had excluded him.

I

Since 'actor' contains a built-in trap, we should begin with it. It must not be confused with dissimulation. Dissimulation is merely the necessary consequence of executing certain parts. The shifts and devices of Richard are the public manifestation, even a vulgarisation, if you like, of his role-playing. To 'act' is to perform before an audience, but not to deceive it, and not – though here we stir the depths of the actor's mind – oneself. The earliest refutation of the idea that Richard is an 'actor' because he is a deceiver is supplied by Henry VI. Alone of his society, he penetrates Richard's identity with this: 'What scene of death hath Roscius now to act?' (3 *Henry VI*, v, 6, 10). There is no question of Richard deceiving anyone at this point (save himself). But the gap between self and role opens out even here, in the logical inadequacy of his meditation:

O, may such purple tears be always shed
From those that wish the downfall of our house!
.... I have no brother, I am like no brother ...

(v, 6, 64-5, 80)

10 *The Shakespearean Metaphor*

He kills Henry as an enemy to his house; he denies that the house, as a mental reality, exists. It will not do; the whole soliloquy is an extended self-exculpation, clear enough in

And so I was; which plainly signified
That I should snarl and bite and *play the dog*.
Then, since the heavens have shaped my body so,
Let hell make crook'd my mind to answer it.

(v, 6, 76-9)

In blaming heaven, he acknowledges it. No further proof is needed of the logical imbecility of his argument. The role of playing the dog is not imposed on him by Providence, it is merely a reaction to the deficiencies of his physical heritage. And the 'glorious crown' of the great Act III soliloquy in *3 Henry VI* indicates the role that, of all others, he longs to play; because it 'round impales' (i.e. protects) his 'mis-shaped trunk'.

The situation has become stabilised by the opening of *Richard III*. Richard is at some distance from the psychic pain of *3 Henry VI*; having come to terms with himself, he announces his conclusion as an apparently logical inference, and as an act of will: 'And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover . . . / I am determined to prove a villain' (I, 1, 28-30). The interesting feature here is the technical nature of the soliloquy. Nicholas Brooke characterises it thus: 'this is not, however, soliloquy in the sense of the speaker talking to himself: it is an address to the audience, not so much taking them into his confidence as describing himself.'² The distinction is useful, but I think we can have it both ways. Richard, in thinking his thoughts aloud, addresses himself to a mental audience: that audience is *there*, in his imagination. I take it for granted that the actor, at this point, will always speak directly to the audience – the physical reality of the theatre is the incarnation of the psychological.³ It is an extraordinary fusion of the Vice's direct address, and the perception that Richard needs an audience.

The rhetoric of the opening soliloquy seems exaggerated, affected, and removed some distance from the ironically disdainful consciousness of the speaker.⁴ For the understanding of Richard's sensibility here, we can draw on the concept of 'camp'. The word has had some currency of recent years as a way of identifying a certain mode of behaviour. I use the term not in its sense of 'kitsch' – that is, displaying a banal and mediocre artistic quality – but in the sense supplied by the A-G Supplement to the *OED* (1972): 'ostentatious, exaggerated, affected, theatrical.' Those are the premier senses: the additional possibilities of 'homosexual' are not obviously relevant here. The classic description of the mode is Susan Sontag's, in her 'Notes on Camp', and some of her

observations do help us to come closer to Richard's mind. 'Camp is a certain mode of aestheticism. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon.'⁵ Camp has clear affinities with the theatre: Sontag refers to it on several occasions as 'the theatricalization of experience',⁶ viewing it as 'the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater.'⁷ Let us regard camp, then, as a mannered projection of self that reflects an intense appreciation of being-as-role-playing. Now Richard, evidently, is seized with the delights of the actor's address to the world. He takes it well beyond an exploitation of the actor's craft as a political means to a political end. And this is apparent in the extravagance and panache with which each *part*, within the central mode of *actor*, is pursued. M. C. Bradbrook has detailed several: '... among the many parts in his wardrobe, that of the Plain Blunt Man is his favourite. With Clarence he plays the Honest Soldier, with Anne the Lovesick Hero.'⁸ Later he becomes the 'Pious Contemplative'. Richard's role-playing has a farouche, inverted-comma quality; particularly is this true of the wooing-scene, in which Richard appears to be calling across time to the yet unborn spirit of Colley Cibber. It is pure Drama of Sensibility; and Miss Bradbrook's capitals are precisely what we need, to understand Richard throughout these activities.

The language of Richard tends to express this quality I seek to isolate. It is mannered, prone to certain stylistic shifts, very much aware of itself. Consider the heavily adjectival nature of the opening soliloquy. In the first twenty lines there are as many adjectives: 'stern alarums', 'merry meeting', 'amorous looking-glass', 'wanton ambling nymph'. The adjectives interpose a mental buffer between self and others; through adjectives one controls objects and people. It's a form of naming. Here, one catches that quality of seeing everything in inverted commas that Sontag discerns as a mark of camp.⁹ A woman ceases to be a woman – she becomes a 'woman', or 'nymph', or even 'Nymph'. (The typographic conventions of our own age can help bring out the innate qualities of Shakespeare's words.) Then, there is the equally mannered bluntness of the Plain Man mode. John Palmer identifies the 'vernacular quality of Richard's speech. It is one of his favourite tricks.'¹⁰ Thus, there is the taste for proverbial expressions: 'But yet I run before my horse to market' (I, 1, 166): 'Small herbs have grace, great weeds do grow apace' (II, 4, 13): 'So wise so young, they say, do never live long' (III, 1, 79): 'Short summers lightly have a forward spring' (III, 1, 94). It is, perhaps, a perception of self in a mock pastoral – Colin Clout among the courtiers. Sometimes the transition from trope to bluntness is the effect that Richard seems to relish: 'Your eyes drop millstones, when fools' eyes drop tears: / I like you, lads; about your business straight' (I, 3, 354–5). Here Richard becomes the Actor-

12 *The Shakespearean Metaphor*

Manager, sending some stage hands about their business. Or, in a reverse transition, Buckingham's plea – the language is the spare mode of total political realism – encounters a mocking, distancing rhetoric that further gilds and protects the self, before yielding to simple statement :

Buckingham My lord, whoever journeys to the prince,
For God's sake, let not us two be behind;
For, by the way, I'll sort occasion,
As index to the story we late talked of,
To part the queen's proud kindred from the king.
Gloucester My other self, my counsel's consistory,
My oracle, my prophet ! My dear cousin,
I, like a child, will go by thy direction.
Towards Ludlow then, for we'll not stay behind.
(II, 2, 146–54)

Here, I think, we detect the Star graciously accepting a minor role in a tactical operation – and, naturally, stealing the scene. The transitions, with Richard, are very considerably the essence of his appreciation of style.

The consequence, and therefore the objective of this immersion in role-playing is clear : Richard insulates himself against a central reality, the existence of a moral order. If the world is an aesthetic phenomenon, the categories of good and evil dissolve; thus Richard is not a villain, but a person playing a villain. The actor, as actor, sheds responsibility for the actions committed in the name of the role. He retreats from moral responsibility to technical expertise, to aesthetic excellence. For the Richard of the first half, experience becomes 'a victory of "style" over "content", "aesthetics" over "morality", of irony over tragedy.'¹¹ It is precisely the affair of the second half to reverse this multiple victory, to demonstrate that life, as Sontag observes, is not stylish.

II

All this leads us directly to the central verb of Richard's existence, *play*. He uses it himself on three occasions only, but it defines his mode of existence, and with it the entire play :

And seem a saint, when most I play the devil.
(I, 3, 338)