

# Shakespeare at Work<sup>1</sup>: I

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## Abstract

This essay, broken into two parts, is the most recent in a series of articles devoted to demonstrating the vital role that metonyms play not only in giving rise to metaphors (metonymy's rhetorical function, as it were) but also as a sign (a signifier of what is signified) which can only perform its (logical) function when the presuppositions and entailments which it carries have been worked out. The passages analysed come from the works of William Shakespeare. The first part of the essay studies the metonymic and metaphorical characteristics of Shakespeare's *Sonnet 18*, one long dramatic speech from *Richard II*, and one short speech from *Macbeth*. The analyses are designed to show how the metonyms underpin both the metaphorical and logical structures of the texts in question. Part II of this work, a necessary follow-on, will look at *Sonnet 73*, and passages from *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Henry IV, Part I*.

Key words: metonymy, metaphor, implication

## Introduction

This piece picks up where I left off last time, with an implied promise that I would conduct a more serious analysis of some passages from Shakespeare, to demonstrate the ubiquitous presence of metonymy, not only

in the workings of metaphor, a matter of rhetoric, but also in the activity of schemes and figures of invention, a matter of logic. A rhetorical trope such as metonymy which uses parts to signify wholes and a logical scheme that seeks to deduce wholes from parts both require that we infer from a given part of a whole the inter-related network that knits that part and its fellow parts into a whole, either within the workings of a metaphor (which often relies on a single metonym to activate a whole world of implied conditions) or as a set of presuppositions and entailments that need to be understood.

My aim, here as elsewhere, is to consider how metonymic strategies inform not only the metaphorical but also the logical structure of almost any 'literary' text that we may choose to look at, and to argue that detailed attention to these figures of rhetoric inevitably leads us into an exploration whose goal is to establish a text's coherence, both rhetorical and semantic.

## **Sonnet 18**

In recent years, many scholars have written commentaries on Shakespeare's Sonnets, but as each commentator has his or her own particular row to hoe (or axe to grind)<sup>2</sup>, I hope that my particular focus on the rhetorical features of the verse (rather than on its psychological revelations or on its prosody or verse techniques) may further my own local cause, which is to claim the primacy among tropes of the omni-present figure of metonymy in establishing at one level, at any rate, the text's method of working, and how, by considering metonymy and its co-worker metaphor, we may nonetheless come closer to whatever the texts have to tell us by following the clues that the metonymies, like Sherlockian (or Holmesian) signs, offer as our guides.

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In using these figures of rhetoric, Shakespeare was not being in any way original: he was just doing what all well-educated poets of his time would have done. That we are more likely to remember his verses than those of his fellows and return to them more often is because he showed greater inventiveness in their employment than did most of his contemporaries.

I choose *Sonnet 18* for this exercise partly because it is well known, but principally because it begins with a flourish that signals its rhetorical credentials: the poet is going to make a comparison (which at its simplest is a simile, at its most complex a metaphor): “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?”

To appreciate the comparison, however, we need to have some idea of what the phrase “a summer’s day” represents for the poet and his reader, what is implied by the reference, which I am, of course, treating as a metonym, a sign for the thing signified. If we are English, and should this be (which seems to be implied) the best sort of summer’s day, the term will probably conjure up fair weather, warm but not hot, cloudless skies, gardens full of the scent of flowers and the song of birds, green meadows and woods, a peaceful and idyllic hiatus between the promises of spring and the realities and disappointments of harvest.

In hierarchical terms, “a summer’s day” might be thought of as a synecdoche, the whole standing as the sum of its parts, yet in terms of its infinite suggestibility, the multitude of personal associations that it will carry, we can treat it as a metonymy, as all the best synecdoches invariably are: it summons up whatever we, thanks to our own experience, presuppose an ideal summer’s day to be like, and what this will entail for us as readers or listeners who remember or can recall such days.

*Thou art more lovely and more temperate:*

We might also need to remind ourselves that amongst the basic *topoi* which the Renaissance inherited from ancient Greece and Rome, a man at the height of his powers (in his thirties usually) was considered to be passing through the summer of his life, neither too young nor too old, neither too moist nor too dry, neither too hot nor too cold, having left his springtime behind but not yet entering upon his autumn, a person at the apex of his strength and authority, when his gifts are at their peak and working all together at their very best, as in the benign rule of a great prince<sup>3</sup>. Such a man might no longer possess a boy's beardless beauty, but he would display all those virtues which we can exercise effectively only in the summer of our days<sup>4</sup>. Since Shakespeare's friend can hardly be supposed to have attained such a stage of maturity, the analogy might not carry so far, but he is presumably enjoying his early summer, May at least, and it was a commonplace to treat summer, the apex of the year, as an emblem of the apex of a man's life, his prime.

At its simplest, 'summer' represents ideal weather, when the weather is 'fair', since the underlying comparison (the metonymies that enable the metaphor to work) seems to be between fair, as of a person, and fair, as of the weather. The poem itself, however, immediately begins to subvert the simplicity of the comparison, since actual summer days, in England at least, are by no means always fair, and you are not, as they are, changeable, inconsistent, unreliable: you are 'more lovely', more fair, and 'more temperate', which implies at once, as the poem then elaborates, that a summer's day is rarely ideal and may move between extremes (whereas 'you' do not):

*Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May:*

May is, in England, the month of early summer, when newly-flushed vegetation is at its most vulnerable, when 'rough winds', which are seasonal in November and February (although common enough in May) shake the

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leaves and flowers and by dashing them to the ground destroy them. In common Elizabethan usage, 'darling' is applied to young and beloved children, and in this context it carries two entailments: the buds are young and they are beloved: 'darling' is thus metonymic in that it implies both what the buds are in themselves and what we may feel about them: that they are vulnerable imps of spring. If 'darling' is a term that signifies a young person to whom you are lovingly attached, then to regard buds as beloved children is a metaphor, but it is the fundamental metonymy ('darling' for 'beloved child') which gives the metaphor its doubled power. Since the young man is a temperate summer's day, though, he will not be shaking them: and if he is still enjoying the Maytime of his own life, he is not yet at the peak of his powers (or his virtues).

*And summer's lease hath all too short a date:*

In this metaphor the length of the summer season is compared to the length of a lease that we may take out on a property. If we are unable to purchase a property outright, we may buy the leasehold and we may hold that lease (a legal right to possession) for a number of years (as many as ninety-nine in some cases), but at the end of the time set for possession of the lease, we must hand it back to the legally authorised owner: it is only in reversion ours. These are the presuppositions and entailments upon which the metaphor rests, which are built into it, as it were, by the choice of the words 'lease' and 'date'; and these, of course, are essentially metonymic in their operation since they are the truly operative parts of the whole business: the taking out of a lease is the precondition for holding it and the date is the fixed time when the lease must be given up.

What the terms encompass here is the beginning and the end of the period during which we may possess whatever we have leased: a brief summer. It is this fixed pattern of taking over and giving up which we

have to understand if the metaphor is to work: that summer is ours for only a limited period of time: that time will have its period. To understand the metaphor we have to understand what is presupposed by the taking out a lease, and what is entailed by the fixing of a date: 'lease' and 'date' are metonyms which signify the implied, completed transaction. It would also follow that we cannot expect our prime to last for very long: the autumn of our life will be here shortly — and that is not the state of things that the poet wishes for the young man or that he wishes to say about him.

*Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,*

*And often is his gold complexion dimmed:*

Since “the eye of heaven” (qualified by ‘too hot’ and ‘shines’) must stand, as a metaphor, for the sun, that in turn would imply that the arc of heaven is a face (we presuppose the presence of the face from the presence of the eye), with the further implication that the eye is observant, that it is watching us, since this is what eyes do. Yet in the next line, the sun itself becomes a face, since complexions are attributes of faces not of eyes, and in renaissance iconography that is how many visual representations portray the sun, a golden mask surrounded by flaming hair.

If its ‘gold complexion’ is dimmed, this would be likely to entail that it must, as a result, lose its brightness, which can only happen if it is veiled, unfaced, which can only be by cloud, and obscured sufficiently for the weather to be unseasonably cold. This is entailed since syntax and logic (as well as rhetoric) counter-balance the terms ‘hot’ and ‘dimmed’: if it is hot, it is undimmed; if it is dimmed, it is not hot. We can only deduce all this, however, if we work out what the metonymic signifiers require us (in a split second) to infer from their position in the chain of contingencies that relate to the common domain of the ‘sun’.

*And every fair from fair sometime declines,*

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*By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed:*

Here, both 'fairs' are elliptical halves of different wholes (and ellipses can be regarded as species of metonymy when they generate metonyms, which they often do): the first 'fair' signifies "fair human beings" while the second 'fair' signifies the "fairness of face or person" of which a human being might for a time be the fortunate possessor. At some time or other, however, a beautiful person loses his or her beauty: it declines, sliding from a higher to a lower state (the up-down metaphor, which operates in most languages)<sup>5</sup>. We notice, too, that 'fair', an adjective, can, like the abstract noun 'beauty', be applied metonymically, to someone who exemplifies fairness or beauty: "None but the brave deserve the fair", as Dryden puts in 'Alexander's Feast'; "she's a beauty", as one might say of a mare as well as a woman<sup>6</sup>.

We may lose our beauty, which editors gloss from the last word in these two lines as 'a trimming', which means a decorative extra, something which can be stripped from us, so that we are untrimmed, our beauty either removed by accident or lost as, in the natural course of things (what was known to the Renaissance as the *cursus aetatis*), we grow older. If by chance, we must supply out of our own general knowledge the instances of accidents that would damage our beauty: for sickness in general, say, smallpox ; for warfare of any kind, a facial wound; for all kinds of human misfortune, grief. At the same time, if this how we are to interpret the idea of 'a trimming', then it presupposes that beauty or fairness is not an essential property: it is not ours to keep, any more than a lease: we hold it only in reversion. Once again, only if we are alert to the metonymic contingencies shall we be able to appreciate the metaphoric substitutions.

Yet, 'to be trimmed' also means to have our beards cut, our hedges clipped, and when in *Richard II* one of the gardeners regrets that Richard

had not “so trimmed and dressed his land As we this garden”, does he mean by “trimmed” the same as “dressed” (and since Shakespeare often doubles words with similar meanings, he might), or is he meaning “had made it firm and strong”, “put it to rights” (equally important meanings), or, even, could he have meant “clipped and made neat”?

Some editors of the Sonnets put a comma after ‘course’, some omit it and omit, too, a comma after ‘chance’, all of which could well alter how we read the lines. The 1609 edition of the Sonnets has a comma after ‘chance’, but not after ‘course’, which seems to leave us free to consider another possibility: we may decline as a result of accidents or chance, while should the changing cycle of nature be allowed to take its course, we should grow shaggy and unkempt, become decrepit: we need barbers, beauticians and plastic surgeons to trim us and make us neat (and cleanly, captain). If that were a possible interpretation, it would still leave us robbed of the beauty we possessed when we were beardless boys: “golden lads and all girls must As chimney sweepers come to dust”. Yet, whichever way we read the lines, “untrimmed” is metonymic before it is metaphoric, and we have to decide on its metonymic relationships (and their implications) before we decide how to interpret the metaphor.

*But thy eternal beauty shall not fade*

*Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest.*

In these lines, ‘beauty’ and ‘fair’ are synonymous, as are ‘possessions’ and ‘that thou owest’, for although, as Feeble, the woman’s tailor, says, in *Henry IV, Part II*, “we owe God a death”, the primary meaning of ‘to owe’ for Shakespeare seems to have been “to own, to possess”. If something fades, this entails that it loses its colour and its freshness, and thus its beauty: leaves and flowers fade, so do human beings, since, like leases, the beauties of youth have to be handed back: we owe to our leasor what we

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own if it is leased, it is only ours for a season.

Yet the poem claims that the beauty of the person addressed will not be subject to such a strict law: it will exist outside time's jurisdiction. The claim denies the inevitability of natural processes, and since it is a condition of eternity that it exists outside time's revolutions, beyond time's reach, this makes no sense. To those who have been brought up to believe in life after death and a better, more perfect, life than they have lived while subject to "envious and calumniating time", this may not be such a paradox as it seems, or so unfamiliar an idea; yet the eternity which Shakespeare appears to have in mind is obstinately temporal, eternal life in this mundane world.

*Nor shall Death brag thou wanderest in his shade.*

Death must presumably rejoice in his absolute rule, boastful that kings and emperors and popes walk with peasants and fools in his kingdom, here signified metonymically by 'shades', since his kingdom, his house, his residence, his estate, his domain, is permanently in the dark, black as night, stygian darkness: the antithesis of all that is fair — the middle of a winter night as opposed to the noon of a summer's day.

*When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.*

The 'lines' are the individual verse units which signify the work that they combine to create: not simply, synecdochally, the small unit (the line) for the greater whole (the poem) yet the signifying feature, the metonym, by which we recognise that what we are reading is a poem and not some other kind of writing. The poet's lines are his poem, and they have the potential at least to survive long after their creator's death.

Because of its normal usage, the word 'grow' suggests the growing into something bigger, into something greater, and, by implication, something better. Yet the semantics of the preposition seems odd (there is no metonymic propriety): you might grow *through* time, perhaps, or *over* time,

but how can anything grow *to* time? Is it, perhaps, that you will grow until you become co-terminous with time, become time itself, time's icon?

*As long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.*

The figures here are straightforward metonyms without crossing over into metaphors: 'breath' signifies life (it is the cause of life and in consequence maintains life), while 'eyes' signify perception and the ability to read the lines that are here written, since eyes are the agents of sight and understanding (the agent here standing for both its acts and achievements). As long as men have life and eyes can read what is written, then, 'this' (these written lines of mine and the claim they make) will live, too, and 'this' (the claim that I am making on your behalf) will live as long as my lines do (the consequence that would follow such a cause). Even the demonstrative adjectives partake of metonymical shiftings, and all are inter-related in a tissue of implications, for should the human race be annihilated, then you, we can suppose, will die along with them, but not until then. Until such time, you will be immortal: a monstrously arrogant claim, it would seem, but since we are still able to read the lines and appreciate the claim they make, they are apparently justified.

## **II Richard the Second in his Dungeon**

*I have been studying how I may compare  
This prison where I live unto the world,  
And for because the world is populous  
And here is not a creature but myself,  
I cannot do it: yet I'll hammer it out.*

In his prison cell at Pomfret (Pontefract), Richard the Second takes the

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figure of comparison, of analogy (that at its most concentrated is metaphor) as his starting point, as if he were a schoolboy given this task as an exercise. He begins, as a schoolboy might, and as he was taught by Aristotle and his heirs to do, by comparing the microcosmos to the macrocosmos, the smaller to the greater, one of rhetoric's basic aids to (or topics of) invention. Within that domain, the domain that comprises the human race, there will be many component parts, of which he is one, yet, because he is one and the people of the world are many, he finds the task impossible: he cannot see himself as a solitary replacement for a much greater congregation.

Yet he is a diligent student and he will, to coin a metaphor, "hammer it out". To understand the metaphor, however, we must relate the hammer to the context in which hammers are used. The context is a favourite one, which Shakespeare reverts to when he wishes to provide an image of how the mind works when it is in the throes of creation, when it is inventing.

The hammer is a metonym and the domain to which it belongs is the Shakespearean forge. The human imagination, as Falstaff put it, is forgetive, or, as the Chorus to *Henry V* claims, "the forge and working house of thought", and the hammer is enough to fill out the picture of the forge, the fire, the anvil, and the metal that is being worked: base ore that, as a result of the smith's skill and creative genius, is transformed into a ploughshare, a silver goblet, a sword, or, in Shakespeare's case a poem or a play. The poet, like a smith, is the craftsman whose trade it is to use the elements of his trade to forge a piece of work, which might be, as it is in Louise Bogan's poem 'Roman Fountain', both a bronze waterworks and the poem that celebrates it, a verbal artificer's demonstration of the delight he (or she) feels in his ability "to beat out the image whole"<sup>7</sup>.

But having introduced the image of the forge, Shakespeare drops it at once to pick up another image which, for him, is closely related: the image

of the mind as a womb, a place of conception, a *pia mater*. Both 'forge' and 'womb' are places where disparate elements are brought together and are changed into something new, something 'rich and strange'. When one idea comes into Shakespeare's mind, associated ideas seem to follow inevitably, so that the particular link between forge and womb is, for Shakespeare, a perfectly natural one, since the metaphors have a common metonymic base. When I spoke of the 'throes' of creation, I was extending the metaphor, by a metonymy, since 'throes' literally means 'the labour of childbirth', and is a common metaphor to describe the painful production of whatever is being produced, which might be a poem (or an essay).

*My brain I'll prove the female to my soul,  
My soul the father, and these two beget  
A generation of still breeding thoughts,  
And these same thoughts people this little world  
In humours like the people of this world:*

The Chorus in *Henry V* asks the audience to set its own imaginary forces to work and to divide one man into a thousand parts so that one man may represent an army, and, at the same time, that the microcosmos of the Globe theatre might stand for the macrocosmos of two mighty monarchies at war with each other, synecdoches if treated at their simplest, yet metonyms in bringing to mind their contingent features. So, Richard decides to attempt to create out of his own single *pia mater* (in which the brain and soul work exist in a state of Cartesian dualism) a generation of thoughts which will continue to breed further generations of thoughts, his image almost a 'locus classicus' of what was soon to become a familiar idea: the idea of the 'conceit': a mental or intellectual conception. Famously, Sam Johnson was not so impressed with what he thought of as "heterogeneous ideas yoked with violence together", but for the metaphysical poets it

was their ideal way of bringing poems to birth.

Since Richard is constructing analogies rather than striking out single images on the anvil of his mind, he himself elaborates the metonymic or implied context, and we do not need to fill in the details since the details are given to us, but the brain and the soul clearly stand as metonymic agents of the body and the spirit, and we are therefore reminded that it is the spirit, the divine in man, which has the power to imitate the divine creator, and inspirer, of that spirit itself and all other spirits.

The verb phrase 'I'll prove' is at first a surprising one, however, for it is certainly ambiguous, while the reference to the humours creates, summons up, in one word the entire world of mediæval psychology and its ramifications. When you hammer out a sword, you have to prove it, again and again: you must *test* it to make sure that it is worthy, proof against stain or weakness or deterioration: you may wish to demonstrate that it is one hundred percent proof. Perhaps Richard wishes to test his brain, to put it to the proof, to see if it is capable of sustaining the demands put on it by the soul, or, maybe, as the father was thought to stamp the mother, so Richard imagines that he will use his soul to set a seal on his brain, thereby giving evidence of its genuineness, proof of its fecundity. Or that the brain will give evidence of its fecundity when the soul seeks to breed with it: at any rate, Richard will show, or demonstrate, that one or all of these things is what his brain can do, is capable of doing.

Mediæval medicine supposed that each human being was an amalgam of the four humours, some people having too much of one, some too much of another. Only very rarely were the humours in complete harmony, in perfect balance, when the complexion would be ideal; generally, we are an uneven mixture of the hot, the moist, the cold, and the dry. The Venerable Bede, with whose work Richard seems to have had some acquaintance (for

Bede, too, saw each individual man as “a microcosmos”), related an admixture of humours to the seasons and to the ages of man: hot and dry (red choler, summer and fire) which predominates in youth; cold and moist in old age (phlegm, winter, water); moist and hot in childhood (blood, spring, air); dry and cold in maturity (black choler, autumn, earth)<sup>8</sup>.

The conceptions of Richard’s brain and soul will then people, will make populous, his microcosmic world, but since man is humorous — in the sense now of being capricious and unstable — he is never satisfied with his condition, one side of his nature always in conflict with another, since human beings are conscious creatures and their minds are for ever engaged in sifting the evidence of their experience, and their thoughts may centre on a range of concerns: the theological and other-worldly (“thoughts of things divine”), or mundane and this-worldly (“things tending to ambition”) or philosophical and unworldly (“thoughts tending to content”), where the desire to classify is to represent things by their parts rather than their wholes, yet each part bringing to mind those other parts with which they might be in conflict, since in some sort of contiguous relation, all of them signifying our attitude towards life, our own point of view.

*For no thought is contented: the better sort,  
As thoughts of things divine, are intermixed  
With scruples, and so set the word itself  
Against the word,  
As thus, “Come little ones”, and then again,  
“It is as hard to come as for a camel  
To thread the postern of a small needle’s eye”.*

Theology, or scriptural authority (the ‘word’), which one might think (without thinking) would be constant and consistent, is as shifting as everything else. On one occasion, the words of Jesus (and everyone would

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know that Jesus was the author of these words) suggest that it is easy for anyone to be accepted into the kingdom of heaven; at another time Jesus suggests that it is well nigh impossible, in a saying that has become proverbial in English as well as Hebrew. The needle's eye, a metaphor based on similarity of appearance, is called a postern, a gateway or door, since that is the aperture's function: to allow you to enter. We thread a needle (the correct collocation) with cotton; a camel, however, would have been the largest of the living creatures with which the people of the Middle Eastern were acquainted, and so represented size, the largest living thing they knew: it might thus have been a metaphor for the riches (both signifying them and bearing them on its back) that would have made it difficult for their owner to thread his way (a common metaphor) into the kingdom of heaven, something that 'little ones', who would have been poor, would perhaps find easy, a detail which Richard has forgotten.

A scruple was an extremely small weight put into a measuring pan to adjust the weight of a balance, and came, by metaphor, to mean a small but crucial factor in the weighing of decisions: the link is the common idea of weight, first literal and then metaphoric. The sixteenth century translation of the Bible into English gave sixteenth century writers of English many such examples of metonymic side-steps that transformed the derived metaphors into statements of an idiomatic cast.

*Thoughts tending to ambition, they do plot  
Unlikely wonders, how these vain weak nails  
May tear a passage through the flinty ribs  
Of this hard world, my ragged prison walls,  
And, for they cannot, die in their own pride.*

It looks as if Richard is thinking of Hope and Ambition as related species, though if one of these is a species of the other might be hard to

decide. Certainly, he entertains the hope, which he knows to be both vain and in vain, that his nails, representative of the frail and the frangible, would have power to destroy flint and rag, two types of stone used by builders, the first known for its hardness, the second for its roughness.

Once again, we have two opposites set in hopeless conflict (another *topos* of Invention): an example of weakness (nails) and an example of hardness (flint and ragstone). The 'walls' are physically present and can, by metaphor, stand for Richard's 'world', present, too, but *meta*-physically. Richard's world has 'ribs', which are prison-like in both their appearance (like the bars on a window) and their function, and they are as hard as flint, a stone found and used in East Anglia as a building material. Since the stone of the West Riding of Yorkshire, where Pontefract Castle is located, is limestone and sandstone, it is unlikely that the walls of Pomfret were made of flint, but, even if they were, Shakespeare is using the appropriate epithet because it represents hardness, and can be used as a metaphor ("flint-hearted man"), while ragstone ("any stone of hard and coarse texture") is found mostly in the South-East of England: these two types of stone thus stand for the hardness of all stone.

The metonyms and metaphors are knotted together here in ways that are easily comprehensible but are not quite so easy to dis-entangle. If you die in your own pride, you are presumably, like any hubristic hero, self-consumed.

*Thoughts tending to content themselves  
That they are not the first of fortune's slaves  
Nor shall not be the last — like silly beggars  
Who sitting in the stocks refuge their shame  
That many have and others must sit there,  
And in this thought they find a kind of ease,*

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*Bearing their own misfortunes on the back*

*Of such as have before endured the like.*

Thoughts tending to offer content appear to be those which, in certain situations are called 'philosophical', a term which is itself a metonymic replacement for 'stoical' (stoicism being a branch or species of philosophy, as we shall see in Part II of this essay), implying the acceptance of whatever fate, or fortune, has in store for us. Since the stocks were the most visible sign of public shame, Shakespeare does not have to go far for the comparison, a simple simile, which in *King Lear* he turns into a dramatic moment when Kent, Lear's 'servant', is placed in the stocks by Lear's daughter and son-in-law, and where, by association, Kent's shame is felt by Lear as a sign of his own humiliation, since a man sitting in the stocks presupposes that he has sinned or committed a crime, that he has been found out, judged and sentenced to such a punishment by an authority higher than his master's; and it entails that anybody wishing to humiliate him (or his master) can do so, either by verbal or physical abuse.

The reference, as used here by Richard, is one example (a species) of similar such fateful misfortunes (the genus), and is thus metonymic, the crucial step in a set of presuppositions and entailments. Yet Richard is using it as simile: people who experience misfortune are like those who, subject to the humiliation of public shame, take refuge in the thought that they are not the first nor the last to suffer such indignity, which enables them to transfer their own pains to the others who have suffered and will suffer like pains.

*Thus play I in one person many people,*

*And none contented. Sometimes am I king.*

*Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar,*

*And so I am: then crushing penury*

*Persuades me I was better when a king,  
Then am I kinged again and by and by  
Think that I am unkinged by Bolingbroke,  
And straight am nothing.*

Keats thought that he was, like Shakespeare, a chameleon poet, who had no character of his own, but existed only in the part (or character) that he was playing; Keats termed this ability to be all men while being in oneself nobody “negative capability”. The dramatist Richard finds no satisfaction, though, in being so many-faced, since, for Richard, only two parts suit the actual conditions of his life as he has experienced them: to be a king, which implies absolute power, or to be a beggar, which implies absolute nothingness; yet while it is obvious that no one would wish to experience the condition of penury (the cause and condition of one’s beggardom), the position of king is also fraught: it may be impossible to trust anyone (a consequence and condition of one’s kingship). From these two premises, it follows that until a man is reduced to the condition of utter nothingness, annihilation, a living thing consigned to death and oblivion, then no earthly thing is likely to ease him of his “divine discontent”.

*Music do I hear?*

*Ha, ha! Keep time. How sour sweet music is  
When time is broke and no proportion kept!  
So is it in the music of men’s lives,  
And here I have the daintiness of ear  
To check time broke in a disordered string  
But for the concord of my state and time  
Had not an ear to hear time broke.*

Richard’s meditations are broken into by the sound of music, but all that this does is to cause him to embark on further meditations, once again

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making use of a comparison, a *topos* familiar to renaissance man in general, and to Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida* in particular: this time, of music as metaphor for the order (or disorder) of cosmological, public and personal systems of government. Yet again it is a trope that depends for its successful use as a metaphor upon our understanding of how the various conditions that make music possible are related and subordinated one to another in relations of cause and effect: the nature of stringed instruments in particular, say, the tuning of strings so that they sound in harmony with each other (concord), proportion between the parts (concord again), strictness of tempo, to which all the parts must submit (concord, once more).

Richard takes the comparison, or trope, as it is commonly taken, as a familiar and simple simile (“so is it”), and develops it as an analogy, rather than as a metaphor, to signify or represent both his personal and public roles. The breaking of time is the failure of the musicians to keep together, to achieve concord, when each note sounds with the notes it is supposed to sound with: when all the parts should conform to create a perfect whole (each musician is being too individual, perhaps): for ‘sweet’, too, we understand ‘concordant’ and harmonious, and for ‘sour’ we hear ‘discordant’ and inharmonious.

We might, instead of ‘daintiness’, say ‘niceness’: the power to discriminate, to recognise the aptness of parts to wholes (or the power to recognise when this propriety of parts is not observed by the musicians), and once again the reference is to a microcosmos designed to mirror in a small compass the macrocosmos, in this instance, the state. During his rule, Richard was deaf to the discordant music of the state and so neglected his responsibility as the time-keeper, the person responsible for keeping everyone together, which, as the leader of the band, it was his duty to do: his ear (metonymically here representing his attention and his interests) was obvi-

ously attentive to a different music.

Nor is Richard the only one to make the point: his gardeners have already done so, as I noted above, only they take the garden, rather than music, as their tropic microcosmos. The gardeners cut away superfluous branches so that the boughs which bear fruit may live: “Had he done so, himself had borne the crown, Which waste of idle hours hath quite thrown down.” This is a pre-echo of the assessment that Richard now goes on to make:

*I wasted time and now doth time waste me.*

People of a puritanic disposition do not like to waste time, and the chiasmus not only reverses the order of time and waste, but re-aligns the meaning of the word ‘waste’: if you spend time wastefully, time will revenge itself upon you by wearing you away, by eroding your very being (which it will do anyway, by chance, or nature’s changing course untrimmed). This is not the only time Shakespeare makes jokes about ‘waste’, though he puns it with ‘waist’, when in *Henry IV, Part II*, the Lord Chief Justice observes that Falstaff’s “means are very slender” and his waste “is great”. Falstaff, as nearly always, has an answer, one which nicely and cleverly encapsulates the figures of contrast and comparison: “I would it were otherwise. I would my means were greater and my waist slenderer”.

*For now hath time made me his num’bring clock,  
My thoughts are minutes, and with sighs they jar  
Their watches on unto mine eyes, the outward watch,  
Whereto my finger, like a dial’s point,  
Is pointing still, in cleansing them from tears.*

When Falstaff claims to have fought with Hotspur “a long hour by Shrewsbury clock”, he is of course lying. If he had been speaking the truth, he would not have known this because he had been able to see the clock, but

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because he would have heard it, which might just have been possible had the day been still and the wind in the right direction (the battlefield of Shrewsbury is a good three miles from the town centre). If he had heard the clock, either of St Mary's or the Abbey (where Brother Cadfael dispensed herbs and solved mysteries), he would have not have seen any clock face because at that time there were none.

The word 'clock' comes from a word which means bell, and may have been Celtic in origin (mediterranean bells are *campana*, hence campanology)<sup>9</sup>, and was associated first with the church bell, which was not used to mark and signal the hours until the fourteenth century, when the first 'turret clock', the first to strike the hour, was installed, in Milan in 1335, and Chaucer (who, like Richard, died in 1400) has two references to them<sup>10</sup>; but they would not have had dials. The word 'dial' probably derives from *dies* (L), day, and by metonymic shift came to mean the daily wheel, which was laid out first on a sundial; dials on clocks only came in after 1500, while the first recorded use of the word to mean the face of a clock was (according to the *OED*) in 1575. Shakespeare could therefore have known both uses, although he would have been equally familiar with sundials. Minute hands, however, did not appear on clocks until 1670 (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). The 'watch' was the man who kept watch in a town during the night, and would call out the hours as they passed: he was the watchman or, by ellipsis, the watch.

I have felt it necessary to find out all this in order to have a sense of the metonymic relationships that Shakespeare is taking for granted<sup>11</sup> here, or assuming that his audience would follow: a modern audience might find this difficult. Shakespeare has another reference to a dial in *Sonnet 104*: "Ah, yet, doth beauty, like a dial hand /Steal from his figure and no pace perceived". In her recent edition of the Sonnets<sup>12</sup>, Katherine Duncan Jones

thinks that 'the dial hand' refers to the hand of a mechanical time-piece (which would be some sort of clock), and John Kerrigan<sup>13</sup> is bothered by the ambiguity of 'steal from', which could be transitive or intransitive, 'to steal something from somebody' or 'to steal away from, to leave quietly'. He, too, thinks that the figure refers to the number on a clock face. Yet in a note to *Sonnet 77*, he also quotes a proverb, "We percieve the shadows of a dial passed, but perceive it not passing." I would therefore prefer to think of this as the figure of a sundial, and as the shadow cast by the dial's hand grows steadily greater, so the beauty of the figure engraved on the dial is cast further and further into shadow by its own hand (which could be nature's changing course again), all done with stealth so that no one can see it happening.

Since numbers would at the time have referred to hours, a numbering clock could simply have been a turret clock, striking every hour, yet Richard then speaks of minutes, and as each minute is a sigh, which is a jar, that does suggest a mechanical clock, which is a system of weights and wheels, which as the wheels engage, do jar (or jolt or jerk), and a jar is a harsh ugly movement, accompanied by a sound that may set your teeth on edge, which is like the watchman's cry, which jar his eyes into wakefulness, since his eyes are the agents that watch, that keep watch, and like the point of the dial, his finger, which could be a sundial's pointer or the single hand that marked the passing hours, is wiping the tears away from his eyes.

Because of one's doubts about what kind of clock Shakespeare (rather than Richard) has in mind, it is not an easy thing to see how this image functions, but if we were satisfied that we had been able to work it out, it would be because we had seen how all these details, metonyms as isolated details, fitted together to form a whole which we could then apply analogically (an extended metaphor). As Richard carries the image on

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further, however, it becomes easier to grasp, especially in terms of what we have discovered about clocks and bells.

*Now, sir, the sound that tells what hour it is  
Are clamorous groans that strike upon my heart,  
Which is the bell — so sighs, and tears, and groans  
Show minutes, times, and hours — but my time  
Runs posting on in Bolingbroke's proud joy,  
While I stand fooling here, his Jack o' the clock.*

Bells are struck by internal or external clappers, and if internal, they are known as tongues: when you swung the bell to cause the tongue to strike the inside, you tolled it, and so the bell told the time (now we 'tell the time' by looking at the clock face); in the early days, bells were struck once an hour. Richard's groans are internal, made partly by his tongue. His sighs, though, seem to come every minute. His tears show 'the times', which are sad (I am supposing, since "the times" signifies 'the present day' rather than 'the present moment'). His groans come on the hour. The place of the plural form 'times' is odd and seems out of sequence since hours and minutes are units of time, and my gloss may be wrong, but it seems to give Richard his next move.

'My time' is the time covered by the period of my life (if I say "It was before my time" this means that whatever we are speaking of took place before I was born and could know anything directly about it), and in Richard's case it clearly stands as a metonym for 'my life', which runs as quickly as a post carries news, the post that proclaims, in my dejection, Bolingbroke's joy. A Jack-o-the-clock was a figure carved like a man, which, on the hour, would appear and strike the bell (at Wells Cathedral, he is supported by 'quarter-Jacks'): its duty was merely to tell the time, which is all Richard can do, marking time, counting it (that is 'telling' it), for

someone else; a Jack was often, as well, the name given to someone of little importance, as in a pack of cards, where the knave (or servant) is sometimes called the Jack of a suit. We need to understand these contingent, and thus metonymic, associations if we hope to make whatever sense of the comparison we can manage to hold in our heads: that Richard's heart is a bell that sounds to the stroke (or tolling) of his griefs.

*This music mads me, let it sound no more,  
For though it hath holp madmen to their wits  
In me it seems it will make wise men mad.*

Music as therapy is a commonplace as old as the ancient Greeks, and in *King Lear* it helps to kill Lear's great rage. Bacchic music encourages bacchantic behaviour, while orphic music calms even the wildest animals: the correspondance in mood between music and animal behaviour is more than merely analogic: the one induces the other, is the cause for the consequence, which relates it to the workings of metonymy since the music and the mood it induces have become elements in a single domain, the psyche: what works on it, and the results of its working.

*Yet blessings on his heart that gives it me,  
For 'tis a sign of love, and love to Richard  
Is a strange brooch in this all-hating world.*

It is not that the world hates everybody but that everybody in the world hates Richard, 'the world' being a common metonym for 'the people' of the world, the container for what it contains. One might at first have expected Richard to use the word 'badge' rather than 'brooch', since a badge is a sign of affiliation, a heraldic device that indicates the company you keep; it is like a blazon in that it signals your feudal relationships, of lord to vassal, of vassal to lord. Yet, since a 'brooch' meant then, as it does now, an ornament fastened to a woman's dress by a pin (the origin of the word in the

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more common ‘broach’, an object with a sharp point), a trimming if you like, this might signal a more intimate relationship than a badge between the wearer of a brooch and the person who gave it to her: it might be a sign of love rather than duty, and might be reclaimed or lost. We have, that is to say (once again), to understand what the object would signify in its everyday use (the sign, a brooch, for the thing signified, a gift from a lover, say) if we are to get the best out of the metaphor.

### III Macbeth at the day’s end

As his end approaches, Macbeth expresses in a dramatic moment what in *Sonnet 73* Shakespeare takes rather more time over (as we shall see in Part II of this piece); but in both instances, he uses the same word, ‘yellow’, to establish the speaker’s time of life, which in Macbeth’s case seems to be old age; Shakespeare adds, and puts first, the word ‘sere’ (withered, sapless) to strengthen the sense that Macbeth’s prime is long past.

*I have lived long enough: my way of life  
Is fall’n into the sere, the yellow leaf,  
And that which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,  
I must not look to have, but, in their stead,  
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath  
Which the poor heart would fain deny and dare not.*

In fact, Macbeth makes explicit what *Sonnet 73* leaves implicit, in order to draw rather different conclusions from those that are come to by the speaker of the poem. “I have lived long enough” carries a number of linked implications: I have done all that I want to do or am capable of doing, and if consequently I have nothing more to live for, then there is no point

in prolonging my life. I have reasons for thinking this: I am old, since my life is no more than a leaf (autumn here reduced to one of its signifiers) that has grown withered, sere, and yellow, its colour faded. If I am no more than a mere leaf, my life cannot be worth much, and if it falls, so much the better: I might as well die.

Old age is not in itself without appropriate blessings, however: certain goods may accompany it (things which are in themselves good), that keep it company, goods that are perhaps not available when we are younger, certainly not when we are young. But Macbeth must not look to have these goods (he must not expect them as attendant upon his own old age) since he will, by his behaviour (we understand), have forfeited them.

Both the granting and the refusal to grant them will be the results or consequences of some prior, and causal, conditions or reasons. Honour is awarded to those who have behaved honorably, whose actions have been worthy of respect. If Macbeth does not anticipate being treated with honour, this presupposes that he believes himself to have behaved dishonorably, that he believes his behaviour to have been unworthy, not deserving of respect. Similarly, love is offered only to those who in their lives have shown love, whose actions have given happiness to those whom they love. Obedience is only shown to those who have, as leaders, shown that they deserve to be obeyed, because they possess certain qualities, of courage, self-forgetfulness, modesty, courtesy, consideration for those they lead, natural nobility, cheerfulness, justice, wisdom, compassion — these would be the characteristics of good leadership as I see them; others may favour different qualities. But however we define love and leadership, Macbeth is supposing himself to have failed to have shown such qualities that might have been rewarded with love and obedience. If, over a long life, we have acquired many friends, through the friendliness of our own behaviour, by

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keeping, in Sam Johnson's words our friendships "in good repair", we might expect to have at the end a goodly company of them. Macbeth has, by his own admission, done nothing to deserve such friendship.

He can only expect curses, which presupposes that his actions have been harmful to those who would curse him: the deeper the curses, the more cruel his actions in provoking them must have been; if the curses are not loud, they are made so as not to be heard (or overheard), which implies that if they were heard, Macbeth still has the power to punish those who curse him, which means that he is feared as well as hated.

Mouth-honour would imply respectful behaviour, but words only, not heartfelt deeds, since if 'mouth' is specified, it implies, by their absence, various organs that are not specified, such parts of our human composition as 'heart' or 'mind' or 'soul', in whose depths our feelings would necessarily be true as well as hidden. The words of the mouth are not necessarily the thoughts of the heart: they are, by contrast, superficial and may easily, even possibly, be false. Since Macbeth knows this, he knows that he cannot trust what people tell him; he knows that their expressions of respect and duty are hypocritical.

Our words are carried on our breaths and are formed by our mouths, so that breath is a metonym for the words we utter, breath being an intermediary here between our minds (hearts or souls) and our mouths. In Macbeth's presence, or in the presence of his agents (presumably), as in the presence of any tyrant, we speak what we have to say to please the tyrant: our words are false and we would wish to deny our utterance of them, but, if we dare not, we must fear the anger of the tyrant.

If all these conditions apply — that Macbeth has done nothing to deserve the love and respect of his people and everything to provoke their hatred and fear — the absence of what makes old age worth living would,

by contrast, make such an old age not worth the trouble. The implication would again seem to be that Macbeth would rather, in the end, be dead, and so he goes off to his final battle in a state of hysterical exaltation, to embrace it like a smug bridegroom. When Eric Porter played Macbeth at Stratford, he deliberately impaled himself on Macduff's sword, hugging Macduff as if he were his bride.

We string together this intricate web of logically implied presuppositions and entailments from the few significant features which are all that we are given, all of these features being, in my sense of the term, metonyms, that is signifying parts of wholes, which enable us to create from the parts we are given the whole world which they, because of their crucial and critical position in the web, bring to the mind of those who are in possession of the total picture, that world in its entirety.

### **Holding Conclusion**

To some readers, it may seem that all I have done is to offer extensive paraphrases of the texts I have looked at, and there may be some truth in that; but my paraphrases have attempted to draw out all those unspoken but necessary conditions which depend from and upon the metonyms which, when used as the vehicles of the metaphors, need to be understood in their manifold connections and relationships with casually linked fellow members of their common domain. We must do this if we hope to appreciate the metaphors they become when they cross-over from their own often remote domain (trees and autumnal yellow leaves) into the domain that is the underlying or 'continuous' tenor or theme of the text they illuminate (Macbeth's time of life). It is through the workings of "the metonym within the metaphor" that metaphors are enabled to function, and so enable us, the

readers, to make sense of them. Yet if Edmond Wright is correct, we can take none of this for granted (see Note 11).

## Notes

- 1 A book with this title has already appeared: *Shakespeare at Work*, John Jones (Oxford, 1994), a wonderful account of the changes which Shakespeare made to the (various) Quarto editions of his plays before Heminges and Condell issued the *Folio* Edition (1623). I have stolen Jones's title.
- 2 Two idioms based on metonymies that have become clichés: a man, i), who hoes his own row (to plant his own seeds) or, ii), grinds his own axe (to inflict damage or harm), does so because his row and his axe are his personal causes and they declare his own interest and concerns (in growing food or sharpening his weapon). These days, the idioms are used metaphorically (as are most idioms) and signify, i), working hard at something because it will be a means of achieving a person's particular goal, or, ii), wishing to point out that we are in a bellicose frame of mind. We are not, that is to say, disinterested: we have our purposes.
- 3 In such discussions, it is always a 'he' whose humours are thus described. In feminine terms, it might be a woman in her prime, as Muriel Spark describes such a woman in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.
- 4 All these issues are comprehensively, and exhaustively, discussed in *The Ages of Man*, by J. A. Burrow, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986.
- 5 As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson demonstrate so famously in *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, 1979)
- 6 That is, terms which depict qualities that can be applied metonymically to those who exemplify the qualities: 'the brave' for 'the man who is brave'. What is possessed is used to name the possessor, just as authors

give their names to their works (Shakespeare for his plays), or as the first users (or inventors) of things give their names to what they used or invented (wellington boots, cardigan jackets, macintosh waterproofs).

7 The last verse of 'Roman Fountain' by Louise Bogan runs

O, as with arm and hammer  
Still it is good to strive  
To beat out the image whole,  
To echo the shout and stammer  
When full-gushed water alive  
Strike on the fountain's bowl  
After the air of summer.

8 Burrow, op. cit., page 12

9 Horology is the study of time, from *hora*, time, and *logos*, the science of: "the study or science of measuring time; the construction of clocks, watches, etc.", *NOED*

10 i) In Chaucer's 'Nun's Priest Tale', Chanticleer's crowing is described as merrier than the merry organ, and as more reliable (from his perch) in his lodging "Than is a klokke or an abbey orlogge" (horologue=clock), line 34.

ii) In 'The Parson's Prologue', line 5, seq., the Parson seems rather carried away by his need to be precise about the time, judging the hour of the clock by the length of his shadow, like Holmes working out the details of 'The Musgrave Ritual'(*The Return of Sherlock Holmes*).

11 Dr Edmond Wright has pointed out that we can never take things for granted: although there is an overlap (otherwise communication would be impossible), we all look at things from our own point of view.

12 *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones, The Arden Shakespeare, 1997

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- 13 *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*, ed. John Kerrigan, The New Penguin Shakespeare, 1986