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# Analogy and Poetic Faith: Metaphors that are Meant

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One of the large changes of outlook that occurred with the epoch that we call modernity is a kind of paradigm shift from analogy to metaphor as the dominant mode of figurative thought—from resemblances discovered

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The late DR. LOUISE COWAN dedicated her life to teaching and establishing programs and institutions that would carry forward the liberal arts tradition. Among her many accomplishments at the University of Dallas, Dr. Cowan designed and established the Braniff Graduate School's doctoral program, the Institute of Philosophic Studies, and its Master of Humanities. In addition, she served as dean of Braniff twice, from 1973–77 and 1998–99, and as director of the IPS from 1973–77 and again from 1997–99.

A recipient of the highly distinguished National Endowment of Art's Charles Frankel Prize, Dr. Cowan bestowed an astonishing collection of her life's work to the University of Dallas. This assortment of papers contains over fifty years of teaching and writing. At present, the University is undertaking a project to archive this collection to make it available to scholars and students. This class lecture from her papers is one of many that Dr. Cowan wrote on the topic of the lyric. Known for her penetrating intellect and masterful reading of literary texts, Dr. Cowan continually prompted students to consider the deepest levels of meaning embodied in poetic language as she does in this talk on the paradigm shift from analogy to metaphor and its effect on poetry. The first part of the lecture details the difference between the *analogia entis* characterizing the Middle Ages and the shift to metaphor in the seventeenth century. The talk then turns to consider some of the features of analogy in Donne's "Valediction Forbidding Mourning" and ends with a broad reflection on modes of figuration, which undoubtedly elicited lively conversation among students in the class. As the work on organizing and cataloguing her surviving work continues, we hope to share some of her writings through this journal.

Though not directly involved with the founding of *Ranify*, Dr. Cowan and the program she designed shaped the spirit of the journal; the editors are deeply grateful for her dedication to Braniff and to the liberal arts. We hope that this journal is a continuation of her vision.

in *being* to resemblances in *thought*. Analogy is essentially vertical; metaphor is essentially horizontal. Metaphor is the perception of similarities; analogy is their discovery.

The modern age, you remember, is that era beginning in the seventeenth century and ending rather spectacularly with the twentieth century. (We don't know what to call the epoch we are just now in, but I think we can tell that its very basis is different.) The marks of modernity have been the dominance of fact, of analysis, the rise of science and technology, the emphasis on rationality, the de-emphasis of the feminine, of feeling. But the large governing shift in modes of thought concerns what philosophers called the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being—what Arthur Lovejoy in his classic work calls *The Great Chain of Being*. According to this habit of thinking, which had come about during the middle ages as the result of harmonizing Christian with Greek thought, all stages of being were related to each other. Dante and other medieval poets and thinkers made us aware of what they called the “analogical mirrors” that were able to shine forth the reflection of divine grace and benevolence throughout the universe. And there was a great chain of being, rising from the depths up to the heights of heaven itself. Above the human were the angelic orders; below the human were the animal, vegetable, and mineral, all sharing a kinship. So that, as John Donne wrote, man is in some sense like a radish, in some sense like a seraph. The similarity, while essentially figurative, was nonetheless believed. Analogies were considered to be in some sense true. For instance, according to this way of looking at things, to call God our father was in some sense really true and not simply a symbolic utterance. That is, when we encounter the ultimate truth our conception will not be seen to have been only a figure of speech, a symbol for something entirely different. The analogy is: we are to the children that we love and chide as God is to each of his creatures. Hence, the view was: if we perceive relationships and similarities, they exist in reality itself.

But analogy as the dominant mode of medieval thought was being replaced in the seventeenth century by metaphor, which is governed by our own minds and not by creation itself. We began at this time the endless occupation of watching ourselves think. In such a change of cultural and cosmological paradigm, the lyric poet is affected more acutely than other writers. And in Donne's day, the *analogia entis*, the great chain of being, was weakening as the implications of the Copernican

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revolution became increasingly evident. As Donne wrote, "the sun is lost, and the moon, and no man's wit / Can tell us where to look for it."

With the advent of modernity, then, and its underlying belief that only that which could be demonstrated empirically (measured) was real, our pattern for the relation of things to each other began to turn itself on its side, so that the horizontal structure of the evolutionary theory was already in people's minds and imaginations long before Darwin. In this way the transcendent was cut off; angels had no place in this lateral scheme. And it was no longer analogy anyhow; in the modern view, the human is related to the animal not so much by any real likeness (as it would be in an analogical view of the universe) as by what we call descent. All this may be good biology, but it plays havoc with the poet. He is left with no ladders of analogy, no way to reach the stars except by a terrifying leap.

In a way, what we have in a little poem, written near the end of the seventeenth century, Waller's "Go, Lovely Rose," is a kind of farewell to analogy, of taking the figure seriously:

Go, lovely rose  
Tell her that wastes her time and me  
That now she knows  
When I resemble her to thee  
How sweet and fair she seems to be

Tell her that's young  
And shuns to have her graces spied  
That hadst thou sprung  
In deserts where no men abide  
Thou must have uncommended died.

Then die! That she  
The common fate of all things rare  
May read in thee  
How small a part of time they share  
That are so wondrous sweet and fair.

The lover is looking at the rose that he plans to send to his inamorata, thinking, "What can it say to her to woo her?" What in fact does a rose say to a lovely young woman? 1. In its very external appearance, it is a message that the person who sent it considers it to reflect her sweetness and fairness; 2. To meditate on it all is to recognize that it needs to be seen and admired to be appreciated (praised); 3. Then— and here is where the analogy comes in—that, in its very action, its short-livedness, it tells her some-thing. In the same way that it, and all things rare, will wither and die in just a few days, her life too will be cut short; she too will die; and so the seductive *carpe diem* theme is brought in indirectly—but only implicitly, by analogy. The rose is being asked to act out an analogy—a suicide mission, so to say. There is a tender wit in this lovely little lyric.

After Waller, literature tended, in the eighteenth century—the century following this shift—to become excessively mundane; the Royal Society of London had actually instructed poets to be plain and literal, to give up figures of speech. And it is remarkable to look back at Dryden, Pope, Gray, Collins, and the other neo-classical poets to see how void of metaphor are their chiseled lines. Classical allusion, elegant variation, description—these took the place of figurative language. And hardly any lyrics were produced. The lyric was courageously brought back to the attention of the literary mind with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. But for Wordsworth (if not Coleridge) analogy was replaced by what he called organic sensibility: a feeling with and through nature. There was no need for a figure of speech since the tie with the cosmos was actual and could be experienced. And Keats' superb poetry pondered images such as urns and nightingales and did not depend on analogies for its meaning. Thus, as the twentieth century Modernist poets thought (Eliot, Pound, Stevens, Tate), the seventeenth century was the time when our language deserted the full path of its genius. As T. S. Eliot pointed out in one of his most famous essays ("the Metaphysical Poets"), the English language was split in two; there occurred what he called a dissociation of sensibility: the language of feeling went into Milton and that of thought and analysis into Dryden. Not until the modernists of his own day had there been an attempt to put the language back together, with thought and feeling uniting again. This union occurred, as its disunion had also been noted, in that form that is the most intense of all the literary genres: the lyric.

The lyric is usually brief enough and complete enough in itself to offer a full insight into the way in which fiction of any sort provides

meaning. By its very nature lyric is inclusive, having its origins in communal dance and song and retaining its basic nature even after being reduced to black marks on a printed page, to be pondered by the solitary reader. Thus the fictional voice speaking the lyric is just that—a fiction, with sometimes an ostensible specific hearer, as when Keats addresses the taciturn but finally loquacious urn; and sometimes a general or universal one, as when that same poet speaks to whoever will hear him, as in the “Ode on Melancholy.” But in both instances the address is communal, and the utterance is conceived of by the poet, whether or not consciously, as not simply metaphor, but analogy. The ethos, mythos, and dianoia are all mimetic—that is to say—analogous to something of significance in life. Roman Ingarden, the Polish critic, suggests that much of poetic imitation functions to reveal metaphysical objects—that is, qualities present in life but largely inaccessible to the conscious mind because manifested in times of stress when the analytical powers of the mind are in abeyance. So the lyric has always a strong urge toward analogical thought, even in a skeptical age.

But back at the time of the paradigm shift: before the mode of analogy diminished, there was a brilliant flareup in the writings of the poets that we call Metaphysical: John Donne, George Herbert, Andrew Marvell, Henry Vaughan, Thomas Traherne, Richard Crashaw, and others. Their style was overtly and dramatically analogical; they were able to make far-fetched comparisons because they saw all things as connected in some manner. But when writers are out of step with their epoch, that is, when they hold fast to a way of thought that is disappearing in the culture that surrounds them, the strain tends to distort their writings, to make it in some sense skewed (This is the source of Flannery O’Connor’s grotesque quality, it seems to me). So the rather elaborate analogies in the poetry of Donne and Herbert in particular came to be considered by the succeeding epochs as strange and rather repellent. Dryden first used the word “metaphysical” for them, which in those days meant simply philosophical. “Donne too much affects the metaphysical in his love lyrics,” he wrote. And Samuel Johnson, following upon Dryden, spoke of the metaphysical conceit as “two unlike ideas yoked together by violence.” It is precisely that word *violence* that gives away the change in world view that has occurred. For, to Donne and Herbert, strange and

interesting things were tied together in the very order of creation, not simply in the violence of man's mind.

Thus, though the *analogia entis* as the dominant mode of medieval and Renaissance thought was largely replaced by metaphor, the lyric retained its essential vertical character, reflecting the whole of being in a concrete instance. Seventeenth century lyrics were forced, however, to maintain this larger connection at the risk of seeming merely witty or grotesque. The analogical overtones in seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry are quite strongly manifest, particularly in the poems of John Donne. Donne's most frequently anthologized lyrics—"The Canonization" in particular—speak by analogy not simply of love between the sexes, but of desire for a transcendent order to be attained only in seclusion, though its effect will be to permeate culture and redeem the world.

The *analogia entis* is our inheritance from the Greeks; the Christian middle ages kept it alive, viewing the world in all its varieties as related to each other. Modernity became more literal and scorned analogy as a mode of knowledge. And this is why the metaphysical poets seemed so strange: they still employed analogies, and so their resemblances were not of the senses, but of the mind: man is a crazy, brittle glass; a nest of boxes; prayer; a set of kennings (analogies)

The conceits of such poems as "Valediction Forbidding Mourning" and "The Good Morrow," when looked at seriously, appear to arise not so much out of a peculiar yoking together by violence as out of a penetrating look into the implications of the *analogia entis*. If man is, as Donne says, in some ways like a radish, a turnip, then the intense connection between lovers is analogous to larger patterns in the whole of existence. And, when we look closely at the lyrics, we discern in the close analysis of the love between man and woman analogical overtones suggesting the human relation with invisible orders of being. Kierkegaard once declared that the whole content of eternity is love, and it is this quality that Donne more than any other poet observes in the human participation in the spiritual life.

In "Valediction Forbidding Mourning," for instance, one of Donne's most famous poems, the speaker attempts to "prove" his argument that genuine love surmounts all barriers of space and time, that it cannot, as a matter of fact, be separated:

As virtuous men pass mildly away  
 And whisper to their souls to go  
 While some of their sad friends do say  
 The breath goes now; and some say no---

So let us melt and make no noise  
 no tear floods nor sigh tempests move  
 Twere profanation of our joys  
 To tell the laity our love;

The poem begins with an extended simile: "As virtuous men pass mildly away...so let us melt." What we are to retain out of this comparison is both mildly> make no noise and virtuous> us. And there is the introduction of the high vs the low: profanation, laity. It is an attempt to persuade the lady that virtuous lovers (lovers who are the high priests of love, in comparison with the laity) should be quiet in their parting. He goes on to extend the simile with a cosmological comparison:

Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears;  
 men wonder what it did and meant  
 but trepidation of the spheres  
 Though greater far is innocent.

The simile is growing stronger, though implicit; ordinary love is like an earthquake; our love is much more massive, like trepidation of the spheres. Yet that cosmic disturbance is silent, attracts no attention. He doesn't need to make the comparison explicit here. He knows that the lady will retain the contrast between virtuous and non-virtuous lovers, high and low, from the first comparison and be flattered by its cosmic grandeur. He goes on,

Dull sublunary lovers' love  
 Whose soul is sense cannot admit  
 Absence, because it doth remove  
 Those things which elemented it

But we by a love so much refined

That our selves know not what it is  
 Interassured of the mind  
 Care less eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

These figures have all been elaborate similes.

Then there comes the attempt at the first “metaphysical conceit,”  
 that is, the first analogy:

Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
 Though I must go, endure not yet  
 A breach, but an expansion,  
 Like gold to airy thinness beat,

This is no ordinary comparison; it is not based on likeness, but on an idea: it is an analogy: “gold to airy thinness beat.” But not finding that entirely satisfactory, he goes on to the exact analogy: the two legs of a compass.

If they be two, they are two so  
 As stiff twin compasses are two;  
 Thy soul the fixed foot, makes no show  
 To move but doth, if the’other do.

And though it at the center sit  
 Yet when the other far doth roam  
 It leans and hearkens after it,  
 And grows erect as it comes home.

Such will thou be to me, who must  
 Like th’other foot obliquely run  
 Thy firmness makes my circle just,  
 And makes me end where I begun.

The legs of a compass: Two things working together, doing radically different jobs, but forming a perfect harmony.

Why do we call this an analogy and not an extended simile?

#### MODES OF FIGURATION

Let’s make an attempt to distinguish between figures of speech, if we can.



**IMAGE:** a whole condensed cosmos of feeling and sensation, a complex of undifferentiated meaning. According to Ezra Pound, “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.”

Ezra Pound: “In a Station of the Metro”

“the apparition of these faces in the crowd / petals on a wet black bough”

Thomas Hardy: “Neutral Tones”

We stood by a pond that winter day,  
 And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,  
 And a few leaves lay on the starving sod  
 They had fallen from an ash, and were grey.

.....  
 Since then, keen lessons that love deceives  
 And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me  
 Your face, and the God-cursed sun, and a tree  
 And a pond edged with greyish leaves.  
 (A constructed image)

D. H. Lawrence: “Bavarian Gentians,”

Bavarian gentians, big and dark, only dark  
 darkening the daytime, torchlike with the smoking blueness of  
 Pluto’s gloom  
 ribbed and torchlike, with their blaze of darkness spread blue

.....  
 among the splendour of torches of darkness, shedding darkness  
 on the lost bride and her groom.

**SIMILE:** a stated resemblance, marked by “like” or “as” It is a similarity in the mind, not the thing; an intellectual figure, even though it treats of the senses.

Robert Burns, “A Red, Red Rose”

“My love is like a red, red rose”

T.S. Eliot: "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"  
 "like a patient etherized upon a table"

Emily Dickinson: "As imperceptibly as grief"

**SYMBOL:** partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; abides as a living part of that whole of which it is a part.

John Keats' nightingale in "Ode to a Nightingale"

Herman Melville's white whale in *Moby Dick*

W.B. Yeats' great beast in "The Second Coming"

Gerard Manley Hopkins: "God's Grandeur"  
 "like shining from shook foil"

**IKON:** sheds a supernal light upon an earthly scene or thing (doesn't stand for something else, or resemble anything else but is a revelation in itself).

Thomas Hardy: "Darkling Thrush  
 so little cause for carolings . .  
 of such ecstatic sound  
 was written on terrestrial things ...  
 afar or nigh around  
 that I could think there trembled through  
 His happy goodnight air  
 Some blessed hope whereof he knew  
 And I was unaware.

Keats: "Ode on a Grecian Urn": image turned, finally, into an ikon  
 (revelation)

Yeats: Among School Children

"O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer . . Are you the  
 root, the blossom, or the bole"

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Sylvia Plath: "Black Rook in Rainy Weather"

"Waiting for the .....the descent of the angel"

**METAPHOR:** a stated *identity* between two things, even if that identity is only in one's mind, not in existence itself.

Yeats "Sailing to Byzantium": the metaphor of song

Dickinson: "The Soul Selects"

"then closes the valves of her attention / like stone."

Keats: "Ode on Melancholy"

"can burst joy's grape . . ."

Shakespeare: "Sonnet 30"

"When to the sessions of sweet silent thought"

**ANALOGY:** the resemblance is not between two things but between two sets of things, none of which resemble each other: the two sets are in some measure alike (Our two souls are to the making of the perfect life as the two legs of a compass—doing entirely different things).

Hopkins: "Spring and Fall"

"Margaret are you grieving"

Over goldengrove unleaving . . .

It is Margaret you mourn for....

The parallel is in being itself and is taken to be in some sense true (simile and metaphor are taken to be fanciful, imaginative, an enhancement by the mind and imagination rather than a discovery of something in being). What analogy does is advance meaning: we learn something from analogy.

With the Romantic symbol: the object became connected with the numinous, but it was not analogous to something else. Then the romantic image became a small intense convergence of meaning and sensation.

Hopkins was the first to bring back analogy in its full strength: "I caught this morning morning's minion."

Analogy is not a mode of expression, but a mode of knowledge, a mode of transformation, finally. Robert Frost shows the inadequacy of simile or even metaphor to make the radical transformation of meaning that analogy evokes. He starts with a myth that he would like to believe but has to let "truth break in with all its matter of fact." But after he has established the facts, he is free to go back to his heart's preference, the boy climbing to the top and bending the tree downward, swinging the birch. He gives us an elaborate portrayal of the way in which the boy develops skill: to go on at the ending to what he has wanted to talk about all along; the way in which one has to strive in life for the balance to go as far near heaven as one can manage; but the birch tree analogy reminds him that it is toward heaven and that earth's the right place for love.

It is analogy that can translate the natural dimension into a spiritual dimension, becoming a medium for restabilizing a firm correlation of sense between the two areas. Thus aesthetic experience appears to be grounded in analogical mediation: the experience of beauty can be interpreted as the perception of form through which is grasped, ultimately, the content corresponding to the appearance at first approach. Art and aesthetic experience are, moreover, territories in which are manifested more visibly every possible crisis of experience.