On Metonymy and Symbol:
Seamus Heaney and W. B. Yeats[1]

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Since Roman Jakobson lamented in his seminal 1958 paper, "Linguistics and Poetics" that metonymy is "less explored than the field of metaphor"[2], much work has been done in philosophy, aesthetics, cognitive linguistics, psychiatry, psychoanalysis and literary theory; and much of this work has been based on Jakobson's crucial distinction between metonymy and metaphor—that metonymy and synecdoche are tropes of the contiguity of one entity with another in space and/or time, while simile and metaphor are tropes of similarity.

My purpose here is to attempt to show how a simple metonymy is made and finally to distinguish it in certain respects from symbol, because, when these terms are used in literary studies in discussion of poetry, novels and film, symbol is frequently confused with metonymy. It is not my purpose to ask with philosophers of language or cognitive linguists as to whether language is used 'as if it were' referential or as 'actually' referential ; or whether troping is basic to human thought; or whether it can tell a truth or is merely an ornament of suasive writing or speech; or whether man is an unique symbol making animal; or whether one trope is the master trope from which all others are made – issues which, among innumerable others, are much debated inside and outside literary study.

So what is a useful way of identifying metonymy for the literature student? Certainly Jakobson's breakthrough concept of metonymy as a trope of contiguity in space / time is a most useful identification of metonymy and so too is his distinction of the other trope of contiguity, synecdoche. Both tropes are derived from the association of the verbal vehicle's referent with an entity close to that referent in space/ time. Synecdoche is uncontroversially a part for a whole: 'sails' signifies boats in Homer's 'thirty sails'; 'crown' signifies the monarch

as a person in the sentence, 'The crown is entering the room'. These are samples of a simple and obvious trope. Noticeably the 'part' and 'whole' of synecdoche's verbal vehicle are 'concrete' nouns, if I may use a grammatical term that poaches inside the terrain of ontology.

Metonymy is far less perceptible than synecdoche, although the latter, too, is a trope of contiguity. It is a metonymy to say: "I am profoundly moved by Tennyson," meaning I am profoundly moved by the thoughts, feelings, poetic achievement of the man named Tennyson, i.e., Tennyson is associated in space and/or time with these particular entities and comes to stand for these entities. This is, of course, only one sample of metonymy, perhaps its most frequent and unconscious usage. In *Metaphor and Metonymy at the Crossroads*, cognitive linguist Antonio Barcelona puts together the traditional categories of metonymy, an update of Quintillian, as it were:

> *She's just a pretty* face. (FACE FOR PERSON)
>
> *The* ham sandwich *is waiting for his check.* (CONSUMED GOODS FOR CUSTOMER)
>
> *There are a lot of* good heads *at the University.* (BODY PART FOR PERSON AND BODY PART FOR INTELLECTUAL ATTRIBUTES CONVENTIONALLY ASSOCIATED WITH IT)
>
> *I'll have a* Löwenbrau. (PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT)
>
> *He walked with* drooping *shoulders*. He had lost his wife. (DROOPING BODILY POSTURE FOR SADNESS, EFFECT FOR CAUSE)
>
> *John has a long* face. (DROOPING FACIAL MUSCLES FOR SADNESS) (EFFECT FOR CAUSE)[3]

In nearly every instance the metonymy is unostentatious, less perceptible than synecdoche as a trope and highly likely to be unconsciously part of our ordinary discourse. What's more, there is something common to all Barcelona's samples: the pretty face, the ham sandwich, heads, a Löwenbrau, drooping shoulders, a long face, are, like synecdoche, all what one might call 'concrete' nouns or a 'proper' noun as in the case of "a Löwenbrau" or as in the case of Tennyson in "I'm reading Tennyson." (I shall use the term 'concrete' noun to refer to both 'concrete' and 'proper' nouns.)

The metonymy, so often a simple noun or noun phrase, gets its significance from 'activation' in its 'microcontext' (to use Stephen Ullmann's term) and/or macrocontext. The macrocontext may be a large part of a work, the entire work, and/or the entire work set in its cultural tradition. It may be the whole of Tennyson's achievement as a poet and as a man that constitutes his name as a metonymy. Any famous name—Shakespeare, Nelson Mandela, Greta Garbo – is constituted as a metonymy the same way, that is, through its contiguity with characteristics or achievements of (contiguous to) the actual person named. The synecdoche, a part for a whole, a concrete noun for a concrete noun, is quite clear in its significance and is so usually by its microcontext. The metonymy may need more interpretation than synecdoche because the metonymy finally refers to the abstract, despite its beginning as a concrete noun or noun phrase. The 'just a pretty face' phrase signifies the intellectual and perhaps spiritual limitations of the girl with a pretty face; the 'ham sandwich' phrase signifies the routinized and reductive way the speaker as waitress or waiter has of perceiving and identifying a customer. The 'good heads' at the university refers to the undefined higher intellectual capacities of those employed at the university (and may be employing another trope, irony, but we cannot tell this from this limited phrase). 'A Löwenbrau' is a metonymy not just for beer, but for a foreign and famous beer, that betokens probably discriminating taste on behalf of the speaker who orders it.[4] The 'drooping shoulders' metonymy has its microcontext given us by Barcelona: the man had lost his wife. The drooping shoulders signify sadness, perhaps even a permanent grief that has altered the man's posture. 'A long face' metonymy signifies sadness too, although Barcelona does not supply a microcontext; and as it stands, 'John has a long face' could mean exactly that: John has a long and not a short or round or oval face. But Barcelona asserts here that the metonymy, 'a long face,' does signify sadness.

In all these cases a concrete noun signifies the abstract that one must ascertain from the micro or macrocontext. So too in poetry or novels or film where the metonymies, perhaps at first imperceptible, can, if done well, be quite ingenious; that is, they yield a lot of significance from quite an economy of words or effects. Metonymy, as the basic trope of realism in novel and film, is powerful. However even very ingenious metonymies are not quite the display of ingenuity that a metaphor is. It stuns and gratifies the reader with its adroit comparison of one entity (concrete) with another (whether concrete or

abstract)—or as various critics put it, it stuns with similarity in dissim-
ilarity and dissimilarity in similarity. Nevertheless in the right hands,
metonymies are quiet achievers, economically activating considerable
significance, yet beginning usually in humble concrete nouns.

A poet whose work is figured pre-eminently by metonymies is the
1995 Nobel Laureate, Seamus Heaney. Heaney's work is replete with
homely but fresh metonymies, activated by his subtle underplayed
but ever apt means. In this poem "Punishment"[5] he uses a central
image, the 1951 discovery of a late first century A.D. very young
woman, preserved in peat bog. The microcontext that charges the
metonymy of this long dead, maimed youngster is firstly the title; the
reader knows that what the first person 'speaker' of the poem is con-
templating is already significant, someone punished and a subject of
a poem. Soon the first person 'speaker' starts to activate feelings for
this tormented girl. He (a 'he' is safely presumed) reiterates her signs
of punishment, connected with his own apparent sensitivity of feel-
ing for her once actual physical and emotional torment—the "tug" of
the halter at the nape of her neck; her nakedness open to the wind;
the stone that weighs her down (ll. 3-10); the humiliation of her
shaved head (l. 17); the soiled bandage across her eyes (l. 19). He pres-
ents a catalogue of her suffering and makes it 'actual' to the reader's
presumed empathy by imagining what the suffering was as if she were
alive. So sensitive is the speaker of the poem, he even understands the
poignancy of her adulterous "memories of love" (l. 22) that led piti-
fully to the torture and death of this "Little adulteress" (l. 23). He can
also pity what was likely her beauty (ll. 26-28) before her torture and
death. He can, indeed, recognise her as in history's tradition of the
scapegoat (l. 28) and feel "I almost love you" (l. 30). But at this admis-
sion of near love, the speaker of the poem with total self-knowledge
confesses that he is an "artful voyeur" (l. 33), who would have shunned
her by the "stones of silence" (l. 32) – just as he has stood by "dumb"
(l. 38), when Belfast girls have been humiliated and tormented by IRA
sympathisers for a perceived sexual betrayal, perhaps dating British
soldiers. He recognises his own hypocrisy: he would "connive in
civilised outrage" (ll. 42-3), yet actually want revenge against the girls,
exact, tribal, "intimate revenge" (l. 44), an unnerving description of
his unspoken, apt cruelty. The poem ends with the speaker quietly
(the whole poem is quiet) and sadly aware of his lesser self, parallel-
ing his conflicted feelings over both the dead girl and the living
Belfast girls. But at least he is confessing. The poem is a confession

of complicity and guilt and is consciously offered as another instance in the endless disgraceful history of scapegoating.

The two basic metonymies, the peat bog girl and the Belfast girls, are throughout 'activated' by being associated with the speaker's feelings and by the fact that we are to know that they are real persons in history. They are concrete tokens, indeed concrete nouns, signalling something abstract. By the poem's end, through their interrelations with the speaker's conflicted emotions and shocking confession; the use of the loaded word scapegoat; and the ironic comparison of the purportedly primitive Iron Age to the civilised contemporary, they signify not just suffering but perennial suffering, unending in history, of the scapegoat.[6] This is the macrocontext of their signification.

So a poetic metonymy, if well done, that is, if adroitly 'charged' or 'activated', may well be unobtrusive as a trope, like the peat bog girl or the Belfast girls; but can be highly significant and deeply affecting. Heaney's simple metonymies begin in concreteness, but come through the carefully worked micro and macrocontext to suggest something abstract – feelings and associations that finally hover and haunt.

Heaney's achievement is, in nearly all his poems, the unshowy skilful activation of the simplest and most ordinary object, and much can be learned from his strategies. Consider the linen cloth in "The Wife's Tale"[7]. In this poem, a veritable litany of simple but moving metonymies, the "linen cloth" appearing in the very first line and so close to the title, comes to suggest the wife's 'world': the linen cloth always associated by Heaney with the wife's implied feelings, signifies her small scale, quiet, enclosed 'world'; but it also signifies her crossing from it to the 'world' of the outdoors, the 'world' of active, hard working men doing the threshing. She crosses from her world to theirs by means of her gift of fineness and affection, signified by her picnic. The poem ends intertwining her temporary, quiet satisfaction with the act of folding up her white linen cloth (we know it is white only by l. 11) after her husband's appreciation and the men's gratitude as they loaf a little longer. The 'white linen cloth', beginning in concreteness, is so handled as to come to betoken an implicit serene lovingness in a wifely defined (but not resentfully confined) 'world'.

Heaney's metonymies, however, never reach the power of Wordsworth's in, say, "Michael". By the time one reaches the following lines, Wordsworth has activated a powerful metonymy, yet as simple as the linen cloth:

> 'Tis not forgotten yet
> The pity which was then in every heart
> For the Old Man – and 'tis believed by all
> That many and many a day he thither went,
> And never lifted up a single stone.[8]

The stone referred to throughout the poem and always in association with the feelings of Michael, the narrator and the 'chorus' of those who know Michael's story, has become a metonymy of the dogged, unending, profound grief of the father for an errant son, who has crushed his very life force. The "pleasurable feeling of blind love/ The pleasure which there is in life itself" (ll. 78-70) has gone and the stone that Michael does not lift betokens this irreparable loss (helped by the heavy stress on stone, its subliminal rhyme with groan and moan, and its diminuendo in the nasal consonant 'n' that keeps the loss lingering). Wordsworth repeatedly does give what he programmatically sought to do – the "real language of men in a state of vivid sensation"[9] and this makes for powerful metonymies – again unobtrusive as a trope, but powerfully charged.

However Heaney's work does grow out of the loving intimacy with quotidian reality as does Wordsworth's; and his Nobel prize acceptance speech of 1995 clearly illuminates Heaney's usage of metonymy and certain characteristics of metonymy. Heaney says: "...poetry can make an order as true to the impact of external reality and as sensitive to the inner laws of the poet's being as the ripples that rippled in and rippled across the water in [our] scullery bucket fifty years ago."[10] Heaney explains that he wanted "that truth to life [in poetry] to possess a concrete reality, and rejoiced most when the poem seemed most direct, an upfront representation of the world it stood in for or stood up for or stood its ground against"[11]. Heaney's aims match his strategies and make for the privileging of metonymy in his work as in Wordsworth's. If his power is more subdued than Wordsworth's, it is intended to be. Heaney, a Catholic from Northern Ireland, can no longer be 'a man speaking to men' in uncontaminated speech (he was ambivalent about the use of English) nor with the optimism of Wordsworth and his eudaemonistic trust in the healing powers of nature. Nevertheless like that of his heroes of poetry, Chaucer, Keats, Hopkins, Robert Frost, Wilfred Owen, Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, and Patrick Kavanagh, Heaney's lyric work is a perfect study in the poetics of metonymy, which is the poetics of the 'real'. (I may add that Heaney avoids the dull posturing of the Imagists

with their experiments in metonymy. I think of Hilda Doolittle's much anthologised "Oread"[12] as paradigmatic of this movement.)

But what of symbol with which metonymy is so often confused? Seldom does one confuse metaphor, so conspicuously a trope of similarity, with metonymy, based on contiguity, or symbol, which seems something very vague indeed. No one is likely to confuse metonymy or symbol with, say, Shakespeare's famous metaphor of the advancing seasons and advancing age in Sonnet 73:

> That time of year thou mayst in me behold
> When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
> Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
> Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.[13]

The sonnet superbly sustains this metaphor where both aspects of the comparison, age and the seasons, are patently present in the verbal vehicle. As a trope of similarity, it is ingenious, showy, unlike most metonymy (although for success it is important that Shakespeare teases out the similarity with no false sentiment nor loss of feeling, with suitable quiet tonal work, and a stately but even and thereby an inevitable pace). Metaphors are a display and may well take more poetic strategies than metonymies; but they run greater hazards. A metonymy runs the risk of being unactivated, a dead signifier and a bore; but a metaphor runs the risk of being self preening or too strained. Shakespeare's famous 'Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang' with the rich polysemy Empson makes much of,[14] is totally in keeping with the ongoing metaphor of regretful ageing and inevitable seasonal change: a ruined old body is spare and skeletal as a winter tree, capable of only remembered passion, once sweet as the birds' song in the tree and now absent. Shakespearean metaphors in his sonnet sequence are some of literature's finest models of how to handle the type of metaphor that requires both sides of the comparison in the verbal vehicle.

However this kind of metaphor is not the only manifestation of metaphor. Metaphors can suggest a similarity when one side of the similarity has been dropped out, due to the obviousness of the comparison and/or due to its general acceptance in ordinary discourse. Both metaphorical *verb* expressions and metaphorical *noun* expressions belong here; but I will stay with noun metaphors for the present purposes of comparison with metonymy and symbol. 'Skyscraper' is a metaphor permanently emerged from its implied original context: 'The building is so high it (metaphorically) scrapes the sky'. This

collapses to a shorthand metaphor 'skyscraper'. With 'skyscraper' it is clear a similarity is implied even though only one side of the similarity is in the verbal vehicle. It is obvious 'skyscraper' is a trope of similarity and not of contiguity; and it is obvious metaphor, like metonymy, favours the concrete noun to work with.

Generally it may be enough to note that the feature that distinguishes metaphor from metonymy is that metaphor is based on an obvious or implied similarity between two entities, both of which may appear in the verbal vehicle (as with Shakespeare's seasons/ageing metaphor) or only one of which may appear in the verbal vehicle (as with skyscraper). It is usual and perhaps even crucial that at least one part of the similarity uses concrete nouns. But this does not alter the radical difference between metaphor as a similarity trope and metonymy as a contiguity trope.

But what of symbol? It is the subject of centuries of comment, definition, redefinition, and contention, among philosophers, cognitive linguists, semioticians, theologians and literary scholars, among others. *The Princeton Encyclopædia of Poetry and Poetics* of 1975 is not certain that symbol is a trope at all:

> A s[ymbol] is like a trope, in that a simile, metaphor, personification, allegory ... and so on, each represent a manner of speaking in which what is said means something more or something else. But a s[ymbol] is not a trope, and may be distinguished in terms of how it relates subject and analogy in a poem. In the other figures mentioned, what is said (analogy) is distinct from what is meant (subject), and their relationship is based upon a stated or implied resemblance within difference.[15]

The 1993 entry on symbolism in *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia* is more circumspect, dividing the use of symbol into 'larger contexts' and the presumably smaller context of poetic usage. It considers it safe to say that the term symbol can be considered as a trope of similarity, a species of metaphor. But how does it differ from metaphor or metonymy? The 1993 entry , in a careful reworking of a passage in the 1975 entry, says that symbol is "a kind of figurative language in which what is shown (normally referring to something material) means, by virtue of some sort of resemblance, suggestion, or association, something *more* or something *else* (normally immaterial)".[16] This reference to the material and immaterial is important.

This does not definitively distinguish symbol, if that ever can be

done, from metaphor or even metonymy, but the reference to the 'material' and the 'immaterial' can offer a clue to symbol's specialness and also a clue to where to go for both an expansion and a variation of this notion of the attributes of symbol. Where to go is "The Symbolism of Poetry"[17] by that other Irish Nobel Laureate, W.B. Yeats. In this essay, published in 1900, Yeats discusses some of the most important features of the literary symbol, although he does so in the manner of a great practitioner and advocate of symbol rather than as philosopher or linguist or semiotician. Also Yeats's romanticism and his anti-positivism colour his views.

Nevertheless what he says of symbol and symbolism is very useful. I use the term post-Romantic symbol because it developed into fairly coherent usage by both critics and poets by the end of the nineteenth century.[18] 'Symbol' on its own is an ever troublesome term, as its use has historically been as loose as 'to symbolise' has been. 'To symbolise' is often merely used as 'to mean' or 'to signify'; and 'symbol' gets confused, in fine arts discourse, with icon, emblem and metonymy; and in literary studies, although few would confuse symbol with an analogue in allegory, after Goethe's and Coleridge's admonitions, 'symbol' is often confused with metonymy and used loosely for every figure that carries very vague, indeterminate, significance. It is often seen as a fuzzy metonymy or fuzzy metaphor. As Umberto Eco says: "What is frequently appreciated in many so-called symbols is exactly their vagueness, their openness, their fruitful ineffectiveness to express a 'final' meaning, so that with symbol and by symbols one indicates what is always *beyond* one's reach."[19] He is right to complain cheekily:

> Are there in the specialised lexicons more technical definitions of this category and of the corresponding term? Alas. One of the most pathetic moments in the history of philosophical terminology is when the collaborators of the *Dictionnaire de philosophie* of Lalande (1926) gather to discuss the definition of /symbol/ [sic]. This page of 'technical lexicon is pure Ionesco.[20]

Eco concludes: "The effort of Lalande has not been fruitless, it has suggested that a symbol can be everything and nothing. What a shame."[21] The shifting uses are centuries' old and probably ineradicable, but the notion of 'post-Romantic symbol' is fairly coherent as it grew out of the self conscious coteries with self-conscious theorizing. It is worth looking into.

In his essay, Yeats firstly eschews the writing of the previous era of positivism, "the scientific movement"[22], as did the French *symbolistes* from Baudelaire on.

Yeats describes the 'immateriality' reached through the use of symbol in varying and very Yeatsian ways:

> ... if I look at the moon herself and remember any of her ancient names and meanings, I move among divine people, and things, that have shaken off our mortality, the tower of ivory, the queen of waters, the shining stag among enchanted woods, the white hare sitting upon the hilltop, the fool of Faery with his shining cups of dreams, and it may be 'make a friend of one of these images of wonder,' and 'meet the Lord in the air.'[23]

Jean Moréas puts this use of symbol, *its grasp at ultimacy*, somewhat less poetically in his famous manifesto of symbolism, appearing in *Le Figaro*, September, 1886. He sums up many contemporary French ideas about symbolism that would also apply not just to Yeats but to Shelley and many other nineteenth and early twentieth century poets across cultures. Moréas eschews the poetry that came out of positivism and espouses the uttermost reach of poetry for the 'immateriality' that the entries of 1975 and 1993 in *The Princeton Encyclopædia of Poetry and Poetics* refer to. Moréas declares:

> Opposed to 'teaching, declamation, false sensibility, objective description,' symbolic poetry seeks to clothe the Idea in a perceptible form, which, nevertheless, would not be an end in itself; rather while serving to express the idea it would remain subject to it.[24]

For Yeats and other symbolists, daily life, the usual world of Seamus Heaney or Wordsworth, to take only two examples, embodied in non-symbolic imagery, is not enough to 'move the soul'. Yeats says: "one is furthest from symbols when one is busy doing this or that, but the soul moves among symbols and unfolds in symbols when trance, or madness, or deep meditation has withdrawn it from every impulse but its own."[25]

The symbol that Yeats and Moréas describe is used by Romantic and post-Romantic poets and writers, trying to reach some sort of inexpressible *ultimacy*. Eco asks: "Is the Romantic symbol the instance of an immanence or of a transcendence?"[26] It is both, depending on the poet. But *ultimacy*, whether the goal of the secular poet or of the metaphysical dualist, like Yeats himself, is what symbol

seeks to express. This means symbol is frequently the strategy of poets who accept both the phenomenal and noumenal 'worlds', *howsoever each individual poet seeks to interrelate them.* The symbol may begin in a concrete noun or a series of them, but the verbal vehicle's referent will be eventually 'deconcretised'- one might say 'surrealized' – in order to suggest the aspect of ultimacy that the poet perceives. As Moréas says:

> Thus in this art, the depiction of nature, the actions of men, all the concrete phenomena could not show themselves *as such*[my italics]: they are concrete appearances whose purpose is to represent their esoteric affinities with Primordial Ideas.[27]

Or, as Yeats says, a poet with utmost subtlety and complexity,[28] through "evocation and suggestion",[29] is giving a "body to something that moves beyond the senses."[30] That *body* is symbol and what moves beyond the senses for Yeats, the ultimacy he seeks and seeks to express, is the noumenal harmony of Beauty and Being. To achieve the expression of this, he must deconcretise his concrete nouns' referents.

Deconcretisation is a crucial strategy of the symbolist poet. What's more, the complexity and subtlety that Yeats says the poet avails himself of consists in the liminal and subliminal associative power of a well conjured symbol, its capacity to evoke and, in a sense, give the experience of its meaning, often synæsthetically:

> All sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of their preordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable yet precise emotions, or ... call down among us certain disembodied powers...[31]

To achieve this somewhat complex task of symbol making, Yeats advises "wavering meditative, organic rhythms,"[32] which he trusts lead the reader in somewhat of a state of trance, beyond intellect – to be "done with time" and to "gaze upon some reality, some beauty."[33] The rhythm that aids the power of the symbol must be so handled that it prolongs:

> The moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols.[34]

Although he is not conclusive about the distinction, Yeats feels there are emotional symbols and intellectual symbols, associated with

emotions.[35] A fine example of 'emotional' symbolism is some of Yeats's early work such as "To The Rose Upon the Rood of Time".[36] Already in the title the rose is not an 'actual' rose; it is being deconcretised because of its relation to the suffering implied by the traditional cultural associations with the cross as a site of agony, which in turn is used as a metaphor of time – the cross of mutability. Yet the rose, which by the first line, is significantly identified as red, is allowed to retain its traditional cultural associations with beauty, youth, love, passion, or, as here, all these. (Whatever late nineteenth century Rosicrucian associations there might be with the rose and rood are here reworked by Yeats.) In addressing the poem to the rose, Yeats is already personifying it and changing it from a mere unmeaningful actual rose. The microcontext of the rose in the title employs a macrocontext of unspoken, liminal associations, but which are nonetheless fresh, as the rose conjures up beauty and love, but also its own crucifixion by mutability – far from Robert Burns's jubilant simile,

> "O my luve's like a red, red rose...".

Yeats's title begins the deconcretising of the rose. The very first line of the poem furthers this process. In "Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!" this first mention of a red rose could be to that of an actual rose. But certain factors supervene. The rose is already altered, for in the title, it is related to suffering and mutability. What's more it is being apostrophised. The mention of "proud Rose, sad Rose" expands the personification , making the border between inner and outer disappear, as it makes one aware that the speaker now imputes his own deep feelings to the rose, his pride and sorrow. And "of all my days" interrelates the pride and sadness of what was a passionate love with time, the endlessness of the poet's suffering. The rose suggests his grieved love or passion, not necessarily a specific loved one. But it could be both. The hovering of this ambiguity is an aspect of the deep and rich innerness of the poem. The rhythm – one of Yeats's great achievements as a poet – and the cadence of the line, a rise and then a fall, dissipating in the fainting ending of 'days', deepen the poignancy of the rose's significance, imitating, as it were, a profound sigh. The rhythm and cadence help the rose in its microcontext to evoke its meaning, to give the reader an experience of its liminal meaning. The poet next begs the rose to come near while he sings of "ancient ways" (l. 2) and stay near so that he can sort through the phenomenal to perceive "Eternal beauty wandering on her way" (l. 12). He so needs the endless memory of his love, his passion, how-

ever painful; it is the ground of his being as a poet.

How different the handling of the rose to that of the reference to the "weak worm" and "field mouse" (ll. 16-17), representing the "common things that crave" (l. 15). The worm and field mouse retain their concreteness in the poem and are simple metonymies; whereas the rose is conjured by Yeats into a symbol. With the surrealizing personification, the saddening interrelated associations of the rose with crucifixion, mutability and passion, with the impelling iambics and sighing cadences as well as the macrocontext of the whole poem as an imploring of his remembered love to stay with him and be his muse, Yeats with the 'subtlety' and 'complexity' he advocates, creates of the rose a symbol. And it is a fresh creation. No easy feat. Relying wholly on the rose as simply a ready-made from his cultural tradition would be feeble. Yeats recharges the rose and its trailing cultural traditions with new interrelatedness to recreate the rose as a revived symbol, haunting anew.

Later work shows Yeats developing greater concreteness and more original imagery; he becomes a master of metonymies, as profound and moving as any in T.S. Eliot's work. The later philosophic poem, "Among School Children,"[37] explores the various paradigms by which our lives can be viewed within mutability. It ends with two dazzling metonymies—one from nature and one from art, the chestnut tree and the Mallarméan dancing dancer, two concrete nouns. Calling these symbols is probably ineradicable, but they are tropes of contiguity in space / time, fully concrete, accruing associations with the other entities in the poem that suggest paradigms of life within time but which are sadly invalid – the philosophers', the nun's, mother's and lover's paradigms. By stanza VIII the poet knows unity of being within mutability is possible: "Labour is blossoming or dancing where / The body is not bruised to pleasure soul..." (ll. 57-58); and his rhetorical questions to the magnificent chestnut tree and the dancing dancer imply his triumph, for the answer to his rhetorical questions is instantiated in the wholeness of the tree in growth and the organicity of the dancer with the dancing. Division and self division give way to ecstasy – and the right paradigms of unity of being within time.

"Sailing to Byzantium"[38] and "Byzantium"[39] both offer Byzantium as a metonymy, a locale within the world of the poem, associated with art, wholeness, the triumph over time. In "Sailing to Byzantium", the poet escapes mutability in the permanence of being art, the little golden bird that triumphs in the last line over time as it sings of "what is past or passing, or to come" (l. 32). The poet becoming the

artwork (the poem, in this instance) participates in the "artifice of eternity" (l. 24).Byzantium is the metonymical exotic locale for this triumph, just as it is the uncanny site for the purgation of souls in the surrealistic lyric "Byzantium".

Part of the strength of Yeats's later work is his extraordinarily original use of metonymy, leaving behind the touching but less original symbolism of the rose, or, say, that of the white birds that he conjures into lovers' souls beyond time in early "The White Birds".[40] Yeats may always have thought of all his imagery as entirely symbolic, as his poem "Symbols" suggests; but this later poem is full of metonymies nonetheless :

> A storm-beaten old watch-tower,
> A blind hermit rings the hour.
> All destroying sword—blade still
> Carried by the wandering fool.
> Gold sewn silk on the sword-blade,
> Beauty and fool together laid.[41]

Always original in their collocation and always profound, Yeats's complex metonymies are among English poetry's most successful and most memorable and show how no one poem or poet stays with any one trope. This is important to note here, as I have dealt so far with simple examples. The most moving tropes may be those that purloin some of the powers of other tropes in both the micro and macrocontext. Even the archpriest of *symbolisme*, Mallarmé, in one of his more famous poems, his sonnet, "Ses purs ongles,"[42] conjures up a metonymy to suggest the hieratic and exquisite nature of the creative process. Michael Riffaterre sees in this sonnet not only allegory and mere simile, but also its basic metonymy transferred to a metaphorical role.[43] Eva Feder Kittay sees Shakespeare's sonnet 73 as the usual extended metaphor; but, with metonymies within, such as that of the "autumnal boughs" as metonymical of autumn.[44] And in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"[45] T. S. Eliot employs one of the most original and stunning similes in English poetry in "When the evening is spread out against the sky/ Like a patient etherised upon a table..." (ll. 2-3) – with the metonymy of the 'etherised patient' within. Then Eliot shifts to simple metonymies like the coffee spoon (l. 51), betokening Prufrock's routinized gentility. But Eliot ends the poem in the last few lines with symbol when he uses and re-activates the surrealised, impossible mermaids (from conventional symbology) that Prufrock says he hears; Eliot tries to plunge to the depths, when he

wants to reach the inarticulate profound, the *ultimacy* of the state of Prufrock's soul, where a desolate desire flickers up, then gutters out forever. Eliot is not attempting any metaphysical dualism in his use of symbol here, but he is seeking ultimacy – the ground of Prufrock's being.

Although symbol will always be a capacious term and arguments will go on as to whether a certain literary figure is a metonymy or symbol, and although the charisma-laden symbol will usually win, attempting to understand a work's troping can help to prevent over-interpretation. For instance, metonymy, when overinterpreted as symbol, makes a critic free to exceed the micro and macrocontext of the poem, to dislocate literally the trope out of the context of the poem into an ideological context that may not be relevant. For instance to read the white linen table cloth in "The Wife's Tale" as a 'symbol' of the wife's blank, small, defined life is to miss the tone of the poem – its quiet loving serenity that Heaney so delicately activates; and it is to miss the utter concreteness, its attempt at actuality in which a loving serenity is fully instantiated. It does not limit the poem to let it take the reader where the poet wants to go – here to a celebration of a lived loving, alive in every quotidian gesture.

There is another advantage to studying the tropes of a work and here I have considered only poetry, although all the arts trope. To study any well done troping in any poem is to come closer to poetry's dazzling resources and its precious range of thinking feeling and feeling thinking, and thereby to come both to know and to feel poetry's indispensable genius.

Notes

1   This paper is a small thank you to Dr. Bruce Gardiner whose encouraging, generous collegiality has ever kept up my interest in troping.

2   Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics", *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge (Longmans: London, 1988), p. 53. On Jakobson's work, Willard Bohn has a most useful bibliography: "Roman Jakobson's Theory of Metaphor and Metonymy: An Annotated Bibliography," *Style*, col. 18, No 4 (Fall 1984), pp. 534 – 550.

3   Antonio Barcelona, "Introduction. The cognitive theory of metaphor and metonymy" in Antonio Barcelona, ed. *Metaphor and Metonymy at the Crossroads. A Cognitive Perspective* (Mouton de Gruyter: Berlin, 2000) pp. 4-5, hereinafter referred to as Barcelona (2000). Note that Barcelona prefaces his list of metonymies by a definition that is different from

Jakobson's although he does not contradict Jakobson's. But Barcelona's definition is far less directly helpful to the student of literature than Jakobson's, because it stresses the mental processes of metonymy making, rather than the workings of the verbal vehicle itself in an artwork: "Metonymy is a conceptual projection whereby one experiential domain (the target) is partially understood in terms of another experiential domain (the source) included *in the same common experiential domain.* Metonymy is, in my view, a special case of what Langacker (1987: 385–386) calls *activation.* The metonymic mapping causes the mental activation of the target domain (Kövecses and Radden 1998: 39), often within a limited discourse purpose (Lakoff 1987: 78-80)". (Barcelona, 2000, p. 4)

4   For metonymies in brand names and advertising, see the interesting article "Muted metaphors and the activation of metonymies in advertising," by Friedrich Ungerer (Barcelona (2000) pp. 321–340).

5   Seamus Heaney, *Opened Ground. Poems 1966-1996* (Faber and Faber: London, 1998) pp. 117-118.

6   I emphasise the use of scapegoat as a ready-made, very meaningful term. I disagree with Conor Cruise O'Brien in his brief analysis of "Punishment". His reading is more political; he assumes the Belfast girls betrayed the IRA, whereas I assume the Belfast girls are related to the theme of sex and tribal response in parallel with the 'Little adulteress' of the Iron Age. See Conor Cruise O'Brien, "A Slow North-East Wind: A Review of *North*," in *Seamus Heaney* ed. Michael Allen. New Casebooks: Contemporary Critical Essays (Macmillan: London, 1997), pp. 25-26. David Lloyd views the poem unpolitically but unfavourably: "As so often in Heaney's work, the sexual drive of knowing is challenged, acknowledged and let pass without further interrogation, the stance condemned but the material it purveys nevertheless exploited" (*ibid.,* p. 175). I think this is to ignore the ironic paralleling of the Iron Age with the contemporary and the speaker's honest confession.

7   Seamus Heaney, *Opened Ground. Poems 1966-1996* (Faber and Faber: London 1998) p. 24.

8   William Wordsworth, "Michael", ll. 470-474 in *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones (Methuen: London, 1968) p. 240.

9   William Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800, *ibid.,* p. 241.

10   Seamus Heaney, "Crediting Poetry. The Nobel Lecture, 1995" in *Opened Ground. Poems, 1966-1996* (Faber and Faber: London, 1998), pp. 444-450.

11   *ibid.,* p 450.

12   Hilda Doolittle [H.D.], "Oread" in *Imagist Poetry*, ed. Peter Jones (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1972). Perhaps the most successful, certainly the most famous, poem of this 'movement' put together by Ezra Pound,

is Pound's own near haiku, a mere three lines with the title as one of them:

> In a Station of the Metro
> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
> Petals on a wet, black bough (*ibid*; p. 95)

The passing faces, in association with the petals and the fecund wet bough, and seen as an apparition of *presences*, betoken a momentary apprehension of the fragility and beauty of individuals, shedding the anonymity of the urban crowd. Note that the whole three lines construct a metonymy of the faces; but this is assisted by the implied metaphorical relation between the face and the petals on the wet black bough. Most outstanding tropes have elements of other tropes assisting them. It is common for a metonymy to be assisted by a metaphor or synecdoche and so on.

13 William Shakespeare, Sonnet 73 (ll.1-4) in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Hardin Craig (Scott, Foresman: Chicago, 1961) pp. 483-4.

14 William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 2nd ed. (Meridian: New York, 1963) p. 5.

15 *The Princeton Encyclopædia of Poetry and Poetics*, eds. Alex Preminger et al. (Macmillan: London, 1975) p. 833.

16 *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, eds., Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan et al (Princeton, 1993) p. 1252.

17 W.B. Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry," in *Essays and Introductions* (Macmillan: London, 1969) pp. 146-164. An interesting book specifically endeavouring to help the teaching of literary studies is *Metaphors and Symbols: Foray into Language* by Roland Bartel (National Council of Teachers of English: Urbana , Illinois, 1983). Bartel makes some useful points about metaphor and gives a useful although incomplete list of how symbol is created (repetition, connotation, allusion); but it is very vague on the nature of symbol. Bartel says: "A word advances from a sign to a symbol when it is used to elicit extended thought and feeling rather than an automatic response. The literal meaning is not destroyed, but it is used in such a way that we suspect that it stands for something else" (p. 62).

18 Cf., Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1982) p. 199: "Until 1790, the word 'symbol' had a very different meaning from the one it was to acquire in the romantic era. Either it was simply synonymous with a series of other, more commonly used terms such as allegory, hieroglyph, figure (in the sense of number), emblem, and so on, or else it designated primarily the purely arbitrary and abstract sign (mathematical symbols)."

19 Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Indiana University

Press: Bloomington, 1984) p. 130.

20 *loc. cit.*

21 *ibid.*, p. 131. In a work that for a while was a classic of its kind, Geoffrey Leech sees symbol as so capacious a term that it could encompass metonymy: ' This optional extension ... of the meaning from literal to fig-urative is what we associate with SYMBOLISM. Symbols in common use, such as 'lamp' = 'learning', 'star' = 'constancy', 'flame' = 'passion', are assigned their underlying meaning by custom and familiarity. There need not, therefore, be any linguistic indication of what the tenor is, or of why the term cannot be taken at its face value. The most interesting symbols, poetically are metaphorical – i.e. X (the symbol) stands for Y because X *resembles* Y – but many more of the conventional ones are metonymic: for example, 'coffin' and 'skull' as the symbols of death"*A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (Longman: London. 1969) p. 1962. In the recent *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2001), Michael Ferber says: "This dictionary depends on no particular definition of 'symbol' ... many instances come close to metaphor, allusion, or even motif ..." (p. 4).

22 *Essays and Introductions*, p. 155.

23 *ibid.*, pp.161-2.

24 Jean Moréas, "A Literary Manifesto" in *Paths to the Present*, ed. Eugen Weber (Dodd, Mead and Company: New York, 1969) p. 206. Translation from the French by Eugen Weber.

25 *Essays and Introductions*, p. 162.

26 Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1984) p. 143.

27 Jean Moréas, "A Literary Manifesto" in *Paths to the Present*, ed. Eugen Weber (Dodd, Mead and Company: New York, 1969) p. 206. Translations from the French by Eugen Weber.

28 *Essays and Introductions*, p.164.

29 *ibid.*, p. 155.

30 *ibid.*, p. 164. Cf., Wordsworth's remarks in his preface of 1815 on "To the Cuckoo" (1802):

> "'Shall I call thee Bird,
> Or but a wandering Voice?'

This concise interrogation characterises the seeming ubiquity of the voice of the cuckoo, and dispossesses the creature almost of a corporeal existence..." *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, ed., W.J.B. Owen (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1974) p. 181.

31 *Essays and Introductions*, pp 156-7. Cf., Yeats's advice to a German artist in

"Symbolism in Painting." The German artist thinks he must eliminate the lily, rose or poppy from his painting as they are mere allegory, having "their meaning by a traditional and not by a natural right (*ibid.*, p. 147). Yeats defends the use of lily, rose and poppy, providing they do have a 'natural right', providing they are so "married" (*loc. cit.*) to their ultimate meanings of love, purity and sleep by means of their colour, odour, or their association with "other symbols" of love, purity and sleep and have "been so long a part of the imagination of the world" (*loc. cit.*). Yeats acknowledges that symbols from traditional symbology can be revived in power, when handled adroitly, when their powers of long association are realised anew.

32 *ibid.*, p. 163.

33 *loc.cit.*

34 *ibid.*, p. 159.

35 *ibid.*, p. 160.

36 *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (Macmillan: London, 1967) p. 35.

37 *ibid.*, pp.242-5.

38 *ibid.*, pp. 217 –8.

39 *ibid.*, pp. 280-1 Some critics take this poem to be about the artistic process, although Yeats states that it is about the purgation of souls. See A. Norman Jeffares's discussion in *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (Macmillan: London,1968) pp.352-359.

40 *ibid.*, p. 46.

41 *ibid.*, p. 270.

42 Stéphane Mallarmé, *Poésies* (Gallimard: Paris, 1949) pp.127-128.

43 For his interesting analysis, see his *Semiotics of Poetry* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1984) p. 60.

44 Eva Feder Kittay, *Metaphor* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1987) p. 66.

45 T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (Faber and Faber: London, 1969) pp. 13-17.