Metaphor and style

Gerard Steen

The study of metaphor and style

The stylistic study of metaphor involves the idiosyncratic way metaphor is used in specific texts, by individual authors or, more broadly, sets of authors forming a school, generation or similar social groupings. Metaphor has been studied in individual texts such as Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth* (D. C. Freeman 1993, 1995, 1999), Patrick Süskind's *Perfume* (Popova 2003) and Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Semino and Swindlehurst 1996), and this is typically seen as a matter of stylistics: after all, metaphor in literature is a stylistic device, and its forms, meanings and use all fall within the remit of stylistics. But is this conceptualisation of metaphor completely valid?

Since 1980, the study of metaphor has been shifted from one based in poetics, stylistics and rhetoric to one based in linguistics and cognitive science. This is due to a number of revolutionary publications that showed that metaphor was not just a matter of literature, style or rhetoric but of all language use (G. Lakoff and Johnson 1980): we speak of arguments as if they are wars that can be won or lost, love as if it is a journey that can get stranded, and understanding as if it is looking through a glass darkly. Moreover, metaphor was shown to be not just a matter of language use but of thought (Ortony 1979; Honeck and Hoffman 1980; G. Lakoff and Johnson 1980): we do not only speak in these metaphorical ways, but we conceptualise these abstract, less understood and complex topics in metaphorical ways as well, making use of our knowledge of wars, journeys and seeing to impose conceptual structure on our thoughts and texts about arguments, love and understanding. Today, metaphor is therefore not seen as a stylistic device but as a matter of thought, witness the overview of current metaphor research in the *Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought* (Gibbs 2008; see also Steen 2011a).

As a result, most metaphor occurs as a regular ingredient of the conceptual systems in our culture, and is expressed in conventionalised metaphorical language in all sorts of sociocultural domains of discourse, of which literature is only one. Moreover, most metaphor is not used as a stylistic or rhetorical device, but is simply part and parcel of the conceptual and linguistic systems we use to think and speak. The question therefore arises how metaphor should be conceptualised and analysed in relation to style. For general metaphorical language use and thought can also exhibit styles, but these are different notions of style from the idea that metaphor can be used as a stylistic device to spice up the rhetoric of a political or festive speech, to increase the intelligibility of a lecture or a business proposal, or to condense the aesthetic content of a poem into one expression. The latter seem to be deliberate metaphors, while the former are not.

It is the purpose of this chapter to make sense of these distinctions as well as their relations against the background of contemporary metaphor research. This will be done by means of a brief overview of the most important contemporary discussions in order to then illustrate the importance of some of their issues in some detailed textual analysis.

Deliberate and non-deliberate metaphor

The idea that metaphor can be used deliberately or not deliberately has aroused a controversy about the notion of deliberateness. When deliberateness is equated with consciousness, researchers object that language use is hardly ever conscious, and that a lot of cognition and behaviour are hardly ever conscious (Gibbs 2011). We do not really know how conscious poets or speech writers are when they produce their metaphors – they may be writing in a flow that is high speed and fairly automatic. The structure of a metaphor in a text does not really tell us whether it was put there while the writer was conscious of what they were doing. The same holds for metaphor in talk (see L. Cameron 2008).

However, when we make a distinction between consciousness and deliberateness, the situation changes. Even though it is possible to assert that we do not know anything about Shakespeare's consciousness when he wrote 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?', it does not make sense to deny that he wrote this line deliberately. Nor does it make sense to assert that he did not deliberately write the extended metaphorical comparison that follows and makes up the body of his famous Sonnet 18. Deliberate metaphor is the intentional use of metaphor *as* metaphor, and its function is to offer an 'alien' perspective (a summer's day) on some target domain (the addressee in the poem as lover). This type of metaphor is deliberate because it insists on positioning the reader in some source domain by forcing the reader to mentally attend to the source domain as a referent in its own right: 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?' There

are particular linguistic structures that clearly signal deliberate metaphor use, including the use of a verb such as *compare* in between two incomparable entities that are each presented in their own right. The rest of the poem features comparative structures in an extended comparison ('thou art more lovely and more temperate'), and so on. Deliberate metaphor hence does not have to be conscious to be deliberate.

In fact, all language use is deliberate, in the sense of intentional in the context of some goal-directed action, but this does not also make it conscious, in the sense of the language user being aware of what they are doing linguistically when producing or receiving utterances. On the contrary, this would cognitively be far too demanding, and most language use therefore is unconscious – but not unintentional. All metaphor is therefore intentional in the general sense that applies to all language use. It is also mostly unconscious, as has been claimed by most metaphor researchers since the 1980s, and this is not a contradiction.

Metaphor only becomes deliberate when it is used *as* a metaphor. This does not happen very often. Deliberate metaphor *may* impinge on our consciousness and lead to conscious metaphorical cognition – but it does not have to, and does not often do so. Yet, when metaphor is used deliberately, it also turns into a stylistic device, while all other, non-deliberate metaphor, is simply part of a more general style of language, thought and communication.

Metaphor, fiction and other registers

An interesting reflection of this situation can be found in the results of a recent corpus project examining metaphor use across fiction, news, academic texts and conversations (Steen et al. 2010a, 2010b). In a specially constructed sample from the British National Corpus (BNC), four sets of text excerpts totalling some 50,000 words each were analysed for metaphor, making a distinction between regular metaphors on the one hand and similes and other types of direct figurative comparison on the other. The latter are all typically deliberate, while the former are typically not.

There was a massive difference between the two types of metaphor. First of all, 99 per cent of all metaphor turned out to be regular (typically non-deliberate) metaphor, with only 1 per cent being expressed as a direct metaphorical comparison (typically deliberate). Secondly, the distribution of both types of metaphor across the four registers was quite different: regular metaphor occurred most frequently in academic texts (18.5 per cent), followed by news (16.5 per cent), with fiction only in third place (13.5 per cent), and conversations (7.5 per cent) closing the rank order; by contrast, direct metaphorical comparison occurred most frequently in fiction, followed by news, with academic texts and conversations closing the rank order.

These data suggest that most regular metaphor is a non-deliberate part of a more general style of language, thought and communication, which would be typically a matter of register, and varies in intelligible ways between registers, including fiction (Biber et al. 1999). By contrast, most if not all direct figurative comparison is a deliberately used stylistic device that is most typical of fiction (Dorst 2011; Krennmayr 2011) and news (think of headlines, sports, political, financial, science and arts pages). These findings confirm and refine some of the most important intuitions and observations about metaphor and style made by Lodge (1977).

This suggests that a high density of metaphor in academic texts is not something stylistically special. It is the regular 'style' of scientific writing. It can be explained by the highly abstract content of most academic texts, which requires frequent use of conventional metaphorical models to think and talk about, for instance, organisations as machines, societies as plants, illness as wars, or time as space. Within such a register, however, some texts may display a higher frequency of instructive metaphors to help the reader understand explanations of complex conceptual models, or of entertaining metaphors to increase the level of attractiveness of the text. An example of each is provided by the following two quotations from a well-known textbook on cognitive neuroscience:

> The brain is a kind of Amazon rain forest with many undiscovered species of trees, plants, and animals. To begin we will focus only on one prototypical tree, but this is only a convenient fiction. The great diversity of the neurons in the brain is suggested by Figure...
>
> *(Baars and Gage 2010: 64)*

> Keeping up-to-date with cognitive neuroscience is much like surfing the Big Wave at Waikiki Beach. New findings keep rolling in and maintaining a stable balance is a big challenge. It is exciting, fun, and, at times, a little bit scary. But we keep climbing back on our mental surfboards, to catch the coming rollers of advancing science. This book aims to provide an overview of...
>
> *(Baars and Gage 2010: xiii)*

These *are* stylistically special, with a deliberate use of metaphor *as* metaphor (Herrmann 2013; cf. Semino 2008).

That fiction has the lowest percentage of regular metaphor among the three written text registers is also worthy of comment. Part of this is explained by the presence of dialogue, which resembles conversation in having a low number of metaphors (Dorst 2011; Kaal 2012). But fiction is also rather concrete and physical in its language use, lowering the number of metaphors used for talking about abstract phenomena in comparison with news and academic writing. This may also be dependent on perhaps a preference for showing rather than telling in the sample analysed in the project, however, which in turn may be a result of the texts included in the BNC or a preference for showing rather than telling in contemporary

British fiction. It is an interesting question for future quantitative research whether the observed tendency is more generally valid.

In addition, the fact that fiction has the highest frequency of direct metaphors, including similes and so on, is a reflection of what most people would expect about the relation between metaphor and these four registers. It may now be seen as perhaps due to the fact that direct metaphor is deliberate metaphor and may impinge on the consciousness of the reader relatively more easily or frequently than non-deliberate metaphor. If this occurs more frequently in fiction than elsewhere, this impingement may be mainly responsible for the impression that fiction is the most metaphoric of written registers (which now turns out to be incorrect).

Modelling and researching metaphor and style

The notion of deliberate metaphor and the corpus-linguistic investigation of metaphor's distribution in fiction and other registers across large sets of data are two recent foci of attention in stylistic metaphor research. They build on developments in the study of metaphor that were set in motion in 1980, and point to other controversial issues in contemporary metaphor studies. Space permits only brief indication of these other issues, with references to ongoing work suggesting where the interested reader can go for further information.

The most important aspect of metaphor revealed by the cognitive turn in the 1980s is the fact that many metaphors in language can be related to underlying metaphors in thought. These have been called 'conceptual metaphors' by G. Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and include the examples given above. Thus, many instances of metaphor in literary and non-literary texts do not appear to be novel creations of figurative comparisons, but instead represent familiar linguistic expressions of culturally shared conceptual models. Most of these linguistic expressions are so familiar that their metaphorical senses are listed in general dictionaries, showing that lexical units having to do with fighting or war, such as *defend*, *attack*, *defence* and so on are all systematically polysemous between fighting and war on the one hand and their metaphorical use in the domain of argumentation on the other. An introduction to this research has been provided by Kövecses (2010).

It is customary in metaphor research to make a distinction between these conceptual metaphors and their expression in language. The conceptual structures of metaphor in thought may be typically conventional but may also be novel, as happens in innovative poetry but just as well in copywriting for advertising or for political speeches. Independently, all metaphor in thought may be expressed in a range of linguistic forms, from regular metaphor and simile through analogy, extended comparison and thematic metaphor to text-based metaphoricity for parable and allegory. The conceptual structures as well as linguistic forms of metaphor may now

also be seen to exhibit at least two distinct communicative functions: deliberate metaphor versus non-deliberate metaphor use.

One of the areas that has not been theorised very broadly yet is the interaction between all of these metaphor properties on the one hand and the presence of other figures, such as hyperbole and/or irony, on the other. One of the masters in combining metaphor and hyperbole is Jeremy Clarkson, the presenter of the BBC TV programme *Top Gear*. While he is no Shakespeare, he does have a separate page of magical metaphors on the internet. It features some of his most outrageous deliberate figurative comparisons, typically involving overstatement and humour, including 'Aston Martin DB9, that's not a racecar, that's pornography', or 'This air conditioning feels like there's an asthmatic sat on my dash-board, coughing at me.' The interaction between metaphor and irony will be illustrated in the analysis below.

Other issues in recent metaphor research include the relation between metaphor and aspects of encompassing text and context. For instance, metaphors can participate in encompassing frames that are used in politics to set up discourses about politics as family life (G. Lakoff 2004). Such frames may develop into complete scenarios, where for instance European politics is compared to love relationships between countries, including wooing, courting, divorces and so on (Musolff 2004). All of these affect the nature of texts in ways that go beyond style and have to do with the role of metaphor in, for instance, narration, argumentation and exposition as text types. Such aspects of metaphor use have also been studied as negotiated between speakers in different situations of spontaneous verbal interaction (L. Cameron 2008). Eventually all of these stylistic and non-stylistic analyses of metaphor need to be related to a genre model of discourse events to make them fully comparable across cases (Steen 2011b).

Metaphor in poetic style

In order to see some of the complexities of metaphor in action, consider the following poem by James Lasdun.

Plague Years

'There is, it would seem, in the dimensional scale of the world, a
kind of delicate meeting place between imagination and
knowledge, a point, arrived at by diminishing larger things and
enlarging small ones, that is intrinsically artistic.'

Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*

Sore throat, persistent cough ... The campus doctor
Tells me 'just to be safe' to take the test.
The clinic protocol seems to insist

On an ironic calm, I hold my fear.
He draws a vial of blood for the City Lab,
I have to take it there, but first I teach
A class on Nabokov. Midway I reach
Into my bag for *Speak, Memory*, and grab
The hot bright vial instead. I seem at once
Wrenched from the quizzical faces of my class
Into some silent ante-room of hell:
The 'delicate meeting place'; I feel it pounce;
Terror – my life impacted in the glass
My death enormous in its scarlet grail.

James Lasdun (1995)

The simple style of this poem conceals a subtly complex structure and message. The fourteen lines, the rhyme scheme, and the turning point between lines 8 and 9 suggest that this is a sonnet. The first eight lines contrast with the last six lines in a way that is summarised by the non-metaphorical key phrases *ironic calm* (line 4) and *terror* (line 13). But there is more: the second half of the poem links back to the Nabokov epigraph, quoting *the delicate meeting place* in line 12. This is technically metaphorical, since imagination and knowledge cannot really meet, but this hardly adds significance. The meeting place does offer a unifying frame for the whole text, though: the quotation implies that the persona observes his experience of his own terror as a mixture of knowledge and imagination that is intrinsically artistic. This observation, prompted by the fact that he has to teach Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*, not only adds a distancing layer of irony to the overt terror in lines 9–14, but it also builds a contrast with the irony insisted on by the clinic protocol in the first eight lines. The explicit link between main text and epigraph moreover suggests that the persona's experience of terror as something intrinsically artistic may be the motivation for writing the poem. The conjunction of main text and epigraph then finally needs to be linked back to the title, 'Plague Years': the interaction between imagination and knowledge has always been crucial for our experience of life-threatening diseases. The encompassing title frame of 'plague years' is mostly hyperbolic, not metaphorical, and it somewhat dampens the explicitly invoked artistic quality of the experience of the disease that is at the centre of this poem, ultimately reasserting the priority of life (and death) over art.

So what is the role of metaphor in all this? At first glance, there hardly are any prominent metaphors, with one conspicuous exception, the very last word of the poem. This clearly is a deliberately constructed artistic metaphor which forces the reader to work hard on its meaning and purport. I will first examine this metaphor in more detail, as an example of a metaphor that may be deemed typical of literary style. This may then be

used as a background against which we can look at some of the other stylistic features of metaphor in this poem.

The last line presents the potentially lethal vial containing the persona's blood as a scarlet grail. This is an unexpected and in fact shocking image, since the grail is the chalice in which Christ's blood was caught. The reader could not have been prepared for this identification between the persona and Christ but it is the only possible solution to resolving the implied mapping between the concepts of vial and grail. Indeed, the only other overtly religious term in the poem is the corresponding (half-)rhyme word *hell* in line 11, but this suggests the opposite perspective and constructs the I not as Christ but as a human who is getting ready for hell.

The shock effect is not only due to the grail's association with Christ, but also by the cultural fact that the grail itself has been the object of many quests in western literature, from *Perceval* to *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. The grail has been an object of desire throughout western history, which poses a stark contrast with the target concept it metaphorically projects onto: for the patient, the vial with its perhaps lethal content, is not exactly the thing he has been looking for throughout his life. The scarlet grail thereby becomes a highly ironic, if not sarcastic, metaphor of the I's possibly impending death.

How does this metaphor work? It can only be understood in connection with the previous line:

> ... – my life impacted in the glass
> My death enormous in its scarlet grail.

The two lines set up two contrasting perceptions of the same situation involving the speaker's blood in a vial. Line 13 sees the blood as a metonymy of the I's life, and places it in a container depicted as just a glass object. Line 14 sees the blood as metonymically containing the cause of death and situates it in a culturally central if not holy artefact. Both work by a metonymy where the blood can stand for life (l. 13) or death (l. 14), but line 14 adds a heavily metaphorical twist that is hard to understand.

The interpretation of these lines, and of the metaphor in line 14 in particular, is textually incomplete unless the epigraph is invoked. Line 13 can be seen as an example of 'diminishing larger things', since the persona's life has been impacted in the glass of a small vial. Line 14 can be seen as an instantiation of 'enlarging small ones', since the persona's death has been made 'enormous' in nothing less than a scarlet grail. This epigraph-driven interpretation of the metaphor hence implies another conceptual frame for the experience described in the sonnet: people's deaths can be presented as small things being enlarged only if they are compared with Christ's death, which is not only culturally but also existentially the central big event in western history. The allusion is to the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice in order to redeem mankind and enable their entrance into an afterlife in heaven, not hell (the now more significant half-rhyme word in

line 11). From that perspective, the I's death can be made to look enormous in its scarlet grail, the I being identified with Christ, with the understood assumption that the I's death in fact remains a small thing that is enlarged by art, the meeting place of imagination and knowledge.

The initial shock effect of the metaphor of the scarlet grail in isolation is now beginning to turn into an artistic effect of the metaphor as a hub for the entire poem's theme. It is not just a startling image and allusion as a metaphor by itself, which seems to mimic the intensity of the shock experienced by the I. The metaphor is also part of a more complex perception and conceptualisation of the same situation, expressed by the contrast between the last two lines (which are not separated by punctuation). And this complex conceptualisation in turn is part of a much more encompassing textual argument that depends on the parallelism between the last two lines on the one hand and the core of the epigraph on the other, leading to the surprising implication that the apparent enlargement of the I's imagined death in fact presupposes the opposite point of view, that people's individual deaths are small. It is the artistic moment that can enlarge them, but this should not be confused with reality. And it is the artistic enlargement into the death of Jesus Christ that by implication offers hope to those who believe in its redeeming effect. This is yet another twist to the relation between the metaphor and the poem: the comfort that may be derived from such an argument only holds for those who are Christian, or more generally religious, believers; everybody else will see this as another cruel irony of life, offering hope to those who need it whereas in fact there is none, only plague years.

The scarlet grail forms the climax of the poem. It is a striking and complex metaphor that displays many conceptual and affective ramifications. It is deceptively descriptive in a context of six lines that is full of intensity and hyperbole, as with *hell, terror* and *enormous*, but on close inspection it delivers the goods it promises as the starkly alien word in final position it is. The literary function of a metaphor does not just reside in the underlying cross-domain comparison that is the basis of every metaphor (vial is grail), or even its ironic as opposed to sincere use (your death is not something you have looked for). Metaphor in poetry is often multilayered with many relations to other aspects of the text and its language, which makes it strongly dependent on all sorts of other information throughout the poem and the knowledge it assumes, as we have seen (you are not Christ, and your death is not enormous, but this is in fact a comfort, not an existential problem – unless you do not believe, of course). All of this may be seen as highly typical of the use of metaphor in poetry.

By way of contrast, consider another metaphor that is also related to irony:

The clinic protocol seems to insist
On an ironic calm.

The ironic calm is the main referent of this sentence, and it is stylistically mimicked by the metaphorical expression 'the clinic protocol seems to insist'. The effect of *insist* is to turn the protocol into a human agent, taking the doctor out of the equation so that it is the protocol or the institution of the clinic that is to be held responsible for the ironic calm, not the doctor. What this in effect does is contrast the superficially ironic calm of the individual doctor to the perception of the situational, even institutional irony by the patient, who must hold the doctor responsible for what is happening. The attribution of the ironic calm to the protocol, not the doctor, is of course the patient's perception, which explains the hedge 'seems'. However, the hedge 'seems' is a double-edged sword and can also be read as pertaining to the doctor's stance, who apparently prefers a tentative and ironically calm attitude since nothing can been decided until the lab results come in.

This is a locally subtle use of metaphor by personification which is complex but much less enormous than the grail metaphor in line 14. It is, however, another typically stylistic exploitation of the potential of metaphor in literature since it attracts more than one simple conventional metaphorical meaning on the basis of the charged significance of poetic writing. Similarly deliberate exploitations of simple metaphor do not occur very often outside literature, except in language play occurring in, for instance, newspaper headlines or advertisement copy. Moreover, the thematic role of the ironic personification in relation to the massive irony at the end of the poem lends the phrase a greater reach than other less prominent metaphors, which have a purely local effect, as will be illustrated now.

Consider the verb *hold* in the ostensibly simple sentence 'I hold my fear' in line 4. On the one hand, this is a somewhat lame, submissive reflex to the ironic calm exhibited by the doctor. The sentence suggests control on the part of the patient – or at least an attempt at control. This is an element which appeals to a conventional metaphor in our language, which places us in charge of our emotions as if they are dogs or horses (Kövecses 2000).

On the other hand, the longer you look at the verb 'hold', the more the tension seems to rise. Instead of 'I hold my fear', the text reads as if it says 'I hold my breath', an expression which seems trivially metaphorical but is now revitalised in the present context. From this moment, the patient's breathing has changed into fearing. And for how long exactly will it turn out to be possible to *hold* that fear, as if it were an animal, a person or a thing, the typical direct objects associated with the verb 'hold'? For, next to control, 'hold' also has an element of voluntariness – you simply want to hold something in check, in order to prevent it from escaping but also in order to keep it and perhaps even cherish it. 'I hold my fear': fear rather than truth? But that will not work: at the end of the poem, the patient does succumb to the tension and experiences the existential angst and terror in all its enormity.

Loss of control is the turning point or *volta* in the sonnet. It involves the use of another inconspicuous metaphor. When the I accidentally takes the vial in his hand, in line 9, he describes it as 'hot'. But the vial has never been hot and can hardly be warm any more. Instead it is probably the cause of the patient turning 'hot'. This is a subtle exploitation of the conventional metaphor in our language that emotions are temperatures; for example, Dutch national goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar was called 'ice-rabbit' for his lack of display of emotions.

This conventional metaphor in language is due to our physical experience of emotional events, which can turn us warm or cold. In this poem this conventional metaphor is transferred outside the body and the emotions: it is not the I's body or the I's sensation that is presented as hot, but the cause of that experience, the vial with blood. In addition, the projected temperature of the vial is not called 'warm', which would imply a positive affect, but 'hot', which is negative and invokes associations with stolen or dangerous goods, something that is completely appropriate for the vial and its contents. Just like 'hold' in line 4, 'hot' is a conventional metaphor in language that is here deployed as a subtle stylistic device to give shape to the personal experience of an individual in a complex literary way.

There are other local metaphorical expressions, such as the verbs 'wrench', 'pounce' and 'impacted'. However, they all display the same interaction between local use and contextual significance, albeit in different ways, as 'hot' and 'hold'. There are different stylistics uses of metaphor in poetry which need our attention now. Consider the following poem by the late Julia Darling.

Chemotherapy

I did not imagine being bald
at forty-four. I didn't have a plan.
Perhaps a scar or two from growing old,
hot flushes. I'd sit fluttering a fan.

But I am bald, and hardly ever walk
by day, I'm the invalid of these rooms,
stirring soups, awake in the half dark,
not answering the phone when it rings.

I never thought that life could get this small,
that I would care so much about a cup,
the taste of tea, the texture of a shawl,
and whether or not I should get up.

I'm not unhappy. I have learned to drift
and sip. The smallest things are gifts.   *Julia Darling (2003)*

Metaphor works by setting up a comparison with completely different things that do not belong to the topic or situation that is the dominant

target domain of a part of a text, like the grail in connection with a vial with blood. Metonymy, by contrast, zooms in on details of topics or situations that have to stand for the bigger picture. What has remained of life for this patient has been reduced in literary fashion to a number of small experiences that recur from day to day:

> a cup,
> the taste of tea, the texture of a shawl,
> and whether or not I should get up.

But here, too, the patient remains standing by means of conventional metaphor: 'the smallest things are gifts'. And here, too, it seems as if the metaphor has been used ironically: for if the smallest things are gifts, who is it that offers them to the patient, what sort of gifts are they, and how do they relate to that other, completely unwanted gift of cancer which has preceded them? These are the natural questions that often arise but are seldom heard when this conventionally metaphorical response to a lethal disease as a gift is used as a rationalisation or defence mechanism. This poem dramatises the way this metaphorical logic works on a minute but effective scale.

Perhaps it even criticises the metaphor in the same stroke, with irony. It may take some effort to accept this potentially ironic reading of the metaphor, perhaps because the last line expresses such a generally accepted and socially desirable stereotype of positive attitude. But look at that line from the perspective of the preceding one. The assertion 'I'm not unhappy' is a bomb in all its literalness; it does not take long before it denies what it affirms. And this immediately undermines the ostensibly positive purport of the last two utterances.

This also has an effect on the syntactic coordination of 'drift and sip', containing another hidden metaphor. The combination of verbs acquires a wry, almost humorous effect, as with zeugma. The metaphorical 'drift' involves a big gesture of letting go which has been acquired, probably at great pains, but its grandeur is almost completely annihilated by the metonymic 'sip', the series of daily recurring small and effortful actions that are needed for the I to keep herself alive. What kind of acceptance of cancer as a gift is this?

What we see happening in this poem is that the big thoughts by metaphor to deal with the complexities of life can be undercut or criticised by irony and metonymy. These can revitalise the underlying conventional metaphorical model and reveal its cruel ineptness (cancer is a gift?). They can also reveal and question the naturalness with which people repeat metaphorical stereotypes in natural language (I have learned to drift?). Some metaphor in poetry is therefore used not to think big, but to show how conventionalised metaphorical models in language and thought can prevent us from thinking at all – this is when they are used in their inconspicuous conventional forms in apparently innocent stylistic ways

that need further interpretation and reflection because of their literary context.

The last poem to be used for illustration in this chapter goes in the other direction. It exploits the potential for big thought in metaphor to the full, displaying an extended metaphorical comparison throughout the entire text. This is another typical use of metaphor in literature, which results in a rather different style from what we have seen so far. Here is Marin Sorescu's 'Pure pain', translated from the Romanian:

Pure pain

I don't feel ill in order to feel better,
I feel ill in order to feel worse.
Like the sea with its green, treacherous waves,
You cannot sound the bottom of pain.

I dive into pure pain,
Essence of scream and despair,
And I return to the surface blue and pale,
Like a diver who lost
His oxygen tank.

To the emperor of fishes, I beg,
Kindly send me your trustworthy shark
To cut short my passing.

> *Marin Sorescu (translated by Adam J. Sorkin*
> *and Lidia Vianu; Sorescu 2004)*

This poem is an attempt to think the unthinkable. In 'Chemotherapy', illness is represented by a number of small, metonymic *slices of life*, which allude to emotions that are metaphorically expressed. Recalling Nabokov's 'delicate meeting place' between knowledge and imagination, 'Chemotherapy' works in particular by what it does not say, making an appeal to our knowledge of the situation in order to fill in our own picture. In 'Pure pain' we are moving in the direction of an appeal to our imagination by an active and explicitly formulated metaphor that presents aspects of an extended novel comparison.

We are also moving from the small or large gesture in 'Chemotherapy' to verbalised thought in 'Pure pain'. In terms of narrative theory, we are going from *showing* in 'Chemotherapy' to *telling* in 'Pure pain'. We are asked to structure the immeasurability of pure pain by means of a metaphorical comparison that we need to set up from one line to the next, requiring us to spell it out by means of our knowledge of deep-sea diving. This is a highly specific variant of yet another conventional metaphor, which represents intense experiences as something that you can be submerged in. The conventional metaphor is made special first, by using the concept of deep-sea diving, and then undermined, by imagining a sea that has an

emperor of fishes who can send a trustworthy shark to shorten the diver's passage. The metaphor is extended into fantasy and grotesqueness. This is not just artistic play, but an expression of the alienating potential of pure pain.

These are a number of typical variations on the theme of metaphor in poetic style. I have shown how poets make use in varying ways of metaphorical models in language and thought, some of which are criticised in for instance the medical humanities, following such writers as Susan Sontag (1978). On the one hand poets show how such metaphor can work, both positively and negatively, for patients and their caregivers. On the other hand poets show how the conventionalised, often stereotypical content of those conceptual and linguistic metaphors can be revealed and criticised by irony, metonymy and other stylistic devices. It sometimes happens that an entire metaphor is even blown up from the inside, as with Sorescu. In some cases, life and death become 'enormous', as with Lasdun; in other cases, they become unimaginably 'small', as with Darling. Both of these options allude to another conventional metaphor in our thought, that everything important is big, and everything insignificant is small.

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Edited by

Peter Stockwell
University of Nottingham

Sara Whiteley
University of Sheffield

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