

Mastering Metaphors: A Possible Path to Understand Modern Poetry

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Understanding modern poetry is a big problem for average readers because of all kinds of rhetorical devices filled with them, especially metaphors, which are hard for the readers to understand clearly. Thus, grasping metaphors would provide a possible solution to enhance the understanding of modern poetry. Based on the motivation to better understand modern poetry, the paper explores the 11 mechanisms of metaphors in modern poetry with examples in detail, i.e., blending, mapping, frame shifting, image schema, conceptual integration, contextual grounding, inter-subjectivity, embodied cognition, recursiveness, juxtaposition, shape-moulding, by borrowing some concepts from Cognitive Linguistics, literary studies, and Rhetorics, which can be adopted as means and methods to understand modern poems.

Keywords: metaphor, modern poetry, metaphorical mechanism, aesthetic feeling

Introduction

Generally, a piece of the modern poem is a kind of challenge for average readers to understand completely. First, modern poets have not followed conventional paradigms, like, foot, rhyme, line, or style, etc., so modern poems are filled with long or short broken sentences. It is hard for readers to follow them according to the rules and regulations of conventional poetic creation. Besides, modern poems are composed of creative forms of language, fresh images, individual rhetoric, and complicated themes. Moreover, due to highly embedded privacy, individual talents of modern poets (Eliot, 1961, p17-22), and the advancement of science and technology, it is hard for us to grasp and grip the image and rhetoric. So, reading or appreciating modern poems, to many average modern readers, it is something like the blind men and the elephant to some extent. Even if they hold the same

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part of an elephant in modern poems, readers have different interpretations. Worse, some readers could hold opposite understandings against others with efficient evidence. Because there are too many kinds of interpretations of one work, which are full of rapids and torrents, and some are kinds of random and doubtful situations, common readers might be puzzled and drifted away by them. Therefore, we should re-examine the situation of chaotic explanations to explore a new way to understand modern poems, which is accessible and available to average readers of modern poems. We are not going to provide them with a unanimous interpretation of modern poems, but only a trial approach to understanding them; further speaking, we would merely provide readers with a kind of definite means (Humboldt, 2018), hoping they have infinite uses (Humboldt, 2018) to appreciate modern poems. Exactly, based upon theories of metaphorical studies, we are going to explore metaphors in modern poems, by which we hope to help popular readers understand modern poetry better.

Literary Survey

Roughly, the development of metaphorical studies could be divided into three stages. Before the 20th century, metaphor was regarded as a rhetorical device, which is the first stage. Aristotle, one of the first philosophers to study metaphors in Old Greek, in his work *Poetics*, has defined, “A metaphor is the application of a noun which properly applies to something else” (Aristotle, 1996, p. 34). The definition laid an essential foundation for metaphorical studies. He has also divided metaphors into four kinds, “The transfer may be from genus to species, from species to genus, from species to species, or by analogy” (Aristotle, 1996, p. 34). The following are his detailed explanations of the four species: (i) By a transfer from genus to species I mean (e.g.) “Here stands my ship”; lying at anchor is one kind of standing. (ii) From species to genus: “Odysseus has in truth performed ten thousand noble deeds”; ten thousand is a large number, and is used in place of “many”. (iii) Species to species: e.g., “drawing off the life with bronze” and “cutting off water with edged bronze”; here “drawing off” means cutting, and “cutting” means drawing off—each is a kind of removal. (iv) By analogy I mean cases where B stands in a similar relation to A as D does to C; one can then mention D instead of B, and vice versa (Aristotle, 1996). Aristotle laid the foundation for the studies of metaphors, and his four divisions of metaphors are frames and guidelines for further investigation. The first stage is referred to as the comparison or substitute for Aristotle’s impact.

The 20th century has witnessed a new stage of metaphor studies, the second stage. In the 1930s, I. A. Richards (1965) published a book entitled *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, in which he explores how metaphors function and how they affect our understanding and interpretation of language. He introduces the idea of “inter-animation” (Richards, 1965), which refers to how words interact with each other within a sentence or phrase, creating complex networks of meaning. Richards also distinguishes between two types of metaphors: “dead” metaphors, which are so familiar that their metaphorical nature is no longer recognized, and “live” metaphors, which are more vivid and actively engage our imagination. While *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* is not exclusively about metaphor, it’s one of the earliest works to treat metaphor as a central concern of language theory and to argue for its fundamental role in shaping thought and communication. Richards’ ideas on metaphor laid the groundwork for later scholars, such as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson.

The third stage is marked by the publication of the ground-breaking work *Metaphors We Live by* by co-authored by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (2003), American linguists, two pioneers who are hard to ignore in the discipline only if we discuss metaphorical studies. The landmark work *Metaphors We Live by* could be one of the greatest works in humanities of the century, in the eyes of the author of the paper. In the book, they have

declared a new idea of conceptual metaphor, an original and revolutionary one to further push the studies. In their opinion, a metaphor is not only a figure of speech used in speech and writing but also a way of thinking in mind and cognition. They divide metaphors into three species: structural metaphor, oriental metaphor, and substantial metaphor, which are ubiquitous in daily life and have impacts on thinking and action. After the two pioneers, metaphorical studies developed quickly like mushroom after rain over the world.

Besides the classical theories mentioned above, there are other renowned researchers, who have made great progress in the field. For instance, Paul Ricoeur, the distinguished French philosopher of the 20th century, is one representative of them. In his book *Living Metaphor*, he has illuminated how metaphors work effectively both in philosophy and science without encroaching on each other in communication (2004). What Ricoeur has contributed to the studies is that the philosophical approach to language offers the specific possibility of traversing the whole domain of semiology to go beyond signs into the heart of the relation between language and reality, thus allowing the ancient philosophical problem of truth to be posed in new forms. But this result can only be obtained at the expense of a journey that is both semiological and philosophical, a long route, to use Ricoeur's favorite expression, "moving from rhetoric through semantics to hermeneutics" (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 77). In short, Ricoeur has also pushed metaphoric studies upward to a new height.

Briefly speaking, metaphor, from a rhetorical device, interaction, and way of cognitive thinking, has attracted the attention of many related scholars. Through the survey and summary of the representative literature, we can better understand the meaning and application of metaphors, and provide others with some enlightenment for further research on metaphors.

Understanding Metaphors in Modern Poetry

Metaphor as Part of Modern Poetry

Metaphor, as an essential element of modern poetry, plays a big role in building up themes, images, situations, experiences, etc. A poem, with no metaphor, would be easy to understand, less vivid, and be forgotten shortly by readers. Formalism, Structuralism, and New Criticism have explored the roles of metaphors in modern poetry.

Formalism, particularly, Russian Formalism, has made exceptional explorations of the roles of metaphors to create artistic effects, and new language styles in modern poetry. Viktor Shklovsky, one of the milestone characters of the school, claims,

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (1965, p. 12)

As we know, this is how alienation has come into being, which has its impacts and echoes in literature today. Here, the "art" referred by Shklovsky is Poetics in general, including poetry, novel, drama, and prose. His alienation is a light to write and understand modern poems. Boris Eikhenbaum, another great giant of Formalism, in his essay "On the Formal Method in Literary History", explores the use of metaphor in modern poetry. He writes: "Metaphor is the most characteristic figure of modern poetry... It is the basic means of constructing new images" (Eikhenbaum, 1965, p. 30), whose ideas have proved that metaphors are popular in modern poetry. Roman Jakobson, a linguist and the banner bearer of Formalism, has further discussed how to use metaphors in Poetics. He writes:

The development of language is marked by a shift from metaphor to metonymy... Metaphor is based on an intuitive perception of the similarity between the two phenomena compared; it is an instant operation... Metonymy is based on contiguity, which is a kind of causal relationship... It is a gradual operation. (Jakobson, 1956, p. 84)

Here, Jakobson not only admits the existence of metaphor in Poetics, but also explores the function of metaphor and metonymy, which has made contributions to metaphor studies.

If it is not enough to prove that metaphor is essential in modern poetry by Formalists, New Critics also had some things to say about metaphor and modern poetry, though they were primarily concerned with the formal properties of a text, such as its structure, language, imagery, etc. Cleanth Brooks, one core member of the Critics, in his book *The Well Wrought Urn*, discusses the role of metaphor in creating meaning in poetry. He writes: "The metaphor is the ultimate unit of meaning, the final focus into which all the elements of meaning in a poem may be gathered... The metaphor is the key to the unity of a work of art" (Brooks, 1947, p. 23).

What Brooks addressed about poems indicates that grasping metaphors is the ultimate way to understand poems. William Empson, who is also a great theoretician of the Critics, in his book *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, explores the use of metaphors in poetry to create complex layers of meaning. He claims: "The simplest kind of metaphor is when one thing is directly substituted for another... Metaphor is a very strong form of ambiguity, and it gives an effect of great depth" (Empson, 1995, p. 10).

Empson not only points out the layers of meanings in poems, but also makes research on metaphor, whose achievement is regarded as a new stage in the development of metaphor studies, substitute. Another influential critic of the school, Allen Tate, in his book *Religion and the Old South*, discusses the relationship between metaphor and modern poetry. He writes: "The metaphor is the most powerful means of unifying the disparate elements of experience... It is through metaphor that we grasp the essential nature of our experience" (Tate, 1963, p. 18).

Besides the two schools mentioned above, Structuralists also contribute a lot to the metaphor mechanism in modern poetry. Two masters of Structuralism, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Tzvetan Todorov, have explored how metaphors are used in myths to convey complex ideas and relationships. Here is what Lévi-Strauss once said: "Metaphor consists in perceiving resemblances where there are none, or at least, very few. It is the result of the mind's tendency to reduce the chaos of the world to order" (Lévi-Strauss, 1962, p. 30). Tzvetan Todorov, a representative of Structuralism, discusses the role of metaphor in modern poetry. He writes: "The metaphor is not simply a comparison; it is an identification... The metaphor says 'this is that'; it does not say 'this resembles that'" (Todorov, 1977, p. 106). These quotes demonstrate the Structuralist focus on the underlying structures and relationships that govern the use of metaphors in language and literature. By examining these structures, Structuralists aim to uncover the universal principles that shape meaning in modern poetry.

Hence, after seeing so many sayings about metaphors from literary critics, poets, and writers, we are convinced that metaphor is a part and parcel of modern poetry.

Types of Metaphors in Modern Poetry

To understand metaphors, we must be clear about what types of metaphors exist in modern poetry, though the division of metaphors would not be scientific at all without statistical data, which I have not found until today. The types of metaphors are a kind of subjectivity. And there are various types according to various criteria of scholars. Here are some common kinds of metaphors, generally recognized by scholars, divided by following standards.

There are three kinds of metaphors by degree of conventionality in metaphorical usages, i.e., dead, stock, and creative. The dead refers to metaphors that have been so commonly used that they've become part of everyday language and their figurative sense is often forgotten, e.g., "legs of a table, feet of the mountain, head of a bed". The stock is widely recognized and frequently used metaphors that do not surprise the reader due to their familiarity, e.g., "a sea of faces"; "I have seen the eternal footman hold my coat, and snicker,/And in short, I was afraid" ("The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T. S. Eliot). Here the use of "eternal footman" is a stock metaphor often used to represent death or fate. The creative metaphors refer to unique, original comparisons that challenge or refresh the reader's perception, e.g., "the sound of one hand clapping"; "Because I could not stop for Death—/He kindly stopped for me—" ("Because I Could Not Stop for Death" by Emily Dickinson). In the lines quoted here, the personification of Death as a gentleman visitor is a creative metaphor, making a solemn subject more approachable and thought-provoking.

There are two types of metaphors according to the duration and development of metaphorical usages. One is isolated, and the other is extended. The isolated occur as single instances without much development throughout the text, e.g., "Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright/In the forests of the night" ("The Tyger" by William Blake). Here the image of the tiger, whose eyes are burning bright in the night, is an isolated metaphor to characterize a divine power or perhaps the destructive force of the French Revolution. The extended, also known as sustained metaphors, are developed throughout a poem, a stanza, or an entire collection of work, creating a complex network of associated meanings, e.g., in "The Waste Land" by T. S. Eliot, the entire poem uses an extended metaphor of a desolate landscape to reflect the disillusionment and emptiness felt by many after World War I. Throughout the poem, various scenes and characters are interwoven to depict this wasteland both literally and metaphorically.

There are four kinds of metaphors, i.e., simile, metaphor, mixed metaphor, and implied metaphor in terms of the structure of metaphors. Here simile, I take it as a special kind of metaphor. It is a direct comparison between the source object and the target one, using "like" or "as", e.g., "Life is like a box of chocolates". The second one, i.e., metaphor, refers to a direct statement of being something else without using "like" or "as", e.g., "Life is a journey". But in the proverb "Time and tide wait for no man", a metaphor is used in it by the juxtaposition of time and tide, which compares time and tide to entities that do not wait for anyone. The mixed refers to combining elements from two or more different metaphors, sometimes resulting in a new, complex image, e.g., "She was a snake in the grass, but he saw through her facade and called her out on her shady dealings". In this sentence, "snake in the grass" is a metaphor that means someone who is deceitful or treacherous, while "facade" is a metaphor that means a false appearance or front. Combining the two metaphors creates a mixed metaphor because a person cannot literally be both a snake and have a facade. The implied metaphor is not directly stated but suggested through context or allusions in the poem.

By function and meaning, metaphors can be categorized as symbolic, emotive, and rational, three kinds. Symbolic is used to represent larger concepts or themes within the poem, e.g., a rose symbolizing love or beauty. Emotive is adopted to express emotions or states of mind, e.g., "a heart of stone" to convey coldness. Rational is employed to explain or clarify abstract ideas by relating them to concrete images, experiences, or situations, e.g., a mind is a machine; nature is a family.

There are two categories of metaphors from the level of explicitness. One is an overt metaphor, which is clearly stated one that is easy to identify; the other is a covert metaphor, which is subtler and might require deeper analysis to recognize, e.g., "He was drowning in his sorrows"; "She was a shining light in the darkness".

There are two divisions of metaphors in the standard of interaction with the reader. One is engaged metaphors, which involve the reader in their interpretation, often requiring active imagination (e.g., Emily Dickinson's use of personified nature). The other is observational one, describing an external reality, inviting the reader to observe rather than participate (e.g., descriptions of landscapes in William Wordsworth's poetry).

By the contextual relevance, there are two kinds of metaphors. One is historical/cultural metaphors, which relate specifically to the historical or cultural context in which the poem was written, e.g., in "Don't cry over spilled milk", such kind of American colloquialism is tinged with the colors of American culture; "He eats no fish on Friday" is a metaphor used to suggest that someone is not a Christian. The phrase originated in the 16th century when Catholics persecuted and sometimes tortured suspected Protestants, who were known as "nonpareil" or "no comparison" to distinguish them from other heretics. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I of England, the government required all citizens to attend Anglican church services on Sundays and to take part in the Holy Communion. Those who refused were fined, imprisoned, or even executed. To avoid punishment, some Protestants would eat fish on Fridays instead of meat, which was prohibited by the Catholic Church during Lent. Therefore, if someone did not eat fish on a Friday, it was assumed that they were not Catholic but rather Protestant or non-Christian. Historical/cultural metaphors draw upon shared cultural or historical references to make a comparison. The second type is personal metaphors that draw from the personal experiences or perspectives of the poet, e.g., "I'm feeling under the weather today", "She's a social butterfly". Such kind of metaphors are more individualistic and often rely on personal experiences or characteristics to create a unique comparison, and they probably have added more ups and downs for readers in understanding modern poetry. What's more, if readers are not quite familiar with the original culture, history, or personal experience, it is very hard for them to understand foreign poetry, let alone translate it.

These categories mentioned above might be overlapped and are not always mutually exclusive; they can serve multiple functions and belong to more than one category simultaneously. The classification of metaphors in modern poetry is often subjective and depends on the interpretation of the reader or critic. It's also important to remember that the way metaphors are categorized can vary between different schools of literary thought and critical theory.

Metaphorical Mechanism in Modern Poetry

A metaphorical mechanism, though not a standard term in literary theory, refers to the way in which metaphors function within a piece of modern poetry. In this context, the "mechanism" refers to the underlying process by which metaphors operate to create meaning, impact, and aesthetic effect. Here's a breakdown of how metaphors might work in modern poetry. Roughly, there are 11 ways in Cognitive Linguistics, so we think that they could be transferred to modern poetry as well. What we have shown in the following is the illustration of the mechanism one by one with examples.

Blending

Blending is a cognitive process where disparate elements, such as language, imagery, and sound, are combined together in the reader's mind to create new meanings, experiences, or imaginary situations or atmospheres. For instance, a poet might blend the concept of time with a physical landscape to evoke a sense of life's journey. In blending, elements from different domains are mixed to create a new, composite image or idea.

Example 1: “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost

And sorry I could not travel both
 And be one traveler, long I stood
 And looked down one as far as I could
 To where it bent in the undergrowth.

In this stanza, Frost blends the concept of a life choice with the physical image of a road. The road becomes a metaphor for the choices we make in life. The blending is subtle—the reader is not just thinking about a literal road but also about the abstract concept of decision-making and life paths.

Example 2: “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” by T. S. Eliot

Would it have been worth while,
 To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
 To have squeezed the universe into a ball
 And rolled it up one street
 And down another?

Here, Eliot blends the concepts of physical action (squeezing a ball) with the abstract idea of understanding or mastering the universe. The blending creates a vivid image that suggests both the triviality and the impossibility of such an attempt to comprehend life’s complexities.

Mapping

Mapping in modern poetry refers to the use of metaphors and symbols to connect one conceptual domain to another, creating a deeper understanding of the poem’s themes and meanings. Metaphors map the qualities or features of one domain (source) onto another (target), creating a framework that allows readers to think about one thing in terms of another. For example, love might be mapped as a journey, with its ups and downs. Mapping involves taking the attributes of one concept (the source) and applying them to another concept (the target).

Example 3: “Song of Myself” by Walt Whitman

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
 And what I assume you shall assume,
 For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

Here Whitman maps the attributes of atoms (small, fundamental units) onto the concept of selfhood. He suggests that every basic part of himself is also a part of the reader, creating a sense of unity and shared existence. If we are not clear on the idea of mapping, please see the next example in the following.

Example 4: “The Second Coming” by W. B. Yeats

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned.

Yeats maps the attributes of a physical catastrophe (a flood, a tide) onto the concept of societal collapse and moral decay. The metaphor implies chaos and destruction on a cosmic scale.

Example 5: “Ode to a Nightingale” by John Keats

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
 No hungry generations tread thee down;

The voice I hear this passing night was heard
 In ancient days by emperor and clown!

Keats maps the attributes of immortality and timelessness onto the nightingale, contrasting it with the transient nature of human life. The bird's song, heard by all classes of people across ages, becomes a metaphor for the eternal and unchanging.

Frame Shifting

Frame shifting in modern poetry refers to the poet's ability to switch between different perspectives or mental frameworks to present multiple viewpoints on a particular theme or idea. Modern poetry often uses metaphors to shift the reader's frame of reference, prompting them to view a situation from a different perspective. A metaphor might compare the world to a stage, encouraging readers to consider life as a performance.

Example 6: "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio" by James Wright

Already the first frost has come,
 Already the hay is moldering in the fields,
 Already the bright-leaved sumacs are burning
 Like bonfires in the wind.

Wright shifts the reader's frame of reference by comparing autumn leaves to bonfires, which is unexpected. The frameshifting activates a new perspective on the changing season, infusing it with a sense of urgency and dramatic change.

Image Schema

An image schema in modern poetry is a recurring pattern of sensory-motor experience that is used to structure the reader's understanding of the poem's meaning and themes. Image schemas are basic cognitive structures that allow us to make sense of the world around us. Poets use metaphors that tap into these schemas, such as container schema (in/out), path schema (movement from A to B), or balance schema (symmetrical arrangements), to create vivid images and convey complex emotions or ideas.

Example 7: "Midnight Session" by Robert Bly

We enter silent and alone
 Into a room where no one can follow us,
 Where even the moon is too distant,
 And the daylight stands far away from us.

Bly uses the container schema as an overarching metaphor for the inner space of meditation or contemplation. The room represents a place of introspection, where one is isolated from external influences like the moon and daylight.

Conceptual Integration

Conceptual integration in modern poetry refers to the process of combining multiple mental spaces (or frames) to create a new, blended space, situation or atmosphere that contains elements from each of the input spaces, situations or atmospheres, allowing the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the poem's meaning. This is an extension of blending where metaphors combine multiple source domains to create a more complex understanding of the target. For example, a poem might integrate metaphors of nature, architecture, and machines to comment on human civilization.

Example 8: "Song of Myself" by Walt Whitman

I am the teacher of athletes,

He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves a master,
Only as he sounds his own note can he give the command to me.

Whitman integrates multiple metaphors of teaching and athleticism to convey a message about self-reliance and individualism. The conceptual integration shows how personal growth and self-expression are intertwined with social roles and relationships.

Contextual Grounding

Contextual grounding in modern poetry refers to the process of anchoring a poem's themes and meanings in a specific cultural, historical, or personal context in order to give it greater significance and resonance for the reader. The effectiveness of a metaphor often relies on its contextual grounding—how well it fits within the overall theme, tone, and structure of the poem. A metaphor that aligns with the poem's mood or message will resonate more deeply with the reader.

Example 9: "Dulce Et Decorum Est" by Wilfred Owen

Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All along the road
The snow fell like white gravestones on their pates,
They cursed and shivered and died in the icy silence.

Owen grounds his metaphor of snow as gravestones in the context of a soldier's experience during war. The metaphor resonates deeply because it aligns with the poem's overall theme of the tragic loss of young lives in World War I.

Inter-subjectivity

Inter-subjectivity in modern poetry refers to the shared understanding or agreement between the poet and the reader about a particular concept, idea, or experience presented in the poem. Metaphors in modern poetry often rely on a shared understanding between the poet and the reader. They draw on commonly experienced phenomena to communicate private or idiosyncratic experiences, making the personal universal.

Example 10: "The Waste Land" by T. S. Eliot

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

Eliot relies on the shared human experience of recognizing the transition between seasons to communicate a complex mix of emotions associated with rebirth and renewal after desolation. The metaphor of April as a cruel month taps into a collective memory and yearning for revival.

Embodied Cognition

Embodied Cognition in modern poetry refers to the theory that our cognitive processes are grounded in our physical experiences and interactions with the world, and that the use of sensory language and imagery in poetry can activate these embodied experiences for the reader. Many metaphors in modern poetry are based on our physical experiences as human beings. For example, metaphors of light and dark might correspond to feelings of knowledge and ignorance, respectively, based on our embodied experience of seeing and being in the dark.

Example 11: “The Red Cliff” by Kenneth Rexroth

The cliff hangs above the river,
 Giant, trembling, eternally renewed,
 The color of the sunrise, the topaz, the rose,
 The color of the sunset, the pearl, the carnelian.

Rexroth uses metaphors rooted in our physical perception of light and color to describe the cliff. The colors represent not just a visual experience but also evoke feelings of transience and permanence, mirroring the cycle of day and the passage of time.

Recursiveness

Recursiveness in modern poetry refers to the use of repetition and variation to create a sense of depth and complexity in the poem’s themes and meanings. Some metaphors in modern poetry are recursive, meaning they contain layers of metaphors within metaphors, creating a complexity that invites deep analysis and interpretation.

Example 12: “A Map of the World” by Mary Oliver

The soft world is built upon hard rock,
 It doesn’t matter what you think,
 You are alive,
 And your task is to live—
 Without paralysis.

Oliver’s metaphor of the world being both soft and hard is recursive; it contains within it the idea that life is both fragile and resilient. The metaphor encapsulates a larger philosophical debate about the nature of existence, inviting deep reflection.

Juxtaposition

Juxtaposition in modern poetry refers to the act of placing two or more seemingly disparate elements side by side to create a new, unexpected meaning, experience, situation, or atmosphere for the reader. Modern poets often use metaphors to juxtapose seemingly dissimilar elements, which are something like “objective correlative” put forward by T. S. Eliot, creating tension or contrast that can illuminate new insights or emotional states.

Example 13: “The Manhunt” by Audre Lorde

But there will be no surcease from pain
 While men stand bounding, gleeful and opaque,
 Their eyes holding neither depth nor light,
 As thick and heavy as olden coffins.

Lorde juxtaposes the image of men who are oblivious to be suffered from pain with the imagery of coffins, representing death and finality. This juxtaposition underscores the poem’s themes of societal indifference and the weight of unaddressed suffering.

Shape-moulding

Shape-moulding, which is coined by the author of the paper for there have been popular in modern poetry. Generally, it refers to the process of changing the shape or contour of an object by various means. The process can be physical, as in sculpture, metalworking, or plastic molding, or visual, as in graphic design or visual art. In modern poetry, it refers to the use of visual and typographical elements to create a specific shape or form that enhances the meaning or emotional impact of the poem. This technique is often used by poets who want to

experiment with non-traditional forms of expression and engage readers on a visual level. For example, a poem might be written in the shape of a heart to express love, or in the shape of a tree to convey a sense of growth and interconnections. The shape can also be more abstract, such as a spiral or a wave, to suggest movement or change.

Shape-moulding in modern poetry can be seen as an extension of concrete poetry, which emphasizes the visual aspect of language and often uses unconventional layouts and typefaces. However, while concrete poetry focuses on the visual representation of words and phrases, shape-moulding takes this idea further by creating a larger, more encompassing visual structure that shapes the entire poem.

Example 14: “l(a” by E. E. Cummings

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one
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In this poem, E. E. Cummings uses the typographical arrangement of the words to create a visual representation of a solitary figure. The word “loneliness” is split into its constituent parts, with each letter placed on a separate line, except for the word “one”, which is centered on its own line. The parentheses around the sequence of letters suggest containment or isolation, further emphasizing the theme of loneliness.

William Carlos Williams’ “The Red Wheelbarrow” is also a poem rich in visual metaphor, which requires the reader’s eyes to see its unique shape and to imagine visual images. Here’s the poem,

Example 15:

so much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens

The short, Imagist poem emphasizes the visual and sensory aspects of the scene described, which consists of three lines, with the second line being a single word, creating a strong emphasis on the imagery presented. The red wheelbarrow, glazed with rainwater, is placed beside white chickens, creating a vivid contrast between the two objects.

Firstly, the subject of the poem, “The Red Wheelbarrow”, is endowed with strong visual symbolism. Red is often associated with passion, vigor, and vitality, while the wheelbarrow symbolizes the fruits of everyday work and labor. In the poem, the red wheelbarrow is set against the white backdrop—the snow, a sharp contrast that intensifies the brightness and prominence of the wheelbarrow, making it a representative of vitality in nature. Secondly, the

structure and rhyme scheme also enhance the effect of this visual metaphor. The poem employs clear and straightforward language and direct description, allowing its readers to vividly imagine the scene, achieving a realm where “there is poetry in painting, and painting in poetry”. This mode of expression forms a mental image for the reader, deepening their understanding of the wheelbarrow as a visual symbol. Finally, on a deeper level, the poem may also imply a praise for American rural life and an appreciation for the beautiful details in ordinary existence.

In summary, Williams’ “The Red Wheelbarrow” not only provides aesthetic pleasure visually but is also rich in metaphorical meaning, demonstrating the poet’s keen observation and profound understanding of life’s details.

Overall, shape-moulding is a creative way for poets to play with language and engage readers on multiple levels, combining visual and textual elements to create a unique and memorable experience. So, shape-moulding poems are called visual metaphors, pictorial or graphic.

The examples above demonstrate how metaphors can function in different domains to create rich layers of meaning in modern poetry. Through these techniques, poets can explore complex themes and emotions, often opening up multiple avenues for interpretation and connection with the reader.

The metaphorical mechanism in modern poetry is thus a dynamic interplay between language, cognition, emotion, and context, allowing poets to communicate on multiple levels simultaneously and offering readers rich experiences of discovery and connection. Each of the mechanisms contributes to the richness of modern poetry by allowing poets to explore complex ideas and emotions through intricate webs of language and imagery.

Conclusions

Based on the types and mechanisms of metaphors with examples in modern poetry, which are not exhausted and comprehensive enough for readers to understand modern poetry, we can see metaphor is not only used as a figure of speech, but also a tool to characterize the external world and internal mentality. The history of metaphor has indicated that it is dynamic, not static. With the advancement of science and technology in the future, as Charles J. Forceville (2009) has worked on multimodal metaphors, we are completely convinced that multimodal metaphors as well are sure to come into being and into play in poetry around the corner, which need more efforts and explorations to figure out the mechanism of a new type to decode the layers of meaning, describe and represent the aesthetic feelings with more exact dimensions; the mechanism is dynamic and dimensional as well.

Though shape-moulding can enhance readers’ experience of the world and mentality, it is of secondary significance. The authors of the paper expect multi-modal metaphors will play a big role in the characterization.

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