REPETITION, METAPHOR AND CONCEIT IN THE RENAISSANCE

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There is a rhetorical technique systematically used by the medievals to intensify the significance, truth and reality of an object, whether thing or person, text or event[1]. It consists in *expanding* the object, typically by means of repetition, duplication, multiplication, unfolding, mirroring. The allegorical mode so dominant in the Middle Ages relied for its effectiveness on the conception of the world as twofold, in the sense that every object had a significance which related it, as a mirror-image, to some object in the spiritual domain. The use of the figure of the 'companion' of the hero (Bran's three foster-brothers in the Irish *Voyage of Bran*, Roland's Olivier in *La Chanson de Roland*), or of the figure of his 'double' (Roland's Ganelon, Sir Gawain's Green Knight) exemplifies the same effort to unfold and thereby to emphasize and intensify, through repetition or through contrast, heroic behaviours and values. The exegetical technique similarly allowed commentators to present texts as twofold constructs, endowed with, beside their literal meaning, a second, spiritual level of interpretation.

The technique was known as *amplificatio*, and according to Quintilian it offered four main strategies: augmentation, comparison, reasoning, and accumulation (Preminger 1990:32). Any device which, from the simplest exclamation to hyperbole, division, comparison, or repetition tends to intensify the object, falls under the general label of *amplificatio* (Lanham 1991:8).

The technique is not alien to the Renaissance; 16th century writers used *amplificatio* lavishly as part of their rhetoric of intensification in poetry or drama; let me offer some examples from both Spanish and English texts. In Fernando de Rojas' *La Celestina* (*The Spanish Bawd*, 1499), Calixto, madly in love with Melibea, compares the fire of his passion to that of Purgatory;

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1 See Aguirre (X), where I discuss the uses of repetition in medieval literature and its value in the context of the medieval theory of truth and reality. A more extended treatment of Richard II's soliloquy from the point of view of the medieval definitions of being, truth, reality and meaning is the subject of an article in preparation.

remonstrated by his servant, "Are you not a Christian?", he replies: "I am a Melibean, I adore Melibea, I believe in Melibea, and I love Melibea" (Mabbe's translation, Act I). In unfolding his experience into four categories (being, worship, faith, and love), Calixto simply seeks to enhance his devotion.

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, when Claudius reproaches the prince for his immoderate grief he pronounces: " 'tis a fault to Heaven, / A fault against the dead, a fault to nature, / To reason most absurd" (I.ii.101 ff.). The fourfold description of the object tends to enhance it, this time stressing its negative value, its excess. The technique is no different from that used by Thomas Aquinas to argue, e.g., the existence of God through not one but five different proofs[2]. Never mind that the specific categories resorted to by Calixto or Claudius have no direct counterparts in scholastic philosophy-that they are, in a sense, arbitrary, that their rhetorical nature is shown up by the facility with which the two sequences could be extended, perhaps indefinitely: why could Calixto not say "I hope in Melibea", "I serve Melibea", and so on? Why could Hamlet's grief not be labelled a fault against Denmark, or against the self, or against his mother? The point is rather the technique of multiplication itself, the fact itself of a three-or four-or fivefold categorization, the use of 'scholastic' classifications of experience which, by unfolding it, intensify its significance.

In *Richard II*, the king intensifies in just this way the presentation of his grief at the loss of some of his followers:

> *Of comfort no man speak.*
> *Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs,*
> *Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes*
> *Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.*
> *Let's choose executors and talk of wills*
> *(III.ii:144 ff.)*

These five lines reveal to us an immature man wallowing in an excess of grief which he intensifies by practicing *divisio* of his subject-death: "let's talk of death," the king is saying; but, put like this, it would sound somewhat paltry, so he divides the concept of death into some of its aspects –worms, graves, epitaphs, wills–. In effect, he uses multiple metonymy[3].

I want briefly to introduce here the concept of *congruence*. In the case of Calixto, it will be observed that the four categories into which he divides his devotion to Melibea –being, faith, worship and love– are all of the same order of abstraction and share the common quality of human experience. The same can be said of Claudius' breakdown of Hamlet's grief into four different but similar kinds of offence. Much the same goes for Richard II when he 'amplifies' death into a series of metonymies. What I am trying to say is that we have to do with one single object which is then expanded or unfolded into several aspects of itself and that, therefore, these aspects are all congruent with one another: it makes sense to speak in one breath of worms, graves, epitaphs, dust and so on in the context of death. The point is almost trivial, but acquires a special importance when we move into one Renaissance version of *amplificatio*.

We recall that one of Quintilian's four kinds of amplification was comparison; by establishing the resemblance of A to B we enhance some of A's attributes or discover in it some quality which only the simile may bring out. Now, a simile is a weaker form of metaphor, and it is reasonable to assert that metaphor, too, is a figure of amplification. Where the simile establishes likeness between A and B, metaphor goes further and *identifies* the one with the other, thereby lending A the attributes of B and allowing A thus to enjoy a *double* essence for the duration.

The use of metaphor, like that of simile, intensifies the nature of its object. Now, metaphor consists of, basically, two terms, which I. A. Richards labeled "tenor" and "vehicle". In the expression "the road of life", the tenor is life, what we want to talk about; the vehicle, "road", is the means we employ to discuss the tenor, what we say about it: we want to say that life is like a road, or, better, that life is a road or that it shares some basic attributes of roads.

Now, as in other cases of amplification, *congruence* must be found in metaphor: the vehicle must display a certain appropriateness to its tenor. It is all right to speak of "the road of life", but in ther expression "the dictionary of life" it is not quite obvious what is meant. True, there is a context for nearly everything, and in a certain context "the dictionary of life" might make perfect sense; but the difference resides in that the expression "the road of life" makes sense (to our Western culture) in *most* contexts, whereas "the dictionary of life" will be found to make sense in few.

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2 "[...] in thirteenth-century theology each *summa* supplied a variety of ways in which divine truth could be apprehended [...] The idea that to multiply the foundations of faith is to strengthen it [...] was widely accepted" (Vinaver 1971: 00 f.).

3 We might equally consider Shylock's speech in *The Merchant of Venice* (III.i.) as a question ('Am I not human too?') rhetorically amplified into a series of metonymic references to the experience of being human ('If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laught?').

Though amplification as a rhetorical strategy persists into the Modern age[4], the Renaissance tends to construe its own versions of it. The rhetoric of the 16th and 17th centuries builds on, and exploits, a discrepancy between appearance and reality: *is* is not the *same* as *seems*; the comedy of errors, misunderstandings and *double-entendres*, like the tragedy of honour, builds on a dissociation between the two terms of all metaphor: expression and meaning; what is said is no longer necessarily a reflection or expansion of what is meant[5]. This, one of the grand Renaissance themes, shapes a world of dissembling and enquiry, of uncertainty and reflection, of pretence and paranoia; or, as Hamlet finds out, a world in which "One may smile, and smile, and be a villain": the face one puts on does not necessarily correspond any longer to the sentiments beneath.

If expression and meaning are at variance, it makes sense that a new type of metaphor should arise in the Renaissance to convey this rift between tenor and vehicle: this is the conceit. "A conceit", Helen Gardner tells us, "is a comparison whose ingenuity is more striking than its justness". "A conceit", she goes on, "is like a spark made by striking two stones together. After the flash the stones are just two stones" (Gardner 1957:19).

For my example, I turn to the first 9 lines of Richard's monologue in *Richard II* (V, v), where the deposed king sits alone in his prison-cell at Pomfret Castle, expecting the worst:

> *I have been studying how I may compare*
> *This prison where I live unto the world;*
> *And, for because the world is populous*
> *And here is not a creature but myself,*
> *I cannot do it. Yet I'll hammer it out.*
> *My brain I'll prove the female to my soul,*
> *My soul the father, and these two beget*
> *A generation of still-breeding thoughts,*
> *And these same thoughts people this little world [...].*

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4 Other examples of Renaissance use of *amplificatio* would be found in the *contrafactum* which turned a secular lyric into a religious one; or the time-honoured technique of redaction which made it possible for Calderón de la Barca to write an *Alcalde de Zalamea* after Lope de Vega's, or for Shakespeare to compose a *Hamlet* after Thomas Kyd's (hypothetical) play on the same subject (see Aguirre 1993). Indeed, it is debatable whether our Modernity has really eschewed the rhetoric of amplification: Joseph Campbell (1968) persuasively argues that Realism and Modernism merely insist on a *repetition of uniqueness*.

5 Rüdiger Ahrens reminded us in this same forum a year ago (see the coming *Proceedings of SEDERI III*) that one characteristic of the poetics of the Renaissance is a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. See also Aguirre 1990, chapter 3.

The purpose of comparing cell to world is obvious: Richard seeks to justify his condition by making it into a mere example of the human condition in general. We recall that Hamlet, feeling similarly shackled in Elsinore, concludes that 'Denmark's a prison', 'the whole world is one'; and we recall that Calderón de la Barca's drama *La Vida Es Sueño* ("Life Is a Dream", 1635) resorts to a literalization of this metaphor in its central character Segismundo, imprisoned from birth in his tower - a fitting image for a widespread Baroque view of human life. But unlike Hamlet or Segismundo, Richard cannot discern in his experience that universal quality that would redeem it: because it remains intrinsically private, his is a senseless condition. And then, he hits (if you'll pardon the expression) upon the hammer: he will force a sense where none was to be had. To this purpose he begins by redefining two human faculties in gender-terms: his brain tells him the comparison is not possible; his soul will effect it anyway. The brain is the seat of the intellect, reason, advising him as to the rationality of his endeavour; his soul, on the other hand, stands for the will, and the conflict between these two is described as a violent sexual encounter: the male Will shall overpower the female Intellect; in other words: only by sheer *force of will* can Richard make possible his unlikely metaphor.

But of course, the image thus obtained is unwieldy, and is sustained only through two metaleptic strategies. *Metalepsis* is a rhetorical device which essentially consists in the bridging of a distance between two terms, either by omitting intermediate steps ('The ship is sinking: damn the forest where the mast grew'), or by violating ontological borders. Richard uses an a rebours metalepsis in so far as he requires the *construction*, rather than the omission, of several intermediate steps –the gendering of mental faculties, the sexual encounter of these, the subsequent begetting of thoughts– for his image to make sense; secondly, he posits his thoughts as inhabitants of his cell; now, the 'thoughts' Richard's comparison begets do not really people his prison but his mind; the image therefore takes a step from the conceptual to the real which is not warranted by the means employed; of course it makes great sense, but it is inappropriate from the logical point of view. In other words, what Richard has constructed is not a traditional 'comparison', a metaphor or simile, but a Renaisasance conceit, and one which reveals, and reflects, the tragic gap between his private experience and the universal condition.

The conceit represents a breach in the basic structure of metaphor in so far as it forces a tenor-vehicle relationship on things which the language of the Renaissance sees as incongruous. Its effect is one of intensity, and one which, I dare to add, is probably much more powerful than that obtained by means of traditional metaphor; but this intensity is full of poignancy, there is something

almost pathetic about it: it arises not so much from an *amplification* of A into B as from a *tension* between A and B. It is as appropriate to say of the late Renaissance and Baroque period as it will be of Modernism that, in the words of W.B.Yeats, "things fall apart, the centre cannot hold". What is falling apart in Richard's world is meaningfulness. A whole semantic and cultural system is collapsing around 1600; and it is no coincidence that the modern (as distinct from the Petrarchan) conceit should emerge in this period.

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MILTON AND THE LANGUAGES OF THE RENAISSANCE

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The central obstacle facing anyone who wishes to undertake a serious study of Milton is a massive linguistic hurdle: Milton could read in nine or ten languages other than his native English. If St Epiphanius was, as Jerome dubbed him, πεντάγλωσσως –he knew Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, Latin and Egyptian (by which Jerome must have meant Christian Coptic)– Milton was δεκάγλωσσως. In the poem *Ad Patrem* Milton thanks his father for paying for lessons in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French and Italian in the years before he went to St Paul's at the age of twelve:

> *tuo pater optime sumptu*
> *Cum mihi Romuleae patuit facundia linguae*
> *Et Latii veneres, et quae Jovis ora decebant*
> *Grandia magniloquis elata vocabula Graiis,*
> *Addere suasisti quos jactat Gallia flores,*
> *Et quam degeneri novus Italus ore loquelam*
> *Fundit, barbaricos testatus voce tumultus,*
> *Quaeque Palaestinus loquitur mysteria vates.*

[When at your expense, excellent father, I had become fluent in the language of Romulus, the charms of Latin, and the lofty words of the eloquent Greeks, fit for the mighty lips of Jove himself, you urged me to add the flowers that France boasts and the language the modern Italian pours from his degenerate mouth –testifying in his speech to the Barbarian invasions– and the mysteries uttered by the Palestinian prophet].

By the time that Milton travelled to Italy in 1638 he had composed a considerable body of poems in Latin, and a smaller number in Greek and Italian, and at some point had acquired enough Spanish to merit its inclusion in Antonio Francini's ode in praise of Milton:

> *Ch'ode oltr'all Anglia il suo più degno Idioma*
> *Spagna, Francia, Toscana, et Grecia e Roma.*