Form miming
meaning

Iconicity in language
and literature

Edited by
Max Nanny
University of Zürich
Olga Fischer
University of Amsterdam

1999

JOHN BENJAMINS PUBLISHING COMPANY
AMSTERDAM/PHILADELPHIA
Iconicity and Divine Likeness
George Herbert's "Coloss. 3.3"

Matthias Bauer
University of Münster

1. Introduction

The subject of this essay is the connection between formal and semantic aspects of language in George Herbert's poem "Coloss. 3.3", which will be examined from the perspective of 'iconicity'. This term, as distinct from other expressions which might be used for such a relationship (e.g. 'functionality'), fits particularly well the cultural and theological context in which Herbert's use of poetic language has to be seen, for it points to the concept of similarity or likeness which can be regarded as a common denominator of the pursuit of knowledge, artistic creation, and the search for religious truth in the early modern period. It can be argued that Herbert is more obviously conscious of poetic form than, for example, Donne or Crashaw. One might even go so far as to say that in Herbert's The Temple, published in 1633, nearly every kind of iconic representation is to be found. Thus, to give only a few examples, thematic concerns may be reflected by the shape and outline of the printed text or the sound of its words, by the numbers implied in the structure of a poem, by syntactical patterns conspicuously employed, or by links made between poems through formal correspondence. This characteristic feature of Herbert's poetry, however, defies critical simplifications, and is only to be appreciated by means of closely reading individual poems. At the same time, the close reading of such a poem as "Coloss. 3.3" may contribute to making us more acutely aware of the iconic dimension of poetic language in general.

Joseph H. Summers once observed critically that Herbert is too often
remembered only for the poems which "reassemble the subject in typographical appearance", and is credited with inventing "the practice of writing poems in shapes such as wings and altar" (Sumsers 1954: 123). Among some 170 poems of The Temple, however, there are just two obvious pattern-poems, "The Altar" and "Easter-wings". The shapes of both poems are traditional and could already be found in the Greek Anthology. Summers points out that besides those two "visual hieroglyphs" (ibid p.146) The Temple includes a number of poems in which the "formal organisation of the subject [is] imitated by the formal organization of the poem" (ibid p.135), a way of representation which, in semantic terminology, would be called diagrammatic. In these cases, the reader's process involves discovering the hidden relationship between the subject matter of a poem and the sounds and letters of its words, as well as their grammatical and metrical order. While Summers himself mentions several examples of this kind, and some critical attention, notably by Martin Elyks, has been paid to "the materiality of language" in Herbert's poems (Elyks 1983), many treasures remain to be raised. Furthermore, the function and intellectual context of Herbert's iconic language have not yet been fully explored. One of the most perceptive contributions to this topic is still Rosalie Colle's 1965 essay, in which she discusses "the shape of content" in The Temple, regarding the poet's matching of form to matter as an imitation of the logos. For the greater number of Herbert's poems, however, the question of what this imitation exactly means still remains unanswered. In spite of John Shawcross' pointing out that it is "a cliché of criticism... that the stanzaic form, stanzaic, and metrics of the individual poems in The Temple have major significance for meaning within each poem and within the sequence" (Shawcross 1980: 211), it seems that we are only just beginning to see or hear on how many interconnected levels of Herbert's poetry the medium is an image and part of the message.

For example, John Leimberg has recently shown that the "idea" of "Easter-wings", namely that "faith in Christ's resurrection is like a pair of angel's wings carrying man out of... his fallen existence upwards to be again with God" (Leimberg 1996: 480) is to be recognized not only in the outline of the poem, as a whole but in the "very shape of its letters. Thus in the lines "Tell he became / Most power. / With thee / O let me see" and "That I became / Most thinne. / With fear / Let me combine", the letters M and W, which mark the center and turning point in both parts of the poem, are given a position in which they become an image not only of the wings but of the complete reversal taking place at Easter, as they exactly mirror each other. The example already suggests that in Herbert's poetry iconic representation is not confined to the mimetic relationship between subject matter and auditory pattern or visual shape. Rather, as will be shown more closely in "Coloss. 3,3", order form itself may become an image and the connection between "outside" and "inside". Herbert's concern with the relationship between God and man, spirit and matter, principle and realization, or structure and content is, as it were, translated into the spatial and temporal unfolding and appearance of the poem. The spatial and identity of both kinds of form—the outward shape of the poem. The Castelli of his 'poetic atlas' are thus reflected by outer and inner, things and their inner pattern or archtype— thereby reflected by outer and inner, things and their inner pattern or archetype— thereby reflected by outer and inner, things and their inner pattern or archtype— thereby reflected by outer and inner, things and their inner pattern or archtype— thereby reflected by outer and inner, things and their inner pattern or archtype— thereby reflected by outer and inner, things and their inner pattern or archtype— thereby reflected by outer and inner, things and their inner pattern or archtype— thereby reflected by outer and inner, things and their inner pattern or archtype— thereby reflected by outer and inner, things and their inner pattern or archtype— thereby reflected by outer and inner, things and their inner pattern or archtype.
2. "Coloss. 3:3"

Coloss. 3:3

Our life is hid with Christ in God

My words & thoughts do both express this notion,
That life hath with the sun a double motion.
The first is straight, and our dearest friend,
The other Hid and doth obliquely bend.
One life is wagt In thesis, and tends to earth:
The other wanders towards Him, whose hanging birth
Taught me to live here so, That still one eye
Should aim and shoot at that which is on high:
Quoting with daily labour all My pleasure,
To gain at harvest an eternal Treasure.

In "Coloss. 3:3" the subject of embodiment and enclosure is visualized by a diagonal intercussus (or, and one should not put it past Herbert to have implied this pun, an acrosynthesis) reminiscent of the figural poetry by Porphyry and Hrabanus Maurus. Elizabeth Cook has reminded us that Wimpeling's 1503 edition of Mauranus's De Leadiibus Sanctae Crucis was republished in 1608, and that Herbert's sponsor and friend Lancelot Andrews owned a copy (Cook 1986: 23-24). The poem is an exact square of ten lines having ten syllables each (not counting the feminine endings in lines 1, 2, 9 and 10). The diagonal intercussus divides this square into two equilateral triangles, each having three sides of nine units length. Semantically, the notion of two seems to prevail. In line 1, the two-fold nature of "words & thoughts" is emphasized by "both", in line 2 a "double motion" is mentioned, and in lines 3-6 the syntax is structured by the contrasting pairs "The first"—"The Other" and "One"—"The other". Then, however, only one of a pair of eyes is mentioned, the one which "aim[s] and shoot[s] at that which is on high". Mere opposition and dichotomy thus seem to be left behind when the speaker and the divine "He", the two persons referred to in the diagonal line, become one. This transformation of two into one corresponds to the transformation of three into one or two into one or two into three as it is expressed by the biblical quotation which forms the substitute of the poem: "Our life is hid with Christ in God". Man, Christ, and God are three-in-one, but the triad also forms united groups of two. "Our life" and Christ are hidden together in God; since "hid with" also means "hidden by" however, the subtitle also says

that our life is enclosed by Christ-in-God. The mystical mathematics of this theological statement is epitomized and reflected by the shape of the poem, which evinces a kind of miraculous geometry: a square which is formed of two equilateral triangles, so that the numerical length of its diagonal (10) is identical with the length of its sides (also 10). The unity of two and three is also to be found in the two equilateral triangles which remain when the diagonal line is taken out; each of it has three sides of nine units length; nine, however, is also the square of three.

Herbert's subject is the motion of human life which, like (or together with) that of the sun, is a double one. When he stresses the identity of "words & thoughts" in expressing this "motion," he implicitly points to the proximity of subject-matter and visual representation on the page. Notion and notation go together. (The musical connotations of "notion" should not be neglected, either.) But what exactly is expressed both semantically and iconically? At first it seems that there are two motions clearly to be distinguished: a "straight" one, which is "our dearest friend", indicated by the straightness of the poem's lines to be read in time, one after the other, and a hidden one, which "doth obliquely bend", indicated by the line forming, at an oblique angle to the lines proper, the hidden words, "My Life Is Hid In Him That Is My Treasure". Apart from our daily lives, Herbert seems to say, there is a life-secretly enclosed in or by one who is above or beyond our quotidian existence. This is confirmed by the familiar pun on "sun" in line 2. This line refers to the celestial body whose daily course from dawn to dusk appears to be a straight one from east to west, but which, during the year, follows an oblique or slanted course between the two tropics (or which, during the night, remains unseen to the east); it also refers, however, to the sun who shared human life but who, in his divine nature, is hid in God. (The parallel between "with Christ" in the subtitle and "with the sun" in line 2 confirms this reading.)

Such a reading agrees with Chauncey Wood's view, shared by most commentators, that the diagonal line represents the "hidden life with Christ, which is said to 'obliquely bend'" (Wood 1979: 15; cf. Fish 1972: 203-04, Farides 1974: 100, Cook 1986: 44). But when we look at the poem more closely, doubts arise about such an unequivocal identification. Is the notion which "obliquely bends" (line 4) to be identified with the one that "winds" (line 6) and to be contrasted with the one that "tends to earth" (line 5)? This seems possible, but it is equally possible to see a connection rather than a contrast between lines 4 and 5 since both refer to a life which is inside rather
than outside, as it is “Hid” or enclosed by a body of flesh (“wra... | ICONICTY AND DIVINE LIKENESS

made flesh (“whose happy birth”) and is, as Herbert says in the next poem of the sequence (“Vanité [1]”), “Emboscem[ed] in us” (24). This mystery is literally “centred, and embowell’d in the wonts and bosom” of Herbert’s text (Donne 1953-62: vol. 7, 302). The N-shaped appearance of the poem as a whole (a square with a diagonal line from the top left-hand corner to the bottom right-hand one) also points to the subject of “in-being”, for the letter N, as Nicholas of Cusa has it, is an abbreviation of IN.3

The subject of mystical enclosure is further elaborated by the organic imagery of birth and death, sun and earth. These are again dislocations which bear the seed of their transcendence in themselves. And again this is realized iconically in that the apparent dichotomies between terms are to be found connotatively within single words. Double “notions” cunningly reflect the unified double motion of life. Let us read once more the central lines:

One life is wra-j in flesh, and tends to earth,
The other winds towards Him, whose happy birth
Taught me to live here so, ...

The syntactic order underlines that the first life is a movement from life to death, as “earth” marks the end of the sentence, while the second is a movement towards life, as “birth” marks the end of the line, and “live here so” the end of the relative clause. These movements are both confirmed and reversed by the predicates “is wrapt” and “winds”. “Winds” of course here denotes a circular movement upwards but, in the context of life and death, it also connotes the winding-sheet, the cloth in which Joseph “wrapt the body of Christ” (Matt 27: 59; cf. Mark 15: 46, Luke 23: 55). Accordingly, Christmas (“whose happy birth”) already implies Good Friday (which in turn implies Easter). Conversely, “wrapt” in line 5, which primarily refers to the death-bound body in which man’s soul is dressed, also points to the mystery of the incarnation and the birth of Christ, whose light, as Herbert says in his poem “Christmas”, “Wrapt in nights mantle, stole into a manger” (10). Moreover, folded in the word “wrapt”, so to speak, is the word rap; which according to the OED (1.1.) primarily means “Taken and carried up to or into heaven (either in literal or mystical sense).” Together with another meaning of rap, namely “Carried away in spirit, without bodily removal” (OED), this would make Herbert’s expression sound like a contradiction in terms. But, one might object, doesn’t “(w)rapt in flesh” rather imply a kind of bodily rupture, being “ravished” or “enraptured” (OED 3.) and by a body, or even “raped” (OED 5.)? The answer is yes, of course, but this
again is the very point made: whatever is thought or said or done by man is located “in flesh”. This is also emphasized by Herbert’s changing his biblical text, which in the Authorized Version reads: “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God”. Herbert leaves out “ye are dead” and changes the more distant “ye” into the more personal “ou” (further changed into the even more personal “my” in the diagonal line; cf. Bloch 1985: 36). Herbert here in a way converts the Apostle Paul, in so far as the Christian is not already glorified in death but has to “live here” a life of “daily labour”. Only in and through such a life an eternal harvest may be gained. Herbert brings Colossians 3.3 visibly closer to other statements in St. Paul, for instance Philippians 1: 23–24: “For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you”. He also visualizes Isaiah 41: 4–5 or Luke 3: 4–5 (“make his paths straight”; “he crooked shall be made straight”) with its characteristic climax, “And all the flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Luke 3: 6). “... here on this lowly ground”, Donne’s speaker says in Holy Sonnet VII, “Teach mee how to repent” (Donne 1952: 8). Herbert shares this humanistic emphasis on teaching and right action: Christ’s birth “Taught me to live here so, That still one eye / Should aim and shoot at that which is on high”. The daily labour must finally be quitted but first it must be done in order to repay or clear off (“quix”) pleasure, which in turn has to be completed: that is, the poem itself, the “versing” that the poet elsewhere confesses to “refish” (“The Flower” 39). As in “The Flower” the imagery of natural growth goes together with a reflection of the writer’s work.

William B. Bache (1982: 28) has pointed out that each horizontal line of “Coloss. 3.3” branches out from the italicized diagonal (e.g. “My Life Is Hid In flesh and tends to earth”). Herbert thus secretly inscribes his poem with an icon of organic growth. At the same time, the horizontal verse lines are like furrows in the field that has to be tilled by the poet — an image of great appeal to George Herbert, who time and again alludes to the etymology of his Christian name. The poet as a γυμνόπιλον indeed “tends to earth” in that he attends to it. He does not create but cultivate, tending carefully what language brings forth. Language itself points out this mimetic relationship between the farmer and the poet, who are both oriented towards the sun. As we have seen, verser is the poet as well as the farmer’s occupation. In Latin, he who cultivates land and he who clads notions into words is said to peragere; at the same time, their lines both resemble the course of the sun, which also describes a turning movement.ICONICITY AND DIVINE LIKENESS

As Joseph Scaliger has it in his commentary on Varro’s explanation of solstitium as the point on the sun’s path where it turns and recedes:

Versus siquidem vocabuntur nutritio, cùm ulice ad fœnum pertinent χειρον τε μετ᾽ ἄλλων initiata est unde aequilatres principiis suscipiantur: quod versus, peragere dictum Plin. lib. 18. Ab eo Græci, ut atit Pausanias, flores populant iudiciis; discebat, cùm uno versa peracto in paginis, unde samitum initiatur ad ilium progressiendi, ut in ustrum. Quand nos contra faciamus, nā versa peracto, idem semper initiatus progressiendi sine quo. Sic legiur sē elegantissimē ad varnum dictum ad versus præximum stare cum regisadit (Scaliger 1619: 73)

For indeed farmers used the word versus when the furrow having been drawn down to the end [of the field] was turned again to the point from where the ploughing was first undertaken; this is why it is said by Pliny in Book 18 of Naturalis Historia that one line is to carry on with a verse.13 For the same reason the Greek, as Pausanias says, use the expression ‘to write like the turning of the oxen’; when one verse line is written down on the page; another is made from there to proceed to the next line, as in the ploughed (field). This is done conversely by us, for once a verse is made, we always keep the same starting point from where to proceed. One the way is most elegantly said by Varro to stand at the nearest verse before it returns.

Even if we do not read or write any more in the ancient Greek manner of boustrophedon, we have to return to the beginning before we can begin to “plough” through the next line.

With the coincidence of farming and verse-making once more the shape of the poem comes into view. The effect of the hidden line depends upon the “earth” in which it is embedded. George Puttenham, whose The Arte of English Poesie contains an extensive discussion of figured poetry, regards “the square of quadrangle equilatere” as a sign of the earth. The relationship is not arbitrary or merely symbolic but iconic, as the square and the element of earth share the essential feature of “inconscissible steadiness” (Puttenham 1589: xxi). 1936: 100). The iconic reference of Herbert’s squarely arranged verse-lines is corroborated by the fact that in Varro’s Res rusticae (1.10) versus is a square measure of farmland (Varro 1978: 33). Even the diagonal or “oblique” line iconically points to the farmer’s work, since according to Pliny’s Naturalis historia (18.178), a field which has been ploughed in straight lines must be worked with oblique furrows as well.14 Herbert’s poem may thus be regarded as an image of the field in which the treasure is hid (cf. Matt. 13: 44), which in turn encloses the speaker’s life. At the same time, the diagonal divides the poem
into two equilateral triangles, and this triangle, in Puttenham’s discussion of geometric shapes in poetry, represents the air (100). This again coincides with the verbal imagery of the poem, since the downward movement towards the earth is complemented by an upward movement in the open air towards the sun. The seed has to be lowered into the earth before the shoots (cf. line 8) may appear and follow that which “Is on high”; i.e. the sun or son of line 2, which is literally placed high up in the poem.

Herbert’s connection between the square form of his poem with its openly hidden diagonal and the image of vegetative growth, however, is not only to be seen as part of a symbological tradition but also as drawing on the thesaurus (or “eternal Treasure”) of language and matter itself. The square is the prototypical geometrical form which leads to endless growth in that its diagonal is the side of another square which is double the size of the first one. This generative energy of the square is reflected in the terms power and root: the root is the first power (OED “root” 14.) and the second power is the square (OED “square” 11.a.). In accordance with the Pythagorean theorem, the diagonal of a square is the root of 2: “Like the vegetal root, the root of 2 contains the power of nature which destroys in order to progress (it severs the initial square) and it also contains the power which instantaneously transforms 1 into 2” (Lawlor 1982: 29). In the mystical geometry of Herbert’s poem the diagonal or root of 2 not only multiplies the speaker’s and the readers’ motions; in this truly magic square, as we have seen, the diagonal has the same length as its sides. Accordingly, the one not only grows into two but also, at the same time the two grows into one.

The growth of the one-and-double life may furthermore allude to the vine, which is a traditional emblem of life. The Latin paronomasia vita and vitis is similarly traditional. When Christ says “I am the true vine” (John 15: 1) he also stresses the mutual “in-being” of Christ and the Christian: “Abide in me, and I in you” (15: 4); in Psalm 80: 8 God’s people are the vine. The winding of the vine corresponds to the winding life described in line 6, an analogy which is borne out by the “eye” in line 7, which in a plant is the spot from which shoots develop.13 The eye directed at the sun finds its counterpart in it.14 The visual form of the poem, a straight line around which another line is wound, itself eludes to the vine; this spatial representation, which includes the sun in line 2 and “Christ” and “God” in the title on top of it, may seem blindered by the fact that the winding of the verse lines necessarily implies a downward movement towards the bottom. Not quite so necessarily, however. Puttenham, who has already proved helpful for the geometry of this poem, has examples of two pattern-poems which are shaped like spires or obelisks, one of which represents the Queen who aspiring “After an hier / Crown & empire” (Puttenham 1936: 96). Accordingly, this poem has to be read from the last line upwards while the other, which represents God’s gift of grace coming from above has to be read in the usual way from top to bottom. We cannot read Herbert’s poem upwards15 but in a winding, somewhat irregularly spiralling way we may do so with the hidden text: “My Life Is Hid In Him That Is My Treasure”; but also “My Treasure Is[,] That In Him Is Hid My Life”. This upward movement with its apparent regressions looks like a spiral in perspective. It is a variant of the versus retrogradi quite common in figured poetry (and of course reminiscent of fugal retrogressions), which is not only a fitting emblem of man’s struggling daily life with all its setbacks but also marks the “double motion” of the sun itself. Its daily movement from East to West taken together with the movement along the “Ecliptick line” (“The Church-porch” 137) from one tropic to the other results in an apparent spiral course.16 This correspondence between the vine and the sun coincides with the correspondence between the diagonal line and the subtile, which also can be read, in a ‘spiralling’ way, as a kind of palindrome. With this retrograde motion another iconic image comes into play, for the “double motion” of the sun may also refer to the famous sundial of King Ahaz (2 Kings 20 and Isaiah 38: 8) on which the shadow was both proceeding and receding, and which was often imitated or rebuilt during the Renaissance. It was a sign to Hezekiah that the Lord was with him and made him “to live” (Is 38: 16). The reference is further corroborated by the much discussed fact that in the Vulgate the sun recedes not ten degrees but ten “lines”17 — which is of course the exact length of Herbert’s poem. The sundial makes the circular movement of the sun visible by means of straight lines, and since this movement and its reflection on earth is the subject of “Coloss. 3:3” we are justified in regarding the diagonal line as an icon of the gnomon or diagonally protruding index of a sundial.18

Another reference to the dial (as the sundial was usually called in the Renaissance, see OED ‘sundial’) is also made iconically. We have seen that the iconic technique of enclosure is employed not just in the poem as a whole but also in single words. Embedded in the “diurnal” movement of the sun is an “urn”, pointing to death as the necessary complement to the daytime of life (most fittingly an urn is a container defined by its circular shape). What remains of “diurnal” if one takes out the enclosed “urn”, is “di-all”, another memento mori as well as a reference to the circular plane on which the shadow is marked.
Herbert uses the word “diuiall” nowhere else. Semantically and orthographically it is the exact counterpart of “eternal” in the last line. Both words, moreover, are connected by means of internal rhyme: while in our daily lives we may have hopes to “earn all” (or at least “earn”) for all, we are gradually realizing that we shall “gain” a “treasure” rather than merely earn our deserved wages, or that we have to die in order to “earn all.” The very sounds of the words thus echo the relationship between human effort and divine grace, which coincides with the double motion of the speaker’s life. The linear movement towards death is complemented by or transformed into a winding, spiralling, circular one towards life. Accordingly, while “diuiall” viscerally stresses everyone’s death, “eternal” audibly promises a “run-all,” a final circular movement or conversion.22

In Pottentia’s explanation of poetic shapes the circle is the most perfect form; as the square represents the earth and the triangle the sky, the “roundell or Spheare is appropriate to the heauen”. While the square is the most obvious visible icon of the poem and the triangle derives from it, the circle is more “Hid”. Herbert finds it once more in the smallest parts of language, the letters and their shapes, again confirming that understanding, intelligere, means intex legere (Cassirer 1987: 57, quoting Campanella). In the diagonal line paraphrasing the biblical text he chooses capitalized initials which are all linear. In his subtitle, to which one eye always glances in comparison while the other is gradually discovering the hidden text, Herbert, as we have seen, also changes the original. He replaces “Your” with “Our” and thus not only stresses the common course of speaker and listener but arrives at the visual cipher of three capital letters which are all round.22

3. Iconic poetry in an iconic world

In conclusion, let us return for a moment to our starting point, the fact that Herbert addresses the metaphysical relationship between outer and inner form, or spirit and matter, not just by drawing attention to the relationship between the form and the content of his poems, presenting the one as expressive of the other. Rather, the shapes and sounds of the words themselves in their relative positions to each other may represent the dialectic of center and periphery, truth and appearance. Iconicity is driven by Herbert to its limits. He does not simply give his poems the outward shape of its central image or its subject matter; there are no cross-shaped poems about the cross, for example (a well-established tradition by Herbert’s time, see the examples in Adler and Ernst 1987). Neither does he confine himself to, ‘et we say, an occasional chiasmus when the cross is mentioned. He rather makes the iconic image or iconic diagram part of a verbal texture where meaning is to be discovered in every aspect of the language used.

This iconic method is itself appropriate to the representation of a physical and spiritual world, which, in Sir Thomas Browne’s words, is full of “common Hieroglyphicks”, i.e. visible and audible signs indicating their hidden meaning by their outward form. This implies the idea of an allegorical Book of Nature or mundus symbolicus and, more specifically, the concept of a world in which the significance of things is at one with their shape and structure. ‘Likeness’ in the sense of analogous relationship or similarity and in the sense of image or portrait thus appears as a key concept both with respect to human existence in relation to the Creator and the religious poet’s work in relation to the Word. As the example of “Coloss. 3.3” indicates, it is because of the similarity of man and Christ that “words & thoughts” may “both” express the same “motion”, that is to say, outward and inward language may coincide and, accordingly, the linguistic form of the poem may be expressive of its idea. The poem also shows, however, that the relationship between ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ is mutual or dialectical rather than simply twofold: while the semantic meaning of a word is found ‘inside’ the shape and sound of its letters, the opposite is equally true since elementary formal (or geometrical) relationships may underlie the semantic content.

Accordingly, the form of a poem’s ordered language not only ressemblés or is subservient to the subject matter its words denote. It may also represent or embody in a more direct manner the res of which the mental concept signified by the word is but an imperfect sign. This can be seen, for example, in “Trinitie Sunday”, where the complex “thing” to which the abstraction denoted by the word “trinity” refers is more immediately realized by the all-pervasive interplay of threefold structures on the levels of syntax, rhyme, line and stanza numbers etc. In “Coloss. 3.3” the “double motion” in line 2 is more fully expressed by the spatial and syntactic form to which these words draw attention than by their literal meaning. This kind of paradoxical relationship is not unlike the one existing between literal and metaphorical significlation, in which the apparently secondary or removed expression may be more directly expressive of the matter in question than the immediate or literal one (cf. Gombrich 1985: 167). Thus the study of iconic language in Herbert has to be pursued with a view to the history of poetic language in general, to which in turn it also contributes.

Inner form is not realized by means of a simply denotative outer correlative
but by means of an outer form which makes visible (and audible) the complexi-
ties (or the richness) of the concept or subject-matter of the poem. For ex-
ample, a chiasmus may serve to do so by suggesting a cross where it is not
denoted by the words, as in the famous ending of “Affliction” (I): “Let me not
love thee, if I love thee not.” Herbert and other Metaphysical Poets (in partic-
ular Henry Vaughan) seldom use established, basically non-iconic poetic forms
such as the sonnet, nor do they choose blatantly iconic forms which delimit
the reader’s attention. Herbert’s poetic method is, as it were, “meta-iconic” in that
the expressivity of form, hidden upon the surface of each poem in a somewhat
different manner, itself indicates a fundamental truth about the created world.
With the exception of a few sonnets, Herbert never uses the same poetic form
twice. Each subject, each moment, each place requires its very own order of
language (the classical stylistic ideal of the ognum [Lanzenberg 1973: § 1055 ff.],
but now made to include all formal aspects of language). In this respect,
Herbert’s poems are icons of the religious poet’s most fundamental concern, the
relationship between God and man. The human being, body and soul, who is
created in the likeness of God, paradoxically shows this likeness by being like
no body else. Perhaps surprisingly, this concept has points of contact with what
is discussed in linguistic studies of iconicity under the heading of isomorphism
(cf. Haiman 1980, Givón 1995). This particular kind of iconic assumption
“serves as the unifying basis for the commonly accepted axiom that no true
synonyms exist” (Haiman 1980: 516). Homonymity, which is often adduced as
an exception to the isomorphic principle, in Herbert’s poetry depends upon that
very principle to be effective. Only if there is a distinctive verbal form for each
individual content, inner resemblances may become apparent by means of
phonetic or graphic similarity. By gradually discovering hidden resemblances, as
well as tensions, between what is said and how it is realized in language the poet
makes his readers aware of the relationship between inner and outer form, as
well as between the speaker and his Lord. To Herbert, this relationship is a
precarious and complex or even paradoxical one, but in the last resort it is to be
taken for granted.

Notes
1. For the context see Leibniz (1966), esp. 15–18 and 56–64 (“Der Kunstcharakter des Buches
   der Natur”). As an example, cf. just one characteristic quotation from Sir Thomas Browne
   (1604: 58), to whom “similitudo” is the principle that makes individual existence possible: “And
   this is Man like God, for in the same things that we resemble him, we are utterly different
   from him. There was never any thing so like another, as in all points to converse, there will
   ever some reserved difference slip in, to prevent the identity, without which two several things
   would not be alike, but the same, which is impossible” (Relatio Medici II).)
   there were 351 translations of the Ambrosian Plutarch by the middle of the seventeenth century,
   c.s. “Anthologie”).
3. This is confirmed by the etymological reference to John 1: 14 (“And the Word was made flesh,
   and dwelt among us”), where the Greek verb enoplos originally means “to pitch a tent”, as was
   pointed out by Rezni (1966).
4. See Browne (1964: 10): “That allegorical description of Hermes [Iphialas caput coronam ubique,
   configuro sensu nullius] plethron mee beyond all the Morphysical definitions of Divines”
   (Relatio Medici II). 10.
5. Notus could also mean a “character, relation, form, etc., in which anything is conceived,
   mentioned, or exists” (OED 1.1.c., with a quotation from a 1653 sermon by Donne as the first
   example). Taylor (1974: 61–62) sees a contrast between “words & things” which corresponds
   to the difference between the words of the poem as a whole and the “ten-word cipher hidden
   among them”.
6. Browne (1984: 466): “Thus my selfe discerne the necessity of its obliquity, and how inconve-
nient its motion had been upon a circle parallil to the Aquator, or upon the Aquator it self”
   (Paradoxologia Epidemica VI). 7.
7. See, for example, Johnson (1989) VI.xxvii: 7: “Verus aman vulgo vocati quis hic seiubant
   antigi simar aestas termas.”
8. In his Triologia de fontibus, Nicholas of Cusa (1989: 334) regards the N graphically as
generated by m η which is being led back to itself (“Ne petro ennym ex singulorum η in σc
dicto generatur”), while acoustically, BN and N are identical (“Unde si i additar ad N non plus vocis habitat”).
9. Cf. OED “tenet” v. 3.c., “To resist, attention upon, attend to, esp. foster, cultivate (a plant, etc.)”
10. The allusion is to Namurad Adonua 18.177: “...in arando versus perpetuique in acta spiritus.” This is translated by H. Rackham as: “...when ploughing finish the row and do not
   fall in the middle while taking breath” (Pilp 1963: 303). 11. The proverbial uselessness of earth, together with the fact that “earth” is word number 42 of 84
   words in the poem (not counting the amperides) suggests the hidden pronouncement “Satus-cuo
   and fortuna” especially when seen against the background of a statement like Elysio’s in The
Governs in this: “Fortitude...is a Mediator or mediator between two extremes” (quoted from OED “mediator”). For a similar allusion to fortitude in “Lent” see Leibling 1996: 230. On the significance of the strophe 42 of Heber see Christian Lang-Graumann’s discussion of “The Glimpse” (1995: 212-14).

12. Play 180: “She (these aren’t recus salver, not et oblonga rubra debem)"

13. Cf. Vogel’s “locus imponentis,” Georgica II.I.3 and OED “eye” s.v. [p.163].: “The auxiliary baud” and the quotation: “1615 Lawrence Orch. & Gard. (a.s. (1668): 20 Let your gnaw have three or four eyes for readiness to put forth.”

14. Cf. Spencer’s Faerie Queene 1.3.4 (“the eye of heaven”) and the tops of the non-likeness of the eye going back at least to Plato’s Republic (509c).

15. Word (1979: 264f.) refers to Fetterley’s two-column poem. He does not locate the reversal of movements in the printed space of the poem but points out that “the verse leads us to a larger perspective in which we see that our earthly life is in fact upside down, and to ascend truly we must descend apparently” (Word 20–21). This is taken up by McMahon, who identifies the daily movement of the sun from east to west with the horizontal-versus-vertical lines and the diagonal line with the elliptic (McMahon 1992: 65). As a consequence, he imagines a post facing south. Following Arion’s argument that “the southern hemisphere is really in the top of our globe” this, according to McMahon, would mean that “though the eye descends the page as it reads, the poem deposits our spiritual vision aground” (86). McMahon contradicts himself. If the poem is regarded as an imaginary view or globe on which the poet is on the left and the poet at the top, the order will reverse reversed or away from the south.

16. See Facker (1963: 343). Wood (1979: 26) points out that the movement of the eyes in reading the poem intimates “both the poet’s daily activities and its annual, for the resolution of the two motions is, as Dante expressed it in the Commedia, a spiral like the turning screw of a great press”. Such an implied reference to the one (or press) perfectly agrees with the iconic representation of the poet. McMahon (1992: 62) speaks of “the spiral movement which ‘quotes’ Chaucer as opposed to the life whose motion is ‘straight’ and ‘tends to earth’”. As has been shown, the two motions are in fact intertwined.


18. See also the Latin poem “In Solusam”, in which Harvey, putting on an 150 solare, compares man to a soaring living sun and soul. On this poet, as well as on the implicit image of the natalium in “verse,” see Leibling 1996: 234–29.

19. Cf. OED “suns” s.v.2

20. Cf. Paradise Lost 5.496-97: “...and from these corporeal instruments perhaps / Your bodies may at last term all to spirit.”...

21. I agree with Sidney Gottlieb (1981: 177) that the “one eye” of Herbert’s poem may be inspired by emblematic representations of single eyes, which would further underscore the iconic dimension of “Cyclus 3.3.” The example Gottlieb singles out, however, Thomas Innis’s The Statesman Solarus (1626), also shows a characteristic difference. To Inness, “That eye must shut, that mouth to survey / Heaven, or see of, or wordily see” (Emblem no. 14, quoted from Gottlieb 177), while Herbert would certainly have agreed with this, he says nothing about closing our eyes to the world. "We live here but should it all be the same” ("We live here but should it all be the same") keep our eye on heaven. Even though they were published only after Herbert’s death, the two emblems from Horens Engelbrecht’s Late Engelbercht in Olde Orag (1592: 427, plates II and III) are also quite suggestive. One of them, illuminating “Two shall love the neighbors to Rylott” (Matt 22: 40), shows two face-looking eyes looking in different directions; the other shows a single eye looking up at the stars by means of a telescope forming a diagonal line from the lower right to the upper left. What makes this visual representation particularly interesting for Herbert’s poem with its emphasis on encumbrance and hiddenness is in its motif from the Song of Songs 4: 1: “Ahbbe on quick intentness late”. At least in the edition I consulted (Anstey 1852), the parallel is further enhanced by a subscription taken from Colossians 1: “pure view et quater: pura spectat et quad. quater: pura spectat et quad. quater: quater spectat et quad. quater: quater spectat et quad. spectat et quad. spectat et quad.” (Emblem XL. p 397), this is aligned from the verses immediately preceding Col. 3,3, in the Authorized Version: “set these things which we abowe...set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”

22. Cf. Gadney Toy (1973: fol. Vb) on the I and O as the letters from which all other letters are derived: “L & O cd les deux lettres, desquelles toutes les lettres Actiques out faites & formées.” Cf. fol. XCIX and XCVI.


25. As, for example, in the sound-symbolism of “quick-witting minds” (“Vanity [I]”)


27. Cf. the dialogue in heaven in Book III of Paradox Lost, where the chiasma is a characteristic figure in both the Latin and the Son’s speech, e.g.: the Son’s words in III.227-28 referring to the means of satisfying man: “...men shall find peace / And shall Grace not find means, /...”, here δεκάτα is blended with γενεσία. At the center “Coloss. 3.3”. McMahon (1992: 61) has drawn attention to the chiastic ordering of the related syntactic groups “My life/4 tis Rylot” and “That it be/My treasure” around the central “In Him”.


References


Gentilhe, Sidney. 1981. "Herbert’s ‘Coloss. 3.3’ and Thomas Jenner’s ‘The Souls Solace’". English Language Notes 18: 175–79.


