

## **Conventionality and Novelty of Time Metaphor in English Poetry**

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For cognitive linguist George Lakoff and his colleagues, most poetic metaphors are based on conventional metaphors. But this proposition has yet to be tested by a systematic survey of poetic texts. The present article aims to explore whether data from English poetry are consistent with the idea that most poetic metaphors for time are grounded in conventional ones. From the data for this study, ten schematic elements of time metaphors are extrapolated. The conventionality and novelty of these ten metaphorical elements are then discussed in their respective poetic contexts. The results show that the distinction between poetic and conventional metaphors for time is frequently blurred in English poetry and that, although most of the poems for the present study contain a time metaphor that has a feature of a conventional metaphor, that feature usually is not predominant enough to serve as the fundamental principle of the poetic metaphorization.

Key words: poetic metaphors, conventional metaphors, time metaphors, English poetry

### **1. Introduction**

Lakoff and Turner (1989) hold that metaphors in poetry are not divergent from those in everyday language; rather, most poetic metaphors are based on commonplace metaphors. They have listed a number of basic metaphors for time, such as TIME MOVES and TIME IS A DESTROYER, that recur not only in everyday language but also throughout the body of Western poetry. Metaphors of this type are known as conventional metaphors. "At the conceptual level, a metaphor is conventional to the extent that it is automatic, effortless, and generally established as a mode of thought among members of a linguistic community" (Lakoff and Turner 1989:55).

Poets use the mechanisms of everyday thought, but go beyond the ordinary and create new ways of thought (Lakoff and Turner 1989:67 and Kovecses 2002: chapter 4). Four common creative mechanisms are based on conventional metaphors, namely, extending, elaborating, questioning, and composing (*ibid.*). A conventional metaphor can be extended in a novel way. The novel extension of metaphor involves mapping of elements otherwise not mapped. In other words, additional slots are mapped, as in Robert Frost's poem 'The Road Not Taken', which extends the conventional metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY to create new slots: The poet or the speaker of the poem could not travel two roads at the same time and took the one that was grassy and wanted wear.

The elaborating of metaphorical domains is another mode of poetic thought. The source domain of a metaphor is a schema. When a metaphor is elaborated, some

existing slots of its schema are filled with uncommon or exceptional elements, with the existing schema or source domain elaborated on in an unusual way. For example, in Adrienne Rich's poem 'The Phenomenology of Anger', the conventional metaphor in question is ANGER IS HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER, and the hot fluid gets elaborated as acetylene and the passive event of explosion is replaced by directing the dangerous substance of acetylene at the target of anger (Kovecses 2002:47-48).

In the case of questioning, the everyday metaphorical understanding of a common metaphorical concept is called into question. The poet may point out the inadequacy of the conventional metaphor by commenting on the limitations of the conventional metaphor and then offer an alternative, as in Tomas Tranströmer's prose poem 'Answers to Letters' (See Section 4.10 of the present paper).

Finally, composing is a very common way to use conventional metaphors in poetry to go beyond the mundane. When this happens, two or more conventional metaphors are joined together in ways that they ordinarily would not be, as in William Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 19' (See Section 4.7 of the present paper).

The foregoing discussion suggests that elements of conventional metaphors can become important ingredients in poetic metaphors. As noted earlier, recent work on poetic language by cognitive linguists has found that most metaphorical language in poetry is based on conventional metaphors (Kovecses 2002:43). Original, creative literary metaphors of the structural kind seem to be less frequent in literature than conventional ones (*ibid.*). However, this claim has not been supported by evidence from a systematic survey of poetic texts. The present paper is intended to make up for this insufficiency by examining systematically whether most metaphors in English poetry are based on conventional ones.

## **2. Conventional time metaphor**

Systematic conceptual metaphors, which map elements and inferential structure from a source domain onto a target domain, are the cornerstone of human thought. They enable us to conceptualize and understand abstract concepts in terms of more concrete concepts (Gibbs 1994, Johnson 1987, Lakoff 1987, 1993, 2001, Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999, 2003, Lakoff and Nunez 2000, and Sweetser 1990). Time metaphors are a remarkable group of such systematic conceptual metaphors, on which much literature has been published. Many researchers have noted systematic correspondences between space (the source domain) and time (the target domain) in everyday language (e.g. Bennett 1975, Clark 1973, Lehrer 1990, Shie 2004: chapter 7, and Traugott 1978). This is the major reason why the present paper focuses on time metaphors in exploring metaphorical novelty and conventionality.

Traditionally, an interesting contrast has been made between moving-time and moving-ego metaphors (Clark 1973, Evans 2003, Gentner 2001, Lakoff 1993, Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Nunez, Motz, and Teuscher 2006, and Traugott 1978). In the moving-time metaphor, time moves from front (future) to back (past) with respect to a stationary time experiencer, as in *Winter is approaching*. and *That's all behind us now*. In the moving-ego metaphor, times are fixed locations and the time experiencer moves forward from the past into the future, as in *She's only just approaching middle age*. and *He passed the time happily*. In both cases, the time experiencer is facing the future, with his location mapped onto the present time. In Section 4 we will see how often these two conventional metaphors for time, on which much research in everyday language has focused, occur in English poetry. We will also identify and discuss other metaphors for time in English poetry that may be grounded in everyday thought.

### **3. Research questions and data**

Through a systematic survey of English poetic texts, the present article seeks to answer the following two questions. Is there a clear line between creative (or novel) metaphors and conventional ones? If there is, are poetic metaphors for time grounded in conventional ones?

The textual data for this study are drawn from *Poetry for students* (21 volumes, see Appendix 1), published by The Gale Group from 1998 to 2005. The 21 volumes contain 371 English classic and contemporary poems, providing readers with a guide to understanding and studying poems. The poems for each volume were selected by surveying many sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula. The editors for the series also solicited input from an advisory board and educators from various disciplines. Each entry in the collection includes a general introduction to the poem, the actual text of the poem, a summary of the poem, and a brief analysis of important themes in the poem. The present author reviewed all 371 poems (including all the analyses of the themes) and looked for the ones that have been unmistakably viewed as dealing with the theme of time, as indicated by the editors of the collection. As a result, it was found that 24 of the 371 poems deal with the theme of time (see Appendix 2). The poetic metaphors for time in these 24 poems were then compared with conventional metaphors for time to see how many of the 24 poems contain a poetic metaphor that has a feature of or is grounded in a conventional metaphor. The results of the survey will be presented and discussed in the following section.

#### 4. Time metaphor in English poetry

From the data for this study, the following ten schematic elements of time metaphors have been extrapolated: moving ego, moving time, ego racing against time, time as a straight line, time as a river, time as a circle, time as a destroyer, time as a person, time as a vertical rope, and time as a labyrinth. They are identified from all the source domains of time metaphors in the 24 poems for this study. The conventionality and novelty of these ten metaphorical elements in time metaphors will be explored in the remainder of this section.

It should be emphasized at this point that the headings of the subsections below refer not to a whole conventional metaphor, but to an element or feature extrapolated from the schema of a poetic time metaphor. Therefore, it is possible that one poetic metaphor of time may contain more than one of these extrapolated elements or features, especially when the poetic metaphor results from the composing of, among others, different elements of different time metaphors (See Sections 4.7 and 4.8 of the present paper).

##### 4.1 Moving ego

As noted earlier, the moving ego metaphor is a conventional metaphor for time. In its conceptual domain, the ego or time experiencer moves toward the future, with times as fixed locations on the temporal landscape. Corresponding to the present time, the ego's location functions as the temporal reference point, relative to which other times or temporal points are determined. Locations in front of the ego are mapped onto temporal points in the future and those behind the ego onto temporal points in the past. Five of the 24 poems for the present study contain a metaphor that demonstrates an attribute of the moving ego concept.<sup>1</sup> The attribute of the conventional metaphor is inconspicuous, granted that it is perceptible in the poetic metaphor, as in the following excerpt from Emily Dickinson's well-known poem 'Because I Could Not Stop for Death':

Because I could not stop for Death—  
 He kindly stopped for me—  
 The Carriage held but just Ourselves—  
 And Immortality  
 ...  
 We passed the School where Children strove

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<sup>1</sup> The titles of these five poems are given in items 3, 5, 17, 22, and 24 in Appendix 2.

At Recess—in the Ring—  
 We passed the Fields of Grazing Grain—  
 We passed the Setting Sun—  
 ...

In this poem, Death is personified as a suave gentleman. He takes the poem's speaker on a carriage ride around her hometown. The final journey through time while the poem's speaker is dying (in the target domain) is depicted as a late-afternoon ride through space (in the source domain). The sights perceived on the spatial journey—the school, the children, the rings, the fields of grazing grain, and the setting sun—suggest metaphorically that on the seemingly leisurely journey the speaker is still distracted by the fading mortal world. The tour could be based upon the old superstition about one's entire life flashing before one's eyes at the instant of dying (Napierkowski and Ruby 1998:30). Granted that the ego (the poem's speaker) is moving, the motion is not in accord with that of the conventional moving-ego metaphor. In the source domain of the conventional moving ego metaphor, the ego moves toward the future. In other words, the ego's motion is unidirectional. However, the ego in the poem moves back to the past before moving on toward the future (as indicated in the above direct quotation and the last two lines of the poem: *I first surmised the Horses' Heads / Were toward Eternity—*). Furthermore, in the conventional metaphor, the ego moves on foot alone, while the ego in the poem moves by taking a carriage ride, accompanied by the personified Death and Immortality. It is also noteworthy that, unlike the conventional moving-ego metaphor, the ego's location on the poetic temporal landscape cannot be taken to be the temporal reference point. The ego on the imaginary journey has transcended the limits of the conventional time frame. The temporal reference point in such a poetic schema is similar to that of time travel in science fiction, in which the time traveller moves backward and forward to different points in time that cannot be understood relative to the traveller's location. Therefore, this poem contains appreciable creative elements granted that it is consistent with one aspect of the conventional metaphor: the ego is moving. This might as well be viewed as a case of novel metaphor resulting from elaboration of a conventional metaphor. If this is true, however, the schema has been elaborated so intricately that the schematic structure of the poetic scenario and that of the conventional one are widely divergent, so much so that the latter can no longer be said to be the fundamental principle of the former. Thus it is more adequate to say that the two scenarios have one aspect in common than that the poetic scenario is based on the conventional one.

## 4.2 Moving time

It has been stated above that, in the moving-time metaphor, time moves from front (future) to back (past) with respect to a stationary time experiencer. Again, the time experiencer's location stands for the present time. Locations in front of the ego are mapped onto temporal points in the future and those behind the ego onto temporal points in the past. Far more common in English poetry is the moving time concept. Fifteen of the 24 poems for the present study reflect a moving time feature,<sup>2</sup> but that feature is not prominent enough to serve as the groundwork for the poetic metaphor either, as in the following excerpt from the classic *carpe diem* poem 'To His Coy Mistress', by Andrew Marvell:

Had we but world enough, and time,  
 This coyness, lady, were no crime.  
 We would sit down, and think which way  
 To walk, and pass our long love's day.  
 ...  
 But at my back I always hear  
 Time's winged chariot hurrying near:  
 And yonder all before us lie  
 Deserts of vast eternity.  
 ...

Through this classic *carpe diem* poem, the poet encourages his young mistress to enjoy youth now and seize the day since life is short and time passes quickly. In the poem, time (in the target domain) is personified as a driver in a winged, swiftly moving chariot chasing the poem's speaker (in the source domain), which insinuates the speaker and his young mistress' fleeting days in their transient lives. But time, or the chariot driver, hurries near, stops, lies down, and then undergoes a metamorphosis into deserts of vast eternity before the speaker. The hot and barren deserts connote "a denial of the life-giving processes of love and sexual activity" (Ruby 1999b:278). This metaphorical scenario does not accord with the basic schematic structure of the conventional moving time metaphor either. In the conventional schema, time moves from future to past with respect to a stationary time experiencer. And yet in the poetic schema, time moves from past (when the chariot driver is hurrying near) to future (when the vast eternity lies before the time experiencer). Simply stated, it moves in

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<sup>2</sup> The titles of these fifteen poems are given in items 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 23 in Appendix 2.

the reverse direction. Beyond that, in the conventional schema time never stops moving, and nothing can stop its movement. But in the novel metaphor in the poem, time is not always moving. It can move and stop of its own volition. And the stationary experiencer may not be stationary. As a matter of fact, the time as a chariot driver metaphor is a composite of important elements of the following three metaphors: the moving time metaphor (the chariot driver moves), the moving ego metaphor (the poem's speaker moves), and a specific case of personification (time is a chariot driver). However, not all aspects of the three metaphors are conventional. As a matter of fact, to metaphorize time as a winged chariot driver is original. The novel concept that time moves and stops of its own volition arises primarily from the creative personification of time as a chariot driver rather than from the conceptual integration of conventional metaphors. This suggests that the conventional metaphorical elements of the poetic metaphor in question do not necessarily constitute the basis of the creative metaphorization.

### 4.3 Ego racing against time

Metaphor scholars, when researching time metaphors, usually distinguish between moving time and moving ego. In other words, in the schema either time moves or the observer of time moves. And yet few have noticed that both time and the experiencer of time can move in the schema of a time metaphor, as shown in the previous section. In addition, the ego and time can run a race with each other, as illustrated by the idiom *race against time* in the sentence *We are racing against time to complete this essential task*. Three of the 24 poems for the present study represent a moving ego racing against time.<sup>3</sup> Consider the following excerpt from H. W. Longfellow's 'Paul Revere's Ride':

...  
It was twelve by the village clock,  
When he crossed the bridge into Medford town.  
...  
It was one by the village clock,  
When he galloped into Lexington.  
He saw the gilded weathercock  
Swim in the moonlight as he passed,  
...  
It was two by the village clock,

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<sup>3</sup> The titles of these three poems are given in items 4, 12, and 14 in Appendix 2.

When he came to the bridge in Concord town.  
 He heard the bleating of the flock,  
 And the twitter of birds among the trees,  
 ...

The poem depicts Revere's ride from Boston to Lexington to warn American patriots of the British army. The passage of time is one of the main themes of the poem. As Napierkowski and Ruby (1998:177-178) put it, "with its fast pace, its highly compressed action (all of the events of the poem take place in one night), and its constant reference to the clock, the poem reminds us that time is indeed passing quickly." "Revere almost flies through the town, moving so quickly that he catches only glimpses of the scenery, such as a single weather-vane" (ibid.:183). Obviously, the above excerpt of the poem indicates that time is fleeting while Revere is making his isolated midnight ride to Lexington at breakneck speed.

The present author has found that in the poem there is an element of the conventional metaphor of ego racing against time. The perception of passing landscapes and the repeated reference to the clock are in fact new slots in the schema of the conventional metaphor. Thus it can be said that the ego racing against time metaphor in the poem is an extension of the conventional metaphor. The quick motion of time is marked with repeated reference to the clock in the poem, and the pace of Revere's ride is indicated by the description of the passing landscapes. Even so, Revere's movement is bodily movement from one physical place to another, while the movement of the ego in the conventional schema of ego racing against time is not (as evoked by the idiom *race against time* in the sentence *We are racing against time to complete this essential task.*). In other words, in the poetic schema the ego moves physically, but in the conventional schema the ego moves metaphorically. Here the conventional schema should not be viewed as the basis of mappings for the poetic one. Rather, the opposite of the metaphorical conceptualization has occurred. That is, the concrete concept (the bodily movement) has been conceptualized in terms of the more abstract concept (the metaphorized temporal movement). Such a poetic metaphor, where the temporal movement is mapped onto the spatial movement, can be thought of as a case of what might be called "reverse metaphorization".<sup>4</sup>

#### 4.4 Time as a straight line

Conventional metaphors for time are not confined to moving-time or moving-ego

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<sup>4</sup> The most common types of reverse metaphorization in English poetry are personification and depersonification. The latter demonstrates the reverse metaphorical projection from the nonhuman onto the human. See Shie (2004: chapter 4).

schemas. People often represent time as a straight line as well (as in Comrie 1985:2-3, Klein 1994:61, and Smith 2003:94ff.). Two of the 24 poems for the present study have an attribute of the time as a straight line metaphor,<sup>5</sup> as in the following excerpt from the melancholy poem ‘Tears, Idle Tears’, by Alfred, Lord Tennyson:

...  
Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,  
That brings our friends up from the underworld,  
Sad as the last which reddens over one  
That sinks with all we love below the verge;  
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.  
...

As the phrase *the days that are no more* suggests, early memories of happiness are the beginning and sadness is the end of the linear representation of the author’s state of mind. This is the suggested metaphorical meaning of the above excerpt. In accordance with this poem, all sorrow is owed to the hard fact that beautiful days and wild first love come to an end sooner or later. The images of sunrise and sunset, evoked by *the first beam* and *the last*, indicate that life follows a natural progression from beginning to end. The idea of death shows that, unlike recurring days or seasons, life is not a never-ending cycle, but a straight line with a beginning and an end. Viewed from this angle, time is also a straight line as perceived by people who think of life as having an end where nothing good is renewable, as evinced in the poem. What is creative and paradoxical about the metaphorical schema is that sunrise and sunset—which are usually thought of as repeated, circular phenomena—have filled the slots in the conventional schema of a straight line where only single and nonrecurring events can be inserted. Thus sunrise and sunset are uncommon or exceptional elements in the poetic schema. It is also noticeable that the images or elements of sunrise and sunset are not given directly in the poem. Rather, they have to be inferred from the text of the poem, in particular, from *the first beam glittering on a sail* and *the last which reddens over one / That sinks with all we love below the verge*. Such poetic implications make the poetic schema far more complicated than the conventional one, where concepts and their connections are expressly located.

#### 4.5 Time as a circle

In contrast with the conceptualization of time as a straight line, time can be

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<sup>5</sup> The titles of these two poems are given in items 10 and 19 in Appendix 2.

viewed as a recurring period in which certain phenomena repeat themselves in the same order as if they were passing through or moving in a cycle. For example, spring, summer, autumn, and winter repeat themselves around the circle of a year. This is the conceptual basis of the conventional metaphor of time as a circle. Five of the 24 poems for the present study conceptualize time as having features of a circle,<sup>6</sup> as in the following excerpt from ‘Hope Is a Tattered Flag’, by Carl Sandburg:

...  
The evening star inviolable over the coal mines,  
The shimmer of northern lights across a bitter winter night,  
The blue hills beyond the smoke of the steel works,  
The birds who go on singing to their mates in peace, war, peace,  
...

Natural and social images are juxtaposed in the poem, such as *the evening star* and *the coal mines*. The images of *blue hills* and *the smoke of the steel works* imply the circle in which society moves through good and bad. The industrial society causes damage to nature and its ecological balance. In the history of human civilization, Sandburg points out, “the good sometimes fades, but tokens of its subterranean existence remain evident, albeit faintly, as in the diminutive crocus blooming at the car lot or the humble lucky charm” (Smith and Thomason 2001:122). This means that “difficult times are merely one phase of a historical cycle that will one day restore peace and prosperity to the world” (ibid.:123). The suggested metaphorical meaning is that blessings and adversities are recurring parts of a circular movement of time. Elements that depart from the conventional time-as-a-circle metaphor are the manifold (twenty-four to be exact) images that are used to define hope in the poem (e.g. hope is a tattered flag, hope is the evening star inviolable over the coal mines, hope is the shimmer of northern lights across a bitter winter night, and so on). Each of these images constitutes a mini-schema. Thus time (in the target domain) is no longer conceptualized as a single circle, but as a multiplicity of circles (in the source domain) that go toward what is hoped for.

#### **4.6 Time as a river**

Time is frequently associated with a river, whose course is neither a straight line nor a circle. We often speak of the flow of time. The natural stream of flowing water entails that time moves all the time. And both time and flowing water are irrevocable

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<sup>6</sup> The titles of these five poems are given in items 3, 6, 18, 19, and 21 in Appendix 2.

when they are past. Elements of the conventional metaphor TIME IS A RIVER can also be found in English poetry. Three of the 24 poems for the present study contain such elements,<sup>7</sup> as in the following excerpt from the patriotic poem ‘Concord Hymn’, by Ralph Waldo Emerson:

...  
The foe long since in silence slept;  
Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;  
And Time the ruined bridge has swept  
Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.  
...

This poem pays tribute to the contributions of citizens at the Battle of Lexington and Concord, the first battle of the American Revolution. The bridge mentioned in the poem, just like the citizens who fought there, has been washed down the river of time. Quite some time had passed since the battle, and Emerson suggested that people had forgotten the struggle. *The dark stream which seaward creeps* is an image that suggests the phenomenon of forgetting (Ruby 1999a:37). It can also be noted that, in the poetic schema, time and the bridge are both moving, while the ego or the experiencer of time is not. The experiencer of time is stationary, watching time go by, as if he were standing on the shore and watching water flow downstream. Thus there is an element of the conventional moving time metaphor (i.e. time is moving while the ego is stationary) in the poetic scenario (i.e. the ego is watching water flow downstream). But unlike the conventional moving-time schema, the ego in the poetic schema is not facing the future since, watching the dark stream flowing from the future to the past, he focuses his thoughts on the ruined bridge downstream. A related observation here is that in the poetic metaphor the ruined bridge is driven by the force of the stream, which is too powerful to occur in the conventional time-as-a-river metaphor. As the word *creeps* in the poem suggests, the dark stream flows slowly rather than rapidly and violently toward the sea (in the source domain, where the flow of water corresponds to the passing of time in the target domain). In a conventional schema, slow flowing water cannot sweep such a heavy and solid object as a ruined bridge. The latent power of time is thus highlighted via the creative image of the ruined bridge being swept down the dark stream, metaphorizing the latent yet immensely powerful effects of the passage of time that obliterate the Battle of Lexington and Concord from people’s memory.

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<sup>7</sup> The titles of these three poems are given in items 8, 9, and 18 in Appendix 2.

#### 4.7 Time as a destroyer

All things—including the beautiful, the powerful, the kingly, and the long-lived—fall victim to the ravages of time. Nothing can stop the march of time across our skin. All organisms degenerate in their physical qualities as time goes by. Even hard rocks disintegrate sooner or later. Such awareness of the destructiveness of time leads to the mapping between time and a nonhuman animate being that performs or causes the action of destroying. Five of the 24 poems for the present study characterize time as a devourer, an animal or a ravager that causes degeneration of all things under the sun.<sup>8</sup> For example, in ‘Sonnet 19’, William Shakespeare writes:

Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion’s paws,  
 And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;  
 Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger’s jaws,  
 And burn the long-lived phoenix in her blood;  
 Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleets,  
 And do whate’er thou wilt, swift-footed Time,  
 To the wide world and all her fading sweets;  
 ...  
 My love shall in my verse ever live young.

Time devours everything. This major metaphorical element implies that nothing can get away from the ravages that time inflicts. But Shakespeare defies the destructive power of time by asserting that his friend’s youth and beauty will remain intact through his verse after he bids time blunt the lion’s claws, pull out the tiger’s sharp teeth, burn the phoenix alive, and the like. Addressing time as a devouring monster, Shakespeare seems to have been inspired by the ancient Roman poet Ovid, on the ground that the metaphorical expression “Time the devourer destroys all things” occurs in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. This means that in Shakespeare’s time, the metaphor of time as a devourer was not a novel one. In addition, in the sonnet, time is conceived as “swift-footed,” highlighting not only the quickness of time passing but also the role of time as having life. This is a case of the composing of several conventional metaphors. That is, elements in the source domains of the following four metaphors are joined together in ways that they ordinarily would not be: TIME IS A DESTROYER, TIME IS A DEVOURER, TIME MOVES, and TIME IS A LIVING THING, bringing forth much more specific and intricate mappings onto the poetic

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<sup>8</sup> The titles of these six poems are given in items 2, 9, 12, 16 (in which time is conceptualized as both a devourer and ravager), and 23 in Appendix 2.

target domain than the conventional time-as-a-destroyer metaphor. The combination of these mappings results in the complex schematic scene in which fast-running time wreaks ravages of nature by eating up everything in its path. Each of the four conventional metaphors provides the complex scene with a constituent element, but none of them can be said to form the basis of the poetic metaphor. In the source domain of the poetic metaphor is a swift-footed monster devouring everything in its path, which is put into correspondence with the swiftly passing time destroying everything in the world in the target domain.

#### 4.8 Time as a person

In European mythology, time is often personified as an elderly bearded man, known as Father Time, dressed in a robe, carrying a timekeeping device, such as an hourglass. This is the prototypical personification of time. And yet there are quite a few other variants of personified time in English poetry. In six of the 24 poems for the present study, time is portrayed as a specific person, including a foster-parent of a work of art ('Ode on a Grecian Urn', by John Keats), a watcher of lover ('As I Walked Out One Evening', by W. H. Auden), a sluttish character (Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 55'), a driver in a chariot ('To His Coy Mistress', by Andrew Marvell), and Father Time (Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 116'). In the following excerpt from John Milton's 'On His Having Arrived at the Age of 23', time is represented as the subtle thief of time:

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,  
 Stol'n on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!  
 My hasting days fly on with full career,  
 But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.  
 ...

This poem expresses anxiety over the loss of time and the inevitability of aging. The poet feels anguish over the thought that his adulthood has not produced the greatness he seeks. Again, we can perceive an explicit feature of the conventional moving-time metaphor: *My hasting days fly on with full career*. There is also an implicit feature of the conventional moving-time metaphor in that winged time is depicted as having stolen the poet's youth. In a typical schema of stealing, the thief moves while the things stolen don't. In the poem, time is referred to as *the subtle thief of youth* since time steals the poet's youth before he knows it. The thief is mapped onto time. The creature on the wing is superimposed over the swift-passing time. The

way the thief takes the property of another without the latter's knowledge is mapped onto the way time passes the ego rapidly without being noticed. The novel schema of such a winged thief is widely different from the conventional image of Father Time. Traditionally, theft is not only immoral but also illegal. Therefore, the phrase *the subtle thief of youth* has a negative connotation. But the image of Father Time is largely positive. He is held in great reverence. Thus the description of time as a thief is an act of contempt for and defiance against the conventional authority of the all-powerful Father Time, which can be viewed as the primary meaning that the poetic metaphor in question is intended to express.

#### 4.9 Time as a vertical rope

A poetic metaphor may have no or very little conventional basis. Metaphors of this type are usually the most creative ones. For example, we usually conceive of time as a horizontal line, as can be seen in the illustrating figures representing time in Comrie (1985) and those portraying a moving-ego metaphor in Nunez, Motz, and Teuscher (2006). This is a deeply entrenched metaphorical concept. And yet in Lucille Clifton's lyric poem 'Climbing', time is conceptualized as a vertical dangled trembling rope rather than an abstract horizontal straight line:

a woman precedes me up the long rope,  
her dangling braids the color of rain.  
maybe i should have had braids.  
may be i should have kept the body i started,  
slim and possible as a boy's bone.  
...  
the woman passes the notch in the rope  
marked Sixty. i rise toward it, struggling,  
hand over hungry hand.

The author is an African-American woman born to working-class parents. The poem addresses, among other things, the poet's regret over aging and changes in her self-image as she ages. The above excerpt presents a vision of a woman climbing up a rope that signifies time. Like all other human beings, she ages while climbing up the rope of time. The rope, which corresponds metaphorically to time in the target domain, can be thought of as having a notch standing for each decade. Thus the woman above the speaker passing *the notch in the rope / marked Sixty* has turned sixty years old. The speaker's *struggling to rise toward it* connotes that she herself is

approaching sixty, fighting the aging processes, yet still envisioning herself as a youthful woman full of life and the desire to live (Hacht 2002:114). All these are important meanings suggested by the poetic metaphor based on the element of time as a rope.

‘Climbing’, the title of the poem, means upward movement, often symbolically associated with growth. In addition, the act of climbing also requires a goal, something to climb toward. For the speaker of the poem, that goal is built in—a part of the natural process of aging—not one that is chosen by the speaker herself. The goal, or the culmination of aging, is death (ibid.:115). This new scene is different from the conventional schema of the ego moving along the horizontal time line without a specified goal. Moreover, the idea of the vertical time line and the characterization of aging as upward movement is also a new departure from the conventional conception of time as a horizontal phenomenon. The upward movement along the vertical time line is creative and paradoxical since, as the poem suggests, the end of climbing or growth is death, which deviates from the conventional metaphorical concepts of UP IS GOOD and DOWN IS BAD (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

#### **4.10 Time as a labyrinth**

A labyrinth can be understood as an intricate combination of paths in which there are choices of path and direction but it is extremely difficult to find one’s way out. A labyrinth’s confusing network can involve any kind of path, including curves, zigzags, straight lines, and so on. Features of a labyrinth have been manipulated by Tomas Tranströmer in an original metaphor for time in his surrealistic prose poem ‘Answers to Letters’. The following is an excerpt:

In the bottom drawer of my desk I come across a letter that first arrived twenty-six years ago. A letter in panic, and it’s still breathing when it arrives the second time.

A house has five windows: through four of them the day shines clear and still. The fifth faces a black sky, thunder, and storm. I stand at the fifth window. The letter.

Sometimes an abyss opens between Tuesday and Wednesday but twenty-six years may be passed in a moment. Time is not a straight line, it’s more of a labyrinth, and if you press close to the wall at the right place you can hear the hurrying steps and the voices, you can hear yourself walking past there on the other side.

Was the letter ever answered? I don’t remember, it was long ago. The

countless thresholds of the sea went on migrating. The heart went on leaping from second to second like the toad in the wet grass of an August night.

...

Through poetic metaphors, the poem presents a temporal journey of self-discovery. The first stanza introduces the theme of an irresistible letter representing something bewildering 26 years ago. The letter is still breathing and panicking by virtue of the metaphorical mapping from the psychological experiencer (the speaker of the poem) to the psychological cause (the letter), which is highly creative. The second stanza seems to refer to some obscure and cloudy version of time outside its “fifth window” (Hacht 2005:32). Representing something in the past that confuses and overwhelms the speaker, the letter has suddenly opened up a window to the past and coerced him into facing that puzzling past event once again many years later. In the third stanza, *abyss* refers to a deep immeasurable space, which corresponds metaphorically to sleep, a dreamland of an immeasurable time. Dream can inhabit a separate and timeless world related to the subconscious. This is one reason that time is like a labyrinth (ibid.:31). The past, subconscious memories, as well as major unanswered questions about life, continue to haunt and baffle the speaker of the poem until the time when he is struggling through a previous passage of the maze of life to find a way out of time and to escape desperately (ibid.).

It should be noted at this point that a common metaphorical concept—TIME IS A STRAIGHT LINE—is denied in the third stanza. Time does not run in a straight line. Rather, each moment, like a toad on wet grass, leaps randomly without a definite direction, as suggested in the fourth stanza. Instead of the conventional metaphor, a novel one is offered—TIME IS A LABYRINTH. The speaker of the poem must enter a stormy labyrinth of his time in order to find his identity (ibid.:32). He is making a desperate attempt to get out of the obscure labyrinth and reach a sunny place. This is a case of questioning, one of the four common mechanisms that poets use to go completely beyond the conventional metaphorical thought. In addition, there is a case of metaphor composing. Two metaphors are joined together—TIME IS A LABYRINTH and SLEEP IS ABYSS. However, both metaphors are novel. They are not two conventional ones joined together. Equally noticeable is that no features of the denied conventional metaphor (namely TIME IS A STRAIGHT LINE) can be found in the novel metaphor (namely TIME IS A LABYRINTH). Thus it is untenable to argue that the novel metaphor is based on the conventional one.

## 5. Conclusion

Observing the frequent recurrence of conventional metaphors not only in everyday language but also throughout the body of Western poetry, some cognitive linguists argue that most poetic metaphors are based on conventional metaphors. They have found that four common mechanisms (namely, extending, elaborating, questioning, and composing) are used to compose new metaphors from conventional ones.

Is there a clear line between poetic metaphors and conventional ones? The contention that poetic metaphors are based on conventional ones entails a definite line between these two types of metaphors. It is clear from the discussion in Section 4 that the distinction between the two is not hard and fast in English poetry. Rather, it is frequently blurred. As a matter of fact, we can think of original poetic metaphors and conventional ones as two ends of a sliding scale. At one end of the scale are original poetic metaphors, while a full range of conventional metaphors are located at the other end. In between the two extremes there is a continuum: Some metaphors are more creative than conventional, and yet others are more conventional than creative. Most, if not all, of the poetic metaphors in the data for the present study are closer to the original poetic end.

The proposition that poetic metaphors for time are grounded in conventional ones is not viable since the line between the two extreme types of metaphors is frequently blurred. Moreover, none of the poetic metaphors for time surveyed in the present study is found to be based on the general schema of a conventional metaphor. It is more accurate to say that poets use the four mechanisms (namely, extending, elaborating, questioning, and composing) to incorporate features or elements of conventional metaphors into their poetic ones than to say that they use the mechanisms to compose new metaphors from conventional ones. Even though the present article is not a report of quantitative research, it can be said safely that most of the 24 poems for the present study contain a poetic metaphor for time that has a feature of a conventional metaphor, but that conventional feature, more often than not, is not conspicuous enough to serve as the fundamental principle of the poetic metaphorization.

All of the metaphors for time in the data for the present study contain appreciable creative elements although they may be consistent with one aspect of a conventional metaphor. It is usually the case that the poetic schema and the conventional one are widely divergent. Uncommon or exceptional elements of a poetic metaphorical schema may be expressed explicitly in the poem. Or they have to be inferred from the text of the poem. Such subtle implications are associated with a poetic schema that generates far more intricate and specific metaphorical mappings than a conventional

metaphor. From the survey of English poetic texts, we can see that poetic metaphors for time usually represent a new departure from conventional metaphorical conception of time.

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**Appendix 2: The data for the present study**  
**(Twenty-four poems that deal with the theme of time)**

1. Ode on a Grecian Urn (John Keats)
2. The Love Song of Alfrd Prufrok (T. S. Eliot)
3. Because I Could Not Stop for Death (Emily Dickinson)
4. Paul Revere's Ride (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)
5. Sailing to Byzantium (William Butler Yeats)
6. Old Age Sticks (e. e. cummings)
7. Sonnet 116 (William Shakespeare)
8. As I Walked Out One Evening (W. H. Auden)
9. Concord Hymn (Ralph Waldo Emerson)
10. Tears, Idle Tears (Alfred, Lord Tennyson)
11. Sonnet 55 (William Shakespeare)
12. To His Coy Mistress (Andrew Marvell)
13. Music Lesson (Mary Oliver)
14. Names of Horses (Donald Hall)
15. A Red, Red Rose (Robert Burns)
16. Sonnet 19 (William Shakespeare)
17. Four Mountain Wolves (Leslie Marmon Silko)
18. How We Heard the Name (Alan Dugan)
19. An Arundel Tomb (Philip Larkin)
20. The Base Stealer (Robert Francis)
21. Hope Is a Tattered Flag (Carl Sandburg)
22. Climbing (Lucille Clifton)
23. On His Having Arrived at the Age of 23 (John Milton)
24. Answers to Letters (Tomas Tranströmer)

## 英詩中時間隱喻的習用與創新

謝健雄

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George Lakoff 等學者主張詩歌中的隱喻多半以習用隱喻為基礎，但這點仍需有系統地檢視詩歌文本加以確認。本文旨在考察英詩文本以驗證習用隱喻是否果真為英詩中時間隱喻的基礎。筆者從英詩文本語料推斷出十項時間隱喻基模之要素或特色，在英詩特定的情境中探討這十項要素之習用性與創新性，結果發現英詩中習用與創新的時間隱喻二者間的區別並非絕對的，雖然英詩語料中大多數的時間隱喻帶有習用隱喻之要素或特色，但該要素或特色通常不足以構成新創隱喻之基本原則。

關鍵詞：時間隱喻、創新性、習用性、英詩