

# ARCHETYPAL METAPHOR IN RHETORIC: THE LIGHT-DARK FAMILY

Michael Osborn

THIS study probes the possibilities of one form of "new criticism" occasionally mentioned by critics of rhetorical criticism—the idea that a fresh and sensitive look at the figurative language of a speech, focusing especially upon its metaphors, might yield a critical product rich and useful as some similar ventures in literary criticism.<sup>1</sup> For example, one could study the speeches of a man, or speeches of a certain type, or the public address of different ages, in order to determine preferred patterns of imagery or to trace the evolution of a particular image. One could even consider questions such as whether the quantity of imagery varies according to rhythms such as crisis and calm or development and deterioration within a culture.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Osborn, Associate Professor of Speech at Memphis State University, wishes to thank the members of the Research Council of the University of Iowa, who encouraged this study with an Old Gold Faculty Summer Research Fellowship and a supplemental travel grant.

<sup>1</sup> See for example: Martin Maloney, "Some New Directions in Rhetorical Criticism," *Central States Speech Journal*, IV (March 1953), 1-5, and Robert D. Clark, "Lessons from the Literary Critics," *Western Speech*, XXI (Spring 1957), 83-89. Various approaches in literary criticism are illustrated by: Richard Harter Fogle, *Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark* (Norman, 1964); Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (Cambridge, 1935); and Stephen Ullmann, *The Image in the Modern French Novel* (Cambridge, 1960).

<sup>2</sup> Some work in these directions has already been accomplished, as occasional references to published research here will indicate. Among unpublished research, William Martin Reynolds provides a study of societal symbols and metaphors in his "Deliberative Speaking in Antebellum South Carolina: The Idiom of a Culture," unpubl. Ph.D. diss. (University of Florida, 1960). Reynolds argues that when inven-

tion becomes exhausted during the course of a protracted argument, rhetorical energies may then be concentrated upon the development of stylistic devices in order to dramatize and reinforce entrenched argumentative positions.

From this plenitude the present study selects for more extensive consideration what an earlier article has termed "archetypal metaphor."<sup>3</sup> Investigation indicates that the archetypal metaphor of rhetorical discourse has certain characterizing features.<sup>4</sup>

Examination of the annual listings in *Speech Monographs* indicates that a movement towards image study developed at the masters thesis level in the early 1930's. This movement, which withered as quickly as it appeared, produced two works which deserve more than the usual oblivion reserved for masters theses. Junella Teeter's "A Study of the Homely Figures of Speech Used by Abraham Lincoln in his Speeches" (Northwestern, 1931) shows appreciation in the manner suggested by Clark of the functional, "communicative" aspects of imagery. Melba Hurd's "Edmund Burke's Imaginative Consistency in the Use of Comparative Figures of Speech" (University of Minnesota, 1931) is a highly competent study of the kind projected by Maloney.

<sup>3</sup> Michael M. Osborn and Douglas Ehninger, "The Metaphor in Public Address," *Speech Monographs*, XXIX (August 1962), 223-234.

<sup>4</sup> The usefulness of the term, "archetype," may be impaired somewhat by ambiguity, for writers in various fields have extended it to suit their purposes. The word may refer to myth and symbol, or to a certain "depth" responsiveness to great literature, or to ancient themes reverberated in literature, or even to structural phenomena of the brain that have developed as a kind of "race consciousness" to certain forms of recurrent experience. See for example: Philip Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain: A Study in the Language of Symbolism* (Bloomington, 1954), pp. 86-93, 123-154, and *Metaphor and Reality* (Bloomington, 1962), pp. 111-128; Northrop Frye, "The Archetypes of Literature," in *Myth and Method: Modern Theories of Fiction*, ed. James E. Miller, Jr. (Lincoln, 1960), pp. 144-162; and Maud Bodkin, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination* (London, 1934). Despite such variation, the term carries the idea of basic, unchanging patterns of experience. The use here is consonant with that theme.

First, archetypal metaphors are especially popular in rhetorical discourse. Within the almost limitless range of possibility for figurative association, such metaphors will be selected more frequently than their non-archetypal approximations. For example, when speakers wish to place figurative value judgments upon subjects, they will more often prefer a light or darkness association over an association with Cadillac or Edsel, ivy or poison ivy, touchdown or fumble, etc.

Second, this popularity appears immune to changes wrought by time, so that the pattern of preferential selection recurs without remarkable change from one generation to another. A similar immunity belongs to archetypal metaphor considered cross-culturally, for such preferential behavior appears unaffected by cultural variation.<sup>5</sup> Thus, when Dante conceives of God as a light blindingly bright, and of Hades as a place of gloomy darkness, or when Demosthenes speaks of troubled Athens as launched upon a stormy sea, the meaning comes to us clearly across the barriers raised by time and cultural change.

Third, archetypal metaphors are grounded in prominent features of experience, in objects, actions, or conditions which are inescapably salient in human consciousness. For example, death and sex are promontories in the geography of experience.

Fourth, the appeal of the archetypal metaphor is contingent upon its embodiment of basic human motivations. Vertical scale images, which project desirable objects above the listener and undesirable objects below, often seem

<sup>5</sup> A general concept of cultural similarity in the use of metaphor gathers some empirical support from Solomon E. Asch, "The Metaphor: A Psychological Inquiry," *Person Perception and Interpersonal Behavior*, ed. Renato Taguiri and Luigi Petrullo (Stanford, 1958), pp. 86-94.

to express symbolically man's quest for power. Such basic motivations appear to cluster naturally about prominent features of experience and to find in them symbolic expression. Thus, when a rhetorical subject is related to an archetypal metaphor, a kind of double-association occurs. The subject is associated with a prominent feature of experience, which has already become associated with basic human motivations.

This peculiar double-association may well explain a fifth characteristic, the persuasive potency of archetypal metaphors. Because of a certain universality of appeal provided by their attachment to basic, commonly shared motives, the speaker can expect such metaphors to touch the greater part of his audience. Arising from fundamental interests of men, they in turn activate basic motivational energies within an audience, and if successful turn such energies into a powerful current running in favor of the speaker's recommendations. Certain archetypal combinations such as the disease-remedy metaphors are quite obvious in this respect. They provide a figurative form of the threat-reassurance cycle discussed by Hovland *et al.*<sup>6</sup> Images of disease arouse strong feelings of fear; images of remedy focus that emotional energy towards the acceptance of some reassuring recommendation.

Finally, as the result of the foregoing considerations, archetypal metaphors are characterized by their prominence in rhetoric, their tendency to occupy important positions within speeches, and their especial significance within the most significant speeches of a society. One can expect to find such images developed at the most critical

<sup>6</sup> Carl I. Hovland, Irving L. Janis, and Harold H. Kelley, *Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change* (New Haven, 1953), pp. 59-96.

junctions in a speech, establishing a mood and a perspective in the introduction, reinforcing a critical argument in the body, and synthesizing the meaning and force of a speech at its conclusion.<sup>7</sup> And because of their persuasive power, their potential for cross-cultural communication, and their time-proofing, one can expect the perceptive rhetorician to choose them when he wishes to effect crucial changes in societal attitude, to speak to audiences beyond his own people, or to be remembered for a speech beyond his lifetime.

This paper focuses particularly on four sources of archetypal metaphor—light and darkness, the sun, heat and cold, and the cycle of the seasons—related by their affinity in nature and by their sharing of a basic motivational grounding. The paper's organizing metaphor is that of a solar system: it is most illuminating to think of these sources as a kind of spatial family in which light and darkness occupies the center, and the sun, heat and cold, and seasonal cycle sources range out from it in that order of proximity.

Light and darkness is the sun of its own archetypal system, in which the sun itself has only planetary significance. The reason for placing light and darkness at the center is that its motivational basis is shared in varying degrees by the other archetypes to be considered here. The nature of these motives and the rationale for their attachment to light and darkness are immediately apparent.

Light (and the day) relates to the fundamental struggle for survival and

development. Light is a condition for sight, the most essential of man's sensory attachments to the world about him. With light and sight one is informed of his environment, can escape its dangers, can take advantage of its rewards, and can even exert some influence over its nature.<sup>8</sup> Light also means the warmth and engendering power of the sun, which enable both directly and indirectly man's physical development.

In utter contrast is darkness (and the night), bringing fear of the unknown, discouraging sight, making one ignorant of his environment—vulnerable to its dangers and blind to its rewards. One is reduced to a helpless state, no longer able to control the world about him. Finally, darkness is cold, suggesting stagnation and thoughts of the grave.

What happens, therefore, when a speaker uses light and dark metaphors? Because of their strong positive and negative associations with survival and developmental motives, such metaphors express intense value judgments and may thus be expected to elicit significant value responses from an audience. When light and dark images are used together in a speech, they indicate and perpetuate the simplistic, two-valued, black-white attitudes which rhetoricians and their audiences seem so often to prefer. Thus, the present situation is darker than midnight, but the speaker's solutions will bring the dawn.

Light-dark metaphor combinations carry still another important implication which students of rhetoric appear to have neglected. There are occasions when speakers find it expedient to express an attitude of *inevitability* or *de-*

<sup>7</sup> Concluding sex and death metaphors are investigated in John Waite Bowers and Michael M. Osborn, "Attitudinal Effects of Selected Types of Concluding Metaphors in Persuasive Speeches," *Speech Monographs*, XXXIII (June 1966), 147-155.

<sup>8</sup> This conception of man in the presence or absence of light is influenced somewhat by the account of essential aspects of behavior offered by Charles Morris, *Signs, Language, and Behavior* (New York, 1946), p. 95.

*terminism* about the state of present affairs or the shape of the future. Change not simply *should have* occurred or *should* occur, but *had to* or *will* occur.

The deterministic attitude usually has more strategic value in speeches concerning the future. The speaker may wish to build a bandwagon effect: "you had better come join us: the future is going to happen just as we predict." In moments of public crisis and despondency, the speaker may wish to reassure his audience: "there's no reason to lose heart: good times are just ahead." Statements such as the latter will have not simply a public reassurance value, but also a personal rhetorical value: public declarations of confidence in a future desired by his audience will enhance the speaker's *ethos*, suggesting him as "a man of faith."

The combination of light-dark metaphors is ideally suited to symbolize such confidence and optimism, because light and dark are more than sharply contrasting environmental qualities. They are rooted in a fixed chronological process, the movement of day into night and night into day. Therefore, symbolic conceptions of the past as dark and the present as light or the present as dark and the future as light always carry with them a latent element of determinism, which the speaker can bring forth according to his purpose.

Most often, it appears, this sense of historical determinism in rhetoric is tempered by conditions, and therefore can not often be equated with philosophical determinism. The latter eliminates the significance of all contingencies, and, in works such as Hegel's *Reason in History*, sees historical process as one ceaseless, remorseless flow toward a fixed end or "Absolute." Rhetorical determinism, while it also elimi-

nates or ignores the myriad accidents and contingencies of life, nevertheless stops this reductive process one step short of philosophical determinism. It usually offers a conception of two patterned alternatives potential in historical process, depending upon a choice specified in the speech. One of those fundamental, possibly unconscious strategies of rhetoric, it therefore simplifies complex situations and facilitates choice, at the same time lending a certain dramatic significance to the rhetorical situation. If an auditor feels he is playing an important role in an elemental conflict, his gratitude for this feeling of personal significance may well predispose him in favor of the speaker's position.

The choice situation which a speaker thrusts upon his audience always concerns the acquisition of an attitude or the adoption of a solution; these forms of choice become conditions when a speech is imbued with rhetorical determinism. The speaker will say: "the present flowed from the past *because* you adopted (or did not adopt) my solutions or *because* you possessed (or did not possess) certain qualities. The future I envision will flow from the present *if* you adopt my solution or *if* you possess certain qualities." While both conditions may be present in a speech, the solutional condition is suited more to deliberative speeches, the qualitative condition more to ceremonial or inspirational speeches.

Whatever the conditions, patterns of light-dark metaphors can serve to suggest (where the determinism is left implicit) or to reinforce (where the determinism becomes explicit) the impression that some particular series of events had to or will occur. The metaphoric combination creates and strengthens this feeling by associating possibly controversial assertions con-

cerning the inevitability of a particular process with a general, unquestionably determined cycle of nature. One could, therefore, simply classify this important work of light-dark metaphor combinations as argument by analogy. The classification, however, seems somewhat bald, especially when qualitative conditions are the hinge upon which rhetorical determinism turns. With such conditions, the symbolic combination emerges as an analogical form significant enough to be individuated as *argument by archetype*.

To discover the reason for this special significance, one must examine more carefully the effectiveness of qualitative conditions. This effectiveness depends upon audience acceptance of a basic ethical premise, which indeed animates a good part of the public discourse of Western nations and even provides much of the rationale for the significant occurrence of such discourse in the first place. This usually invisible axiom may be reconstructed in the following form: *material conditions follow from moral causes*. If a man or state qualifies by having certain specified virtues, the present condition of well-being is explained, or a radiant future is assured. Corresponding qualities of evil in a man or state have led or will lead to correspondingly opposite material conditions.<sup>9</sup> The Western quality of this submerged premise becomes apparent when one considers that the tracing of material conditions to moral causes tends to enhance the

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Burke discloses an excellent example of the past-present relationship regarded as dependent upon moral qualities in his analysis of Hitler's rhetoric, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Form* (Baton Rouge, 1941), pp. 204-205. One infers from Burke's analysis that Hitler fused his views of the past and present, present and future into a panoramic interpretation and prediction of German history. To blame the present ills of Germany upon past moral degeneracy (sin) was to promise the future well-being of Germany when moral health should be restored (redemption).

stature and responsibility of individual man within the historical process. The world is made to turn upon the struggle between good and evil within the human soul, giving a grand historical significance to intensely personal moral crises. An Eastern or Marxist point of view might well reverse the terms of the cause-effect relationship and, accordingly, diminish the stature of the individual.

An assertion that some series of events has been or will be determined, according to the presence of certain moral qualities, may depend therefore upon dual sources of support. First, the assertion rests upon a faith in moral causation and is the conclusion of a submerged enthymematic structure. Second, the assertion may call also upon an association with the fact of an unquestionably determined archetypal process. But the two forms of support do not operate independently. The faith itself is confirmed by an association with the fact of archetypal process, which constantly suggests to the impressionable mind of man that evil darkness contains the promise of light, good light the potential for darkness, in unending succession. Therefore, vivid symbolic representations of light and darkness may often perform a subtle but fundamental probative function in a speech, well deserving individuation in such cases as *argument by archetype*.

Among rhetoricians, ancient and modern, none has been more aware of the potential power of light and dark metaphors than Sir Winston Churchill. Indeed, Churchill in his war speeches shows a remarkably consistent preference for archetypal images in general. This favoritism may be a symptom of a more general truth, that in moments of great crisis, when society is in

