

impacts on its message. It is a heavily onomatopoeic poem. It is perhaps best known for the diacopic repetition of the word "bells."

These and various other data we'll take up in the discussion lend support to Cleanth Brooks' caveat "not to split the poem between its 'form' and its 'content'" (*The Well Wrought Urn*, 201) – which he sums up with: "to refer the structure of the poem to what is finally a paraphrase of the poem is to refer it to something outside the poem" (201). Or, in Urban's words (*Language and Reality* – quoted in Brooks (199)) "[in poetry] form and content, or content and medium, are inseparable".

Were poetic paraphrase or translation impossible, it would seem to follow that *form can shape content* – that what a word means in poem *is* a function of how that word is presented to us. To quote Brooks, 'the poet, within limits, has to make up his language as he goes' (9). From this perspective, it would seem that the poet's ideas, concepts and thoughts are ineluctable in prose; and, even in another poem.

According to the Heresy of Paraphrase Thesis, an (unambiguous) word might mean one thing in a physics article or on a laundry list, and something else in a poem; even across poems its meaning might shift. *Sacrificing* the idea that what an (unambiguous) word means, it means everywhere it occurs will not sit well with many philosophers, linguists and cognitive scientists, including me. It involves what a number of us have dubbed a loss of *semantic innocence* – the label inspired by a comment of Donald Davidson's:

Since Frege, philosophers have become hardened to the idea that content sentences in talk about propositional attitudes may strangely refer to such entities as intensions, propositions, sentences, utterances, and inscriptions ... If we could but recover our pre-Fregean semantic innocence, I think it would be plainly incredible that the words 'the earth moves uttered after the words Galileo said that' mean anything different, or refer to anything else, than is their wont when they come in other environments. (Davidson, 1968)

Davidson's intuition is that, except for idioms and the like, the "meaning" of complex expressions "depends on" the meaning of its parts and the "way" the complex is assembled. But, according to the Heresy of Paraphrase thesis, it is claimed that what the words of a poem mean are contingent upon their location in that poem.

This skeptical thesis seems vulnerable to a direct and simple refutation.

The Simple Refutation: Suppose someone utters sentence S in a poem. If S is meaningful, it expresses a thought or an idea or a proposition or whatever – call whatever it expresses p. Why couldn't another sentence S' be arbitrarily introduced to express p, regardless of whether it occurs in a poem or in a patch of prose?

The Poet's Retreats

Of course, the free variables in this discussion are poetry and translation and paraphrase and so the non-paraphrasability theses might become more or less interesting contingent on how wide or narrow we cast these practices. Given the vast variety of poetic translation, it would seem to be in vain to locate any essential feature of poems –

other than perhaps what the form American Robert Pinsky once said: ‘poetry is what a bookstore puts in the section of that name’.

On Paraphrase and Translation: I don’t think much hangs on these notions either. Everyone, for example, agrees that whatever paraphrasing a poem is, it requires telling a reader at least part of what the poem is about; but whatever a poem is about – no matter how broadly or loosely we construe this notion – will either exceed what’s determined by the meanings of its expressions and the ways in which these compose or it will not. Granted that usually, when someone tries to say what a poem is about he does not feel constrained to invoke only the meanings of its words but also historical, sociological or psychological concerns matter as well. But even if we cast the scope of paraphrase this widely, the described procedure for re-expression suggested by the simple refutation (above) can be stretched accordingly to accommodate a paraphrase. The point being that whatever a poem is about – and however that is determined – novel linguistic items can be introduced to express it, regardless of their form. The same point of course extends to translation.

One strategy for trying to rebuff the simple refutation would be to change the topic from one of paraphrase or translation *per se* to something vague, say, about the *aesthetic or emotive or imagistic quality poems*. And indeed when the translators and poets and critics speak of how the ‘feel’ or the ‘music’ (Seamus Heaney) or the ‘tone’ or the ‘voice’ or the ‘beauty’ of the poem resists paraphrase or translation they are suggesting that they have something other than meaning and semantics in mind. But to be told that something *non-contentful, non-propositional, non-interpretive* resists paraphrase or translation is neither surprising nor very interesting. More importantly, the comments of the New Critics on paraphrase as well as those of followers clearly convey a strong claim about the semantics of poetry, not a weak one about the poetic aesthetics or the psychology of poetry reading.

So, then, what’s wrong if anything with the simple refutation? To begin with, it rings hollow; the described procedure for paraphrasing or translating poetry seems to miss the point of the original charge. Acknowledging this skepticism has led me into a sort of philosophical crisis – I have philosophical commitments that do not jibe with my intuitions about the brute intuitions about paraphrase and translation. In my presentation, I will reconcile intuition with theory; I will show why the simple refutation fails, and so, in effect, I will be defending the Heresy of Paraphrase, but I will do so in a way that avoids the loss of semantic innocence and compositionality; and thus, that avoids the claim that form can shape meaning.