

# Metaphor and Metonymy in Names

Carole Hough, University of Glasgow

ICOS online lecture 19 October 2022

## Abstract

Many names are descriptive, but the descriptions are often non-literal, drawing particularly on metaphor and metonymy. This lecture begins by outlining the most common types of metaphor in place-names, with examples of the LANDSCAPE IS A BODY and LANDSCAPE IS A CONTAINER metaphors. Both are highly productive in place-names as well as in ordinary language. However, some place-names are ambiguous between metaphorical and non-metaphorical interpretations, and the same applies to other types of names. Using examples from *The Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland*, the lecture discusses surnames from bird-names, animal-names and fish-names. In some instances, either a physical or behavioral quality of the creature is mapped onto the surname bearer; in others, the link is metonymic, with the animal, bird or fish representing an area of activity connected to the surname bearer. Many such surnames are ambiguous, potentially drawing on historical associations that are no longer recognised. This problem is even more acute with regard to personal names, many of which are from the Bible and were created within an ancient culture very different from our own. Using examples from *A Dictionary of First Names*, the lecture discusses some of the main semantic fields represented in Biblical personal names, again with a focus on those based on terms for living creatures. Here it is particularly difficult to differentiate between metaphor and metonymy, although literal references to the same creatures within the Bible may throw some light on potential associations. Finally, the lecture returns to place-names, identifying different types of metonymic formations and arguing that metonymy is more prevalent in place-names than has previously been recognised.

## References

*A Dictionary of First Names*, by Patrick Hanks, Kate Hardcastle and Flavia Hodges, 2nd ed. 2006. Oxford: OUP.

*The Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland*, ed. by Patrick Hanks, Richard Coates and Peter McClure, 4 vols. 2016. Oxford: OUP.