STEPHEN OWEN AND WALTER L. REED*

A Motive for Metaphor

Among the many ways in which language exerts its tyranny over us, the choice of parts of speech for phenomena is one of the most subtle. At some time in our education we were reading a poem and our teacher pointed out a word and told us, " that's a metaphor." Ever after we were convinced that a " metaphor " was a " thing " of some sort; we found these " things " in texts where they were masquerading as regular words. Our teachers further taught us to seek out metaphors behind their disguises, to evict them from their positions in the sentence, and to put the right words back in their places. We were, in fact, very grateful for this instruction, because we had been using metaphors for many years and had not known quite what to do with them. Thereafter we continued our lives happily secure in our knowledge that metaphors were special kinds of " things," different from real words but hiding among them. But what we really learned, or had known all along, was how to " metaphor," how to perform an operation in which we moved from a duplicitous text to a " real " meaning somewhere else. As we grew older this real meaning became more and more difficult to discover, but the energy of the operation was predicated on the assumption that such a meaning existed—somewhere.

What we would like to propose in this essay is a thoroughgoing operational theory of metaphor, a theory designed to avoid the pitfalls of the substantive and/or spatial notions of metaphor that have predominated in discussions of the topic or phenomenon since Aristotle. This theory borrows from structural linguistics, but it also makes some modifications of the most important of the structuralist discussions of metaphor, Roman Jakobson's concept of the metaphoric and metonymic poles. Jakobson's is a well-known and influential distinction, but as we shall argue, it involves a misleading limitation of the term " metaphoric " and an unjustified privileging of the term " metonymic " when one is considering the function of metaphors in particular literary texts.[1]

* Stephen Owen is an Associate Professor of East Asian Languages and Literatures at Yale University and is the author of several books on classical Chinese poetry. Walter L. Reed is an Associate Professor of English at The University of Texas at Austin and is the author of *Meditations on the Hero.*

[1] See " Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbance," *Fundamentals of Language* [with Morris Halle] (The Hague: Mouton, 1956), pp. 90-96.

Metaphor is an operation that calls into play both paradigmatic (Jakobson's "metaphoric") and syntagmatic (Jakobson's "metonymic") relations; it cannot be limited to either alone.

In fact, most modern semiological and structuralist theories, which have proven so useful in studies of narrative, run into serious difficulties when they try to account for metaphor, the old stronghold of Anglo-American formalism. The new terms don't offer much help: metaphor is a sign whose signified is a relationship between its usual signified and another sign or signified; it is a staggered system whose structure is indistinguishable from that of connotation. Such reductive descriptions do not account for the essential disjunction which begins the metaphorical process, nor the event that occurs called "metaphor."

The critical literature on metaphor is voluminous, extending from Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* to recent issues of scholarly journals in this country and abroad.[2] What we offer here is a merging of the systematic precision of early structuralism (Saussure, Jakobson, Barthes, and Greimas) with the insistence on particularized ambiguity and tension in the early Anglo-American formalists (Richards, Empson, Wimsatt, and Brooks). In effecting this merger, we end up sharing the post-structuralist suspicion, voiced by Derrida, de Man, and the later Barthes, that the real problem is not metaphorical or figurative language so much as the necessary illusion of a literal, referential truth.[3]

Certain fundamental questions naturally arise when we consider how a metaphor functions in a text. How do we *know* when Rilke writes about a panther that he is not just writing about a panther? How do we know when Achilles acts "like a lion," that this does not mean that he settles down with slain Hector under some tree of the Trojan plain and dines on him? In short, 1) how do we know that a metaphorical relationship is operative, 2) how can we describe the interaction of terms which creates the meaning of a metaphor, and 3) of the multitude of possible relationships between the two terms of a metaphor how do

[2] E.g. the special issues devoted to the topic of metaphor in *New Literary History*, 5 (1974), *Poetics* (August, 1975), and *Critical Inquiry*, 5 (1978). An exhaustive survey, running to some 300 pages, is provided by Warren A. Shibles, *Metaphor: An Annotated Bibliography* (Whitewater, Wisc., 1971).

[3] See Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," *New Literary History*, 6 (1975), 5-74; Paul de Man, "Theory of Metaphor in Rousseau's *Second Discourse*," *Romanticism: Vistas, Instances, Continuities*, ed. David Thorburn and Geoffrey Hartman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), pp. 83-114; Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), esp. pp. 3-22.

we know which are functional and which are not? We will take up the first two questions later; let us consider now how we know what elements to relate in a metaphor, how we know what the correct third terms are. How do we know that Achilles is like a lion in strength, ferocity, etc. and not that he has great tufts of tawny fur around his neck?

The reason we have picked such an absurd countercase is to reveal the extent to which both literary language and ordinary language privilege certain attributes above others. If a western and a Chinese poet compare a king to a dragon, their comparisons *mean* different things, not simply because Chinese and western dragons have different attributes (Chinese dragons can be malevolent too), but because there is a different hierarchy of privilege in those attributes. The possible attributes of any thing or class of things are virtually infinite. It is part of our cultural coding to choose and rank essential attributes. If asked to list the characteristics of a lion, the members of one cultural group will produce similar terms, especially in the privileged position at the beginning of the list. This cultural coding is essential for reading literature. For Marino, Maria de Medici's breasts are like snow because whiteness and coldness, associated with chastity, are privileged attributes—we do not imagine that they fell from the sky, that no two are identical, that they will melt if warm water is poured on them, that they appear only in the winter.

If the privileging of certain attributes transcends context, the absurd countercases demand exclusion because of context. The most elegant formulation of a theory of context is Greimas' notion of isotopy: simply stated, Greimas' theory is that when we read, we organize the semantic possibilities in the words and phrases of a discourse towards coherence, automatically excluding the semantic irrelevancies.[4] Thus, on a simple level, given the two sentences " in the race he broke the record " and " walking through the messy room he broke a record," we are able to decide the correct semantic value of " record " in each case from a coherence of semantic units, or semes, elsewhere in the sentences.

There is no difficulty in this process when we are dealing with simple sentences, but in more complex literary situations, isotopy is always an unrealized end. We name this distance from isotopy " disjunction." [5] Textual disjunction may occur either on the level of the

[4] A. J. Greimas, *Sémantique structurale* (Paris: Larousse, 1936), pp. 69-101.

[5] It might be argued that we are underestimating the complexity of non-literary language here. In Greimas' more recent writings (e.g. *Maupassant: la sémiotique*

language of the community as a whole ("... And I must enter again the round/Zion of the water bead/And the synagogue of the ear of corn...") or it can be intended into a text according to the code of a particular group (e.g. the Bible does not mean what it seems to mean, but is in fact an immense numerological system). But whether it occurs on the level of shared language or on the level of the rules of reading of a special group, disjunction is a phenomenon which occurs continually in the reading process.

When a reader encounters a series of metaphors like Dylan Thomas' "... And I must enter again the round/Zion of the water bead/And the synagogue of the ear of corn..." isotopy, the semantic coherence of the text, is thwarted.[6] The first operation that must be performed is to isolate the semes, the basic semantic units of the words. Then the reader must try to find one or more semes which unify the disparate elements and link them with the text to that point. Here we find a group of semes including dissolution, death and rebirth, and religious worship. These semes may come from single images; for example, the " water bead " may be a dewdrop or a raindrop. Associations with the soul and with the impermanence of life rank fairly highly among the dewdrop's privileged literary attributes. Similarly the raindrop is easily associated with nurture and vegetative growth. The two thus can be unified in the seme of " the cycle of death and rebirth."

The unifying semes of the line may also come from larger syntactic units, but these larger units can be disjunctive (and thereby initiate the metaphorical process) just as easily as single words and images. On the level of character there is the very real problem of how the gargantuan poet can " enter " a drop of water or an ear of corn. The contextual seme of " dissolution " offers one possible resolution. However, the multiplicity of significant semes will constantly generate new areas of disjunction: for example, we have a contradiction between the idea of physical dissolution and the integrity of the " I " who will

du texte [Paris, 1976]) and even more in the earlier Marxist semiotics of M. M. Bakhtin and his circle (e.g. V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik [New York: Seminar Press, 1973]) the notions of " cultural competence " and " play of ideologies " indicate that such disjunctions are pervasive in other types of language and text as well. Relatively speaking, however, literary discourse heightens and foregrounds the disjunctive potential within and between other language and culture systems.

[6] " A Refusal to Mourn the Death, By Fire, of a Child in London," *The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas* (New York: New Directions, 1957), p. 112.

be in Zion and the synagogue. The identity which is the soul is not going to Heaven but is entering the physical world with the dissolving body. We try to repair the contradiction with another unifying seme, pantheism, and as we do so, we are forced to suppress some of the privileged literary attributes of the dewdrop. The process never ends: new disjunctions constantly arise, and isotopy is never achieved. The reader may close off this process by an act of will: he may declare that the text is entirely coherent and all disjunctive elements are accounted for. But such willed closure is only a screen against a virtually infinite potentiality for disjunction in any text, once the initial disjunction is signalled on the text's surface. Whether the reader chooses to stop at some satisfying point or is willing to confront the plenitude of new disjunctions and tentative resolutions is immaterial, since the metaphor lies only in the process from disjunction towards isotopy.

If we return to our simpler example " Achilles is a lion," we can see essentially the same thing occurring on a low level of disjunction. Here it is easier to close off the process than in the Dylan Thomas lines. Given the context of the *Iliad*, " human " is not one of the primary semes of Achilles, but in " Achilles is a lion " the human-animal dichotomy comes to the fore. The initial ground of coherence lies in privileged attributes such as " brave," " fierce," etc. shared by Achilles and the lion. The essential disjunction lies in the dichotomy of animal versus human; this is the issue called into question by the metaphor, and it is on this level that the process towards isotopy occurs. Here the hierarchy of meanings of " Achilles " is changed to include all kinds of animal traits which can be integrated in the isotopy of the text—unthinking *animal* strength and courage, a rampage of blood-lust.

The presentation of a piece of literature involves a complex series of operational modifications on the *langue* of the community: when a printed page looks at you and says " Sonnet," a set of new laws of reading and expectations takes over. A non-literary analogy to this might be when a parent listens to a child or a dentist listens to a patient: the functional phonetic, semantic, or syntactic discriminations of ordinary language cease to function and new sets of rules develop. If an adult were to hear another adult deliver the typical sentence of a two year old, it would not be comprehensible unless it was realized on some level that " this adult is speaking like a child." As Roland Barthes says, literature is *institutionalized* subjectivity. The problem of how metaphorical language means can never be wholly resolved in the text itself or in terms of the laws of ordinary language.

There are three kinds of modifications on the shared *langue* of the community which occur in a literary text. The first of these is " literarity " itself, a set of semiotic operations, the most important of which is hypersignification. Hypersignification is *not* an inherent quality of a text, though there are texts into which it is intended, which fulfill or facilitate this mode of reading. Everyone is aware of the difference between reading a novel for pleasure and reading a novel critically: literarity and hypersignification are a continuum of possibilities in the way to read a text. When we sit down with a text, we choose the level of literarity with which we want to approach it. Our choice is usually influenced by powerful cultural and social codes: " this novel is a ' classic,' therefore it has a multiplicity of meanings " ; " I must ' teach ' this novel tomorrow; therefore I will it to have a multiplicity of meanings."

When we intend hypersignification in our reading, everything potentially signifies, and the majority of the significations are hidden. This hiddenness of signification is a crucial act of alienation from the language of the community as a whole, a separation of the initiate and the uninitiate: one reads " good " novels at college or if one is intelligent or well educated, and we presume that we find more " hidden signification " (" read better ") at certain universities than at others, etc. This privilege of literarity, its status as an act of asserting class superiority, has bothered many critics. A less menacing side of the hiddenness of signification, alienation from the language of the community, is that of subjectivity, emphasizing the privacy of perception. This aspect is emphasized in an essay like Walker Percy's " Metaphor as Mistake " : literature in its hiddenness mediates between the communal and the subjective, between the individuated and the shared.[7]

The second kind of modification on the language of the community is that of the dialects or idiolects. There are authorial idiolects, generic idiolects, class idiolects, and others. The *langue* as a whole has no concept of frequency: it is merely a set of possibilities. The idiolect creates a hierarchical ordering of the possibilities of the *langue*. We, as readers, translate these hierarchies of language into expectations: we expect a certain author to talk about certain topics in certain ways using certain vocabulary, certain recurring images, syntactic patterns, etc. With these expectations, we enter into a dialogue with a text in terms of how it " speaks " this private language, the idiolect.

[7] *The Message in the Bottle* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1975), pp. 64-82.

Like literarity, the various idiolects emphasize their variance from the language of the community: their hierarchical orderings exist to differentiate one speech act from another and to classify them. To use colloquial language in a sonnet highlights " colloquiality " in a way that hearing colloquial language in the street does not. This is a negative use of the idiolect, a perversion of expectations. On the positive side, we know that if Mallarmé writes about an ocean voyage in a poem, it is likely he is referring to the act of writing a poem. The reason we know this is not from anything inherent in the poem itself, but because that is one of the operations of signification which has a high frequency in the poetry of Mallarmé.

The third kind of modification is the creation of an inner *langue* of the text itself; i. e. a text is not only a *parole*, actualizing some of the possibilities of the communal language, it also creates its own internal language. As the nature of the *langue* as a whole can only be approached through the individual speech acts of the community, so the *langue* of a text is perceived through the speech act of the text itself. That inner *langue* of the text attains meaning as it differentiates itself from the *langue* of the community as a whole.

Structuralists will usually emphasize the self-referentiality of a literary work, that literature is about literature; i.e. the creation of a sign system is an act of such authority that it always takes itself as its own end. But orthodox structuralists are often trapped by this self-referentiality and as a result they cannot account for metaphor. As such structuralists would say, a text " speaks itself," but they find it difficult to explain how a text " speaks itself " about something else, and how it " speaks itself " for the sake of something else.

Metaphor stands at the heart of all three of these modifications of the communal *langue*. First of all, metaphor is the primary tool of hypersignification: it is, in fact, the term we give to the suspension of the usual, limiting significatory system of language. We asked earlier how we know when a metaphorical relationship is operative. In everyday speech we usually use only metaphors that are dead, dying, or in varying states of decay. Usually we include both terms of the metaphor: " You are my sunshine," but not " sunshine made my dinner." But when we intend literarity into a text, any disjunctive element is potentially a metaphor. And the text as a whole, insofar as we intend into it meaning other than what it says, is a vast metaphor for a hidden truth. Second, metaphor is the primary tool of the idiolects: if a metaphorical term does not mean what it means in ordinary language and

if it does not mean "anything whatsoever," then it must have a limited range of meaning which is *other than* its usual meaning. In the general sense, this "other meaning" is the essential act of differentiation from the language of the community which characterizes the idiolect: in itself it is an act of individuation. In the specific, the repetition of certain kinds of metaphor is essential to the establishment of an idiolect. The signified is neither random nor usual, but rather definite and repeatable within the system of the idiolect.

The individuation which metaphor performs in the idiolect helps make the literary object a possession, a possession having two components: 1) exclusion of others and 2) association of the object with a subject. Metaphor excludes the community at large in favor of the individual or initiate-group and in doing so it associates itself with them. Thus by making certain kinds of metaphors, Wallace Stevens says "*my* language—not Hart Crane's, not Eliot's, *mine*."

In the internal *langue* of a text, metaphor functions in several ways. The essence of a syntagm in the *langue* is repeatability. Particularly when we are dealing with the inner *langue* of a text, we are learning a new language, and a language is learned by substitution; for example, we learn the subject-verb-object construction by repetition in which we substitute innumerable subjects, verbs, and objects. The metaphorical substitutions in a text are a condensed indication of substitutions in the syntagms of a text, that the relationships which the syntagm sets up have general as well as particular application.

Metaphor is of course more important on the paradigmatic level in that out of a multiplicity of possible paradigms, it asserts one given paradigm. This is close to Greimas' notion of the classeme.[8] A metaphor is not simply a substitution but rather it sets up a significant paradigm row. In its function as a discriminator, metaphor privileges one class of things, and within that class the metaphor takes on meaning in relation to other things of its kind.

III

The appropriate question now is how does all this theory apply in an actual text. As an example, we can go through the first strophe of Pindar's Olympian XI, in Bowra's translation (For Hagesidamos of Western Lokroi, winner in the boy's boxing):

[8] *Sémantique structurale*, pp. 50-54.

There is a time when men's strongest need
Is for the winds, and a time for the sky's water,
The clouds' showery children.
If anyone toils and succeeds,
Sweet voices of song
Are paid on account for words to come
And a faithful pledge to surpassing actions.[9]

Here is an excellent example of how substitution functions in establishing a basic syntagm: X needs Y. Man needs winds, and man needs rain. On the paradigmatic level, which we will take up in detail later, we notice that in the first case " man " is substituted for " sailor," and in the second case for " farmer," two paradigmatic series generalizing the situation. The third substitution, the third element in the paradigmatic row, is that the " victor needs song." Pindar, however, leaves that implicit, and instead expands his primary syntagm to encompass the fulfillment of the need: the poet gives the victor the song he needs. What is interesting is that the fulfillment arises from a complementary need on the part of the poet: he " owes " the victor the song. Notice that initial substitutions limit the syntagm and cut off the element of exchange: there is no *quid pro quo*, only a statement of a subject and his need. It is the silence about the exchange (what the sailor gives for his winds, the farmer for his rain, or the victor for his song) which makes the singer's " gift " of song to satisfy *his* debt an expansion of the syntagm. Thus we can say that the " gift of song " is *generated* by silences about reciprocity in need and giving in the opening metaphors and implied tenor: the first two metaphors and the implied tenor generate a need for reciprocity which the gift of song *partially* fulfills. The song does not satisfy the " debt " ; it is only " payment on account." Instead of simply fulfilling the need, a complementary need or debt is taken care of in the fulfillment. The last two lines of the strophe project the reciprocity forward in time: you will give more actions; I will give more words. The poem is, in its multiple substitutions, developing an internally complete language of need, receiving, and giving, bringing the syntagm from an unstable state of need and desire to a stable state of continuous reciprocity.

Now if we turn to the paradigmatic aspect, we see a paradigmatic series has been set up: man/sailor/farmer/one who " toils and succeeds "

[9] *The Odes of Pindar*, trans. C. M. Bowra (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 62.

(Olympian victor)/poet—all the people who have " need," the subjects of the reciprocity. Fundamentally, these subjects of reciprocity are defined by what they do, and with the exception of the Olympian victor, the definition of the subject is economic. This definition of the subject is from the syntagm of Need transforming into that of Reciprocity: the subject is defined by what he can produce to fill out the syntagm of reciprocity which is simultaneously being generated. Here we have a clue for the motives for the substitution of " man " for sailor and farmer: in the system of Need without Reciprocity, their functional definition, what they can produce, is suppressed. The inclusion of the Olympian victor, and to some extent the poet, in this paradigmatic series assimilates them into the exchange system; i.e. the Olympian victor can have his functional, economic position in society defined by his victory as can the poet by his poetry—they become valid tokens of exchange. Indeed, a critic of Marxist persuasion could say that the purpose of the strophe is to justify the non-laboring classes' inclusion as " producers in an economic system."

Next we consider the short paradigm of reciprocity: " paid on account for words to come. . .faithful pledge to surpassing action." For " paid on account," the Greek has simply *archa*: " a *beginning* is accomplished for words to come." Though Bowra's translation may seem stretching it, it is also the indication of a sure understanding of Pindar that he grasps the essentially economic nature of this strophe. The economic metaphor becomes explicit with the " pledge," *orkion*, an " oath " or in economic terms, a " surety." This creates a paradigmatic row of " songs-beginnings-pledge." Notice that these songs paid are likewise substitutions for future songs, a " surety " in partial payment and promise. In the development of this paradigm the " thing," the song, is transformed into a function in the exchange system. The singer with his song is like the sailor-merchant with his goods or the farmer with his seed. The promise of growth and increase allows the substitution of promise for payment in the exchange system: this is how what is needed can be acquired with nothing to give for it. From mere need we have moved to partial payment, possible because the goods will increase and pay off the debt. The insufficient " thing " becomes sufficient and thereby can participate in the exchange system. In between the " thing," " songs," and its transformation as a function, the " pledge," lies the crucial mediating term in the transformation, " beginning," *archa*: this term changes the immobility of need and the insufficiency of the thing offered into a continuing process of recipro-

city, fulfills the diachronic nature of the syntagm by promising future movement.

Now the last and most interesting paradigm can become comprehensible: "sky's water, the clouds' showery children." Here our paradigmatic row is (rain/water/children). The bipolar paradigm is the most common metaphorical form, and despite the three element row we have above, this paradigm is essentially bipolar. This bipolar form is different from a full paradigmatic row. A series like man/(sailor)/(farmer)/victor/poet works differently from "sky's water, clouds' showery children," or "poet, farmer of song." A multiplicity of elements in a paradigmatic row repeat one unifying seme with enough frequency to increase exclusions and clarify the paradigm.

A bipolar paradigm is an "open" or "potential" paradigm. It simultaneously enforces the otherness of the vehicle and engenders a project to assimilate it into the inner *langue* of the poem. Furthermore, it indicates the language-making function of the poem; it insists that new paradigms are being made. In short, a metaphor is a kind of sign that reveals itself as "merely sign." Equal to this metalinguistic function is the kinetic aspect mentioned above, the project to join the two elements in a new language and reestablish system. Because the bipolar paradigm is only a "potential" paradigm (i.e. the unifying terms between the two elements of the metaphor are potential rather than actual), it directs toward signification rather than pretending to it. Here the good structuralist will stop, staying inside the text: the metaphor is an indicator of system itself rather than of any given system; it is language about language. Metaphor is in its very form an actualization of desire and need, the mark of an absence—the readily available unifying term which dissipates the tension, undoes the otherness, and kills the metaphor. Hence we can see the function of the bipolar metaphor at this particular point in the strophe when unfulfilled need is the initial form of the syntagm.

As with all forms of desire and need, the metaphor, the process of unifying disjunctive terms, destroys itself on attainment (hence Pindar's resolution of the strophe with only a *promise* of fulfillment). We hurry metaphors to their "death" by explaining them, and always feel let down with explanation, when we close the paradigm, fix the points of correlation, unite subject and other. The potential, by its very openness, is always fuller than the actual.

However, to explain bipolar metaphor merely as an indicator is seriously to miss the point: without the *process*, the enactment of

reasserting a closed paradigm, we leave it impotent; whatever metaphor is, it lies neither in the *fact* of potentiality nor the fulfillment and closing off of the relationship, but rather, as we saw earlier, in the movement from one towards the other. What we do in reading is to move toward uniting the halves of the metaphor but stop before we close off the relationship. So let us do the obvious for the metaphor of the " clouds' showery children." The notion of the clouds begetting rain points towards the generation of seeds into crops, the farmer continuing into the future with rich crops and many children. It is the first element in the theme of production and increase taken up later in the strophe, the crucial shift in attention from the immobile present of need to the future fulfillment of continuous exchange. It is the generative point where one becomes many, the hidden parent of the *archa*, the " beginnings " later in the strophe.

What we have been trying to show here is the essentially generative nature of the *langue* of the poem, how it takes a syntagm which defines itself by incompleteness and develops it into an internally complete range of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships. In every case, the possibility of metaphorical substitution is a precondition for this development.

IV

Thus our structural account of metaphor departs from orthodox structuralist pronouncements on metaphor in several ways. First, we emphasize that metaphor is an interpretative operation forced—and guided—by a disjunction in a particular narrative code or semantic context, that metaphor cannot be assimilated *within* a particular system but lies in the movement from one system to another, and that full re-establishment of semantic isotopy is the point at which metaphor ceases to be metaphorical. Secondly, we insist that as institutionalized subjectivity, literature is a *formalized* modification of the communal *langue*, that by hypersignification on the one hand and restriction of expectations on the other an idiolect is established with rules of a higher order than the rules of non-literary language in general. And finally, we propose that an idiolect is established by a particular text, through a generative process. Syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes are generated by particular sequences of predication and substitution, and through the interplay of these relations the full *langue* of the text is achieved. While adopting Jakobson's structure, derived from Saussure, we modify Jakobson's terminology, which identifies the metaphoric

with only one of the coordinates of linguistic relationship and which weakens the Saussurian model of complementary *axes* by speaking of the metaphoric and metonymic *poles*. Jakobson limits the term *metaphor* at the same time that he expands the term *metonymy*, which in traditional rhetoric had always been considered as a subcategory of metaphor.

One might raise the question at this point whether something is gained for an understanding of metaphor by adopting any of the structuralist assumptions. Might it not be better for Anglo-American critics to remain within the more traditional analyses and terminologies—for example, I. A. Richards' venerable distinction between " tenor " and " vehicle "—and continue to value the tensional ambiguities that the New Criticism has found to be so central in literary metaphor? The only problem here is that metaphor means too much, and hence escapes formalization entirely. Richards' vehicle and tenor, in spite of his assertions that they are a distinction within metaphor alone and not a distinction between metaphor and meaning, fall back finally on the distinction between form and theme or content (Thus in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* Richards defines ' tenor ' as " the underlying idea or principle subject which the vehicle means," an idea or subject which may not be present in the linguistic texture).[10] The syntagmatic and the paradigmatic, which we single out as the most fruitful of structuralist dichotomies, provide a more genuinely formal construct, in the way they describe linguistic relations and interpretative procedures. They provide a more flexible and a more thoroughgoing formalization of the text than the vehicle-tenor dichotomy, which in spite of itself must leave the thematic " tenor " out of the analysis—or rather must exclude it initially only to smuggle it in later on. " Tenor " is finally indistinguishable from " theme," which in New Critical interpretation is simply too ambiguous a term. On the one hand it means " the paraphrasable ideological content," with which we are not supposed to concern ourselves as critics; on the other hand, it is a kind of *deus ex machina* which rescues form from its mere formality, which provides it with a meaning and a goal.

Thus our structural theory of metaphor attempts to correct the excesses of over- and under-formalization in various types of modern criticism, and to restore the notion of process and the reader's experi-

[10] *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 97.

ence of a text. As with any such critical concoction, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and we would like to validate these suggestions in another interpretation of a text. We choose Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* for this application, partly because it is so deliberately resistant to thematic designs like those of New Critical formalism, and partly because it is in many respects a reflection on the very process we have been describing—the process of moving from disjunction to isotopy through the mastery of a series of idiolects, involving the generation of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. In other words, *Through the Looking-Glass* reflects on its own formal operations even as it frustrates the attempt to fix these operations in any homogenous " meaning."

V

The strategy of *Through the Looking-Glass* is to create a series of idiolects within the basic rules of the English language, a series of what Barthes would call staggered systems. Thus at the very beginning, we are informed by the author that the sequence of events in the narrative constitute a chess-problem—" White Pawn (Alice) to play, and win in eleven moves." [11] Interestingly enough, Saussure uses a chess game as a prime analogy for the functioning of language.[12] But in *Through the Looking-Glass*, the chess game exists on a lower level of signification; rather than adding a connotative dimension to the story, it reduces more complex happenings to its own idiosyncratic rules. To read Alice as a white pawn is to limit radically her possible meanings as a character, and to read her progress as a series of moves on a chessboard is to see a strict order in a wonderfully random sequence of encounters. The fact that chess puzzle purists have taken Carroll to task for fudging on the sequence of moves only points up the rigidity of this particular idiolect, a set of operations in which the question of meaning, or reference, becomes virtually irrelevant.

This masterplot of the chess puzzle is only one of the innumerable denotative reductions that Carroll forces upon the story. The whole conceit of a journey *through* the looking glass suggests a critique of

[11] Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, ed. Donald J. Gray (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 104.

[12] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, in collaboration with Albert Riedlinger, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 88-89.

the supposed referentiality of language, where a word is held to reflect or mirror an idea or thing. The endless nursery rhymes, literary parodies, riddles and parlor games which govern the actions and conversations of the different characters proclaim that words do not have to mean the official things that the adult world thinks they do, that in fact words do not have to *mean* at all. This is the significance of Carroll's nonsense, in which a linguistic sign is cut off from its normal linguistic constraints and made to refer first and foremost to itself. Thus we see the lion and the unicorn fighting for the crown not because these characters refer metaphorically to something other than themselves, but because they " mean " only the nursery rhyme which is the property of the child. Barthes would call these linguistic subsystems " metalanguages," reductive or analytical languages in which " the signifieds of the second system are constituted by the signs of the first." [13]

Thus in a limited sense of metaphor, the traditional sense of metaphor we were given in our early education, *Through the Looking-Glass* is a profoundly anti-metaphorical book. It takes the child's part in resisting the tyranny of meaning and reference, insisting not on the semantic plenitude of language but on its logical poverty. " ' Oh, you wicked, wicked little thing! ' cried Alice, catching up the kitten and giving it a kiss to make it understand that it was in disgrace." [14] The sub-linguistic gesture cancels out the adult speech; there is no question of a " carrying-over " of reference from one context to another.

In terms of our operational definition of metaphor, however, where both syntagmatic rules and paradigmatic substitutions are in play, *Through the Looking-Glass* emerges as a classic example of metaphorical process. In her adventures, Alice turns out to encounter two types of linguistic distortion, which may best be exemplified by the poem " Jabberwocky " on the one hand, and by Humpty Dumpty's interpretation of the poem on the other. When Alice and the reader first read " Jabberwocky " (with the help of the looking glass they have already gone through) they have a clear understanding of sequence (" *somebody* killed *something* " Alice says), but very little understanding of identities (" Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas, only I don't know what they are ").[15] The first stanza, the

[13] Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston: Beacon, 1970), p. 92.

[14] *Alice in Wonderland*, p. 107.

[15] *Alice in Wonderland*, p. 118.

most densely non-sensical, is in fact a triumph of syntagm over paradigm: " 'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves/Did gyre and gimble in the wabe. . . ." By a series of temporal and spatial clues, the authority of poetic narrative is asserted, and the absolute idiosyncracy of all the nouns, adjectives and verbs does not interfere with the purely syntagmatic comprehension. On the other hand, in Humpty Dumpty's glossing of the poem in the later chapter, paradigmatic substitutions are introduced, in a way that dismantles the coherence of any narrative progression. " 'At four o'clock in the afternoon, the lithe and slimy badger-lizard-cork screws were going round and round and making gimlet holes in the grass around the sundial. . . .' " We are left with a series of identities that cannot be brought into significant relation with one another. " 'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.' 'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master—that's all.' " [16] In his excessive mastery of meanings Humpty Dumpty defeats the possibility of moving from one to another. Thus his own poem, which begins, " 'In winter when the fields are white,' " never gets beyond its beginning, and his theory of the portmanteau word, adopted with unfortunate consequences by James Joyce, is a semantic falling between two stools rather than a carrying over.

In fact, Carroll arranges these two types of linguistic disorder, curiously similar to the disorders of similarity and contiguity relations that Jakobson describes in his classic study of aphasia, so that the excess of syntagm occurs on the red squares and among the red chess pieces, while the excess of paradigm occurs on the white squares and with the white pieces. The Red Queen insists on literal meaning, killing off dead metaphors and generally bullying Alice about the rules of the game ('I don't know what you mean by *your* way,' said the Queen: "all the ways out here belong to me") and forcing her to go faster.[17] The White Queen is vague and disorganized; she can add but not subtract. She can read words of one letter, but has trouble remembering her own name. In her progress toward becoming a queen herself, Alice encounters and finally subsumes both extremes. She embodies the severity of the rule of rules, she incorporates the leniency of free association. She is thus initiated not into society (Carroll, it will be remembered, did not like little girls to pass through adolescence)

[16] *Alice in Wonderland*, p. 163.
[17] *Alice in Wonderland*, p. 124.

but into language itself, into a command and mastery of the medium in which the adult world represents itself.

Thus the initial syntagm of *Through the Looking-Glass*, which might be called " escape from the control of adult significance," turns out to be something very like the *paradigmatic* relations within language. Related terms are freely transformed by association, kittens become red queens, white queens become sheep in shops. But this initial syntagm is restructured by a paradigm row of substitutions, in which a series of *different* syntagms all claim their own autonomous rule. Given the special laws of each game within the game, a series of different consequences are entailed. Thus the paradigmatic axis of this text is something very like the *syntagmatic* axis of language in general, and the initial syntagm of " escape from adult significance " is redefined as " assumption of one's own authority through the mastery of language." The metaphorical operation of *Through the Looking-Glass* is therefore the redefinition of escape and control as freedom and authority. But the " meaning " of this process is not to be found in any fixed terms or positions. It takes place within the structure of the sign and not in the relationship of sign and referent. This is not to say that Carroll's text does not finally refer beyond itself, but it is to say that this reference is the point at which the operation of metaphor ceases.

VI

As a conclusion to our discussion, we would like to suggest the possibility of applying such a structural theory of metaphor to longer and more traditional narratives. If metaphor has proved to be a stumbling block for structuralism, narrative is an area in which the metaphorics of the New Criticism have proved least fruitful. Aristotle was interested in the example of Achilles as a lion (in which he claims there is no essential difference between metaphor and simile), but modern readers may also see Achilles as Diomedes, Ajax, Odysseus, and most explicitly Patroclus, the successive heroes who " stand in for " Achilles after his withdrawal in anger. The larger patterns of narrative in the *Iliad* come to signify in what is fundamentally a variation of the metaphorical process. The specific actions of heroic warfare repeated in the poem (often verbatim in the epic formulae) constitute a syntagmatic axis of plot. Within this framework of repetition, which in itself provides one ground of coherence, Diomedes, Ajax, Odysseus, and Patroclus become a series of paradigmatic substitutions for the

figure of heroic perfection. The *Iliad* presents us with the declensions of epic endeavor in which the complete hero, like the infinitive form of the verb, seems to stand above the finite constraints of heroic action. When Achilles returns to the struggle, his identity subsumes the various modes of excellence of his alternate selves, but in his very totality, he points to the limits of epic heroism as a whole, the archaic fragility of the heroic culture that Homer is memorializing. Achilles is at once the perfection and the surpassing of epic codes.

On the plane of action, one might say, as well as on the plane of imagery, the *Iliad* enacts a metaphoric process that strives for isotopy of the various syntagmata but recognizes the impossibility of such isotopy ever being achieved. The various Greek heroes signify in relationship to the Achilles who is not there, until Achilles finally is there and finds that he too must stand in for Achilles who will soon be there no longer. In the novels of Jane Austen, to take a totally opposite example, it would seem that an isotopy of elements is so consummate and firmly established that any metaphorical process is all but impossible. The fanciful purveyors of substitution, such as Elizabeth Bennett or Emma Woodhouse, must purge themselves of a plastic imagination and learn the rational identity of things, and the pale consistency of Fanny Price would seem the ideal embodiment of the power to discriminate fixities and densities, to separate sameness from difference. But even Fanny's character in *Mansfield Park* is established by a version of the metaphorical process in which semantic isotopy is generated, challenged, and redefined.

We read the particularities of characterization, words and gestures, the way we read metaphors. As we easily discriminate the privileged semes of whiteness and chastity in the snow which is Maria de Medici's breasts, so when a character says "Damn you," we know he is expressing anger and not his fundamentalist religious convictions. Gestures and speech patterns are as culturally loaded with semes as metaphors: an angry phrase is no more the same as an irascible temperament than Achilles is the same as a lion or animal ferocity. Gestures and words have a range of disjunction in their contexts which is the same as the range of disjunction in metaphor. Much of traditional narrative is necessarily taken up with easily intelligible actions which give an easy sense of isotopy, like dead metaphors. But energy comes from disjunction upon this ground of coherence.

Thus Fanny Price's identity is established by a long series of actions which are unified by semes of modesty, sincerity, and moral

sense. As a matter of fact, actions containing these semes appear so frequently that semes of consistency and stability must be included. From the repetitions of these semes, we quickly learn to exclude the accidental elements and particulars from the different aspects of Fanny's behavior in a given episode—or do we? When a disjunctive scene does come, it raises something of a crisis, and the narrator, who has been "reading" Fanny's actions along with the reader, tries desperately to restore isotopy. When Fanny returns to her natural family in Portsmouth, her attitude towards them is clearly unfilial. She disapproves of the confusion and poverty of the family from which she came in a way which strikes most readers as repugnant. What we have here is a deliberate challenge to the isotopy of her character. A struggle to restore isotopy begins, in which the narrator and the reader try to find a ground of coherence to unify her behavior in Portsmouth with her character earlier in the novel. We attempt to shift the weight from Fanny's unfilial attitude to the moral grounds for that attitude (e. g. her censure is expressed as a moral evaluation in which she contrasts the manners of Portsmouth with those of Mansfield Park). We might try to explain her attitude by saying that her "real" family is that of Mansfield Park, not her biological family. We demand that Fanny's behavior be significant and not random, and to make it signify we must find a ground of coherence. Sometimes we are compelled to name that ground of coherence "significant change." But in each case, the attempt to integrate a disjunctive element of narrative is essentially the metaphorical process. No conscientious reader feels that he or Austen has entirely succeeded in recapturing Fanny's awesome stability of character in the Portsmouth episode: isotopy of moral character is only achieved through the sacrifice of other moral possibilities.

These two examples tell us a great deal about how metaphor works in narrative. Actions and agents (plots and characters) occur as discrete literary codes, but they also occur in parallel as comparable versions of one another. We read along both these axes, following through the logic of a particular syntagmatic unit from beginning to end, but recalling analogically the similar sequences or concatenations which the latest syntagm appears to stand in for. "Meaning" in narrative, we would argue (which is ultimately an operation, a way of reading) is a subfunction of the metaphorical process. The syntagmatic level is "pure" narrative, but this level is continually crossed by the paradigmatic, in which stories lose their linear innocence. The metaphoric process as a whole may be combinatory and definitive, as in the *Iliad*:

Achilles' heroism is built up from lesser examples. Or it may be discriminatory and transformational: Fanny Price becomes her moral essence only in the course of a development. A more elaborate typology of narrative operations is possible, but would, we think, be misleading if it suggested a comprehensive system. Each text finally performs the act of metaphor according to the special rules that it lays down.