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Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature

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Part Two

Metaphor and Metonymy

1 Jakobson's Theory

The idea of a binary opposition between metaphor and metonymy can be traced back to Russian Formalism. Erlich observes that Zirmunskij 'posited metaphor and metonymy as the chief earmarks of the Romantic and classic styles respectively' in an essay of 1928.[1] Roman Jakobson records that he 'ventured a few sketchy remarks on the metonymical turn in verbal art' in articles on realism (1927) and Pasternak (1935), and applied the idea to painting as early as 1919.[2] Alluding briefly in their *Theory of Literature* (1948) to 'the notion that metonymy and metaphor may be the characterizing structures of two poetic types—poetry of association by contiguity, of movement within a single world of discourse, and poetry of association by comparison, joining a plurality of worlds', Wellek and Warren refer the reader to Jakobson's essay on Pasternak, Karl Bühler's *Sprachtheorie* (1934) and Stephen J. Brown's *The World of Imagery* (1927).[3] The most systematic and comprehensive (though highly condensed) exposition of the idea, however, and the source most often cited in modern structuralist criticism, is Jakobson's essay 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances', first published in *Fundamentals of Language* (1956) by Jakobson and Morris Halle. In his 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics' addressed to the 1958 Indiana Conference on Style in Language,[4] Jakobson referred to the same distinction but in a less even-handed way, reinforcing that bias of criticism towards the metaphoric at the expense of the metonymic mode which he had himself diagnosed in the earlier paper. The later one is, however, much better known to English and American critics than the earlier. Perhaps the title, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances' has not seemed very inviting to literary critics, and a quick glance at the contents of that essay might well discourage further investigation. The seminal distinction between the metaphoric and metonymic poles is compressed into half-a-dozen pages, and seems almost an afterthought appended to a

specialized study of language disorders. The theory of language upon which the distinction rests is expounded in a highly condensed fashion, with few concessions to lay readers. In the account of this essay which follows I have tried to make its content and implications (as I understand them) clear by expansions and illustrations which may seem obvious or redundant to readers already familiar with structuralist thinking about language and literature.

Jakobson begins by formulating one of the basic principles of structural linguistics deriving from Saussure: that language, like other systems of signs, has a twofold character. Its use involves two operations—selection and combination:

> Speech implies a selection of certain linguistic entities and their combination into linguistic units of a higher degree of complexity.[5]

This distinction between selection and combination corresponds to the binary oppositions between *langue* and *parole*, between *paradigm* (or *system*) and *syntagm*, between *code* and *message*, in structural linguistics and semiotics. It is perhaps most readily grasped in relation to concrete objects that function as signs, such as clothing, food and furniture. Roland Barthes gives useful illustrations of this kind in his *Elements of Semiology*. For example, to the garment *langue*/paradigm/system/code belongs the 'set of pieces, parts or details which cannot be worn at the same time on the same part of the body, and whose variation corresponds to a change in the meaning of the clothing', while the garment *parole*/syntagm/message is 'the juxtaposition in the same type of dress of different elements'.[6] Imagine a girl dressed in teeshirt, jeans and sandals: that is a message which tells you what kind of person she is, or what she is doing or what mood she is in, or all these things, depending on the context. She has selected these units of clothing and combined them into a garment unit 'of a higher degree of complexity'. She has selected the teeshirt from the set of clothes which cover the upper half of the body, jeans from the set of clothes which cover the lower half of the body and sandals from the set of footwear. The process of selection depends on her knowing what these sets are—on possessing a classification system of her wardrobe which groups teeshirt with, say, blouse and shirt as items which have the same function and only one of which she needs. The process of combination depends upon her knowing the rules by which garments are acceptably combined: that for instance sandals, not court shoes, go with jeans (though the rules of fashion are so volatile that one cannot be too dogmatic in these matters). The combination teeshirt-jeans-sandals is, in short, a kind of sentence.

Consider the sentence, 'Ships crossed the sea'. This has been constructed by selecting certain linguistic entities and combining them into a linguistic unit (syntagm) of a higher degree of complexity: selecting *ships* from the set (paradigm) of words with the same

grammatical function (i.e. nouns) and belonging to the same semantic field (e.g. *craft*, *vessels*, *boats* etc.); selecting *crossed* from the set of verbs with the same general meaning (e.g. *went over*, *sailed across*, *traversed* etc.) and selecting *sea* from another set of nouns such as *ocean*, *water* etc. And having been selected, these verbal entities are then combined according to the rules of English grammar. To say 'The sea crossed the ships' would be nonsensical, equivalent to trying to wear jeans above the waist and a teeshirt below (both types of mistake commonly made by infants before they have mastered the basic rules of speech and dressing).

Selection involves the perception of similarity (to group the items of the system into sets) and it implies the possibility of substitution (*blouse* instead of *teeshirt*, *boats* instead of *ships*). It is therefore the process by which metaphor is generated, for metaphor is substitution based on a certain kind of similarity. If I change the sentence, 'Ships crossed the sea' to 'Ships *ploughed* the sea', I have substituted *ploughed* for *crossed*, having perceived a similarity between the movement of a plough through the earth and of a ship through the sea. Note, however, that the awareness of *difference* between ships and ploughs is not suppressed: it is indeed essential to the metaphor. As Stephen Ullmann observes: 'It is an essential feature of a metaphor that there must be a certain distance between tenor and vehicle.* Their similarity must be accompanied by a feeling of disparity; they must belong to different spheres of thought.'[7]

Metonymy is a much less familiar term than metaphor, at least in Anglo-American criticism, though it is quite as common a rhetorical device in speech and writing. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines metonymy as 'a figure in which the name of an attribute or adjunct is substituted for that of the thing meant, e.g. *sceptre* for *authority*'. Richard A. Lanham gives a slightly different definition in his *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* 'Substitution of cause for effect or effect for cause, proper name for one of its qualities or vice versa: so the Wife of Bath is spoken of as half Venus and half Mars to denote her unique mixture of love and strife.' Metonymy is closely associated with synecdoche, defined by Lanham as 'the substitution of part for whole, genus for species or vice versa: "All hands on deck".'[8] The hackneyed lines, 'The hand that rocks the cradle/Is the hand that rules the world' include both tropes—the synecdoche 'hand' meaning 'person' (by inference, 'mother') and the metonymy 'cradle' meaning 'child'. In Jakobson's scheme, metonymy includes synecdoche.

Rhetoricians and critics from Aristotle to the present day have generally regarded metonymy and synecdoche as forms or subspecies

*Terms coined by I. A. Richards in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* to distinguish the two elements in a metaphor or simile. In 'Ships ploughed the sea', 'Ships' movement' is the tenor and 'plough' the vehicle.

of metaphor, and it is easy to see why. Superficially they seem to be the same sort of thing—figurative transformations of literal statements. Metonymy and synecdoche seem to involve, like metaphor, the substitution of one term for another, and indeed the definitions quoted above use the word 'substitution'. Jakobson, however (and there is no more striking example of the advantages a structuralist approach may have over a commonsense empirical approach) argues that that metaphor and metonymy are *opposed*, because generated according to opposite principles.

Metaphor, as we have seen, belongs to the selection axis of language; metonymy and synecdoche belong to the combination axis of language. If we transform our model sentence into '*Keels* crossed the *deep*' we have used a synecdoche (*keels*) and a metonymy (*deep*) not on the basis of similarity but of contiguity. *Keel* may stand for *ship* not because it is similar to a ship but because it is part of a ship (it so happens that a keel is the same shape as a ship, but *sail*, which would be an alternative synecdoche, is not). *Deep* may stand for *sea* not because of any similarity between them but because depth is a property of the sea. It may be objected that these tropes are nevertheless formed by a process of substitution—*keels* for *ships*, *deep* for *sea*—and are not therefore fundamentally different from metaphor. To answer this objection we need to add an item to Jakobson's terminology. In his scheme selection is opposed to combination, and substitution is opposed to 'contexture'—the process by which 'any linguistic unit at one and the same time serves as a context for simpler units and/or finds its own context in a more complex linguistic unit.'[9] But 'contexture' is not an optional operation in quite the same way as 'substitution'—it is, rather, a law of language. I suggest that the term we need is *deletion*: deletion is to combination as substitution is to selection. Metonymies and synecdoches are *condensations* of contexture. The sentence, 'Keels crossed the deep' (a non-metaphorical but still figurative utterance) is a transformation of a notional sentence, *The keels of the ships crossed the deep sea* (itself a combination of simpler kernel sentences) by means of deletions. A rhetorical figure, rather than a précis, results because the items deleted are not those which seem logically the most dispensable. As the word *ship* includes the idea of keels, *keels* is logically redundant and would be the obvious candidate for omission in a more concise statement of the event, and the same applies to *deep*. Metonymy and synecdoche, in short, are produced by deleting one or more items from a natural combination, but not the items it would be most natural to omit: this illogicality is equivalent to the coexistence of similarity and dissimilarity in metaphor.

On a pragmatic level, of course, metonymy may still be seen as a process of substitution: we strike out *ships* in our manuscript and insert *keels*, without consciously going through the process of expansion and deletion described above. This does not affect the fundamental

structural opposition of metaphor and metonymy, which rests on the basic opposition between selection and combination.

> Selection (and correspondingly substitution) deals with entities conjoined in the code, but not in the given message, whereas in the case of combination the entities are conjoined in both or only in the actual message.[10]

Ploughed has been selected in preference to, or substituted for, other verbs of movement and penetration (like *crossed*, *cut through*, *scored*) which are conjoined in the code of English (by belonging to a class of verbs with approximately similar meanings) but not conjoined in the message (because only one of them is required). *Keels*, on the other hand, is conjoined with *ships* both in the code (as nouns, as items in nautical vocabulary) and in the notional message, *The keels of the ships etc*. The contiguity of *keels* and *ships* in many possible messages as well as in the code reflects their actual existential contiguity in the world, in what linguistics calls 'context', whereas there is no such contiguity between ploughs and ships.

2 Two Types of Aphasia

Impressive evidence for Jakobson's argument that metaphor and metonymy are polar opposites corresponding to the selection and combination axes of language comes from the study of aphasia (severe speech disability). Traditionally aphasia has been studied under the two aspects of sending and receiving the verbal message. Jakobson, however makes his methodological 'cut' in a different dimension, along the line between selection and combination (and again the advantage of a structuralist over an empirical approach to the problem is striking):

> We distinguish two basic types of aphasia—depending on whether the major deficiency lies in selection or substitution, with relative stability of combination and contexture; or conversely, in combination and contexture, with relative retention of normal selection and substitution.[1]

Aphasics who have difficulty with the selection axis of language—who suffer, in Jakobson's terms from 'selection deficiency' or 'similarity disorder'—are heavily dependent on context, i.e. on contiguity, to sustain discourse.

> The more his utterances are dependent on the context, the better he copes with his verbal task. He feels unable to utter a sentence which responds

neither to the cue of his interlocutor nor to the actual situation. The sentence 'it rains' cannot be produced unless the utterer sees that it is actually raining.[2]

Even more striking: a patient asked to repeat the word 'no', replied, 'No, I can't do it'. Context enabled him to use the word that he could not consciously 'select' from an abstract paradigm. In this kind of aphasic speech the grammatical subject of the sentence tends to be vague (represented by 'thing' or 'it'), elliptical or non-existent, while words naturally combined with each other by grammatical agreement or government, and words with an inherent reference to the context, like pronouns and adverbs, tend to survive. Objects are defined by reference to their specific contextual variants rather than by a comprehensive generic term (one patient would never say *knife*, only *pencil-sharpener*, *apple-parer*, *bread knife*, *knife-and-fork*). And, most interesting of all, aphasics of this type make 'metonymic' mistakes by transferring figures of combination and deletion to the axis of selection and substitution:

> *Fork* is substituted for *knife*, *table* for *lamp*, *smoke* for *pipe*, *eat* for *toaster*. A typical case is reported by Head: 'When he failed to recall the name for "black" he described it as "What you do for the dead"; this he shortened to "dead".'
>
> Such metonymies may be characterized as projections from the line of a habitual context into the line of substitution and selection: a sign (e.g. *fork*) which usually occurs together with another sign (e.g. *knife*) may be used instead of this sign.[3]

In the opposite type of aphasia—'contexture deficiency' or 'contiguity disorder'—it is the combination of linguistic units into a higher degree of complexity that causes difficulty, and the features of similarity disorder are reversed. Word order becomes chaotic, words with a purely grammatical (i.e. connective) function like prepositions, conjunctions and pronouns, disappear, but the subject tends to remain, and in extreme cases each sentence consists of a single subject-word. These aphasics tend to make 'metaphorical' mistakes:

> 'To say what a thing is, is to say what a thing is like', Jackson notes. . . . The patient confined to the substitution set (once contexture is deficient) deals with similarities, and his approximate identifications are of a metaphoric nature. . . . *Spyglass* for *microscope*, or *fire* for *gaslight* are typical examples of such quasi-metaphoric expressions, as Jackson christened them, since in contradistinction to rhetoric or poetic metaphors, they present no deliberate transfer of meaning.[4]

This evidence from the clinical study of aphasia is not merely fascinating in its own right and persuasive support for Jakobson's general theory of language; it is, I believe, of direct relevance to the study of modern literature and its notorious 'obscurity'. If much

modern literature is exceptionally difficult to understand, this can only be because of some dislocation or distortion of either the selection or the combination axes of language; and of some modern writing, e.g. the work of Gertrude Stein and Samuel Beckett, it is not an exaggeration to say that it aspires to the condition of aphasia. We shall investigate this further in due course; I proceed immediately to consider the final section of Jakobson's paper, 'The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles', in which he applies his distinction to all discourse, and indeed to all culture.

3 The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles

> The development of a discourse may take place along two different semantic lines: one topic may lead to another either through their similarity or their contiguity. The metaphorical way would be the more appropriate term for the first case and the metonymic for the second, since they find their most condensed expression in metaphor and metonymy respectively. In aphasia one or other of these two processes is blocked. . . . In normal verbal behaviour both processes are continually operative, but careful observation will reveal that under the influence of a cultural pattern, personality, and verbal style, preference is given to one of the two processes over the other.[1]

Jakobson proceeds to classify a great variety of cultural phenomena according to this distinction. Thus, drama is basically metaphoric and film basically metonymic, but within the art of film the technique of montage is metaphoric, while the technique of close-up is synecdochic. In the Freudian interpretation of dreams, 'condensation and displacement' refer to metonymic aspects of the dreamwork, while 'identification and symbolism' are metaphoric.* In painting, cubism 'where the object is transformed into a set of synecdoches' is metonymic and surrealism metaphoric (presumably because it combines objects not contiguous in nature, and selects and substitutes

*These are the basic processes by which the latent content of the dream—the real anxieties or desires which motivate it—is translated into its manifest content, the dream itself. Condensation is the process by which the latent content of the dream is highly compressed, so that one item stands for many different dream thoughts, and displacement is the process by which dreams are often differently centred from the anxieties or guilts which trigger them off. Thus something trivial in a dream may have the significance of something important in actuality and the connection between the two can be traced along a line of contiguities by the technique of free association. Dream symbolism is the more familiar process by which, for instance, long pointed objects represent male sexuality and hollow round objects female sexuality.

visual/tactile values on the principle of similarity or contrast.* The two types of magic discriminated by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, homeopathic or imitative magic based on similarity and contagious magic based on contact, correspond to the metaphor/metonymy distinction. In literature, Russian lyrical songs are metaphoric, heroic epics metonymic. Prose, which is 'forwarded essentially by contiguity' tends towards the metonymic pole, while poetry, which in its metrical patterning and use of rhyme and other phonological devices emphasizes similarity, tends towards the metaphoric pole. Romantic and symbolist writing is metaphoric, and realist writing is metonymic: 'following the path of contiguous relationships, the realistic author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time. He is fond of synecdochic details. In the scene of Anna Karenina's suicide Tolstoy's artistic attention is focused on the heroine's handbag. . . .'[2]

'The dichotomy here discussed', says Jakobson, 'appears to be of primal significance and consequence for all verbal behaviour and for human behaviour in general'† and it may be asked whether anything that offers to explain so much can possibly be useful, even if true. I believe it can, for the reason that it is a binary system capable of being applied to data at different levels of generality, and because it is a theory of dominance of one quality over another, not of mutually exclusive qualities.‡ Thus the same distinction can serve to explain

*Cf. Max Ernst: 'One rainy day in 1919, finding myself in a village on the Rhine, I was struck with the obsession which held under my gaze the pages of an illustrated catalogue showing objects designed for anthropologic, microscopic, psychologic, mineralogic, and paleontologic demonstration. There I found brought together elements of figuration so remote that the sheer absurdity of that collection provoked a sudden intensification of the visionary faculties in me and brought forth an illusive succession of contradictory images, double, triple and multiple images, piling up on each other with the persistence and rapidity which are peculiar to love memories and visions of half-asleep.

'These visions called themselves new planes, because of their meeting in a new unknown (the plane of non-agreement).' *Beyond Painting* (New York, 1948), quoted in *The Modern Tradition* (New York, 1965) ed. Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson Jr. p. 163.

† And perhaps not only human behaviour. Recent experiments in America in teaching chimpanzees sign-language have made impressive progress. The chimps are able spontaneously to combine the signs they have learned to describe novel situations, and it is reported that one chimp, Washoe, referred to a duck as 'water-bird' and another, Lucy, referred to a melon as 'candy-drink'—metonymic and metaphoric expressions, respectively. 'The Signs of Washoe', *Horizon*, BBC 2, 4 November, 1974.

‡ I think Hayden White fails to appreciate this point about dominance when he describes the metaphor-metonymy distinction as 'dualistic' (*Metahistory*, p. 33n.) He himself follows a more traditional fourfold distinction between the 'master-tropes' of Metaphor, Metonymy, Synecdoche and Irony, which he ingeniously combines with other fourfold classifications of Argument (Formism, Organicism, Mechanism, Contextualism) Emplotment (Romance, Comedy, Tragedy, Satire) and Ideology (Anarchism, Conservatism, Radicalism, Liberalism) to establish a typology of historiography. The symmetry of this apparatus is not without its disadvantages; in particular it entails a strong contrast between synecdoche (seen as essentially integrative, relating part to whole, and thus allied to metaphor) and metonymy (seen as essentially reductive, relating effect to cause, and allied to irony) which tends to blur the meaning of all four terms and thus limit their explanatory power.

both the difference between category A and category B and the difference between item X and item Y in category A. To make this point clear it is necessary to look more closely at some of Jakobson's pairings of opposites, and to follow up what are no more than cryptic hints in his paper. But first, for convenience of reference, the main points of the paper may be summarized in a schematic fashion by two lists:

METAPHOR	METONYMY
Paradigm	Syntagm
Similarity	Contiguity
Selection	Combination
Substitution	[Deletion] Contexture
Contiguity Disorder	Similarity Disorder
Contexture Deficiency	Selection Deficiency
Drama	Film
Montage	Close-up
Dream symbolism	Dream Condensation & Displacement
Surrealism	Cubism
Imitative Magic	Contagious Magic
Poetry	Prose
Lyric	Epic
Romanticism & Symbolism	Realism

4 Drama and Film

When Jakobson says that drama is essentially 'metaphoric' he is clearly thinking of the generic character of dramatic art as it has manifested itself throughout the history of culture. Arising out of religious ritual (in which a symbolic sacrifice was *substituted* for a real one) drama is correctly interpreted by its audience as being analogous to rather than directly imitative of reality, and has attained its highest achievements (in classical Greece, in Elizabethan England, in neoclassical France) by being poetic, using a language with a built-in emphasis on patterns of similarity and contrast (contrast being a kind of negative similarity). The 'unities' of classical tragedy are not means of producing a realistic

illusion, but of bringing into a single frame of reference a constellation of events (say, Oedipus's birth, his killing of an old man, solving of a riddle, marriage) that were not contiguous in space or time but combine on the level of similarity (the old man is the same as the father, the wife is the same as the mother, the son is the same as the husband) to form a message of tragic import. Elizabethan drama is more obviously narrative than Greek tragedy (that is, more linear or syntagmatic in its construction) but its most distinctive formal feature, the double plot, is a device of similarity and contrast. The two plots of *King Lear* and the complex pairing and contrasting and disguising of characters in that play is a classic example of such dramatic structure, which generally has the effect of retarding, or distracting attention from, the chronological sequence of events. In the storm scene of *Lear*, for instance—one of the peaks of Shakespeare's dramatic achievement—there is no linear progress: nothing happens, really, except that the characters juggle with similarities and contrasts: between the weather and human life, between appearances and realities. And it is not only in *Lear* that the chain of sequentiality and causality in Shakespearean tragedy proves under scrutiny to be curiously insubstantial. Stephen Booth has convincingly demonstrated how the opening of *Hamlet* plunges us immediately into a field of paradoxes and non-sequiturs which we struggle in vain to unite into a coherent pattern of cause and effect[1] (hence, perhaps, the ease with which Tom Stoppard grafted on to it his more explicitly absurdist and metaphorical *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*). It is demonstrable that the plot of *Othello* allows no time in which Desdemona could have committed adultery with Cassio—but that anomaly doesn't matter, and is indeed rarely noticed in the theatre: the play is built on contrasts—Othello's blackness with Desdemona's whiteness, his jealousy against her innocence, his naivety against Iago's cunning—not cause-and-effect. Othello's self-justifying soliloquy, 'It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul' (V, ii, 1) carries a bitter irony, for there is no cause: not only is Desdemona innocent, but Iago's malice has no real motive (that is why it is so effective).

The naturalistic 'fourth wall' plays which have dominated the commercial stage in our era must be seen as a 'metonymic' deviation from the metaphoric norm which the drama displays when viewed in deep historical perspective. In naturalistic drama every action is realistically motivated, dramatic time is almost indistinguishable from real time, ('deletions' from the chronological sequence being marked by act or scene divisions) and the characters are set in a contextual space bounded and filled with real (or *trompe l'oeil* imitations of) objects—doors, windows, curtains, sofas, rugs—all arranged in the same relations of contiguity with each other and with the actors as they would be in reality. Such naturalism is, arguably, unnatural in the theatre. In reaction against it, many modern playwrights have put an

extreme stress on the metaphoric dimension of drama. In Beckett's plays for instance, there is no progress through time, no logic of cause and effect, and the chintz and upholstery of drawing-rooms has given way to bare, stark acting spaces, with perhaps a chair, a row of dustbins and a high window from which nothing is visible (*End Game*). These plays offer themselves overtly as metaphors for the human condition, for on the literal level they are scarcely intelligible. Yet arguably *any* play, however naturalistic in style, is essentially metaphorical in that it is recognized as a *performance*: i.e. our pleasure in the play depends on our continuous and conscious awareness that we are spectators not of reality but of a conventionalized model of reality, constructed before us by actors who speak words not their own but provided by an invisible dramatist. The curtain call at which the actor who died in the last act takes his smiling bow is the conventional sign of this separation between the actors and their roles, between life and art.

The experience of watching a film is entirely different, notwithstanding the superficial similarity of modern theatre and cinema auditoria. There is, for example, no cinematic curtain call. Credits scarcely serve the same function: being written signs in an essentially non-literary medium their impact is comparatively weak, and often considerable ingenuity is used to make it even weaker, distracting our attention from the information the credits convey and integrating them into the film 'discourse' itself (by, for instance, delaying their introduction and/or by superimposing the words on scenic establishing shots or even action shots). Some films do attempt something like a curtain call at the end when they present a series of stills of the main actors with their real names superimposed, but these are invariably stills taken from the film itself, portraying the actor 'in character'—in other words the gap between performance and reality is not exposed.

Of course it is always possible for the film-maker to expose the artificiality of his production—Lindsay Anderson's *O Lucky Man*, for instance, ends with a celebration party on the set for actors and technicians, and Fellini likes to incorporate his cameras and other equipment into his pictures—but this is a highly deviant gesture in film. It is a commonplace that film creates an 'illusion of life' much more readily than drama. We are more likely to feel strong physical symptoms of pity, fear, etc. in the cinema than in the theatre, and this has little to do with aesthetic values. Whereas the play is created before us at every performance, the film is more like a record of something that happened, or is happening, only once. The camera and the microphone are voyeuristic instruments: they spy on, eavesdrop on experience and they can in effect follow the characters anywhere—out into the wilderness or into bed—without betraying their presence, so that nothing is easier for the film-maker than to create the illusion of reality. Of course film is still a system of signs, a conventional language

that has to be learned (films are more or less unintelligible to primitive people never exposed to them before).[2] The oblong frame around the image does not correspond to the field of human vision, and the repertoire of cinematic shots—long-shot, close-up, wide-angle, etc.—bears only a schematic resemblance to human optics. Nevertheless, once the language of film has been acquired it *seems* natural: hence the thudding hearts, the moist eyes, in the stalls. We tend to take the camera eye for granted, and to accept the 'truth' of what it shows us even though its perspective is never exactly the same as human vision.

This verisimilitude can be explained as a function of the metonymic character of the film medium. We move through time and space lineally and our sensory experience is a succession of contiguities. The basic units of the film, the shot and the scene, are composed along the same line of contiguity and combination, and the devices by which the one-damn-thing-after-another of experience is rendered more dramatic and meaningful are characteristically metonymic devices that operate along the same axis: the synecdochic close-up that represents the whole by the part, the slow-motion sequence that retards without rupturing the natural tempo of successiveness, the high or low angle shot that 'defamiliarizes', without departing from, the action it is focused on. Consciousness is not, of course, bound to the line of spatio-temporal contiguity, in the way that sensory experience is, but then film does not deal very much or very effectively with consciousness except insofar as it is manifested in behaviour and speech, or can be reflected in landscape through the pathetic fallacy, or suggested by music on the sound track.

This does not mean that film has no metaphoric devices, or that it may not be pushed in the direction of metaphorical structure. Jakobson categorizes montage as metaphoric, presumably because it juxtaposes images on the basis of their similarity (or contrast) rather than their contiguity in space-time. However, the fact that the techniques of cutting and splicing by which montage is achieved are also the techniques of all film editing, by which any film of the least degree of sophistication is composed, creates the possibility of confusion here. John Harrington, for example, in his *The Rhetoric of Film*, defines montage as

> a rhetorical arrangement of juxtaposed shots. The combination, or gestalt, produces an idea by combining the visual elements of two dissimilar images. A longing face, for instance, juxtaposed to a turkey dinner suggests hunger. Or the image of a fox following that of a man making a business deal would indicate slyness. Segments of film working together to create a single idea have no counterpart in nature; their juxtaposition occurs through the editor's imaginative yoke.[3]

The main drift of this definition confirms Jakobson's classification of montage as metaphorical, but the first of Harrington's examples is in fact metonymic or synecdochic in Jakobson's sense: longing faces and turkey dinners *are* found together in nature (i.e. real contexts) and all that has been done in this hypothetical montage is to delete some of the links (*e.g.* a window) in a chain of contiguities that would link the face with the turkey. The fox and the businessman, on the other hand, are not contiguous in nature, but are connected in the montage through a suggested similarity of behaviour, as in the verbal metaphor 'a foxy businessman'. Context is all-important. If the montage of longing face and turkey dinner described by Harrington were in a film adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*, we should interpret it metonymically; if it were interpolated in a documentary about starving animals, it would be metaphoric. Those favourite filmic metaphors for sexual intercourse in the pre-permissive cinema, skyrockets and waves pounding on the shore, could be disguised as metonymic background if the consummation were taking place on a beach on Independence Day, but would be perceived as overtly metaphorical if it were taking place on Christmas Eve in a city penthouse.

Eisenstein himself included in the concept of montage juxtapositions that are metonymic as well as metaphoric:

> The juxtaposition of two separate shots by splicing them together resembles not so much a simple sum of one shot plus another shot—as it does a *creation* . . . each montage piece exists no longer as something unrelated, but as a given *particular representation* of the general theme that in equal measure penetrates all the shot-pieces. The juxtaposition of these partial details in a given montage construction calls to life and forces into the light that *general* quality in which each detail has participated and which binds together all the details into a whole, namely, into that generalized *image*, wherein the creator, followed by the spectator, experiences the theme. . . . What exactly is this process? A given order of hands on the dial of a clock invokes a host of representations associated with the time that corresponds to the given order. Suppose, for example, the given figure be five. Our imagination is trained to respond to this figure by calling to mind pictures of all sorts of events that occur at that hour. Perhaps tea, the end of the day's work, the beginning of rush hour on the subway, perhaps shops closing, or the peculiar late afternoon light. . . . In any case we will automatically recall a series of pictures (representations) of what happens at five o'clock. The image of five o'clock is compounded of all these individual pictures.[4]

Translated into film such a montage of 'five o'clock' would be metonymic or synecdochic rather than metaphorical, representing the whole by parts, parts which are contiguous (because they belong to a larger complex of phenomena taking place at the same time) rather than similar. This is confirmed by Eisenstein's use of the word 'condensation' a few lines later: 'There occurs "condensation" within the process above described: the chain of intervening links falls away, and there is produced instantaneous connection between the figure and our perception of the time to which it corresponds.'[5]

Condensation, it will be recalled, belongs to the metonymic axis in Jakobson's scheme.

Eisenstein was not so much concerned with the difference between metaphoric and metonymic montage as with the difference between montage in general, and what he calls 'representation'—the photographing of an action from a single set-up by a simple accumulation of 'one shot plus another shot'—the cinematic equivalent of non-rhetorical, referential language in verbal discourse. Though celebrated for his daring use of the overtly metaphorical montage (e.g. soldiers being gunned down juxtaposed to cattle being slaughtered, Kerensky juxtaposed with a peacock) Eisenstein was comparatively sparing in his use of the device[6] (*Battleship Potemkin*, for instance, has no fully metaphorical montage though, as Roy Armes points out, the juxtaposition of shots of the three lions, one lying, one sitting and one roaring in the Odessa Steps sequence, creates the impression of a lion coming to life and 'conveyed the idea of protest—with an emotional meaning something like "Even the very stones cried out"'[7]) for the simple reason that if it becomes the main principle of composition in a film, narrative is more or less impossible to sustain. 'Underground' movies define themselves as deviant by deliberately resisting the natural metonymic tendency of the medium, either by a total commitment to montage, bombarding us with images between which there are only paradigmatic relations of similarity and contrast, or by parodying and frustrating the syntagm, setting the naturally linear and 'moving' medium against an unmoving object—the Empire State Building, for instance, or a man sleeping. Poetic drama, as I suggested earlier, is also in a paradoxical sense unmoving, nonprogressive, more concerned with paradigmatic similarities and contrasts than with syntagmatic sequence and cause-and-effect. The peculiar resistance of Shakespearian drama to successful translation into film, despite its superficial abundance of cinematic assets (exotic settings, duels, battles, pageantry etc.) is notorious; and one may confidently assert that the same difficulty would be still more acutely felt in any attempt to film Beckett's plays.* Even modern naturalistic drama (e.g. Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* or Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple*) seems slightly ill-at-ease in the film medium, and

*It is noteworthy that Beckett's one screenplay, for a short film entitled *Film*, made in 1964 with Buster Keaton in the main role, is quite different in structure from his plays, though just as 'experimental' and aesthetically self-conscious. There is plenty of action and no dialogue. Event succeeds event in a logical time/space continuum. The camera follows a man along a street and up some stairs to a room; whenever the camera eye threatens to get a view of the man's face he displays anxiety and takes evasive action. In the room he banishes or covers all objects with eyes—animals, pictures, etc. But while he is dozing the camera eye stealthily moves round to view his face. The man wakes and registers horror at being observed. A cinematic 'cut' identifies the observer as the man himself 'but with a very different expression, impossible to describe, neither severity nor benignity, but rather acute *intentness*'. (Samuel Beckett, *Film* (1972) p. 47.)

most obviously so when it deserts the economical single setting for which it was originally designed, to take advantage of the freedom of location afforded by film. The two media seem to pull against each other. The realistic novel, on the other hand, converts very easily into film—and novelists were in fact presenting action cinematically long before the invention of the moving-picture camera. Consider this passage from George Eliot's first published work of fiction, 'The Sad Misfortunes of Amos Barton':

> Look at him as he winds through the little churchyard! The silver light that falls aslant on church and tomb, enables you to see his slim, black figure, made all the slimmer by tight pantaloons, as it flits past the pale gravestones. He walks with a quick step, and is now rapping with sharp decision at the vicarage door. It is opened without delay by the nurse, cook and housemaid, all at once—that is to say by the robust maid of all work, Nanny; and as Mr Barton hangs up his hat in the passage, you see that a narrow face of no particular complexion—even the smallpox that has attacked it seems to have been of a mongrel, indefinite kind—with features of no particular shape, and an eye of no particular expression, is surmounted by a slope of baldness gently rising from brow to crown. You judge him, rightly, to be about forty. . . .[8]

The passage continues in the same style: Barton opens the sitting-room door and, looking over his shoulder as it were, we see his wife Milly pacing up and down by the light of the fire, comforting the baby. Change George Eliot's 'you' to 'we' and the passage would read not unlike a film scenario. The action certainly breaks down very readily into a sequence of 'shots': *high-angle crane shot of Barton walking through churchyard; cut to door of vicarage opened by Nanny; close-up of Barton's face as he hangs up his hat* . . . and so on. In one respect the passage requires the cinema for its full realization: the charmless, yet human, ordinariness of Barton's physiognomy—the ordinariness which is unloveable yet which (George Eliot insists) we must learn to love—is a quality the cinema can convey very powerfully and immediately, whereas George Eliot can only indicate it verbally by means of negations. There is little doubt, I think, that George Eliot would have been deeply interested in the possibilities offered by the motion-picture camera of capturing the human significance of the commonplace: as it was, she had to appeal, as a visual analogy for her art, to the static pictures of the Dutch painters.[9]

5 Poetry, Prose and the Poetic

Jakobson's characterization of prose as 'forwarded essentially by contiguity' is consistent with the commonsense view that prose is the appropriate medium with which to describe logical relationships between concepts or entities or events. The formal rules of poetry (i.e. verse)—metre, rhyme, stanzaic form etc.—are based upon relationships of *similarity* and cut across the logical progression of discourse. The physical appearance of prose and verse in print illustrates the distinction: the end of a line of prose is arbitrary and of zero significance—the line ends merely so that the text may be accommodated on the printed page (there is no reason other than convenience why prose should not be printed on a continuous strip of paper like ticker tape) and the justification of margins is a visible sign that we should ignore line length in reading prose. The important spaces in the printed prose text are those of punctuation, which are directly related to the sense of the discourse. In verse, on the other hand, the separation of one line from another, made visible on the printed page by the irregular right-hand margin and the capital at the commencement of each new line, is a crucially important component of the discourse, which may be exploited either to support or to contrast with the punctuation according to sense. Jonathan Culler points out that 'If one takes a piece of banal journalistic prose and sets it down on a page as a lyric poem, surrounded by intimidating margins of silence, the words remain the same but their effects for readers are substantially altered.'[1]

The elaborate phonological patterning of poetry, though not in itself semantically motivated, makes metaphor, as Jakobson puts it, 'the line of least resistance' for poetry. Rhyme illustrates the point most clearly, for effective rhyme in poetry, as W. K. Wimsatt observed, consists not in pairing words of similar sound and closely parallel meanings, but in pairing words of similar sound and widely divergent meanings, or with contrasting associations, or having different grammatical functions, e.g. Pope's:

> One speaks the glory of the British Queen,
> And one describes a charming Indian screen.

or

> What dire offence from am'rous causes springs,
> What mighty contests rise from trivial things.[2]

As Roland Barthes puts it: 'rhyming coincides with a transgression of the law of distance between the syntagm and the system (Trnka's law); it corresponds to a deliberately created tension between the congenial and the dissimilar, to a kind of structural scandal.'[3]

Rhyme, in its combination of similarity and dissimilarity, is thus equivalent to metaphor, and is often contrived *by* metaphor, i.e. the two rhyming words are combined through a metaphorical substitution. If we look at the compositional process we can see that the prose writer and the poet are quite differently situated. Both set out to tell a story or expound an argument (all writing must in a sense do one or both of these things) but the poet is constantly diverted from combining items in a natural, logical or temporal succession by the arbitrary demands of the metrical form he has elected to employ. Rhyme, especially, is apt to prevent the poet from saying what he originally intended to say, and to lead him to say something that he would not otherwise have thought of saying. This is well known to anyone who has ever tried to write regular verse, though it is rarely admitted, as though there were something vaguely shameful about it. Of course, if the sense is completely controlled by the exigences of metre and rhyme, doggerel and nonsense result. Successful poetry is that which manages to fulfil all the requirements of a complex, purely formal pattern of sound and at the same time to seem an utterly inevitable expression of its meaning:

> I said, 'A line will take us hours, maybe;
> Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
> Our stitching and unstitching has been naught'.[4]

Sometimes this process of stitching and unstitching will lead the poet so far from his original design that the final draft of the poem is unrecognizable from the first; invariably he will be obliged to follow his original line of argument or narrative in an oblique or convoluted fashion, deviating from it and returning to it via metaphorical digression:

> O Wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
> Thou from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
> Are driven like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
>
> Yellow, and black, and pale and hectic red,
> Pestilence-stricken multitudes! O thou
> Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
>
> The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
> Each like a corpse within its grave, until
> Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

> Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
> (Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
> With living hues and odours plain and hill;
>
> Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
> Destroyer and preserver; hear, O hear!

Although rhyme is only one of the poetic devices involved here, it is surely doubtful that Shelley's apostrophe would have been so extended or so rich in imagery, or that it would have developed in precisely this way, if it had not been expressed in *terza rima*, in which the second line of each stanza dictates the rhyme of the first and third lines in the next stanza.

The progress and final shape of a prose composition is not necessarily more predictable—one always discovers what it is one has to say in the process of saying it—but this is because of the plurality of contiguities in any given context. In describing a given event (say, a hanging) we cannot record all the relationships between all the items in the context (the context being in any case theoretically infinite); we are obliged to choose at every stage of the discourse to report this detail rather than that, make this connection rather than that. But the combination of discrete items is almost completely under the writer's semantic control—it is not subject to arbitrary and complex phonological requirements as in verse. I say 'almost' because there is, clearly, such a thing as prose rhythm, however difficult to analyse, and other phonological values enter into prose composition and exert some influence over the choice and combination of words (e.g. the obligation to *avoid* rhyming); but it is an infinitely more flexible and less rigorous system of restraints than operates in poetry, where the natural impulse of discourse to thrust onwards and generate new sentences is checked and controlled by the obligation to *repeat* again and again a certain pattern of sounds, syllables, stresses and pauses. The 'poetic function [of language]' Jakobson stated in his paper 'Linguistics and Poetics', 'projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination.'[5]

This is one of Jakobson's most celebrated and often-quoted pronouncements, but there is a difficulty about the word 'poetic' here which has not, I think, been generally recognized: in theory it embraces the whole of literature; in this paper, however, it is applied almost exclusively to verse composition. 'Poetics', Jakobson states at the beginning of his paper, 'deals primarily with the question, *What makes a verbal message a work of art*?' and his answer, already referred to in Part One, is that 'The set (*Einstellung*) towards the MESSAGE as such, focus on the message for its own sake, is the POETIC function of language.'[6] He is quick to point out (following Mukařovský on foregrounding) that the poetic function is not *peculiar* to poetic messages (it occurs in advertising, political slogans and ordinary

speech) but is their 'dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent.'[7] How does the poetic function focus attention on the message for its own sake? Jakobson answers with the formula just quoted: 'The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination.' He continues:

> Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence. In poetry one syllable is equalized with any other syllable of the same sequence; word stress is assumed to equal word stress, as unstress equals unstress; prosodic long is matched with long, and short with short; word boundary equals word boundary; no boundary equals no boundary; syntactic pause equals syntactic pause, no pause equals no pause. Syllables are converted into units of equal measure, and so are morae or stresses.[8]

While the paper sets out to define 'literariness' in general, this passage seems to identify 'poetry' with metrical composition. Certainly if literature (verbal message as work of art) is characterized by the dominance of the poetic function of language, and the poetic function is dominated by 'equivalence', the whole theory of what constitutes 'literariness' is heavily biased towards verse rather than prose literature. Not surprisingly most of Jakobson's article is taken up with (highly perceptive) analysis of verse writing, with particular attention to phonological patterning. Though he produces examples of the poetic function in nonliterary discourse (e.g. the complex paronomasia of *I like Ike*, and the principle of syllable gradation that makes us prefer 'Joan and Margery to Margery and Joan') he does not face the question of what makes the verbal message in prose a work of art until almost at the end of his paper:

> 'Verseless composition', as Hopkins calls the prose variety of verbal art—where parallelisms are not so strictly marked and strictly regular as 'continuous parallelism' and where there is no dominant figure of sound—presents more entangled problems for poetics, as does any transitional linguistic area. In this case the transition is between strictly poetic and strictly referential language. But Propp's pioneering monograph on the structure of the fairy tale shows us how a consistently syntactic approach may be of paramount help even in classifying the traditional plots and in tracing the puzzling laws that underlie their composition and selection. The new studies of Lévi-Strauss display a much deeper but essentially similar approach to the same constructional problem.
>
> It is no mere chance that metonymic structures are less explored than the field of metaphor. May I repeat my old observation that the study of poetic tropes has been directed mainly towards metaphor, and the so-called realistic literature, intimately tied with the metonymic principle, still defies interpretation, although the same linguistic methodology, which poetics uses when analysing the metaphorical style of romantic poetry, is entirely applicable to the metonymical texture of realistic prose.[9]

This is a puzzling and tantalizing passage. The reference to 'the

entangled problems' presented by the 'transitional linguistic area' of prosaic verbal art may seem evasive—or patronizing towards such art. We do not, after all, feel any less confident of classifying *Middlemarch* as literature than *In Memoriam*, and a comprehensive poetics should be able to tell us why. The allusions to Propp and Lévi-Strauss are not really relevant to this problem because these analysts deal with narrative structures abstracted from any particular verbalization, whether in prose or verse. Jakobson seems to acknowledge this lacuna in his argument in the second paragraph, where he invokes his earlier distinction between metaphoric and metonymic writing, but it is a curiously cryptic acknowledgment. Why does realistic literature continue to 'defy interpretation' if metonymy is the key to it? Why doesn't Jakobson himself analyse some examples of this kind of writing in this paper? The answer to these questions is perhaps to be found in the discrepancy between 'Linguistics and Poetics' and the earlier paper on the two aspects of language, namely that the latter implied a concept of literariness ('poetry', verbal message as art) that included *both* metaphoric and metonymic types, but 'Linguistics and Poetics' identifies literariness with only *one* type, the metaphoric. The projection of 'the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination', offered as a definition of the poetic function in 'Linguistics and Poetics', is in fact a definition of metaphorical substitution according to the linguistic theory of 'Two Aspects of Language'.

Jakobson is more explicit about the problem in the last paragraph of this earlier paper. There he points out that research into poetics has been biased towards metaphor for two reasons. First, the relationship between tenor and vehicle in metaphor is paralleled by the relationship between language and metalanguage, both operating on the basis of similarity. 'Consequently, when constructing a metalanguage to interpret tropes, the researcher possesses more homogeneous means to handle metaphor, whereas metonymy, based on a different principle, easily defies interpretation. Therefore nothing comparable to the rich literature on metaphor can be cited for the theory of metonymy.' The second reason is that 'since poetry is focused upon sign, and pragmatical prose mainly upon referent, tropes and figures were studied mainly as poetic devices' and poetry (i.e. verse) is innately metaphorical in structure. 'Consequently the study of poetical tropes is directed chiefly towards metaphor. The actual bipolarity has been artificially replaced in these studies by an amputated, unipolar scheme which, strikingly enough, coincides with one of the two aphasic patterns, namely with contiguity disorder.'[10] After this laconic observation, it is a little surprising that Jakobson should have perpetuated the 'amputated, unipolar' approach in his later paper on linguistics and poetics.

But one can appreciate the difficulties. To preserve the binary

character of the general theory, there ought to be some formula parallel to 'the projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination' that would describe the *metonymic* aspect of the poetic function. Logically, this ought to be: 'the projection of the principle of contiguity from the axis of combination into the axis of selection'. But if we interpret this formula in the strong sense, as a deviant or foregrounded manoeuvre, we find that it applies to verbal errors characteristic of the similarity disorder, such as saying *fork* for *knife*, *table* for *lamp*, *smoke* for *pipe* etc., of which Jakobson observed, 'Such metonymies may be characterized as projections from the line of a habitual context into the line of substitution and selection.' And if we interpret the formula in the weak sense, to mean simply that continguity, or context, controls the field of selection, then we have nothing more than a simple description of the way ordinary referential discourse works. This is in fact what we might expect, since literature written in the metonymic mode tends to disguise itself as nonliterature (cf. 'A Hanging') but it does not help us to accommodate such writing in a linguistically-based poetics. On the contrary it would licence us to discuss such literature entirely in terms of its content.

6 Types of Description

I suggested earlier (p. 76) that metonymy and synecdoche, considered as verbal tropes, are transformations of literal kernel statements produced by a process of combination and nonlogical deletion. This would seem to correspond to what we commonly refer to as a novelist's 'selection' of details in narrative description. Such details, E. B. Greenwood claims, 'are surrogates . . . for the mass of observed detail which would have been there in actuality.'* If, then, the appropriate critical response to the metaphoric text is to construct a metalanguage that will do justice to its system of equivalences, the appropriate response to the metonymic text would seem to be an attempt to restore the deleted detail, to put the text back into the total context from which it derives. And indeed the most familiar kind of criticism of the

*'Critical Forum', *Essays in Criticism* XII (July 1962) pp. 341–2. Greenwood was contributing to a discussion of F. W. Bateson's and B. Shakevitch's commentary, published in an earlier issue of the same journal, on a story by Katherine Mansfield. Greenwood actually applied the terms metonymy and synecdoche to descriptive detail in realistic fiction, without, it would appear, being aware of Jakobson's theory. I, certainly, was not when I quoted Greenwood's remark in *Language of Fiction* (pp. 43–4).

realistic novel follows precisely this path. The critical commentary is not so much an analysis of the novel's system as a witness to its truthfulness, or representativeness, its contribution to, and consistency with, the sum of human knowledge and human wisdom. Up to a point such a procedure is natural and indeed inevitable in discussing realistic fiction, and literary education in schools rightly begins by teaching students how to do criticism at this level. But such a procedure can never supply the basis for a 'poetics' of fiction because its essential orientation is towards content rather than form. At its worst it merely regurgitates what the novelist himself has expressed more eloquently and pointedly. Perhaps this is what Jakobson means when he says that realistic literature 'defies interpretation'.

Characterizing the realistic text as metonymic need not, however, lead us to adopt such a critical procedure if we remember that metonymy is a figure of *nonlogical* deletion. This is where we may locate a specifically literary motivation for the selection of detail. Since we cannot describe everything in a given context, we select certain items at the expense of not selecting others: this is true of all discourse. But in discourse with no 'poetic' coloration at all, (Jakobson's 'pragmatic prose') the selection of items is based on purely logical principles: what is present implies what is absent, the whole stands for the part, the thing for its attributes, unless the part or attribute is itself vital to the message, in which case it is brought into the message as a whole or thing in its own right. Here, for instance, is an American desk-encyclopaedia entry on the city of Birmingham, England:

> BIRMINGHAM (bur'ming-um) second largest English city (pop. 1,112,340) Warwickshire; a great industrial centre. Covers 80 sq. mi. Has iron and coal nearby and is noted for metal mfg. Most of Britain's brass and bronze coins minted here. Utilities and a bank are city owned. Has noted city orchestra. Site of Anglican and Roman Catholic cathedrals and Univ. of Birmingham. Heavily bombed World War II.[1]

In reference books of this type, space is at a premium, so abbreviations and elliptical syntax are used whenever words and letters can be omitted without causing confusion. This graphological and syntactical condensation is representative of the way the text is organized semantically. It does not, for instance, tell us that the skyline of Birmingham displays many factory chimneys—that is implied by 'great industrial centre'. 'Utilities' includes several agencies and services, but not banks, so the bank has to be mentioned separately. Birmingham is not noted for the arts generally, only for its orchestra, so the orchestra is specified; but we are not told anything about the orchestra and therefore infer that it is an ordinary symphony orchestra. In short, the general only yields to the particular when it does not adequately imply the particular, and the particular never represents the general—except insofar as the whole catalogue of facts

collectively 'represents' the real city. The text is therefore metonymic only in the sense that it is not metaphoric. It has selected certain details rather than others and combined them together—but any text must do the same. The point is that there is nothing figurative or rhetorical in the mode of selection and combination corresponding to the actual tropes of metonymy and synecdoche. The article is not, of course, a neutral or objective account of Birmingham, just because it *is* selective. But the selection of information, it is safe to assume, is governed by the general conventions and utilitarian purpose of the encyclopaedia rather than by the particular interests and observations of the author, or any design upon the reader's emotions. As a message it is orientated almost entirely towards context; or, in other words, it is referential. Compare this:

> Most students who come to Birmingham are agreeably surprised by their first view of the campus. Steeled to expect an environment of unrelieved industrial sprawl and squalor, they find the University situated on a fine, spacious site, its oddly but interestingly assorted architecture not noticeably stained by soot, surrounded on most sides by the leafy residential roads and green spaces of Edgbaston, a rare example of an inner suburb that has kept its privacy in a modern city.
>
> On one side of the campus, however, the factory chimneys and mean terraced cottages of Selly Oak strike a note more characteristic of 'Brum'. At the Bournbrook gate, indeed, as if by symbolic intent, one small factory (which seems, on acoustic evidence, to be breaking rather than making things) edges right up against the University grounds. Overalled men, stunned by the din inside, emerge occasionally to breathe fresh air, draw on a fag, and stare quizzically at the scholars passing in and out of academe. Whatever illusions life at Birmingham University may foster, the ivory tower mentality is not likely to be one of them.[2]

These are the opening paragraphs of an article published in the *Guardian*, 9 October, 1967, in a series on British Universities entitled 'A Guide for the First Year Student'. It was orientated to a much more specific audience than the encyclopaedia article (not merely Birmingham University first-year students, of course, but *Guardian* readers in general, especially those interested in higher education). And although written by an anonymous 'correspondent', it obviously expressed a more individualized and personal point of view than the encyclopaedia article. Comparing the two texts, one immediately notices how much the *Guardian* article depends on metonymical devices of an overtly rhetorical kind—for example, synecdoche in, 'leafy residential roads and green spaces of Edgbaston' and 'the factory chimneys and mean terraced cottages of Selly Oak'. Parts stand for wholes in these formulations, and they do so with a certain affective and thematic intent. It would have been just as 'true' to the facts to have said, 'the silent streets and hushed houses of Edgbaston' and 'the busy pavements and snug back-to-backs of Selly Oak'; but that would

not have served the writer's purpose, which was to set up an opposition between (A) suburban-pastoral and (B) urban-industrial environments. In the first paragraph, the expectation of B is corrected by the experience of A, and in the second paragraph this recognition is in turn corrected by the experience of B: a kind of double peripeteia. The passage reads more smoothly than the encyclopaedia article not simply because it eschews abbreviations and ellipses, but because it combines items in a sequence that both corresponds to their natural contiguity and supports the text's theme. The description in a sense imitates the physical process of exploring the campus, approaching it from the Edgbaston side, and finishing at its border with Selly Oak—where the implied explorer is himself, as it were, observed by the quizzical workers (synecdochically evoked by their overalls and fags). In comparison, the items in the encyclopaedia article are 'contiguous' only in the sense of being connected with the same place—Birmingham. At first unified by what one might call an 'industrial theme', that text quickly disintegrates into a series of heterogeneous facts.

These distinctions are not intended as comparative value-judgments. The two passages have quite different ends in view, and it may well be that the encyclopaedia article does its job better. But there is no doubt, I think, that the *Guardian* piece is more 'literary', and that this is directly traceable to the fact that it exploits metonymic form (both at and above the level of the sentence) for optional, expressive purposes, whereas the encyclopaedia article only uses metonymic procedures inasmuch as it has to, and because it has to.

Am I then claiming that the *Guardian* text is 'literature'? That question could only be answered by putting the passage back into its original context—the entire article, which in fact becomes much more like an encyclopaedia article as it goes on. So my answer would be, no. There is not the kind of systematic internal foregrounding through the whole text which would allow it to sustain a literary reading. Those first two paragraphs do, however, exhibit within themselves a systematic foregrounding of detail, and could conceivably be the opening of a novel, without any revision at all.*

Let us look now at a couple of classic fictional descriptions of cities. They both occur at the beginnings of their respective texts. The first is from E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*.

> Except for the Marabar Caves—and they are twenty miles off—the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary. Edged rather than washed by the river Ganges, it trails for a couple of miles along the bank, scarcely

*The encyclopaedia article could of course also provide the opening to a novel—Kingsley Amis's *The Green Man* (1969) begins with a clever pastiche of an entry in the *Good Food Guide*—but such a novel could not possibly continue for long in the same mode: the encyclopaedia article could only serve as a prelude or foil to the main narrative.

> distinguishable from the rubbish it deposits so freely. There are no bathing steps on the river-front, and bazaars shut out the wide and shifting panorama of the stream. The streets are mean, the temples ineffective, and though a few fine houses exist they are hidden away in gardens or down alleys whose filth deters all but the invited guest. Chandrapore was never large or beautiful, but two hundred years ago it lay on the road between Upper India, then imperial, and the sea, and the fine houses date from that period. The zest for decoration stopped in the eighteenth century, nor was it ever democratic. There is no painting and scarcely any carving in the bazaars. The very wood seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving. So abased, so monotonous is everything that meets the eye, that when the Ganges comes down it might be expected to wash the excrescence back into the soil. Houses do fall, people are drowned and left rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life.[3]

A Passage to India might be described as a symbolist novel disguised as a realistic one, and realistic writing, as we have already seen, tends to disguise itself as nonliterary writing. This opening paragraph certainly achieves its effect of knowledgability and authenticity partly by skilfully imitating the tone and method of the guidebook or travel essay. Yet the passage mentions only three specific topographical items—the Marabar Caves (very deliberately nudged into the prime position by syntactical inversion), Chandrapore itself, and the Ganges. The other substantives are mostly vaguely generalized plurals—bazaars, temples, streets, alleys, fine houses, gardens. There are no overt metonymies and synecdoches of the kind commonly found in travel writing to evoke 'atmosphere' and local colour. The reason for this is obvious: Chandrapore (that is, the original, native city—for the second paragraph goes on to draw a contrasting picture of the suburbs dominated by the British civil station) *has* no local colour, no atmosphere, except that of neglect, monotony and dirt; and to have evoked these qualities by metonymy and synecdoche, to have made them concrete and sensible, would have been to risk making them positive and picturesque. The dominant note of the description is negativity and absence: *nothing extraordinary—scarcely distinguishable . . . no bathing steps . . . happens not to be holy . . . no river front . . . shut out . . . temples ineffective . . . deters . . . never large or beautiful . . . stopped . . . nor was it ever democratic . . . no painting and scarcely any carving* . . . The only overtly metaphorical expressions enforce the same theme: *The very wood seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving . . . like some low but indestructible form of life.**

If the passage has no metonymic and few metaphorical tropes, what

*These are of course similes, not metaphors proper. Although Jakobson does not comment on simile as such it must belong on the metaphorical side of his bipolar scheme since it is generated by the perception of similarity, but it does not involve substitution in the same radical sense as metaphor. For this reason it is more easily assimilated into metonymic modes of writing. For a fuller discussion of this point see below pp. 112–13

is its rhetoric, and why does it remind us of guidebook writing? I think the answer is to be found in the schemes of repetition, balance and antithesis—especially isocolon (repetition of phrases of equal length and usually corresponding construction): *edged rather than washed . . . the streets are mean, the temples ineffective . . . no painting and scarcely any carving . . . The very wood seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving. So abased, so monotonous . . . Houses do fall, people are drowned . . . swelling here, shrinking there . . .* These patterns of words and word order, and the rhythms and cadences they create, are very like the 'figures of sound' that Jakobson analyses in poetry, and they are perhaps the nearest thing in prose to 'the projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination'. Their familiarity in travelogue and guidebook writing is a good example of the appearance of the 'poetic function' in nonpoetic discourse. In such writing rhetorical patterning provides a certain aesthetic pleasure—the pleasure that inheres in all rhythm—which is supplementary to the interest of the information conveyed and separable from it—in Jakobson's phrase it 'acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent'.[4] It has a general effect of humanizing the discourse by imparting to it a homogeneous tone of voice and of enabling graceful transitions between discrete facts, thus making the text generally more accessible and assimilable, or in common parlance more 'readable'. The encyclopaedia article on Birmingham could be recast in such a style without any significant modification of the information conveyed (and would indeed have to be so recast if it were an article of any length). But it would be quite impossible to recast Forster's description into the style of the encyclopaedia without loss or change of effect because his tone of voice is inextricably part of the paragraph's meaning. The elegant syntactical inversions, pointed antitheses, delicate cadences, artful repetitions, are not merely wrapping up the facts in a pleasing package, but are at every point organizing and presenting the 'facts' in a way which will emphasize the underlying theme of negativity and absence.

This is still not quite a case of 'projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination', however. The rhetorical paradigms do not actually intrude into, or divert or frustrate or cut across the syntagmatic continuity of the discourse (in the manner of stanzaic form in poetry)—they collaborate with it. With due respect to Pope, it is in prose not verse that the sound should be an echo to the sense. If this happens consistently in verse, a trite jingle results. Conversely, if phonological patterning is allowed to dominate sense in prose, as in Euphuistic writing, the result is freakish and ultimately self-defeating. Between these two extremes there is plenty of room for verse to shift in the direction of prose norms and vice versa; but the opening of *A Passage to India* is not 'poetic' prose. It is metonymic writing, not metaphoric, even though it contains a few

metaphors and no metonymies; it is metonymic in structure, connecting topics on the basis of contiguity not similarity. The description of Chandrapore begins with the river Ganges, then proceeds to the river banks, then to the bazaars which are built along the river banks, then to the streets and alleys that lead away from the river, with the occasional fine houses and gardens. There the description pauses for a brief historical digression (temporal rather than spatial contiguities) before reversing itself and proceeding back from the houses to the bazaars and eventually to the river. Thus the whole paragraph is a kind of chiasmus pivoting on the historical digression, its symmetrical structure duplicating on a larger scale the dominant figures of repetition and balance within individual sentences. Ending, topographically, where it began, it mimics the defeat of the observer's quest for something 'extraordinary' in the city of Chandrapore.

Another example:

> London. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimneypots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill-temper, and losing their foothold at street corners, where tens of thousands of other foot-passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke) adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.[5]

This is prose pushed much further towards the metaphoric pole than any of the other examples. The basic structure is a catalogue of contiguous items, but there is a marked tendency for the items to be elaborated metaphorically rather than represented metonymically. The text accelerates rapidly from brief, literal statements to the personification of the November weather ('implacable') then to the fantastic vision of the Megalosaurus and the apocalyptic vision of the death of the sun (metaphorical time-trips to the beginning and end of creation, respectively).* Then the paragraph, so to speak, comes down

*The reference to 'waters . . . newly retired from the face of the earth' is ambiguous in that it could allude either to the separation of the waters from the dry land at the Creation (*Genesis* i, 9–10) or to the aftermath of the Flood (*Genesis* viii, 7–17). Verbally the latter passage is more closely echoed, but thematically the other interpretation is more satisfying. In either reading the image yokes together Biblical and modern scientific versions of prehistory in a very striking way, as Mrs J. Politi has observed in a discussion of this passage (*The Novel and its Presuppositions*, Amsterdam, 1976, pp. 201–2). She points to a similar double perspective in the image of the death of the sun, which both echoes Biblical prophecy ('The sun shall be darkened in his going forth'—*Isaiah*, xiii,

to earth again, starts a new sequence of short, literal descriptive details (dogs, horses, umbrellas) but it is not long before the literal mud has generated a new metaphorical excursion. It is perhaps worth comparing this image of the mud 'accumulating at compound interest' with Forster's 'the very wood seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving'. The metaphorical force of the latter is far more muted because of the contextual relationship between tenor and vehicle: with the Ganges present in the scene, mud does not seem an incongruous or unexpected source of analogy. The wood and the people are in fact in physical contact with (contiguous to) the mud with which they are compared. In Dickens, the mud is the tenor of the metaphor, and the vehicle, 'compound interest' has no such physical contiguity with it—and could not have since it is an abstraction. There *is*, however, a contextual relationship of a kind, and one that has been often pointed out; namely, that the setting is the City of London, dedicated to making money ('filthy lucre' in the proverbial phrase) and that the misery caused by the Court of Chancery, which is one of the main themes of the novel, derives from greed for money. Thus, through the conceit, 'accumulating at compound interest', the mud appears to be not merely an attribute of London in November, but an attribute of its institutions: it becomes a kind of metaphorical metonymy, or as we more commonly say, a symbol. The symbolic significance of the mud (as of the fog introduced in the next paragraph) is made explicit a little later in the chapter:

> Never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds, this day, in the sight of heaven and earth.[6]

In this opening of *Bleak House*, then, 'the principle of equivalence' has projected into 'the axis of combination' on a considerable scale. Another indication that it belongs to or at least inclines to the metaphoric mode is that any attempt to translate it into film would inevitably rely on the technique of montage: a rapid sequence of juxtaposed shots—panorama of London, the Lord Chancellor in his hall, 'special effect' of a Megalosaurus, smoke lowering down from chimneys, dogs and horses splashed with mud, pedestrians colliding at a street-corner—making up what Eisenstein called a 'generalized *image*, wherein its creator, followed by the spectator, experiences the theme'. No doubt the omission of finite verbs, creating an impression

10, 'The sun became black as sackcloth of hair'—*Revelation*, vi, 12) and alludes to the modern geological theory of the gradual cooling of the sun. Mrs Politi plausibly traces the underlying pessimism of the authorial sections of *Bleak House* in part to the troubling impact of biological and geological science upon orthodox belief in the mid-nineteenth century.

of synchrony, the lack of smooth transitions between sentences, and the uniform syntactical structure of sentences, contribute to this montage effect. A film treatment of Forster's opening to *A Pasage to India*, on the other hand, or of the description of Birmingham University and environs, would use a much smoother and less noticeable cutting technique, aiming at a condensed version of a 'natural' visual survey or exploration of the scene. Dickens's verbal montage is, however, more boldly metaphorical than film montage can generally manage to be—and is not, in the last analysis, truly cinematic. The things it makes us 'see' most vividly aren't actually there at all; and what *is* there—muddy dogs and horses, ill-tempered pedestrians—are rather drably and vaguely described. The image of a Megalosaurus waddling down Holborn Hill would be quite difficult to interpret in a film, and might arouse expectations that we were about to see a science-fiction fantasy of the *King Kong* variety. The subtlety of the sootflakes and compound-interest metaphors would be more or less impossible to communicate visually. Quite simply, Dickens's paragraph is not so much a seeing as a saying. It approximates to drama rather than to film inasmuch as the narrator, instead of disguising himself as an eye, a lens, seems to address us as a voice, a histrionic voice (quite different from Forster's relaxed, ruminative voice): the voice of Chorus. He summons up by the power of his eloquence a vision of the familiar, prosaic capital (the technique could hardly work on an *un*familiar city like Chandrapore) strangely denatured and time-warped, fit setting for the tale of twisted motives and distorted values that is to follow. To literal-minded readers, the description will, of course, appear overdone or 'exaggerated'. 'I began and read the first number of *Bleak House*', Henry Crabb Robinson wrote in his diary on 19 March 1852. 'It opens with exaggerated and verbose description. London fog is disagreeable even in description and on the whole the first number does not promise much.'[7]

Bleak House, as Philip Collins observes, 'is a crucial item in the history of Dickens's reputation. For many critics in the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s, it began the drear decline of "the author of Pickwick, Chuzzlewit and Copperfield"; for many recent critics—anticipated by G. B. Shaw—it opened the greatest phase of his achievement.'[8] *Bleak House* marked Dickens's transition from being a humorous, cheerful, essentially reassuring entertainer, who deployed large casts of comic and melodramatic characters against realistic and recognizable backgrounds, to being an ironic and pessimistic critic of what he diagnosed as a sick society,* using symbolist techniques that impart to the physical world a sinister and almost surreal animation; or in our terms, it marked his shift from a metonymic to a metaphoric mode of

*H. M. Daleski has drawn attention to the submerged imagery of disease in the opening paragraphs of *Bleak House: infection, pollutions, pestilent. Dickens and the Art of Analogy* (1970), p. 169.

writing (as far as the authorial chapters are concerned, for Esther's narrative is essentially metonymic, contrasting in this, as in so many other ways, with the author's). The description of London at the beginning of *Bleak House* might be contrasted with the description of Jacob's Island and Folly Ditch in Chapter 50 of *Oliver Twist*, which begins:

> Near to that part of the Thames on which the church at Rotherhithe abuts, where the buildings on the banks are the dirtiest and the vessels on the river blackest with the dust of colliers and the smoke of close-built, low-roofed houses, there exists the filthiest, the strangest, the most extraordinary of the many localities that are hidden in London, wholly unknown, even by name, to the great mass of its inhabitants.[9]

Immediately one notices how much closer this is to the tone of the opening to *A Passage to India*. Like E. M. Forster, Dickens models his discourse on the guide-book: 'To reach this place the visitor has to penetrate through a maze of close narrow streets . . . he makes his way with difficulty . . . Arriving, at length, in streets remoter and less frequented than those through which he has passed. . . .' And so on. There is a profusion of synecdochic detail:

> he walks beneath tottering house-fronts projecting over the pavements, dismantled walls that seem to totter as he passes, chimneys half crushed, half hesitating to fall, windows guarded by rusty iron bars that time and dirt have almost eaten away, every imaginable sign of desolation and neglect.[10]

Although there are metaphorical expressions here (*tottering*, *hesitating*, *eaten away*) they are familiar, almost dead metaphors and their impact is relatively weak. Collectively their anthropomorphism invests the environment with a certain quality of menace, but more importantly these architectural details function as indices of (not metaphors for) desolation and neglect. The same strategy is repeated in the following paragraph, which describes the houses on and overlooking Jacob's Island:

> Crazy wooden galleries common to the backs of half-a-dozen houses, with holes from which to look upon the slime beneath; windows, broken and patched, with poles thrust out, on which to dry the linen that is never there; rooms so small, so filthy, so confined, that the air would seem too tainted even for the dirt and squalor which they shelter; wooden chambers thrusting themselves out above the mud, and threatening to fall into it—as some have done; dirt-besmeared walls and decaying foundations; every repulsive lineament of poverty, every loathesome indication of filth, rot, and garbage; all these ornament the banks of Folly Ditch.[11]

This description is clearly a more 'realistic' townscape than that which begins *Bleak House*—which is not to say that *Oliver Twist* as a whole is the more realistic novel. Indeed, one of the signs of its being a relatively immature piece of work is the distance or disparity between its fairy-tale-like plot and the topographical specificity of its London

setting. Arguably, Dickens was never an essentially realistic novelist (as, say, George Eliot or Trollope were), and achieved his finest work when he allowed his novels to develop according to metaphorical principles. 'It is my infirmity', he wrote, 'to fancy or perceive relations in things which are not apparent generally.'[12]

These terms—metaphoric, metonymic—are however (it has to be emphasized) relative. Any prose narrative, however 'metaphorical', is likely to be more tied to metonymic organization than a lyric poem. To illustrate the point, and to complete our sample of urban descriptions, we might cite the 'Unreal city' sequence of *The Waste Land*, which, beginning with a deceptively metonymic description of London commuters, in which there is a submerged analogy with Dante's *Inferno*

> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many
> I had not thought death had undone so many

suddenly explodes into metaphor:

> 'Stetson!
> 'You who were with us in the ships at Mylae!
> 'That corpse you planted last year in your garden
> 'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
> 'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?'

There is no contextual support for these remarks, which would explain them or supply links between them. They are intelligible only as metaphorical articulations of motifs already introduced elsewhere in the poem (e.g. in the very first lines, with their allusions to the distressing burgeonings of spring). *The Waste Land* is indeed a prime example of metaphorical discourse, since it is structured almost exclusively on the principle of similarity and contrast, dislocating and rupturing relationships of contiguity and combination.

7 The Executions Revisited

If we arrange the texts discussed in the preceding section in a horizontal order, thus:

1	2	3	4	5
Encyclopaedia	*Guardian*	*Passage to India*	*Bleak House*	*The Waste Land*