

Metaphor and Metonymy in Modern Fiction*

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It is generally recognized that there are two kinds of prose fiction in the modern period. The pursuit of 'reality' in fictional representation throughout the nineteenth century eventually led some writers to adopt techniques that were, when developed to their limits of expressive possibility, the reverse of 'realistic'; while other writers, equally convinced that they were rendering the real, were content to refine and modify the techniques of traditional realism. James Joyce and Arnold Bennett may stand as representative of the two directions between which the post-Flaubertian novelist had to choose; and at different points in our century—notably in the thirties and sixties—novelists have been collectively conscious of facing essentially the same choice.

To denote the kind of fiction that deviated from traditional realism we have added a syllable to the chronological term 'modern' and called it 'modernist' or sometimes 'symbolist', thus linking it to a cosmopolitan movement of innovation and experiment in all the arts, and especially to modern poetry and poetics. The generic characteristics of this kind of fiction are now fairly well catalogued. Modernist fiction is much concerned with consciousness, and also with the subconscious or unconscious workings of the human mind. Hence the structure of external 'objective' events essential to traditional narrative art is diminished in scope and scale, or presented selectively and obliquely, in order to make room for introspection, analysis, reflection and reverie. Frequently, therefore, a modernist novel has no real 'beginning', since it plunges us unto a flowing stream of experience with which we gradually familiarise ourselves by a process of inference and association; and its ending is usually 'open' or ambiguous, leaving the reader in doubt as to the characters' final destiny. To compensate for the weakening of narrative structure and unity, other modes of aesthetic ordering become more prominent—such as allusion to or imitation of literary models, or mythical archetypes; or repetition-with-variation of motifs, images, and symbols, a technique often called 'rhythm', 'leitmotif' or 'spatial form'. Modernist fiction eschews the straight chronological ordering of its material, and the use of reliable, omniscient and intrusive narrators. It employs, instead, either a single, limited point of view or a mode of multiple viewpoints, all more or less limited and fallible;

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and it tends towards a complex or fluid handling of time, involving much cross-reference back and forth across the temporal span of the action.

Only a few novelists—James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, for instance—exhibit all these qualities. Other novelists exhibit only some, or exhibit them in a modified form, either because—like Henry James and Joseph Conrad—they belonged to an early phase of modernism and retained some of the conventions and assumptions of traditional realism, or because—like D. H. Lawrence and Ernest Hemingway—they disagreed with certain modernist aims and assumptions, or—like E. M. Forster and Ford Madox Ford—for a combination of such reasons. Nevertheless these, and other novelists one could name, are linked by a family resemblance, constituted of these qualities, that distinguishes them from other novelists of the modern period who were not modernist. The question I want to examine here is whether it is possible to include in this family resemblance any common mode of writing: to connect, that is, the larger narrative options and strategies these novelists exercise (between which we can see certain obvious resemblances) and the language in which these options and strategies are realised (between instances of which we are mainly conscious of difference, because of the highly self-conscious and idiosyncratic styles of the writers concerned). The object of the investigation is not in fact ‘style’ (what is linguistically peculiar to each writer) nor, of course the English language—with neither *parole* nor *langue* in Saussure’s terms—but with what Roland Barthes has called *écriture*, a mode of writing, within which the writer exercises his own style.

A language and a style are objects: a mode of writing is a function: it is the relationship between creation and society, the literary language transformed by its social finality, form considered as a human institution and thus linked to the great crises of history.¹

Without adopting the historicist emphasis of *Writing Degree Zero*, I want to offer some notes towards a definition of the *écriture* of modernist fiction in English, using a linguistic concept to which Barthes and other practitioners of the French *nouvelle critique* such as Gérard Genette, have been deeply and creatively indebted: that is, Roman Jakobson’s distinction between metaphoric and metonymic expression.

II

Jakobson begins his classic paper ‘Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances’² by stating that language, like other systems of signs, has a twofold character. Speech (and writing) involves two operations: ‘a selection of certain linguistic units and their combination into linguistic units of a higher degree of complexity’. Selection implies the possibility of substitution, and the

perception of similarity, and is therefore the means by which metaphor is generated. Metonymy (the figure which names an attribute, adjunct, cause or effect of the thing meant instead of the thing itself) and the closely associated figure of synecdoche (part standing for whole, or whole for part) belong to the combinative axis of language, since they operate with terms that are contiguous in the language and in reality. A simple example (mine, not Jakobson's): in the sentence, 'A hundred keels ploughed the waves', *keels* is a synecdoche meaning *ships*, derived from the contiguity of ships and keels, and *ploughed* is a metaphor derived from a perceived similarity between the movements of ships and ploughs.

Traditional rhetoric has usually associated metaphor and metonymy under the general heading of tropes and figures. Jakobson opposes them, and one of his main reasons for doing so is their manifestation in two distinctive types of aphasia. Aphasics who have difficulty in selecting the right linguistic units tend to use metonymic expressions, while those who are unable to combine linguistic units tend to use metaphorical expressions. 'In normal verbal behaviour', Jakobson says, 'both processes are continually operative, but . . . under the influence of a cultural pattern, personality and verbal style, preference is given to one of the two processes over the other'. In the development of any discourse, one topic leads to another either through their similarity or through their contiguity, and on this basis Jakobson categorises a wide range of artistic and cultural phenomena as either 'Metaphoric' or 'Metonymic'. Heroic epics tend toward metonymy; Russian lyrical songs toward metaphor. Drama is basically metaphoric, film a basically metonymic art—but, within the art of film, the technique of dissolves, jump-cuts and montage is metaphoric, while that of close-up, which represents the whole by the part, is synecdochic. In Freudian interpretation of dreams, 'condensation' and 'displacement' refer to metonymic aspects of the dreamwork, and 'identification' and 'symbolism' to the metaphoric. In painting, Cubism is metonymic, Surrealism metaphoric. But, for our purpose, Jakobson's most interesting observation is that prose, 'which is forwarded essentially by contiguity,' tends toward metonymy—while poetry, which, in its metrical structure and use of rhyme, stresses similarity, tends toward the metaphoric pole. He also suggests that Realistic writing is metonymic, and Romantic and Symbolist writing metaphoric. Hence the traditional novel—which is both realistic and written in prose—is essentially metonymic: 'Following the pattern of contiguous relationships', he says, '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.'

Now, since modernist fiction has a symbolist bias and deviated from traditional realism, we should expect to find it tending towards the metaphoric pole of Jakobson's scheme. Intuition suggests this is

true. No doubt a statistical analysis would reveal a higher incidence of metaphor in the work of James, Conrad, Forster and Ford than in Wells, Galsworthy, Bennett and Gissing. Indeed the very titles are an indication: the Edwardian realists, like the Victorians before them, tended to use the names of places or persons for titles (*Kipps*, *New Grub Street*, *Anna of the Five Towns*, *The Forsyte Saga*), while the moderns tended to favour metaphorical or quasi-metaphorical titles (*Heart of Darkness*, *The Wings of the Dove*, *A Passage to India*, *The Rainbow*, *Parade's End*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake*). Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* indeed seems to fit the theory perfectly, since it is entirely based on the principle of similarity and substitution; structurally and thematically, in that every event is a re-enactment or a premonition of several other events in the history of the race, and verbally, in the use of a synthetic language based on the pun, which is a form of metaphor.* But *Finnegans Wake* is at the extremity of modern fiction; and indeed suggests that, because the novel is inherently a metonymic form, to force it *completely* to the metaphoric pole entails its dissolution as a novel. What makes *Finnegans Wake* 'unreadable' for many people is not the expression of multiple similarities through the pun, but the lack of logical or narrative continuity in the combination of puns. And this in turn suggests that there may be modernistic uses of metonymic as well as metaphoric modes.

III

A useful text to begin with is *Ulysses* where, indeed, the two 'streams-of-consciousness' that constitute the book's linguistic staple—Stephen's and Bloom's—may be said to tend toward the metaphoric and metonymic poles respectively. This is Stephen, catching sight of Mrs. McCabe, a midwife, in the 'Proteus' episode:

One of her sisterhood lugged me squealing into life. Creation from nothing. What has she got in the bag? A misbirth with a trailing navelcord, hushed in ruddy wool. The cords of all link back, strandentwining cable of all flesh. That is why mystic monks. Will you be as gods? Gaze in your omphalos. Hello. Kinch here. Put me on to Edenville. Aleph, alpha: nought, nought, one.

Spouse and helpmate of Adam Kadmon: Heva, naked Eve. She had no navel. Gaze. Belly without blemish, bulging big, a buckler of taut vellum, no, whiteheaped corn, orient and immortal, standing from everlasting to everlasting.³

The significant thing is not merely the presence of specific metaphors ('cable of all flesh,' 'buckler', etc.) but the fact that the interior

*The pun seems to be a way of operating on the axis of selection/substitution without the normal entailment of having to choose one item to the exclusion of another. Where metaphor substitutes one term by another that is positionally similar, the pun fuses two terms that are phonologically similar, creating a new semantic complex analogous to that produced by metaphor.

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monologue *proceeds* by perceived similarities and substitutions. The perception of an analogy between a telephone cable and the umbilical cord leads Stephen's thoughts comically from midwife to Genesis, from his own birth to that of the race. And drawn in are other similarities and contrasts (contrast being a kind of negative similarity): the cords round the habits of monks, which are symbols of chastity and, when linked, of community in the Mystical Body of Christ; the navels contemplated by oriental mystics; the navelless belly of Eve, evoking images from the *Iliad*, *Song of Songs*, and Thomas Traherne. This, now, is Bloom, looking at his neighbour's servant girl, served before him in the pork butcher's:

A kidney oozed bloodgouts on to the willowpatterned dish: the last. He stood by the nextdoor girl at the counter. Would she buy it too, calling the items from a slip in her hand. Chapped: washing soda. And a pound and a half of Denny's sausages. His eyes rested on her vigorous hips, Woods his name is. Wife is oldish. New blood. No followers allowed. Strong pair of arms. Whacking a carpet on the clothes line. She does whack it, by George. The way her crooked skirt swings at each whack.

The ferreteyed porkbutcher folded the sausages he had snipped off with bloody fingers, sausagepink. Sound meat there like a stalled heifer.⁴

Bloom's perception of the girl is strikingly synecdochic: he sees her in terms of chapped hands, vigorous hips, strong arms, and skirt: parts standing for the whole. His thought *proceeds* by associating items that are contiguous rather than, as in Stephen's consciousness, similar: the 'nextdoor' girl is linked with her master, the master with the mistress, the age of the mistress with the youth of the girl, and so on. In the second paragraph, with *ferreteyed*, *sausagepink*, etc., we appear to have reverted to metaphor; but these are *weak* metaphors, and are so precisely because they depend on contiguity and context. Thus the physical juxtaposition of the butcher's fingers and the sausages he handles provides the readymade metaphor *sausagepink*; the butcher is compared with animals; and it is because the two terms of the comparison, the tenor and vehicle, are not widely separated that the metaphors are weak.⁵

The structure of *Ulysses* is metaphorical, being based on similarity and substitution (the parallel between modern Dublin and the *Odyssey* and the many other parallels subsequently superimposed). But it is clear that this is compatible with extensive and deliberate exploitation of metonymy; and that the basically metonymic writing through which Bloom's consciousness is rendered is no less 'modernist' than the metaphoric rendering of Stephen's consciousness. The interesting conclusion follows that modernist fiction may be characterized by an extreme or deviant drive toward the metonymic pole of language to which the novel naturally inclines, as well as by a drive toward the metaphoric pole from which it is naturally remote.

IV

Another clear example of this double tendency is Gertrude Stein, a central figure in modernist experimentation with language. Her writing went through distinct phases we can associate with the metonymic and metaphoric poles. This is from her early long novel *The Making of Americans* (1906-08):

It happens very often that a man has it in him, that a man does something, that he does it very often that he does many things, when he is a young man when he is an old man, when he is an older man. One of such of these kind of them had a little boy and this one, the little boy wanted to make a collection of Butterflies and beetles and it was all exciting to him and it was all arranged then and then the father said to the son you are certain that this is not a cruel thing that you are wanting to be doing, killing things to make collections of them and the son was very disturbed then . . . ⁶

And so on. Gertrude Stein herself observed that

When I first began writing, I felt that writing should go on, I still do feel that it should go on but when I first began writing I was completely possessed by the necessity that writing should go on and if writing should go on what had colons and semi-colons to do with it, what had commas to do with it.⁷

This both states and illustrates Jakobson's dictum that prose is naturally forwarded by contiguity; indeed it seems that Gertrude Stein was at this time deliberately and programmatically cultivating a kind of writing corresponding to the Similarity Disorder, or Selection Deficiency, type of aphasia of which Jakobson speaks. This type of aphasic has great difficulty in naming things; shown a pencil, he is likely to define it metonymically by reference to its use ('to write'), and in his speech main clauses disappear before subordinate clauses, subjects are dropped, while 'the words with an inherent reference to the context, like pronouns and pronominal adverbs, words serving merely to construct the context, such as connectives and auxiliaries, are particularly prone to survive.' Compare Stein in 'Poetry and Grammar':

A noun is the name of anything, why after a thing is named write about it. A name is adequate or it is not. If it is adequate then why go on calling it, if it is not then calling it by its name does no good . . . Verbs and adverbs are more interesting. In the first place they have one very nice quality and that is they can be so mistaken . . . Then comes the thing that can of all things be most mistaken and they are prepositions . . . I like prepositions best of all . . . When I was writing those long sentences of *The Making of Americans*, verbs active present verbs with long dependent adverbial clauses became a passion with me. I have told you that I recognize verbs and adverbs aided by prepositions and conjunctions with pronouns as possessing the whole of the active life of writing.⁸

What she was after was to make 'a whole present of something that it had taken a great deal of time to find out'—that is, to capture the living quality of a character or experience she had long observed or brooded over without giving the impression of *remembering* it. It was a technique of repetition, though she denied that it *was* repetition, and compared her means to the art of film, because 'each time the emphasis is different just as the cinema has each time a slightly different thing to make it all be moving.'⁹ Film, it will be recalled, is a metonymic art in Jakobson's scheme.

A little later, however, Gertrude Stein's methods changed, though a continuity of aim persisted. She began to write 'very short things and in doing very short things I resolutely realized nouns and decided not to get around them but to meet them, to handle them in short to refuse them by using them and in that way my real acquaintance with poetry was begun.'¹⁰ She is here talking about her 'still-life' studies of objects, collected in the 1911 volume *Tender Buttons*, of which this is an example:

APPLE

Apple plum, carpet steak, seed clam, coloured wine, calm seen, cold cream, best shake, potato, potato and no gold work with pet, a green seen is called bake and change sweet is bready, a little piece a little piece please.

A little piece please. Cane again to the presupposed and ready eucalyptus tree, count out sherry and ripe plates and little corners of a kind of ham. This is use.¹¹

This is essentially metaphoric writing, as the title of the whole collection suggests. Since buttons cannot be literally tender, 'Tender Buttons' must be a metaphorical expression. (It resembles the soft treatment of hard objects in surrealistic painting—e.g. the melting watches of Salvador Dali). It has been suggested that 'Tender Buttons' may mean nipples, but without a context there is no knowing what such an expression may mean. Gertrude Stein described her method as, 'looking at anything until something that was not the name of that thing but was in a way that actual thing would come to be written.'¹² In short, the technique was one of selection and substitution in Jakobson's sense, but the perception of similarities on which this operation depends was entirely private, and the result therefore inscrutable. Furthermore, the contextual relationships which should link the substitutions together into a chain are largely neglected. The result sometimes resembles the speech of aphasics suffering from Jakobson's second disorder, Contiguity Disorder or Contextual Deficiency, where 'syntactical rules organizing words into a higher unit are lost' and sentences degenerate into 'a mere "word-heap"'. Superficially, the result is a writing resembling that of the Dadaists and later exponents of randomness like William Burroughs, with his 'cut-up' method—developments Stein might be held to have anticipated. However,

where their aim is to affront human rationality, and/or to demonstrate the capacity of Nature to generate its own meanings without human interpretation, hers is not. She still maintains the traditional stance of the artist, as one who by the exercise of a special gift or craft is seeking to bring her medium into closer relation with her perceptions.

Hers is, indeed, an aesthetic of realization, a pursuit of the thing itself: 'I had to feel anything and everything that for me was existing so intensely that I could put it down in writing as a thing in itself without at all necessarily using its name.'¹³ This is essentially the symbolist poetic—expounded by Mallarmé in terms of evocation and suggestion, by Pound in terms of the 'image,' by Eliot in terms of the 'objective correlative'. The resemblance to the prose-poem is considerable, and Gertrude Stein herself noted that she was concerned to avoid narrative and was moving in the direction of verse: '. . . and here was the question if in poetry one could lose the noun as I had really and truly lost it in prose would there be any difference between poetry and prose'.¹⁴ The answer must be no: apart from typographical layout, the sections of *Tender Buttons* are indistinguishable from symbolist or surrealist lyric poems. Prose, as Jakobson says, is forwarded essentially by contiguity, and narrative is inseparable from the combinative axis of language; to neglect this side of language completely removes the writer from the realm of prose fiction—and in Stein's case from the realm of meaningful communication.

However, the point I want to stress about Stein's work is this: though *The Making of Americans* and *Tender Buttons* tend toward the opposite poles of metonymy and metaphor, they are both recognizably 'modernist' and both pursue the same general artistic aim—to render that elusive quality, 'existence'. Her use of repetition with slight variation in her earlier, metonymic prose has the effect of converting the dynamic into the static, the temporal into the spatial, for the pace of the narrative is heavily retarded and we are scarcely conscious of progressing at all. This is consistent with the aim of metaphor-oriented symbolist and imagist verse, or Pound's definition of the 'image', which 'presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.' The instantaneousness is an illusion inasmuch as language is necessarily extended in time, but it is an illusion easier to achieve in the metaphorical mode of poetry than in the metonymic mode of prose. Gertrude Stein showed that by an artful use of repetition-with-slight-variation both lexical and grammatical, prose might achieve a similar effect; and since repetition of this kind is natural to casual vernacular speech, the method lent itself to a writer like Hemingway who wanted to be both a realist and a modernist.

Consider, for example, the opening paragraph of his story 'In Another Country', in which Hemingway applies to the American vernacular (the characteristic medium of American realism) an

elaborate but cunningly disguised verbal craft, so as to give his writing something of the magical, incantatory quality of symbolist poetry, without losing the effect of sincerity, of authentically observed experience, of—in his favourite phrase—‘the way it was’.

In the fall the war was always there, but we did not go to it any more. It was cold in the fall in Milan and the dark came very early. Then the electric lights came on, and it was pleasant along the streets looking in the windows. There was much game hanging outside the shops, and the snow powdered in the fur of the foxes and the wind blew their tails. The deer hung stiff and heavy and empty, and small birds blew in the wind and the wind turned their feathers. It was a cold fall and the wind came down from the mountains.¹⁵

This perfectly illustrates Jakobson’s account of the realistic author’s metonymic method: ‘Following the path of contiguous relationships, the realist 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’. Hemingway’s narrator indeed digresses from the situation of himself and his comrades to the atmosphere (the cold autumn evenings) and the setting, Milan, which is presented synecdochically (the city represented by its shops, the shops by game shops, the game by certain animals, and the animals by certain parts of their bodies—fur, tails, feathers). In this way the paragraph moves along a straight line of contiguity. But there is another system of relationships at work in the passage, based on the repetition of certain words and certain grammatical structures and rhythmical patterns, which has the opposite effect, drawing attention to similarities rather than contiguities, keeping certain words and concepts echoing in our minds even as our eyes move forward to register new details. In particular one responds to the repetition with variation of the words *fall*, *cold* and *wind*. Though *fall* and *cold* are paired together in the second sentence, all three words are combined only once, in the last sentence, which is why it has a finality and resonance not easy to account for in logical or semantic terms. The last sentence clinches a network of association between the weather and the emotions of the wounded soldiers. As the carefully arranged words of the opening sentence intimate, and the story goes on to make explicit, the war is always with the soldiers, in their minds and in their wounds. The war is in the mountains, the the wind comes from the mountains, *cold* and *fall* are connected obviously enough with violent death. In the context of these reverberating repetitions, the synecdochic details about the game inevitably function as symbols of death and destruction, though there is nothing figurative about the manner of their description, just as there is no pathetic fallacy in the description of the weather. In this way an essentially metonymic style is made to serve the purpose of metaphor.

Another modern novelist who uses repetition to give a basically

metonymic style the kind of effect usually associated with metaphorical writing is D. H. Lawrence—though in his writing, of course, there is vastly more overt metaphor than in Hemingway. Here is a fairly representative passage from *Women in Love*, just after Gudrun and Ursula have witnessed Gerald Crich ruthlessly controlling his horse, panic-stricken by the passing of a colliery train:

The man [i.e. the gatekeeper] went in to drink his can of tea, the girls went on down the lane, that was deep in soft black dust. Gudrun was as if numbed in her mind by the sense of the indomitable soft weight of the man, bearing down into the living body of the horse: the strong, indomitable thighs of the blond man clenching the palpitating body of the mare into pure control: a sort of soft white magnetic domination from the loins and thighs and calves, enclosing and encompassing the mare heavily into unutterable subordination, soft-blood-subordination, terrible.¹⁶

In this short, two-sentence paragraph there is a remarkable degree of repetition—lexical repetition (*soft, indomitable, man, body, thighs, mare, subordination*) and syntactical repetition or parallelism, especially in the extraordinary expansions of the second sentence, which consists of a main clause ('Gudrun was as if numbed in her mind by the sense of') followed by three participial phrases, each of which is an expansion of the preceding one, thus:

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|--|---|
| 1. indomitable soft weight of the man | bearing down into the living body of the horse |
| 2. the strong indomitable thighs of the blond man | clenching the palpitating body of the mare |
| 3. a sort of soft white magnetic domination from the loins and thighs and calves | enclosing and encompassing the mare heavily into unutterable subordination, soft-blood-subordination, terrible. |

Of particular interest in this paragraph is the behaviour of the word *soft*. 'Soft black dust' in the first sentence is a straightforward adjectival use. 'Soft weight' in the next sentence is more unusual, a kind of synaesthetic expression. It could be a literal description—some things are heavy and soft, others heavy and hard—but it doesn't seem particularly appropriate to Gerald in the circumstances, even if one remembers the description of a few pages before that 'Gerald was heavy on the mare, and forced her back. It seemed as if he sank into her magnetically, and could thrust her back against herself.'¹⁷ One can't help feeling that the *soft* in 'soft weight' has been suggested to the writer by its previous occurrence in 'soft black dust', yet it does make a kind of metaphorical sense: for Gerald, the colliery owner, is associated with the black dust that covers the countryside, and this chapter is in fact called 'Coal-Dust'. A kind of equation is implied—Gerald: mare as colliery: countryside. The next use of *soft* is explicitly metaphorical: 'a sort of soft white magnetic domination.' Again, *soft* seems to have been suggested by

previous occurrences of the word, and to be incomprehensible without reference to them, and yet to add a new meaning. For we have here both repetition (*soft*) and inversion (*white* for *black*), and Gerald is, of course associated throughout the novel with white as well as with black: his fair physique, for instance (here indicated by *blond*) and the 'soft white' snow in which he meets his death. 'Soft-blood-subordination', in which *soft* appears for the fourth and last time, is another mysteriously metaphorical expression, with yet another shade of meaning. Exactly *what* meaning it is not possible to say with any precision. We are told elsewhere in *Women in Love* that 'words themselves do not convey meaning, that they are but gestures we make, a dumb show like any other',¹⁸ and the paragraph under discussion contains its own reminder to this effect in the word 'unutterable'. We might suggest that the whole passage is a premonition of the ultimately destructive sexual relationship that is to develop between Gerald and Gudrun. That Gerald's horse is a mare, not a stallion, is not of course fortuitous. Gudrun sees in his domination of the mare a type of sexual possession which both appals and fascinates her. Certainly, much of the language, from 'the soft weight of the man' to 'soft-blood-subordination', which seems odd as a description of a man struggling to control a horse, becomes more intelligible when applied to a man making love to a woman, or, to be exact, when applied to a woman's imagining what it would be like to be made love to by a certain kind of man. In short, the passage would, at its deepest level of meaning, seem to conform to Jakobson's metaphoric category, in that it turns on Gudrun's perception of a similarity between herself and the mare, and her emotional substitution of herself for the mare. Yet in terms of linguistic structure Lawrence's prose seems to conform to the metonymic type, in that it is 'forwarded by contiguity,' each clause or phrase typically taking its impetus from an item in the preceding clause or phrase. What we know of Lawrence's compositional habits supports this view: to revise his work he had to write it all out again from the beginning, unlike Joyce, whose revision was a process of innumerable insertions and substitutions. The repeated words in the paragraph under discussion have the effect of maintaining the metonymic continuity and rhythmical flow of the writing, knitting the phrases together on the pattern: A aB bC cD . . . Most of these words do not change in meaning, but *soft*, as we have seen, does change and thus directs our attention, almost subliminally, to the possibilities of a metaphorical meaning beneath the metonymic surface.

V

I have been arguing here that, while it seems true that modernist fiction belongs to the metaphoric mode in Jakobson's scheme, this

is perfectly compatible with the retention and exploitation of metonymic writing on an extensive scale. This is so for two reasons: first, that prose fiction is inherently metonymic, and cannot be displaced towards the metaphoric pole without turning into poetry, and, secondly, that metonymic techniques can be manipulated to serve or support the purposes of metaphorical writing. Much the same conclusion is reached by Gérard Genette in a perceptive essay on Marcel Proust: 'without metaphor, Proust says, more or less, no true memories: we add for him and for all: without metonymy, no linking memories, no story, no novel.'¹⁹

The 'deep structure' of *Remembrance of Things Past* is, like the deep structure of *Ulysses*, essentially metaphoric: the action of involuntary memory, which is the prime moving force behind the narrative, is a linking of experiences on the basis of their similarity (an irregularity in the paving-stones of Paris, for instance, recalling to Marcel the floor of the baptistery of St. Mark's in Venice) not their contiguity. But, says Genette, if the initial trigger-mechanism of memory is metaphoric, the expansion and exploration of any given memory is essentially metonymic, because of Proust's characteristic tendency towards 'assimilation by proximity . . . the projection of analogical affinity upon relationships of contiguity', and vice versa. Genette's first illustration of this interpenetration of metaphor and metonymy in Proust is a comparison of two descriptions of church steeples. In the first, from *Swann's Way*, the narrator contemplates the church of St. André-des-Champs on the plain of Méséglise; in the second passage, from *Sodom and Gomorrah*, Marcel, at Balbec, evokes the church of St. Mars-le-Vêtu. Genette points out that the two pairs of steeples are clearly very similar in appearance, but that the basic analogies in each passage are quite different. Why does Proust compare the steeples in the first passage to ears of corn and those in the second passage to fish? Clearly because of the context of each perception—the cornfields of Méséglise and the sea and bathing of Balbec, respectively. As Genette observes, *resemblance* in an analogy mattered less to Proust than its *authenticity*, 'its fidelity to relations of spatio-temporal proximity.' Such handling of analogy seems to follow naturally from the modernist novel's concern with consciousness, yet it is something that illustrates its continuity with, rather than its deviation from, the aims of traditional realism, and is one of the reasons why Proust's writing does not strike us as being so radically modernist as, say, Joyce's.

If an essentially metaphorical mode of writing can utilize metonymy in the ways suggested above, it would not be surprising to find that the basically metonymic mode of non-modernist, realistic writing in the modern period can make extensive use of metaphoric devices. To examine thoroughly this alternative mode of writing, which, as Jakobson observes, has been rather neglected by critics and stylisticians in favour of the more amenable metaphoric mode, is beyond

the scope of the present essay; but I will venture one final speculation in this connection, if only to show that to say each mode of writing includes elements of its opposite does not deprive the distinction of significance. My suggestion is that writers using the metonymic mode tend to express relationships of analogy through simile rather than through metaphor; and that what, in this kind of writing, often looks like simile is really a disguised form of metonymy or synecdoche. These features are especially marked in the realistic novelists of the thirties who were in conscious revolt against the experimental, 'aesthetic', modernist novel. Consider, for example, the opening of Christopher Isherwood's 'A Berlin Diary' in *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939):

From my window, the deep solemn massive street. Cellar-shops where the lamps burn all day, under the shadow of top-heavy balconied facades, dirty plaster frontages embossed with scroll-work and heraldic devices. The whole district is like this: street leading into street of houses like shabby monumental safes crammed with tarnished valuables and second-hand furniture of a bankrupt middle class.²⁰

The only analogical expression here is the simile, 'like shabby monumental safes.' The word *like* is also used to stress the synecdochic significance of the architectural detail: 'The whole district is like this.' In the subsequent description of the interior of Frl. Schroeder's house where 'Herr Issyvoov' is a lodger, we find the same pattern. The only metaphorical expressions in the plethora of detail are in fact similes: 'The tall tiled stove, gorgeously coloured, like an altar. The washstand like a Gothic shrine.' An *objet d'art* that is iconically metaphorical is described in terms of simile: 'a pair of candlesticks shaped like entwined serpents.' And again we find the word *like* used to give special emphasis to the metonymic and synecdochic significance of the furnishings and bric-a-brac:

Everything in the room is like that: unnecessarily solid, abnormally heavy and dangerously sharp. Here, at the writing table, I am confronted by a phalanx of metal objects — a pair of candlesticks shaped like entwined serpents, an ashtray from which emerges the head of a crocodile, a paperknife copied from a Florentine dagger, a brass dolphin holding on the end of its tail a small broken clock. What becomes of such things? How could they ever be destroyed? They will probably remain intact for thousands of years: people will treasure them in museums. Or perhaps they will merely be melted down for munitions in a war. Every morning, Frl. Schroeder arranges them very carefully in certain unvarying positions: there they stand, like an uncompromising statement of her views on Capital and Society, Religion and Sex.²¹

That last use of *like* is particularly interesting. Although it seems to indicate a simile, there is in fact no *similarity* involved. There isn't, there couldn't be, any such thing as a statement of Frl. Schroeder's views on Capital and Society, Religion and Sex; or if there were,

it would in no way *resemble* a pair of candlesticks, an ashtray, a paperknife and a broken clock. One might say that the possession of these objects is consonant with the possession of those views, or even that possession of those views caused the acquisition of these objects. Thus a synecdochic or metonymic relationship has been presented as if it were metaphorical.

Once you notice it, the recurrence of the word *like* in this book of Isherwood's comes to seem quite obsessive; and I think that an analysis of other thirties novelists in the same stylistic current, like Orwell and Greene, would show a similar preference for simile over metaphor. Supposing my hunch is correct, what conclusions might we draw from it?

Jakobson does not comment on simile as such. There has not, in fact, been very much discussion by critics and rhetoricians concerning the relationship between metaphor and simile, and what little there is is inconclusive. Some maintain that there is no difference, others that metaphor expresses identity, simile likeness, and some have on this ground regarded metaphor as the superior, more 'poetic', figure. Northrop Frye, indeed, offers the distinction between metaphor and simile in much the same way as Jakobson offers the distinction between metaphor and metonymy:

Realism, the art of verisimilitude, evokes the response, 'How like that is to what we know!' When what is written is *like* what is known, we have an art of extended or implied simile. And as realism is an art of implied simile, myth is an art of implicit metaphorical identity. The word 'sun-god' with a hyphen used instead of a predicate is a pure ideogram, in Pound's terminology, or literal metaphor in ours.²²

It seems to me however that when we say 'How like that is to what we know!' we recognize a synecdochic rather than an analogical relationship between the work of art and our experience. Realistic fiction typically pretends to be a piece of previously unrecorded or overlooked true history. It is sometimes said to provide a '*slice of life*'.

Winifred Nowotny, while inclining to the view that there is a significant difference between the two tropes, usefully points out that a writer's choice of simile rather than metaphor is often due simply to the fact that his language does not allow him to express a perceived analogy metaphorically: 'the common language does not provide him with what he wants to use as the figurative extreme of the metaphor,'²³ and Genette points out that simile can approach the poetic intensity of metaphor by unpredictable or anomalous analogies.²⁴ Certainly a writer like Virginia Woolf, whose work tends very obviously towards the metaphorical pole, moves from metaphor to simile in the texture of her prose without any noticeable variation in effect:

The sun fell in sharp wedges inside the room. Whatever the light touched became dowered with a fanatical existence. A plate was like a white lake. A knife looked like a dagger of ice. Suddenly tumblers revealed themselves upheld by streaks of light. Tables and chairs rose to the surface as if they had been sunk under water and rose, filmed with red, orange, purple like the bloom on the skin of ripe fruit. The veins of the gaze of the china, the grain of the wood, the fibres of the matting became more and more finely engraved. Everything was without shadow. A jar was so green that the eye seemed sucked up through a funnel by its intensity and stuck to it like a limpet.²⁵

This passage from *The Waves* contrasts interestingly with the passage from Isherwood quoted earlier. Both are descriptions of interiors, of objects in rooms; yet they are totally different in form and function. The objects in Virginia Woolf's room are in an unstable state, they are undergoing a process of strange and vivid metamorphosis. This is the metaphoric imagination running riot. The fact that the process is expressed sometimes through metaphor and sometimes through simile doesn't seem to make very much difference.

This would suggest that the effect of any analogy will be determined more by the specific nature of that analogy, by the distance between tenor and vehicle, by the register of the diction and the character of the context, than by the presence or absence of the 'like' construction. Nevertheless, I think we may suggest that, in Jakobson's terms, simile is, so to speak, inherently less metaphorical than metaphor. Though simile involves the perception of *similarity*, it does not seem to involve substitution in quite the same radical sense as metaphor. Simile, by using the *like* or *as if* construction, spreads itself along the line of contiguity and combination which metaphor, as Frye's example 'sun-god' suggests, always threatens to disrupt. As we have seen from the Isherwood passage, simile can merge almost imperceptibly into the metonymic mode. And it is easy enough to see how simile lends itself more readily than metaphor to the empiricist philosophical assumptions that, historically, underpin realism in fiction. When we say that A is like B, we do not confuse what is actually there with what is merely illustrative; but when we say that A in a sense *is* B, the possibility of such confusion is always present—and, in modernist fiction, by design. As James Ramsay realises at the end of *To the Lighthouse*, in a passage which very clearly contrasts the metonymic with the metaphoric vision, 'nothing was simply one thing'.

James looked at the Lighthouse. He could see the white-washed rocks; the tower, stark and straight; he could see that it was barred with black and white; he could see windows in it; he could even see washing spread on the rocks to dry. So that was the Lighthouse, was it?

No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other was the Lighthouse too. It was sometimes hardly to be seen across the bay. In the evening one looked up and saw the eye opening

and shutting and the light seemed to reach them in that airy sunny garden where they sat.²⁶

That is perhaps the central assertion of the modernist novel—nothing is simply one thing; it is an assertion for which metaphor is the natural means of expression.

Notes

1. Ronald Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (London, 1963) p. 3.
2. Roman Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances', in Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (the Hague, 1956) pp. 55–82. All citations of Jakobson are from this article.
3. *Ulysses* (1st Bodley Head edn., pp. 34–5).
4. *Ibid.* p. 52.
5. '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.' Stephen Ullmann, *Style in the French Novel* (Cambridge, 1957), p. 214.
6. Gertrude Stein, *Look at me Now and Here I am: Writings and Lectures, 1909–45*, ed. Patricia Meyerowitz (Harmondsworth, 1971) p. 90.
7. *Ibid.* p. 130.
8. *Ibid.* pp. 125–7 & 130.
9. *Ibid.* p. 106.
10. *Ibid.* p. 137.
11. *Ibid.* p. 187.
12. *Ibid.* p. 142.
13. *Ibid.* p. 145.
14. *Ibid.* pp. 145–6.
15. *The Snows of Kilimanjaro and other stories*, (New York, 1968), p. 65.
16. *Women in Love* (Harmondsworth, 1960) p. 126.
17. *Ibid.* p. 123.
18. *Ibid.* p. 209.
19. 'Metonymie chez Proust, ou la naissance du Recit', *Poétique*, 2 Reprinted in *Figures III* (Paris, 1972) pp. 41–63.
20. Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* (Harmondsworth, 1965).
21. *Ibid.* p. 8.
22. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (New York, 1965) p. 136.
23. Winifred Nowotny, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
24. *Figures III*, pp. 28–9.
25. Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (Harmondsworth, 1964) p. 94.
26. Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (1960) p. 286.