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Texts, Thoughts, and Things

IN THIS CHAPTER we ask you to shift your attention from the large, or "macro," structures of narrative and drama to the small, or "micro," structure of language itself. In particular we will focus on a single crucial element of language: the creative principle of metaphor.

A friend of ours who became a writer and teacher himself told us that his whole attitude toward language was changed when a teacher said to him—somewhat brutally—"Words are razor blades. You use them as if they were bricks." The point, of course, was that careless, clumsy use of language could be dangerous: that a certain awareness, a certain delicacy, is demanded by language. A razor blade can be a tool, a weapon, or a hazard, but you ignore its sharp edges at your peril. The point was forcefully made by the teacher's own use of the blade of metaphor, drawing the student's attention to a potential danger in language that he had overlooked.

We do not intend to draw any blood here, nor do we recommend wounding people to get their attention, but we hope this fragment of an anecdote will help explain why we have singled out metaphor as a dimension of language that should receive special attention. The reading and writing work in this chapter is designed to help you develop your awareness of the presence and function of metaphor in all sorts of texts. This awareness should help you attain greater precision and power as a writer. It should also enhance your pleasure and ability as a reader. Metaphor is at the heart of the creative process embodied in human language.

THE LINGUISTIC BASIS OF METAPHOR

It is widely understood that metaphor is a basic element of poetry. It is also true, however, that metaphor is a fundamental building block of ordinary language and of such forms of written prose as the essay. We begin our investigation of metaphor with two passages from a book called *Words and Things* by the psycholinguist Roger Brown.

In the first passage, Brown uses the case of the Wild Boy of Aveyron as a way of directing our attention to the linguistic problem of names for things—or nouns, as we call them. By clarifying for us the way in which nouns refer not to individual things but to "universals," or categories of things, Brown lays the basis for an understanding of metaphor.

In a metaphor the name of one thing is applied to another, so that, as in certain chemical reactions, there is an exchange of particles between the two. That is, when we say, "Words are razor blades," certain defining attributes of the category *razor blades* are transferred to the category *words:* namely, delicacy and danger. This is the way metaphor works. In the second passage included here, Brown helps us understand why the transfer takes place. He also suggests that all nouns are to some extent metaphorical. Language grows by a kind of metaphorical extension. Metaphor is thus not an ornament added on top of language, but a principle built in at the most fundamental level of linguistic behavior.

The following selections by Roger Brown are clear but dense—packed with meaning. Please read them slowly and carefully. Your understanding of metaphor will depend on your understanding of how words refer to things. That is, Brown's discussion of metaphor in the second selection depends upon his discussion of reference and categories in the first. To understand metaphor, we must be aware of how delicate and complicated is the connection between language and all the things we use language to discuss.

What Words Are: Reference and Categories

Roger Brown

"A child of eleven or twelve, who some years before had been seen completely naked in the Caune Woods seeking acorns and roots to eat, was met in the same place toward the end of September 1797 by three sportsmen who seized him as he was climbing into a tree to escape from their pursuit." In these words Dr. Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard began his first report on the education of 1

the wild boy found in the Department of Aveyron. The discovery of a human creature who had lived most of his life outside of all human society excited the greatest interest in Paris. Frivolous spirits looked forward with delight to the boy's astonishment at the sights of the capital. Readers of Rousseau expected to see an example of man as he was "when wild in woods the noble savage ran." There were even some who counted on hearing from the boy mankind's original unlearned language—they conjectured that it was most likely to be Hebrew. The savage of Aveyron disappointed all of these expectations. He was a dirty, scarred, inarticulate creature who trotted and grunted like a beast, ate the most filthy refuse, and bit and scratched those who opposed him. In Paris he was exhibited to the populace in a cage, where he ceaselessly rocked to and fro like an animal in the zoo, indifferent alike to those who cared for him and those who stared. The great psychiatrist Pinel, who taught France to treat the insane as patients rather than as prisoners, was brought to examine the boy. After a series of tests Pinel pronounced him a congenital idiot unlikely to be helped by any sort of training.

Many came to believe that the so-called savage was merely a poor sub- 2
normal child whose parents had recently abandoned him at the entrance to some woods. However, a young physician from the provinces, Dr. Itard, believed that the boy's wildness was genuine, that he had lived alone in the woods from about the age of seven until his present age of approximately twelve, and there was much to support this view. The boy had a strong aversion to society, to clothing, furniture, houses, and cooked food. He trotted like an animal, sniffed at everything that was given him to eat, and masticated with his incisors in the same way as certain wild beasts. His body showed numerous scars, some of them apparently caused by the bites of animals and some which he had had for a considerable time. Above all, a boy of his general description had been seen running wild in the same forest some five years earlier.

Dr. Itard had read enough of Locke and Condillac to be convinced that 3
most of the ideas a man possesses are not innate but, rather, are acquired by experience. He believed that the apparent feeble-mindedness of the boy of Aveyron was caused by his prolonged isolation from human society and his ignorance of any language and that the boy could be cured by a teacher with patience and a knowledge of epistemology. Itard asked for the job. He had been appointed physician to the new institute for deaf mutes in Paris and so asked to take Victor there to be civilized and, most interesting for us, to learn the French language. Permission was granted and Itard worked with the boy, whom he called Victor, for five years. Itard had little success in teaching Victor to speak. However, he had considerable success in teaching Victor to understand language and, especially, to read simple words and phrases. . . .

In teaching Victor to understand speech, Itard found that he must, in the 4
beginning, set aside the question of meaning and simply train the boy to identify speech sounds. In the first period after his capture Victor paid no attention to the human voice but only to sounds of approach or movement in his vicinity—noises that would be important to a creature living in the forest. Itard devised an instructive game for teaching Victor to distinguish one vowel from another. Each of the boy's five fingers was to stand for one of five French

vowels. When Itard pronounced a vowel, Victor was to raise the appropriate finger. Victor was blindfolded and the vowels were pronounced in an unpredictable order so that if the boy made correct responses it must be because he could distinguish the vowels. In time Victor learned to play the game, but he was never very good at it. Thus Itard decided that the boy's vision was more acute than his hearing and thought he might be taught to read more easily than he could be taught to understand speech.

Again Itard came up with an ingenious game designed to teach Victor to 5
identify the forms of the written and printed language, even though he could not yet understand their meanings. The same collection of words was written on two blackboards, making the order of words on one board unrelated to the order on the other. Itard would point to a word on his board and it was Victor's task to point to its counterpart on the other board. When the boy made a mistake, teacher and pupil "spelled" the word together; Itard pointed to the first letter of his word and Victor did the same with his supposed match, and they proceeded in this fashion until they came to two letters where Victor saw a difference. After a time Victor could read quite a large number of words, some of them very much alike. As yet, however, this was not reading with understanding but simply the identification of empty forms.

The time had come to teach Victor something about the meanings of 6
words. Itard arranged several objects on a shelf in the library, including a pen, a key, a box, and a book. Each thing rested on a card on which its name was written, and Victor had already learned to identify the names. Itard next disarranged the objects and cards and indicated to Victor that he was to match them up again. After a little practice the boy did this very well. Itard then removed all the objects to a corner of the room. He showed Victor one name and gave him to understand that he was to fetch the object named. Victor also learned this very quickly, and Itard grew increasingly optimistic.

The next test went badly at first. Itard locked away in a cupboard all of 7
the particular objects with which Victor had practiced, but made sure that there were in his study other objects of the same kinds—other pens, keys, boxes, and books. He then showed Victor a word, e.g., *livre,* and indicated that the boy was to bring the referent. Victor went to the cupboard for the familiar book and finding the cupboard locked had to give up the task. He showed no interest in any other book. The same failure occurred with the other words. Victor had understood each word to name some particular thing rather than a category of things.

Itard then spread out a variety of books, turning their pages to show what 8
they had in common. He indicated that the word *livre* could go with any of them. After this lesson, when shown the word *livre,* Victor was able to fetch a book other than the specific book of his training. However, he did not correctly constitute the book category at once, for he brought a handful of paper at one time and a pamphlet and magazine at another. As his errors were corrected, however, he learned to distinguish books from other sorts of publications and also to recognize such categories as are named *key, pen,* and *box.* The crucial test for understanding of the referent category was always Victor's ability to identify new instances.

Itard next approached the difficult problem of conveying an understanding of words that name qualities and relations rather than objects that have size, shape, and weight. He took out two books, one large and one small, and Victor promptly labelled each with the word *livre*. Itard then took Victor's hand and spread it flat on the front of the large volume showing how it failed to cover the full surface. The same hand spread out on the smaller book did cover that surface. Victor then seemed puzzled as if wondering that one word should name these two different objects. Itard gave him new cards labelled *grand livre* and *petit livre* and matched them with the appropriate books. Now came the test to see whether Victor had learned specific habits or had abstracted a general relationship. Itard produced two nails, one large and one small, and asked that the cards *grand* and *petit* be correctly assigned. Victor learned this relationship and others besides. 9

Itard had another good idea for verbs that name actions. He took a familiar thing, e.g., a book, and made it the object of some action—pounding it or dropping it or opening it or kissing it. In each case he gave the boy the appropriate verb in the infinitive form. The test was for the boy to label such actions when their object was changed, e.g., to a key or a pen. This too Victor learned. 10

The end of all this imaginative teaching was that Victor learned to read with understanding quite a large number of words and phrases. He would obey simple written commands and also use the word cards to signal his own desires. In addition to all this he assumed the manners and appearance of a civilized young man. However, Itard's final word was discouraging. Although Victor had been greatly improved by education, diminishing returns on his efforts convinced Itard that the boy was performing to the limits permitted by his intellectual endowment and these limits, unfortunately, were subnormal. 11

Reference and Categories

When Dr. Itard wanted to give Victor some idea of the meanings of words, he hit upon a way of showing that each word stood for something, that each word had a referent. This is the sort of thing each of us would do to convey to a small child the meanings of his first words; it is also the usual recourse in trying to communicate with a foreigner who understands no English. The use of language to make reference is the central language function which is prerequisite to all else. It is the beginning of the psychology of language and is, accordingly, the focus of this book. 12

What Victor learned about reference was at first too specific. Words do not name particular things as Victor thought; they name classes or categories. Someone who properly understands the word *book* is prepared to apply it to any and all particular books. I see in the room where I sit a novel in a highly colored dust jacket and quite near it one numbered volume of a sober encyclopedia; on the floor is a Penguin paperback, and asleep in the hall the telephone directory. Although they differ in many respects, all of these are, nevertheless, books. They have the printed pages and stiff covers that define the category. 13

Actually, we do not badly stretch the notion of the category if we treat even a single particular book as a category. The single book, the single anything, 14

is a category of sense impressions. Victor must have seen the book that was used in his early training on many occasions, in various positions, and from different angles. At one time a book is a rectangular shape lying on a table; at another time the same book is only the back of a binding on the library shelf. While it is possible to say that these various experiences constitute a category, that category must be distinguished from the sort named by *book* in general. The various appearances of one book have a continuity in space-time that makes us think of them as one thing preserving its identity through change. The various individual books around my room do not have this kind of continuity. So let us agree to call all referents categories but to distinguish the particular referent from the general by calling it an "identity" category.

Itard's later training procedures show that not all referents are objects with size, shape, and weight. Actions like dropping and kissing are referents and so are such qualities as large and small or red and green. Clearly too, these referents are categories. The act of dropping changes many of its characteristics from one occasion to the next but preserves something invariant that defines the action. Any sort of recurrence in the non-linguistic world can become the referent of a name and all such recurrences will be categories because recurrences are never identical in every detail. Recurrence always means the duplication of certain essential features in a shifting context of non-essentials. 15

It is quite easy to see that the referents of words are categories but somewhat less easy to see that language forms, the names of referents, are also categories. Variations in the production of a language form are probably more obvious in the written or printed version than in the spoken. Differences in handwriting and of type are so great that it is actually difficult to specify what all the renderings of one word have in common. Even the individual letter is a category of forms changing considerably in their numerous productions. Variations in pronunciation are also certainly ubiquitous but our early extensive training in disregarding the dimensions of speech that are not significant for distinguishing English words causes us to overlook them. So long as phonetic essentials are preserved we identify utterances as the same, although they change greatly in loudness, pitch, quaver, breathiness, and the like. From acoustic studies we know that even one speaker "repeating" the same vowel does not produce identical sounds. Itard's productions of the French vowels cannot have been identical from one time to another and neither, we may be sure, were the "matched" words he wrote on the two blackboards. In these first games Victor was learning to categorize the empty forms of language, to pick out the essential recurrent features and to overlook the non-essential variations. 16

FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING: DEFINING CATEGORIES

1. It is easy to understand Brown when he says that the word *book* refers to a "category" that includes all the books that one could possibly encounter. But things get more complicated when he says that any particular book is also a category—what he calls an "identity category." Reconsider Brown's fourteenth paragraph and discuss the notion of "identity

category." Define this term in your own words, and illustrate your definition with examples.

2. Every word, even every letter, says Brown, is also a "category of forms." Looking over paragraph 16, define "category of forms" in your own words, and illustrate the way in which a word may be described as a "category of forms."

What Words Are: Metaphor

Roger Brown

When someone invents a new machine, or forms a concept, or buys a dog, or manufactures a soap powder his first thought is to name it. These names are almost never arbitrary creations produced by juggling the sounds of the language into a novel sequence. We think hard and ask our friends to help us find a "good" name, a name that is appropriate in that its present meaning suggests the new meaning it is to have. 1

Sometimes new words are introduced by borrowing words or morphemes[1] from classical languages. The biological sciences have been especially partial to this practice as *photosynthesis, streptoneura,* and *margaritifera* testify. In order to savor the appropriateness of these names a classical education is required and so, for most of us, they are functionally arbitrary. 2

The usual method of creating a new name is to use words or morphemes already in the language; either by expanding the semantic range of some word or by recombining morphemes. Every word has a history of former meanings and, traced back far enough, an ancestor that belongs to another language. The modern French *lune* derives from the Latin *lux*. The extension of the Latin word for *light* to the moon is appropriate and may once have been experienced as appropriate. Today, however, because of phonetic change and loss of the earlier meaning, the metaphor in *lune* must be overlooked by most French speakers even as we overlook the metaphor in our *moon* which is a remote cognate of Latin *mensis* for month. Both languages arrived at their word for the moon by metaphorical means, though the metaphors are constructed on different attributes of the referent—its luminosity for the French, its periodic cycle for the English. In both cases the whole process dates so far back that the appropriateness of these names like that of *margaritifera* or *photosynthesis* is evident only to scholars. 3

Many new names are still very familiar in an older reference and so their appropriateness to the new referent is easy to see. There are dogs called *Spot* or *Rover;* detergents and soaps are called *Surf, Rinso,* and *Duz;* one kind of personality is said, by clinical psychologists, to be *rigid.* Compounds like *overcoat, railroad train,* and *fireplace* have familiar constituents. While the origins of these names are obvious enough they probably are not ordinarily noticed. It seems to be necessary to take a special attitude toward language, quite different from our everyday attitude, to discern the metaphors around us. 4

[1][morpheme: the smallest unit of meaning in any given language. In English the word *dog* is a morpheme. The word *dogged* adds a second morpheme. *Eds.*]

The metaphor in a word lives when the word brings to mind more than a single reference and the several references are seen to have something in common. Sometime in the past someone or other noticed that the foot of a man bears the same relation to his body as does the base of a mountain to the whole mountain. He thought of extending the word *foot* to the mountain's base. This word *foot* then referred to two categories. These categories share a relational attribute which makes them one category. Within this superordinate category, which we might name *the foundations* or *lower parts of things,* are two subordinate categories—the man's foot and the mountain's base. These two remain distinct within the larger category because the members of each subordinate category share attributes that are not shared with the members of the other subordinate category. The *man's foot* is made of flesh and has toes, which is not true of the base of any mountain. Thus far the relationship is like that of any set of superordinate and subordinate categories, e.g., *polygons* as superordinate to triangles and squares. The subordinates have something in common which makes them species of one genus but they are distinct because members of one subordinate have still more in common. Metaphor differs from other superordinate-subordinate relations in that the superordinate is not given a name of its own. Instead, the name of one subordinate is extended to the other and this, as we shall see, has the effect of calling both references to mind with their differences as well as their similarities. The usual superordinate name, e.g., polygons, calls to mind only the shared attributes of the various varieties of polygon. 5

The use of *foot* to name a part of the mountain results in the appearance of *foot* in certain improbable phrase contexts. One hears, for the first time, the *foot of the mountain* or *mountain's foot.* Until someone saw the similarity that generated the metaphor these sayings were not heard. They cause the metaphor to live for others who have not noticed the similarity in question. The anatomical reference is called to mind by the word *foot* which has been its unequivocal name. The context *of the mountain* is one in which this word has never appeared. The phrase suggests such forms as *peak* or *top* or *slope* or *height* or *base;* it is a functional attribute of all these. Only one of these forms has a referent that is like the anatomical foot and that one is *base.* There is a click of comprehension as the similarity is recognized and some pleasure at the amusing conceit of a mountain with toes, a mountain anthropomorphized. If the metaphor was created for a poem about the mountain climber's struggle with his almost human antagonist—the mountain itself—then the metaphor might figure importantly in communicating the sense of the poem. 6

This metaphor blazed briefly for the person who created it and it lights up again when anyone hears it for the first time, but for most of us it is dead. This is because with repetition of the phrase *foot of the mountain* the word *foot* loses its exclusive connection with anatomy. The word may be used of 7

mountain as often as of man. When that is true there is nothing in the phrase *foot of the mountain* to suggest a man's foot and so the phrase is experienced as a conventional name for the lower part of a mountain. Part of the phrase is accidentally homophonic with part of the phrase *foot of a man* but there is no more reason for one to call the other to mind than there is for *board of wood* to remind us of *board of directors, bored with psycholinguistics,* or *bored from within.* In the interest of univocal reference we attend to the context in which each form occurs and do not consider the meanings it might have in other contexts.

The word *foot,* in isolation, is ambiguous. It has many referents including the mountainous and the anatomical. That special attitude toward language which brings out the potential metaphors now seems to me to involve attending to forms in isolation, deliberately ignoring context. In this last sentence, for instance, consider the word *attending* and disregard its surroundings. *Attending* names at least two kinds of behavior; there is "attending a lecture" and "attending to a lecture." The latter behavior is notoriously not the same as the former. In the sentence above only the intellectual attention sense of *attending* comes to mind; the other is ruled out by context. 8

A metaphor lives in language so long as it causes a word to appear in improbable contexts, the word suggesting one reference, the context another. When the word becomes as familiar in its new contexts as it was in the old the metaphor dies. This has happened with *foot of the mountain.* Sometimes there is a further stage in which the older set of contexts dies altogether and also the older reference. In these circumstances one speaks of a historical semantic change in the word. The term *strait-laced* is applied nowadays to people who follow an exceptionally severe, restrictive moral code. An older sense can be revived by placing the term in one of its older contexts: "Mrs. Mather was miserable in her strait-laced bodice." In the days when people laced their clothing *strait* meant *tight* and to be *strait-laced* was literally to be rather tightly trussed up. It is not difficult to see the attributes of this condition that resulted first in a metaphor and then in a semantic change. Whether one is tightly laced into his clothing or into his conscience he will feel confined, he may strain against his bonds and burst them, or, when no one else is about, he may secretly relax them a little. The metaphor is so rich that we should not be surprised to find it in poetry as well as in the history of linguistic change. 9

In fact there exists a poem founded on the very similarities that caused *strait-laced* to change in meaning. 10

Delight in Disorder

A sweet disorder in the dress
Kindles in clothes a wantonness.
A lawn about the shoulders thrown
Into a fine distraction;
An erring lace, which here and there
Enthrals the crimson stomacher;
A cuff neglectful, and thereby

Ribbands to flow confusedly;
A winning wave, deserving note,
In the tempestuous petticoat;
A careless shoestring, in whose tie
I see a wild civility;—
Do more bewitch me, than when art
Is too precise in every part.

Robert Herrick

Herrick lived in seventeenth century England, through the period of Puritan rule into the restoration of Charles II. F. W. Bateson . . . points out that the poem reproduced above is concerned with more than disorder of costume. It is not only the clothes but also the wearers that Herrick would have *sweet, wanton, distracted, erring, neglectful, winning, tempestuous, wild,* and *bewitching.* The poem is a plea for disorder of manners and morals as well as of dress. It is a statement of anti-Puritanism. 11

How does Herrick communicate these depth meanings? The poem by its title professes to be concerned with dress. The word *disorder* can be applied to dress, to manners, to politics, to morals, or even to a man's wits. The fact that we are reading a poem makes us receptive to multiple meanings but the title alone does not indicate what secondary meanings, if any, are relevant. In the first line *sweet* sounds a trifle odd since it is not often said of disorder in dress. *Sweet* starts several auxiliary lines of thought having to do, perhaps, with girl friends, small children, and sugar cane. Only one of these is reinforced by what follows. *Kindles* and *wantonness* in the second line rule out children and sugar cane. Thoughts about girls and loose behavior are supported by words like *distraction, enthrals,* and *tempestuous.* All of these words can be used in talking about clothes. However, their choice is improbable enough to call for some explanation. Since the improbable words are all drawn from a set of terms having to do with girls and their behavior a second group of consistent references is created. 12

A scientist might call Herrick's message ambiguous since he uses words that have several different referents and does not clearly sort these out with critical contexts. Behind that judgment is the assumption that the poet intends, as a scientist might, to call attention to just one kind of reference. In fact, however, Herrick wanted to talk simultaneously about clothing, ladies, and morality and to do so in a very compact way. Rather than string out three unequivocal vocabularies he uses one vocabulary which is able to make three kinds of reference. 13

When a poet uses simile he explicitly invites us to note the similarities and differences in two referents as in "My love is like a red, red rose." When he uses metaphor a word is used in a context that calls for a different word as in "The *lion* of England" or "My *rose* smiled at me." The context evokes one reference, the word another and the meaning is enriched by their similarities and differences. *Lion* and *king, rose* and *love* concentrate on similarities. There is an extraordinary sentence of e. e. cummings' . . . in which the difference in the 14

two references is the main thing: "And although her health eventually failed her she kept her sense of humor to the *beginning.*" The most probable word for final position in that sentence is *end.* This is not only different from *beginning,* it is the antonym. The probability of *end* is so great that the reader is bound to anticipate it. Finding instead its antonym almost makes us feel reprimanded. Our worldly outlook has made us too prone to think of death as the end.

FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING: DEFINING METAPHOR

1. At the end of paragraph 4, Brown says that "it seems to be necessary to take a special attitude toward language, quite different from our everyday attitude, to discern the metaphors around us." Try to define or describe the attitude Brown is discussing.
2. Adopting the attitude of a student of metaphor, examine the metaphors that Brown himself employs—as in the first sentence of paragraph 7, for instance. Does his use of metaphor differ from that of a poet like Robert Herrick?
3. Examine more closely the poem by Herrick. Brown has discussed the major system of metaphor in the poem, but the poetic text is enlivened by other instances of metaphoric language. Discuss the range of meaning evoked by some of the following words in the poem:

   kindles (line 2)
   enthrals (line 6)
   flow, wave, tempestuous (lines 8, 9, 10)

   How do you understand a phrase like "wild civility"?
4. Produce, in your own words, a working definition of metaphor, with some appropriate illustrative examples. You will need some clear notion of metaphor to begin your study of the workings of this feature of language in poems, dreams, essays, and advertisements.

METAPHOR IN THREE POEMS

Metaphor is a vital principle of all language, but it is especially important in poetry. If metaphors grow like weeds—in ordinary language—poets cultivate them, extend them, and combine them to make new hybrids that might never occur in nature but are exotic and exciting in those formal gardens we call poems.

Our study of the workings of metaphor will take us ultimately to essays, arguments, and advertising—back toward ordinary life. But we begin with three short poems, as laboratory specimens designed to illustrate some of the principles of metaphoric language. Please read them carefully and consider the questions for discussion and writing after each poem.

Separation

Your absence has gone through me
Like thread through a needle.
Everything I do is stitched with its color.

W. S. Merwin

FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING: METAPHOR AND THE UNEXPECTED

1. It has been said that a good simile or metaphor is both unexpected and appropriate. Consider Merwin's poem in light of this view. How would you expect someone to complete the phrase "Your absence has gone through me like . . ."?
2. If someone said "Your absence has gone through me like a dagger," that would signify that separation is painful. What does Merwin's metaphor signify?

Let us honor . . .

Let us honor if we can
The vertical man
Though we value none
But the horizontal one.

W. H. Auden

FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING: MODIFYING METAPHOR

This very small poem was sent by Wystan Hugh Auden to his friend Christopher Isherwood, and later appeared at the beginning of a volume of Auden's poetry. The poem depends upon the use of two words that are nearly synonyms (*honor* and *value*) and two words that form an abstract, geometrical opposition (*vertical* and *horizontal*). The reader is invited to make his or her own interpretive distinction between the meanings of *honor* and *value* and also to supply some concrete interpretations for *vertical* and *horizontal.* One way to do this is simply to rewrite the poem by filling in the blanks:

Let us _____ if we can
The _____ man
Though we _____ none
But the _____ one.

The assumption you must make in filling in these blanks is that *horizontal* and *vertical* are metaphors for something: for instance, death and life, slackness

and probity. By supplying your interpretation, you collaborate in the completion of the poem.

Compare your version with others. Are some more satisfying than others? Is any one so satisfying that you feel like adopting it as "correct" and labeling the others wrong? Are any so unsatisfying that you want to rule them out entirely? Does the idea of interpretation as a collaborative or creative activity please or displease you? Discuss these matters.

Metaphors

I'm a riddle in nine syllables,
An elephant, a ponderous house,
A melon strolling on two tendrils.
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!
This loaf's big with its yeasty rising.
Money's new-minted in this fat purse.
I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.
I've eaten a bag of green apples,
Boarded the train there's no getting off.

Sylvia Plath

FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING: MAKING METAPHORS

1. This poem is a riddle, with each line providing a metaphoric clue to its solution. Solve the riddle, and consider how the relationships between the metaphors contribute to its solution.
2. Compose your own riddle poem to present to the class for solution. Your subject should be something with which the class is familiar, such as a physical or emotional state (sleepiness, hunger, happiness, envy), or a place (classroom, fast-food restaurant), or a thing (car, TV, pizza). To get started, make a list of the qualities of your subject that first come to mind. Consider which quality or qualities best describe your subject, and concentrate on developing metaphors that will make your audience experience your subject from your point of view.

METAPHOR AND DREAM

For centuries people have believed that dreams are messages from somewhere, perhaps in a code that disguises their meaning. Over the past hundred years, a new theory of dreams has dominated discussion, the theory developed by Sigmund Freud. According to Freud, dreams are messages from the human unconscious, in a code designed to bypass the censorship of our conscious mind. These messages, which have to do with our most

primal needs and desires—especially those relating to sexuality—must be censored because we do not wish to admit that we could even "think" such things, since they conflict with our status as civilized, reasonable beings.

Freud has a name for the psychic process or mechanism that transforms our desires into acceptable shape. He calls it the *dream-work*. For our purposes, Freud's dream-work is interesting on two counts. First, it operates much as do those linguistic devices called figures of speech, of which metaphor is especially important. Second, Freud calls the process of making sense of dreams *interpretation*, and what he means by interpretation is very close to what literary critics mean by the interpretation of poems.

Dreams and poems are texts that work in similar ways—to a certain extent. We are concerned here with both the similarities and the differences. But before discussing them, we should examine Freud's own definitions of his key terms. We have numbered and arranged these definitions here, but the language is Freud's (from the English translation of his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*). We have added explanatory comments after each quotation from Freud.

From Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis

Sigmund Freud

1. *Latent* and *manifest*

We will describe what the dream actually tells us as the *manifest dream-content* and the concealed material, which we hope to reach by pursuing the ideas that occur to the dreamer, as the *latent dream-thoughts*.

Comment: Freud's theory depends upon a metaphor of surface and depth. What is manifest *is what is visible on the surface. What is* latent *is hidden in the depths. For instance, a dream about the loss of a wedding ring (manifest) might signify a (latent) wish for separation from a spouse. What is manifest can be read directly. What is latent must be interpreted.*

2. *Dream-work* and *work of interpretation*

The work which transforms the latent dream into its manifest one is called the *dream-work*. The work which proceeds in the contrary direction, which endeavors to arrive at the latent dream from the manifest one, is our work of *interpretation*. This work of interpretation seeks to undo the dream-work.

Comment: Freud here gives a name to the unconscious process that enables our real feelings to be expressed in a disguised manner. Thus disguised, thoughts and feelings we would censor or "repress" if we were awake can find expression