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Metaphor or Metonym, Applying Lodge to Realism

In his essay "The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy," David Lodge applies Roland Jakobson's theories on metaphor and metonymy, as posited in "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," to an analysis of Modernist literature. This analysis covers the works of Joyce, Stein, and Hemingway, among others, and suggests that these authors use metaphor as the main structural technique in their work. In regards to *Ulysses*, Lodge notes that the "The structure…is metaphorical, being based on similarity and substitution" (Lodge 486). In making this observation, Lodge asserts modern prose's reliance on metaphor as a structural unit, which is a significant realization because, as Lodge and Jakobson both note, prose is traditionally structurally reliant on metonymy while poetry is usually crafted out of metaphors (483).

While Lodge differentiates Modernist prose from the traditional prose structural model that Jakobson outlines, he makes little mention of any writers from other modes. Lodge acknowledges in his conclusion his limited outlook and suggests that there be an analysis of prose from the Realist mode, to see if, as he says, "the basically metonymic mode of traditional realism can make extensive use of metaphor" (Lodge 494). Lodge states that he expects the results of such an analysis to be that the Realist texts' use of metaphor, or analogy, "is certainly different from Modernist writing's use of analogy" (Lodge 494). He believes that Modernist and Realist prose likely act as antitheses of one another. Lodge argues that Modernist prose uses metaphor as the main structural unit in order to overwhelm the reader and destabilize the narrative, where as Realist prose uses metaphor to ground the reader in the text (494). He also explains that Modernist texts operate in this way because their goal is to express the fact that "nothing is simply one thing" and they see metaphors as displaying this multiplicity of existence

(495). Based on Lodge's analysis of Modernist prose five questions can be established to guide an analysis of a Realist's work that follows Lodge's method:

1. Do Realist authors make use of metonymy and strong metaphors?
2. Which technique is the structural base of the text?
3. What does each technique accomplish in the text?
4. How do these relate to the effects of metaphor and metonymy in Modernist texts?
5. Why does the author work in this way?

John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* is an ideal work to apply Lodge's analytical method to, because it is well accepted that Steinbeck intended *East of Eden* to be a biographical work, detailing the history of his family in California for his two sons ("East of Eden: Contemporary Reviews"). As such, the text attempts to capture the world in its actual nature, providing a singular look at the nature of people and the environment they live in. The text also strives to emphasize a selection of themes it decides are important.

The majority of the narrative of *East of Eden* functions in the traditional method of moving between the plot, atmosphere, characters, and setting as Jakobson outlines in his "Two Aspects" essay (Jakobson 130). Take for example the following passage:

> He came to the Salinas Valley full-blown and hearty, full of inventions and energy. His eyes were very blue, and when he was tired one of them wandered outward a little. He was a big man but delicate in a way. In the dust business of ranching he seemed always immaculate. His hands were clever, and he could improvise anything with bits of wood and metal. He was forever inventing a new way of doing an old thing and doing it better and quicker, but he never in his

> whole life had any talent for making money. Other men who had the talent took Samuel's tricks and sold them and grew rich, but Samuel barely made wages all his life. (Steinbeck 9)

This paragraph begins with a description of Samuel Hamilton that employs metonymy as the main structural technique. Throughout the depiction, the text has individual parts, such as Samuel's eyes and hands stand in for the whole of Samuel. The description of the plot is also metonymic; the statement that Samuel did not have the "talent for making money" represents the whole explanation that Samuel has never made any substantial profits in his life and is struggling to get by everyday. At no point in this passage does the text use a metaphor, choosing rather to exclusively make use of metonymy instead of metaphor or a blend of the two techniques. As such, the entirety of the narrative is built out of metonyms, becoming a series of partial descriptions, just like this passage.

The text's use of metonymy establishes the temporal and spatial framework for the narrative of *East of Eden*. In using metonyms, the text keeps the narration inside the same setting throughout; it does not need to leave the space and time it has already established to make an abstract comparison. This temporal and spatial continuity allows the text to establish its thematic elements, especially the important relationship between man and nature. Its comparisons, instead of highlighting abstract similarities, establish the physicality of the characters, as seen in the description of Samuel's size and hands. He is not just large, but also graceful in comparison to other farmers. Not only is he good at working with his hands, but he also has a special affinity for working with the products of nature: wood and metal.

The text does not pass judgment on Samuel or other characters when describing them. It simply presents them as they are and allows their actions to stand in for their moral qualities. If

the text relied on metaphors, the characters' moral qualities would be established without them ever acting, an action that would undercut the text's central theme of *Timshel*, or man's ability to choose. The one contradiction to this is Cathy Ames, who the text labels as being evil from the moment she is introduced. However, it follows up this labeling with a description of her actions, which anyone would say are atrocious, even if she were introduced in a more neutral manner.

This is not to say that *East of Eden* does not employ metaphors. Just as Modernist novels employed metonymy to support their metaphor heavy narrative, *East of Eden* uses metaphor to add to its metonymically driven prose. In Part 4 of Chapter 22, the text introduces a metaphor, which shapes the entire narrative. Samuel and Adam Trask discuss naming Adam's twins:

> "What a shame it is that the proper names for them they cannot have."
>
> "What do you mean?" Adam asked.
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> "Freshness, you said. I thought last night—" He paused. "Have you thought of your own name?"
>
> "Mine?"
>
> "Of course. Your first-born—Cain and Abel." (Steinbeck 264)

This suggestion given by Samuel is purely metaphorical; he has replaced Adam's twins, who are eventually named Caleb and Aron, with the Biblical figures of Cain and Abel. In making this comparison, a sort of equivalency is set between the two pairs. This relation is later demonstrated in the professions each twin takes up. Caleb becomes an exploitative farmer and Aron becomes a priest, a profession often compared to that of shepherds. With these relations established it is easy to see how the twins live out a modern version of the Cain and Abel story. The two unintentionally compete for Adam's affection, before Caleb acts out of spite and jealousy to destroy Aron because Adam chooses to give his affection to him instead of Caleb.

The Cain and Abel metaphor also affects how Adam is interpreted. If the brothers are like Cain and Abel, Adam must be like the Biblical Adam. His "forbidden fruit" is Cathy, the malicious and dangerous woman he falls in love with. This is an important distinction because the first act of the novel establishes a brotherly relationship built out of conflict and torment between Adam and his brother Charles. Their relationship could easily be seen as being symbolic of that Cain and Abel's. However, through its use of metaphor, as laid out in Samuel's speech, the text establishes an entirely different dynamic; Adam and Charles are not representative of Cain and Abel, but rather Adam and God respectfully. Charles does not mean to hurt Adam, but rather protect him from unnecessary harm. This provides a basis for Charles' insistence that Aron leave Cathy alone and have nothing to do with her.

Given the way this metaphor operates, it is clear that *East of Eden* is using metaphors differently than Modernist novels, just as Lodge hypothesized. In *East of Eden*, the Cain and Abel metaphor establishes a framework from which it becomes possible to properly understand the nature of the characters. Recognizing the equivalency between the twins, Caleb and Aron, and the brothers, Cain and Abel, allows for the understanding of the true nature of each twin. The same is true for Adam, Charles, and Cathy. The metaphor replaces additional lengthy descriptions by making statements of equivalency. The characters are not just similar in some aspects to those they are compared to. Rather, they are the same in every possible aspect. The metaphor, as the text uses it, pulls the vehicles, Cain and Abel, out of time and space and places them in the already established narrative of the tenors. Take for example Adam who in the first two acts, without the Cain and Abel metaphor, is easily read as a victim that should be pitied. However, when the framework of the Cain and Abel metaphor is applied, the reader understands Adam to be the fool that ignores the warnings and rules of his higher power, who in this case is

Charles. The metaphor makes it clear that Adam is not just like Adam in that he fathers a Cain and Abel pairing, but that he is essentially Adam, pulled out of the temptations of the Garden of Eden and dropped into the temptations of 19th century America.

To better see how this confirms Lodge's hypothesis, it is helpful to compare *East of Eden's* use of metaphor to the usage employed by the Modernists. Where the Modernists rely on the metaphor to build a narrative that reflects the many forms of existence, *East of Eden* uses metonyms to construct a linear and stable narrative that reflects the history and factuality of the world it has created and the characters inside of it. The text uses metaphors to emphasize the stability of the narrative, in the same way that metonyms in Modernist writing emphasize the disjointed and multiple perspectives that mode strives for. To understand this difference in usage, take the following example. If a Modernist author compared his character to Cain, the metaphor would speak to the character's subconscious feelings of inadequacy, resentment, and jealousy. It would be understood that the character and his work and livelihood are not appreciated. Additionally, the temporality of the text would be called into question. However, it would not mean that the character was going to enter into open conflict with his brother to win affection, as is the case in *East of Eden*.

At this point, the questions necessary for Lodge's analysis are finally answered, and some interesting results are observable. First, Lodge was correct in predicting that the Realist novel would structurally operate as the antithesis of the Modernist novel. This supports Lodge's expansion of Jakobson's theories on metaphor and metonymy. Where Jakobson's applications to literature were limited, Lodge has begun to develop a more complete understanding of the structural units of different modes. Expanding Jakobson's original classifications, which only took into account Romanticism, Symbolism, and Realism as modes, can only help to understand

the relationship of structural techniques to the goals of texts in a certain mode. For example, understanding the goals of Modernist novels and knowing that they structurally rely on metaphor allows for the conclusion that metaphors must better break down temporal and spatial limitations and express the Modernist notion of existence than metonymy.

Second, the analysis reflects the influence of a text's purpose on its structure. *East of Eden* is not in the Realist mode or making use of metonyms for no reason in particular. Instead, the text's overall purpose and thematic goals are dictating the mode and structure that it employs. While commenting on a text's intention will always be a tricky and complicated facet of analysis and criticism, having an understanding of the relationship between a text's intention and the structural techniques it employs, will serve to help better predict what the text was attempting to express and convey.

Works Cited

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