

A Voice Full of Money:
Metaphor and the Art of Meaning

Kathryn McCracken

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Marybeth Davis Baggett, Ph.D.
Thesis Chair

Michael Scott Jones, Ph.D.
Committee Member

James Harold Nutter, D. A.
Committee Member

Brenda Ayres, Ph.D.
Assistant Honors Director

Date

Abstract

The common definition of metaphor as a “comparison between two things that does not include the words ‘like’ or ‘as’” has, in the recent decades, lost the respect of serious students of language. Originating in Aristotelian thought, this “Comparison Theory” of metaphor is oversimplifying and therefore inadequate. By using examples to outline these inadequacies, a more accurate, more robust view of metaphor emerges. Far from being a mere literary flourish, the concept of metaphor—especially as metaphor is identified as the means through which symbols function—is at the very base of the general process of meaning conveyance through language.

In order to conduct a fruitful discussion of metaphor in its true scope, a close analysis of a single metaphor from Fitzgerald’s novel *The Great Gatsby*, “her voice is full of money,” is given. In light of the shortcomings of The Comparison Theory, analysis of the power of a single metaphor to draw connections throughout a work will shed light on the necessity for a study of metaphor that reflects the continuity-building aspects of metaphor. Discussions of metaphor that attempt to define the phenomenon by isolating the context of terms run against the process of association and synthesis by which metaphor functions. Therefore, a fruitful study of metaphor is necessarily one that analyzes metaphor across contexts, as this thesis does.

A Voice Full of Money:

Metaphor and the Art of Meaning

Today, middle school students everywhere are taught the term “metaphor” as part of an introductory lesson on the figures of speech. The students will learn that metaphor is a special, figurative use of language where two things are compared to each other without using the word “like” or “as.” As examples, the teacher might cite Shakespeare’s famous metaphor, “All the world’s a stage,” (2.7.139) and then compare it against Robert Burns’s famous simile, “My love is like a red, red rose,” to show the difference (1). These definitions are extremely simplistic, but since the concept of metaphor is often taught in conjunction with a host of other English classroom buzzwords (personification, synecdoche, metonymy, for example), making the distinction between metaphor and simile becomes the main goal. According to the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, a metaphor is “a word or phrase for one thing that is used to refer to another thing in order to show or suggest that they are similar” (“Metaphor”). This definition can be traced the whole way back to Aristotle’s *Poetics* (335 BC), but in the past century, it has quickly begun to lose its firm philosophical ground. Especially in the last several decades, the theoretical understanding of metaphor has undergone serious revision, leading to an enormous expansion of metaphor’s importance. This new understanding of metaphor, if not outright opposed to, is at least far beyond the simplistic definitions currently taught in schools.

Introduction to the Comparison Theory of Metaphor: Aristotle’s Model

Aristotle provides a description of metaphor that has endured to this day in common use. As Aristotle defines it, metaphor is “the application to one thing of the

name belonging to another” (67). Because he sees metaphor as a comparison between two objects, he judges a metaphor’s aptness based on the similarities between the objects being compared. His definition assumes that a metaphor involves terms that either already share some sort of genus/species relationship or can be related by proportional analogy. Aristotle cites an example, “Here stands my ship,” as one where the genus is given in place of the species—since “to stand still” is a larger category under which the special case “to be at anchor” falls (68). The function of such metaphors, he asserts, rests in a categorical similarity that already exists in the literal uses of the terms. As an example of a metaphor that functions by proportional analogy, Aristotle offers the following: “. . . old age is to life what evening is to day; and one may speak of evening as ‘the old age of the day’ and of old age as ‘the evening of life’” (68). Such metaphors, though different in practice from those organized by a categorical relation between terms, also find their grounding in the similarity between the things being compared.

By this definition, interpreting a metaphor is nothing more than the solving of a riddle. Aristotle himself says that “anything composed entirely of [nonliteral] language will be . . . a riddle if composed in metaphors” (69). This statement is consistent with his definition of metaphor, for if the purpose of composing a metaphor is to replace an “everyday” word or phrase with one that is more elaborate, then to interpret a metaphor is to attempt to reverse that process and find the original, unstated term. For example, to interpret the metaphor “the old age of the day,” one would first have to recognize the similarity between the aging of a person and the passage of a day. Next, one would trace that similarity to its implied analogy: “old age is to life what evening is to day.” Therefore, “the old age of the day” is the evening. The riddle has been solved.

This theory of metaphor is the most widely accepted model in common usage and is behind all the standard questions that beginner students of literature are taught to ask. Referred to as the “Substitution,” “Similarity,” or “Comparison Theory,” it relegates metaphor to the realm of specialized language, treating it as a mere creative deviation from standard use (Theodorou n.pag.). The Comparison Theory is useful—especially in a classroom setting—because it defines a clear process of “solving” metaphor that can be taught and tested with relative ease. Students can circle a metaphor in a poem, label it, translate the riddle, and turn in the assignment to be checked for accuracy of interpretation. By this model, the study of metaphor becomes an exercise in verbal problem solving.

Weaknesses of the Comparison Theory

Despite its continued popularity, the Comparison Theory of metaphor is riddled with problems. Consider, for instance, the following implication of the Comparison Theory: metaphors are dependent upon the similarity between the objects they relate. According to this statement, the best metaphors, then, would be those that compare two things that are most similar. This is simply not the case. “This pigeon is a crow” is not a particularly powerful metaphor, despite the fact that it contains two things that are very similar. In fact, to make sense of the statement as a metaphor at all one must first think of the ways in which pigeons and crows are different in order to decipher what specific qualities the metaphor might be emphasizing. Consider instead the phrase, “my heart is an old crow.” This metaphor, though it contains two subjects with few obvious similarities, carries much more weight than the first. In fact, as Hills explains in the introduction to his encyclopedic summary of metaphor, “much of the power and interest

of many a good metaphor derives from how massively and conspicuously different its two subject matters are” (“Metaphor” 3). Metaphors make connections and illuminate similarities, but similarity Thus, while metaphors necessarily relate terms, the strength of the metaphor is not directly linked to the amount of similarity between the terms being related.

Secondly, the Comparison Theory implies that a metaphor is a matter of replacement—that in resorting to metaphor, one is avoiding the literal term that is meant in favor of a metaphorical term that adds interest by temporarily obscuring the literal subject. This understanding of metaphor as a negative sort of deviation from “regular” or “proper” meanings is what lends the alternate name “Substitution Theory” to the ancient model (Theodoru n.pag.). It is the same assumption that leads to questions like the following: what did Shakespeare mean when he said “All the world’s a stage”? Or, when a poet says “my heart is an old crow,” what is he or she talking about? Such questions, while indispensable in the classroom, carry troubling implications. Shakespeare did not say that the world is a stage because he wanted to puzzle his audience. He didn’t avoid using the “regular words” that he “really meant” just so that hundreds of years later high school English teachers could torture students with endless questions. Shakespeare *chose* to use a metaphor that linked the concepts of “the world” and “stage” to convey a meaning that is entirely separate from the simple sum of the two words. Terms and contexts do not simply replace one another—they interact to produce a new sense of meaning.

In his book *The Rule of Metaphor*, Paul Ricoeur explores this interactive property of metaphor and asserts that metaphor’s transformative power has basic cognitive value.

Ricoeur rejects the concept of simple substitution and instead emphasizes the meaning-transformation of *both* terms involved:

In [creating a metaphor] . . . one simultaneously recognizes and transgresses the logical structure of language . . . This applies not just to the substitution of one word for another, but also to the jumbling of classification in cases that do not have to do only with making up for lexical poverty . . . In all metaphor one might consider not only *the* word alone or *the* name alone, whose meaning is displaced, but *the pair* of terms or relationships between which the transposition operates. (21)

This distinction is crucial because it challenges the gross over-simplification implicit within the common understanding of metaphor. The functioning of metaphor does not rest in clever riddle-making. Metaphors make use of the structures of language in order to *subvert* that structure—thereby creating new a sense of meaning.

A third argument against a solve-the-riddle approach to metaphor comes from the difficulty of paraphrasing metaphor. Though today many students are being taught that the goal of studying a metaphor is to be able to paraphrase it successfully, literary scholars and philosophers alike are still divided on whether or not true paraphrase is even possible. In a chapter of his book *The Well-Wrought Urn*, literary critic and pillar of the New Criticism school of literary theory Cleanth Brooks asserts that the mark of true poetry is its resistance to paraphrase. His chapter on the subject is titled “The Heresy of Paraphrase,” and claims that while paraphrase can be useful when talking *about* a work, it should never be considered equivalent to the work itself (192-199). Brooks advises that paraphrase be avoided as much as possible because it lends itself to the erroneous

assumption that the core meaning of a poem can be produced by “translating” the metaphors into “normal” English.

Other thinkers, such as American philosopher Steven Cavell, have taken much more moderate approaches to the issue. In opposition to Brooks’ theory, Cavell says that the use of paraphrase is necessary because it is the only way to prove that one understands a metaphor. He concedes that, in paraphrasing a metaphor, one is not “translating” the “real meaning”: “The whole truth in the view that metaphors are unparaphrasable [is] that their meaning is bound up in the very words they employ” (78). Yet, in order to explore that meaning, he argues that one *must* be able to paraphrase. Where Brooks would argue that the best metaphors cannot be paraphrased, Cavell suggests that a metaphor can only ever be proved to be well-wrought by the quality and number of paraphrases it produces.

Cavell draws an important distinction between “telling” what a metaphor means and “explaining” what a metaphor means. “Telling,” as Cavell uses the term, assumes that a paraphrase takes the thought or meaning present within a metaphor and simply translates it into synonymous words (78). Conversely, he uses the word “explaining” to describe a more open-ended process that is conducted *in addition to* the metaphor as a supplementary exploration of the meaning that the metaphor implies (79). Thus, Cavell can defend a paraphrase that “explains” a metaphor without having to claim that his paraphrase explicitly “tells” the meaning that the metaphor embodies. As an example, Cavell explains how one might paraphrase the metaphor “Juliet is the sun”:

I may say something like: Romeo means that Juliet is the warmth of his

world; that his day begins with her; that only in her nourishment can he grow. And his declaration suggests that the moon, which other lovers use as emblems of their love, is merely her reflected light, and dead in comparison; and so on. In a word, I paraphrase it. (79)

Cavell defends paraphrase as a necessary tool for literary discussion. He asserts that powerful metaphors inspire paraphrase and that without paraphrase, no critical discussion of a work can take place.

However, as Cavell himself points out, his example of paraphrase is not exhaustive: it ends with the phrase “and so on.” This is crucial because the inevitable “and so on” quality of a metaphor’s paraphrase is what allows for the “pregnancy of metaphors, the burgeoning of meaning in them”—thereby safe-guarding against oversimplification (80). Cavell is not attempting to translate a metaphor definitively. Brooks’ rejection of paraphrase is only valid in that he is arguing against paraphrase as definitive translation. Cavell is able to embrace paraphrase because he defines it as an external exploration rather than a one-to-one determination of a metaphor’s core meaning. Cavell’s insistence on the need for an added “and so on” reinforces the special, expansive quality of metaphorical language as well as the inherent inadequacy of literal language to “solve” it.

Where Cavell’s defense of paraphrase, based in the rather abstract concept of “and so on,” is incomplete, David Hills offers much more solid, empirical evidence in his article “The Problems of Paraphrase.” Instead of speculating about general qualities of metaphor, Hills turns directly to evidence found within respected written works:

The frequently voiced conviction that paraphrase is always “heretical”—always either (a) impossible or at least (b) a bad idea—is that rare thing, a widely held philosophical thesis we can refute once and for all on a straightforwardly empirical basis. For very often, and in the widest possible variety of styles and periods, we find intelligent and rhetorically skillful speakers arranging to accompany their very own metaphor with their very own paraphrases. (21-22)

Hills cites everyone from Pascal and T.H. Huxley to Picasso and Shakespeare to make his case—he even pulls lyrics from a 1930s pop song. In each case, the author of the quoted section states a metaphor and then quickly paraphrases that metaphor in the sentences that follow. In the face of such staggering evidence, one can no longer dismiss paraphrase as impossible or unwise, for to do so would be to accuse even Shakespeare of being irresponsible with his treatment of meaning (“Problems” 24). Yet the popularity of the anti-paraphrase stance—especially in the face of such obvious evidence—speaks to the intense complexity of metaphors and the meanings that they generate.

Finally, the Comparison Theory is inadequate because there is a staggering amount of evidence against the claim that metaphor is a strictly artistic device and does not at all affect the everyday uses of terms. In their book *The Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson outline an extensive study of what they call “conceptual metaphors”—that is, underlying metaphorical concepts that shape the way everyday language functions. For each concept they discuss, Lakoff and Johnson use examples to prove their claims. Consider the following:

. . . let us start with the concept ARGUMENT and the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR. This metaphor is reflected in our everyday language by a wide variety of expressions:

Your claims are *indefensible*.

He *attacked every weak point* in my argument

I *demolished* his *position*.

I've never *won* an argument with him.

He *shot down* all of my arguments. (4, emphasis in org.)

Throughout the chapter, Lakoff and Johnson list even more examples of ways in which the metaphorical concept “argument is war” shape the way English speakers both discuss and participate in arguments. In the same way, their book also outlines metaphorical concepts such as “Time is Money,” “Happy is up; sad is down,” and “Love is a journey,” to name just a few. Each time, detailed lists of common expressions are given in order to substantiate the claims being made. The book proves quite handedly that the use of metaphor goes far beyond the realm of literature and that, in fact, everyday language is almost—if not completely—dependent upon an underlying network of metaphorical concepts.

Toward a More Accurate View of Metaphor

In the last two centuries, philosophers, literary critics, philologists, and other such scholars have rejected the Comparison Theory as a grossly inadequate model for comprehensively explaining metaphor, for many of the reasons discussed thus far. Additionally, the Comparison Theory relies largely upon a strict realist epistemology, where there is a clear relation between the external world, perception, thought, and

language (Theodorou, n.pag.). The fundamental existence of clear categories is what makes the definition of metaphor as a temporary, descriptive transfer of terms possible. Hence, as the existence of straightforward, self-explanatory connections between the external world and the human mind has come into question, the status of metaphor as mere riddle has also been reevaluated. Today, there is an increasing tendency to view metaphor as something inherently open-ended and difficult to define rather than a sort of riddle than can be easily solved.

The Comparison Theory of metaphor, especially as it is applied in the common use of the term “metaphor,” has not lost its credibility on accident. Almost every main tenant of the theory can be disproved. Metaphors are not a matter of comparison based in similarity. Metaphors are not a simple case of substitution, but rather involve the interaction of both terms at once. Metaphors cannot be easily solved, and the jury is still out on the problem of paraphrase. Most importantly, metaphors are not artistic flourishes that exist only in high literature—metaphors permeate and structure even the most informal of conversational language.

If all of these conclusions are true, what constitutes a proper understanding of metaphor? Expanded to include these observations of its qualities, the definition of metaphor becomes something more along the lines of Lakoff and Johnson’s description: *“The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”* (5). The fact that metaphor has the effect upon words that it does reveals truths about the underlying qualities of language itself. On a certain level, all language can be viewed as metaphorical, for language understands and experiences reality in the terms of specifically human existence.

Though they violate the surface structure of language, metaphors are not completely alien elements. For if metaphors violated the entire process of meaning conveyance, they would convey no meaning at all. Instead, metaphors disrupt only the logical, surface-level of language. In doing so, they reveal a deeper transformative power underneath. Metaphor taps into the basic power of language to relate unlike things. As previously stated, words are symbols insofar as “the choice of a given slice of sound to name a given idea is completely arbitrary” (Saussure 67). Consider, for example, the word “tree.” As a word, “tree” functions as a symbol to refer, not to a single plant, but rather to any number of plants with woody trunks. The symbol “tree” is used to unite all of these various, unlike plants under a single category.

I. A. Richards, one of the founding scholars of New Criticism, speaks primarily on the power of metaphor in his book *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. Richards was the first to coin the terms “tenor” and “vehicle” to designate the two main components of a metaphor (“tenor” being the literal subject that is being spoken in terms of the metaphorical “vehicle”)—terms that would become the general standard for later discussions on the subject (97). Richards emphasizes the interdependency of words within a context in order to convey meaning. Much like Lakoff and Johnson, Richards identifies metaphor as the mode through which all symbols function. By this definition, the world of language is one built and sustained by the power of metaphor: “Our world is a projected world . . . The process of metaphor in language, the exchanges between the meanings of words which we study in explicit verbal metaphors, are super-imposed upon a perceived world which is itself a product of earlier or unwitting metaphor” (Richards

109). According to this extreme stance on the issue, the main distinction between “metaphorical” and “literal,” language is not of substance, but only of degree.

In the same way that an artistic painting (by pushing the boundaries of the medium) is able to highlight qualities of paint that would pass unnoticed in a more pragmatic setting, so metaphorical language (by exploring the potential of words as a medium for meaning conveyance) is able to highlight inherent qualities of language that might otherwise remain hidden. As explained by William Franke in his essay “Metaphor and the Making of Sense,” “Conspicuously metaphorical language is . . . distinguished [from “non-metaphorical” language] only by being especially revealing of the primordial essence of language as such” (141). That is, by disrupting language, metaphors are able to highlight aspects of the process of meaning-conveyance which pass by unnoticed in more “literal” statements. This quality is what is meant when we observe that metaphor has the ability to “reinvent” words; when faced with metaphor, one can no longer take the meaning of a word for granted. The entire process must be re-evaluated. In this way, poetic uses of language, by disrupting the logical order, highlight the basic properties of language as a whole.

The Comparison Theory does not account for these truths. What, then, would a more preferable model look like? What would it be based upon? These questions, in light of the many failed estimations cited thus far, may seem impossible to answer. Given its quickly broadening scope, the theoretical concept of metaphor is a daunting topic to broach. Therefore, let us return again to the beginning and study a single metaphor within a single work of literature. Only in exploring the many functions of a metaphor at work can new descriptive conclusion be drawn.

***The Great Gatsby* as a Test Case in Metaphor: Three Key Terms**

As a test case, consider F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic American novel, *The Great Gatsby*. A highly lyrical novel with a well-designed structure, *Gatsby* has generated an enormous body of criticism since its publication in 1925. The proven richness of metaphor in the novel makes it an ideal context for exploring the concept. Specifically, consider the following metaphor, found in chapter seven of the novel: "Her voice is full of money" (120). Even completely out of context, this metaphor is striking in its initial dissonance. In it, "voice" (a sound word) is connected directly with "money" (a tactile, item-word) via a metaphor of containment. Additionally, within the novel, all three of these words carry symbolic meaning—making this particular metaphor an ideal focus for close study. In order to explore this metaphor accurately, its constituent terms must be considered within their greater context.

The sentence in question is spoken by the novel's titular character, Jay Gatsby, to the novel's narrator, Nick Carraway, in reference to the voice of Daisy Buchanan, Gatsby's love interest. Gatsby, who fell in love with Daisy during a brief but poignant relationship they shared before he was sent off to war, spends the entirety of the main plot line seeking Daisy's affections. His characterization is directly tied to Daisy and the things she has come to symbolize to him: "[Gatsby] talked a lot about the past, and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was" (Fitzgerald 110). Daisy—or at the very least, Gatsby's idea of Daisy—is Gatsby's central motivating desire. Thus, when Gatsby speaks of "her," he is

referring to something of immense symbolic importance to him—something much larger and in some ways much more significant than anyone else who might talk about Daisy.

Critically, the character of Daisy Buchanan has been interpreted as symbolic of several different ideas, but since Gatsby is the speaker of the metaphor in question, it is most fruitful to analyze what Daisy symbolizes to him. Gatsby is described in epic terms as “a son of God” that “sprang from his Platonic conception of himself” (98). Convinced of his own fantastic destiny in “the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty,” Gatsby’s “extraordinary gift for hope” urges him forward and sustains him in his grand dreams (98, 2). Upon meeting and falling in love with Daisy, Gatsby’s vague, idealist dreams are given a physical counterpart. Daisy becomes the patron saint of Gatsby’s dreams; as Norman Pearson puts it in his essay on the novel, Daisy is “the representation of what he yearned for: the platonic essence, the noumenal as he saw it through the phenomenal metaphor” (28). Gatsby’s devotion to Daisy—especially during the interim when the two are left apart from one another—gives her special symbolic importance to him. This importance grows over time and distance until, in Gatsby’s romanticized conceptions, she becomes much more to him than she can ever, in reality, prove herself to be.

The primary way in which Daisy is able to inspire this immense devotion is via the second keyword of our metaphor: voice. While Daisy’s actual person must often fall short of the vastly significant illusion to which Gatsby has devoted himself, Nick makes it clear that despite such tumbles, her *voice* still holds absolute sway. It is the one thing about her upon which imagination cannot improve: “I think [her] voice held [Gatsby] most, with its fluctuation, feverish warmth, because it couldn’t be over-dreamed—that

voice was a deathless song” (Fitzgerald 96). Daisy’s voice is the anchor of the almost magical influence she has on those around her—Gatsby most of all.

Yet, tragedy lurks behind the magic. Scholar Glen Settle goes so far as to read the character of Daisy as a “modern-day siren”, asserting that “both the backdrop against which she is presented and, even more, Fitzgerald’s artful handling of the quality of her voice” allow for the reading (112, 115). Fitzgerald describes Daisy’s voice in terms of almost other-worldly enchantment: “. . . there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered ‘Listen,’ a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour” (9). Daisy’s magically alluring qualities, by which she has become the symbol of Gatsby’s yearnings for greatness, are somehow directly connected to this sense of excitement that she imparts with the sound of her voice.

What is this magic? Gatsby’s metaphor gives us his answer at least: “Her voice is full of money” (120). Money is the third and final main term of the sentence. Like the other objects involved in this metaphor, money—and the dangers associated with it—is a central theme of the novel. Gatsby, who was born poor but always pushed himself toward greatness, seems at first to be a shining embodiment of the American Dream. As Roger Pearson defines it, the American Dream “is the belief that every man, whatever his origins, may pursue and attain his chosen goals, be they political, monetary, or social. It is the literary expression of the concept of America: the land of opportunity” (638). But Gatsby does not achieve his goals. He has all the trappings of success, but when he finally stands up to challenge Tom Buchanan—who symbolizes old money (Elmore

430)—for the affection of Daisy, he falls short. When Gatsby is murdered, Daisy and Tom move on quite easily with their lives—insulated as they are by their inborn upper class status. In so far as Gatsby ultimately fails, Pearson and others read *The Great Gatsby* as a critique of the American Dream (639). This reading has become the standard. As a tragedy, *The Great Gatsby* is a tale that begins in a glamorous world of fame and fortune and ends in lonely death. The wealth Gatsby aspires to obtain becomes the instrument of his downfall. Gatsby's story suggests that the American Dream, tainted by empty materialism, is destined, like Gatsby, for tragedy.

Throughout the novel, immense wealth is at the same time shown in all its glamour and all its inherent corruption. No vast display of money is offered without some taste of harrowing caveat. Even if it is something as small as mentioning that, in preparation for one of Gatsby's enormous weekend parties, "every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrives from a fruiterer in New York—every Monday these same oranges and lemons left [Gatsby's] back door in pyramid of pulpless halves" (Fitzgerald 39). All extravagant wealth comes at a cost, and the possession of large amounts of money does not ensure the success it seems to promise. Money, wealth, and gold all possess a strong attraction within in the novel. Much like Daisy's siren voice, wealth is described in almost fantastical terms: "Money serves as the medium of the magic" that brings Jay Gatsby to life (Langman 43). Through money, Gatsby is able to create the persona by which he hopes to win back Daisy's affections.

But this glittering gold has a flipside. Gold is the color of success, but once the light has left it, gold is only the yellowing color of decay (Elmore 434). For example, consider Gatsby's "gorgeous car" (Fitzgerald 63). It is a status symbol: "[Gatsby] saw me

looking with admiration at his car . . . Everybody has seen it. It was a rich cream color, bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length” (Fitzgerald 64).

However, at the end of the novel this status symbol is the mark by which Gatsby’s killer is able to find him. The car, with Daisy at the wheel, is involved in a crash that kills Tom’s mistress Myrtle Wilson. Myrtle’s husband, George, finds Gatsby and kills him before committing suicide. Interestingly, it is only after the car is involved in the fatal crash that it is called “yellow” as opposed to cream (139). Yellow is the color of gold, but in *Gatsby*, it is also the color of death.

***The Great Gatsby* as a Test Case in Metaphor: The Metaphor as a Whole**

Now that an overview of the three key terms in the metaphor has been given in the context of the novel in general, an informed look at the workings of the metaphor can commence. Gatsby’s statement, “her voice is full of money” is a tipping point in the novel. It occurs right before the climactic hotel scene in which Gatsby makes his final, public plea for Daisy’s love. The resonances the metaphor acts upon have been building throughout the novel. In saying that Daisy’s voice is “full of money,” Gatsby is striking directly upon a truth that he himself does not fully seem to understand. He makes the statement “suddenly” and without any other comment, suggesting that it is a simple statement of observation rather than some sort of intense metaphorical discovery.

The metaphor is an example of the type that Hills, in his earlier quoted essay, used to defend the legitimacy of paraphrase. Though Gatsby makes the statement, it is Nick who understands it. The sentences directly following Gatsby’s words are authorial paraphrase, written in the narrating voice of Nick: “That was it. I’d never understood it before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the

jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it . . . High in a white palace the daughter, the golden girl" (Fitzgerald 120). This paraphrase strikes home the intensity of Daisy as a symbol of wealth.

Daisy's voice, her "deathless song," is money. The metaphor strikes a powerful chord of connection down through the repetitions that have been building throughout the novel. On one hand, the sound of her voice is similar to the tinkling, musical sound of coins. On the other, she is the ideal of her class and her voice is the glittering, yet ultimately empty promise of the glory of wealth. Just as Daisy uses her voice to give off a captivating impression of herself, James Gatz uses money to buy himself an impressive identity as Jay Gatsby. But just as Daisy's substance—the yellow at the core of her flowering white petals—cannot quite measure up to the promise that jingles in the excitement of her voice, the mythical character of Jay Gatsby cannot, through money alone, realize the dreams his hopes demand of him. *Gatsby* is easy to read as a critique of the materialistic nature of the American Dream because the hope of success and wealth is placed in the voice of a siren. Money is the magic of a woman who brings death to the idealistic hero.

Gatsby could not have made a symbol out of anyone less appealing. She is the patron saint of his achievements because time, distance, and worship have made her so. But in spite of Gatsby's powerful imagination, Daisy's voice remains as the one part of her that cannot be over-dreamed. In the same way, though Gatsby's wealth has come suddenly (and could depart just as suddenly, the text seems to suggest), Daisy's wealth is a very real, very powerful constant. The interplay between symbol and substance is striking. Scholar Kermit Moyer comments, "[Daisy's] magical voice is full of money.

She represents the materialism of her class as well as the materialism at the core of Gatsby's transcendental idealism" (221). Gatsby's hope, purpose and meaning are wed to Daisy. She is the incarnation of his aspirations. When he chose to kiss Daisy for the first time, Gatsby "knew that his mind would never romp again like the mind of God" (110). When "he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath . . . the incarnation was complete" (111). Note the uses of the word "unutterable" here. Gatsby's vision could not be perfected in words. It was something that could only find life through symbolic infusion with flesh and blood. Gatsby's dream *is* Daisy, and Daisy's voice *is* money; note as well that Gatsby is wedding his idealism to Daisy's "perishable breath" (111). Intentional or not, the metaphorical resonances are there. For Gatsby, the blessing of Daisy's breath—her voice, her life, her essence—is ultimately as perishable and transitory as the money it holds.

Metaphors in Language: A Network of Meanings

A single sentence, within the greater context of a novel, is able to invoke a powerful network of connected meanings. The above example is only one of many like it within the book—as is evidenced by the thousands of critical writings that have been published on the text. This powerful network of meaning is based, on the simplest, broadest level, to the use of language in time. Norman Pearson explains this in the opening of his article on *Gatsby*:

In one sense of course we do more re-reading than first reading of a novel, even from the start. The memory of the first page of its text is in our mind when the second page meets our eye. These two pages combine to repeat the experience with the next. It is the constantly re-awakened

memory of what has preceded in a novel which gives us a sense of the repetitions which establish a symbol out of what was originally only a citation. (22)

Language builds on itself. It both requires context and creates context. The specific connotations and powerful symbolic understandings of “her,” “voice,” and “money” are only possible because of the careful construction of repetitive use. Therefore, the job of criticism becomes one of exploring the ways in which “the smallest units in the language of the novel function as indicators of its meaning as a whole” (Bryer 123). Especially with the rise of New Criticism, close reading is employed to tease out the structure of resonances beneath weighty symbols.

Literary uses of language are unique in that they tend to be intentionally crafted to give special significance (or rather, to borrow Cavell’s phrase, “pregnancy of meaning”) to central terms (80). For the building of a symbol to be effective, it must rely on a structure of some sort. In other words, a novel’s “texture of meanings should find a structure to attach itself to” (Ransom 129). Though brief, this exploration of “her voice is full of money” is a clear example of such a structure. The function of the metaphor does not rely solely upon the words in the sentence, but upon repeated metaphors throughout the novel: “A novel creates its own world” (Norman Pearson 21). In order to study a single metaphor, one must take into account the entire world of context present within the novel’s language.

If the close analysis of poetic language is a completely valid way to begin an investigation into the process of language as a whole, then the metaphorical structure apparent within novels must have a counterpart in conversational language. As Lakoff

and Johnson's text on conceptual metaphors attests, this is exactly the case. In everyday language, the underlying metaphorical structures that shape our verbal conception of the world pass largely unrecognized. Flat, literal meanings are necessary for the functioning practicality of language—but this does not mean that the words used in every day conversation are any less world-building than the language of a novel. It only means that native speakers (who tend to use words on their most practical level) are often unaware of the metaphorical structures with which they interact. However, within the crafted context of a single novel, authors have the space and time to construct their contexts—their closed worlds of language. Therefore, they can afford both to recognize and to employ connections in a way that everyday speakers cannot.

The direct correlation between poetic uses of language and common uses of language is the primary reason that the Comparison Theory falls flat, and it is also the driving force behind the exponentially increasing scope of the study of metaphor. In tracing the stream of metaphor backwards from obviously metaphorical statements like “her voice is full of money,” to conversational concepts like “argument is war,” all the way to the general power of language to connect ideas, metaphor becomes the touchstone by which the intertextuality of experience is understood. In using language, one both makes use of and contributes to that intertextual meaning. Just as the language of a novel creates a world in itself, so all uses of language create worlds: “The special symbolic forms are not imitations, but *organs* of reality, since it is solely by their agency that anything real becomes an object for intellectual apprehension, and as such is made visible to us” (Cassirer 8). That is, as readers of reality, we can only ever know the world in terms of that which it is possible for us to understand. An appreciation for metaphor is

more than just the fleeting pleasure of solving a riddle—it is an attentiveness to the patterns of meaning within language, and therefore within the world.

Conclusion

The main problem in creating a model for metaphor is that such a model can only ever exist in words. And since this hypothetical model would exist in words, those words themselves would be tainted by intertextuality. Words create worlds of context—words about words are no exception. As C. S. Lewis puts it, metaphors create life into language by “secretly evoking powerful associations” (219). Teasing out the exact structure behind that secret process is impossible. Given its rootedness in the basic symbolic properties of language, here is no way to define metaphor outside of metaphor. At least, there is no definitive way to pin down a model. The previous discussion of the problems of paraphrase is a good example of the issues that quickly surface when one attempts to exhaustively explain words using other words.

In *Poetic Diction*, Owen Barfield attacks the commonly held view of metaphor as the primary process by which primitive languages gained meaning. His model offers a counterpoint to those who view language as having come (through the building up of metaphors over time) out of simplistic bluntness and inaccuracy into intricate complexity. Barfield criticizes this view, asserting that it reads modern abstraction back into an ancient context where such abstraction did not yet exist. As his primary example, he cites Max Müller’s explanation of the term “spiritus” (meaning life) as metaphorically arising from the association of “wind” and “breath” with the abstract idea of life within an animal or person. He then deconstructs Müller’s position:

So far from the psychic meaning of “spiritus” having arisen because someone had the abstract idea, “principle of life. . .” and wanted a word for it, the abstracted idea ‘principle of life’ is a *product* of the old concrete *meaning* “spiritus” which contained within itself the germs of both later significations. We must, therefore, imagine a time when “spiritus” or πνεύμα, or older words from which these had descended, meant neither *breath*, nor *wind*, nor *spirit*, nor yet all of three of these things, but when they simply had their *own old peculiar meaning*, which has since, in the course of the evolution of consciousness, crystallized into the three meanings specified. (86)

Radically opposed to the common view of metaphor, Barfield’s concept of the original, literal unity of terms offers a balance to ones that view language as an infinite matter of signs for signs.

Barfield’s assertion of original unity points to an inherent structure of reality. Contemporary metaphor, he says, is the job of re-discovering the original unities of existence that have been abstracted through the “evolution” of language. “Single meanings,” explains Barfield, “tend to split up into a number of separate and often isolated concepts,” he asserts (87). A drive for accuracy and specificity within the use of language leads to a division of meaning. To become more highly specified, meaning content must be lost. Rejuvenating a pregnancy of meaning is, then, the job of literature and poetry: “Reality, once self-evident, and therefore not conceptually experienced, but which can now only be reached by an effort of the individual mind—this is what is contained in a true poetic metaphor” (88). The generative power of metaphor rests in its

ability to strike upon latent resonances between things. Metaphor re-institutes the uniting power of language in the face of modern language's scientific tendency to specialize and isolate. This tension—between specificity and unified meaning—helps make sense of the difficulty facing anyone attempting to adequately define metaphor. All works of criticism, all philological explorations, and all theoretical treatises create individual worlds of context. And in attempting to be exact, these contexts tend toward specifying and dividing up the meanings of the terms being used.

Therefore, if the power of metaphor is its ability to combat abstraction, the weakness of theoretical discussion on metaphor is its complete reliance upon abstraction. In *Fiction and the Figures of Life*, William H. Gass pokes fun at those who turn to metaphor for “its power to produce brilliant flashes of dogmatic light,” calling such people “critics who pursue literature because they prefer philosophy but will not submit to the rigorous discipline of systematic thought” (68). His statement, though humorous, strikes a dichotomy that is at the very heart of the difficulty surrounding a proper definition of metaphor. Systematic thought relies entirely upon the process of specification of meaning. The central power of metaphor is in its generative unity of meaning. The two processes are diametrically opposed.

If a meaningful study of metaphor is to take place, we must adjust our tools of description to better fit the subject rather than expecting our powers of description to force the subject into a mold that does not naturally fit. Rather than attempting to divide, specify, and abstract, a truly profitable discussion of metaphor will be one that combines contexts. Because all discussion takes place in words, discussions on metaphor will inevitably employ metaphors to make their points. However, resisting this fact in an

attempt to “purify” or “objectify” the subject is counter-productive. Better to embrace the aptness of the process—it need not be a tragedy to recognize that words create connections. Combine discussions across the disciplines: just as metaphor revitalizes meaning, so cross-disciplinary studies will revitalize relevance.

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