

Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics

Author(s): Paul Ricoeur

Source: *New Literary History*, Vol. 6, No. 1, On Metaphor (Autumn, 1974), pp. 95-110

Published by: [Johns Hopkins University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/468343>

Accessed: 06-10-2015 21:04 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Johns Hopkins University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *New Literary History*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics

Paul Ricoeur

I ASSUME IN THIS PAPER that the main problem of hermeneutics is that of interpretation. Not interpretation in any undetermined sense of the word, but interpretation with two qualifications: one concerning its scope or field of application, the other its epistemological specificity. As concerns the first point, I should say that there are problems of interpretation because there are *texts*, *written* texts, the autonomy of which (as regards either the intention of the author, or the situation of the work, or the destination to privileged readers) creates specific problems; these problems are usually solved in spoken language by the kind of exchange or intercourse which we call dialogue or conversation. With written texts, the discourse must speak by itself. Let us say, therefore, that there are problems of interpretation because the relation writing-reading is not a particular case of the relation speaking-hearing in the dialogical situation. Such is the most general feature of interpretation as concerns its scope or application field.

Secondly, the concept of interpretation occurs, at the epistemological level, as an alternative concept opposed to that of explanation (or explication); taken together, they both form a significant contrasting pair, which has given rise to many philosophical disputes in Germany since the time of Schleiermacher and Dilthey; according to that tradition, interpretation has specific subjective implications, such as the involvement of the reader in the process of understanding and the reciprocity between *text*-interpretation and *self*-interpretation. This reciprocity is usually known as the "hermeneutical circle" and has been opposed, mainly by logical positivists, but also for opposite reasons by Romantic thinkers, to the kind of objectivity and to the lack of self-involvement which is supposed to characterize a scientific explanation of things. I shall say later to what extent we may be led to amend and even to rebuild on a new basis the opposition between interpretation and explanation.

Anyhow, this schematic description of the concept of interpretation

is enough to delineate the two main problems of hermeneutics: that of the status of written texts versus spoken language, and that of the status of interpretation versus explanation.

Now enters the metaphor!

The aim of this paper is to connect together the problems raised in hermeneutics by *text-interpretation* and the problems raised in rhetoric, semantics, stylistics—or whatever may be the discipline concerned—by metaphor.

I. Text and Metaphor as Discourse

Our first task will be to find a common ground for the theory of text and for that of metaphor. This common ground has already a name—discourse; it has still to receive a status.

One first thing is striking: the two kinds of entities which we are now considering are of different length and may be compared from the standpoint of length of the basic unity of discourse, the sentence. Of course a text may be reduced to only one sentence, as in proverbs or aphorisms; but texts have a maximal length which may go from paragraphs to chapters, to books, to “selected works,” to “complete works” (*Gesammelte Werke!*), and even to full libraries. I shall call a *work* the closed sequence of discourse which may be considered as a text. Whereas texts may be identified on the basis of their maximal length, metaphors may be identified on the basis of their minimal length, that of the words. Even if the remainder of the analysis tends to show that there are no metaphors, in the sense of metaphorical *words*, without certain contexts, even therefore if we shall have to speak of metaphorical *statements* requiring at least the length of a sentence, or of a phrase, nevertheless the “metaphorical twist” (to speak like Monroe Beardsley) is something which happens to words; the shift of meaning which requires the whole contribution of the context affects the word; it is the word that has a “metaphorical use,” or of a nonliteral meaning, or a novel, “emergent meaning” in specific contexts. In that sense the definition of metaphor by Aristotle—as a transposition of an alien *name* (or word) (ὀνομα)—is not cancelled by a theory which lays the stress on the contextual action which creates the shift of meaning in the word. The word remains the “focus,” even if this focus requires the “frame” of the sentence, to use the vocabulary of Max Black.

This first remark—merely formal—concerning the difference of length between text and metaphor, that is, between *work* and *word*, will help us to elaborate our initial problem in a more accurate way: to what extent may we treat metaphor as a work in miniature? The answer to this first question will help us afterwards to raise the second question: to what extent may the hermeneutical problem of text-interpretation be considered as a large-scale expansion of the problems condensed in the explication of a local metaphor in a given text?

Is a metaphor a work in miniature? May a work—say, a poem—be considered as an expanded metaphor? The answer to the first question relies on the general properties belonging to *discourse*, since both text and metaphor, work and word, fall under one and the same category, that of discourse.

I shall not elaborate the concept of discourse at length, but limit my analysis to those features which are necessary for the comparison between text and metaphor. For the sake of this analysis, I shall consider only the following characteristics. All of them present the form of a paradox, that is, of an apparent contradiction.

First, all discourse occurs as an *event*; it is the opposite of language as “*langue*,” code, or system; as an event, it has an instantaneous existence, it appears and disappears. But, at the same time—here lies the paradox—it can be identified and reidentified as the same; this sameness is what we call, in the broad sense, its *meaning*. All discourse, let us say, is effectuated as an event, but all discourse is understood as meaning. We shall see in what sense metaphor concentrates on the character of event and of meaning.

Second, metaphor as a pair of contrasting traits: the meaning is carried by a specific structure, that of the proposition, which involves an inner opposition between a pole of singular identification (this man, the table, Mr. Jones, London) and a pole of general predication (mankind as a class, lightness as a property, equality with such and such as a relation, running as an action). Metaphor, as we shall see, relies on this “attribution” of characters to the “principal subject” of a sentence.

Third, discourse, as an act, may be considered from the point of view of the “content” of the propositional act (it predicates such and such characters of such and such things) or from the point of view of what Austin called the “force” of the complete act of discourse (the “speech act” in his terms): what is *said* of the subject is one thing; what I “do” *in* saying that is another thing: I may make a mere

description, or give an order, or formulate a wish, or give a warning, etc. Hence the polarity between the locutionary act (the act *of* saying) and the illocutionary act (that which I do *in* saying); this polarity may seem to be less useful than the preceding ones, at least at the level of the structure of the metaphorical statement; it will play a significant role when we shall have to replace the metaphor in the concrete setting, say, of a poem, of an essay, of a fictional work.

Fourth, metaphor as a pair of opposite features: discourse, mainly as sentence, implies the polarity of *sense* and *reference*, that is, the possibility to distinguish between *what* is said, by the sentence as a whole and by the words as parts of the sentence, and *about what* something is said. To speak is to say something about something. This polarity will play the central role in the second and the third parts of this paper, since I shall try to connect the problems of explanation to the dimension of "sense," that is, to the immanent design of the discourse—and the problems of interpretation to the dimension of "reference" understood as the power of discourse to apply to an extralinguistic reality *about* which it says what it says.

But, before developing this dichotomy of sense and reference as the ground for the opposition between explanation and interpretation, let us introduce a last polarity which will play a decisive role in the hermeneutical theory. Discourse has not only one kind of reference, but two kinds of reference: it refers to an extralinguistic reality, say, the world or a world, but it refers equally to its own speaker by the means of specific devices which function only in a sentence, therefore in discourse, such as personal pronouns, verbal tenses, demonstratives, etc. In that way, language has both a *reality*-reference and a *self*-reference. And it is the same entity—the sentence—which has this twofold reference, intentional and reflective, thing-bound and self-bound. As we shall see, this connection between the two directions of reference will be the key of our theory of interpretation and the basis of our reappraisal of the hermeneutical circle.

I enumerate the basic polarities of discourse in the following condensed way: event and meaning, singular identification and general predication, propositional act and illocutionary acts, sense and reference, reference to reality and self-reference.

Now, in what sense may we say that text and metaphor rely on this same kind of entity which we called discourse?

It is easy to show that all texts are discourse, since they proceed from the smallest unity of discourse, the sentence. A text is at least a set

of sentences. We shall see that it has to be something more in order to be a work. But it is at least a set of sentences, therefore a discourse.

The connection between metaphor and discourse requires a specific justification, precisely because the definition of metaphor as a transposition occurring to *names*, or to words, seems to put it in a category of entities smaller than the sentence. But the semantics of the word demonstrates very clearly that words have *actual* meanings only in a sentence and that lexical entities—words in the dictionary—have only potential meanings and for the sake of their potential uses in sentences. As concerns the metaphor itself, semantics demonstrates with the same strength that the metaphorical meaning of a word is nothing which may be found in a dictionary (in that sense we may continue to oppose the metaphorical sense to the literal sense, if we call literal sense *what-ever* sense may occur among the partial meanings enumerated in the dictionary, and not a so-called original, or fundamental, or primitive, or proper meaning). If the metaphorical sense is more than the actualization of one of the potential meanings of a polysemic word (and all our words in common discourse are polysemic), it is necessary that this metaphorical use is only *contextual*; by that I mean a sense which emerges as the result of a certain contextual action. We are led in that way to oppose *contextual* changes of meaning to *lexical* changes, which concern the diachronistic aspect of language as code, system, or *langue*. Metaphor is such a *contextual* change of meaning.

By saying that, I agree partially¹ with the modern theory of metaphor, from I. A. Richards to Max Black and Monroe Beardsley; more specifically, I agree with these authors on the fundamental issue: a word receives a metaphorical meaning in specific contexts within which they are opposed to other words taken literally; this shift in meaning results mainly from a clash between literal meanings, which excludes a literal use of the word in question and gives clues for the finding of a new meaning which is able to fit in the context of the sentence and to make sense in this context.

This contextual action creates a word meaning which is an event, since it exists only in this context; but it can be identified as the same when it is repeated; in that way the innovation of an “emergent meaning” (Beardsley) may be recognized as a linguistic creation; if it is

1 My main disagreement concerns their use of the “field of associated commonplaces” or of the “potential range of connotations” which concerns more trivial metaphors than genuine metaphors. In that case, which is alone paradigmatic, the contextual effect goes further than mere actualization of the potential range of commonplaces or connotations. I shall return to this point in the second part. The theory of metaphor must address itself directly to novel metaphor and not proceed through an expansion from flat metaphors to novel metaphors.

adopted by an influential part of the speech community, it may even become a standard meaning and be added to the polysemy of the literal entities, contributing in that way to the *history* of language as *langue*, code, or *system*. But, at that ultimate stage, metaphor is a dead metaphor. Only genuine metaphors are at the same time “event” and “meaning.”

The contextual action requires in the same way our second polarity, that between singular identification and general predication; a metaphor is said of a “principal subject”; as a “modifier” of this subject, it works as a kind of “attribution.” The three theories to which I refer here rely on this predicative structure, either when they oppose the “vehicle” to the “tenor,” or the “frame” to the “focus,” or the “modifier” to the “principal subject.”

That metaphor requires the polarity between sense and reference will demand a complete section of this paper; the same must be said of the polarity between reference to reality and self-reference. You will understand later why I am unable to say more about sense and reference, and about reality-reference and self-reference at the level of metaphoric statements. Here the mediation of the theory of text will be required.

We have so far delineated the framework of our comparison. We are now prepared for the second part of our task, in which we shall answer our second question: to what extent may *text* explanation and interpretation, on the one hand, and the explication of metaphor, on the other hand, be said to be similar processes, only applied at two different levels of discourse, the level of the *work* and the level of the *word*?

II. Explanation and Metaphor

I want to explore the following working hypothesis. From one standpoint the process of understanding a metaphor is the key for that of understanding larger texts, say, literary works; this point of view is that of explanation and develops only this aspect of the meaning which we called the *sense*—the immanent design of discourse. But, from one other standpoint, it is the understanding of a work as a whole which gives the key to metaphor; this other point of view is that of interpretation properly, which develops the second aspect of the meaning which we called the reference, that is, the intentional direction toward a world and the reflective direction toward a self. Therefore, if we apply explanation to sense as the immanent design of the work, we may reserve interpretation to the kind of inquiry devoted to the power of

a work to project a world of its own and to initiate the hermeneutical circle between the apprehension of those projected worlds and the expansion of self-understanding in front of these novel worlds.

Our working hypothesis invites us therefore to proceed from metaphor to text at the level of the "sense" and of the "explanation" of the sense—then from text to metaphor at the level of the reference of the work to a world and to a self, that is, at the level of interpretation, properly said.

What aspects of metaphor explication may serve as paradigms for text explication or explanation?

These aspects are features of the *work* of explanation which do not appear when we start from trivial cases, such as—man is a wolf, or a fox, or a lion. (You could look at most of the good authors on metaphor and notice interesting variations within the bestiary which furnishes them with examples!) With those examples we elude the major difficulty, that of *identifying a meaning which is a word meaning*. The only way of doing it is to *construct* it so that the whole sentence makes sense.

On what do we rely in the case of trivial metaphors? Max Black and Beardsley argue that the meaning of a word does not only depend on the semantical and syntactical rules which govern its use as *literal* use, but by other rules—which are nevertheless rules—to which the members of a speech community are committed, and which determines what Black calls the "system of associated commonplaces" and Monroe Beardsley the "potential range of connotations." In the statement "man is a wolf," the principal subject is qualified by one of the traits of the animal which belong to the "wolf-system of related commonplaces" (p. 41);² this implication system works as a filter or as a screen; it does not only select, but brings forward aspects of the principal subject.

What may we think of this explication in the light of our description of metaphor as a word meaning occurring in a new context?

I agree entirely with the "interaction view" implied by this explication; the metaphor is more than a mere substitution for another literal word which an exhausting paraphrase could reconstitute at the same place. The algebraic sum of these two operations of substitution by the speaker and of restitution by the hearer or the reader equals zero. No new meaning emerges and we learn nothing. As Max Black says: "Interaction-metaphors are not expandable . . . this use of a subsidiary subject

² Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca, 1962), page references included in text.

to foster insight into a principal subject is a distinctive intellectual operation"; this is why you cannot translate an interaction metaphor in plain language without "a loss in cognitive content" (p. 46).

But are we doing better justice to the power of metaphor "to inform and enlighten," by merely adding to the semantic polysemy of the word in the dictionary and to the semantic rules which govern the literal use of the lexical terms, the "system of associated commonplaces" and the cultural rules—I coin the term—which govern their use? Is not this system something dead, or at least something already established?

Of course, this system of commonplaces has to be assumed in order that the contextual action follow the guidelines of some directions for the construction of the new meaning. And Max Black's theory reserves the possibility that metaphors are "supported by specially constructed systems of implication as well as by accepted commonplaces" (p. 43). The problem is precisely that of these "specially constructed systems of implication." We have therefore to inquire into the process of interaction itself in order to explain the cases of novel metaphors in novel contexts.

Beardsley's theory of metaphor leads us a step further in that direction when he emphasizes the role of logical absurdity—or of clash between literal meanings within the same context. "And in poetry," he says, "the chief tactic for obtaining this result is that of *logical absurdity*" (p. 138).³ How? Logical absurdity creates a situation in which we have the choice between either preserving the literal sense of both the subject and the modifier and concluding to the meaninglessness of the whole sentence—or attributing a new meaning to the modifier such as the whole sentence makes sense. Then we have not only a self-contradictory attribution, but a significant self-contradictory attribution. When I say "man is a fox" (the fox has chased the wolf), I must shift from a literal to a metaphorical attribution *if* I want to save the sentence. But, where do we have this new meaning from?

As long as we raise this kind of question—from *where*—we are sent back to the same kind of solution; the potential range of connotations does not say more than the system of associated commonplaces; indeed we enlarge the notion of meaning by including the "secondary meanings" as connotations within the scope of the full meaning; but we keep linking the creative process of metaphor-forming to a non-creative aspect of language.

Is it sufficient to add to this "potential range of connotations," as

3 Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York, 1958), page references included in text.

Beardsley does in the “revised theory of controversion” (*the metaphorical twist*), the range of *properties* which do not yet belong to the range of connotations of my language? At first sight this addition improves the theory; as Beardsley says very strongly, “the metaphor transforms a property actual or attributed into a sense.” The shift in the theory is important, since we have now to say that “the metaphors would not only actualize a potential connotation, but establish it as a staple one”; and further: “some of the relevant properties are given a new status as elements of verbal meaning.”

But to speak of properties of *things* (or of *objects*) which were not yet meant is to concede that the novel meaning is not *drawn from* anywhere, in language at least (property is a thing-implication, not a word-implication). And to say that a novel metaphor is *not drawn at all*, is to recognize it for what it is, that is, a momentaneous creation of language, a semantic innovation which has no status in language, as already established, neither as designation nor as connotation.

At that point it could be asked how one can speak of a semantic innovation, of a semantical *event* as of a *meaning* which can be identified and reidentified (such was the first criterion of discourse in our first part).

Only one answer remains possible: to take the standpoint of the hearer or of the reader and to treat the novelty of an emergent meaning as the counterpart, from the side of the author, of the *construction* from the part of the reader. Then the process of explanation is the only access to the process of creation.

If we don't take this way, we do not get rid of the theory of *substitution*; instead of substituting for the metaphorical expression some literal meaning restituted by the paraphrase, we substitute the system of connotations and commonplaces. This task must remain a preparatory task which relates literary criticism to psychology and sociology. The decisive moment of explication is that of the construction of the network of interaction, which makes of this context an actual and unique context. In doing that, we point to the semantic event as to the point of intersection between several semantic lines; this construction is the means by which all the words taken together make sense. Then—and only then—the “metaphorical twist” is both an event *and* a meaning, a meaningful event and an emerging meaning in language.

Such is the fundamental feature of the explication of metaphor which makes of it a paradigm for the explanation of a literary work. We construct the meaning of a text in a way which is similar to the

way in which we make sense of all of the terms of metaphorical statement.

Why have we to "construct" the meaning of a text? First because it is a *written* thing: in the asymmetric relation of the text and the reader, only one of the partners speaks for two. Bringing a text to speech is always something else than hearing somebody and listening to his words.

A second reason concerns more specifically the fact that a text is not only a *written* thing, but a work, that is, a closed chain of meaning. Now a work has to be constructed because a text—especially if it is a literary work—is more than a linear succession of sentences. It is a cumulative, holistic process.

From these two reasons what we may give for the necessity of constructing the meaning of a *text* or more precisely of a *work*, of a literary work, we may draw more suggestions concerning the "how" of this construction. It is at that stage that the pole of text understanding is homologous to the understanding of a metaphorical statement.

On the one hand, this construction necessarily takes the form of a guess. As Hirsch says in his book, *Validity in Interpretation*, there are no rules. As concerns the place of *guessing* in the construction it follows from what we said about the absence of the author's intention as a guideline and the character of a work as a system of whole and parts. We may summarize in this way the corresponding features which are the grounds for the analogy between the explication of a metaphoric statement and a literary work as a whole.

In both cases the construction relies on the "clues" contained in the text itself: a clue is a kind of index for a specific construction, both a set of permissions and a set of prohibitions; it excludes some unfitting constructions and allows some others which make more sense of the same words.

Secondly, in both cases a construction may be said more probable than another, but not true. The most probable is that which (1) accounts for the greatest number of facts provided by the text, including potential connotations, and (2) offers a better qualitative convergence between the traits which it takes into account. A poor explication may be said to be narrow or farfetched.

I agree here with Beardsley that a good explication satisfies two principles: that of congruence and that of plenitude. I have spoken so far of convergence. The principle of plenitude will provide us with a transition to our third part. This principle reads: "all the connotations that can fit are to be attached; the poem means all it can mean."

This principle leads us farther than mere concern for the "sense." It already says something of the reference. Since it takes as a measure of plenitude the requirements raised by an expression which wants to be said and to be equated by the semantic density of the text. The principle of plenitude is the corollary at the level of the *sense* of a principle of integral expression which draws our inquiry in a quite different direction.

A quotation from Humboldt will help us approach this new field of inquiry: "A language," he said, "language as discourse (*die Rede*) stands on the boundary line between the expressed and the unexpressed. Its aim and its goal is to always repel this boundary a bit farther."

Interpretation conforms to this aim.

III. From Hermeneutics to Metaphor

1. At the level of interpretation, text-understanding gives the key for metaphor-understanding.

Why? Because some features of discourse begin to play an explicit role only when discourse takes the form of a literary *work*. These features are those which we put under the two headings of reference and self-reference. I oppose reference to sense by identifying "sense" with "what" and "reference" with "about what" of discourse. Of course, these two traits may be recognized in the smallest unity of language as discourse, in sentences. The sentence is about a situation which it expresses and refers back to its own speaker by the means of specific devices. But reference and self-reference do not give rise to perplexing problems until discourse has become a text and has taken the form of a work.

Which problems? Let us start once more from the difference between written and spoken language. In spoken language, what a dialogue ultimately refers to is the situation common to the interlocutors, that is, aspects of reality which can be shown or pointed at; we say then that reference is "ostensive." In written language reference is no longer ostensive: poems, essays, and fictional works speak of things, events, states of affairs, characters which are evoked, but which are not there. Nevertheless, literary texts are about something. About what? About a world, which is the world of this work.

Far from saying that the text is there without a world, I will now say without paradox that only man has a world, and not just a situation, a *Welt* and not just an *Umwelt*. In the same manner that the text frees its meaning from the tutelage of the mental intention, it frees its reference

from the limits of ostensive reference. For us, the world is the ensemble of references opened up by texts. Thus we speak about the "world" of Greece, not to designate any more what were the situations for those who lived then, but to designate the nonsituational references which outlive the effacement of the first and which henceforth are offered as possible modes of being, of symbolic dimensions of our being-in-the-world.⁴

This nature of reference in the case of literary works has an important consequence for the concept of interpretation. It implies that "the meaning of a text is not behind the text, but in front of it. It is not something hidden, but something disclosed." What has to be understood is what points toward a possible world thanks to the non-ostensive references of the text. Texts speak of possible worlds and of possible ways of orientating oneself in those worlds. In that way disclosure becomes the equivalent for written texts of ostensive reference for spoken language. And interpretation becomes the grasping of the world-propositions opened up by the nonostensive references of the text.

This concept of interpretation expresses a decisive shift of emphasis within the Romanticist tradition of hermeneutics; here the emphasis was put on the ability of the hearer or of the reader to transfer himself in the spiritual life of another speaker or writer. The emphasis now is less on the *other*, as a spiritual entity, than on the world that the work displays. *Verstehen*—understanding—is to follow the dynamics of the work, its movement from what it says to that about which it speaks. "Beyond my situation as reader, beyond the author's situation, I offer myself to the possible ways of being-in-the-world which the text opens up and discovers for me." This is what Gadamer calls "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzung*) in historical knowledge.

The shift of emphasis from understanding the other to understanding the world of his work implies a corresponding shift in the conception of the "hermeneutical circle." By "hermeneutical circle" Romanticist thinkers meant that the understanding of a text cannot be an objective procedure in the sense of scientific objectivity, but necessarily involves a precomprehension which expresses the way in which the reader has already understood himself and his world. Therefore, a kind of circularity occurs between understanding a text and understanding oneself. Such is in condensed terms the principle of the "hermeneutical circle." It is easy to understand that thinkers taught in the tradition of logical empiricism could only reject as sheer

4 Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, tr. Denis Savage (New Haven, 1970).

scandal the mere idea of a hermeneutical circle and consider it as an outrageous violation of all the canons of verifiability.

For my part, I do not want to deny that the hermeneutical circle remains an unavoidable structure of interpretation. No genuine interpretation which does not end in some kind of appropriation—of *Aneignung*, if by that term we mean the process of making one's own (*eigen*) what was other, foreign (*fremd*). But my claim is that the hermeneutical circle is not correctly understood when it is presented (1) as a circle between two subjectivities, that of the reader and that of the author, and (2) as the projection of the subjectivity of the reader in the reading itself. Let us correct the first assumption in order to correct the second one.

“That which we make our own, we appropriate for ourselves, is not a foreign experience or a distant intention, it is the horizon of a world towards which this refers: the appropriation of the reference no longer finds any model in the fusion of consciousness, in ‘empathy’ or in sympathy. The coming to language of the sense and the reference of a text is the coming to language of a world and not the recognition of another person.”

The second correction of the Romanticist concept of interpretation follows from the first one. If appropriation is the counterpart of disclosure, then the role of subjectivity is not correctly described as projection. I should rather say that the reader understands himself before the text, before the world of the work. To understand oneself before, in front of, a world is the contrary of projecting oneself and one's beliefs and prejudices; it is to let the work and its world enlarge the horizon of my own self-understanding.

Hermeneutics, therefore, does not submit interpretation to the finite capacities of understanding of a given reader; it does not put the meaning of the text under the power of the subject who interprets. “Far from saying that a subject already masters his own way of being in the world and projects it as the a priori of his reading . . . I say that interpretation is the process by which the disclosure of *new modes of being*—or, if you prefer Wittgenstein to Heidegger, of *new forms of life* gives to the subject a new capacity of knowing himself. If there is somewhere a project and a projection, it is the reference of the work which is the project of a world; the reader is consequently enlarged in his capacity of self-projection by receiving a new mode of being from the text itself.”

In that way the hermeneutical circle is not denied, but it is displaced from a subjectivistic to an ontological level; the circle is between my

way (or my mode) of being—beyond the knowledge which I may have of it—and the mode (or the way) of being disclosed by the text as the work's world.

2. Such is the model of interpretation which I want now to transfer from texts as long sequences of discourse to metaphor as “a poem in miniature” (Beardsley). Indeed the metaphor is too short a discourse to display this dialectic between disclosing a world and understanding one's self in front of this world. Nevertheless this dialectic points toward some features of metaphor which the modern theories I quoted above do not seem to consider, but which were not absent from Greek theory of metaphor.

Let us return to the theory of metaphor in the *Poetics* of Aristotle. Metaphor is only one of the “parts” (μερῆ, *merê*) of that which Aristotle calls “diction” (λέξις, *lexis*); as such it belongs to a family of language procedures—use of foreign words, coining of new words, shortening or lengthening of words—all of which depart from common (κυριον, *kyrion*) use of words. Now, what makes the unity of *lexis*? Only its *function* in poetry. *Lexis*, in its turn is one of the “parts” (μερῆ, *merê*) of tragedy, taken as the paradigm of the poetic work. Tragedy, in the context of the *Poetics*, represents the level of the literary work as a whole. Tragedy, as a poem, has sense and reference. In the language of Aristotle, the “sense” of tragedy is secured by what he calls the “fable,” or the “plot” (μῦθος, *mythos*). We may understand the *mythos* of tragedy as its sense, since Aristotle keeps putting the emphasis on its structural characters; the *mythos* must have unity and coherence and make of the actions represented something “entire and complete.” As such, the *mythos* is the principal “part” of tragedy, its “essence”; all the other “parts” of tragedy—the “characters,” the “thoughts,” the “diction,” the “spectacle”—are connected to the *mythos* as the means or the conditions or the performance of the tragedy as *mythos*.

We must draw the inference that it is only in connection with the *mythos* of tragedy that its *lexis* makes sense, and, with *lexis*, *metaphora*. There is no local meaning of metaphor beside the regional meaning provided by the *mythos* of tragedy.

But, if metaphor is related to the “sense” of tragedy by the means of its *mythos*, it is related to the “reference” of tragedy thanks to its general aim which Aristotle calls *mimesis* (μίμησις).

Why do poets write tragedies, elaborate fables and plots, and use such “strange” words as metaphors? Because tragedy itself is related to a more fundamental project—that of *imitating* human action in a

poetic fashion. With these master words—*mimesis* and *poiesis*—we reach the level of what I called the referential world of the work. Indeed, the Aristotelian concept of *mimesis* involves already all the paradoxes of reference. On the one hand, it expresses a world of human action which is already there; tragedy is bound to express human reality, the tragedy of life. But, on the other hand, *mimesis* does not mean duplication of reality; *mimesis* is *poesis*, that is, fabrication, construction, creation. Aristotle gives at least two hints of this creative dimension of *mimesis*: the fable itself as a coherent construction of its own, and above all the definition of tragedy as the imitation of human actions as better, nobler, higher than they actually are. Could we not say, then, that *mimesis* is the Greek name for what we called the unostensive reference of the literary work, or in other words, the Greek name for world disclosure?

If we are right, we may now say something about the *power* of metaphor. I say here the “power,” and no longer the “structure,” no longer even the “process of metaphor.” The power of metaphor proceeds from its connection, within a poetic and work, *first* with the other procedures of “diction” (*lexis*); *secondly* with the “fable,” which is the essence of the work, its immanent “sense,” *thirdly* with the intentionality of the work as a whole, that is, its intention to represent human actions as *higher* than they actually are: and this is *mimesis*. In that sense the power of metaphor proceeds from that of the poem as a whole.

Let us apply these remarks borrowed from Aristotle’s *Poetics* to our own description of metaphor. Could we not say that the feature of metaphor that we put above all other features—its nascent or emerging character—is related to the function of poetry as a creative imitation of reality? Why should we invent novel meanings, meanings which exist only in the instance of discourse, if it were not for the sake of the *poiesis* in the *mimesis*? If it is true that the poem creates a world, it requires a language which preserves and expresses its creative power in specific contexts.

Link together the *poiesis* of the *poem* and metaphor as an emergent meaning, then you will make sense of both at the same time: poetry and metaphor.

Such is the way in which the theory of interpretation paves the way for an ultimate approach to the power of metaphor. This priority given to text interpretation in this last stage of the analysis of metaphor does not imply that the relation between both is not reciprocal. The explication of metaphor as a local event in the text contributes to

the interpretation itself of the work as a whole. We could even say that, if the interpretation of local metaphors is enlightened by the interpretation of the text as a whole and by the disentanglement of the kind of world it projects, the interpretation of the poem as a whole is controlled, reciprocally, by the explication of metaphor as a local phenomenon. I should venture, as an example of this reciprocal relation between regional and local aspects of the text, the possible connection, in Aristotle's *Poetics*, between the function of *imitation*, as making human actions *higher* than they actually are, and the structure of metaphor, as *transposing* the meaning of ordinary language into *strange* uses. Is there not a mutual affinity between the project of making human actions look *better* than they actually are and the special procedure of metaphor as an emerging meaning?

Let us express that relation in more general terms. Why should we draw new meanings from our language, if we had nothing *new* to say, no new worlds to project? Linguistic creations would be meaningless if they did not serve the general project of letting new worlds emerge from poetry.

Allow me to conclude in a way which would be consistent with a theory of interpretation which lays the stress on "opening up a world." Our conclusion should also "open up" some new vistas. On what? Maybe on the old problem of imagination, which I cautiously put aside. We are prepared to inquire into the power of imagination, no longer as the faculty of deriving "images" from sensory experiences, but as the capacity to let new worlds build our self-understanding. This power would not be conveyed by emerging images but by emerging meanings in our language. Imagination, then, should be treated as a dimension of language. In that way, a new link would appear between imagination and metaphor.

UNIVERSITY OF PARIS