Metaphor and figurative language

The recognition and analysis of figurative language, or figures of speech, depend upon a general distinction between literal and figurative uses of language. It should be stressed that the notion of literal meaning does not depend on the idea that each word has only one meaning. In fact, the word 'literal' itself has several meanings. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that the term derives its original meaning from the Old French or Latin for 'letter', and one of its primary meanings is 'Of or pertaining to letters of the alphabet' or 'expressed by letters'. In this sense, all writing is literal. A related meaning appears in the theological notion of interpreting the Christian scriptures according to the letter – that is, 'taking the words of a text, etc., in their natural and customary meaning, and using the ordinary rules of grammar'. In this sense, literal is distinguished from the mystical or allegorical interpretation of scripture. This meaning and distinction is related to the way we will be using the term here: literal is 'applied to taking words in their etymological or primary sense, or in the sense expressed by the actual wording of a passage, without recourse to any metaphorical or suggested meaning'. But what we are not concerned with here, however, is the recent tendency to use the term 'literally' as an intensifier. As *Collins' English Dictionary* notes, this usage either adds nothing to the meaning (as in 'the house was literally only five minutes away') or results in absurdity (as in 'the news was literally an eye-opener to me'). Such usages should be avoided altogether in literary criticism.

Literal, then, tends to be defined in opposition to 'metaphorical' or 'figurative'. The term 'figurative' also has several meanings. One of its meanings is related to the representation of figures in visual art: 'Pertaining to, or of the nature of, pictorial or plastic representation'. An alternative meaning relates to language use: 'Of speech: based on figures or metaphors; metaphorical, not literal' (*Shorter OED*). In literary criticism, figurative language is a general term for a variety of non-literal uses of language. Although 'metaphorical' is also used as a general term in this way, 'metaphor' is also a name for a particular

type of figurative language (as we will see below). Thus it is better to use 'figurative' as the umbrella term and to restrict 'metaphorical' to its specific meaning. (As the use of 'umbrella' in the previous sentence indicates, figurative language appears in all discourses or language uses – including student textbooks.) Figurative use of language, then, can be defined as the use of words or phrases whose literal meaning (1) does not make sense, or (2) cannot be true, or (3) should not be taken as true, but which implies a non-literal meaning that does make sense or that could be true. Thus it is not literally true to say that 'figurative language is an *umbrella* term' (a piece of language cannot be an umbrella, since an umbrella is a device that we take cover under to keep out the rain), but the phrase does make sense – as we will see below.

10.1 Types of figurative language: metaphor, simile, metonymy, synecdoche, allegory, apostrophe

The analysis of figurative language has a long history that goes back at least as far as the analysis of **rhetoric** in ancient Greece and Rome. Classical rhetoric, which was largely concerned with the art of persuasion, identified a large number of different kinds of figurative language, each with its own name. In literary studies today, critics and theorists tend to focus on just a handful of figurative devices: metaphor, simile, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, allegory, apostrophe and a few others. We will be analysing irony in the following unit. In the present unit, we will concentrate on the others in this list.

10.1.1 Metaphor

The word **metaphor** comes from a Greek word *metaphora*, 'to transfer' or 'carry over'. Metaphor occurs when a word or phrase in one semantic field is transferred into another semantic field in order to talk about one thing as if it were another quite different thing. For example, in a phrase like 'to live a quiet life was the summit of his ambition', the term 'summit' has been transferred from the semantic field to do with mountains into a sentence concerning a man's life aspirations. The highest point of the man's ambition is talked about as if it were the top of a mountain. Metaphors work on the basis that there is some similarity between the two ideas that have been brought together, as can be seen in the similarity between 'highest point' and 'summit' (the highest part of a mountain). To interpret the metaphor, we look for the element of similarity between the non-literal word or phrase (here 'summit') and the implied idea (highest point) and transfer it into the new context. We also register the implications of the dissimilarity between the two ideas. In the metaphor we are looking at, there may be an ironic criticism in the perceived disparity between the ambition involved in climbing a mountain and the implied lack of ambition in the desire to lead a quiet life.

All metaphors work like this, and can be analysed in the way described. When Paul Simon sings 'I am a rock' we are unlikely to think that he is made of stone or wonder how a rock can sing. Rather, we select those aspects of a rock that might characterize how the singer may feel or want to represent himself and then transfer them to the new context. The metaphor that results vividly describes psychological or emotional experience by transferring our associations of rock – such as hardness, isolation or imperviousness – to the singer. At the same time, the obvious differences between a human being and a rock may suggest to us that the singer's emotional condition is not to be envied or admired. In the same way, in the statement 'by the year 2010 manufacturing will be dominated by industries now at an embryonic stage', the word 'embryonic' does not initially appear to fit in a discussion of industry and manufacturing (because literally it is a term for the offspring of an animal before birth or emergence from an egg). To make sense of 'embryonic' in this unusual context, we select those parts of its meaning that allow us to interpret the word in a discussion about industry. 'At an embryonic stage' becomes a metaphorical way of saying that the industries of the future are at a rudimentary level of development. The idea of natural gestation is also transferred into the new context, however, and we are therefore invited to see the development of industry as in some way a natural process; this, perhaps, offers us a reassuring sense that the new industries are to be welcomed. In this way, metaphor can significantly affect how we perceive or respond to what is being described.

10.1.2 Simile

Simile is a subdivision of metaphor in that, as its name suggests, it draws attention to a similarity between two terms through words such as 'like' and 'as'. Simile does not, strictly speaking, always entail figurative language, since both terms of a simile can often be understood literally. The simile 'the sky is like a polished mirror', for example, invites the listener or reader to imagine how the sky might actually appear like a polished mirror. The difference between simile and metaphor in this respect can be demonstrated by turning the simile into a metaphor. If we say 'the sky is a polished mirror' this formulation can no longer be understood literally: we know that the sky is not really a polished mirror, though it might look like one, and therefore 'polished mirror' has to be read metaphorically. But simile is included in figurative language because there are many similes that cannot be taken literally. In his 'To a Skylark' (1820), for example, Shelley describes the skylark through an extraordinary catalogue of similes, including the claim that the bird is 'Like a cloud of fire' (8) – a simile that cannot be understood literally.

10.1.3 Metonymy

Metonymy (Greek for 'a change of name') is distinguished from metaphor in that, whereas metaphor works through similarity, metonymy works through

other kinds of association (cause–effect, attribute, containment, etc.). The sentence 'Moscow made a short statement' makes sense only if we understand it figuratively, taking 'Moscow' to stand for the Russian government. This figure is possible not because of any obvious similarity between the government and the city, but because they are associated with each other (the government is based in the city). Metonymies can be formed through many different kinds of associative link. Typical dress, for example, can be used metonymically to stand for those who wear it: if someone says 'a lot of big wigs came to the party', we understand 'big wigs' to refer to 'important people' (a metonymy that probably derives from the fashion among the upper classes in earlier centuries in Europe of wearing elaborate wigs in public – a practice still followed by judges and barristers in court).

10.1.4 Synecdoche

Synecdoche (Greek for 'taking together') is a sub-branch of metonymy. It occurs when the association between the figurative and literal senses is that of a part to the whole to which it belongs. 'Farm hands' is a common synecdoche for workers on a farm; 'a new motor' comes to mean 'a new car' by using one part of the car, its engine, to stand for the whole. (Note that the 'big wig' is not a part of the person to which it belongs, and so would not be called synecdoche.)

10.1.5 Allegory

The term **allegory** comes from the Greek for 'speaking otherwise'. An allegory 'is a narrative fiction in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived to make coherent sense on the "literal," or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of agents, concepts, and events' (Abrams, 1993). Allegory, then, differs from the other kinds of figurative language we are looking at, since an allegorical story makes sense at the literal level as well as indicating that it needs to be understood at a second allegorical level.

10.1.6 Apostrophe

Apostrophe has been described (by Abrams, 1993) as a rhetorical figure rather than as a figure of speech. Whereas figures of speech involve describing things in terms of other things, a rhetorical figure is a modification of normal usage in order to achieve a rhetorical effect. Apostrophe is one of the most important rhetorical figures in poetry. One of the first things to do in understanding a poem is to work out its speech situation – i.e. who is speaking to whom. An apostrophe is a special variant on the poetic speech situation in that it involves the speaker addressing either someone who is not there, or even dead,

or something that is normally thought of as unable to understand language or reply (e.g. an animal or an object). Thus, in 'To a Skylark', Shelley apostrophizes the skylark: 'Hail to thee, blithe spirit'; in 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' (1820) Keats apostrophizes a Greek urn and the figures in its design. One of the consequences of apostrophe is that it personifies the thing that is addressed and thus works, in a way, like personifying metaphor (see below). Apostrophe also typically (but not always) involves the use of an archaic second person pronoun and its associated verb form:

> Hail to *thee*, blithe spirit!
> Bird *thou* never *wert*,
> That from heaven, or near it,
> *Pourest thy* full heart
> In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

One of the consequences of this archaism is that it elevates the thing being apostrophized, partly because of the association of this pronoun and verb form with the Bible and with the mode of addressing God in Christian prayer: 'Our Father which *art* in Heaven, Hallowed be *thy* name'.

10.2 Analysing metaphors

Metaphor is by far the most important and interesting of the various kinds of figurative language, especially to students of literature. A great deal of scholarly and theoretical analysis has been devoted to metaphor (some of which is mentioned in the further reading for this unit). Thus the bulk of the rest of this unit will be devoted to examining various aspects of metaphor and to presenting ways of reading metaphor.

10.2.1 Metaphor and inferencing

One account of the way we understand figurative language is that we do it through the same kind of **inferencing** process that we employ when trying to identify authorial intention (see **Unit 14, Authorship and intention**). Inferencing is a process of assigning a meaning to uses of language by making educated guesses based on evidence from the text and other sources. Deciphering figurative language involves 'reading between the lines' to discover what the author is 'really' saying.

Most users of the language will be able to make sense of the statement that figurative language is an 'umbrella term'. But how do we do this? Most of the time we make sense of figurative uses of language without paying attention to how we do so. Often, we are able to do this because we have heard or read the figurative usage before. However, although there must be a moment

when we hear a figure for the first time, we seem able for the most part to understand new figures without conscious effort. Yet, as with most things that we do unconsciously or without effort, when we try to analyse what we do it suddenly seems difficult or strange. Nonetheless, it is important and useful to analyse the process that we follow in understanding a metaphor.

In the case of 'figurative language is an *umbrella* term', we can break down the process of understanding into several stages. First, we notice that the literal meaning cannot be true. Second, we assume that the phrase must have a potentially true meaning and that we are required to invent or infer a non-literal meaning that is plausible for the sentence. Third, we set about trying to infer that plausible non-literal meaning. (Plausibility depends on a number of factors: the meaning must be capable of being true, it must fit with the rest of the text, and it must have some relation to what is actually said – the non-literal meaning must have some relation to the literal meaning.) In the case we are looking at, we ask what aspects of 'umbrella' might apply in the context: what features or uses of an umbrella might be relevant in the phrase we are trying to understand? Keeping out the rain does not seem relevant to what is being said about the term 'figurative language'. What is possibly relevant is the idea that an umbrella (especially a large one) can cover more than one person. The notion of covering more than one thing appears to fit, since we also said earlier that figurative language is 'a general term for a range of different non-literal uses of language'.

All speakers of the same language should decode the same literal meaning from the same text, but they might differ in the non-literal meaning that they infer from a text. This has several consequences for non-literal meanings. First, a range of non-literal meanings might all be plausible for the same text; sometimes these meanings are compatible with one another, and sometimes they are not. Sometimes the non-literal meaning is very easy to derive and sometimes quite difficult, perhaps because it is only weakly evidenced by the text or because the text can be interpreted in more than one non-literal way. Metaphor – and figurative language more generally – thus generates a degree of indeterminacy in a text, which might be an important part of that text's aesthetic effect. The attempt to interpret figurative language, then, is simply a particular case of the general problem of trying to determine authorial intention through inferencing: it leads not to certainty but to various degrees of uncertainty.

10.2.2 Metaphors as different parts of speech

The process of inferencing just described can be aided by the recognition that metaphors may be formed by different parts of speech and that the inferred meaning of a metaphor needs to be the same part(s) of speech as the metaphorical word or phrase itself. This is because metaphor generally works through a process of substitution, or of comparison, of like with like. In the

example 'figurative language is an *umbrella* term', 'umbrella' could be said to be substituting for other possible words that would make better literal sense: 'general', 'all-encompassing' and so on. This substitutive relation is emphasized by the fact that 'umbrella', 'general' and 'all-encompassing' would all function in the sentence as adjectives (that is, they modify the noun 'term'). 'Umbrella', of course, is normally a noun, as in the following sentence: 'We need to develop a nuclear *umbrella* to defend the world against asteroid collision.' In this case, the metaphorical 'umbrella' could be substituted by a noun phrase such as 'defensive system'.

In the phrase addressed to Spring in Blake's 'To Spring' (1783), 'let our winds / Kiss thy perfumed garments' (9–10), the metaphor is made up of three different parts of speech. In the context, the verb phrase 'kiss thy perfumed garments' seems to mean something like 'blow lightly over the fragrant flowers (of spring)'. Within this metaphor, 'kiss' (verb) could be replaced by 'blow lightly' (verb phrase), 'perfumed' (adjective) could be replaced by 'fragranced' (or some similarly plausible adjective for the smell of flowers), and 'garments' (noun) could be replaced by 'flowers' (noun).

10.2.3 Tenor, vehicle, ground

The recognition that metaphor involves the substitution of equivalent parts of speech is an important step in the analysis of metaphors. It helps us to understand the inferencing process described above, and it also helps us to understand and use an influential method of analysing metaphors developed by the literary critic and philosopher I.A. Richards. Richards's analysis of metaphor involves identifying the different components of metaphor – which he called tenor, vehicle and ground. (Sharp readers – to use a metaphor – will notice that both 'vehicle' and 'ground' are themselves metaphors.) The word or phrase in a sentence that cannot be taken literally in the context is called the vehicle. The meaning that is implied, or referred to, by the vehicle is called the tenor. To work out the ground of the metaphor we need to identify what vehicle and tenor have in common (their 'common ground') and filter out those aspects of the vehicle that do not relate to the tenor. In the case of 'Figurative language is an *umbrella* term', the ground that links vehicle ('umbrella') and tenor ('general') are that both cover more than one thing. The ground of the metaphor is thus something like 'cover all'.

10.2.4 Explicit and implicit metaphors

Another distinction that helps us to understand and analyse metaphors is that between explicit and implicit metaphors. In an explicit metaphor, both vehicle and tenor are specified and present in the text. For example, in the statement 'the M1 motorway is the artery of England', the tenor is 'M1 motorway', the vehicle is 'artery', and the ground is the similarity between motorway and an

artery. In an implicit metaphor, by contrast, while the vehicle is present in the text, the tenor has to be inferred (following processes described above). Thus in 'figurative language is an *umbrella* term', the vehicle is 'umbrella' while the tenor (general, all-encompassing) is merely implied and has to be inferred.

10.2.5 Classifying metaphors: concretive, animistic, humanizing

Another important strategy for analysing and understanding a metaphor is to compare vehicle and tenor in order to identify what kind of transference of meaning or connotations goes on between them (see Leech, 1969). A concretive metaphor uses a concrete term to talk about an abstract thing. Common examples include 'the burden of responsibility' and 'every cloud has a silver lining'. Religious discourse often uses concretive metaphors to make abstract ideas more vivid: heaven is frequently referred to as if it were a place or a building – 'In my Father's house there are many mansions.' An animistic metaphor uses a term usually associated with animate things (living creatures) to talk about an inanimate thing. Common examples include the 'leg of a table' and 'stinging rain'. A humanizing metaphor or anthropomorphic metaphor (sometimes called **personification**) uses a term usually associated with human beings to talk about a non-human thing. Common examples include the 'hands' of a clock and the kettle's 'sad song'. Humanizing metaphor is connected with the **pathetic fallacy** (the idea that the world reflects or participates in one's emotions): 'the kettle's sad song' might thus be used as a way of indicating a character's mood by implicitly describing how he or she perceives the kettle's sound.

These are not the only kinds of transfers that can be used to form metaphors. Consider the phrase 'the nightclubs are full of sharks'. Given that it is unlikely that this will be true, we infer that the statement means that the men (and/or women) in the nightclubs behave in predatory ways like sharks. In other words, human beings are metaphorically described as a kind of animal. In the statement 'the dog flew at the intruder's throat', the dog's action is described as if it were the action of a bird (hence we get an animal–animal transference). In general, though, metaphors tend to represent abstract things – ideas, emotions, thoughts, feelings, etc. – in physical ways (as objects) or to represent things or events in the world in ways that reveal how we think or feel about them. In these ways, metaphors (and figures in general) make thoughts and feelings more vivid or more tangible – they give a 'figure' to thoughts and feelings or transfer connotations to ideas that allow us to see those ideas in new ways. This is why metaphors in particular can be found in abundance in poetry and other forms of literature.

10.2.6 Extended metaphor

When a piece of language uses several vehicles from the same area of thought (or semantic field) it is called an extended metaphor. Extended metaphor is a

common literary device, especially in poetry. In the last two stanzas of her poem 'The Unequal Fetters' (1713), Anne Finch develops an extended metaphor to suggest that marriage ('Hymen') is a set of 'unequal fetters' (chains or bonds) for men and women and that, as a consequence, she intends to avoid it:

> Free as Nature's first intention
> Was to make us, I'll be found
> Nor by subtle Man's invention
> Yield to be in fetters bound
> By one that walks a freer round.
>
> Marriage does but slightly tie men
> Whilst close prisoners we remain
> They the larger slaves of Hymen
> Still are begging love again
> At the full length of all their chain.

10.2.7 Mixed metaphor

Books on 'good style' used to condemn the use of mixed metaphor (the combination of two or more metaphors whose vehicles come from different and incongruous areas or semantic fields) because they can have unintentionally ludicrous effects. For precisely this reason, corny jokes often exploit mixed metaphor. However, Abrams (1993) claims that mixed metaphor can have interesting effects in literature (he refers to the 'To be or not to be' speech from *Hamlet*, III, i, 56–9). Mixed metaphor also has powerful effects in the opening lines of the following sonnet, 'To the Pupils of the Hindu College', by Henry L. Derozio (1809–31):

> Expanding like the petals of young flowers
> I watch the gentle opening of your minds,
> And the sweet loosening of the spell that binds
> Your intellectual energies and powers
> That stretch (like young birds in soft summer hours)
> Their wings to try their strength.

Here, the effect of education on the pupils' minds is figured as an expanding of flower petals, as an opening (a dead metaphor), as the release from a spell, and as the stretching of fledglings' wings in order to get ready for first flight. Yet this is not such an incongruent mixing of metaphors as that in Hamlet's speech. While these metaphors figure the pupils' minds as flowers, as a box or room to be opened, as someone under a spell, and as young birds, all these metaphors have a 'common ground' that could be labelled as growth, release, flight or escape.

10.2.8 Vital metaphors and dead metaphors

New metaphors are constantly being developed whenever a new area of experience or thought needs new descriptive terms. Gradually, however, metaphors become over-familiar and cease to be recognized as metaphors at all. When this happens, they lose their power to confront us with their effects as metaphors. Everyday language is full of such terms. A speaker of English would not normally be conscious of producing two (very different) metaphors in claiming that 'things are looking up for the team since the landslide victory last week'. Yet both 'things are looking up' and 'landslide' have to be understood as metaphors since they cannot be taken literally in the context. Words and phrases that are metaphorical, but cease to be regarded as metaphors, are called dead metaphors (notice, incidentally, that the phrase 'dead metaphor' is itself a dead metaphor).

Dead metaphors tend to reproduce commonplace thoughts and do not require much imagination to be understood. By contrast, vitally new metaphors force us out of established ways of thinking. As Wallace Stevens puts it, 'Reality is a cliché from which we escape by metaphor'. An original metaphor that draws attention to itself as a metaphor can make demands on our powers of creative interpretation. Each time such challenging metaphors are produced, the way language maps the world is altered. Domains that the language usually keeps separate are momentarily fused, and new meanings are brought into existence.

10.3 Reading metaphor in literature

It is sometimes suggested that literature can be distinguished from non-literary discourse because literature uses language metaphorically, while non-literary discourse uses it literally. Yet this is clearly not the case, since all kinds of non-literary discourses (as we have seen) use figurative language. A more useful metaphor for thinking about how metaphor is used in different kinds of language is to imagine a spectrum of language types, ranging from discourses that consist mostly of literal usages and dead metaphors through to discourses that are highly conscious and highly innovative in their use of metaphor. Literature is generally at the highly conscious and highly innovative end of this spectrum, but we should be wary of thinking that only the vivid and strikingly new metaphors count in literature. Such metaphors are often important and require imaginative inferencing responses from the reader. Nonetheless, not all literary texts are necessarily trying to break new ground in their use of figurative language, or at least not all the time. Sometimes, indeed, it is the quieter, almost imperceptible metaphors – those we might easily fail to notice – that do a lot of important work in a literary text. To become good readers of literature, we need to be alert to the subtle metaphors as well as to those that shout in our face.

One of the effects of becoming alert to metaphor is that it suddenly seems as if metaphor is everywhere. However, while it is true that metaphor is everywhere, there is a danger that inexperienced readers will start seeing metaphors where there are none. To avoid this, a good rule of thumb (to use a metaphor) is to say 'if it can be read literally, then take it as literal – only read something as a metaphor if it can't be taken literally'. While this is a good general rule, however, it is not failsafe. Sometimes a text may make use of the ambiguity that can arise when something can equally be taken as literal or as metaphorical. The power of the lyrics at the end of U2's 'Bullet the Blue Sky' (*The Joshua Tree*, 1987) comes from the way they make it possible for the phrase 'the arms of America' to be both literal (weapons) and metaphorical (human, embracing arms) at the same time. Sometimes it might be possible to read something literally, but there are subtle hints elsewhere in the text that it needs to be read metaphorically. In other words, reading for metaphor sometimes has to take the whole text – or at least the immediately surrounding text – into context.

ACTIVITY 10.1

This activity will focus on Toru Dutt's 'Our Casuarina Tree' (India, 1878):

> Like a huge Python, winding round and round
> The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars
> Up to its very summit near the stars,
> A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
> No other tree could live. But gallantly   5
> The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung
> In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
> Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;
> And oft at nights the garden overflows
> With one sweet song that seems to have no close,   10
> Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.
>
> When first my casement is wide open thrown
> At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;
> Sometimes, and most in winter, – on its crest
> A gray baboon sits statue-like alone   15
> Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs
> His puny offspring leap about and play;
> And far and near kokilas hail the day;
> And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;
> And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast   20
> By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,
> The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

But not because of its magnificence
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:
Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,   25
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
For your sakes shall the tree be ever dear!
Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!
What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear   30
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,
That haply to the unknown land may reach.

Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!
Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away   35
In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,
When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith
And the waves gently kissed the classic shore
Of France or Italy, beneath the moon
When earth lay tranced in a dreamless swoon: 40
And every time the music rose, – before
Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,
Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime
I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.

Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay   45
Unto thy honour, Tree, beloved of those
Who now in blessed sleep for aye repose,
Dearer than life to me, alas! were they!
Mayst thou be numbered when my days are done
With deathless trees – like those in Borrowdale,   50
Under whose awful branches lingered pale
'Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,
And Time the shadow' and though weak the verse
That would thy beauty fain, oh fain rehearse,
May Love defend thee from Oblivion's curse.   55

(Note: in the last stanza, Dutt alludes to and quotes from Wordsworth's poem 'Yew Trees' (1815).)

1   Highlight or underline all the uses of figurative language that you can find in this poem and give each usage its appropriate label (similie, personification, etc.).

   1.1   Choose one of the metaphors you have identified and analyse it by using the methods described above: (a) identify vehicle, tenor and

ground; (b) is it implicit or explicit? (c) is it concretive, animistic or humanizing? (d) is it extended – i.e. are there other vehicles or non-literal terms in the poem that come from the same semantic field?

2   Try to rewrite the first stanza in order to eliminate all similes and metaphors. What is the difference between your stanza and Dutt's?

    2.1   What kind of image of the tree do Dutt's similes and metaphors create in this stanza?

3   In the third stanza (line 23), the speaker stresses that the tree is dear to her 'not because of its magnificence'. Focus closely on the metaphors and similes of the third stanza in order to find out why the tree is dear to her. (You could also look at the first four lines of the last stanza.)

    3.1   Do the vehicles of the important similes and metaphors in the third stanza come from (a) the same semantic field, or (b) related semantic fields, or (c) different semantic fields?

    3.2   Where would you locate these important metaphors on a scale ranging from vitally new metaphors at one end and dead metaphors at the other end? What do you learn from this?

4   In what way does the use of apostrophe in stanzas three, four and five confirm or challenge your interpretation of the poem?

5   Is 'deathless' (stanza five, line 50) metaphorical or literal? How will the tree become deathless? How does the wish that the tree should become 'deathless' relate to the overall meaning of the poem?

6   In the course of answering these questions have you: (a) discovered more metaphors and similes than you did when you answered question 1? or (b) realized that some of the metaphors and similes you identified in answering question 1 are not actually metaphors or similes? What do you learn from this?

Reading

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