

ROUTLEDGE

Literary Theory
and Literary Aesthetics

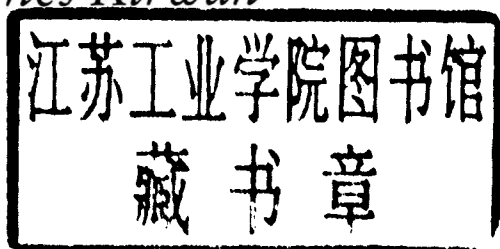
LITERATURE
RHETORIC
METAPHYSICS

JAMES KIRWAN

LITERATURE, RHETORIC, METAPHYSICS

Literary theory and literary aesthetics

James Kirwan



ROUTLEDGE
London and New York

First published 1990
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
a division of Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc.
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

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Set in 10/12pt Garamond

Photoset and printed in Great Britain by
Redwood Press Limited, Melksham, Wiltshire

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Kirwan, James

Literature, rhetoric, metaphysics: literary theory and
literary aesthetics.

1. Literature – critical studies

I. Title

809

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Kirwan, James

Literature, rhetoric, metaphysics: literary theory and literary
aesthetics / James Kirwan.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-415-04849-4.

1. Literature – History and criticism – Theory, etc. 2. Literature –
Aesthetics. 3. Criticism. I. Title.

PN81.K5 1990

801 – dc20 89-10976

ISBN 0-415-04849-4

PREFACE

The most direct way of explaining the purpose, scope, and argument of this book is to explain its genesis. In 1984 I began a Ph.D. at Edinburgh University, on three post-war British novelists and certain affinities I believed existed between them. Time went by. The pages filled themselves. But precisely because the pages were filling themselves, and filling themselves too easily, I became increasingly disaffected with the process in which I was involved. I felt the need for some sort of 'Defence' of criticism to serve as an introduction to the main part of my work. I wrote one, and then another. I began to ask myself whether what I had been doing was really 'defensible' in this way, and, moreover, whether I had ever believed it was. By now this theoretical exposition of the function of criticism and, its corollary, the nature of literature, was the main part of my work. I never wrote this 'Defence', and neither has anybody else.

Edinburgh, June 1989

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LITERATURE?

A critic may with advantage seize an occasion for trying his own conscience, and for asking himself of what real service, at any given moment, the practice of criticism either is, or may be made, to his own mind and spirit, and to the minds and spirits of others.

Matthew Arnold

The question this work sets out to answer is, simply, 'What is literature?', and, perhaps more pertinently, 'What can literature be for criticism?'

What I include under the heading of this 'literature' to be defined, will emerge as I go on. Suffice it to say for now that I have excluded from the normal uses of 'literature' only its reference to the printed matter treating of a particular subject, that is, 'the literature on . . .' My use of 'literature', then, is not an evaluative one; when I mean the sort of literature I like I will say 'good literature', and that is what I will mean by 'good'. Yet my question is one that stands in need of justification; paradoxically much more so than if I were asking about such and such *in* literature or literature *as* such and such. In short, to write a book on literature today is naïve. So, since I cannot write the book in the introduction, I must perforce position myself, must to some extent enter the yeasty collection of contemporary debate (or, to be more precise, place my argument in terms that are familiar within this debate) in order to prevent my argument from being damned even before its prosecution. Fortunately, all the objections against my project fall into two propositions that can be easily articulated – that there is no such thing as literature to define, or that, for the sake of literature, 'literature' should not be defined. Unfortunately, it will take a book to answer the first of these objections while the second, as a moral injunction, can only be answered with obedience or disobedience. However, it will be useful here to examine some of the strategies in which these two objections are manifested, both in order to answer them as far as it is possible at this stage and also, incidentally, to give a clearer picture of what I am doing here, to, in short, 'position myself'.

I will begin with the objection that appears the most reasonable but which is, as an objection, the weakest of those with which I will here deal. So.

Different things are called literature not because of a common essence but on the basis of a 'family resemblance' that exists between them, that while each may have something in common with another there is no universal characteristic they all share (rather like the rhyme scheme of the *virelay*).¹ This concept comes from Wittgenstein, who applies it to the way that language-games are related, that is, how they come to fall under the general concept of language.² He illustrates it by appealing to the disparate activities we call 'games' and our inability to find something which is common to all. But he is able to appeal to this analogy only by pointing to the particular characteristics, the rules, of discrete, individual games – those characteristics which entitle, for example, some particular activity to be tennis rather than chess.³ Just because some concepts are blurred, though usable, does not mean that all concepts are blurred, or equally blurred as the first one we thought of, or that everything must be viewed through half-closed eyes. It depends on whether we consider 'literature' a term akin to 'tennis' or to 'language', as a particular language-game or as something so fundamental that its limits are also those of thought. To use Wittgenstein's concept as a general, a priori, counsel of intellectual quietism, particularly considering the point in Wittgenstein's own thought at which the concept appears, is to urge the end of speculative thought *per se*. Hypotheses, as Novalis writes, are nets; they must be cast if anything is to be caught. Moreover the idea of 'family resemblance' existing between different things is just as vulnerable as any other general theory; if an essence can be demonstrated to inhere in all those things previously held to be so related, then the notion of their family resemblance must defer to this notion. It may be that in certain cases we must fall back on an appeal to family resemblance, but for thought to proceed at all this solution must always be treated as provisional.

Given that some types of text must inevitably be excluded if there is still to be 'literature', then it cannot simply be a resemblance between texts in general, but rather between some type already existing within the species. Indeed, looked at from this point of view my project is simply one to distinguish people from other primates – family resemblances being a task for later (perhaps for genre criticism). But is it given that some type of text will always be excluded? This leads us on to the second objection to a search for essence, that is, the 'institutional theory' of literature. According to this theory literature is that which is called 'literature' by a certain group of people whose task it is . . . to say what is and is not literature. This theory works very well within the more general concept 'art' and has indeed come to constitute the very definition of that term.⁴ But though there can be a post-object art, could there ever be a post-verbal literature? Well yes, of course. The institutional concept of literature is irrefutable – or at least will be, as soon as everyone has agreed to its truth. For, while the idea of literature as a family resemblance must defer to the demonstration of some essence found to inhere in all those things previously held to be so related, if the use which constitutes the meaning can be

changed at will there is no way of predicting even what sort of things – objects, sounds, events, ideas – it may one day refer to. This will be the final triumph of criticism. For the moment, however, nothing that is now called literature falls outside my study.

But perhaps, after Heidegger and Derrida, I should place ‘literature’ *sous rature* – ~~literature~~ – to signify that while my argument cannot proceed without it, nevertheless the term is provisional and inadequate. But what would this act of erasure itself signify? Before answering this question I must point out that whatever ~~erasure~~ is, it is not erasure – the word beneath remains. What do the marks of this ‘erasure’ then signify, and how does their use differ from my use of ‘this’ and quotation marks in the present sentence? If it is simply that the word beneath them is provisional and inadequate then their placing is for the reader to decide, certainly in a book such as this, all concepts should be read ‘under erasure’ by the reader. (Which is only to say the obvious: that language itself exists only in quotation marks.) For me to place a word under erasure, then, would be to signify that I know more than I can say, more than language (by which I do *not* mean the current vocabulary) can say. I am too sceptical for such mysticism.

Apropos ~~Derrida~~ there is another notion I wish to examine. (The use of ~~Derrida~~ here simply signifies that the work of Derrida and the uses of ‘Derrida’ need to be distinguished but that I am not going to do it here.) This is the notion of the confounding of philosophy and literature, or, the inseparability of philosophy and literature. These alternatives are, however, mutually exclusive; at least as they are usually presented. Thus Culler, for example, talks of one of the fundamental implications of deconstruction for the concept of literature as being the undermining of the dichotomy literature/philosophy – an idea he might have found more entertainingly presented in Jean Paul Richter, Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, or even Unamuno – without ever analysing either concept in a way that would make such a discussion more than rhetorical.⁵ This, indeed is the ironical, almost universal, consequence of the popularization of ‘deconstruction’, which is perhaps deconstruction itself; the unreflective use of a number of terms – ‘literature’, ‘philosophy’, ‘metaphysics’, ‘rhetoric’ – which are treated as givens even while the opposite is affirmed. They are all intermingling, but no one can say what it is that is intermingling. The coupling of literature and philosophy within theoretical discourse is, as I will show, inevitable. It is not however a coupling peculiar to Romanticism or even to Dante and Petrarch. The question is not indeed an historical one at all – it did not begin with Mallarmé, even as a question – but rather a matter of how a thing is read now. Thus the notion of an historical shift in the signified of ‘literature’ is due only to a confusion of the accidental with the essential, an essence which literary theory could discover in its own history, if it chose to look. But here I run ahead of myself.

I will turn now to the objection against the definition of ‘literature’ that is made in the name of literature. Hirsch, for example, in his ‘What Isn’t

Literature?' explicitly states that his paper is to be considered 'a defence of literature against literary theory'. 'Literary theory', he writes, 'gets into trouble only when it pretends that the word *literature* can be satisfactorily defined', though he is at pains to point out that his scepticism is not aimed at 'the existence of the class, literature, but at the attempt to falsely constrict its existence through definition'.⁶ There are many instances, he continues, where there is no consensus as to whether a particular text belongs to the class *literature*. The theorist, then, should understand that 'his' definitions can 'only attempt to clarify and make explicit what is already implicit in our use of the word', much as the grammarian must follow the native speaker; 'if they deviate in the least from the usage of educated men, it is the definition that is wrong, and not the common usage'.⁷ But this pointing out of the implicit nature of 'our' criteria for calling things *literature* does not explain why such criteria should remain implicit. Hirsch seems to disqualify literary theory from dealing with literature, then, not because he does not believe that something is implicit in the ascription of 'literature', but on the grounds that this something should not be made explicit. Why? Here his argument changes tack: 'Besides being misleading, [such definitions] always confine and constrict the subject in a way that makes the teaching and study of literature more narrow and one-sided than is good for ourselves, our students and our culture'.⁸ Which is to say that though he already has his object – literature – he does not believe a definition of it can ever be right. What, then, is Hirsch's definition of 'literature', since he must have one if he has a literature to protect? It is this: 'Literature includes any text worthy to be taught to students by teachers of literature, when these texts are not being taught to students of other departments of a school or university'.⁹ So much might be deduced by the refrain of the possessive adjective in the previous quotation, from the appeal to 'the usage of educated men', and, elsewhere and more democratically, 'competent persons'.¹⁰ By 'competent' he can mean no more than habituated, for certainly he appears to view self-consciousness as either undesirable or impossible, or, paradoxically, both. With regard to the undesirability of attempting to define literature he has made no case, with regard to its impossibility the case has yet to be proven.

Hirsch's intuitionism is finally no more than an appeal to institutional authority, as he makes clear in his own stipulative definition, together with an admission that this authority cannot, or will not, the point is still not clear, account for its authority.¹¹ Such a totemic notion of literature is simply bourgeois mystification. This leads me to another objection, that to ask what literature *is* is merely to revive, in Macherey's words, 'an idealistic and conservative aesthetic', to assume 'that literature exists as a *thing*, as an eternal and unchangeable thing with an essence'.¹² But I cannot demystify a notion by dismissing it, indeed, I must have a notion to dismiss before I can even do that. In this Macherey and Balibar's argument mirrors that of Hirsch; just what this thing called literature is, that is being conserved or rejected, is lost somewhere

between them. (Barthes has gone some way towards an analysis of the ideal of literature, but, in exempting a class of texts while still maintaining it is continuous with the genus of which he is speaking, he declares that his definitions are neither necessary nor sufficient.)¹³ If the idea, or ideal, of literature is a matter of bourgeois mystification, of the 'reproduction of bourgeois ideology as the dominant ideology', it still remains to explain why it is so apt a tool for this process.

But literature is not simply an ideal object, it is the ideal of an ideal object. Moreover the existence of this ideal of the literary, if not literature itself, is inevitable. This may be no more than automorphism, a necessarily vain attempt to impose my, or rather 'our', own *episteme* (in Foucault's sense) on the past. Foucault describes the appearance of 'literature' in the nineteenth century as 'a compensation for the demotion of language', a resurrection of 'the naked power of speech'.¹⁴ Though earlier he writes that 'there has of course existed in the Western world, since Dante, since Homer, a form of language that we now call "literature"' – a tautology from his own point of view, and one that perhaps is symptomatic of a mystical strain that leads us back to the notion of *erasure*.¹⁵ For by 'mysticism' I understand the idea that I can have or imagine some idea that I have decided it is impossible to have or imagine. The very supposition of this kind of *episteme* is a form of determinism that can only be answered with 'So what?' (The only practical consequence of the notion, as with that of 'family resemblances', could be the abandonment of analysis on a priori grounds.) Raymond Williams, too, traces the use of the word 'literature', cognate with 'our' own, only to the nineteenth century, René Wellek to the second century AD, with a gap from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century.¹⁶ Since there is no general agreement on a definition of 'literature' it is not surprising that there should be some confusion over what past senses or separate words are cognate with it. Interestingly both Williams and Wellek reach, rather reluctantly, for the word 'aesthetic' when trying to arrive at the modern sense.

I am not however presenting a neologism – 'literature' – that is something like 'literature', the definition of which may or may not overlap with the use of that word today. I have not chosen a neologism because I feel it is still possible, at this stage in the history of ... literature ... to provide a definition that will cover all its uses. What, indeed, is remarkable about the history of 'literature', 'poetry', 'belles lettres', 'poesy', is the continuity between them, the consistency of an object, an ideal, which I believe can today be called 'literature'. Jean Chapelain appeals to intentional criteria when arguing for conformity to genre as a standard of literary excellence, yet his sense of what is literary overturns his very argument. Hurd and Johnson (and Wimsatt and Beardsley, and Barthes, and Derrida) argue against intentional criteria, and yet the sense of genre constantly invades their arguments. It is the very lack of agreement about what is to be called literature that makes literature a stable object within the critical tradition. It is the ubiquity of two figures – *apophasis*

(the affirming of what one pretends to ignore) and *contradictio in adjecto* (contradiction in terms, or by attribution) – in the critical tradition, which is also the history of the word ‘literature’, that points to an essence, a source, which that tradition has tried to express. All the objections to the attempt to define ‘literature’ that I have here considered (including Hirsch’s) arise, paradoxically enough, from the belief that no such definition has yet been found. I would assert on the contrary, that what literature is has been implicit in all the writing that has surrounded the word, that all writers on literature have been right, even when they contradicted one another. This, on reflection, is inevitable; for to assert otherwise one would have to begin from the truly metaphysical question ‘Is “literature” literature?’

What, then, is literature? *Alieniloquium* – ‘transferred speech’. Thus Petrarch defines poetry; poetry is a ‘charming fiction’, a ‘beautiful veil’, or, as Dante wrote, ‘a beautiful lie’ (*una bella menzogna*), which at once hides and reveals the truth. *Alieniloquium* and truth – that is the subject of this present work. To begin with metaphor, itself often described, not with etymological justification, as ‘transferred speech’, is not a new idea. Emanuele Tesauro, in a work picturesquely entitled *Aristotle’s Telescope* (1655), held that all art is essentially metaphorical, indeed that all gestures, dances, tournaments, masquerades, statues, theatre props, coats of arms, and hieroglyphics, are also metaphorical! But my theoretical ambitions are not so universal, nor so vague. I have begun with metaphor because, as will emerge, metaphor provides the best model of literature *from an aesthetic point of view*. I have begun with a detailed discussion of that figure because, given that, drawing from the same source, I obtain a quite different distribution of the concepts of truth, lies, and beauty to that obtained by Petrarch, an examination of the precise nature of that source seems in order.

One last word. I have introduced the term ‘aesthetic’ quite early on in this book, and have made it do a great deal of work throughout; precisely how it is to be understood will emerge along with the definition of literature.

METAPHOR

But it is just this technical formulation, which reveals the truth to our understanding, that conceals it once again from our feelings; for unfortunately the understanding must first destroy the objects of the inner sense before it can appropriate them. Like the chemist, the philosopher finds combination only through dissolution, and the work of spontaneous Nature only through the torture of Art. In order to seize the fleeting appearance he must bind it in the fetters of rule, dissect its fair body into abstract notions, and preserve its living spirit in a sorry skeleton of words. Is it any wonder if natural feeling does not recognize itself in such a likeness, and if truth appears in the analyst's report as paradox.

Schiller

'There is', writes Montaigne, 'more ado to interpret interpretations than to interpret things; and more books upon books than upon any other subject; we do nothing but comment upon one another.'¹ Three hundred years later we find even in the field of literary studies not only works of criticism, that is, books upon books, and works of literary theory, or books about books about books, but also works *on* literary theory, or books about books about books about books. It begins to sound like the refrain from a nursery rhyme. I would defend the present work, however, by stating that it is, first, about a part of language – metaphor – and, second, an act – interpretation. But why should I feel in need of a defence? Disparaging though Montaigne's comment seems, a few sentences later he is speaking of how our opinions 'are grafted upon one another; the first serves as a stock to the second, the second to the third, and so forth; thus step by step we climb the ladder', presumably to comprehension.² This may be so, nevertheless this essay is cast in a form which I feel I need to defend, even if only to myself.

The source of my misgivings is this, that the present study is, to my mind, full, one might say 'stuffed', with quotations and references. In the essay quoted above, Montaigne goes on to discuss the use of 'foreign and scholastic examples' and asks if they are so much used because 'we seek more honour

from the quotation, than from the truth of the matter in hand?'³ His own essay is replete with quotations from Plutarch, Tacitus, Plato, Seneca, Quintilian, Aristotle, Propertius, Cicero, Virgil, Martial, Horace, Juvenal, Ovid, and others, quotations that often simply repeat what he has previously said in his own words. (The title of the essay is 'Of Experience'!) Yet there may be many reasons for using quotations. They can lead the reader gently to a subject through something of subsidiary and intrinsic interest, as, hopefully, my use of Montaigne has done here. They may be summarizing, as many of Montaigne's are; a function to which the brevity of Latin is well suited. They may be essential to the integrity of the argument, as in scientific papers. It may be that they express something which you yourself wish to say but cannot say as well, or summarize a position more succinctly than a paraphrase could. But they can also be used as mere ostentation, the seeking after 'honour'. I have used them for all these reasons, including the last; for as a piece of research it must appear as a piece of research. (Quotations can also be used as an *argumentum ad verecundiam*, but this is an argument beneath contempt.) Bacon, in his essay 'Of Studies', writes that one should read 'not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider'. And this, I believe, is very sound advice, except I would add that if one's aim is to write on the same subject then one should read also 'to improve upon'.⁴ As to the display of one's researches, here there are three considerations to be made: first, it is good manners to acknowledge a debt, and justice to fairly represent what one indicts; second, by comparing and contrasting my own views with existing writings I place the reader in a position to judge to what extent what I have to say is novel; and, third, and perhaps most important, since my own reading in the subject largely progressed by way of the footnotes and bibliographies of existing works it would seem churlish not to extend the same benefit to future students of the subject.

But there is another, more important reason: this work is concerned with certain existing problems in the treatment of literature, principally within literary criticism, but also in a more general context, that is, wherever a definition of literature is called explicitly or implicitly into play. What I intend to show is that all these problems are interconnected, that they are, in fact, all aspects of a single problem – the application of a consistent notion of the aesthetic to literature. That a 'consistent notion of the aesthetic' exists is one premise of this work; that it is continually on the point of realization within the tradition of writing on literature, and continually, for a variety of reasons, left unrealized by that tradition, is another. To this extent my work has been simply a matter of connecting previously remote areas of this tradition, of discovering what it has left out, or what it leaves over, of drawing implications. The reader, therefore, who, to avoid the difficulty of constantly adjusting to a new voice, skips over the quotations in the hope of finding their gist below, or skims them in the belief that they will pick up the thread in what

follows, will soon become lost. This is a work about talk about literature, which is to say that it is a work about literature with a certain historical sense. I have endeavoured to let a tradition speak for itself, to let readers experience for themselves the relation of undertow to main current. In this respect I have been hampered (perhaps to the benefit of the reader) by the exigencies of space, though also of time. Indeed I believe it would be possible to replace every quotation I have used with another unused, every author cited with another unmentioned, without altering the central thesis of this work at all. To this extent it is intended also as a guidebook to what it does not contain.

Yet;

Men do not know the natural disease of the mind; it does nothing but ferret and inquire, and it is eternally wheeling, juggling, and perplexing itself like silkworms, and then suffocates itself in its work . . . It thinks it discovers at a great distance, I know not what glimpse of light and imaginary truth; but whilst running to it, so many difficulties, hindrances and new inquiries cross it, that it loses its way, and is made drunk with the motion: not much unlike Aesop's dogs, that seeing something like a dead body floating in the sea, and not being able to approach it, set to work to drink the water and lay the passage dry, and so choked themselves.⁵

Now that I have satisfied myself as to the form of this essay, why does this passage from Montaigne make me pause? Could the research and its inclusion be represented by the sea, a sea that will choke me before I reach my quarry? Even apart from this resemblance the application of the simile contains all sorts of unflattering comparisons; the goal of the intellectual endeavour is represented by a corpse, the inquirer by a pack of dogs. Even the word 'quarry', meaning an object of pursuit, is, after all, etymologically derived from the Latin for 'skin', and its use might therefore presume the destruction of the object of pursuit. We could remember here how Schiller, in the epigraph to this chapter, speaks of the understanding destroying 'the objects of the inner sense before it can appropriate them'. Is the analogy, however, a fair one? For though I have at times felt quite overwhelmed by the literature on the subject, given that we are discussing language and the description of language, the 'literature' on literature is not something separate from literature in the way that our figurative body is separate from our figurative sea; that is, the water is a route rather than an obstacle. But still the image is troubling, for how we see a thing depends very much on what we see it through. This is the subject of the present chapter.

THE PROBLEM OF METAPHOR

Perhaps the oddest thing about the problem of metaphor is that outside of its discussion in poetics, or philosophy, or linguistics, that is, outside the dis-

cussion of it as a problem, it is not a problem at all. Montaigne wrote that when one heard 'talk of metonomies, metaphors, and allegories, and other grammar words' one was apt to think of 'some rare and exotic form of speaking' though they in fact describe 'phrases that are no better than the chatter of my chambermaid'.⁶ While researching this essay I decided to turn my recreational reading to good use by looking out for metaphors which I might use as examples or test cases in this chapter. After a short time, however, I had to give up, for my 'recreational' reading had ceased to be that and had become a difficult task, demanding more than usual concentration! The difficulty lay not in trying to analyse such metaphors as I discovered, but rather in finding them at all, for simply remembering to register metaphors turned the most fluid and easy text into something quite different. This experience impressed on me from the beginning of my study two related facts about metaphor; first that metaphor is so far a part of 'ordinary' language that it is not something we are generally used to contrasting with non-metaphorical language, that is, it does not 'stand out'; and second, as a corollary to this, in the vast majority of examples our comprehension of what the metaphor means is spontaneous, we are not aware of being presented with a problem.

There is no 'problem of metaphor', then, in this sense; the problem of metaphor is the problem of its formal description – nothing more. For to describe our comprehension of the meaning of metaphor as 'spontaneous' is to describe the speed of that comprehension not its nature, just as when scientists claimed that mice could be 'spontaneously generated' from heaps of corn or drawers full of old shirts they demonstrated only their own ignorance. Yet description and, indeed, interpretation is an unrewarding task unless undertaken for one's own pleasure; the layman, who is aware of no problem to begin with, is apt to respond to a solution to that problem with 'Yes. Of course. So?' But it is not always obvious why the obvious is such, and to make it so, to express what was oft, but confusedly, thought, is the *raison d'être* of a study such as this. The purpose of this chapter, then, is neither to recount a discovery, except in so far as interpretation is discovery, nor to invent the gratuitous, but rather to make explicit in abstract terms what is implicit in the very use of metaphor in concrete instances.

Metaphor ranges from the familiar and prosaic, 'Man is a wolf', which produces little more than a mental shrug, to the outrageous, 'Light is but the shadow of God', against which the rational processes disperse like spray from a rock. For this reason those studies of metaphor which proceed with the analysis of a single example often end with a characterization of their subject which, while applying to the case in hand, can seem inadequate to cover the whole range of metaphorical usage. On the other hand comments on metaphor which are abstract and aphoristic, while initially satisfying in their brevity and suggestiveness, often reveal chronic ambiguities if one tries to use them to distinguish metaphorical language from any other type of language. I

have chosen to take a more abstract pathway and to approach the goal not through the rigorous analysis of a single example but through a series of topics: first, how the actual meaning is generated/understood; second, what is specifically metaphorical about metaphor; third, what type or types of meaning can metaphor generate, and, last, the role of metaphor in pleasure and persuasion. As will soon become apparent, these divisions are artificial if not entirely arbitrary; each topic is almost inextricably bound up with all the others, and often it has been necessary, since only part of the subject can be in focus at a time, to use as premises what will only later become conclusions. Indeed, already here, in the introduction, I have found myself talking in the context of assumptions some of which, we will later find, cannot be made. This is primarily a problem of vocabulary; to begin at all it will be necessary to use terms the precise sense of which it is yet our task to determine. But let us begin at a beginning.

MEANING

Aristotle in his *Poetics* defines metaphor as ‘the application to one thing of a name belonging to another thing’, adding later that mastery of its use is the most important thing for the aspiring poet.⁷ This definition is a masterpiece of concision but the examples which Aristotle proceeds to give seem to confuse rather than clarify it. He divides metaphor into transference from genus to species, as exemplified in ‘Here lies my ship’, in which ‘lying at anchor’ is a species of ‘lying’; from species to genus, as in ‘Odysseus has indeed performed ten thousand noble deeds’, in which ‘ten thousand’ is a species of the genus ‘many’; from species to species, as in ‘Drawing off the life with the bronze’ in which ‘drawing off’ is used for ‘severing’, both being species of ‘taking away’.⁸ These may have been excellent metaphors in ancient Greek but, for historical reasons that we shall discuss when describing dead metaphors, they do not immediately strike the modern English-speaking reader as particularly illuminating examples of transference.⁹ ‘Ten thousand’ does not appear to fall naturally into the genus of ‘many’, not for instance in describing populations or astronomical data; even as a species of the genus ‘number of performable noble deeds’ it would still seem to be hyperbole rather than metaphor. There is, however, according to Aristotle, a fourth category of metaphorical transference – by analogy.

I explain analogy as what may happen when of four things the second stands in the same relationship to the first as the fourth to the third; for then we may speak of the fourth instead of the second, and the second instead of the fourth.¹⁰

He gives as an example ‘old age is to life as evening is to day’, from which one can derive the metaphors ‘the evening of life’ or ‘the sunset of life’ to stand for ‘old age’, and ‘the old age of the day’ to stand for ‘evening’. Metaphor by