**Metaphor Game**

**The Dynamic Metaphor as an Analytic Instrument of Understanding**

*I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own.* Ludwig Wittgenstein[[1]](#footnote-2)

A person, sitting in his room, opens a book of poetry. Hesitantly leafing through the pages, he looks at the form of the poem he has chosen to read. He reads only the beginnings or endings of sentences until he stops, stops as if trapped in the lines:

The hour is not clear; again / the night sober-minded leaves, that whose greenness / opposite toward inside / slowly passes / in the sign of knife’s thread whose burn / is harder than the hardest of metals, and his light / not from the sun is borrowed / and eating the bread’s inside; / in the true night tonight not in vain / shall suspend a smile as interior tax, shall not ease / on man’s move, flower, wasp, shade or stone; the youth weary with satiety / stress the rubbish herald / the dead that finds life in those sober-minded night leaves / that never should obtain greenness from a sunbeam / but from outside streets descending as twilight / in the hour continuing over the bread’s inside”[[2]](#footnote-3)

The reader reads the poem once in its entirety, yet it is still unclear. He stops for a moment. He extracts familiar words from the sequence and connects them to adjacent words, but to no avail, he fails to understand. He thinks to himself, “The literal meanings of individual words are understood: hour, night, leaves, youth.” These are common, everyday words, trapped, as it were, within incomprehensible phrases, “The hour is not clear”; “the night sober-minded leaves”; “the youth weary with satiety.” He stops again and thinks about the sequence of his actions involved in reading an incomprehensible poem or, more precisely, reading a poem whose individual words are understood, but whose phrases are not. He ponders what constitutes this gap between comprehensible words and incomprehensible meaning, and wonders if perhaps

his experience is somehow a singular instance of a seasoned reader of poetry who finds himself unable to penetrate the obscurities of a specific poem. He soon realizes, however, that in some way he represents all readers, and that the challenge constituted in the gap between his understanding a word’s literal meaning and understanding its meaning in the context of a poem is a universal experience. On the other hand, he reflects further, this gap is also the miracle of poetry, the wonder that nurtures its beauty, that seduces the reader to take part in the poetic dialogue. This gap can also be described as that between a word’s literal and figurative meanings, in other words, evolution of the metaphor’s meaning.

This research arises from a common embarrassment: the reading of a poem without understanding it. The situation of a disparity between a reader’s fluency of language and richness of vocabulary, and the inability to comprehend a poem, prompted me to explore what occurs in the transition from the knowledge of a word’s literal meaning to its incomprehension in the context of a poem. It became clear in the initial stages of this study that metaphors—which, one can argue, form the “backbone” of poetic language—constitute the nuclei of this perplexity. Thus, to understand metaphor and how it works, I turned to scholarly literature. However, these works did not provide tools for an understanding of metaphors in poetry, given that they were primarily preoccupied with the definition of metaphor, the relationship between its parts, or the classification of common metaphors. In other words, an additional gap opened between the abundantly available scholarly literature and the inability to “translate” these insights into a working tool that facilitates understanding.

This study is meant to add a new layer to conventional insights on metaphors (Aristotle; Beardsley 1962; Richards 1936; Black 1962; Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1993; Lakoff & Johnson 1999; Turner & Fauconnier 1995; Barcelona 2000; Fauconnier 2002), while its theoretical premises draw more specifically on particular definitions in previous work, such as “Man is a Wolf” (Black 1962); “Love is a Journey” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999); “Sally is a Block of Ice” (Searle 1993); “Time is Space” (Fauconnier 1997); “Crazy Numbers” and “The Genie in the Computer” (Fauconnier & Turner 1995), to demonstrate how they cannot serve as a means to understanding metaphors such as “while the wall’s wall talks to the body’s wall” (name of poem, Hurvitz 1996).

Resolving the complexity of this example, as well as others like it, marks the metaphor as a dynamic pattern (Harshav 2007, 34) whose meaning is the activity (Wittgenstein 1953)[[3]](#footnote-4) and which leads to the construction of a model describing various paths of interpretation. This model, which I will call the “Metaphor Game,” is based on the logic of metaphors and exposes and charts the sequence of a word’s various meanings that are dispersed and active within a particular context (Wittgenstein 1953). Hence, this study aims to shift the focus from defining metaphor to developing descriptive and analytical tools for dealing with metaphorical texts (Harshav 2007, 32). Notably, this descriptive approach differs from previous work that focuses on the figurative, “falsity” (Ortony 1993 and Miller 1993) or “irregularity” of metaphor (Glucksberg and Keysar 1990). Rather, the proposed model sees metaphor as a key to understanding. It is a constitutive model that applies four principle narratives to describe the dynamics of metaphor and ultimately lead to understanding. Thus, the present research proposes a formalized and dynamic model of the logic of metaphor thereby validating the assertion that metaphor is an activity that always produces meaning. I begin by introducing the four “narratives” of metaphor’s dynamics—Fracture, Cross-referencing, Expansion, and Division.

In the following diagrams, “Ma” represents a figurative term bound within the metaphor; Ma+Mb represent the confluence of two figurative terms to produce a metaphor; and La, Lb, and Lc are all literal terms. Drawing on conventional descriptions of metaphor as constituted in a two-term relationship (A+B) in which each term can assume the literal meaning of more than a single word or sentence in a given text, the + sign signifies the connection of two figurative terms, while the → sign signifies the logical process, the traceable shift that discloses the transformations from one meaning to another. Elements will be defined as irremovable parts that are integral to the building of the metaphor, whether literal or figurative.

*Metaphoric Fracture*

In the case of metaphoric fracture, meaning is attained through the tracing of a metaphor (a word that simultaneously evokes a minimum of two referents or meanings which in turn, gain figurative agency by means of this simultaneity) that is sequentially fractured; put differently, the link between a word’s two figurative referents and its literal meaning (or a realization of a metaphor, as defined by Formalists) is dissected.



Ma + Mb La + Lc



or Lb + Lc

Formalization is merely another way of expressing the explicatory process for those to whom it forges an easier path to understanding.

*Metaphoric Cross-referencing*

In metaphoric cross-referencing, meaning is generated by tracing the literal element that gains metaphoric agency, which evokes a different literal meaning, by means of sequential movement:

La + Lb Ma + Mb

Ma + Mb Lb + Lc



*Metaphoric Expansion*

In this case, meaning is clarified by tracing identical literal elements that move sequentially and expand, as it were, into two optional successive metaphors:

La + Lb Ma + Mc

Mb + Mc

*Metaphoric Division*

In metaphoric division, meaning is defined by tracing the constituent figurative elements which are split into two new and different metaphors :

Ma + Mb Ma + Mc

Mb + Md

Effective implementation of these techniques is contingent on the identification of what I call a poem’s “metaphorical backbone.” This backbone consists of metaphors which, although dispersed throughout the poem, are linked to one another by way of linguistic, phonetic or semantic movement. In “movement” I am referring to the course along which words move and interact in new contexts. One of the metaphor’s components dangles and moves to another metaphor, and is then bound to it. Thus, I will henceforth refer to metaphors that are linked through one mode of movement, as “vertebrae”—metaphors that combine into the poem’s backbone in the sense that its unique combination of various vertebrae constitutes the key to its comprehension. It is important to note that the backbone figure is a means to illustrate and document the pragmatic route that a word charts as it moves from one context to another. Motivated by the different dynamic narratives of metaphor outlined above, this construct is inherent in the poetic text and lends itself to the first phase of the Metaphor Game, that is the marking of metaphoric routes, followed by the explicatory stage in which the rules of the “game” are disclosed, thereby lending meaning to the linkages between the vertebrae.

This study describes a model, the foundation of which consists, ostensibly, of the isolated metaphor, which is subsequently linked by a systematic logical connection to other isolated metaphors scattered sequentially throughout the text. The model shows that, in many cases, the metaphor is not a static element, but rather a dynamic unit that breaks out of its boundaries and opens up in its contact with other elements in a poem. The model shows how a metaphor moves sequentially, and seemingly marks out the vertebrae which make up the metaphorical backbone, and how, following the logic of the metaphorical backbone, it exposes meaning.

As a model geared toward the constitution of a logical procedure of analysis through practice, on the one hand, and as a means to trace “familial relations”, on the other, it draws on both Harshav’s description of dynamic patterns, or “productive metaphor,” and Wittgenstein’s “meaning as use” model. “Metaphor is not a confined linguistic unit […] but a free pattern in the semantics of the text,” (Harshav 2007, 12) Harshav argues. “Each of [the metaphor’s] elements can extend in the text over much more than a word or sentence. Frequently this is not a fixed unit, but an open relation with flexible boundaries” (Harshav 2007, 11); “We musn’t regard metaphors in literature as closed, static, separate and discrete units, but as dynamic forms interwoven into context and dependent on the readers’ interpretation and construction” (Harshav 2007, 12). To trace these dynamic patterns is, in Wittgenstein’s terms, the uncovering of the course of changes which is determined by an array of constitutive rules (Wittgenstein PI, §82) of the language game being played (Wittgenstein, PI §13, §50, §83). , “The language is itself the vehicle of thought” (Wittgenstein, PI § 329); “One cannot guess how a word functions. One has to look at its use and learn from that” (Wittgenstein, PI §340). Wittgenstein further argues that “We must do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place [...] by looking into the workings of our language” (Wittgenstein, PI §109).

Let us return to Hurvitz’s poem “Night Truth the Night”to demonstrate how the Metaphor Game model facilitates the understanding of the workings of metaphor in poetry.

The poem opens with a statement, “The hour is not clear,” however, the following sentence locates this indeterminate hour within a more distinctive timeframe: “the night sober-minded midnight leaves.” This linkage prompts a succession of interconnected figurative frameworks: “The hour is not clear; again / the night sober-minded leaves, that whose greenness / opposite toward inside / slowly passes / in the sign of knife’s thread whose burn / is harder than the hardest of metals, and his light / not from the sun is borrowed / and eating the bread’s inside.”

These metaphors are not closed and static,[[4]](#footnote-5) but rather dynamic and open: “… the youth weary with satiety / stress the rubbish herald / the dead that finds life in those sober-minded leaves / that never should obtain greenness from a sunbeam / but from outside streets descending as twilight / in the hour continuing over the bread’s inside.” The sobriety of the aforementioned night is extremely important in contrast to one’s inability to understand it.[[5]](#footnote-6) The use of “again the night sober-minded” gives the feeling of something that is ritualistic and familiar. The word “again” in the beginning of the line demonstrates that although “the night sober-minded” may occur within the poem, it is no isolated incident, rather a repetitive experience that Hurvitz is reflecting on. This e generated

Upon first reading the poem, the metaphor “night sober-minded leaves” is incomprehensible as are those that follow up to and including, “the bread’s inside.” This sense of ambiguity and semantic nonconformity contrasts what appears to be the poem’s calculated bilateral structure of four sentences—two literal and two figurative.

I begin by “extracting” the metaphoric backbone from the poem as a means to initiate the Metaphor Game:

First vertebra: “again / *the* ***night*** *sober-minded leaves*, that whose *greenness* / opposite toward inside”

Second vertebra: “in the ***true night*** *tonight*.”

Third vertebra: “stress the rubbish herald / the dead that finds life *in* ***those sober-minded night leaves*** / that never should obtain *greenness* from a sunbeam.”

The first vertebra involves metaphoric division,[[6]](#footnote-7) constituted in the division of

the signifier “leaves” from “again / the night sober-minded leaves.” Given its polysemic potential, “leaves” conjures for a fleeting moment the image of a leafy green color, thus constituting a metaphorical break. It is however the appearance of “leaves” in a new sense— “that whose greenness (of the leaves) / opposite toward inside”—that overrides this image. Thus, the metaphor “night sober-minded leaves” (Ma + Mb)[[7]](#footnote-8) creates a metaphorical break by constructing a figurative component that means, literally, “greenness of leaves” (Lb + Lx).[[8]](#footnote-9) The movement Ma + Mb → Lb + Lx becomes a different figurative metaphor with a different meaning through metaphorical division. In other words, “night sober-minded leaves” (Ma + Mb) becomes greenness (of the leaves) / opposite toward inside,” or (Mb + Mx [+Mc]).[[9]](#footnote-10) The complete flowchart is: Ma + Mb → Mb+ Mx (+Mc).

The second metaphorical division involves the word “night” in the line “the night sober-minded leaves” (Ma + Mb) which adds three metaphorical qualities: “night that slowly passes… and burns like a sharp knife” (Ma + Mf);[[10]](#footnote-11) night whose “light not from the sun is borrowed (Ma + Mg);[[11]](#footnote-12) and “night that eats the bread’s inside” (Ma + Mh [+Mm]).[[12]](#footnote-13) This dynamic image reflects movement (slowly passes), emotion (which burns harder), and existence (bread’s interior):

Ma + Mf → Ma + Mb

→ Ma + Mg

→ Ma + Mh (+Mm)[[13]](#footnote-14)

The complete metaphorical division pattern can now be described in the following terms: the aforementioned metaphorical picture made up of Ma + Mb —“the sober-minded night leaves”—is divided into two metaphorical pictures, the first of which connotes the leaves

“that whose greenness / opposite toward inside,” while the second connotes night “in the sign of knife’s thread whose burn / is harder than the hardest of metals.”

→ Mb + Mx (+Mc) Ma + Mb

→ Mh [+ Mm])[[14]](#footnote-15) + Mg Ma + (Mf)

The second vertebra reiterates the poem’s title, “In the true night tonight.” This is the first time that the speaker’s voice of experience is heard, despite no use of the pronoun “I”: (I) shall suspend a smile; (I) shall not ease on man’s move. The true night refers to a period of time of deep insight and realization of the world. “[I] shall not ease” implies an investigation of its relation to material objects, including from the animal, vegetable and mineral worlds—“man and wasp, flower, shade, and stone.” This vertebra will take on an additional meaning retrospectively after the understanding of the meaning of “this night sober-minded.”

The third vertebra is the core of the poem in that it refers back to the other vertebrae for further meaning. Consisting of the lines “…the rubbish herald / the dead that finds life in those sober-minded night leaves,” it also involves metaphorical division, the first of which is manifested in “the dead that finds life” (Mm + Mk),[[15]](#footnote-16) and the dead who can live only in the nighttime, in the “sober-minded night.” The second metaphorical picture is an implication of this metaphorical understanding. When the two metaphors are juxtaposed—“dead finds life” and “night sober-minded leaves”—they defy a structure of parallelism evident, for instance, in “I’m exhausted, I can’t take another step.” The night is sober life, like active life, in the sense that to know death is an ability that belongs to the living. In knowing death, the living seize the moment and live in the present, while also forging a sharp and burning impression of deep sobriety and understanding. Two additional possible meanings for “life” in the same sentence are (1) the dead who live for only a second, or (2) the dead who are able to live only by the living person who gives the dead the quality of life. Death provides the living with the opportunity to live, and to those who are already dead, with momentary life. Put differently, the dead who finds life can create a fulfilled life in the “night sober-minded leaves, which fulfills life,” or the dead who finds life is an activity of “sober-minded night leaves, fulfills life”:

Mm + Mk → Mm + [Mb + Mx (+Mc)].[[16]](#footnote-17)

The second metaphorical division in **“**those sober-minded night leaves that never should obtain greenness from a sunbeam” prompts a return to our earlier understanding of “sober-minded night” in the first vertebra. This repetition underscores the sense that this night is one that involves a particular sober mindedness in action of this night, rather than the common experience of every night. On the other hand, “sober-minded night leaves” is a continuation of understandings of this sober night; the description of the expanded metaphor of the night, Ma, those sober-minded night leaves, Mb + Mx (+Mc).[[17]](#footnote-18) In this way:

Mb + Mx (+Mc)+ [Ma]

Next, the word “leaves” divides into another metaphor through the greenness of the leaves that emanates from the sun—a metonymy for the abilities of living leaves—by means of metaphorical fracture. Unlike the first vertebra, where the division conjures the fleeting image of green leaves, here the effect of the fracture lingers. The metaphorical fracture gives back to the green leaves a tangible quality; however, it is upside down: the leaves receive life not from the sun, but from the bread’s inside. In other words, “leaves” becomes figurative again, but in a different way, that is, through metaphorical division: “Those night sober-minded leaves,” Mb + Mx (+Mc) + Ma becomes “that never should obtain greenness from a sunbeam,” Mb + Mx (+Mg).[[18]](#footnote-19) Hence the dynamic move is:

Ma + Mb + Mx (+Mc) → Mb + Mx (+Mg)

This upside-down quality also points to an implied analogy between “Night sober-minded leaves” and “night sober-minded life,” in the sense that the leaves are the living whose lives emanate not from the sun, but from the bread’s inside, or from an interior source. In the context of that particular night, there is a deep understanding that the source of life is interior, thereby indicating a return to the first vertebra— “night sober-minded leaves / that whose greenness / opposite towards inside.”

Now we can trace the logic that is constructed through the poem. The night, Ma, which refers to that particular night, is the “night whose green leaves opposite toward inside,” Mb + Mx (+Mc), which is then divided into another variant of the same night, “whose green leaves never should obtain greenness from a sunbeam,” Mb + Mx (+Mg). This results in:

Ma + Mb + Mx (+Mc) → Ma + Mb + Mx (+Mg)

If we eliminate the common component, i.e. the green leaves, we are left with night (Ma) + opposite toward inside (Mc); and with night (Ma) + never should obtain greenness from the sun (Mg). This suggests that there are only two components remaining, the night which is interior and the night that possesses the quality of an inner light. In this case, the process is:

Ma + Mc → Ma + Mg.

While this elimination of a common element is a temporary step performed to emphasize the quality of the night, it is contingent on the expansion of the metaphor that will show the framework of the parallels utilized. On the one hand, by means of its analogy to leaves which depend on the sun for their existence, “Truth night” is “night sober-minded leaves” is “night fulfills life” is “that night that revives the dead.” On the other hand, the analogy between the poem’s implied narrator and leaves yields the following meaning: in order to exist themselves, the leaves require nutrition from an inner light, that is the bread’s inside; in other words, the leaves are life, which, in turn, is the inside. These shifts can also be described as follows: night sober-minded leaves, which is night sober-minded life, which is night existing as life from a light which is interior, which is the bread of nutrition. Alternatively, night sober-minded night, life sober-minded life, through leaves sober-minded leaves.

We might add that the unknown hour becomes an exact time of action— “in the hour continuing over the bread’s inside”—thereby suggesting that the exact time is irrelevant (hour, day, season), but the time of action taken is important. In this sense, “again” seems to indicate many unknown hours in time, effectively transforming the normative relationship of time such that the action is prioritized over the specificity of the occurrence in that time. The quality of the night, whose light is not borrowed from the sun, and which eats the interior bread, is parallel to the quality of the leaves, whose greenness is not from the sun, turning it upside down.[[19]](#footnote-20)

# To conclude, in this poem, Hurvitz seems to undermine many common truths. He revives the dead, transforms linear time in terms of action, and makes it possible for leaves to grow without the sun. All of these insights were made possible by playing the Metaphor Game.

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1. *Philosophical Investigation* 1953, Preface [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Hurvitz, Yair 1986*,* p 8. “Night Truth the Night” The poem ends without a point, according to the source [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. “Look at the sentence as an instrument, and at its sense as its employment” (PI §421). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Like the familiar metaphor found in research: George is a gorilla. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. On the emotional level, the reader is apparently invited to feel the activities involved in organizing the materials, i.e., to “feel” the activities of sobriety. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. In other words, the metaphorical meaning is built up by a metaphorical picture that divides into two different metaphorical pictures, M**a**+ M**b** → M**a**+Mc

   → M**b**+Md [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Ma = sober-minded, Mb = leaves. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Lb = leaves, Lx = their greenness. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Mb = leaves, Mx = their greenness, Mc = opposite toward inside. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Ma = night, Mf = sharp knife [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Ma = night, Mg = his light not from the sun is borrowed. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Ma = night, Mh = bread, Mm = inside. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. The movement can also be described as follows, following “reduction” of the term “night,” which is subsumed in all three of the poem’s descriptions:

    Ma + (Mf + Mg + Mh (+ Mm)) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. The metaphorical division can also be described in the following expanded fashion: Ma + Mb → Mb + Mx (+ Mc) + (Mf + Mg + Mh [+ Mm]) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Mk = dead that finds, Mm = life. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. In other words, (fulfilled) life on a night [of] sober-minded leaves: Mm + [ Mb + Mx (+ Mc)]. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Unlike sober-minded leaves, Ma + Mb. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Mb = leaves, Mx = greenness, Mg = not from a sunbeam. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. We can say more about “the time of action” that refers to “that action” through the appearance of time in the poem “night”, “that night”, “hour continuing”, “as twilight”, “slowly passes”; and the interior time – “youth weary with satiety”; I shall add more, so that sensitive readers can reach the analogy between leaves and life and through that lead them to understand the meaning of the poem without giving them a report on the interpretive activities of the Metaphor Game. But such success proves the existence of the dynamic cognitive process that this model exposes. I do not understand what you mean here. And why address “sensitive readers” thereby implying that those reading this paper are “less sensitive”? [↑](#footnote-ref-20)