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Imaginative Use of the Metaphorical Concept 'Life is a Journey' in Dobyns' *Body Traffic*: the Creation of the Novel Imaginative Metaphor 'the Body is a Vehicle'¹

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Abstract

This article shows how the conceptual metaphor 'life is a journey' pervades Stephen Dobyns' book of poems *Body Traffic* (1990) and how within the same scope we can find some related metaphors, such as 'time moves', 'death is rest' and 'life is a play', among others. For this analysis I will use the model created by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and developed by Lakoff and Turner (1989) for its application to poetic metaphor.

The metaphor that gives "body" to the book takes as source domain the concept 'vehicle' and as target domain the concept 'body'. The metaphor 'the body is a vehicle' is an extension of the metaphor 'life is a journey'. Since life is a journey, we need a vehicle to travel through life. This vehicle - usually a car - represents the human body in Dobyns' book. This conceptual contrast can be perceived just by looking at the title of the book *Body Traffic*.

Keywords: cognitive grammar; Dobyns, Stephen; Body Traffic; metaphor

A novel creates an alternative world, a poem creates a
metaphor for an aspect of the existing world.

(Dobyns 1996: 2)

1. A version of this paper was presented in The 17 International PALA Conference 1997. After the discussion that took place there, I decided to include some modifications to the version presented, giving rise to this article. In this sense I thank the audience for their suggestions, especially D. C. Freeman who, later, took a good time to comment this paper thoroughly. For his interest, suggestions and wise remarks, I am indebted to him.

1 Introduction

Nowadays we are witnessing a great proliferation of works in cognitive grammar, most of which are related to the field of metaphor. This results in a tendency to conceptualise metaphorically our understanding of the world.

Apparently, the application of cognitive science to the field of literary criticism, or to the analysis of a literary text may seem rather contradictory. It could appear that this deprives the work of a writer of its inherent creativity, the quality that traditionally makes it *literary*, but this *contradiction* is not such. Literary criticism and cognitive science are compatible, and the key lies in the use that a single writer makes of the metaphorical structures that pervade our everyday language.

This paper starts from the cognitive assumption presented by Lakoff and Johnson in their study of 1980, in which they argue that there is a set of metaphorical concepts around which we conceptualise the world, or better, our worldviews. Following this, metaphor is rather a matter of experience or everyday life, or a matter 'of thought and reason' (Lakoff 1993: 208) than merely a matter of language. But it has an undeniable influence in the poetic character of a literary work (a poem, in this case), which depends on the imaginative use that the poet infers to it. This creative use of metaphor is, in my opinion, what links cognitive science and literary criticism.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 6) claim that part of 'the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined.' This means that we tend to conceptualise metaphorically certain aspects of life in a systematic way. These authors offer a wide range of metaphors that cover basic aspects of life by structuring metaphorically one concept in terms of another. It is surprising that among the set of basic metaphors around which, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), we conceptualise our daily experiences, we cannot find the metaphorical concept 'life is a journey', although some of the arguments they use for the metaphor 'love is journey', especially those that refer to the various types of journeys that can be made (speaking in terms of a love relationship) could easily be applied to the one that will be later gestated by Lakoff and Turner (1989: 3), 'life is a journey'.

A distinction has to be drawn between metaphorical concepts, i.e. concepts that are restructured metaphorically, and metaphorical expressions, i.e. expressions that derive from the metaphorical concept. 'Life is a journey' is, without any doubt, an example of a metaphorical concept, while 'the solitary journey made by each of us,' referred to life, is a metaphorical expression used by Stephen Dobyns in his poem "Summer Evenings" that represents part of the previous metaphorical concept. Obviously, not every single metaphorical expression can fit in the set of basic metaphorical concepts we live by, even though our conception of everyday situations tends to be metaphorically structured. Following

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) we can speak not only of conventional metaphors but also of imaginative metaphors. Within the first group, metaphors can be classified as live and dead metaphors, and within the second group, they can be either live or novel.

On the one hand, live conventional metaphors are the used part of a metaphorical concept. 'The solitary journey made by each of us' referred to human life is one of the parts commonly used of the metaphorical concept 'life is a journey' and, therefore, it is an example of live conventional metaphor. There are expressions that, being classified as conventional metaphors, are not a part of a metaphorical system. In this case, the metaphorical concept of which they form a part is not used systematically in our language. Expressions such as 'running water' are isolated examples of metaphorical concepts. This is the only expression systematically used of the metaphorical concept 'water is a moving object'. This type of metaphorical concepts are marginal in our language and culture; their used part may consist of only one conventionally fixed expression of the language and they do not systematically interact with other metaphorical concepts.

On the other hand, imaginative metaphors can be novel or live. Novel metaphors represent a new way of thinking, 'a metaphor not used to structure part of our normal conceptual system but as a new way of thinking about something'. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 53). An example of these is the expression 'your body keeps slipping from your shoulders/ or gripping you too tightly around the neck' used by Dobyns in the poem "How you are linked" to speak about the human body in terms of a piece of clothing.¹ Imaginative live metaphors are either (i) instances of the unused part of the literal metaphor; or (ii) extensions of the used part of a metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 53). Thus, going back to the initial conceptual metaphor, 'life is a journey', the expression 'see their road as the lucky one', from the poem "Folk Tales", is an example of unused part of this conceptual metaphor; in particular, this expression flatters the unused correspondence 'options in life are different roads'. Moreover, 'Think of/ all those people in transit' from "Walls to Put Up, Walls to Put Down" and 'riding freight car after freight car' from the poem "Freight Cars" are extensions of a used part of this conceptual metaphor. In this case, they are extensions of the correspondence 'the person leading a life is a traveller', which result in the extended mapping 'the person leading a life is a traveller in constant transit'.

1. This metaphor can be connected with the analogies used by the Transcendentalists. Emerson, Carlyle and others, speak of terms such as 'garment' or 'vesture' to refer to the body or to natural facts, in general, in opposition to the spiritual reality that lies hidden behind them.

1.1 Imaginative metaphor

It is precisely imaginative metaphor that interests me in order to approach the use of metaphor that Stephen Dobyns makes in his book of poems *Body Traffic* (1990) and, especially, the first 'subspecie' of imaginative metaphor. This is not to say that Dobyns does not use conventional metaphors (as it will be seen in 2). Dobyns creates novel metaphors from conceptual metaphors, and the appropriate way of analysing them is, in my opinion, the application of the cognitive model of metaphor. In this sense, this model is a useful tool for the analysis of novel metaphor, and it is, at the same time, coherent with the creativity of an author.

The interest of cognitive approach to metaphor, for the purpose of this article, does not simply lie in the fact that the metaphorical concepts are present in the book by Dobyns but, precisely, in the imaginative use he makes of conceptual metaphors. As Lakoff and Turner (1989: 9) argue when referring to poetic metaphor:

General conceptual metaphors are thus not the unique creation of individual poets but are rather part of the way members of a culture have of conceptualising their experience. Poets, as members of their cultures, naturally make use of these basic conceptual metaphors to communicate with other members, their audience.

This view of literary metaphor had already been suggested by other authors. The author takes, as point of departure, our basic conceptual metaphors, and then, explores new territories. As Johnson (1987: 98) claims:

[M]etaphors are sometimes creative in giving rise to structure within our experience. That is, they do not merely report pre-existing, independent experience, rather they contribute to the process by which our experience and our understanding [...] are structured in a coherent and meaningful fashion.

In this sense, our metaphorical conception of the world acquires new tinges and is, in some sense, modified. This procedure generates a type of literary metaphor that shows the author's own views and, thus, belongs to the poetic universe of the author. As Boyd (1979: 361) states:

Typically, a literary metaphor has its *home*, so to speak, in a specific work of a specific author; when the same metaphor is employed by other authors, a reference to the original employment is often implicit.

2 'Life is a journey' metaphor in Lakoff and Turner applied to *Body Traffic* by Dobyns

One of the main basic metaphors that Lakoff and Turner use in their guide to poetic metaphor is 'life is a journey'. Following these authors the implicit knowledge that the speakers share with respect to the structure of the 'life is a journey' metaphor leads one to consider certain correspondences 'as a *mapping* between two conceptual domains', the source domain ('journey') and the target domain ('life').

For the purpose of this article I find it useful to enumerate these correspondences (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 3-4) and illustrate them with examples taken from *Body Traffic* to show how this basic metaphor pervades the book by Dobyns:

- (i) *The person leading a life is a traveller*
- (ii) *His purposes are destinations*
- (iii) *The means for achieving purposes are routes*
- (iv) *Difficulties in life are impediments to travel*
- (v) *Counsellors are guides*
- (vi) *Progress is the distance travelled*
- (vii) *Things you gauge your progress by are landmarks*
- (viii) *Choices in life are crossroads*
- (ix) *Material resources and talents are provisions*

These correspondences between the domains 'life' and 'journey' do not appear in isolation. If we think of a person leading a life in terms of a traveller, it is quite obvious that s/he will have a destination for his/her trip. Thus, the correspondence (ii) may appear as a result of the correspondence (i) as it can be seen in the poem "Walls to put up, walls to put down": 'all those people in transit - all those destinations/ with one single destination waiting a little further beyond'. In the poem "Summer Evenings" life is referred to as 'the solitary journey made by each of us', which flatters (i); and in "Freight Cars" human existence is also viewed in terms of a journey: '[c]oming into the world and imagining some destination for oneself', a metaphor that fits (ii).

Having stated this, I would like to point out that our conventional understanding of 'life' does not come in isolation. The concept 'life' comes intimately associated to the concept 'death'. When Lakoff and Turner (1989: 4) refer to life in terms of a journey, death is part of this journey. The knowledge about life shared by the speakers is such, precisely because they also share certain ideas about death. When, in "Freight Cars", Dobyns refers to death as 'one single destination waiting a single further beyond', he is simply restating the idea that is shared by different cultures and creeds. The word 'beyond' is the key to this interpretation, as we can see when Lakoff and Turner (1989: 4) refer to death with almost the same words:

Life is a journey with a stopping point, and that stopping point is death's departure point. Consequently, death too can involve a journey with a destination. So we speak of going to the great beyond, a better place, our final resting

place, the last roundup.

Correspondence (iii) presupposes that the metaphorical journey of life has different routes that tally with the traveller's means for achieving purposes. In the poem "The Body's Repose and Discontent" the 'means for achieving purposes are routes' correspondence is suggested when the poet says that 'the organism/ [...] resumes its journey - / buying, trading, loving, making'.

The following correspondence that Lakoff and Turner propose, (iv) 'difficulties in life are impediments to travel', appears in the first poem of the book by Dobyns, "The Body's Journey": 'hey buddy, you're blocking the road!'; and later in the same poem: 'what a struggle/to this journey - a foot in this one's face' (lines 19-20). Meaningful enough is the fact that the obstacles in life, or 'difficulties in life' are represented by means of other people living their lives (travellers).

If life is conceived in terms of a journey a guide would be useful in order to know which route to follow. Lakoff and Turner solve this metaphorical situation by means of (v) 'counsellors are guides'. This correspondence can be found in the poem "The Body's Hope" in which Dobyns uses a series of figures that typically act as counsellors in journey contexts. Thus, they clearly appear in the poem 'guiding' the people living their lives (travellers):

hope like a policeman urging the crowd along,
the travel agent with enticing descriptions
of where to go next, the tour guide director
with someplace specific to get to before dark.

The hope is the person leading you through
with promises of the splendour of the next room.

These quotations can also be used to illustrate the next correspondence, (vi) 'progress is the distance travelled'. If life is a journey, a person's progress in life can be compared to the different routes completed ('where to go next', 'someplace specific to get to') before dying ('before dark'). In the same sense, the different landmarks the traveller happens to find along his/her journey are used to exemplify the materialisation of the progress of life. This constitutes a new correspondence between the two domains 'life' and 'journey': (vii) 'things you gauge your progress by are landmarks'. In the poem "Rootless", the poetic persona seems not to make any progress in life, thus, the landmarks that define his journey are always the same ones, as if his life were a journey made in circles:¹

When returning to visit some place he had
left some years before, the same people

1. This does not mean that the conception of the universe, according to Dobyns, is cyclical. Following Freeman M.H. (1995: 658): 'in a cyclical universe[...] no longer makes sense to speak of *destination* after death.' I do not think this is the case in *Body Traffic*.

sitting at the same tables in the same cafes,
the same jokes, same love affairs, the same
houses being painted over and over, lives
fixed like stones along a stream [...]

When travelling one has to follow a route and, in order to do so, choose between one path or another. This is the aspect of life covered by (viii) 'choices in life are crossroads'. In the poem "Careers" this correspondence is used in an explicit way in the beginning of the poem and, later, in a more subliminal way, in the last line of it. Two different careers (poet and nun) are the consequence of two different choices in life. Having to choose between different things is viewed by the poetic voice in this way:

How simple it seemed
to pick a life and have that life make sense.
That was what was easy about being twenty-four.
So it felt correct to choose what seemed hardest,

As for the nuns, (viii) can be seen in retrospective through the poetic voice's point of view; making the choice of not having children in order to become nuns is the crossroad in these women's path of life: 'before death plucked/ those childless women from their chosen calling'.

Finally, the last correspondence between the two conceptual domains of life and journeys, according to Lakoff and Turner, (ix) 'material resources and talents are provisions', underlies certain poems by Dobyns. 'Earthly possessions' are considered to be provisions we accumulate in order to make the journey of life easier, as the poet enumerates in the poem "The Body's Repose and Discontent":

First the dear ones, the red car with new tires,
a racoon skin coat, a microwave oven
with a tiny TV over the controls
for easy viewing as well as easy cooking.

Then come the shots of what one would like
to buy next -what one thinks of as needs-
a bigger red car, a cottage at the beach,

and in the poem "Toting it Up", in which we can see the progression of life by the 'things' acquired during life, some of them showing the deterioration of the body:

He bought one pair of boots, then another.
They were good boots. He had a four boots life.
[...]
He bought twelve cars. He had a twelve cars life
[...]
[...] He drank thirty-four thousand
six hundred and sixty six cups of coffee.
He ate a quarter ton of spaghetti,

[...] He had
a two cane life, a one pair of crutches life
a one wheelchair life,

As it can be seen in these quotations, I have demonstrated how *Body Traffic* is structured around the idea of the life process following the metaphor 'life is a journey' and fitting every correspondence between these two domains suggested by Lakoff and Turner (1989). The idea of life conceived in terms of a journey pervades this book.¹ Dobyns' interest in this device is made explicit in the essay he devotes to metaphor in which he says that the use of imaginative metaphor makes the reader 'clarify and define the relationship between the object and image'. This is what he calls 'the authenticating act of memory'. Following Dobyns (1984: 200) this process: '- one - forces the reader to participate actively in the poem and - two - gives him knowledge about something he did not know or only partly knew by making it analogous to something he can imagine'.

3 Dobyns' novel metaphors

The conventional conceptual metaphor 'life is a journey', a metaphor in which both domains are explicit - 'life' as target domain, and 'journey' as source domain - is traditionally used to cover the concept 'human life' from birth to death. Human life is viewed in *Body Traffic* as a journey in which the departure is birth and the final destination is an unknown place that is never reached. Thus, life - in Dobyns - is an endless journey in which death is only one of the stages of the trip as will be demonstrated later. The fact of taking the metaphor 'life is a journey' as point of departure for this book brings the poet to create certain novel metaphors from the basic metaphor 'life is a journey'. This is a fairly common resource in poetry, as Lakoff and Turner (1989: 26) admit:

[T]he number of *basic* metaphorical conceptions of life and death turns out to be very small. Though these can be combined and elaborated in novel ways and expressed poetically in an infinity of ways, that infinity is fashioned from the same small set of basic metaphors. [...] Poets may compose or elaborate them in new ways, but they still use the same basic conceptual resources available to us all. If they did not, we would not understand them.

As we have seen in 2, the conceptual metaphor 'life is a journey' works systematically in great part of the poems in *Body Traffic*. For the present analysis I have selected those in which Dobyns depicts the idea of life in

1. This does not mean that *all* the poems in the book follow the life is a journey metaphor. The author also includes in the book a series of sonnets based on the painter Cézanne which are not relevant for this analysis. But it is, indeed, meaningful that the poems pervaded by the life is a journey schemata follow an imaginary chronology that corresponds to human life.

terms of a journey, and therefore, uses metaphors related to that one. But what I consider interesting, for the purpose of this article, is precisely the novel metaphor that Dobyns creates from this one, and the possible disagreement with other basic metaphors proposed by Lakoff and Turner.

3.1 'The body is a vehicle'

The novel metaphor 'the body is a vehicle', or more precisely 'the body is a car', that Dobyns creates is perceived just by looking at the title of the book. *Body Traffic* includes the two domains of this metaphor, 'body' as the target domain and 'traffic', a term related to the source domain, 'vehicle'. The conventional metaphor 'life is a journey' pervades the whole book, but the novel metaphor 'the body is a vehicle' gives it shape. Whereas in other Dobyns' works the title of the book is also the title of one of its poems, in *Body Traffic* the title describes the book as a whole, i.e., the body's traffic. Therefore, in the book - and this can be observed simply by taking a look at the titles of the poems - we find poems whose titles correspond to the source domain, as "Freight Cars", "No Map" or "Traffic"; others that correspond to the target domain, such as "The Belly", "Eyelids", "Spleen", "Feet" or "Noses"; and other poems whose titles include both domains, as for example: "The Body's Journey" or "The Body's Repose and Discontent". In the latter cases, the conceptual contrast is established explicitly.

At first sight, the metaphor 'the body is a vehicle' seems to be merely a part of the conventional metaphor 'people are machines' (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 132), but we have to clarify here that it is just the body which is conceived of in terms of a machine, in this case a vehicle or a car, and not the mind or the 'essence' of people (together with the body) as it is the case in the metaphor 'people are machines'. The mind - which is not material - is, then, travelling to that unknown destination, death, and not the body, the vehicle which is used to travel only in some stages of the journey. In this sense, 'the body is a vehicle' and the expressions derived from this metaphorical concept are neither instances of the unused part of the literal metaphor 'people are machines', nor extensions of the used part of this metaphor. Rather, this is a new way of thinking about 'body'. This new way of thinking about this concept is, nevertheless, related to 'life is a journey' only if we negate certain used parts of this conceptual metaphor.

The first poem in the book, "The Body's Journey", establishes the novel metaphor 'the body is a vehicle' and the necessary keys to establish the essential metaphor. This provides knowledge to an understanding of the other poems and their progression in the book. From the very first poem on the book human life is inevitably associated with the concept 'body'. Relating this to the basic metaphor 'life is a journey' that dominates the book, it is clear that life is conceived of as a journey that we make aboard a 'vehicle' which is the 'body':

Born, it's not good for much, a vehicle
stuck on its top, spinning its tires,

a pink VW Beetle or something resembling
a turtle. But it's cute so we keep it.

With this metaphor the poet makes it clear that at the very beginning of life, the traveller will not be able to go anywhere, since it is 'stuck on its top, spinning its tires.' Life begins, then, with a great but seemingly useless effort to start the journey. This metaphor is supported by another metaphor in which we see the body of a baby through the image of a VW Beetle which is at the same time compared to a turtle upside down and unable to move.

The moment of birth is related here to the metaphor 'birth is departure', an extension of the 'life is a journey' metaphor (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 3). Although the metaphor 'birth is departure' is not explicitly stated by these authors, it makes sense to think of the moment of birth as a point of departure in the journey of life 'here'. If 'being alive is metaphorically *here*' (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 121), 'birth is departure' for the metaphorical journey of life 'here'. In the poem "The Body's Journey", from the moment of birth on, the body is identified with a vehicle on which we travel through life. This vehicle is a pink car, making a clear allusion to the skin colour of a new-born, who seems at the outset, not to fulfil the necessary requirements of a car, i.e., to be set in motion. It is worth noting that the author uses terms belonging to the source domain, such as 'tires' or 'VW Beetle', and also terms belonging to the target domain, as 'pink' or 'cute'.

The second stanza embodies the metaphor 'life is a journey' referring to the first stages of the trip performed by the body:

Soon it gets the hang of things and starts
to travel -first on its pudgy belly, then
on its beefy knees, until dangerously,
stubbornly, it wobbles along on two legs.

Dobyns uses terms from the source domain, such as 'spinning its tires' in the first stanza to refer to the baby's extremities, and terms from the target domain, as 'belly', 'knees' or 'two legs' in the second one. The idea of life as a journey appears as an inevitable progression ('[a]fter that there is no holding back'; 'our main system of forward progression') for which different vehicles can be used ('odd machinery it learns to drive:/ unicycles, bathyspheres, spaceships'). This time the identification 'body = vehicle' is not present, but still a vehicle is needed to travel through life. In this sense it is illuminating to point out the different cars Dobyns uses in his poems to refer to the different stages of life, creating a metaphorical chronology or gradation: from the 'pink VW Beetle' to refer to the body of a baby in "The Body's Journey"; followed by a 'red car with new tires' and 'a bigger red car' in "The Body's Repose and Discontent", to refer to youth and maturity; to the 'rusty Ford' representing the ageing body in the poem "Traffic"; to finish with 'a dark Cadillac' to refer to the moment of death in "Black Girl Vanishing: Detroit, 1970". Life appears as a progression, and people follow a path to arrive at the hypothetical final

destination. The path is, in "The Body's Journey", represented by a road: "Toot, toot,/ hey buddy, you're blocking the road". In this road obstacles are to be found, another metaphor for a different aspect of life. This is one of the structural connections offered by Lakoff and Turner (1989: 85) linking the domains of 'life' and 'journey': 'difficulties in life are impediments to travel. The road, the path of life, appears blocked by obstacles that happen to be other people's bodies'. If we take the initial metaphor of the human body as a car in "The Body's Journey", it makes perfect sense to have a road blocked by other cars, which metaphorically would read as finding people making your life more difficult: 'climbing over the bodies of all the folks/ around us, until one can imagine a humungous/ Himalaya of human flesh; and what a struggle/ to this journey - a foot in this one's face'; or in "Black Girl Vanishing: Detroit, 1970" where the same situation is found: 'five hundred drivers waiting impatiently/ in five hundred stalled cars and the truck/ was the only thing moving'.¹ This is coherent with the basic metaphor 'life is a burden' (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 25-26). In the poem "The Body's Weight", 'the body's greatest burden is itself'. The ageing body is described as a burden: 'the legs begin to feel heavy, breasts feel heavy,/ the back won't straighten, belly flops forward,/ the neck stiffens, arms stiffen'. If this description is applied to the metaphor that Dobyns proposes, 'the body is a vehicle', it would read as a car (body) getting old and giving the driver (mind) problems.

In some other poems Dobyns also substitutes the target domain of the metaphor 'the body is a vehicle' for a synecdoche. Certain parts of the body are used to represent certain emotions, vital needs or desires. Interesting enough is the case of the belly in the poem with that title, in which this part of the body acquires 'human shape' and decides to 'travel':

The belly put on a bright red wig.
 It puts on earmuffs and a pair of glasses.
 It puts on a hat of crushed felt [...]
 The belly decides to see the world.
 It begins to travel.

The fact that this organ is endowed with capacity to move, think and have feelings and emotions is relevant since, in this poem, different capacities are related to different organs of the body. In order to think, 'the belly thinks it's a brain' and, consequently, it utters witty sentences ('with its new mouth') such as '[i]n my most considered opinion...', when it 'attends the meetings of the bankers'; or ('with its new lips') 'when one considers what is reasonable and just...' when it 'attends the meetings of university professors'; and ('with its new teeth') 'there is much truth in your argument...' when it 'talks to a beautiful woman'. But the 'feelings' of the belly do not correspond to the things he says, but with more-physical appetites such as 'I like sweet things', 'I like soft things' and 'I want your

1. It is very meaningful that the car that the black girl is riding is a 'dark Cadillac.' Following Dobyns' metaphor the body is a vehicle, a clear allusion to the colour of the girl's skin is found here. The fact that she finds death in that 'dark' car can be interpreted as her skin colour causing her to die, probably for racist reasons.

cunt'. The key is given by the use of other synecdoches (within that initial synecdoche which is the belly) with which the belly utters these alternative sentences. When the belly thinks it is a brain, it really feels hunger; when it says, 'I like sweet things' it says that with 'its belly heart'; when it says, 'I like soft things', it says that 'deep inside'; finally, when it says, 'I want your cunt', it says that 'in its belly heart' again. Dobyns associates 'emotions' with physiological reactions. This follows the pattern of the metaphor 'emotions are physiological reactions' (Kövecses 1990: 172). The physiological reactions of a belly are related with the digestion of food, hence, the third response that the belly has, 'I want your cunt', fits the metaphor 'the object of sexual desire is (appetising) food' or 'sexual desire is hunger' (Kövecses 1990: 131).

Another body organ, the spleen, is used in the poem "Spleen" for similar purposes. The spleen is identified with anger: 'anger is your little engine'. Once again, emotions are associated with parts of the body, and this is coherent with the novel metaphor created by Dobyns, 'the body is a vehicle'. The body is a car, and the spleen, which is a part of the body, is the engine (a part of the car). In connection with this idea, in "The Body's Hope" other feelings or emotions also act as the metaphorical 'engines' of people: "greed,/ anger, lust - these feelings keep us going". I find it interesting that Dobyns uses "these feelings" (traditionally with negative connotations) as the engines that "keep us going" because, precisely, these are typical feelings that are difficult to control, so instincts appear as dominant feelings ('engines') versus other feelings, probably more acceptable from the ethical point of view. (For a study of the concept 'anger' see Kövecses 1986: 11-37 and Kövecses 1990: 50-68).

3.2 Reformulation of some basic metaphors

We have seen how within the metaphor 'life is a journey' we find the metaphor 'birth is departure'. These two metaphors are implicit in the first lines of the poem "Rootless": 'He must have been born with greased feet/ to keep sliding so, born at the pinnacle/ of a glass hill and then released.' But if we relate the metaphors, 'life is a journey' and metaphor 'birth is departure', to the title of the poem the mixture of domain does not seem to be coherent. We have a term apparently not belonging to the domain of 'journey', but of 'plants'. It is interesting to relate this with the metaphor proposed by Lakoff and Turner (1989: 5-6) - 'people are plants' - together with the basic metaphor that pervades the book, and apply it to this poem. The metaphors 'life is a journey' and 'people are plants' bear no apparent relation until they appear in the same poem and the latter is challenged by Dobyns by negating it and transforming it into 'people are not plants'. Our knowledge about plants tells us that a necessary part of one of them is the root. The title of the poem "Rootless" challenges this assumption: that a person is rootless means that s/he should not be described in terms of a plant (unless we describe the person in terms of a 'dead' plant.)

3.2.1 'People are not plants'

As it has already been said, it is a common device in Dobyns' poems to use systematically a metaphorical concept alternating terms from both domains to refer to the same idea. In this case, the metaphor 'life is a journey' also is related to the idea of movement, to the basic metaphor 'time is a moving object' (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 42) or 'time moves' (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 44), due to the fact that, in order to perform the journey of life, a person has to keep on moving. Therefore s/he has to be rootless. The conventional metaphor 'people are plants' does not fit in this scheme, so Dobyns challenges it and transforms it into 'people are not plants'. This brings us to the initial idea of the body as a vehicle, which is supported by the first lines of the poem: "He must have been born with greased feet/ to keep sliding". As we have already said, the novel metaphor 'the body is a vehicle' is created by Dobyns as a modification to the conventional metaphor 'life is a journey'. This is supported by the use of the possessive 'his' to refer to the car's tires, as well as the use of terms associated with human qualities, such as 'caress' or 'love', to refer to the car: "The key turns in the ignition, the view/ in the rear-view mirror repeats itself/ and once more his tires caress the road/ their only love". In this respect, and retaking the initial idea, the whole poem deals precisely with the failure of the conventional metaphor 'people are plants', since the poetic persona cannot be considered to be one:

He had thought
that by acquiring a wife and family
he was at last planting himself, his two feet
sunk knee deep in concrete.

It is meaningful again the mixture of domains. If the author were talking in terms of a plant we would expect his two feet to be planted in soil. But instead, they are planted in concrete (an impossible situation for an actual plant), which brings us to the idea of people being vehicles -not plants - and the path of life a road - not soil.

The conventional metaphors 'life is a journey' and 'time moves', intertwine again in the following lines of the same poem, in which another vehicle is used this time, a boat: 'Better fashion from his life a boat/ with nothing to catch him but time itself,/ that distant cataract'. Here, he uses the novel metaphor 'time is a cataract', which is a non-conventional metaphor derived from the conventional one 'time moves' (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 45-46). Since our experience tells us that cataracts move, and they follow a quick progression, the novelty of the metaphor used in this poem is precisely the challenge to the 'people are plants' metaphor proposed by Lakoff and Turner. In this poem Dobyns makes explicit that 'people are not plants', and that they never could be: "To teach him the folly of standing still". If 'life is a journey', when you stand still, you die. According to Leech (1980: 7): "a negative sentence - (X) - is normally less informative than its affirmative counterpart". This being so, the use of this negative metaphor is meaningful because it implies the negation of something which is conventionally affirmed, and this is more shocking to

the reader.

3.2.2 'Time is a vehicle'

In the poem "Folk Tales" Dobyns takes again the conventional metaphor 'time moves' and transforms it into the novel one 'time is a vehicle'. To grasp the exact meaning of this metaphor it must be analysed in conjunction with 'the body is a vehicle'. If the body is a vehicle that performs its function of moving, then the lines: "the one vehicle/ you haven't smashed against a wall/ is time itself", suggest that among the smashed vehicles is the body. That in consequence, the body dies. Since time cannot be smashed against a wall, even though the body stops working, time continues moving. Time is precisely the one vehicle that catches you. After the destruction of the vehicle which is the body, the journey goes on, this time aboard the vehicle which is time, and towards an unknown destination, hence the impossibility to control it. Time cannot be destroyed, time does not end. So 'life is a journey', an endless journey, and 'time moves' are metaphors that again co-occur.

3.2.3 'Life is an endless journey' and 'death is departure to an unknown destination which nobody reaches'

The three metaphorical projections 'life is a journey', 'time moves', and 'birth is departure' seem clear enough and well attested. What is less easily grasped at first sight is the idea of life as an endless journey. A key question in when trying to establish the metaphors that build up the book is precisely whether the metaphors of birth and death should be considered in terms of arrival or departure. It appears that Dobyns chooses the metaphor 'birth is departure' over 'birth is arrival', but the case is not as clear for the concept 'death'. If 'life is a journey' and 'birth is departure', it seems logical to think that 'death is arrival'. This can be exemplified with the following line from the poem "How Could You Ever Be Fine?": "people on hard streets dragged to inevitable ends", in which we can perceive the 'life is a road' metaphor with the connotations of a 'hard' one, and 'death' as the end, as 'arrival'. A more problematic example is to be found in "Freight Cars": "Coming into the world and imagining/ some destination for oneself/ some place to make all the rest".

Apparently, in these lines the metaphor 'death is arrival' intertwines with the metaphor 'death is rest'. But I do not think we should interpret death as arrival since the author makes it explicit that this is a fallacy, because in the metaphorical journey of life we simply 'imagine' that we are going to arrive at a final destination, just *imagine* it, but never get to this final stop. That is why in this book by Dobyns the metaphor 'life is an endless journey' seems to work out better than the 'life is a journey' one. On the other hand, we can find poems in which the metaphor 'death is departure' seems to operate, as in "Shaving" where the poet speaks about

his daughter: "in twenty years when she/ is getting started, I'll be checking out". Here, 'death is departure', but where? The answer is: to an unknown destination which nobody reaches. This is coherent with the previous hesitation about death as arrival or departure. Indeed, this twofold conception of death appears in the poem "The Body's Strength" where death is apparently presented by the 'death is departure' metaphor: "The mind may not mind death. It means/ at last letting go", but we have to pay attention to the fact that the poem speaks of the mind, probably that 'essence' that we mentioned before. By contrast, 'the body fights right to the end. Up, it keeps saying, you must go up'. In these lines, we can see that the mind doesn't fight to stay here, but the body seems to fight in order to remain here, not to depart. In fact, in the poem "March Morning" the distinction between 'body' and 'heart', in this case, also helps understand this contrast: 'the heart yearns to fly, yearns to be up there/ with the others doing elaborate cartwheels'.

The reader is faced with a seeming contradiction: is death arrival or departure? The answer is both, precisely because Dobyns never conceived of people as vehicles, but the body as a vehicle. So 'death', for the body, is 'arrival', but for the mind, for the essence or whatever we may consider it to be, 'death is departure', more precisely, departure to an unknown destination. The clue for this interpretation is partially given at the end of "The Body's Strength": the body ends up "like turtles/ flipped over in the dirt with four feet/ pumping the air, pumping the air/ and no place left to go". Once again we find the image of the turtle, which was also used by the poet to refer to the moment of birth in "The Body's Journey". We see again the body of a person through the same image of a turtle which is upside down and cannot 'travel'. If there is no other place left for the body to go, then death is arrival (arrival for the body). So it still has to be decided what death is for the other component of the person. The key can be found in another poem. For the person (conceived of as body + essence) death is only a stage in which we abandon the body to start another kind of journey. This time the road disappears and the journey is made on water, as in the poem "Summer Evenings": "rushing streams, broad rivers, unknown seas"; or in "The Body's Journey": "paddling a canoe up a river"¹; or even by air, in space, as in the last lines of the last poem of the book, "The Body's Weight": "embraced by a joyful lightness,/ as light as smoke rising, or a phrase of music or butterfly wings, and then darkness begin". This is the precise reason why 'life is an endless journey', an extension of the basic metaphor that negates a used part of the conventional metaphorical concept, resulting in a modification of the basic metaphor. In "The Body's Journey", which is the key poem to understand the whole book, death appears as another passenger that commanders your vehicle (the body):

1. In D.C. Freeman's (1995: 703) application of cognitive metaphor to the analysis of *Macbeth* a similar idea can be found. Macbeth 'will stand on the bank of the river' -out of reach of death (related to the water medium)- because 'death [...] is a point through which every journey of life must lead.' This is the reason why Macbeth 'will *jump* it,' meaning that he will not die yet.

each person's
private death greets him with a peck in the cheek.
But even then they keep travelling as death
climbs aboard each one, straddles each one
like a man paddling a canoe up a river and they
push off toward that place which nobody conquers.

As we can see, after the moment of physical death, the death of the 'vehicle', the final stage in the metaphorical journey of life is travelled by two passengers, death and the individual person. Now the person has no control of his vehicle since a car is now useless, so the car is transformed into a canoe which death straddles and paddles up a river. But the final destination does not exist, since it is 'a place which nobody conquers.' Time, which continues moving, catches you and your death, as in the 'time is a cataract' example. The body, the vehicle, is left, as we can see in the poem "Shrill": "like an abandoned car, engine gone/ tires missing", but the journey continues, life continues, only now the person does not know what route to follow, and can no longer control his vehicle, his body. In this inevitable final trip death is his companion as can also be seen in the poem "No Map": "Where/ is his manual of instructions? Where is his map/ showing the dark places and how to escape them?"

The fact that people travel the metaphorical journey of life by different media, starting from the most tangible one, or the one in which people normally fit, a road, and continuing by a less controllable one, water, until he ends travelling by air is very meaningful, since these media by which the person travels correspond to the different stages of life, and life, here, also includes the death of the body. Time brings the deterioration of the body, the vehicle, and this is the reason why the traveller changes vehicles. Meaningful enough are the following lines from the poem "Traffic": "his spirit was trapped in a fat body, stuck/ in a rusty Ford in a heat wave in midsummer". The car in which the person travels is changed by a canoe - different vehicles for different media. This means that the person is not able to control his vehicle in a successful way. This corresponds to the stage of life in which the person is ill and, consequently, not able to control his body. This explains the fact that death gets on the canoe and drives it (the person is about to die) and, finally, the traveller is "embraced by a joyful lightness" precisely because he does not have to drive any vehicle. This 'elevation' to the final medium (after paddling up the river -the cataract-) by which the journey continues, gas, does not happen aboard any vehicle. It corresponds to death, that trip to an 'unknown destination'. The person has been trying to avoid the 'dark places' (death) but life does not come with a 'manual of instructions'.

Dobyns relates water with the inability to control your vehicle, your body, but he also uses the metaphorical medium of water, which is a rather uneasy one, to refer to situations that one cannot control or are bound to end. In the poem "Canto Hondo" he refers to "a marriage as shaky as a skiff in rough water/ with a baby a kind of anchor", and in

"Walls to Put Up, Walls to Take Down" the image of water also shows the imminence of death, together with the uselessness of the body:

the water seeped away, leaving several
tires, a cat skeleton tied to a brick, a rusted
car door.

The fact that death appears personified as another person that gets on your vehicle and commanders it, is coherent with other 'apparitions' of death in several poems in *Body Traffic*. In "Feet" the poet uses a "male dancer" on stage,¹ as the personification of death, who touches the other dancers, and there is nothing they can do to 'escape, there is no escape':

spinning, spinning,
until death presses his hand against the most
fragile part of their spine.

The final part of the journey is made by the least tangible medium, air, and the trip does not end. Dobyns refers to this final stage of life in the poem "How it was at the End" as "that nothingness called eternal". The passage from water to gas is present in several poems, since this stage always appears after having lead a terrenal life, or as a contrast to life on earth. In "The Belly" this organ concludes its trip by air:

floating through space the belly comes to the edge
of the universe and sees the alternative universe
floating toward it. In fact it sees itself
floating toward it. The belly and alternative belly.

And in "Rootless" the mentioned contrast between material things - associated with life on earth - and the final stage - air - also appears:

only those few possessions he values-
the wing of a sparrow to remind him
of his loyalties, a blue glass marble
to teach him the folly of standing still
and a box of air, pure air, to show him
where he has come from and what lies ahead.

Death is related to the least tangible of media, ² gas, and - consequently -

1. This is another novel use of the conventional metaphor life is a story (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 172) or life is a play (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 20).

2. I am especially grateful to D.C. Freeman because of his illuminating remarks about the [in]tangibility of the different media in a conversation we held in May 1998.

this implies instability and insecurity. This is coherent with the human lack of knowledge about death. The poem "The Proof" poses a question with respect to this issue:

would we blend with the sky, become
like cloud or smoke, or would we merge
with each other?

4 Conclusion

The use of metaphor in *Body Traffic* shows, once again, that the interest of poetic metaphor lies in the imaginative use a writer makes of it. In this sense, I could not agree more with D.C. Freeman (1993: 16) when he states:

Interpretations that depend on evidence from cognitive-metaphoric analysis are constrained both by that experience and by the requirement that the topology of the schematised experience in a metaphoric source domain be mapped into the topology of the target domain. The relative validity of particular source domains and metaphoric projection can be assessed with reference to

their independent motivation and internal consistency. Of course there is no one valid God's-eye interpretation of a literary work, whether the evidence for such a claim arises from cognitive metaphor or anything else. But there is a range of plausible interpretations and a scale of valid ones. Cognitive metaphor constrains the interpretative community to the body of the embodied imagination.

In this article I have tried to demonstrate that Stephen Dobyns makes an imaginative use of conventional metaphors, and this imaginative use includes the modification of some conventional metaphors, either by using parts of them, as in the case of 'the body is a vehicle' (considered as an extension of the basic metaphor 'people are machines'), or by the modification of the 'frame' (the understanding of a concept) as in the case of 'life is a journey'. In the first case, the restriction of both domains ('body' is a more precise term than 'people', and 'vehicle' is a more precise term than 'machines') results in a more powerful metaphor. This is also achieved by means of negative metaphors such as 'people are not plants'. And in the second case, the metaphorical concept 'life is a journey' is widened to cover a broader aspect of 'life', i.e., life after physical death.

This is, in my opinion, a good way in which the cognitive approach can be applied to literary criticism, since it provides content for the proposal - so widely accepted in this century- that metaphor is fundamental to thought and, by no means, a mere ornamental figure.

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Notes