

# **Literary Metaphor: Salience, Form and Function in a Contemporary Author's Prose Writing**

**Jeannine Fontaine, Indiana University of Pennsylvania**

## **1 Introduction**

Anyone who has enjoyed a good novel, short story or poem will surely have paused, pondering some turn of phrase, image, or metaphor so memorable that it begs to be committed to memory, repeated, shared with friends. At the other extreme, the same reader will have scanned much wording that is so unremarkable as to simply go unnoticed. The goal of this paper is to discuss factors involved in mapping the complex and mysterious territory between those two extremes, using example metaphorical types that occur in the prose of one novelist, acclaimed Canadian writer Margaret Atwood.

I will draw examples from three extended texts by Atwood: two novels and a collection of linked short stories, featuring comparable life tales about female protagonists. The titles are listed in (1), with year of publication and protagonist names. I will refer to plot details only minimally, where needed to clarify the effect of a particular metaphorical passage.

1. The Edible Woman. 1970: Marian (EW)  
 Cat's Eye, 1988: Elaine (CE)  
 Moral Disorder (short stories), 2006: Nell (MD)

Citations from these three works will henceforth simply be identified, as in (1), by initials representing their titles (EW, CE, and MD respectively), and page numbers corresponding to the editions cited in the references list. I have used isolated examples where possible for illustration; however, I end with at least one example illustrating the need to look at whole passages in any full discussion of Atwood's metaphorical usage.

Continua have been proposed to cover many areas where no clear-cut boundary can be drawn between two concepts: metaphor versus metonymy, literary versus everyday language metaphor, etc. The version I have in mind is reminiscent of Andrew Goatly's (1997) idea of a set of 'clines of metaphoricity'. I depart broadly from Goatly's model in this paper, since my goal differs from his; but I have drawn much in both content and inspiration from his substantial analysis of metaphorical form.

### **1.1 Defining Literary Salience**

Before proceeding, I should raise a crucial question: "What is being measured here?" Experientially, seasoned readers have no problem referring to what is 'lyrical' or 'powerful', what impresses them, in a writer's style. Steen (1994) offers detailed empirical evidence that readers pay special attention to metaphor when reading literary passages. But how can we measure the text-internal qualities that trigger such reactions, or heighten them?

It is tempting to turn to some notion of ‘prototypicality’ as a starting point. However, as Margaret Freeman (2007) points out, citing the relevant literature, it is precisely the *atypical*, the non-prototypical, that we notice and praise in literary style. Moreover, ideas like ‘deviance’ from a prototype seem entirely wrong for capturing the positive-toned reaction involved.

Notions like cognitive ‘effort’ are likewise problematic. Cognitive effort can be unconscious, whereas literary appreciation must be largely conscious. Moreover, Gibbs and Tendahl (2006) offer convincing evidence that there is no clear link between cognitive effort and literary effect. At the extreme, they note that we can put much effort into processing a nonsensical form without arriving at any pleasing effect. This last term, ‘effect,’ does seem to come a step closer to capturing emotional response (Gibbs, 2008) or intellectual satisfaction—something with recalls Shen’s (2002: 212) ‘foregrounding’ or ‘poetic effect’ approaches to stylistic work.

However, what I am trying to capture is quite distinct from the function of a trope within a text, and is less specific than ‘poetic effect’ on the reader (to evoke sympathy, joy, etc.). I have settled tentatively on the term ‘salience’, to refer to the extent to which a reader’s attention is drawn to a particular form, though the term has been used in quite different senses, e.g. by Shen (1995). I will also use equivalent terms, such as ‘visibility’.

## 1.2 Brief Caveats

This brief discussion must necessarily sidestep a host of theoretical areas, most notably definitional issues, questions about the boundaries of metaphor, and topics such as the status of primary metaphor, the importance of embodiment, conceptual blending theory and the place of conceptual metaphor in literary text. These admittedly important topics must be set aside here, as they do not affect the literary-readerly quality that I am trying to shed light on.

Of course, I take it as given that the everyday, conventionalized metaphors identified in Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) and countless other works will abound in any creative writing; in fact, these will fall on the extreme ‘invisible’ or ‘non-salient’ end of the continuum I am proposing. Given their relatively neutral status, these forms will not be highlighted.

Finally, the range of features that must affect this visibility/salience is so large and so diverse that I cannot claim to be exhaustive here; some elements have been covered only minimally, while others have had to be omitted entirely.

## 1.3 Overview

The sections that follow focus on the following list of salience-enhancing areas: syntax/morphology (section 2); specification of elements, especially grounds (section 3); domains (section 4); Lakoff and Turner’s four processes (section 5); semantic distance (section 6); metaphor networks (section 7); authorial style (section 8) and narrative

function (section 9).

## 2 Syntactic/morphological form:

Stockwell (2002: 107-108) offers a hierarchy ranging from most to least ‘visible’ among metaphors, based largely on syntactic form (overt simile, appositive, etc.). Goatly (1997) covers morphological and syntactic form in considerably greater detail, suggesting relative metaphorical strengths for different lexical categories and structures, as well as notions such as ‘buried’ metaphors in morphologically complex forms. Although these claims are compelling, I have chosen not to elaborate on the subtle contrasts he proposes, as the contrasts are delicate and difficult to judge without testing the intuitions of a large group of readers. As Gibbs noted over a decade ago, ‘the phenomenology of metaphor in literature is much richer and more complex than what is seen in psychological studies’ (1994:260). This observation remains true today, and it is difficult to assert with certainty that one syntactic category or structure will carry metaphorical meaning more strikingly than another for readers.

It is surely clear that syntactic and morphological form must play a role in metaphorical salience. Moreover, following both Stockwell and Goatly, all things being equal, the *like*-marked simile form favored by Atwood is likely to be more salient to most readers than, say, an indirect metaphor carried by a single lexical item. Clearly, the mere presence of more overt linguistic material should affect the noticeability of a figurative form. In addition, stylistic features that stand out in any prose work, such as repetition and parallelism (see e.g. Short 1996), must contribute to visibility. Of course, countless other syntactic factors could be discussed, some of them particularly problematic, such as the presence of negation. But in the interest of providing an overview of other factors, I will pass over this potentially rich and complex area here, leaving it for future research.

## 3 Degree of Specification

A fully specified metaphorical form may contain overtly stated source, target, and grounds, the basic components of metaphorical mapping. Applying a simplistic ‘more-is-more-noticeable’ idea, it can probably be said that fully specified metaphors will be more salient, and indirect or implied metaphors will be less so. Adjectival forms, for instance often point to a source that is not overtly mentioned, as when the living room of Marian’s friend is said to be *roped-off... consecrated* (MD 70); while this phrasing suggests a museum, the source is not explicitly mentioned. Likewise, when Marian refers to her past as having been *just borrowed*, we may think of books, or a cup of sugar; but it is an empirical question whether, when and how readers accesses such unstated source elements. So the presence of both overt source and target may enhance visibility. But the mere presence of an element is only a beginning. Placement and content are also important, as I try to show in the next section, using the expression of grounds as an example.

### 3.1 Grounds Provided and Placed

There is wide variation in whether the grounds for mapping are provided in connection with any given metaphor. Given this, it is worth looking a little more closely at cases where a metaphor is explained, or its grounds are presented in some detail. In any case, the additional material should give readers the time for additional reflection, and should give the metaphor additional strength. However, I would suggest that the degree of additional strength must depend on two factors: first, whether the explanation of grounds is redundant or necessary for comprehending the metaphor; and second, where the explanation/grounds is placed. In the case of delayed placement, there is a moment of suspense (even bemusement in the case of necessary explanations), before the reader can fully interpret the metaphor.

Example (2) contains a detailed lead-up or introduction, preparing the reader for the underlined simile. The reference of *it* here is to a bizarre severed head made for a Halloween costume by Nell. The point being made is that Nell's sister treats the head as if it were the object of cult worship, and the prior context prepares this reading by listing stand-ins for the pedestal (*pillow*), the ceremonial cloth (*dishtowel*), and the religious meal (the *cookie fragments* and *berries*) that worshippers use. In augmenting the actual linguistic stuff of the metaphor with a little list of implied supporting metaphors, this preposed explanation contributes to the visibility of the main overarching metaphor, as it leads the reader to construct a temple-offering scenario in the domestic picture of the sister's reverential play:

2. Once, I discovered it propped up on my sister's pillow, its neck wrapped in one of our mother's best linen dishtowels. Cookie fragments on dolls' plates were laid out around it, mixed with berries from the prickly-berry hedge, like offerings made to appease an idol. (MD 36)

In (3), in contrast, the explanation is postposed, coming after the source term *churches*; so the reader encounters the underlined simile before its supporting material; however, even without the reference to *reverence* and *genuflecting*, readers would likely be able to interpret the *like* phrase by providing these or similar points of comparison. Hence, the emphatic thrust added by the overt grounds here is real, but relatively mild (the italics here and henceforth are mine unless otherwise indicated).

3. Galleries are too much like churches, *there's too much reverence, you feel there should be some genuflecting going on*. (CE 92)

With the postposed explanation of grounds in (4), however, we are gradually moving into stronger salience-enhancing territory. Here, Marian is describing her co-workers:

4. They squatted at their desks, toad-like and sluggish, *blinking and opening and closing their mouths*. (EW 11)

Readers familiar with toad behavior may spontaneously provide the eye and mouth

embellishments to the metaphor; but many will only add these to their mental image when they encounter the overt elaboration.

In the most extreme cases, a metaphor may be quite incomprehensible to virtually all readers without the provision of explicit grounds. Men are not usually seen as being ‘like tables,’ for instance; companies are not easily likened to frozen treats, and bathrooms have little in common with a man’s arm as it is being stroked by his lover. But Atwood makes these connections possible, as well as visible and comical, by the provision of inventive postposed grounds:

5a. (*re: Nell*) There had been several men in her life, but they hadn’t been convincing. They’d been somewhat like her table—*quickly acquired, brightened up a little, but temporary*. (MD 104)

5b. The company is layered like an ice-cream sandwich, with three floors: the *upper crust, the lower crust, and our department, the gooey layer in the middle* (EW 13)

5c. (*Marian’s observation, while stroking Peter’s arm in an intimate moment*) The arm was like the bathroom: *clean and white and new, the skin unusually smooth for a man’s*. (EW 61)

#### 4 Domains:

Familiar conceptual metaphor tends to be concretizing and clarifying--linking a relatively abstract target concept (LIFE, ANGER), with a more concrete, familiar term (JOURNEY, HEATED LIQUID). Steven Pinker (2007: 242-243) goes so far as to speculate that the ability to extend the concrete to cover abstract concepts may be a key evolutionary step. At any rate, it is the most widespread expected pattern. Given this, it seems reasonable to suspect that departure from this pattern will catch a reader’s attention.

Thus, a mildly attention-getting factor should be present when both source and target are either abstract or concrete. The ‘image metaphors’ common in literary texts typically contain source and target at the same level of abstraction. However, image metaphors in Atwood often get a further boost toward salience for many readers because of the emotional connotations or links they carry. Consider the form in (6), provided by the child Elaine after a disturbing encounter with the rigid morality of her friend’s family:

6. I look out the window, look up: there are the heavens, there are the stars, where they usually are. They no longer look cold and white and remote, like alcohol and enamel grays.... (CE 109).

This tone-setting passage holds much beyond the literal image. For one thing, the passage is immediately amplified by the statement that the stars are now *watchful*. But the

*alcohol and enamel grays* can only be fully appreciated in connection with Elaine's own pragmatic mother and her entomologist father whose science-friendly, objective views have entered the child's world along with the chemicals and equipment in her father's laboratory. More than the night sky has changed for Elaine; her world view, rooted in her own parents' values, has been painfully challenged, and this lost view of the stars, for many readers, may stand in for that deeper loss.

But the most striking domain surprise comes from forms that reverse the expected pattern entirely, linking an abstract source to a relatively concrete target. Shen (1995) proposes that these creative forms, too, obey certain constraints; however, this does not detract from the claim that their deviance renders them 'visible', to a reader. The pattern in question shows up when Elaine calls her husband's recorded voicemail message *an electronic afterlife* (CE 46), or when she refers to coffee as *jitter in a cup*, and as *blackness* (CE 46). Later, she refers to her ex-husband as *looking like relief* (CE 94), and speaks of her childhood companion as treating men as *a special, thrilling joke* (CE 53). Consider also the interesting cases in (7) from *Moral Disorder*, where the underlined abstract sources function to attribute symbolic status to a list of concrete objects:

7a. Now and then I'd indulge myself in a a frill—a vulgar, colourful vase, a flea-market curio...a carved wooden hand holding a sort of chalice with the words *Souvenir of Pitcairn Island* on it...a Thirties perfume bottle minus the stopper. The objects I chose were designed to hold something, but I didn't fill them up. They remained empty. They were little symbolic shrines to thirst. (MD 83)

7b. The soil of the garden was good enough, though there were a lot of stones. Also shards from broken crockery, and medicine bottles of pressed glass, white and blue and brown. A doll's arm. A tarnished silver spoon. Animal bones. A marble. Layer upon layer of lives lived out. (MD 121)

#### 4.1 Cross-modality

An additional issue involving domains should be mentioned here. The metaphorical power of some adjectives seems to increase in cases that I think of as 'cross-modal' mappings. This is tricky stipulation to make clear, since there are quite unremarkable mappings in ordinary language that could be said to be 'cross-modal'; we speak of a 'sour disposition,' for instance, or a 'sweet' victory, applying taste terms to abstract experiences. However, these seem quite limited, and the adjectives in (8) seem decidedly far-fetched by comparison. The first attributes a color to an emotion, while the second links texture to the sound of a voice. Again, we regularly speak of 'silken' or 'velvety' tones of voice; so the novelty here is not just a matter of domain. Further research might, in fact, want to link this to the Lakoff/Turner notion of 'expansion' of a conventional form.

8a. that pale-mauve hostility you often find among women. (EW 8)

8b. heard a soft flannelly voice (EW 94)

## 4.2 Language as a Domain

To revisit the notion of concretizing for a moment, it is important to note that even some forms of concretizing comparisons strike us as unusual. An interesting subset of these involves language forms as targets. Atwood rarely, but noticeably and in a characteristic way, links words metaphorically to physical objects or properties ((9a) and (9b)), or to concrete actions, in (9c):

9a. I was knitting this layette because my mother was expecting. I avoided the word *pregnant*, as did others: *pregnant* was a blunt, bulgy, pendulous word, it weighed you down to think about it, whereas *expecting* suggested a dog with its ears pricked, listening briskly and with happy anticipation to an approaching footstep. (MD 12)

9b. *Last, last, last. Last* was so close to *lost*. *Last Duchess. Duchess* was an insinuating rustle, a whispering: taffeta brushing over a floor. MD 51 (italics in the original)

9c. (*re: sisters of Cordelia, Elaine's childhood acquaintance*) Cordelia says they are gifted. This sounds like vaccinated, something that's done to you and leaves a mark. (CE 79)

## 5. Lakoff and Turner's Four Processes

Lakoff and Turner (1989, pp. 67-72) suggest that creative writers build on the patterns of ordinary conceptual metaphor in four ways: by extension, elaboration, questioning and composing. These notions have been reinforced by dozens of scholars (e.g. Hogan, 2003: 99-101), and have been applied in recent years to other literary works (e.g. Crisp, 2003). These processes surely apply in characteristic ways in Atwood's writing. Some examples are worth mentioning here.

### 5.1 Extending/Elaborating

It can be difficult to tease apart the notions of extension and elaboration, particularly with the creative exuberance of the Atwood texts. However, definitionally, extension involves going beyond the bounds of an original (conceptual) metaphor, while elaboration refers to the practice of highlighting some unusual aspect of the metaphorical pattern. The example in (10), describing Marian's take on Peter's, reaction to their engagement, may involve extension. The *as though* phrase presumably treats the act of buying a new car as an emotional experience, but the narrator/protagonist Marian extends the metaphor, likening herself indirectly to the car:

10. He sounded as though he'd just bought a shiny new car. I gave him a tender *chrome-plated* smile; that is, I meant the smile to express tenderness, but my mouth felt *stiff and bright and somehow expensive*. (EW 92)

Elaboration may also take the form of simply re-stating the metaphor in more detail, as in (11), where Marian is describing her pregnant friend Clara:

11. She lay back in her chair and closed her eyes, looking like a strange vegetable growth, *a bulbous tuber that had sent out four thin white roots and a tiny pale-yellow flower.* (EW 28)

## 5.2 Questioning:

A characteristic form found in Atwood that can be seen as questioning the metaphor involves cases where a cautionary note is appended to a metaphor. In (12a) narrator/protagonist Nell likens a farmhouse to a ‘picture’, but then suggests that the picture in question would not be to her taste (tellingly, since this farmhouse belongs to her lover, Tig, and is their prospective future shared residence). Interestingly, the grounds here lull us as readers into a reverie, only to have that mood shaken by Nell’s negative judgment.

12a. In winter the farmhouse looked like a picture—snow on the roof, icicles dripping from the eaves, the white hills and somber trees rising behind it—*but it wasn’t a picture Nell would ever have allowed on her Christmas cards. Like sunsets, it was beautiful in real life, but too overdone for art.* (MD 98)

In (12b), as the reader and Marian both ponder the meaning of her new contact with the somewhat hapless young Duncan, Duncan himself comments on his incipient relationship with Marian, but immediately adds a warning note to tag his fear of Marian:

12b. I bring out the Florence Nightingale in them. *But be careful.... Florence Nightingale was a cannibal, you know.* (EW 105)

## 5.3 Combining

Combinations and embeddings of figurative forms can take an almost limitless number of forms, and they do so in Atwood’s texts. I cannot hope to do justice to the possibilities here. I will content myself with noting the process, and offering one interesting example that reaches solidly back into the domain of everyday idioms. In (13), Atwood has her first-person narrator Nell combine two familiar idioms as she comments on public reactions to serious social problems. There is no extension or elaboration here: both idioms carry their conventional meaning. But the unaccustomed conjunction makes the statement stand out:

13. People throw up their hands, then sit on them. (MD 3)

## 5.4 Another Category? Hedges and Related Forms

Hedges are, of course, normally seen as elements that weaken a speaker or writer’s meaning. But interestingly, in some cases, they constitute a special case that enhances



the visibility and novelty of a metaphor. These cases may fit into one of the Lakoff/Turner categories; but they have a special quality that makes them at least a distinct sub-group, if not a new category on their own.

In (14a), for instance, the added hedges *in a way* and the *if not... exactly* clause, combined with the repeated *some things*, and the tentative extra metaphor, all reflect Nell's uncertainty as to what her role is in the life of Tig, her lover. Nell's thoughts are indirectly portrayed here. The source of her bafflement is Tig's casually involving his wife, Oona, in the lovers' developing relationship:

14a. She was being interviewed, *in a way*: Oona had her fingered for the position of second wife, or *if not* a second wife *exactly*, something second. Something secondary. Something controllable. A sort of concubine. (MD 107)

Later, Nell tries out other metaphors, again with question form, statement of uncertainty, and adverbials (*evidently*, *possibly*, *sometimes*) serving ironically both as markers of mental confusion on Nell's part and as attention-getting devices for the reader:

14b. What had happened next? Nell *wasn't quite sure*. She'd been swept off her feet, evidently. She'd been swept away. Or *possibly* she'd been kidnapped. *Sometimes it felt like that*. (MD 108)

Still later, Nell muses yet again on her role, at a point where she notes her involvement with Tig's children:

14c. Den mother, *she thought*. Camp counselor. Sunday-school teacher on an outing. Those were her choices, her disguises. (MD 112)

Soon after, when her lover's mother enlists her help with the boys' homework, she finally settles on one role (yet even here using the weakening term *supposed to*):

14d. So that's who I'm *supposed to* be, thought Nell. I'm the governess. (MD 113)

These metaphors, with their hedges, allow us to see the inner vulnerability of this woman who, through the concrete details of the plot, we must view as strong and capable.

## 6 Semantic Distance

Difficult as this claim is to operationalize, the salience of a given metaphor must be affected by the sheer semantic 'distance' between target and source. When characters are said to have *hair the color of a metal refrigerator-tray* (EW 14), or that shines *like a soft velvety lawn* (MD 62), we are given a humorous shock, as we puzzle momentarily over the relationship between hair on the one hand, and refrigerator trays and lawns on the other. However literally 'accurate' the metaphor may be, it is jarring for the dissimilar

items it brings into correspondence--similarly for the phrase a *limp starfish*, applied to a banana peel (EW 87).

Much the same can be said for odd personifications such as (15a). Marian is admonishing herself in the rest room of a bar while her friends share drinks. In the process, she enlists a most unconventional personified object as a companion to her disturbed emotional state.

15a. "Get a grip on yourself," I whispered. "Don't make a fool of yourself." The roll of toilet paper crouched in there with me, helpless and white and furry, waiting passively for the end. (EW 72)

Under the umbrella of semantic distance, we may also include fanciful sources, as when, after an erotic encounter, Marian describes her scattered clothing as being *like fragments left over from the explosion of some life-sized female scarecrow* (EW 86).

## 7 Networks

Of course, even the most familiar conceptual metaphor can be made salient by the use of multiple terms supporting a single image. Something like this happens when Nell speaks of her childhood experiences with a teacher called Miss Bessie, providing a virtual avalanche of forms that encode variants of a frequent of the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY (as herding, a race, or an adventure voyage):

16. She drove us briskly through the curriculum as if herding sheep, heading us off from false detours and perilous cliff edges, nipping at our heels when we slowed down in the wrong places, making us linger in the right ones so we could assimilate the material of importance. She described our task of learning as a race, a sort of obstacle course: there was a lot of ground still to be covered before the final exams, she said, and it had to be covered rapidly. The ground was strewn with hurdles and rough parts, and other difficulties. The days were speeding by, and we still had *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* looming up ahead of us like—we felt—a big steep hill of mud. It was true that once we got to the top of it, Miss Bessie—who'd been up there many times before—might show us a view; but meanwhile there would be a lot of slipperiness. (MD 56)

Seventeen pages later, Nell returns to the daunting prospect of reading *Tess*, at a full gallop a task on which she needs to get a head start (MD 73).

Networks may support either a single metaphor (as in (16)), or a group of metaphors, related either semantically or by function in the text. The many metaphors Marian's friend Clara uses for her children create such a network, since they support a single textual function, characterizing Clara's relationship to her children. These include *fertility god* (EW 31); *goddamned fire-hydrant* (EW 30); and *barnacles encrusting a ship and limpets clinging to a rock* (EW 33).

The Atwood data suggest varying degrees of networking among metaphors, some of which persist over considerable spans of text. However, I have not identified the extreme case of a ‘megametaphor’ (Kovecses 2002: 51-52) which runs visibly through an entire work.

### 8 Authorial Quirks: Atwood’s Serial Metaphors

In an earlier study, I identified a particularly Atwood-esque stylistic practice, which I called the ‘serial metaphor,’ with a nod to nod to ‘serial verb’. The term refers to a series of similar items, often presented as appositives with no conjunction. In fact, Atwood favors ‘serial’ constructions generally, stringing VP or NP elements quite freely in her writing. When she does this with metaphors, it leads to particularly interesting results. In simple cases, Atwood simply juxtaposes two or three source elements, leaving it open as to whether these are in conflict or are meant to both hold. In *Cat’s Eye*, Elaine says of boys that [*t*]hey have a pungent, leathery, underneath smell, like old rope, like damp dogs (CE 66). Much earlier, speaking of her childhood, she strings five metaphors together, allowing them to converge as they evoke the grubby state of a small child’s hands:

17. I’ve started to chew my fingers again. There’s blood, a taste I remember. It tastes of orange Popsicles [sic], penny gumballs, red licorice, gnawed hair, dirty ice. (CE 9)

### 9 Narrative Function:

Often (including in several cases mentioned earlier), a special relationship holds between a particular metaphor and the broader narrative context. In one example, Atwood plays with the notion of ‘eyes’ as both target and source, in a metaphorical passage from *Cat’s Eye*. Note the negation here (*not the eyes of cats*), together with the serial metaphors, and the varying levels of abstractness as the narrator reaches for an appropriate source:

18. The cat’s eyes really are like eyes, but not the eyes of cats. They’re the eyes of something that isn’t known but exists anyway; like the green eye of the radio; like the eyes of aliens from a distant planet.

This repetition of the word ‘eyes,’ with its echo of the novel’s title, gives this brief passage considerable literary prominence.

When story line intersects powerfully with metaphorical form, a very simple example can play a strong role, and be correspondingly noticed, even with minimal linguistic realization. The use that Atwood makes of the word *armadillo* in *The Edible Woman* is a case in point. The term first appears in the mouth of Duncan, the unconventional young man who has befriended Marian (but who seems to relate to her more honestly than her

fiancé, Peter; recall the mention of Duncan in (12b), and Peter in (5c)). This is how Duncan describes his roommates' behavior after they learn that he has tried to set their apartment on fire:

19a ... they just put it out, and then they ran around in frenzied figure-eights like a couple of armadillos, talking about how I was 'sick' and why did I do it,....  
(EW 104)

Days later, Marian is at the office, keeping her calm through what her co-workers view as a major emergency. She reflects on the agitated state of her companions; and in the process, Duncan's odd metaphor springs unbidden into her mind:

19b. At the moment they were running around, she thought, like a herd of armadillos at the zoo. *Armadilloes recalled briefly to her mind the man in the laudromat, who had never reappeared...* (EW 115)

But as the mysterious young man's metaphor pops up, the man himself comes again to mind, the link being enhanced by the rarity of the source noun. Thus, this one minimally specified metaphor plays a critical role in the movement of the plot, thanks perhaps to the rare source noun, offering the reader an early foreshadowing that future encounters with Duncan are likely.

### 9.1 Other Authorial Intentions:

Continuing on this path, one might construct a whole list of authorial intentions (lyricism, narration, character development, humor) that can be supported by metaphor. Of course, one can infer more than one intention in any passage. Consider, for instance, a passage in *Cat's Eye*, in which the child Elaine produces metaphors for the ears of all her family members while out for a drive (Dad's are *like the ears of gnomes, or those of the flesh-colored, doglike minor characters in Mickey Mouse comic books*; mom's are more *like the handles of china cups*, while brother Stephen's are *like the ears of the green-tinged, oval-headed aliens from outer space he draws with his colored pencils* (CE 23). This series is at once lyrical, entertaining, somewhat humorous, and is at once a purveyor of character development, as it portray's the child Elaine's wistful, dreamy side.

### 10 Conclusion: and One Complex Example:

When considering features of metaphorical style one at a time, it is virtually impossible to portray an author's virtuosity. A full picture of metaphor in Atwood must go beyond these isolated examples to whole passages and the overall impression they create in the reader.

In this spirit, I close by offering a single passage that exemplifies a number of the features above all at once: the serial metaphor, parallelism, imagery linked to emotionally toned connotations, striking correlations, partial questioning, and a complex of narrative

functions (including humor and character development).

20. He'd had to get out of this marriage or it would have pulled him down, sucked the blood out of him, gutted him completely. All of these metaphors—suggestive to Nell, of giant squid, of vampire bats, of fish processing—were Tig's... He never said *my wife* or used the wife's name in this connection, because it wasn't his wife as such that would have finished him off, it wasn't Oona all by herself that had done the pulling and sucking and gutting: it was the two of them together. It was *the marriage*, which Nell pictured as a large thorny growth—a cross between a dense, dark-green bush or shrub and a thundercloud-shaped cancer, with the adhesive qualities of tile cement and a number of tentacles, like a ball of leeches. (MD 94-95)

Going back to my opening comment--as a naïve reader, I would certainly smile at this passage, and quote it to fellow readers as a sign of Atwood's virtuosity. It has been my hope, in this paper, to provide some explanatory underpinning for my reaction, by teasing out the features that contribute to the passage's salience.

Mark Turner (1987) exhorts his readers to integrate cognitive features (and by extension, their linguistic expression) into the analysis of literature:

Good literature is powerful because it masterfully evokes and manipulates our cognitive apparatus. How it does so is of interest to anyone concerned with mind. Modern literary criticism, because it is not concerned with these general cognitive capacities, rarely addresses the source of literature's power. (Turner, 1987: 12)

Elsewhere, discussing cognitive reactions to creative language, Turner proposes that 'There is a system to imagination' (1991:64), which he discusses at length. I hope to have been able to contribute, in a small way, by aiming a spotlight on aspects of linguistic form that can be seen as triggering the cognitive processes involved in reading, and ultimately to support and enhance the power of literature.

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