ELSEVIER

Journal of Pragmatics 24 (1995) 627–642

journal of PRAGMATICS

Metaphors of center and periphery in Yeats' *The Second Coming*

Paul D. Deane

CMIR Project, Dataware Technologies, Ottawa, One Antares Drive, Suite 200, Nepean, Ontario, Canada K2E 8C4

Abstract

This paper examines the metaphoric structure of Yeats' poem *The Second Coming* in the light of the Lakoff-Johnson-Turner theory of metaphor. It argues that the poem's meaning depends critically upon various conventional metaphors of center and periphery which combine to define a cultural ideal of legitimate authority. The poem exploits these metaphors to create powerful images in which society is first decentered and then recentered into an inverted social order.

The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand;

Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.

0378-2166/95/$09.50
SSDI 0378-2166(95)00028-3

The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

W. B. Yeats

1. Introduction

W.B. Yeats' *The Second Coming* is one of the classics of twentieth century poetry. It is, among other things, a poem whose power derives in large part from metaphor. No one can remain unmoved by the horrific sequences of metaphors painting image after image of anarchy leading not to the Second Coming of Christ, but to the second coming of the 'Rough Beast'. Precisely because the poem uses metaphor so powerfully, it provides a supreme test for any theory of metaphor. After all, it is the extreme cases, not the ordinary cases, which best demonstrate theoretical validity.

This paper will examine Yeats' *Second Coming* from the perspective of such works as Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Johnson (1987), Lakoff and Turner (1989), and Lakoff (1990). These works argue that ordinary language is replete with metaphor and that literary metaphors elaborate conventional patterns of thought. That is, they claim that metaphor is a cognitive process whose expression in language guarantees that ordinary and poetic language are grounded upon a common conceptual base. When this theory is applied to Yeats' *The Second Coming*, the result is a depth of insight which argues strongly for its validity. Most of the poem's metaphors are revealed as variations on a fundamental conceptual schema: the relation between center and periphery; the power of the poem arises in large part from the coherence and mutual resonance of a series of poetic images which systematically exploit conventional metaphors of social and moral centrality.

1.1. The Lakoff-Johnson-Turner theory of metaphor

For convenience the theory assumed in this paper will be termed the Lakoff-Johnson-Turner theory of metaphor. In its essence, the Lakoff-Johnson-Turner theory advances the following claims:

(i) That metaphor is a cognitive process in which one set of concepts (or *conceptual domain*) is understood in terms of another. The concept which serves as a model is termed the *source* domain; the concept to be understood is termed the *target* domain.

(ii) That each metaphor establishes a *mapping* or set of systematic correspondences between the two domains.

(iii) That this mapping is constrained by what Lakoff (1990) terms the *Invariance Hypothesis*. In the Lakoff-Johnson-Turner theory, there are certain abstract but experientially basic concepts which they term *image schemas*, such as the con-

cepts of PART and WHOLE, CAUSE and EFFECT, or CENTER and PERIPHERY.[1] According to the Invariance Hypothesis, metaphoric mappings cannot alter image-schematic structure. That is, a part/whole relation in the source domain must correspond to a part/whole relation in the target domain; likewise, a cause–effect relation in the source must correspond to a cause–effect relation in the target.

(iv) That the mapping thus established makes it possible to transfer knowledge about the source domain to the target; for example, patterns of inference learned in the source domain may come to be applied in the target domain.

(v) That many metaphorical mappings are *conventional*, i.e., commonly used in a particular language and culture.

These assumptions can be illustrated by considering a particular conventional metaphor: the metaphor THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS. The mapping treats buildings as the source domain by which to understand the target, theories. Theories correspond to buildings, parts of theories to building materials, and logical support to structural support. The resulting metaphor allows us to draw *metaphoric inferences*, such as 'to destroy a theory, *undermine* its *foundations*'. The metaphor is also conventional, used in a variety of idioms and common figures of speech, as shown in (1). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that its conventionality is not merely verbal but reflects the use of the metaphor as a conventional pattern of thought.

(1a) You had better shore up that argument.
(1b) That theory has been thoroughly undermined by new evidence.
(1c) He wants to demolish your theory totally.
(1d) The present theory is built upon three foundational claims.
(1e) He has constructed an imposing edifice with interesting implications in a variety of fields.

The theory of metaphor advanced in Lakoff and Johnson (1980) thus advocates a critical shift in perspective. Rather than viewing metaphor as a *verbal* phenomenon,

---

[1] The concept of image schemas may require a certain amount of elaboration for those unfamiliar with the theory. According to Johnson (1987), image schemata are concepts which are simultaneously abstract (or schematic) and yet derived from perceptual images. As abstract concepts, they range over a broad range of experiences. But they are fundamental building blocks of human cognition, for they emerge directly from bodily interaction with the environment. Image schemata include obviously spatial concepts like PART/WHOLE or CENTER/PERIPHERY, dynamic concepts like FORCE and CAUSE/EFFECT, and a variety of other basic conceptual structures.

Johnson's theory postulates that image schemata have the following key properties:

(a) Since image schemata are abstract *organizations* of experience rather than detailed percepts, they can organize very different concepts. For example, though a part of the body and a part of a theory may have little in common objectively, they share an abstract organizational pattern.

(b) Since image schemata organize fundamental body/environment interactions, they are processed automatically.

These properties entail that humans are likely automatically to recognize image-schematic correspondences between otherwise dissimilar concepts. If so, metaphor should consist in the construction of mappings in which two concepts are aligned because they share the same image-schematic structure. This is Lakoff's (1990) *Invariance Hypothesis*.

to be classed with other tropes such as simile or irony, Lakoff and Johnson classify metaphor as a *species of thought*. Rather than viewing metaphor as a *recognition* of similarity, they view it as the *construction* of similarity in which one conceptual domain is mapped onto another. As a result, it is possible for ordinary language to be deeply metaphorical – and for poetic language to be deeply conventional despite its obvious creativity.

1.2. Lakoff and Turner's account of poetic metaphor

When Lakoff and Turner (1989) apply this theory to poetic metaphor, they argue that poetic metaphors are different in degree, not in kind from the metaphors used in conventional speech. They are particularly careful to argue that poetic metaphor is based upon the same conventional conceptual mappings which operate in everyday language. The major distinction they draw (though by no means the only one) is that the poetic use of metaphor involves various techniques which extend, undermine, elaborate or combine conventional metaphoric mappings.

In other words, Lakoff and Turner contend that poetic use of metaphor is seldom *completely* original. Instead, they argue, poets often take a conventional metaphor and make unconventional use of it. For example, it is conventional to speak of life as a journey. For proof, we need look no further than expressions like 'She's just gotten started in life', 'He's over the hill', 'They're at death's door'. Nonetheless, poets like Robert Frost make creative and effective use of the same metaphor in such well-known poems as 'The road not taken' (Frost, 1969: 105).

Lakoff and Turner argue that there are specific techniques by which poets exploit conventional metaphors for poetic effect: *extension* (using more of the source concepts for the metaphor than are conventionally employed), *elaboration* (choosing a specific concept which fits the general metaphor but adds new and unexpected details), *questioning* (pointing out inadequacies of a metaphor) and *composition* (combining two or more metaphors so that they *cohere* to form a rich composite image).

Each of these techniques arises from the structure of the Lakoff-Johnson-Turner theory. Let us consider each in turn:[2]

---

[2] The discussion in the text was inspired by a poem written for one of my classes. The following poem was written as an assignment for a class on metaphor. The assignment instructed students to take a conventional metaphor and write a poem which applied Lakoff and Turner's techiques. Its author, a linguistics major, had never before written a serious poem; the result, while doubtless rough from a literary point of view, is nonetheless striking in its metaphoric effects:

The Journey Takes My Life (Melinda Kiker)
I learned to walk to walk no more.
The current catches me.
Feet are still, but still I move.
I journey but I know not where.
I lost the itinerary.

Extension. Conventional mappings usually exploit a few obvious correspondences between source and target domain. They do not exhaust the possibilities. It is usually possible to extend the mapping by creating further correspondences. For example, in the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY we conventionally associate life with journey and the stages of the journey with the stages of life. Additional correspondences are possible, however. For example, the *itinerary* for a journey can be mapped onto a plan for life's journey.

Elaboration. Conventional metaphoric mappings are usually quite abstract; but it is always possible to create specific metaphors which instantiate the general mapping. Choice of elaborating details creates additional mappings and allows for additional metaphoric inferences. For example, the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY does not specify what kind of journey life involves. There are many different kinds of journeys, and their properties differ considerably. For example, a leisurely walk down a level path differs markedly from swimming for one's life down foaming rapids. Thus, although LIFE IS AN AFTERNOON STROLL and LIFE IS SWIMMING DOWN FOAMING

I fear what lies in wait.
I turn to flee.
I try to cling.

Desperation.
Nothing to grasp.
I cannot freeze the forward flow.

Many proudly say,
"I chose and planned my route."
But is the path always passively underfoot?
Do I take the road less traveled,
or does it take me?
Rapids swirl about me, pulling down.
Over rocks I tumble and turn.
The water all the while reaching for my
flame,
able to put it out
at any time.

The poem provides a perfect illustration of Lakoff and Turner's techniques. It takes as its basis the conventional metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY. However, the first stanza extends the metaphor by invoking the concept of an *itinerary*; the loss of the itinerary translates automatically via the LIFE AS JOURNEY metaphor into a terrifying loss of control over one's own life. Throughout the poem, the author elaborates the metaphor by describing a very unusual journey: downstream, over rapids, without a boat. The LIFE AS JOURNEY metaphor ordinarily implies that we, the travelers, choose our path in life: the poem questions this aspect of the metaphor, suggesting instead that we are lucky to keep our heads above water. Finally, in the last stanza, the author composes her primary metaphor with another conventional metaphor (LIFE AS FLAME), and thereby creates a striking, coherent image of frailty and helplessness in the face of the swift current of events.

Lakoff and Turner apply their theory to a variety of examples from classic English poetry; this example is of interest because it shows that a student with no previous training or aptitude in creative writing could use the theory to produce metaphors that are neither trite nor obvious.

RAPIDS may elaborate the same conventional metaphor they yield very different implications about the nature of life.

Questioning. Any given metaphor highlights some aspects of the target domain while hiding others. For example, the LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor highlights the idea that life occurs in stages but in its most common versions it hides the fact that we can be 'swept away' by events: in normal journeys, travelers choose their own destinations. A poem might choose to question this aspect of the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY by highlighting the frequency with which life is 'out of control'.

Composition. Conventional metaphors are not ordinarily combined; they are used one at a time. But it is possible to choose language which simultaneously evokes two very different metaphors; if they are conceptually coherent, the result is a complex metaphoric idea. For example, the LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor is not ordinarily combined with the metaphor LIFE IS A FLAME, although both occur as conventional metaphors in the English language community. But if the metaphor has been elaborated as LIFE IS SWIMMING DOWN FOAMING RAPIDS then the LIFE IS FLAME metaphor may logically be combined with it to yield a complex metaphor about the frailty of human life.

1.3. The structure of the argument

It should be noted at this point that the body of the paper will focus strictly on the poem's metaphoric structure, leaving aside contextual information critical to a full critical analysis. W.B. Yeats was an Irish Nationalist, and an occultist for whom the word 'gyre' was a technical philosophical term. Such contextual details matter greatly for a full appreciation of the poem, but they do not account for its impact on readers who may not be aware of them.

That is, *The Second Coming* has a powerful impact on a general audience which knows little or nothing about the author's background and personal philosophy. We must assume a certain cultural background, i.e., a readership with basic knowledge of falconry, Christianity, and perhaps the Sphinx: a literate audience, certainly, but not a specialized one. The critical issue here is the extent to which literary metaphor can be understood primarily by reference (a) to the text itself; (b) to shared cultural frames. According to the Lakoff-Johnson-Turner theory of metaphor, metaphor maps the known onto the unknown: i.e., the source domain must be highly structured and well understood (both for author and audience) so that it can successfully provide a model by which to understand the target domain. The theory thus predicts that those metaphors will be most highly valued whose source domain and mapping are a matter of common knowledge.

The theory predicts, in other words, that accessible metaphors can be interpreted without reference to specific contextual information. Of course, nothing in the theory rules out idiosyncratic metaphors based on unconventional or personal knowledge (though it is likely that such metaphors would be harder to understand and hence have less broad appeal). However, the broad appeal of *The Second Coming* strongly suggests an account in terms of widely shared cultural frames and conventional metaphoric mappings.

The rest of the paper will seek to motivate such an analysis. Sections 2 and 3 will focus on information conventionally available to construct an interpretation: conventional knowledge, that is, of the source concepts CENTER and PERIPHERY and of conventional metaphors employing them. Section 3 will show how the poem's metaphoric structure emerges from this conventional background. In the conclusion, discussion will focus on specific contextual information about the author and circumstances of writing. It will be argued that such information may be essential to a critical assessment of the poem, but that it serves primarily to enrich our understanding of metaphors whose structure is already determined by culturally structured readings of the text.

2. Center vs. periphery: A basic image schema

Upon reading Yeats' *The Second Coming*, it is immediately obvious that notions of center and periphery play an important role. The poem begins with an image of a hawk (periphery) moving in widening circles about a falconer (center). The next lines explicitly invoke an image of decentering, which is followed up in the second stanza by an image of desert birds circling around a sphinxlike creature. As we shall see, these explicit images are but the tip of the iceberg. Concepts of center and periphery will prove to dominate the poem's metaphoric structure, even where they are not explicitly invoked. To prove this point, it will first be necessary to examine the concepts of center and periphery in detail. These are basic concepts, fundamental to our experience of space, with a rich conceptual structure. That is, the relation of CENTER to PERIPHERY is what the Lakoff-Johnson-Turner theory terms a *basic image schema*. According to the theory, such basic image schemas provide the projective structure of metaphor: their structure (in the source domain) is carried over into the target domain. Let us therefore examine the details of this structure. There appear to be three aspects to the center/periphery schema: center/periphery relations in perception, in part/whole structure, and in dynamic interactions among moving objects.

2.1. Perceptual center vs. periphery

Our first experiences of center/periphery structure involve the body as center and the perceptual field as periphery. As percepts move to the center of the perceptual field, they are perceived in multiple sensory modalities, gain in intensity, and become ever more critical to survival.

A distant entity can be seen but occupies a very small portion of the visual field. As it comes nearer, it occupies a larger portion of the visual vield, and other senses come into play: hearing, as it comes within earshot; touch, as it comes within reach; also smell and taste. Finally, as it comes into intimate contact with the body, it engages basic instinctual drives for nourishment, reproduction, avoidance of injury – experiences of great intensity.

In short, the potential for interaction increases as an object approaches the center. At the very periphery, where an object is visible but inaudible, no interaction is pos-

sible. As the center nears, there is the potential first for verbal interaction, then for long-range physical interaction, for physical grasping, and finally for intimate contact.

2.2. Central vs. peripheral parts

The body also serves as a first instance of yet another kind of center/periphery organization: the organization of a whole object around one central part. The body consists, in the first instance, of the torso: the central part containing most of the vital organs, to which are attached a variety of peripheral parts – arms, legs, the head and neck. Of course, the concept soon generalizes since children rapidly encounter a variety of objects organized into central and peripheral parts.

Note the importance of central parts. The whole gains its integrity from the center. Remove a limb, and what remains is still a body; remove the central torso, and all that is left is a heap of disconnected parts. Remove a wheel or a door and a car remains itself: remove the chassis, and it falls apart. Unity depends upon a strong center capable of holding the peripheral parts together.

2.3. Dynamic center and periphery

Center and periphery also play a critical role in dynamic movement. Distance from the center correlates with an increase in centrifugal force. The package held loosely to the chest is secure; the same package held at arms length must be gripped tightly lest any sudden movement dislodge it. The child at the center of the merry-go-round sits at her ease while others at the edge must hang on for dear life. In other words, the center is secure; the periphery is precarious, likely to 'fly off the handle' without warning and needing to be kept 'in orbit' by an application of force.

The body (specifically the torso) is in the first instance a perceptual, physical, and dynamic center; however, the concepts of center and periphery which derive from basic bodily interactions of the sort sketched above are rapidly generalized, making the distinction between center and periphery critical to a variety of cognitive domains.

This concludes our survey of the center/periphery schema. There are other, more specific concepts (falcon/falconer, for instance) which act as source domain concepts in the poem. However, these can readily be shown to elaborate on one of the center/periphery schemas. For example, the falconer is clearly a kind of dynamic center about whom the falcon circles. Discussion of such specifics will therefore be delayed until one other critical element has been examined: the presence of conventional center/periphery metaphors.

3. Conventional metaphors based on the center/periphery schema

There are at least four conventional metaphors based on the center/periphery schema. Each forms part of a larger system and is expressed in a variety of conven-

tional figures. They differ in two ways: (a) according to which aspect of the center/periphery schema is used as the source; (b) in their choice of target domains, which include society, morality, and politics.

3.1. Social center/periphery

There is a metaphor of society as an object with a place for each individual. The following sentences illustrate conventional phrases embodying this metaphor:

> The great danger, of course, is that society will *fall apart* instead of *holding together*, especially if we can't *keep people in their place*. After all, no one wants to feel *out of place*.

If society is an object, of course, one may have central and peripheral parts:

> some people are *marginal*; but the *in crowd* will form an *inner circle* to run things.

This metaphor maps the part/whole structure of physical objects onto society while imposing an organization into central and peripheral parts. Various metaphoric entailments follow. Most importantly, if society is a whole, its unity and coherence – even its very identity – depend upon the central part, for if it is removed, the peripheral parts will no longer join together to form a whole. Moreover, the continued unity of the whole depends on the strength of the center, i.e., its ability to hold the periphery in place.

3.2. Moral center/periphery

There are a variety of conventional metaphors in which virtue consists in maintaining one's moral balance:

> If you do not keep your life *in balance* you may *fly off the handle* or *fall* into temptation in some other way. Try to *keep an even keel*, live an *upright* life, and watch out for *stumbling blocks*.

But it is far easier to maintain balance at the center: the periphery is inherently unstable. Thus we find conventional expressions like the following:

> It is wise to stick to the *middle of the road* and avoid *extremes*. If your philosophy of life is *off center*, things will get *out of control*, so avoid *far out* behavior.

This metaphor maps balance (and hence stable, controlled motion) onto appropriate moral behavior; the sudden, jerky, uncontrollable movement resulting from imbalance is mapped onto the spasmodic activity of uncontrolled passion. The dynamic properties of center and periphery interact to form a larger metaphoric complex: the

center, being least subject to centrifugal force, corresponds to those most capable of exercising moral self-control; the periphery, dynamically unstable, corresponds to the morally uncontrolled, who must be restrained by external force.

3.3. Political center/periphery

This metaphor partakes of both (1) and (2), as the following expressions testify:

> Terrorist actions are the actions of *extremists*, *fringe* groups whose political programs are *marginal* at best. They succeed only in places where the political *center* has been eroded, strengthening the *far left* and the *far right*.

This metaphor, while mapping onto a different target domain, illustrates how the first two metaphors naturally cohere into an even larger metaphoric system. If society is a body, the center must hold the periphery in check; but if social harmony depends upon the moral acts of individuals, then it depends upon the social center also to be a moral center, and to act to restrain the immoral actions of the periphery. The political center/periphery metaphor is an elaboration of this larger metaphoric system: it carries with it the implication that the political center is also the social and moral center, while adding the idea that the center uses political power to control the erratic behavior of the fringe. Another specialization is the additon of left-right organization to the growing metaphoric complex.

3.4. Centers as influential figures: Orbits and spheres of influence

There are a whole series of conventional metaphors in which social and pyschological influences are understood in terms of physical forces:

> He felt *pushed* into making the decision too soon, perhaps because the teachings of Islam exerted a strange *pull* on him, though job *pressure* played a role as well.

Since the center is able to control or influence elements on the periphery, influential figures are naturally understood as central figures. The most common such metaphors employ concepts like *orbit* and *sphere of influence*:

> John Dewey was long able to keep American education *in orbit around* his philosophy of education. Even today, most have yet to *pull away* and most curricula have yet to be *drawn into* any other *sphere of influence*.

This metaphor employs the dynamic aspect of the center/periphery schema; it is not, however, entirely isolated from the others, since social authority depends upon more than force: it also depends upon its attractiveness as an ideal. It is thus possible to compose this fourth metaphor with the other center/periphery metaphors discussed.

In short, the four metaphors, while capable of functioning separately, can be combined to yield a composite metaphoric model of social order. In such a model, the

center maintains the stability of society – its unity as a body – through its moral stability, political power, and the attraction of its ideals. Each of these characteristics enables it to overcome the destructive frenzy of the fringe.

This combined system of metaphors is itself arguably conventional. To describe someone as politically moderate, for example, carries clear connotation of moral balance and the potential to unite society around a common core of values. The opposite description – extremist – is equally charged, for we are very likely to assume that an extremist is a morally imbalanced follower of crazy ideas who is likely to tear society to pieces unless checked by the forces of moderation.

These results suggest that there is an extraordinarily rich system of center/periphery metaphors embedded within our cultural consciousness, a system whose structure derives from physical center/periphery relations, but which strongly influences our understanding of social, moral, and political order. If the Lakoff-Johnson-Turner theory is correct, this system should provide a major basis for poetic metaphor in Yeats' *The Second Coming*.

4. Center vs. periphery in *The Second Coming*

4.1. The first stanza: Metaphors of decentering

The poem's first stanza is an excellent example of what Lakoff and Turner call *metaphoric coherence*. At first glance, it might seem a loose concatenation of images. But the images are all variations on a single metaphor of decentering, so that they have an overpowering cumulative impact.

The first two lines create an image of a hawk turning high above the falconer, out of control, out of earshot, almost out of sight. This image is, at base, an elaboration of the metaphor of orbits and spheres of control. Ordinarily:

- The falconer controls the falcon by means of spoken commands;
- The falcon willingly obeys the command, hunting when signaled, returning when ordered.
- The falcon moves around the falconer, remaining within the falconer's sphere of influence.

The conventional metaphor CENTER AS INFLUENTIAL FIGURE allows us to interpret the image as a metaphor in which one figure moves under another's influence, though as yet we cannot determine their identity. However, the poem specifies that the gyre is *widening*: the falcon is moving to the periphery. And the falcon cannot hear the falconer: it has moved to the very edge of the perceptual field, beyond the falconer's sphere of influence. The resulting image is thus a metaphor of decentering, of loss of control.

In other words, the first two lines depend critically on the notions of *perceptual* and *dynamic* center, which metaphorically entail a scene in which the influence of the center has gradually waned, and then vanished.

The third line evokes a different type of center: the *central part* which unifies the whole. If the center cannot hold, then nothing can restrain the centrifugal tendencies of

the periphery. This image evokes the conventional metaphor of society as a body, held together at the center. The resulting metaphor is another metaphor of decentering: in this case, a metaphor of social disintegration. Unlike the first image, the target domain is clearly indicated in line four. What is the result of social disintegration? Anarchy.

Now that the target domain has been specified, it becomes clear that the first two images are complementary. If the image of falcon and falconer applies to society, then we must conclude that society is the falcon, which had moved hitherto under some influence which kept it under control, close to the center. Now the center has no influence, so things fall apart, resulting in anarchy.

The remaining lines of the first stanza might not appear, at first glance, to evoke center/periphery metaphors. They seem, instead, mere descriptions of a state of anarchy. But metaphors of decentering are still active under the surface.

In lines five and six, war is described as 'the blood-dimmed tide' which drowns 'the ceremony of innocence'. But what is a tide? It is water encroaching on the land. Water is formless, shifts continually, and hence lacks a center. Metaphorically, then, it is the essence of anarchy. The land, by contrast, is stable; if it is to be drowned by the tide, it is an island, the stable center about to be engulfed by the violent waves at its edge. This image becomes particularly wrenching if we remember the quintessential 'ceremony of innocence' in traditional Western society: the baptism of infants.

Lines seven and eight contrast 'the best' to 'the worst', evoking morality as a target domain. Since themes of center and periphery are already so dominant, it is natural to interpret 'the best' as the moral (and perhaps political) center, and 'the worst' as the moral (and perhaps political) extreme. Perceptually, intensity increases towards the center. It is the center, the body, which is alive, passionate, moving purposefully toward a goal. Thus, lines seven and eight describe an inversion of the natural order: the center lacks all conviction – it is lifeless, helpless to resist the moral and political extremes which seek to pull it asunder.

In short, as all commentators would agree, the first stanza describes a society fallen into a state of anarchy. But it does so by systematically elaborating a series of metaphors based on conventional center/periphery mappings. The stanza's raw power derives from the cumulative impact, as the center is systematically stripped of every attribute conventionally attributed to it. By the end of the first stanza, the author has decentered every aspect of the system of center/periphery metaphors for social order: the center retains neither its capacity to influence, its moral balance, nor even the minimal strength required to preserve order.

4.2. The second stanza: Metaphors of recentering

The second stanza of the poem marks a new departure:

> Surely some revelation is at hand;
> surely the Second Coming is at hand.

These lines evoke the Christian scheme of history. As a result, the social disintegration described in the first stanza is now framed as that which precedes the second

coming of Christ. The effect is to elaborate and specify the metaphors which have preceded.

The image of the falcon and falconer remains vague all through the first stanza, as it is not clear who or what functions as the falconer. But once we invoke the Christian scheme of history, the falconer can only be Christ and his teachings, conceived as the still center around which Western society has orbited for the past two thousand years. The falconer is Christ, the gyres are the cycles of history, and the social decentering of the first stanza reflects the tribulations preceding the Second Coming. The Second Coming therefore represents the hope of a final return to the center – a return of the hawk to the falconer's hand. But there is one problem: the falcon is too far away to respond to its master's voice.

Yeats then constructs another metaphor of recentering. We start with an image set 'somewhere in sands of the desert'. The desert lies at the fringes of the populated land: it is, in other words, yet another metaphor for the periphery. The center of society is in the watered lands, where the people live and work. The desert is the place for fringe elements: bandits, nomads, and hermits.

At the edge of things, therefore, we encounter 'a shape with lion body and the head of a man, a gaze blank and pitiless as the sun'. This image invokes an image of the Sphinx, with all its associated history and myth – a pagan force from the far past. But we have by no means escaped from metaphors of center and periphery. There is a conventional metaphor according to which ESSENCE IS CENTER, APPEARANCE IS PERIPHERY, as may be witnessed in such expressions as:

Let's get to the heart of the matter
You need an inside view of things
He's only kind on the surface

But this creature's physical center, its torso, is that of a lion, not a man. We have to deal, in other words, with a creature more lion than man, possessed of a lion's ferocity without a human heart.

Worse yet, its gaze is 'blank and pitiless as the sun'. There is yet another set of conventional metaphors according to which the eyes are the window to the soul, which is the essence, the center, surrounded by a bodily husk. In short, this creature's soul is but a reflection of the desert sun: harsh, burning pitilessly on a parched and barren land.

And as this beast with the heart of a lion and the soul of the desert 'is moving its slow thighs', suddenly it becomes a center, for 'all about it reel shadows of the indignant desert birds'. Obviously enough, the image of birds' shadows reeling around the beast is meant to recall the image of the falcon turning around the falconer. In other words, we see the 'rough beast' moving from periphery to the center, taking up the central role formerly occupied by Christ, and thus inverting the former scheme of things.

Consider the contrasts between the two images: The center is not man, but beast. It is mute: presumably the indignant desert birds are not. There is not one bird circling the center, but many. They circle, not in obedience to the falconer, but in indig-

nation at the beast. If we interpret this new image in parallel to the image of the falcon, we construct a metaphoric picture of a new social order operating on very different principles.

We are, in other words, dealing with another elaboration of the metaphor of social center and periphery; but in this social order the center controls not by authority but only by virtue of size, strength, and ferocity. It is not circled by a single bird, a single unified society, but by many desert birds, many fringe elements, united only in their indignation at the center, which perhaps they would overthrow if they could. Otherwise, their only clear motivation for circling the beast would seem to be the hope of obtaining carrion in its wake. If this society moves beyond anarchy and war, it is only to achieve tyranny and the peace of desolation.

As we move to the end of the poem, we gain a clear image that this rough beast, this Sphinx, has been waiting at the periphery throughout the Christian era, and now is awakened, a nightmare moving in toward the center. What place better represents the center of things than Bethlehem, the place where Christ was born? Thus we must face the nightmare vision of the rough beast slouching in from the desert, from the edge of things, to the very center, to be born as Christ was, replacing the willing obedience of Christian society with its own horrific social and moral order.

In short, the metaphor of the rough beast is a metaphor of recentering: but a terrifying recentering in which center and periphery are inverted. In this new order, the center's authority is based not on the influence of its ideals, but on the fascination of power and the hope of spoils. It does not unify the fringe elements: rather, it stalks on, intent on its own fell purposes, indifferent to their fate. It has no moral balance: thus it can only increase the moral imbalance of the periphery. Goodness, beauty and truth are missing from the heart of the beast's new social order, for it lacks both heart and soul.

5. Conclusions

The account developed in the preceding sections demonstrates the power of the Lakoff-Johnson-Turner theory of metaphor, for the whole analysis rides on its most distinctive claim: the claim that conventional metaphors are part of a living system of ideas. In another approach, it might have seemed inappropriate to spend most of the paper analyzing conventional patterns of thought and language, not even beginning to discuss the poem until the paper was well underway. But the results bear out the theory: analysis of conventional language reveals the presence of a conventional system of center/periphery metaphors which arguably define what Western culture means by the phrase 'legitimate authority'. These metaphors provide the necessary background knowledge to understand *The Second Coming*; they define the structure of its metaphors, by enabling us to see how each metaphor in the poem contributes to the final horrific image in which legitimate authority has been not merely overthrown but undone for all time.

It is enlightening to compare the account developed in this paper with well-known critical accounts of *The Second Coming*. For the most part, they present essentially

the interpretation presented above, but they focus, not on the metaphoric structure of the poem, but on other matters.

One such matter is Yeats' complicated metaphysical system. In this system, Yeats conceived of history as evolving through the interaction of interpenetrating 'gyres', or cones, each gyre representing the development of a civilization and its predominant tendencies. As one gyre widens, the other narrows, until a crisis point is reached every two thousand years. At this crisis point, one gyre has grown as wide as it may, and is spent; the other gyre, narrowed to its limit, can narrow no more. This crisis signals the birth of a new civilization based on entirely different principles; it begins to expand, while the old gyre recedes. This matter receives considerable attention, particularly since Yeats detailed it in an explanatory note in one edition of the book in which *The Second Coming* appeared (cf. Partridge, 1976: 109–113; Rajan, 1969: 119–122; Unterecker, 1959: 15–29, 164–168).

Another such matter concerns the personal significance of the various phrases in the poem. One critic writes (Partridge, 1976: 113):

"When Yeats wrote the poem he was distressed by events in and after the First World War. Many Irish Patriots had lost their lives in the Easter revolution of 1916. The center *Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world* is thought to refer to the Bolshevik revolution in Russia ... In the fine line 'the ceremony of innocence is drowned' he had in mind the extinction of aristocratic and cultured ways of life he respected."

Other critics make similar comments (Rai, 1983: 113; Stock, 1964: 186).

Both of these are issues of context: what additional inferences we draw when information about context and situation of utterance are added. At least with respect to *The Second Coming* we are arguably justified in drawing the following conclusion: that while this information does allow further inferences that enrich our understanding of the poem, they presuppose the metaphoric structure analyzed in the body of the paper. For example, the key point about Yeats' metaphysical system is that it is itself a system of metaphors coherent with those presented in the poem; we can therefore combine them, and gain additional insights into Yeats' vision knowing that the author intended the poem as an expression of his metaphysical system. But the impact of the poem depends precisely on the author's having successfully developed those metaphors within the poem in the first place; if these had failed, the poem might still be an illustration of the metaphysical system, but it would not stand on its own as a great poem. Similar points may be made about inferences that the poem refers to the historical situation in the early twentieth century: we infer this on the grounds that the early twentieth century displays the structure entailed by the metaphors in the poem and that it inspired the author to write the poem. Such an inference depends, again, on first having interpreted the metaphors as described in the body of the paper.

Leaving such issues aside, therefore, it is important in conclusion to emphasize how the Lakoff-Johnson-Turner theory has contributed to the analysis of *The Second Coming*: it has revealed the underlying unity of the poem, demonstrating how its power derives from its relentless exploitation of a single underlying and highly conventional metaphoric system in which social order and legitimacy are interpreted in terms of the relation between center and periphery.

References

Frost, Robert, 1969. The poetry of Robert Frost, edited by Edward Connery Latham. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Johnson, Mark, 1987. The body in the mind: The bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, George, 1990. The invariance hypothesis: Is abstract reason based on image-schemas? Cognitive Linguistics 1(1): 39–74.

Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson, 1980. Metaphors we live by. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, George and Mark Turner, 1989. More than cool reason: A field guide to poetic metaphor. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Rai, Rama Nan, 1983. W.B. Yeats: Poetic theory and practice. Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg. [Salzburg Studies in English Literature under the direction of Professor Erwin A. Sturzl; Poetic drama and poetic theory; Editor: Dr. James Hogg.]

Rajan, Balachandra, 1965. W.B. Yeats: A critical introduction [second edition]. London: Hutchinson.

Stock, A.G., 1964. W.B. Yeats: His poetry and thought. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Unterecker, John, 1959. A reader's guide to William Butler Yeats. New York: Noonday Press (Farrar, Straus and Giroux).