

REVIEW ARTICLE

LIVING IMAGERY, A DEAD TONGUE, AND A CONTEMPORARY MODE OF ANALYSIS: SILK'S THEORY OF POETIC INTERACTION*

Within the compass of a monograph, Michael Silk has produced a study that bids for judgment on three separate counts. *Interaction in Poetic Imagery* purports to be a contribution (a) to literary theory in general, (b) to the analysis of a broad range of effects of language texture in archaic and early classical Greek lyric and dramatic verse, and (c) to the "literary lexicography" of Greek of the same period. Silk continuously integrates his theoretical, critical, and philological concerns in the course of his study. He expounds his central concept of "interaction" and breaks it down into subtypes by means of specific analyses of poetic imagery, mostly Greek but also some English instances. At the same time, this concept is aimed at generality through Silk's attempts to demonstrate its utility when applied to an entire poetic "corpus." He describes this corpus as "the whole of archaic and early classical verse, . . . from Archilochus at the one end to Aeschylus, Pindar, and Bacchylides at the other, . . . with the exception of the two [Homeric and Hesiodic] hexametric traditions . . ." (p. 79). In addition, since the subject of study is "poetic imagery," and, within that, predominantly metaphor, Silk understandably devotes a good deal of attention to diction: how to distinguish "normal" (nonpoetic) usage from "abnormal" (poetic) usage, and "dead" from "live" metaphor. (The making of these distinctions is what Silk means by "literary lexicography.") Despite Silk's integration of his different concerns, it is easier to describe and evaluate what he has done if his concerns are taken up one by one. I shall begin with the one that receives the first and most prolonged treatment from Silk himself, namely, the theoretical.

Silk's purported contribution to general literary theory is the concept of "interaction." Although it is the core of the book and ultimately becomes a full-blown technical construct with four subtypes and numerous more minor divisions, interaction, oddly enough, nowhere receives from Silk an accessible, nonmetaphorical and nontechnical, definition. I shall therefore introduce it with a definition of my own. In its broadest and most basic sense, Silk's "interaction" appears to denote the perception of relatedness between words in a text, over and above the ordinary grammatical relatedness of the parts of a sentence. One's perception of this extra, poetic measure of relatedness is cued either by the combinatory possibilities of words (in syntax, in lexical sets) or by their physical properties (sound, relative proximity in a stretch of text, prominence of position at the head or end of a line of verse). An interaction is carried through when the perceiver is led to recognize, not just a potential significance in an extra measure of verbal relatedness, but the

* *Interaction in Poetic Imagery, with Special Reference to Early Greek Poetry*. By M. S. SILK. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974. Pp. xiv + 263. \$21.00 (in U.S.A.).

actual existence of a corresponding extra measure of meaning. Silk's interaction, then, is a complex concept. Although it has its sources in the complexities of language, the process with which interaction is identified seems to be essentially psychological—that is, the registering of manifold and intricate semantic connections as these arise from, and proceed far beyond, the relations of words on a page.

While Silk would certainly agree with the emphasis on interrelatedness in my definition, he almost as certainly would protest at my mingling of psychological and linguistic factors in describing interaction. It is a curious (I would say dubious) feature of Silk's literary theory that he insists on drawing a sharp line between the workings of human psychology and human language. Indeed, the motive he alleges for developing his concept of interaction is to reclaim through redefinition I. A. Richards' seminal notions of "tenor," "vehicle," and "ground," in order to make them word-oriented, not idea-oriented, terms. Like many other twentieth-century students of literature, Silk acknowledges the illuminating force of Richards' distinctions between "tenor" on the one hand and "vehicle" on the other, as the literal and figurative dimensions of language respectively, and "ground" as the connections and relations that hold between the two. But Silk laments what he sees as an unfortunate sacrifice of concern with language to a preoccupation with idea content in Richards' theory. This is Silk's own statement of counter-method: "My dualism and analysis, not logical but *terminological*, and so dealing with the immediate words we hear, aspire to explicate and, modestly, enhance perception" (p. 11; Silk's emphasis).

It seems to me that Silk falls into double misunderstanding on this crucial issue: first, in construing Richards' psychological focus in the relevant passages of *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* as a commitment to the logical or idea content of an image that excludes attentiveness to language; and, second, in perpetuating a false (because untenable) division between ideas and language by insisting that he himself is concerned only with the latter ("not logical but *terminological*"). In fact, Silk is constantly concerned with the psychological impact and reverberations of poetic imagery, as he would have to be if his critical commentary were to have value beyond the recording of philological evidence and observations. Silk also makes the interesting and intelligent point that the "substantive aesthetic status," the "significant existence" of an effect of language turns completely on the question of its "perceptibility" (pp. 73, 81). However, this fundamental inconsistency on Silk's part—sometimes admitting psychological considerations along with verbal ones in his discussion, sometimes insisting on the purely verbal nature of his study—is never faced or overcome. Fortunately for him and his readers alike, Silk's practical criticism takes into account operations of the mind under the stimulus of language which his theoretical position allegedly excludes. This theoretical position, nonetheless, is consistently characterized as a purely verbal one. Silk's special vocabulary items for enforcing this view of his enterprise are "*terminological*" and "*terminology*." And it is within the deliberately chosen confines of this verbal theory of poetic imagery that Silk feels the impulsion to bring the concept of interaction into being and to set it up in the place of Richards' admittedly nonverbal "ground."

Silk approaches the specification of what he means by interaction through a

description of the act of reading (here, too, psychology puts in a tacit appearance). To begin, he defines what he means by "tenor" and "vehicle" as these two dimensions of language are registered by the mind of the reader:

It emerges, then, that the tenor may be conceived of as a sequence which the vehicle interrupts and presupposes in part. The word "tenor" is certainly well suited to such a conception; we speak, for instance, of "the whole tenor" of a work. And a vehicle, terminologically abnormal and unpredictable, represents the interruption of such a sequence and the suppression of part of it in favour of "extraneous" material, material not "at issue." Once again, although less obviously, we are only pressing a non-technical use of a current term: one speaks of something as "a vehicle" for something else [p. 12].

Silk's representation of the experience of reading poetry centers on the unpredictability, the overturning of ordinary expectation, that has so often been recognized as a primary characteristic of poetic language. Because "the tenor . . . is the norm, the vehicle . . . a departure from the norm, and under normal circumstances we follow the dictates of the norm," there is on the part of the reader a standing presumption of a "rigid terminological barrier . . . between tenor and vehicle" (pp. 11, 22)—that is, to put it more simply, a standing presumption in the mind of the reader against switches from nonfigurative language to figurative language. Silk calls any such switch, any "breakdown" of the "terminological barrier" between tenor and vehicle, an "interaction" (p. 23). "By interaction," he says in summary at a later juncture, "I mean any local cross-terminological relation between the tenor and vehicle" (p. 79).

It will be evident from the foregoing definitions of interaction, Silk's and mine, that the concept is intimately bound up with analyzing and making precise what goes on in poetic imagery when language becomes, and is perceived as having become, figurative. Silk makes a lucid early announcement of his subject matter that contrasts happily with his obscurity and indirection in expounding interaction: "By imagery I mean primarily metaphor, simile and the various forms of *comparatio*; the tropes and schemes, that is, based on analogy or similarity. 'Based,' of course, refers to the logical basis . . ." (p. 5). (This mention of "logical basis" is one of a number of places where Silk's thought reveals its indebtedness to Richards.) What ensues upon this statement of subject is, as I have been noting, an alleged refocusing from a logical to a verbal perspective. It implements Silk's insistence that interaction is a "terminological" concept and that the four main subtypes which he postulates are the classes into which words divide according to the uses made of them in poetic imagery. Silk claims that his theory and typology of interaction are almost entirely an original creation (see his discussion of the matter in Appendix 1, pp. 209–210). It is true that he makes sparing reference to other theorists and historians of ideas who have dealt with concepts of poetic imagery, and that he does not employ any theories of language structure, poetic or nonpoetic, present or past. Why Silk feels impelled, however, to proceed in such an isolated and independent fashion is not explained, even though the question of what his theory and typology of interaction do for the analysis of poetic language that other theories do not is a question that ought not to have been passed by in silence. Since Silk opts for implicit theoretical justification, letting the presentation

and application of the subtypes and smaller details of interaction speak for themselves, I will now proceed to review the main features of his typology of interaction and then to assess its utility as a proposed formal system for studying imagery.

The first and most important subtype of interaction for Silk is the class he calls "neutral-based." In neutral-based interaction a transition is effected from tenor (understand literal meaning, what is "at issue") to vehicle (understand figurative meaning, what at first seems "extraneous") by way of "neutral terminology." Neutral terminology is diction which "coheres"—that is, combines equally acceptably or idiomatically—with tenor terminology and vehicle terminology (p. 85). In providing a middle ground or meeting place which accommodates a switch from literal to figurative expression, neutral terminology becomes the basis of a vast array of interactions ranging from simplicity to subtlety and encompassing, in Silk's treatment, both simile and metaphor. To make this large subtype more manageable, Silk confines the operation of neutral-based interaction to words that stand in grammatical relation with one another and stipulates this as a matter of definition (pp. 24, 86). His elementary paradigm of neutral-based interaction is Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 48–49, on the Atreidae:

μέγαν ἐκ θυμοῦ κλάζοντες Ἄρη
τρόπον αἰγυπιῶν, οὔτε . . .

where the tenor is μέγαν ἐκ θυμοῦ . . . Ἄρη, τρόπον "an 'empty' marker," αἰγυπιῶν οὔτε . . . the vehicle, and κλάζοντες "neutral terminology" because princes and eagles can alike be said to "cry aloud" (pp. 16, 85). The sequential patterning manifested in the above image under Silk's analysis is T–N–V, the clearest and easiest effectuating of the middle-ground function identified with neutral-based interaction. Silk's more complicated paradigm of this subtype is Aeschylus *Persae* 424–26, a sequence from the Persian messenger's account of the disaster at Salamis:

τοῖ δ' ὥστε θύνους ἢ τιν' ἰχθύων βόλον
ἀγαῖσι κωπῶν θραύμασιν τ' ἐρειπίων
ἐπαιον, ἐρράχιζον.

Here, according to Silk, the tenor is τοῖ plus the whole second line ἀγαῖσι . . . ἐρειπίων; the vehicle is θύνους ἢ τιν' ἰχθύων βόλον; the neutral terminology ἐπαιον and ἐρράχιζον because both men and fish can be said to be "slaughtered" and "boned" (pp. 19, 85, 108). The sequential patterning in this image is more complex; Silk says V–T–N (not entirely accurately because of the initial τοῖ from T, and the cueing function of ὥστε, on which he makes no comment).

Varieties and effects of neutral-based interaction comprise by far the largest number of instances of a subtype adduced by Silk—ninety-six from Greek poetry—and they occupy the longest of the chapters in Part 2 of the study where the theory is elaborated and applied, chapter 5 (pp. 85–137). The progression in this chapter is from qualities of relative definiteness or indefiniteness in the verbal articulation of neutral-based interactive images to interpretations of their semantic functions. Silk introduces what he says are three different basic forms of neutral-based interaction: "pivot," "glide," and "convergence." In the first two the relevant formal quality appears to be distinctness or explicitness, with pivot denoting "a more overt or forceful operativeness" of neutral terminology in effecting a transition

between tenor and vehicle, and glide denoting a “light and momentary” transition which has “a preparatory or introductory character” (pp. 87, 88). But the connection between the two is not further specified or defined. Hence it is impossible to ascertain what common formal basis Silk has for his three terms when convergence is defined subsequently with regard to “prominent position,” “the stationing of the neutral term, or terms, after the vehicle” (p. 103). By this point it seems that the relevant formal quality has become less a matter of articulation than of location, unless there is some common denominator here (which Silk does not indicate). His treatment of the semantic functions of neutral-based interaction attains, however, a solid footing. Silk does well to stress within his own system the importance of the illumination or clarification which figurative expression so frequently provides, and which corrects the initial impression of its “extraneousness” by showing that the meaning conveyed by the image is not “extraneous” at all. Again, as with the formal qualities, Silk makes a tripartite division of the semantic functions of this type, distinguishing “the explanatory function,” “the specifying function,” and thematic “support” (pp. 114 ff., 127 ff., 134 ff.) amidst, once again, a good deal of overlapping and ambiguous assignment.

Silk’s second subtype of interaction is the class he calls “intrusive.” Intrusion can most easily be understood by mentally subtracting the middle ground of neutral terminology and envisaging the much more abrupt switch from tenor to vehicle, or vice versa, that would result. One sort of result would be felt by the reader as intrusion: the coming to the fore of vehicle terminology within a sequence of tenor terminology without prior notice, or—the more creative possibility, according to Silk—the intruding of tenor terminology upon vehicle. It should be emphasized that the intrusion meant here is purely semantic; so far from there being any syntactic rupture or anacoluthon, the sentence structure proceeds and completes itself in a perfectly grammatical way. Nevertheless, the number of instances of intrusive interaction adduced by Silk is extremely small—seventeen from Greek poetry. He offers no reason at all for this curious fact, which leaves room for doubts as to the adequacy of the empirical evidence for the existence of this subtype. Doubts increase, moreover, when Silk identifies the semantic function of intrusive interaction as being the same as one function of neutral-based interaction: explanation. However, this is explanation that can achieve dramatic impact in the abruptness of its introduction and “produce a certain feeling of *enactment*” as its particular effect (p. 140; Silk’s emphasis). Silk’s paradigm for intrusive interaction is *Agamemnon* 966–68 (pp. 24, 140), a sequence from Clytemnestra’s speech upon the arrival of Agamemnon:

ρίξης γὰρ οὐσης φυλλὰς ἔκετ’ ἐς δόμους,
 σκιὰν ὑπερτείνασα σειρίου κυνός.
 καὶ σοῦ μολόντος δωματίῳ ἐστίαν . . .

This is one of Silk’s favored T-into-V intrusions. The vehicle is *ρίξης γὰρ οὐσης φυλλὰς*. Since leaves are not said to “reach home,” the intrusive tenor is *ἔκετ’ ἐς δόμους*, which anticipates the emergence of a “real” subject for itself as the tenor surfaces in the new sentence, . . . *μολόντος δωματίῳ ἐστίαν*, Agamemnon’s home-coming.

Silk’s third subtype, “extra-grammatical” interaction, really owes its separate

existence to the prior definition of neutral-based and intrusive interaction as classes of "interaction within the grammar." The semantic residue in the central concept then becomes the third subtype. "Extra-grammatical" does not, however, mean anything like "ungrammatical"—the force of the term is that this type of interaction takes place independently of syntactic relations, inflectional agreements, and even the order or relative location of the words in the line or lines in question. What is at stake in an extra-grammatical interaction is simply the occurrence of two words or short phrases that perceptibly belong to the same area of linguistic meaning and are so perceived because the interval between them is within the compass of immediate memory. Silk's paradigm for extra-grammatical interaction is Stesichorus 8. 2-4 (Diehl) on Aelios, the Sun:

ὄφρα δι' ὠκεανοῖο περάσας
ἀφίκουσ' ἱαρᾶς ποτὶ βένθεα νυκτὸς ἐρεμνᾶς

(pp. 24, 150). The extra-grammatical interactive relation here, according to Silk, arises between ὠκεανοῖο (T) and βένθεα (V) as members of "the same 'watery' semantic field." What he sees as distinguishing this relation from neutral-based and intrusive interactions, respectively, is, first, that "ὠκεανοῖο is not neutral" but is "in tenor terminology" (Silk means here that "Okeanos" in the genitive is the name of a god like the Aelios who is subject of the poem); and, second, that "there is obviously no question of any displacement," which would betoken intrusion (Silk here alludes to the fact that one can speak normally of the "boundaries" or "limits of Okeanos"). Chapter 7 (pp. 150-72) undertakes to demonstrate the critical applicability of the concept of interaction outside of grammar. Even though the number of instances is greater than that for intrusion—thirty-eight from Greek poetry—the category remains problematic in character because the functions adduced by Silk to justify its existence overlap so extensively with those of neutral-based interaction. (One wonders whether the division into grammatical and extra-grammatical is not, in fact, unmotivated in Silk's system since he does not attribute to it any role or theoretical force beyond the use made of it in defining the subtypes of interaction.) The semantic functions of extra-grammatical interaction as identified by Silk are "preparation" for a surfacing of the tenor, and (in close conjunction, often too close to distinguish among them except possibly by the order of T and V in their sequential patterning) "anticipation of a theme," "link," and "retrospective imagery" (pp. 152, 155, 157 ff., 167 ff.).

The fourth and final subtype of interaction is the class of "aural" relations, which Silk limits mainly "to word-initial or—where the second element in a compound is in question—morpheme-initial alliteration; and this, as it happens, is usually consonantal alliteration" (p. 174). The paradigm of aural interaction is Aeschylus *Persae* 599-600, a sequence from the opening of the Persian queen's speech which follows a choral ode on the naval disaster at Salamis: ὦς, θταν κλύδων / κακῶν . . . (pp. 24, 79). Near the beginning of his study Silk admits openly that aural interaction "differs fundamentally from all the others" which "are overtly and directly *semantic* interactions" (p. 25; Silk's emphasis). Yet he does not specify either here or elsewhere what this fourth subtype has in common with the other three to make it a type of interaction; for one thing, it is obvious that reference to "tenor" in connection with aural effects makes little sense, that these effects

are, if they are anything in this typology of Silk's, all "vehicle." The closest that Silk comes to indicating on what basis aural interaction might be classed with the other three is in this observation near the end of his study: "The alliterations that concern interactions are largely 'associative' " (p. 175).

Because aural interaction continues to seem anomalous alongside the other three subtypes, it is perhaps not surprising that Silk's discussion of the semantic functions of this fourth type fails to identify any that are peculiar to aural interaction alone. Instead, every semantic function identified for aural interaction merges or closely tallies with a semantic function of another type or types. For example, "alliterative link" (pp. 174 ff.) corresponds to extra-grammatical "link" (pp. 157 ff.); "alliteration as enforcement for interaction" (p. 184) is akin to neutral-based "support"; "aural preparation and isolation" (p. 187) parallels extra-grammatical "preparation"; and, finally, "aural suggestion" (p. 191) bears a near resemblance to extra-grammatical "anticipation of a theme" and "retrospective imagery." No student of poetry will be taken aback by Silk's claim that aural interactions are frequent in his Greek corpus—he lists ninety-two occurrences. His candor about their poetic quality would also appear to be borne out by all but the half a dozen or so which he discusses in detail; he remarks of his list in general that it is "more notable for its length than for any subtlety of procedure within it" (p. 184). The final brief chapter (chap. 9, pp. 194–206) connects directly in its content with the character of the semantic functions of aural interactions, specifically, their susceptibility to combining with interactions of other types. This chapter is devoted to instances of other "combinations" of interactions: "preparation," "pivot and convergence," and, yet again, "link."

This completes the typology of interaction as Silk presents it. How is the large theoretical component of his book to be evaluated? In my opinion, the theory of "interaction" is deficient theory on a variety of counts. Viewed as a formal system only, the amount of redundancy and uncertainty that it admits tells against it. In the matter of redundancy, enough has already been said to suggest the great amount of overlap that exists, especially in the identification of semantic functions for subtypes of interaction. I have already remarked on some of the inexplicitness and imprecision to be found in Silk's definitions, but more indication needs to be given of the degree of uncertainty that characterizes this study. Silk himself says of two subdivisions of neutral-based interaction: "The distinction between pivot and glide is not always easy to make. Both are momentary in effect and both have an introductory or preparatory character" (p. 88). Two other observations are characteristic: "It is pertinent to emphasize the point that neutral status is relative, not absolute" (p. 85); "It should be stressed . . . that the explanatory function, in no sense formal itself, may coexist with other functions, including formal functions. . . . It may, alternatively, be a neutral term's primary or, in effect, sole function" (p. 115). Confronted with the alien apparatus of such a theory, one is not tempted to wrestle with difficult cases of classification, since it is unclear what would be gained by the effort. The semantic functions of different subtypes may turn out to be identical anyhow, or one may assign the domains of tenor and vehicle differently for the words of a given sequence and still arrive at the same critical conclusion about the poetic force of the passage. One illustration of this point must suffice because it requires going into a fair amount of detail.

Let us take an instance of Silk's classification and commentary, an English one for (perhaps) maximal clarity of the issues at stake. The following lines, spoken by Shakespeare's Cleopatra to Charmian, are alleged to contain a neutral-based interaction:

Peace, peace.
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep.

Silk says that "baby" and "sucks the nurse" are the two parts of the vehicle; and "at my breast" and "asleep" the two neutral terms which create "the force and pathos" of the interaction within them of tenor and vehicle: "'at my breast,' which babies are and the asp is, and 'asleep,' which nurses may be and Cleopatra soon will be, 'sleep' being a stock equivalent for death" (p. 104). Thus, according to Silk, the neutral-based interactive pattern is (T)-V-N-V-N. But a quite different subtype and equally plausible literary interpretation are assignable to the lines, still within Silk's system. The lines might be taken as a case of intrusive interaction, with "baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse" as vehicle, and "asleep" as the intrusive tenor in the sequence "sucks the nurse asleep." "The force and pathos" would then arise from the ironic impact of an "enacted" displacement of the idyllic natural image of the vehicle: the baby at the breast that (a) sucks itself asleep, or (b) is suckled asleep by its nurse. This "baby" of Cleopatra's, however, "sucks *the nurse* asleep." The sequentiality of the syntax here triggers the jolt to thinking, This is a strange baby that does such a thing; and it induces suspicion in turn as to the strangeness of this "sleep." At this point the interpretation which I am sketching converges with Silk's: the final effect identified in both is the premonition of Cleopatra's death. But if one is to propose or adopt a formal system for identifying and classifying the ways language works in poetic imagery, it should not be possible to have this amount of slack in its basic typology. For, if basic distinctions become a matter of indifference, the indifference can rapidly and rightly spread to the view taken of the theory itself.

But the problematic character of interaction as a formal system hints at deeper underlying problems. The most serious and inexplicable of these, I think, is Silk's decision virtually to go it alone and operate in a vacuum to create a literary theory. Silk himself characterizes his concept of interaction as a revision of Richards, but there is little resemblance between the two critics. In fact, the most noteworthy similarity of which I am aware between Silk's work and that of a predecessor is in the phrasing of Silk's definition of tenor and vehicle (quoted above, p. 148, from his p. 12) and the dictum of Hermogenes of Tarsus as translated by W. Bedell Stanford and mentioned by Silk (p. 11):

It is Oblique Language when a term not relevant to the subject matter but signifying some extraneous object of reference is introduced into a sentence so as to unite in its significance both the subject at issue and the extraneous object of reference in a composite concept; this is also called Metaphor by the grammarians [*Greek Metaphor: Studies in Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 1936), p. 14]

Hermogenes' *floruit*, however, was A.D. 170. This is the later twentieth century. It does not speak well for the often nebulous, ad hoc, and insubstantial nature of

Silk's theory and typology of interaction that it has been developed independently of other theories of language structure, poetic or nonpoetic, present or past. Yet there is little place for present-day formal linguistics or semantics in such a miscellaneous collection of imagistic "effects."

One regrettable consequence of Silk's independent approach to literary theorizing is the confusion in his thinking about the true object of his study and, hence, the true subject of his book. As I have indicated above, Silk is at pains to insist early on that his is a verbal-terminological study, not a logical-psychological one. A possible source of his view that his is a nonpsychological study may be his association of psychologically oriented approaches to literature with intentionalism, a position which Silk attacks on pages 59–64 and again in Appendix 8 (pp. 233–35). Yet the psychological dimension of literature obviously encompasses not just the psychology of the writer, but also the psychology of the reader. The latter, in fact, impinges at almost all points on Silk's concerns without ever receiving explicit acknowledgment or integration in the discussion. The wedge which he seeks to drive between the workings of language, which he purports to be analyzing, and the workings of the mind, which he claims to be leaving aside, thrusts much of the book into a mystifying terminological limbo of its own making. Moreover, having repudiated a logical-psychological frame of reference for his discussion, Silk has at best only occasional recourse to the guidelines available to him in the structure of language itself—above all, in syntax. It is easy to exemplify the attendant difficulties for his theory. I have already mentioned the lack of a clear basis for determining the domains of tenor and vehicle; the unclarity is due in large measure to definitions of these concepts which take no account of phrase and clause structure. Another example of a linguistic difficulty is the considerable significance which Silk accords to sequences of T, V, (N) elements as productive of different patterns of interaction. But, surely, as one sees from his Greek and English examples, the sequence of elements is far more constrained in English word order than in Greek. How can one, then, undertake to generalize about patterns of interaction as if they revealed something vital about poetic imagery without taking into account the constraints on word order that vary from language to language and produce variations in those patterns?

A second regrettable consequence of Silk's independent approach to literary theorizing is his failure to invest his central concept with a fundamental coherence. "Interaction" really remains a catch-all, little more than a rough-and-ready label for any resonances between words in a short stretch of poetry that one happens to notice. To my knowledge, the closest analogues to such a catch-all concept are (a) the later classical rhetorical category of *σχῆμα* (*figura*) with its vexed divisions into *σχήματα λέξεως* (*figurae dictionis*) and *σχήματα διανοίας* (*figurae sententiae*); and (b) the British (neo-Firthian) structural-linguistic notion of collocation sets—that is, groupings of words in a text made only on the basis of their near physical proximity, which may in turn be the basis of some further perception of relatedness. Silk, however, makes no mention of either. And, as anyone knows who has looked into classical *figurae* and modern collocations, neither has proven to have any particular adequacy as a foundational concept for literary theory.

Since Silk's theory of interaction is formulated principally to deal with metaphor and simile, it is not impertinent to ask whether there are any language-based

theoretical proposals for dealing with metaphor and simile, or figurative language more broadly, that can compete with Silk's. I am familiar with two, both possessed of superior coherence and internal clarity. One is the parallel-sentence analysis (simultaneous pairing of a T-sentence and a V-sentence by separating the words in the verse that belong to each, and filling in the blanks left by inference from the "ground," the analogical relation, thus exposed). This combined syntactic-semantic method of analyzing metaphor was proposed by Geoffrey N. Leech in *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (London, 1969), pages 150-57, building upon earlier suggestions by Winifred Nowottny in *The Language Poets Use* (London, 1962), pages 49-71. The Leech-Nowottny analysis would cover, as far as I can tell, the first three types of interaction but not the fourth, "aural" interaction. It also offers the advantage of an intelligible and practicable syntactic-semantic distinction between simile and metaphor, which is not available in Silk's theory.

For a broader theory of "poetic imagery," one that would encompass the range of effects in Silk's interaction, I believe one is on firmer ground with Samuel R. Levin's concept and typology of "couplings," as set out in *Linguistic Structures in Poetry* (The Hague, 1962). Levin's couplings have much in common with interactions in their embrace of aspects of language from phonemics to semantics. Couplings, however, instead of being afloat in a nebulous "terminological" realm, are firmly defined within the coordinates of Roman Jakobson's well-known "axis of selection" and "axis of combination," so that the nature and potential utility of couplings as constructs are more open to comprehension and assessment than is Silk's system. It is regrettable that, although Silk shows acquaintance with Nowottny, he does not appear to be acquainted with the work of either Leech or Levin.

I turn now to the second dimension of Silk's study—his concern as a critic with analyzing and interpreting instances of poetic imagery in his archaic and early classical Greek corpus. Overall, the critical dimension of this book calls for a mixed judgment, but the judgment is, on balance, much more positive than negative. More specifically, the areas in which Silk's criticism shows least well are those in which the criticism is brought in as accessory to the theory of interaction rather than as a set of legitimate perceptions in its own right.

Why do Silk's critical perceptions suffer when they are made accessory to his theory? The answer is simply this: They suffer because they are then subject to demands that they would not incur if they were taken simply as criticism. Let me illustrate. Silk says in his introduction that an important criterion for a poetic theory is that "it must presumably be based on a large number of instances in any event . . ." (p. xii). However, his own analyses of interactions turn on a relatively small body of examples, some of which recur to satiety in his pages. At a later point in his study he gives this description of his corpus of interactions: "There are several hundred instances in all, rather less than a third in Pindar, rather more than a third in Aeschylus" (p. 81, n.). "Index 2: Passages Discussed" (pp. 255-58) lists 353 instances of interactions, but it must be borne in mind that more than one-fourth of these are "aural" ones whose poetic quality is conceded by Silk to be negligible. In fact, Silk's critical procedure imposes much greater selectivity than even the preceding figures would suggest, for his best and most characteristic showings are by way of particular insights intensely rendered. He

carries his lexicographical learning lightly and applies it to his discussions of verbal nuance and of that even more elusive matter—the connotative force of an image—with a consistently deft touch. As a result, his criticism simply cannot be exhaustive or comprehensive to the extent that his theory seems to require.

Taken on its own terms as commentary and interpretation, the critical dimension of Silk's book may fairly be described as a study primarily of the imagistic style of Aeschylus, with a very considerable comparative study of the imagistic style of Pindar. Other poets figure too, often to their and Silk's great mutual advantage; but the proportions of the study are so heavily weighted toward Pindar and Aeschylus that I shall restrict my discussion to examples of Silk's treatment of them only.

Silk's overview of the imagery of Pindar and Aeschylus is of a reciprocally illuminating contrast in styles. Gradually the specific passages which are brought under scrutiny in his pages assemble into a composite picture of what is involved in what Silk calls the "delicacy" of Pindar, the "sturdiness" of Aeschylus. An especially good, extended demonstration of Silk's caliber as a critic is to be found in his comparative analyses of the verbal means by which Pindar and Aeschylus shift into metaphor. Silk isolates a number of passages which he regards as definitive of the "subdued" transitions and subtle modulations characteristic of Pindaric imagery. The generalization made with respect to these passages is that Pindar tends to rely on conjunctions, particles, and especially prepositions and separable prefixes—so-called empty words or relational elements—to effect switches between tenor and vehicle. Because these word classes are not emphatic or prominent in syntax, the introduction of an image by means of them is, correspondingly, muted and unobtrusive. A direct quotation from Silk on Pindar (pp. 115–16) may stand as a first illustration of the critical method employed throughout the book:

A paradigmatic instance of the explanatory function in a more or less pure form is [*Pythian*] 2.62 ff.:

εὐανθέα δ' ἀναβάσομαι στόλον ἀμφ' ἀρετῇ
κελαδέων. νεότατι μὲν ἀρήγει θράσος
δεινῶν πολέμων . . .

'I shall ascend a prow that is crowned with flowers, while I sound the praise of valour', says the Loeb translator. Pindar says more. The interaction concerns *ἀναβάσομαι*, and this word certainly does mean approximately what Sandys says it does—*ἀναβάντες ἐπέπλεον* (*Iliad* 1.312)—but also, economically and graphically, points straight to the tenor: *ἀναβήσομαι ἐς τὸν κατ' ἀρχὰς ἥια λέξων λόγον* (Herodotus 4.82), which is precisely what Pindar 'really' means and precisely what he then does. The ode began with *βαθυπολέμου* . . . "Ἄρεος and *ἀνδρῶν* . . . *σιδαροχαρμῶν* (vv. 1f.) and now returns to that theme.

What Silk is focusing upon here as the point of critical interest is the double role of *ἀναβάσομαι*, and specifically the role of the verb prefix *ἀνα-*, in transmitting the simultaneity of meaning in Pindar's complex image: "I will mount—the prow— / I will rise—to the praise of high deeds."

Another pair of Pindaric passages discussed by Silk (pp. 97, 101) reveals the

role of prepositions in conveying and controlling their imagistic content. The passages are *Pythian* 10. 53–54:

ἄωτος ὕμνων
ἐπ' ἄλλοτ' ἄλλον ὥτε μέλισσα θύνει λόγον

and *Olympian* 2. 19–20:

ἐσλῶν γὰρ ὑπὸ χαρμάτων πῆμά θνασκει
παλίγκοτον δαμασθέν.

Translated as literally as possible, using brackets to indicate where an element must go to render the sense of the Greek in English, the word-for-word sequence of the first passage runs, “The most choice (the flower)—of songs— / from one to another [theme]—like a bee—flits—theme.” In this sequence the *ἐπὶ*, the “from” in “from one to another,” both coalesces the two senses of *ἄωτος*, “most choice” and “flower,” and provides a semantic gradation between moving among flowers and moving from song to song that prepares the sense of perfect justness in the final correspondence: “like a bee flits / theme flits.” The effect, as Silk notes, is hardly that of an overt simile at all. To proceed to the second passage, its word-for-word sequence may be represented as “For under noble joys—[rankling] misery—dies—rankling—is overcome.” Here *ὑπὸ*, “under,” emerges as crucial to the metaphor of the dying of misery, which is really a brief personification—a type of figure of which the Greek mind was inordinately fond. The role of *ὑπὸ* in effecting the personification of misery consists in associating a sense of agency with the joys, and thus suggesting for them too a half-life as personifications. The result is to unify the whole scope of the image as an inward combat in which joys are the victors over misery. But the “allegory,” such as it is, is latent. Silk makes this clear. It exists only in the implications of Pindar’s lines; it is not explicit in his restrained form of expression.

I find it more difficult to give examples of Silk’s critical commentary on Aeschylus, the reason being that there is an *embarras de richesse*. One fine section is the companion piece to the analysis of Pindar’s use of empty words in introducing his imagery. Under parallel analysis, Silk shows how Aeschylus augments the forcefulness of his style by using lexical primaries—nouns and verbs especially—as his means of shifting between tenor and vehicle. We may single out *Prometheus Bound* 368 (ποταμοὶ πυρὸς δάπτοντες ἀγρίαις γνάθοις) and Silk’s remarks on “the sense of strength,” “that truistic energy, which the verb, above all elements of speech, can possess” (p. 98) as applied to *δάπτοντες*. The central position in the line of “devouring,” a verb item used indifferently, as Silk shows, of “fire” and “wild animals,” sets up a powerful centripetal pull whose effect is to unify the entire imagistic sequence: “Rivers—of fire—devouring—with savage—jaws.” Later Silk alludes to the clustered consonants and plosives that give voice to the superb swell of energy in this Aeschylean line (p. 179).

Another well-treated passage in Aeschylus is the fragment on the bereft Niobe, 273. 12–13 (Mette):

Φοῖβος δὲ μῆνιν τίνα φέρων Ἀμφίονι
πρόρριζον αἰνῶς ἐξεφύλλασεν γένος;

In this image the switch from tenor to vehicle is set in motion, according to Silk, by *πρόρριζον*, a verb which applies equally to the utter destruction of human beings or trees, roughly the English “rooted up.” It is characteristic, Silk notes, of Aeschylean imagery that a certain vigorous momentum can be set up for going from tenor to vehicle without necessarily providing all of the logical intermediary steps. This is true in this fragment: the step from *πρόρριζον* to the vehicle *ἐξεφύλλασεν*, the stripping of the leaves of the (family) tree imaged in the mother’s being violently stripped of the tender offspring she has put forth, is at once strikingly abrupt and intuitively intelligible. Silk’s comments are most apposite: “The items are not interchangeable; . . . no tree or other plant can quite have its foliage stripped off (*ἐξεφύλλασεν*) ‘by the roots,’ ‘root and all,’ or whatever. The dissonance is not sardonic in this case, but plaintively, and perhaps still appropriately, harsh” (p. 94). An even more virtuoso discussion by Silk, which is too long and complicated to summarize, concerns the “enactment” produced by the series of “intrusive” images in the parodos of the *Agamemnon* (pp. 145–47).

To summarize concerning Silk as a critic, the close attention to language which the theory of interaction enforces is obviously productive of many good analytical findings, but its application is also aided by the combination of self-restraint and sensitivity which he brings to his texts. The wellspring of Silk’s critical virtues is, I think, his clear consciousness of what the endeavor of criticism should be—in his words, “the recreative mind” operating with “tact” upon a passage with the objective of “progress towards a finer articulacy” (p. 3). Indeed, Silk is unhesitating in applying his standards for responsible criticism beyond his own efforts. On this wider plane of concern for critical standards, his courageous and finely reasoned observations on the “overstatement” in “Whitman’s interpretation of the organic unity of the *Iliad*” (pp. 63–64) show his judgment working at its best.

The third and final dimension of Silk’s book that requires comment is what he himself calls its attempted contribution to “literary lexicography” (pp. 83–84). Silk is necessarily led to attempt distinctions between “abnormal” and “normal” diction, including cliché and dead metaphor, by his overarching concern with poetically vital interactions of words. Following the lead of W. B. Stanford, who in *Greek Metaphor* objected to taking the definitions of Liddell–Scott–Jones as a last word, Silk has done a lot of hard thinking and personal research on the peculiarly vexed subject of word choices and word nuances in a “dead” language. However, in a sense which may be more real than he ever concedes, Silk is attempting the impossible in undertaking to retrieve distinctions between conventional and creative diction in sixth- and fifth-century Greek with the degree of specificity and precision at which he aims. Silk is right, nevertheless, that the undertaking is crucial to any discussion of the nature and effectiveness of metaphor. One of the most interesting and thought-provoking chapters in the book is chapter 2, “Dead Metaphor and Normal Usage,” where Silk sets out his general guidelines and criteria for assessing and categorizing lexical items. Here he draws on the procedures of descriptive and structural linguistics in a sound, informed fashion to develop notions of “distribution” and “spread” as tools for analysis of diction. Appendix 3 (pp. 211–23) is long and important: it adds to chapter 2 the “ancient testimony” for the “normal” or “abnormal” character of various authors’ usage. Silk’s most

informative discussions of his procedures in lexical analysis are found on pages 40–41 and 82–84.

I am not qualified to evaluate the extent to which Silk succeeds in his attempt to reconstruct the parameters of poetic creativity in word choice in archaic and early classical Greek and to approximate to judgments about prosaic or poetic usage that were made (or would have been made) by a living speaker in those periods. However, in his use of lexical considerations as a significant continuing feature of his critical commentary, I find Silk judicious and persuasive; and I am inclined to think that his efforts in “literary lexicography” are another major strength of his book. In this regard, Silk’s excursus on the difficulties faced by a twentieth-century scholar and critic in trying to apply the ancient notion of catachresis in metaphor, when the resources of vocabulary available at the time cannot be reconstructed with certainty, amounts to an original and forthright piece of truth-telling (Appendixes 2 and 5, pp. 210–11, 228–30). I believe that other readers will find stimulation too in Silk’s word-studies and what they reveal of the character of archaic and classical Greek thought, not least the poets’ self-conscious and varied exploitation of the heritage of Homeric diction.

As I have tried to show in the foregoing discussion, Silk’s *Interaction in Poetic Imagery* is an ambitious book, and the demands which its author placed on himself in writing it transfer directly to its readers. The most impressive aspect of Silk’s work is the rigor of his view of literary criticism and scholarship—a view embracing, simultaneously, theoretical articulation, textual scrupulosity, historical learning, and fineness of poetic perception. Even where his work falls short of his ideal, it remains a tribute to it. In his most basic sense of what he was about in his study it would seem that Silk continued under the influence, if not the inspiration, of I. A. Richards. A pair of clauses from *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York, 1936) can stand admirably as an epigraph to *Interaction in Poetic Imagery*: “In this subject it is better to make a mistake that can be exposed than to do nothing, better to have any account . . . than to have none” (p. 115).

JANEL M. MUELLER
University of Chicago