1 "*Shattering the Glass Ceiling*" *A Metaphor Becomes a Metaphorical Story*

> Although we weren't able to *shatter* that *highest, hardest glass ceiling* this time,
> thanks to you, it's got about *eighteen million cracks in it*. . .
> And the *light is shining through* like never before,
> *filling us all with* the hope
> and the sure knowledge that *the path will be a little easier* next time.
> – Hillary Clinton concession speech, Washington, DC, June 7, 2008.

This brief segment from Hillary Clinton's concession speech during the 2008 U.S. Democratic presidential primary campaign blends several apparently distinct metaphors into a coherent whole that expressed something very important to her and to millions of her supporters. The segment can be understood in several ways, most obviously as a story about her first (2008) campaign for the Democratic Party nomination for president, and about the disappointing end to that campaign. It also illustrates several points about metaphor use and comprehension that I will expand on throughout this book. The metaphors, which I have marked in italics (see inset for an explanation of terminology and typographical conventions[1]), are all quite conventional – indeed, many who heard and read about her speech may not have recognized all of them as metaphors.

> **Notation**: I mark metaphorical phrases by placing metaphorical elements in italics and the entire phrase within quotation marks (or in a block quote, as above). I use single quotes for invented examples ('my lawyer is a *shark*') and double quotes for attested examples from actual discourse ("*filling us all with* the hope"). I refer to the metaphorical word or phrase (e.g., "*filling us with*") as the "*vehicle*" and the entity, object, or concept described (in this case, Clinton's strong showing in the campaign) as the "*topic*." The idea that is described or expressed (in this case, "causing people to experience something intensely") is the *apparent meaning*. The relationship between vehicle, topic, and apparent meaning is described as "the vehicle *mapping onto* the topic."

The passage as a whole also tells a story; it is an example of something quite different, which has not received much attention among metaphor

researchers and scholars: a *metaphorical story*. I will begin this chapter by discussing the passage as a story. Then I will show how the individual metaphors might be explained by several conventional approaches to metaphor, and finally I will show how understanding it as a *metaphorical story* adds to the meaning of the passage. In the last half of the chapter, I will introduce several other blends of story and metaphor that will be discussed in detail in later chapters, including metaphors transformed into stories, stories implied by metaphors, and visual images that portray, evoke, or imply metaphorical stories. By the end of this book I hope to have convinced you that many metaphors, including very familiar metaphors, imply and bring to mind stories, that these stories contribute in fundamental ways to understanding metaphors, and that metaphors can often be fully understood *only* through the implied stories.

Stories from Hillary Clinton's Concession Speech

"We make narratives many times a day, every day of our lives" (Abbott, 2008, p. 1). Clinton's concession speech is no exception. She began with an ironic comment about the social context, "this isn't exactly the party I'd planned, but I sure like the company," which implies a contrast with an alternate story in which she would have given a victory speech, not a concession speech. She proceeded to tell the story of her campaign, opening with a brief generic story about her campaign volunteers, in which she expressed her gratitude toward "everyone who *poured* your *hearts* and your hopes *into* this campaign, who drove for miles and lined the streets waving homemade signs, who scrimped and saved to *raise* money, who knocked on doors and made calls, who talked, sometimes argued with your friends and neighbors." This was followed immediately by two specific stories, each expressing a different facet of the campaign. The first story exemplifies dedication and sacrifice, and anchored the campaign in very young women like "thirteen-year-old Anne Riddell from Mayfield, Ohio, who had been saving for two years to go to Disney World and decided to use her savings instead to travel to Pennsylvania with her mom and volunteer there."

> **Terminology**: For the present I will refer to any sequence of causally or thematically related events as a *story*. When the story is presented in a more highly structured way, with a goal, opposition or setback, and resolution, I will refer to it as a *narrative*. Stories and narratives will be defined and discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

The second story referred to the story of women's suffrage, and anchored the campaign in the very old, women who were "born before women could vote," exemplified by Florence Stein of South Dakota,

who was eighty-eight years old and insisted that her daughter bring an absentee ballot to her hospice bedside. Her daughter and a friend put an American flag behind her bed and helped her fill out the ballot. She *passed away* soon after and, *under* state law, her ballot didn't count, but her daughter later told a reporter, "My dad's an ornery, old cowboy, and he didn't like it when he heard Mom's vote wouldn't be counted. I don't think he had voted in twenty years, but he voted *in place of* my mom."

Each of these stories provides a context in time and place; both satisfy some of the elements usually associated with a complete narrative. The story about Florence Stein is the more complete of the two: It includes a setback (Stein's death) and a resolution (her husband cast a vote for Clinton in his wife's memory). It also represents a minor victory that implicitly contrasts with the major primary election defeat Clinton had just experienced. Finally, it embeds Clinton's story in the broader, more universal story of women's struggle for political rights, a story to which Clinton referred repeatedly throughout the speech.

After several more brief stories about her own campaign, Clinton congratulated Obama on his victory and briefly recounted the story of her relationship with Obama, followed by a summary of Obama's own story. Then she merged the two stories, as a basis for urging her followers to work for Obama's election: "We may have *started on* separate *journeys*, but today our *paths have merged*. And we're all *heading toward* the same *destination*, united and more ready than ever to win in November and to *turn our country around*, because so *much is at stake*."

According to Schank and Berman (2002, p. 288) a story is "a structured, coherent retelling of an experience or a fictional account of an experience. A satisfying story will include ... themes, goals, plans, expectations, expectation failures (or obstacles), and perhaps, explanations or solutions." According to Bruner (2002, p. 18), "narrative in all its forms is a dialectic between what was expected and what came to pass. For there to be a story, something unforeseen must happen."

These and many other passages from Clinton's concession speech satisfy both of these definitions. The speech as a whole is a retelling of Clinton's experience, shared with her supporters. This particular passage has the form of a story about a "*journey*" that she and Obama have been taking separately but now are taking together. That is the *vehicle* of the metaphorical story: The *topic* is the campaign for the presidency, which they were undertaking separately and in competition but are now taking together. The topic story is motivated by her goal of being nominated and her defeat by Obama, and thus it also satisfies Bruner's criterion that "something unforeseen must happen." It provides a partial resolution by transferring her and her supporters' hopes and aspirations to her victorious rival, Barack Obama, and extending the story of the campaign into a *future* story of Obama's victory – and

beyond, to an eventual successful campaign by a woman, who might just possibly be Hillary Clinton.

After another series of future-oriented stories focused on the coming campaign, Clinton returned to the theme that was implicit in her opening stories: "But I am a woman and, like millions of women, I know there are still *barriers* and biases out there, often unconscious, and I want to *build* an America that respects and *embraces* the potential of every last one of us." She then exhorted her supporters to "*aim high*," and drew the following comparison:

> As we gather here today in this historic, magnificent building, the fiftieth woman to leave this Earth is orbiting overhead. If we can blast fifty women into space, we will someday *launch* a woman into the White House.

This passage was followed immediately by the "*glass ceiling*" passage, which reprises and summarizes the entire story of the campaign. In parallel to the overall story of her campaign, the "*glass ceiling*" story describes a reversal of expectations, the "*glass ceiling*" that led to the failure of her expectations, along with an explanation and a potential solution. Although this story does not culminate in the protagonist overcoming the obstacle, it does include her receiving help along the way, and it does culminate in her promise that the story is not "*over*," that the canonical ending, overcoming obstacles and succeeding, will happen "next time."

A more extensive and detailed account of narrative and storytelling will be provided in Chapter 2.

"*Glass Ceiling*" and Other Metaphors in the Clinton Speech

Even relatively brief stories often include metaphors. In the brief story about Clinton's defeat and her subsequent support of Obama's campaign, several metaphors related to "*journey*" appear. The "*glass ceiling*" story also includes several metaphors in addition to "*glass ceiling*." In fact, it is saturated with metaphors: about a third of the 53 words in the passage are metaphors or part of a metaphorical phrase. The speech as a whole is only slightly less densely populated with metaphors.

Traditionally, metaphors have been defined as substituting one word for another, or comparing one word with another. Traditional metaphor theory focused primarily on noun-for-noun metaphors, often invented ('a lawyer is a *shark*') or taken out of context ("Juliet is *the sun*"). Clinton's speech includes only a few metaphors that consist of a single noun (e.g., "*hearts*," "*journey*," and "*destination*") and none that take the traditional form of "x is a *y*." The speech also contains some other parts of speech used as single word metaphors ("*poured* your *hearts* and hopes," "*under* state law," "*barriers* and biases," "*launch* a woman into the White House"). However, most of the metaphors in

Clinton's speech, including "*aim high*" and "*glass ceiling*," have to be analyzed as phrases of two or more words.

Conventional approaches to metaphor comprehension. Linguists and other metaphor researchers have proposed a variety of approaches to explain how people understand metaphors. One approach is to look at attributes or qualities of the metaphor vehicle that might be '*transferred*' to the topic. "*Ceiling*" transfers the attributes of being a '*higher*' part of a '*space-enclosing structure*' to the topic, which in this sentence is not explicitly mentioned. From the context we can infer that the topic has something to do with conditions that prevented Clinton, a woman, from achieving career advancement. "*Glass*" transfers the attributes of "*hard*" and '*transparent*' to the topic, which is most directly the word it modifies, "*ceiling*." Since the topic of "*ceiling*" is '*obstacles* preventing career *advancement*,' by extension "*glass*" transfers attributes of "*hard*" and '*transparent*' to '*obstacles* preventing career *advancement*.' The apparently simple two-word metaphor requires a complex, two-stage interpretation beginning with the nominative metaphor (the noun, "*ceiling*") and proceeding with the noun "*glass*," grammatically transformed into a metaphorical adjective. This apparently simple interpretation also requires that we make inferences based on the immediate context (a political concession speech by a woman who sought the Democratic nomination for president) as well as on the larger cultural context, including the history of women's participation in U.S. politics and the origin of the "*glass ceiling*" metaphor and its previous uses in other contexts.

A related approach is to show how the metaphor vehicle establishes an *ad hoc* category of things (or actions) that have similar attributes (Glucksberg, 2008; Wilson & Sperber, 2004). *Glass* is hard and transparent, and *ceiling* is a part of a structure that is above the speaker or other reference point. "*Glass ceiling*" establishes a category of things that are hard, transparent, and overhead. To *shatter* is to break or destroy violently; *a crack* is a line along which a brittle substance is weakened or partially but incompletely broken. To "*shatter* a *glass ceiling*" establishes a category of actions that break or destroy something hard, transparent, and overhead.

Clinton was clearly *not* talking about a physical structure. Her political advancement was not blocked by a hard, flat surface above her head. Her political advancement *may* have been blocked by subtle and unacknowledged ('*unseen*') biases against women serving as political leaders, biases that are unacknowledged ('*transparent*'), difficult to counteract, and even more difficult to change ("*hard*"). In order to make sense in the context of Clinton's speech, since she is clearly *not* talking about a physical structure, the qualities transferred from vehicle to topic, the qualities that form the basis for an *ad hoc* category, require further metaphorical interpretation (Ritchie, 2003b). It is conventional to refer to an organizational hierarchy in terms of

vertical location in space (e.g., to '*move up in* the organization' means to *get a series of promotions*). By extension, "*ceiling*" is a '*barrier to upward motion*,' a "*hard*" ceiling is a '*difficult barrier to upward motion*,' and a "*glass ceiling*" is a '*barrier that is unseen until one encounters it*,' also a '*barrier through which one can see the levels one is unable to reach*.' As the italics indicate, all of these explanations are themselves metaphorical, so they do not really explain how people make sense of the phrase, but they at least express the idea in terms of more conventional and familiar metaphors (Ritchie, 2003a).

Broadening and narrowing. Wilson and Sperber (2004) argue that all language is ambiguous, so that understanding *any* language, including metaphorical language, requires a process of broadening the meaning of words and phrases to encompass the topic, and narrowing the meanings to exclude irrelevant or inapplicable meanings. According to Wilson and Sperber, then, "*ceiling*" and '*barrier*' are broadened to include "any aspect of a situation that impedes one from accomplishing something" and narrowed to exclude "part of a building or other physical object." '*Upward motion*' is broadened to include "achieving a position of greater power and prestige" and narrowed to exclude "physical movement in a vertical direction." These ideas help move us a little closer to understanding how a metaphor like "*glass ceiling*" can come to make sense in the context of Clinton's speech. However, like the attribute transfer and categorization account, Sperber and Wilson's account still does not specify how this process of broadening and narrowing happens, and how it leads to a particular interpretation of a metaphorical phrase (Ritchie, 2003b; 2009).

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). In 1980, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson introduced a radically new way of looking at metaphors – Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). According to CMT, the linguistic form of most metaphors is but an overt expression of an underlying *conceptual* metaphor, a cognitive relation in which one concept (usually more abstract) is experienced as or understood in terms of another concept (usually less abstract) from a different kind of experience. These *conceptual* metaphors are expressed in a number of *linguistic* metaphors; for example, KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT and UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING are the basis for common metaphorical expressions like '*I see what you mean*,' '*keep someone in the dark*,' 'the *Age of Enlightenment*,' '*an illuminating conversation*,' and the ironic aphorism "*blind leading the blind*" (cover image; Preface; Chapter 11). The metaphors in the brief passage in which Clinton joins her campaign to Obama's, discussed in a previous section, express a common conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS A JOURNEY: "We . . . *started on* separate *journeys* . . . our *paths have merged*. And we're all *heading toward* the same *destination*, . . . *turn our country around*."

Notation: Following the convention introduced by Lakoff and Johnson, I designate conceptual metaphors by placing them in small capital letters, e.g., KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT and UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980; 1999), conceptual metaphors are based on correlations in experience. For example, because young children tend to feel loved at the same time that they feel the physical proximity and warmth of a caregiver, this repeated association leads to the conceptual metaphors LOVE IS PHYSICAL WARMTH (or EMOTION IS TEMPERATURE) and LOVE IS PHYSICAL PROXIMITY. These conceptual metaphors are expressed in common expressions like 'a *warm* reception,' 'an *icy* stare,' and 'a *close* friend.' Looking closely at an object or pattern is often associated with understanding it better, and it is easier to see an object in sufficient detail to understand it when it is well illuminated; these associations provide the basis for KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT and UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING. Taller people tend to be more powerful, stronger, and more persuasive, and high places are militarily easier to defend, thus POWERFUL IS UP, a conceptual metaphor reinforced by location of temples and palaces on high hills, location of the executive suite on the top floor of corporate headquarters, and the nearly universal custom (among many species of animal as well as humans) of showing respect and submission by bowing or otherwise lowering one's head and upper body (Schubert, Waldzus, & Seibt, 2008).

In "*shatter* that *highest, hardest glass ceiling*," "*shatter*" and "*cracks in it*" are expressions of TO OVERCOME IS TO BREAK and "*hardest*" is an expression of DIFFICULT IS PHYSICALLY HARD. "*Highest*" and "*ceiling*" are expressions of POWERFUL IS UP. "*Glass*," "*light*," and "*shining through*" are expressions of KNOWING IS SEEING, KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT, and HOPE IS LIGHT. The latter interpretation is strengthened by the next line, "*filling us all with the hope*." Here, "*filling us all with*" seems to be a linguistic manifestation of HOPE IS A SUBSTANCE and A PERSON IS A CONTAINER. The final line of this passage, "knowledge that *the path will be a little easier* next time," expresses A CAREER / ELECTION IS A JOURNEY.

Metaphor and metonym. Metonym is an expression in which the vehicle and topic belong to the same domain; in metaphor, vehicle and topic come from different domains. However, as the discussion of CMT makes clear, these categories are not always distinct. If common conceptual metaphors originate in correlations in our experience of the world, then many of them started as metonyms: in a "*close*" or "*warm*" relationship, the actual physical proximity (and resultant body warmth) of the caregiver stands as a metonym for the entire experience of being loved and cared for. In an example much discussed by Lakoff and Johnson, ARGUMENT IS WAR, the conceptual relationship is probably based on early experiences in which arguments are associated with physical violence or threats of violence. In a corporate office

building, senior executives usually occupy offices that are literally *higher* in the building; '*higher* authorities' is thus both a metonym and a metaphor for organizational power.

Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera-Masegosa (2011) identify two types of metonym: part-whole metonyms ('*all hands* on deck,' in which the hand stands for the entire person) and whole-part metonyms ('*the court* ordered his immediate release,' in which the institution stands for the person or persons who belong to it). As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, these are not discrete categories: metaphors and metonyms are often blended, and it is sometimes difficult to classify a word or phrase as either metaphorical or metonymic. For many, '*passed away*' is a metaphorical euphemism for death, but for others it is a metonymic expression of the actual passage of a spiritual essence out of the body to some other location in time and space. In Robert Frost's (1969) poem, "The Road Not Taken," the entire story can be read as a literal account of a ride through the woods, a metonymic account of a ride through the woods as part of an independent-minded life, or a purely metaphorical account of the poet's choices of vocation and topic. The relationship of metonym to metaphor will figure in several sections of this book.

Perceptual simulations. In the past decade or so, scientists who study mind and brain have begun to turn away from the classic idea that mind is separate from the body, including the physical brain. Barsalou (1999; 2007) demonstrated that in principle all thought, including abstract logic as well as language use and comprehension, can be accomplished through *perceptual simulations*. In perceptual simulations, the perceptual neural systems (hearing, sight, awareness of our own inner physical state, etc.) and the motor control neural systems, used to contract (and relax) muscles for various kinds of movements, become partially activated, just as if the brain had actually perceived a sight or sound, or had actually begun to clench a fist or tense a leg muscle.

Gibbs (2006; 2008) has conducted a series of experiments supporting his contention that language activates perceptual simulations. In particular, a metaphor activates simulations associated with the vehicle. When people hear '*grasp* the concept,' the neural systems that would be used to grasp a physical object become weakly activated. Similarly, Zhong and Leonardelli (2008) have shown that people experience social exclusion as being physically cold (this will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3; for a comprehensive review, see Bergen, 2012).

According to Perceptual Simulation Theory, we would expect that people who hear "*shatter* that *highest, hardest glass ceiling*" would experience a partial simulation of a transparent pane that was blocking someone's upward motion then being violently shattered. "It's got about *eighteen million cracks in it*" would be experienced as a partial simulation of a glass pane with a network of cracks, like a windshield that has been struck by a heavy object but

not broken. "The *light is shining through*" would be experienced as a partial simulation of bright light coming through the cracked glass pane. "*Filling us all with the hope*" would be experienced as simulations of fullness, hope, and optimism. "*The path will be a little easier*" would probably be experienced as simulations of motion along a smooth, level path.

These and other theories about the identification, use, and comprehension of metaphors will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Understanding the "*Glass Ceiling*" Passage as a Metaphorical Story

Taken together, these approaches help us to understand how the various words and phrases in this passage from Clinton's speech might be understood, but they leave out something important. Like the "*different paths*" story discussed before, the "*glass ceiling*" passage tells a story about someone trying to break a hard transparent overhead structure but only putting cracks in it. The speech in which the passage appears, taken as a whole, tells an overtly different story, about a woman trying to achieve a high-status position and failing to achieve her objective, possibly because of unacknowledged ('*invisible*') gender biases. In this section I will show how our understanding of the passage is enriched by treating the entire passage as part of a *metaphorical story*, specifically as the *vehicle* in a metaphor. The immediate *topic* of the story metaphor is the story, or part of the story, about Clinton's campaign, but it also maps onto a more general topic story about women's struggle for equal opportunity and equal access to positions of power and influence.

> Although we weren't able to *shatter* that *highest, hardest glass ceiling*
> this time,
> thanks to you, it's got about *18 million cracks in it*. . .
> And the *light is shining through* like never before,
> *filling us all with the hope*
> and the sure knowledge that *the path will be a little easier* next time.

Each metaphor in the passage seems to express a distinct idea, but taken as a sequence, they blend into a single complex story that maps metaphorically onto the story of Clinton's campaign to become the first female president of the United States, within the larger context of women's long struggle for political, economic, and social equality.

"*Glass ceiling,*" a now-familiar metaphor, was initially coined by Gay Bryant (1984), former editor of *Working Woman* magazine; Bryant was also quoted in an *Adweek* article by Nora Frenkiel (1984): "Women have *reached* a certain *point* – I call it the *glass ceiling*. They're in the *top* of *middle* management and they're *stopping* and *getting stuck*." This quote blends two

common conceptual metaphors, A CAREER IS A JOURNEY and SOCIAL POWER IS UP. It also implies another familiar metaphor in which these two conceptual metaphors are merged, '*climbing the corporate ladder*.' The metaphor, "*glass ceiling*," only makes sense in the context of an implied story about a person climbing a ladder and being blocked from making further progress by an overhead barrier. "*Glass*" implies that the person is able to *see* farther up, above her position on the ladder, but "*ceiling*" implies she is stopped from '*making further progress*.'

The "*glass ceiling*" metaphor has appeared in many articles and as a visual metaphor in political cartoons over the past 30 years, almost always in reference to members of some group who manage to earn promotions to a certain level, then are prevented by various '*structural obstacles*' and '*invisible*' biases from "*reaching*" the '*higher levels*,' which they can '*see*' but never "*reach*." It was incorporated into the name of a unit of U.S. government, the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1991–1995), formed to investigate barriers affecting the careers of not only women but other demographic groups as well, including ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities. In the context of Clinton's speech, then, "*glass ceiling*" refers to the story of past attempts of women politicians, including Clinton, to achieve high political office ('*climb the political ladder*') and their failure to '*break through*' to the "*highest*" office in the nation: the presidency.

Most elements of a narrative are either explicitly present or strongly implied by the passage. Although the element of resolution is still only implied, the '*unseen obstacle*' has been weakened ("about *eighteen million cracks in it*") and further '*progress*' is implicitly promised. Clinton's narrative is more complex than Bryant's initial story, and blends elements from several conceptual metaphors. It begins with a metaphorical story about attempting to destroy a ceiling made of glass, but only damaging it. Then it shifts to a story about light shining through the damaged "*glass ceiling*," and ends with a story about the "*path*" that Clinton and her supporters are "*traveling*." As a series of story fragments this narration is hardly coherent, but it maps smoothly onto the story of Clinton's political career, in which the presidency is the "*highest*" (POWERFUL IS UP) and the '*barriers*' to attaining the presidency are the "*hardest*" (DIFFICULT IS HARD).

With "we *weren't able to shatter* . . . thanks to you, it's *got about eighteen million cracks in it*," Clinton transformed the canonical career story into a story of a collective ("we") attempt not merely to '*break through*' the '*unseen barrier*' but to "*shatter*" it – to destroy it completely. The attempt failed, but the barrier is weakened – not "*shattered*" or even '*broken*' but at least "*cracked*." Not only is it "*cracked*," it has "*about eighteen million cracks.*" In the canonical story, the '*transparency*' of the "*glass*" implies that the ambitious woman can '*see*' the "*higher* office," with all of its privileges and