

Metaphors in Literature¹

What is distinctive about literary metaphors? Why do authors use metaphors in literature? In principle, metaphors in literature don't differ in kind from metaphors in other contexts. On the one hand, we encounter many relatively prosaic metaphors within fiction, of the sort you might hear in ordinary conversation, for the unsurprising reason that the fiction aims to present something that might *be* an ordinary conversation. On the other hand, we also encounter 'poetic' metaphors in real life, for instance in political speeches and history books. Metaphors form a continuum from the prosaic to the poetic – or better, they are arrayed along multiple dimensions which conspire to produce that continuum. These dimensions include, but are not limited to, how much sustained attention a given metaphor warrants in context, how imagistic and emotionally-laden its effects are, and how novel, rich and open-ended it is.

Nevertheless, a literary context does affect interpretation in systematic ways, producing recognizable if defeasible differences between metaphors in literature and in face-to-face discourse. Most of these effects apply in roughly similar ways to all aspects of literary interpretation that depart from explicit, conventionally encoded meaning. But they are especially obvious and controversial in the case of metaphor, both because metaphorical meaning doesn't merely go beyond but expresses something different from what is literally said, and also because metaphors are especially intimately involved with non-propositional, evocative, imagistic and emotive aspects of meaning.

The ways in which the interpretation of literature differs from the interpretation of other verbal artifacts has been the object of long, familiar, and heated debate which I won't rehearse in depth here, since our focus is just on how the literary context affects the meaning-generating relationship among producer, verbal artifact, and recipient with respect to metaphor. I take it that there is an important kernel of truth in the accusation of an "intentional fallacy" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954), which is that the object of literary interpretation and evaluation is, at least typically, not what the writer hoped or intended to create, but the work she actually produced. This differentiates literature from ordinary speech, at least as a matter of degree: in conversation, we are typically prepared to reinterpret surprising utterances as slips of the tongue or otherwise unintended infelicities. With literature, by contrast, we generally treat the text as a finished product, and take our task to be making sense of it as it is.

The question is how this difference affects a text's meaning. In itself, a 'text' is just a sequence of words, ultimately marks on a page; something further must imbue that minimal object with the sort of rich

¹ Special thanks to Tyler Goldberg for discussion of poetry and poetic examples.

significance we credit literature with having. New Critics like Wimsatt and Beardsley posited an objective context that fixes a work's meaning independently of any particular interpretive agent:

The poem is...not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge.

From our current vantage point, this presupposition of a universal poetic subject – 'the human being' – and a universal interpretive background – public language and knowledge – appears as a badly misguided fantasy. All interpretation, literary and otherwise, relies on a host of unstated assumptions, many of which are restricted to quite specific contexts. Metaphorical interpretation in particular is shot through with assumptions that are especially nuanced, difficult to articulate, and contextually restricted: among other things, substantive presuppositions about how the world is or might be, but also intuitive emotive and imagistic associations and assumptions about the aims and interests of the particular conversation or work of art. As a result, the same basic metaphor – say, "the sun" applied as a mark of personal praise – can mean very different things in different contexts: as when Romeo ascribes it to his love interest Juliet, when Homer ascribes it to the warrior Achilles riding onto the battlefield, and when Louis XIV self-ascribes it as the King of France. Indeed, the very same sentence – say, "Juliet is the sun" – can mean quite different things in different speaker's mouths, as it would if Romeo's rival for Juliet's affections, Paris, were to utter it in praise of Juliet's social ascendancy, or if his friend Benvolio were to utter it as a warning against getting too close to her (Camp 2005). Given such variability, it is highly implausible to hold that a universal context determined by 'the language' and 'public knowledge' fixes the meaning of any poem or metaphor outright.

In reaction to the New Critical fetishization of textual autonomy, 'reader response' theorists like Stanley Fish (1982) treat literary texts as invitations for readers to construct their own meanings. A version of reader response theory has been especially popular among philosophers in application to metaphor: thus, Donald Davidson (1978), Richard Rorty (1987), and Matthew Stone and Ernie Lepore (2011) maintain that "metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more" (Davidson 1978, 32). And one of their main reasons for denying metaphorical meaning is that metaphors are not associated with inter-contextually stable contents that are predictively generable from public linguistic meaning – that is, with the sorts of meanings posited by New Critics. Rather than communicating ideas, they claim, metaphors cause us to notice unexpected similarities between things, with different hearers attending to dramatically different things in different contexts.²

² See my (2013a) for discussion of Davidson's non-cognitivism about metaphor.

However, this view goes too far to the opposite extreme. Even if we as readers start from our own assumptions in engaging with a text (where else could we start?), we also aim through reading to work our way out of ourselves and into the text's distinctive insights. If a reader interprets Romeo's utterance as meaning that Juliet blazes forth in anger, say, or that she is an Apollonian warrior-monarch who rises to work and retires to rest at regular times in the day, or even that she will burn and blind Romeo if he gets too close, then he is clearly misinterpreting the metaphor as it occurs in the actual play. Literary texts and their constituent metaphors may admit of multiple 'performances'; but usually this is because each of those readings is only partial, or because those readings have opted for different tradeoffs among theoretical virtues like coherence, simplicity, and fecundity which all parties accept in some form. It is always a live possibility that a fiction or poem does not cohere – indeed, that may be (one of) its (higher-order) point(s). But even then, the ultimate conclusion of disunity is only justified by showing that the text *cannot* be made to cohere, or that two incompatible interpretations are equally coherent, comprehensive, etc. It is not because the only significance the texts and metaphors have is whatever they have prompted their readers to notice, think, or feel. The kernel of truth in New Criticism is that we approach literary texts, and literary metaphors, by trying to make sense of *them*, on their terms – not as exercises in prompted self-reflection, any more than as clues to a writer's personal hopes, dreams and fantasies.

But if literary texts and their constituent metaphors are neither autonomous entities with meaning fixed by a universal context, nor empty vessels for individual readers' associations, then what provides the interpretive background which fills out and transforms the skeleton of conventional meaning into the full-bodied significance we find in literature and metaphor? Ultimately, I take it, we interpret texts and metaphors as we interpret any other human action or artifact: by asking ourselves why someone would do *that*. In the case of everyday conversational metaphors, it is (or should be) relatively uncontroversial that the speaker's intentions play a robust role in determining meaning. To figure out what "John is a bulldozer" means in the context of a discussion about who would make a good departmental chair, for instance, we try to identify what contribution the speaker might be trying to make to the conversation as it has unfolded to this point, which in turn involves determining which features associated with bulldozers might be thought to be similar to features that John might have and also relevant to the speaker's conversational purposes, her other evident assumptions about John and about departmental chairs, and so forth. In the case of literary texts and metaphors, we still try to figure out what their producers were up to; but because the object of interpretation is a published work of art, the relationship between producer and recipient is less direct, more collaborative, and more driven by aesthetic than practical ends. These differences in turn produce commensurate implications for interpretation.

First, the relationship between writer and reader is less direct with literary texts because our primary focus is on the work – which is, as the New Critics emphasized, the work as it is, and not as the writer hoped or tried to make it. For us, the writer matters only as the ‘whoever it is’ who would have as her project to create the work we encounter. That is, the subject of our interpretative consideration is the actual work as the intentional product of an “implicit” or “model” author (Booth 1961, Eco 1992). There are no straightforward rules for determining this author’s intentions; that is why literary interpretation is so interesting, and difficult. In particular, we can’t go by what the actual writer says apart from the text, because the implied author is likely to depart from the actual writer for various reasons and in various ways: for instance, because the writer is self-consciously adopting an alternative persona, as Nabokov claimed to do, or because she is deceived about her own operative intentions, as Blake famously accused Milton of being. Perhaps most importantly, the meaning we ascribe to a literary text regularly goes beyond what any one person could have explicitly anticipated at any one moment (though it is important to remember that we don’t expect speakers in ordinary conversation to consciously anticipate their full meanings, either). However, contra the New Critical assumption of context-free textual autonomy, this does not render the actual writer simply irrelevant to textual meaning: the implied author is a function of the actual work’s historical context, where this potentially includes fairly specific aspects of the writer’s biography, so long as these are features the writer could reasonably have expected her readers might know about her.³

Second, there is an important sense in which the relationship between author and reader is often more collaborative with literary texts, and especially with literary metaphors, insofar as the author wants her readers to cultivate an open-ended “free play of ideas,” and not just to identify some specific proposition. In these cases, the author’s meaning-making intention is more like an invitation to play a game, with an anticipatory endorsement of any suggestion the reader generates which falls within that game’s bounds. This is the kernel of truth, I take it, in reader response theory. However, there are important limits to this collaboration. Most basically, as we saw with Romeo’s metaphor above, even when an author deputizes readers to contribute to developing the text’s meaning, she still sets the ground rules for their collaboration. Further, unlike face-to-face conversations, the interaction between author and reader is inherently uni-directional, insofar as the reader cannot (normally) alter the text himself, nor can the author modify it in response. Thus, the interpretation of literary metaphors lacks the fine-grained, mutual give-and-take and adjustment of contextual assumptions that is so often vital to face-to-face conversation.

³ Nehamas (1987) makes many of these points in an especially well-integrated and persuasive way.

Third, the relationship between author and reader is also more indirect than in face-to-face conversation in that the author, having sent the text into the public domain, does not know exactly who her reader is. And in turn, the reader's implicit knowledge that this is so implies that he cannot reasonably contribute aspects of meaning which he knows to be idiosyncratic. In this sense, the actual reader is tasked with impersonating a "model reader" correlative to the "model author" (Eco 1992). Just how strong a constraint publicity imposes varies across works, because authors vary in the inclusivity of their intended audiences: some are addressed to quite narrow groups, while others aim to speak 'through the ages'. As with the actual writer's interpretive intentions, there are difficult questions here about when it is appropriate to import particular readers' assumptions into a text. For instance, in interpreting Romeo's metaphor I find the mapping from the sun's being the center of the solar system to Juliet's being the center of Romeo's thoughts to be so compelling that I find it quite difficult to ignore, even though I realize that Shakespeare did not endorse heliocentrism. In asking myself whether this is part of the metaphor's meaning, I ask how Shakespeare would have responded to this new information, and whether it would undermine any other aspects of the metaphor which Shakespeare, through his character Romeo, clearly did mean. Because my provisional inclination is that he would have embraced this mapping, I take it to constitute a viable contribution to the metaphor.

Publicity and uni-directionality both serve to restrict the range of assumptions readers can appeal to in interpreting literary metaphors. Cutting against these limitations, the fact that the metaphor occurs in a published text means that readers can assume, at least provisionally, that every aspect of it is the result of reflective choice and not just temporal exigency. This often has the effect of lowering the bar for how salient and relevant a potential feature has to be for it to be plausibly included as part of a metaphor's meaning. It also means that the author has a greater right to expect her readers to be aware of aspects of the world, and especially allusions to other texts, that might not be accessible to them in a passing conversation. Finally, works of literature build up their own extended interpretive contexts, including substantive assumptions about the world as well as interpretive assumptions about what sorts of features and explanatory connections are worth attending to. In particular, literary metaphors often occur, not as isolated one-off figures, but embedded within an extended series of tropes: for examples, within a series of comparisons of persons with astronomical bodies, as in Dante's *Purgatorio*, or within a history of Venice as the history of a woman's life, as in Wordsworth's "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic."⁴ These 'made to order' contexts can produce considerably richer and more nuanced interpretive networks than we find with many non-literary metaphors.

⁴ Kittay and Lehrer (1981) discuss this poem as an example of an extended metaphor.

Metaphors in scientific, political, or historical texts can equally be the subject of sustained public attention, and can be similarly open-ended and even allusive. The fact that a metaphor occurs in a literary context brings with it the further factor that aesthetic power is more squarely a norm of evaluation and a potential influence on meaning. In part, this may involve an interest in non-semantic features like sound and etymology that would be irrelevant in most non-aesthetic contexts. For instance, the final lines of Sylvia Plath's (1965) 'Ariel' contain implicit puns on 'I' and 'Eye' and on 'morning' and 'mourning', which establish a mapping between (among other things) grief in loss of a personal self and ecstasy in resurrection through poetic imagination:

And I
Am the arrow,

The dew that flies
Suicidal, at one with the drive
Into the red

Eye, the cauldron of morning.

As Plath's metaphor also demonstrates, imagistic vividness and emotional punch are often crucial dimensions of aesthetic power as well, contributing to the kind of reaction that Emily Dickenson (1870/1958) took to define poetry in general:

If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can warm me I know *that* is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry. These are the only way I know it. Is there any other way?

Partly, this is because Plath employs terms that are imagistically and emotionally evocative in their own right: 'arrow', 'dew', 'cauldron', 'suicidal'. Overall, though, the metaphor's power lies less in its use of special words and more in the construction of a sustained, highly dynamic image which is then mapped systematically onto an emotionally charged but less easily perceptible situation.

In its creation of a fairly concrete image fused to intense emotion, Plath's metaphor conforms to our standard expectations about poetic metaphor. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that all aesthetically powerful metaphors employ words which directly evoke images or emotions. For instance, when Shakespeare has Macduff utter "Confusion now hath made his masterpiece!" upon discovering King Duncan's murdered body (*Macbeth* II.3.66), the metaphorical vehicle doesn't itself conjure up many specific images or emotions (what kind of artist is confusion: a painter? a poet? what does his masterpiece look like?), let alone any that could compete in vividness and visceralness with that of Duncan's murdered body. Indeed, some metaphors are powerful precisely through their avoidance of inherently intense images and emotions: for instance, when Churchill called Mussolini "the merest utensil," much of

the metaphor's political power lay in its stripping Mussolini of typically human properties, rather than of attributing any substantive, utensil-associated properties to him. Moreover, as Churchill's metaphor demonstrates, aesthetic power is not the sole province of literature or art, nor is it merely incidental when it does occur elsewhere.

In their zeal to celebrate the importance of aesthetic aptness in our engagement with literature, theorists have often been led to deny that literary authors aim at communicating true thoughts. As Peter Lamarque puts it in a recent paper defending the role of abstract thought in poetry, "With respect to a reader's reflection it doesn't seem to matter whether [lines of poetry] take propositional form or not, thus whether they are even candidates for truth" (2009, 47). This tendency is especially forceful in the case of metaphor, as we saw above in connection with reader-response theories; but I think it should be resisted both for literature and for metaphor.

It is clearly true that purveying information is much less important to literature than to other forms of discourse; someone who reads fiction or poetry as a way of accumulating facts, or who takes straightforward factual accuracy to be an important norm of evaluation for fiction or poetry, is pretty clearly misguided. But presenting cognitive content and providing aesthetic pleasure are not incompatible: a novel, poem, or metaphor may accomplish both. In particular, it can be true both that the verbal package and imaginative process through which a poem or metaphor leads its readers are essential, as Lamarque claims, even as it is also true that a metaphor or poem leads those readers *to* some thought or body of thoughts. Moreover, presenting such thoughts is not merely an incidental by-product of most poems, novels, or literary metaphors. Authors typically stake their success in significant part on whether they accurately 'disclose' a certain aspect of the world; and readers typically care about poems, novels, and metaphors partly because they learn something about the world from them. To insist that one should only engage with literary works in aesthetic, non-alethic terms is to refuse to take those works and their authors seriously, on the terms they ask to be taken.

It is useful here to distinguish at least two candidates for cognitive and alethic evaluation. The first candidate, which is what Lamarque, Davidson, and other anti-cognitivists typically focus on, is what we might call a perspective: that is, roughly, an interpretive structure which treats certain sorts of features in the world as especially important and interesting, which seeks certain sorts of explanatory connections among such features, and which takes certain sorts of emotional and evaluative responses to them to be appropriate (Camp 2006, 2008, 2009). Lamarque (2009, 49) claims that a signal difference between poetry and philosophy is that poetry is essentially perspectival, or "integrally tied to a point of view," and

uses this to support his contention that truth-evaluability is irrelevant to poetry. I doubt that philosophy is non-perspectival in this sense – surely part of what is important, and importantly different, about Peter Strawson’s and Peter van Inwagen’s treatments of free will, say, lies in their different philosophical perspectives, in a way that cannot be reduced to straightforward disagreement about specific, determinate propositions. But Lamarque is certainly correct that the presentation of a perspective is a deeply integral aspect of many poems, and arguably essential to literature as such. Further, I think it is true, and important, that perspectives are non-propositional; as Davidson (1978, 47) puts it,

It’s not only that we can’t provide an exhaustive catalogue of what has been attended to when we are led to see something in a new light; the difficulty is more fundamental. What we notice or see is not, in general, propositional in character....Seeing as is not seeing that.

Perspectives, I take it, are modes of interpretation – dispositions to organize one’s attention, thinking and feeling in certain ways – rather than specific claims. However, none of this need exclude metaphors, or even perspectives, entirely from the realm of truth. Often, authors do want their readers to endorse a perspective on a certain topic, so that some particular set of purported facts comes to play what the author takes to be an appropriate role in their overall cognitive economy. And endorsing a perspective when it is applied to a topic in this way does entail a host of propositions: interpretive claims to the effect that certain facts, experiences or features are especially important or serve to explain certain other ones in some way. These propositions are nuanced, difficult to articulate, and largely tacit in our understanding; that is part of why authors communicate them through literature. But they are still commitments which the author puts forward, with which one can agree or disagree. Moreover, even putting these particular interpretive propositions aside, perspectives can still be evaluated in broadly epistemic terms, with respect to how well they enable us to cognize the world. And again, authors often aim for their works to have this sort of epistemic impact: to help us become “finely aware,” someone “on whom nothing [is] lost,” as Henry James puts it.⁵

Second, in addition to promulgating perspectives as interpretive tools which entail interpretive propositions, poetry and fiction are also full of specific contents. Of course, there are important differences here from the sorts of informational contents that dominate nonliterary discourse. One reason authors and readers turn to literature, and specifically to metaphor, is to capture experiential particularities. Often the contents are extremely particular: what it feels like to become an orphan in midlife after a fraught relationship with one’s parents, say; or the trajectory traced by a falcon released into the mountains on a cold clear day. But even extreme specificity does not mean that the author is not

⁵ “Preface to *The Princess Cassamassima*,” “The Art of the Novel”; see Nussbaum 1985 and elsewhere for discussion of James in this context.

representing the world. For instance, when Ted Hughes writes of a fish lying on shore that “The gills were kneading quietly,” he could have represented the same content in literal terms by saying “*This* is what its gills were doing,” if he had only happened to be in a position to ostend the relevant appearance to his audience directly. This alternative statement would not have captured all of the metaphor’s effects, nor would it have been so aesthetically interesting; but it would have accomplished at least an important part of his representational aims. Hughes’ need for metaphor here shows only that he had additional aims beyond mere description, and perhaps that our language as it currently stands lacks the expressive resources to capture the relevant feature directly and explicitly. It does not show that the metaphor lacks content altogether (Camp 2006).

Of course, there are often important complexities in determining just what content a novel, poem, or metaphor is presenting. For one thing, the reader must tease out the appropriate modal relation to actuality, since the author’s point is often not that the particular event described actually happened, but that it easily could or perhaps should happen, or that it is emblematic of a more general type of situation which does, should, or could happen. More specifically with metaphor, figuring out the relevant content requires solving an analogical equation with multiple open variables and multiple candidate solutions. For instance, in *The Golden Bowl* Henry James ascribes to his character Adam Verver a vision of his daughter Maggie as

a creature consciously floating and shining in a warm summer sea, some element of dazzling sapphire and silver, a creature cradled upon depths, buoyant among dangers, in which fear or folly or sinking otherwise than in play was impossible (II.263).

Martha Nussbaum (1985) takes James to be offering Adam’s metaphoric vision as emblematic of a father’s mature, enlightened recognition of his daughter’s independent existence as a passionate, sexual being – although one might well take it to exemplify a “Gothic,” “quasi-incestuous” strand in James’ imagination instead (Posner 1997, 12). To identify the qualities Adam is predicating of Maggie, and hence to evaluate the morality of his attitude toward her, the reader must first figure out that the metaphor’s target is Maggie’s sexuality, and then determine in what respects $R_{1\dots n}$ her sexuality is supposed to resemble the described creature’s features $F_{1\dots n}$, so that Maggie purportedly possesses features $N_{1\dots n}$. With this metaphor, as with many others, there is plenty of indeterminacy, vagueness, and open-endedness about just what those features are. But this does not distinguish metaphor in principle from other cases of inexplicit meaning. Moreover, far from being a cognitive demerit, this is one reason metaphors are such important communicative tools: they enable us to replicate the indeterminacy, vagueness, and open-endedness of our own minds (Camp 2006).

So far, I have argued that literary authors use metaphors to present perspectively-laden contents which are often (but not always) open-ended, evocative, experiential and/or imagistic. Metaphors are not the only means by which authors do this; other salient options include direct exemplification, allusions and puns, just-so stories, similes, and juxtaposition. Among these, metaphor is distinctive because of the way in which it combines inexplicitness with assertive force (Camp 2008, 2009). We might distinguish three broad types of perspectively-laden ‘poetic’ rhetorical devices. Telling details, just-so stories, and other forms of *exemplification* present a particular instance as being true, or at least as if it should be true. They then invite readers to conclude, first, that this instance is typical of the individual or type of entity under discussion, and second, that the explicitly denoted features are associated with other, unmentioned ones. Consider, for instance, Li Po’s poem “The Jewel Stairs’ Grievance,” as translated by Ezra Pound (1915):

The jewelled steps are already quite white with dew,
It is so late that the dew soaks my gauze stockings,
And I let down the crystal curtain
And watch the moon through the clear autumn.

TRANSLATOR’S NOTE: Jewel stairs, therefore a palace. Grievance, therefore there is something to complain of. Gauze stockings, therefore a court lady, not a servant who complains. Clear autumn, therefore he has no excuse on account of the weather. Also she has come early, for the dew has not merely whitened the stairs, but has soaked her stockings. The poem is especially prized because she utters no direct reproach.

As Pound deftly shows, the poem describes only a few details, and does so in resolutely literal terms; but it thereby suggests much about the woman’s emotions and her wider circumstances. Beyond this, her particular, implicitly suggested situation is intended to be emblematic of other romantic non-encounters. Where exemplifications explicitly state a few details and implicitly suggest broader truths about a more general class, stereotypes, slurs, and other ‘*thick*’ terms operate in the opposite direction: they explicitly claim that a specific person or other entity belongs to a certain class and express a certain perspective on that class as a whole; they then implicitly invite readers to conclude that the individual(s) under discussion possesses a host of associated but unmentioned properties, which in turn warrant certain feelings toward them (Camp 2013b).

Metaphors differ from these first two types of tropes in two important respects. First, there is typically no explicitly available content which the author endorses. Romeo, for instance, is not claiming that Juliet actually is the sun, nor is Shakespeare claiming that someone like Romeo could or should think that she is. The metaphor’s proffered content is available only indirectly, by figuring out in what ways Juliet is supposed to be sun-like. (Though it should also be noted that many poetic metaphors, such as Romeo’s, are accompanied by at least partial paraphrases.) But where telling details and other forms of

exemplification merely *suggest* that the subject possesses certain unmentioned features, metaphors *claim*⁶ that the inexplicit, perspectivally-determined content obtains. Thus, the reader must cultivate the evoked perspective simply to determine the speaker's primary speech act, and not just its further implicatures. For some purposes, the difference between suggestion and assertion may be mostly a matter, as Davidson (1979, 41) says, of whether the reader is "invited" or "bullied" into trying on the proffered perspective and contents. But in more real-world contexts – and for literature as it is deployed in the real world – the difference matters. Thus, one reason Jesus often spoke in parables was to avoid explicit commitment to religiously and politically charged claims which would have opened him to accusations of heresy and treason (Camp 2008). And even within the confines of literature, the choice of metaphor over alternative, less illocutionarily forceful tropes can serve to signal the intensity of a speaker's commitment to the associated perspective and thought.

Second, metaphors also differ from the first two types of tropes in the operative relation between the evoked perspective and its target. Exemplifications, as in Li Po's poem, deploy a characterization – a complex, structured, context-sensitive intuitive network of features – associated with a specific entity as a perspective for thinking about an entire class of which that entity is itself an instance; while 'thick' categorizations like stereotypes and slurs deploy a characterization associated with a class for thinking about a specific instance (or subset) of that same class (Camp 2013b). By contrast, metaphors employ a characterization associated with one subject as a perspective or frame for thinking about something *else*, with a felt awareness of the gap between them (Camp 2008).⁷ As Nelson Goodman says, "a metaphor is an affair between a predicate with a past and an object that yields while protesting" (1976, 69). Put in more cognitive, less nominalistic language, we might say that the perspective characteristic of metaphor involves a kind of twofoldness: an experiential awareness of both the representing frame and the represented subject, in their distinctness and in their relation to one another, which is akin to the twofold experience we have with painting, in which we are aware both of the marked surface and of the scent we set in it (Wollheim 1980, Camp 2009).

This phenomenology of twofoldness has both cognitive and aesthetic consequences. Cognitively, the dissimilarities between the metaphor's two subjects serves as a filter, focusing attention on just a limited

⁶ Or present with other illocutionary force, like promising or ordering.

⁷ In this respect, metaphors are akin to similes, parables and other forms of juxtaposition, such as Pound's (1915) poem "In A Station in the Metro." But again, they differ with respect to their illocutionary force: parables and other juxtapositions merely place two characterizations side by side, with the 'direction of fit' and the predication of features being only imputed; while similes assert merely that the subject is like the framing subject in some way.

(if still rich and open-ended) set of features in the focal subject. As a result, metaphors tend to be more bounded and focused than other tropes, for which it is possible that the target subject could possess any, up to all, of the features in the governing characterization. Further, because it can import a framing characterization from a very different domain, metaphor is especially well-poised to dramatically re-configure one's characterization of the subject under discussion. Consider, for instance, the opening of Emily Dickenson's (1893) poem:

My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –
In Corners – till a Day
The Owner passed – identified –
And carried Me away –

Dickenson could have expressed her pent-up potency in more literal ways, for instance by describing a particular, exemplary, possibly fictional occasion on which she bit her tongue or stilled her feet. But in that case, her readers' interpretation of the degree of personal potential and restriction she was talking about would still have been firmly grounded in their expectations about what was possible for the broader class of apparently demure upper-middle-class 19th century women. By describing her life as 'a loaded gun standing in corners,' Dickenson suggests that an indirect resemblance to a radically different subject is called for because the features she wants to communicate are so intense and unusual that no exemplar from any more general class which she actually instantiates could possess them. In a similar vein, importing an interpretive structure from a dramatically different domain also enables metaphors to suggest unexpected connections among features: thus, Dickenson's metaphor suggests that it is in part her rage at her constrained life that enables her to write poetry – to serve her "Master" – as fully and finely as she does.

Aesthetically, metaphor's twofoldness often produces a pleasurable frisson from the discovery of unexpected similarity in the face of a continued perception of difference. Especially with novel and extended metaphors, we enjoy tracing out explanatory threads and kernels of similarity, and emerging into a holistic, intuitive interpretation after actively teasing out an initial glimmer of sense. When comprehension is relatively effortful, this can make the ultimate 'click' of understanding feel more earned, and even more representationally accurate, than a direct description could.

When metaphors do "yield while protesting" in this way, as Goodman says, they accomplish in miniature what Wallace Stevens (1954) claimed poetry in general should do: "resist the intelligence / Almost successfully." Beyond this, some especially challenging metaphors, like Dickenson's, can induce a feeling, not merely of transcended puzzlement, but of more persistent disorientation. Our awareness of the disparity between the two domains reminds us that even as this metaphor is unexpectedly apt, it also

leaves out important features and perhaps even contains internal contradictions. In these cases, we are left with the feeling that the subject is sufficiently complex that *any* perspective must be only a partial one. Tony Hoagland (2010) argues that the aim to confound, to induce vertigo (“a sensation of whirling and loss of balance, associated particularly with looking down from a great height . . . giddiness”), is the “the preeminent topic of contemporary poetry. It may be the dominant stylistic inclination as well.” For the sole purpose of generating vertigo, parataxis – bare juxtaposition without any connecting copula or other linking material – is a more effective rhetorical device; and at least according to Hoagland, it is correspondingly more popular in contemporary literature, because postmodern writers take it to provide an appropriate stylistic reflection of our current phenomenological, epistemic and metaphysical situation. But as Hoagland also notes, an unrelenting barrage of isolated rhetorical shots is cognitively exhausting, and ultimately not very aesthetically rewarding. In contrast, apt yet challenging metaphors like Dickenson’s achieve a kind of Cubist effect, by combining the disequilibrium of seeing one thing in terms of something irremediably alien, which juxtaposition also does, with a powerful sense of orientation: of being given a cognitive and imaginative tool that cuts through to a subject’s core along one plane, and dissects its functional structure along that admittedly limited dimension.

Finally, I think attention to metaphors’ twofoldness can help us begin to make sense of how we can learn from works of literature, whether they contain metaphors or not. Anti-cognitivists often contend that only ‘lessons’ we can extract from fiction are so anodyne as to be banal. For instance, Stolnitz (1992, 193) argues that the “psychological truth” to be gleaned from *Pride and Prejudice* amounts to no more than “Stubborn pride and ignorant prejudice keep attractive people apart”:

Once we divest ourselves of the diverse, singular forces at work within [the novel’s] psychological field, as we must, in getting from the fiction to the truth, the latter must seem, and is, distressingly impoverished. Can this be all there is? From one of the world’s great novels? (1992, 194)

A crucial assumption in this argument is that the truths we learn from literature must take the form of propositions which apply generally to both the fiction and the real world, which must as a result be highly abstract. I think we do sometimes learn such general propositions through literature – or at least, that we come to appreciate them, so that they take on a more prominent and central role in our cognitive economies. However, I am more interested in another way we learn from literature, which doesn’t rely on such generalism: by taking the work itself as “a metaphor for life,” so that “life is transfigured,” in Arthur Danto’s terms (1981, 172).

Treating an artwork as a “metaphor for life” involves a significantly different project from the sort of straightforward empathetic identification in which readers notice (or project) features that a character

shares with themselves. Empathetically treating a character as ‘just like me’ effaces an appreciation of the work and its world in their own terms, collapsing the felt awareness of difference on which a metaphorical perspective depends. Taking a work as a metaphor, by contrast, involves attending to a fiction or poem in all its particularity, and (only) then seeking out matches between it and some real-world analogue (Camp 2009). Crucially, instead of relying on features that the fiction and reality both instantiate, a metaphorical mapping will often appeal to high-level structural analogies between features that are inherently dissimilar. Thus, just as Romeo’s metaphor implicitly maps the sun’s light and warmth to Juliet’s beauty and goodness without assuming that must be a single, general but still substantive property which the sun and Juliet share, so too might we in turn use Romeo’s budding infatuation and love for Juliet as a metaphor for some aspect of the real world: say, for a new graduate student’s attraction to an apparently outré theory for her dissertation topic. In this way, a work-as-metaphor can draw our attention to particularities of the real world, in their particularity and in their difference from the world of the work, without extracting some general but noteworthy proposition that applies identically to both. And in this way, by signaling that she wants us to take her work as such a metaphor, an author can implicate or even claim something about how she takes the world itself to be.

In this article I have defended a fairly commonsense view: that metaphors in literature, like metaphors elsewhere, allow authors to communicate thoughts and even stake claims about how the world is. Making this view plausible while doing justice to the full complexity of literary metaphors requires at least three things. First, we must free ourselves of an overly restrictive conception of how ordinary discourse works. Metaphors in literature are often open-ended, nuanced, and imagistically and emotionally evocative; but other forms of ordinary indirect discourse, and even some forms of conventional meaning like slurs and other ‘thick’ terms, possess these qualities as well. Second, we must attend to the genuine, if largely defeasible, differences generated by a literary context. In particular, because literary texts are published works of art, literary meaning is constructed as a collaboration between a “model author” and “model reader,” each of whom has access to both more and fewer interpretive assumptions than the actual writer and recipient do – more, insofar as they are not constrained by limited resources of time and attention; but also fewer, insofar as they can only reasonably invoke assumptions that are mutually accessible to both figures as publically constituted personae. Third, we must attend to the diversity that exists among literary metaphors and their effects. Metaphors in literature can be laser-focused and precise as well as open-ended and vague; they can be abstract as well as concretely imagistic and emotional; and they can stake truth-evaluable claims while also presenting non-propositional perspectives. There need be no conflict among these; indeed, the flexibility of metaphor’s aims and effects is one of its theoretical and aesthetic joys.

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