

(NOTE: CITED POEMS ARE AT END OF PAPER)

### Poesis without Metaphor (Show and Tell)

Theorists often associate certain “poetic” qualities with metaphor — most especially, open-endedness, evocativeness, imagery and affective power. However, the qualities themselves are neither necessary nor sufficient for metaphor. I argue that many of the distinctively “poetic” qualities of metaphor are in fact qualities of *aspectual thought*, which can also be exemplified by parables, “telling details,” and “just so” stories. Thinking about these other uses of language to produce aspectual thought forces us to pinpoint what is distinctive about metaphor, and also thereby reveals the weaknesses of three established views of metaphor.

Among philosophers who take metaphor seriously, there’s a broad distinction between those who emphasize the ways in which metaphor departs from ordinary thought and talk, and those who emphasize their continuity. On the one hand, there are philosophers who hold that because metaphors so often accomplish such wondrous imaginative effects, they can’t be in the business of meaning in the familiar way that ordinary utterances do. Consider, for example, utterances of the following sentences in their respective contexts:

- (1) Juliet is the sun (from *Romeo and Juliet* II.ii.2).
- (2) Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more (from *Macbeth* V.v.28-30).
- (3) The hourglass whispers to the lion’s paw (from Auden’s translation of ‘Our Bias’ by Sitnitsky).
- (4) No man is an island (from Donne’s *Meditation XVII*).
- (5) The sun blazes bright today; the clouds flee from his mighty beams (from an imagined reworking of the *Iliad*, describing Achilles as he rages on the battlefield).

It is fairly clear that these utterances do something more and different than just express a proposition. Their intended effects on their listeners are open-ended, evocative, and heavily affective and imagistic; this contrasts sharply with the intended effect of a typical utterance of a sentence like

- (6) There’s beer in the fridge.

which really is primarily to communicate information. *Non-cognitivists*, exemplified most forcefully by Davidson (1978; see also Carnap 1935, Ayer 1936, Cooper 1986, Rorty 1987, Taylor 1989, Reimer 2001), argue that doing justice to the full richness and poetic quality of such metaphors requires elevating them out of the domain of propositional meaning and into the realm of insight, inspiration, and imagination.<sup>1</sup> Non-cognitivists already have a very difficult time explaining the fact that ordinary conversational metaphors are obviously used to make claims and other speech acts. For instance, if I respond to a question about how good Bill would be as chair of the department by saying,

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<sup>1</sup> Non-cognitivists are so-called, not because they deny that metaphors have cognitive *effects*, but because they deny that metaphorical sentences or utterances have any *meaning*.

(7) Bill is a bulldozer. He doesn't let anyone stand in his way.

then I clearly have made a claim about what kind of guy Bill is (Bezuidenhout 2001, 157; see also Bergmann 1982, Camp 2006c). But many people seem inclined to think that while non-cognitivism is wrong about ordinary metaphors, it gets poetic metaphors just right.

On the other hand, there are philosophers who emphasize the continuity between metaphor and other uses of language. One version of this position holds that when language users encounter a metaphor, they automatically construct the most plausible meaning for it in context, precisely as with other 'loose' and non-literal utterances. On this view, the fact that most metaphors, like (1) through (3) above, are highly 'deviant' if construed literally carries (at most) merely theoretical interest; it plays little or no role in actual language users' experience and interpretation of metaphor. A different version of this position claims that we interpret metaphorical utterances by *pretending* that they are literally true, and seeing what cognitive and communicative consequences this would have. On this view, we might well be aware of the utterance's literal falsity, but our interpretive energy focuses on understanding it *as* true.

I will argue against both of these broad positions. I agree with non-cognitivists that utterances like (1) through (5) are importantly involved with producing a distinctively non-propositional sort of thought, which has more to do with insight than with information. As it's often put, metaphors make us *see* a subject *in a certain light*; they *frame* the subject in a certain way, and give us a new *perspective* on it. Further, I agree that this effect isn't essentially connected to a certain figure of speech: it's something that other uses of language, but also paintings, music, and art in general, can also produce. However, I want to insist that all of this is fully compatible with metaphors having a meaning, in a fully standard sense of the term.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, I'll argue that even though we do usually process metaphors easily and fluidly, they still depend on a felt gap between what our words mean and what *we* mean *by* them. For an utterance to be metaphorical, it's not enough for us just to ignore the conventional meaning in favor of a contextually appropriate one, or even for us just to pretend that the proposition determined by the conventional meaning is true. Metaphoricity essentially depends on a certain kind of incongruity or contrast in thought.<sup>3</sup>

My arguments for my positive claims and against these alternative views will proceed primarily by the method of show and tell: by drawing our attention to a range of poetic uses of language that accomplish something recognizably like metaphor, but which are clearly not equivalent to it. The most

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<sup>2</sup> Thus, I say about Davidson what Davidson says about theorists like Max Black: "for the most part I don't disagree with [him] in [his] account of what metaphor accomplishes, except that I think it accomplishes more and that what is additional is different in kind." (1978, 33).

<sup>3</sup> This felt difference between literal and metaphorical interpretations also shows up at the level of processing: non-conventional metaphors do take longer to process than equivalent literal utterances. See my (2006a) for discussion of the empirical literature about actual processing.

important consequence of this demonstration will be a clearer understanding of just what metaphor *does* do.

## 1. Near-Metaphors

In order to focus our discussion, I ask you to indulge me in imagining someone — call him ‘Bob’ — with a bizarre fetish for not saying anything he takes to be false: not merely for not lying, but more generally for not leaving open the possibility of going on record as saying something he takes to be untrue. This fetish is certainly bizarre, as many fetishes are. Perhaps Bob is a student in a philosophy or linguistics class, or a politician afraid of being quoted out of context. Or he might be a religious evangelist aiming for an Edenic confluence of word, thought, and deed; or the caretaker for a trusting autistic child who believes everything he says. Whatever the motivation, given his fetish, there are many familiar sorts of utterances that Bob is clearly barred from making: for instance, most (though notably, not all) sarcasm, and at least certain familiar forms of loose talk or hyperbole.

It’s fairly obvious, I take it, that Bob is also barred from uttering metaphors like (1) through (3): they are clearly literally false, if not so absurd as to be meaningless.<sup>4</sup> For most people, this literal falsity is fairly incidental, but Bob’s fetish makes it relevant and problematic for him. Supposing that he wants to utter some such metaphor, what should he do? The most obvious option would be to convert his potential metaphors into similes, by inserting ‘like’ or ‘as’ into them. Thus, rather than saying

(8) My love is the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys (Song of Solomon 2:1),

Bob might opt for

(9) O, my love’s like a red, red rose / That’s newly sprung in June (Robert Burns, 1794).

On a traditional view of ‘like’, all statements of similarity are true, albeit trivially so; as Davidson says, “The earth is like a floor, the Assyrian did come down like a wolf on the fold,” because “everything is like everything, and in endless ways” (1978, 41, 39). If that’s right, then similes are at least technically acceptable for Bob. In fact, though, the traditional view is probably wrong. Most contemporary semantic theories treat ‘like’ as a context-sensitive expression whose semantic value depends upon which respects of similarity are salient in that conversational context. And if this is correct, then given fairly plausible assumptions about the limits of conversational salience, similes like (8) are usually literally false: in most contexts of utterance, a peony really is like a rose, but one’s beloved is not (cf. Fogelin 1988). Thus, similes may well be off the table for Bob as well.

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<sup>4</sup> I argue against the claim that categorically absurd sentences are literally meaningless in my (2004). Because lexicalized and metaphorical meanings range along a continuum of conventionalization, there also are many semi-metaphorical utterances which it’s unclear whether Bob should make. Surely he could point out the “curvaceous legs” of a Victorian table, but could he call someone “a rising star”? A “gluttonous pig”? A “trembling mouse of a man”? The fact that there is no sharp boundary here, even relative to a specific cultural subgroup or dialect, has important implications for literality, languages, and communication, but they are orthogonal to our discussion.

A more interesting tactic that Bob might try, at least for many metaphors, is to drop both the ‘is’ of metaphor and the ‘like’ of simile, and simply *juxtapose* the two subjects. Poets often do this. For instance, in Ezra Pound’s poem “In a Station of the Metro,” we are clearly invited to think of the faces as flowers. Indeed, we might say that a metaphorical ‘are’ floats between the lines, and is nearly rendered explicit in the colon. Similarly, in Walt Whitman’s poem “A Noiseless Patient Spider,” there’s no missing ‘is’ that we could supply, but we’re still clearly expected to compare the spider of the first stanza with Whitman’s soul in the second.

These poems achieve precisely the sort of ‘framing effect’ or ‘seeing-as’ that’s typically associated with metaphor. Pound is after a primarily imagistic effect: we’re supposed to visualize a collection of faces, and see them *as* petals. As I imagine it, these are petals from cherry blossoms, pale pink, papery and translucent, already beginning to wilt after a cold spring storm. This in turn constrains how I imagine the faces: also pale and fragile, rather flat and blank, seeming to float (as “apparitions”), and perhaps slightly upturned, as their owners gaze down the tracks for the next train. Finally, this leads me to think of the people to whom those faces are attached in a certain way: disembodied, ghostlike, passive and somewhat vulnerable.

The ‘seeing-as’ we get from Whitman’s poem is less visual, and more like the metaphors in (1) through (5). Rather than mapping one image onto another, we are invited to think of one situation, which is fairly complex and abstract, in terms of another, which is considerably more concrete. The spider serves as a *frame* that *highlights* certain features of Whitman’s soul, such as his endless striving for connection, while simultaneously *downplaying* other features, like the fact that these strivings involve intellectual conversations and social conventions. Finally, this frame also transfers some affective attitudes from the spider to Whitman’s soul, including perhaps a sort of tender condescension.

This phenomenon of framing, highlighting, and organizing, in a way that is partly but not entirely imagistic and that produces palpable affective effects, is what people like Davidson and Max Black (1962) refer to when they talk of ‘seeing-as’ in metaphor. Because the term ‘seeing-as’ is typically metaphorical in this context — I cannot really *visualize* Whitman’s soul as a spider, or life as a walking shadow — I prefer the term “aspectual thought,” on analogy with what Wittgenstein calls “seeing under an aspect.”<sup>5</sup>

Juxtapositions like Pound’s and Whitman’s seem perfect for Bob, because they accomplish the distinctive effects of metaphor without forcing him to go on record as saying anything false. For this same reason, they also appear to offer strong support for non-cognitivism. According to Davidson, metaphor and simile are merely a few “among endless devices that serve to alert us to aspects of the world by inviting us to make comparisons” (1978, 40). In these other cases, like juxtaposition, though,

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<sup>5</sup> For further discussion of aspectual thought, see my (2003, 2006b, ms. a).

we have no temptation to assign the words any special *meaning*. As he says, a “poem does, of course, intimate much that goes beyond the literal meanings of the words. But intimation is not meaning” (1978, 41). Thus, we shouldn’t be tempted to postulate meanings for metaphors, either.

To determine whether the non-cognitivist is right to abjure metaphorical meaning, we need to answer two questions: (a) should the sort of “intimation” that juxtaposition and metaphor produces be considered a form of meaning after all? And (b) are juxtaposition and metaphor really equivalent: does juxtaposition do all that metaphor does, as the non-cognitivist suggests?

I think the answer to the first question is clearly ‘yes’: both juxtaposition and metaphor do involve meaning. It’s true that when Pound or Whitman juxtaposes two subjects or scenes, we don’t feel any need to “explain what has happened by endowing the words themselves with a second, or figurative, meaning” (Davidson 1978, 40). But word meanings aren’t the only sort of meaning that philosophers traffic in. There’s also *speaker meaning*: what a speaker intended to communicate by saying what she did. Consider an utterance of

(10) Mr. X’s command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular. offered as a letter of recommendation for a job teaching philosophy (Grice 1975, p. 33). By uttering (10), the speaker didn’t just try to implant the idea that Mr. X is a bad philosopher into her hearer’s head, the way an advertiser might do by paying for product placement in a movie, or the way Moe might do by bumping Curly on the head with a two-by-four.<sup>6</sup> Rather, she intended for her hearers to recognize that she uttered (10) *because* she wanted them to recognize that she thinks that Mr. X is a bad philosopher. This sort of reflexive intention is the essential core of speaker’s meaning as Grice (1975, 1989) describes it. And juxtapositions, as in Pound’s and Whitman’s poems, clearly meet this condition, as do the metaphors in (1) through (5). Whitman, for instance, is inviting his hearers to think about his soul in the light of a comparison with a spider, and he wants us to do this because we recognize *that* he’s inviting us to. Thus, if this were the totality of Davidson’s objection to treating “intimation” as meaning, the appropriate response would indeed be to “shrug it off as no more than an insistence on restraint in using the word ‘meaning’” (1978, 46).

Davidson also has another, better reason for objecting to metaphorical meaning, though: there’s a crucial difference between the *kind* of effect the speaker wants to produce by uttering (10) and the kind of effect that Whitman wants to produce by his poem. With (10), there’s a specific propositional message the speaker wants to get across: that Mr. X is a bad philosopher. By contrast, Whitman is after something

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<sup>6</sup> As Davidson (1978, 46) claims that metaphors and similes do: “Joke or dream or metaphor can, like a picture or a bump on the head, make us appreciate some fact — but not by standing for, or expressing, the fact.” Of course, pictures, and perhaps also dreams, can stand for or express facts.

much broader: the open-ended, evocative, imagistic, and affective framing effect of aspectual thought. As Davidson says,

If what the metaphor makes us notice were finite in scope and propositional in nature, this would not in itself make trouble...But in fact there is no limit to what a metaphor calls to our attention, and much of what we are caused to notice is not propositional in character...How many facts or propositions are conveyed by a photograph?...Bad question. A picture is not worth a thousand words, or any other number. Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture. (1978, 46).

In particular, if we're asked what 'message' Pound is trying to convey, we want to respond that this is a bad question, one that misses the real interest of metaphor in particular and of poetry in general.

I agree wholeheartedly that it is an essential part of juxtaposition and metaphor to produce (or at least, rely upon) aspects, and I believe that aspects are better understood as open-ended *tools* for thought than as thoughts *per se* (Camp 2006b, ms.). So I agree that aspects themselves can't be meanings. However, this is compatible with the possibility that juxtapositions and metaphors *also* convey propositional messages, as a result of the aspectual thought they produce. In uttering (1), Romeo communicates, among other things, that Juliet is the focus of his attention and what makes his life worth living. In saying (2), Macbeth communicates, among other things, that the frenzy of jostling for power is fleeting, and that death finally takes us all. And so on. These messages clearly don't exhaust the total cognitive and imaginative upshot of their utterances. And it's not clear that I've gotten these particular claims just right. But even if their total import is essentially open-ended, and can't in principle be captured in any finite paraphrase, this still doesn't imply that juxtapositions and metaphors don't have any propositional message, or that we can't keep making our propositional paraphrases longer and more nuanced (Camp 2006b).

So I think we should treat juxtapositions and metaphors as potential vehicles for speaker's meaning. Thus, we can now turn to our second question: are juxtapositions and metaphors really equivalent? The fact that Grice himself treated metaphor as a form of conversational implicature (1975, 53) might lead us to expect that they are. However, I think there is a clear difference between them. To see why, return for a moment to (10). There's an important difference between the indirect communication we find in (10) and the explicit statements we get with an assertion — a difference that can have significant rhetorical and communicative consequences. By expressing himself indirectly, the speaker of (10) treats Mr. X more gently than if she had said outright that Mr. X is a bad philosopher. More importantly, she also avoids going on record as actually *saying* anything mean about Mr. X; she cannot be quoted or otherwise cited as saying anything unkind. Someone might object that it was perfectly obvious that by uttering (10), the speaker *meant* that Mr. X is a bad philosopher. But the speaker can respond that this only *seemed* obvious to the hearer because he made additional assumptions about his communicative intentions which she didn't intend. This response may well be disingenuous,

but because those assumptions are unspoken, they're not a matter of public record in the way that an explicit utterance is. Implicatures offer a brand of communication with deniability.

Because juxtapositions place two subjects side-by-side without explicitly connecting them, they exhibit much the same kind of deniability. We can see this clearly by considering parables. Parables are a classic form of juxtaposition (indeed, the term "parable" derives from a Greek expression meaning "casting beside"). Consider Jesus' parable of the workers in the field (Matthew 20: 1-16):

A landowner hires several workers early in the morning, and promises to pay them a penny for the day's labor. At four later points in the day, he finds other workers "standing idle in the marketplace," and says to them, "Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you." At the end of the day, he first pays those who were hired last, giving them each a penny; he then pays the next-to-last-hired workers a penny each; and this continues until he comes to the original workers, who also receive a penny each. These workers complain, saying "These last have wrought [but] one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day." The landowner replies, "Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take thine, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?"

The Gospel leaves the parable there, without any further explication. The clear implication, of course, is that we should think of entry into the kingdom of heaven on analogy to the worker's wages: it is fair for those who have dutifully fulfilled the covenant between God and the Israelites to be granted salvation; but it is also permissible for God, out of sheer graciousness, to admit those who come to him late in the day. Instead of grumbling that they didn't get more than they were initially promised, God's dutiful, long-term followers should rejoice at the latecomers' good fortune.

If the lesson of the parable is so obvious, though, why doesn't Jesus just say it outright? First, much as with the letter of recommendation, the parable enables him to communicate his revelation to the appropriate audience without opening himself to accusations of heresy by the religious establishment. Second, and more interestingly, by leaving the analogy implicit, Jesus forces his hearers to make the connection between the two situations for themselves; and this in turn leads them to assume greater interpretive responsibility for that connection. The connection between the two situations seems more robust and objective than it would if it could be attributed entirely to Jesus; and because his hearers have a feeling of having uncovered this connection for themselves, it seems more fully 'theirs'.

In other communicative contexts, however, these rhetorical effects of indirectness and inexplicitness aren't so appropriate; and in those cases, mere juxtapositions won't do. To see this, consider another parable: that of King David and the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 11-12).<sup>7</sup> King David has summoned Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, a soldier in David's army, to the palace sleep with him. When she becomes pregnant, David orders that Uriah be sent to the forefront of the hottest battle and exposed to enemy attack. Uriah is killed; and David, feeling rather smug, summons Bathsheba to live with him in the palace. The Lord then sends Nathan to rebuke David; and Nathan tells this story:

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<sup>7</sup> This example is discussed as a case of aspect-shift by Cohen (1997, 231-242) and in turn by Stern (2000, 260-1).

There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveler unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

Upon hearing this story, David becomes enraged at the rich man's behavior and curses him. At that point, Nathan utters,

(11) Thou art the man.

causing David to repent. David repents because the story induces an aspectual shift in his thinking about his own situation. He acquires no new first-order beliefs about his actions or their effects: he already knew that Uriah loved Bathsheba; that she was Uriah's only wife; that he, David, had many wives and riches; that it's bad to take things without compensation; and so on. What the story does is reconfigure the relative prominence of these facts and the explanatory connections among them. In particular, by attending to the poor man's feelings, needs, and rights, David becomes aware of Uriah's point of view in a new way.

Nathan could easily have left off his final line: he could just have told the story, while casting knowing glances, nudges and winks at David. He could have mentioned how sad it was that Uriah, who was so devoted to his only wife, had died in battle, and how mysterious it was that none of his company were with him when he was killed. He could do all of this to *intimate* that there is an important connection between the two situations, and to insinuate that David did a bad thing. If Bob were in Nathan's situation, this is all that he could do. And according to Davidson, this is all that anyone could do. On his view, the primary difference between juxtapositions, similes, and metaphors lies in the degree of causal force the speaker invests in them: a juxtaposition merely "invites" us to make a comparison, while a simile "tells" us that there is a comparison to be made and a metaphor "bullies" us into making it (1978, 41). On this view, then, Nathan's utterance of (11) is the equivalent of stomping one's feet, where Bob can only raise his eyebrows.

However, it's clear that by saying "Thou art the man," Nathan does something more than just hint at a connection between the two situations. Although he speaks metaphorically, Nathan comes out and *asserts* something about how David is. And by doing this, he puts himself in a palpably more dangerous situation than he would if he'd just juxtaposed the two situations while stomping his feet. By asserting something, one puts oneself down on record as committed to that thing, and thereby renders oneself responsible for justifying its truth if challenged (Brandom 1983, Green 2000). By accusing King David in the manner of assertion, Nathan puts himself on the line in a way that both the speaker of (10) and Jesus with his parable avoid doing.



In this case, the difference between mere juxtaposition and metaphor is especially clear. In other cases, the effect of assertion is less dramatic, but I think the difference is still genuine, and rhetorically significant. Whitman's poem, for instance, exploits the same kind of inexplicitness we find in Jesus' parable, and in order to achieve a similar rhetorical effect. By the time we reach the point in the poem where Whitman actually speaks of his soul in spidery terms, in the second-to-last line, we've already been forced to construct the analogy between spider and soul for ourselves; and as with Jesus' parable, this leads us to take more interpretive responsibility for the analogy, and makes it seem more natural and real. Indeed, even in the final lines, the explicit metaphors that Whitman does employ, such as describing his attempts at emotional connection as "the gossamer thread you fling," all still *presuppose* the basic metaphor of soul-as-spider. That basic metaphor remains implicit throughout.

Now suppose that Whitman had written the following lines as the opening of the second stanza instead:

(12) Oh my soul, you are that spider;  
you too stand on the precipice, casting forth  
gossamer threads of conversation, in the hope that they catch somewhere.

This wouldn't itself affect his primary communicative purpose, which would still be to get us to use the spider as an aspect for thinking about his soul. Even so, the change would make a substantive rhetorical difference. First, it would make the connection between spider and soul communicatively more obvious; Whitman would be telling or "bullying" rather than inviting us to think of the latter in terms of the former. And this would make at least some contentious readers less inclined to see what connections they could play out between the two domains, and more inclined to notice salient disanalogies. Second, because Whitman would have asserted something about how his soul is, he would be responsible for defending the content of that assertion: roughly, the claim that his soul possesses all or most of the salient properties of souls that can be plausibly matched to salient properties of the spider described in the first stanza, given the level of interpretive effort warranted by the role the utterance plays in the conversational context (for details, see Camp 2003, ms. b).<sup>8</sup> Thus, it would not be an appropriate objection to Whitman's assertion in (12) to point out that his soul doesn't have eight legs, because this is not part of a plausible mapping between the spider and any sort of soul.<sup>9</sup> But it *would* be an appropriate objection to point out that Whitman had lots of bosom companions, or that he didn't even try to get out and see people. If someone

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<sup>8</sup> Alternatively, if Whitman had written a simile-based version of (12), and so claimed that his soul was *like* the spider, then he would have been responsible for the weaker claim that his soul possess *some* of the salient properties established by the mapping described above. In effect, I think that the 'like' in similes functions simultaneously as a statement of comparison and as a hedge, in the sense of 'hedge' described by e.g. Lakoff 1973 and especially Siegel 2002.

<sup>9</sup> This would, however, be an objection to what Whitman literally *said* in (12), and does, I think, establish that he didn't really mean what he said (Camp 2006c).

said this and it were true, it would not merely render Whitman's poem less illuminating or revealing; it would show that he had claimed something false.

Thus, I think we have reason to treat metaphors, not just as a form of speaker's meaning on a par with implicature, but as genuinely assertive.<sup>10</sup> However, my emphasis on the rhetorical effects of juxtaposition, as making the connection between the two subjects feel 'natural' and 'real', raises a worry for treating *either* juxtaposition or metaphor as a form of speaker's meaning. It seems highly appropriate to describe Jesus and Whitman as *showing* rather than *telling* their hearers that there is a connection to be made between the two domains. In effect, we might think, Jesus and Whitman simply point, and let their hearers discover for themselves the fruitful effects of thinking of the one in light of the other; Davidson gestures at this idea when he speaks of metaphors as "nudging us into noting" certain facts in the world (1978, 38). But it is a key component of speaker meaning, as a form of non-natural meaning, that the hearer's recognition of the relevant content depend essentially on her recognition of the speaker's communicative intention. When Herod presents Salome with the head of John the Baptist on a charger, she recognizes both that Herod intends for her to come to believe that John the Baptist is dead, and also that he intends for her to recognize this intention. But her recognition of this reflexive intention is not communicatively necessary: she can just directly *see* that John the Baptist is dead, by perceiving the "natural meaning" inherent in the severed head itself. As a consequence, Grice (1957, 382) claims that Herod doesn't really count as *meaning* that John the Baptist is dead (although he might mean that Salome must now go to bed with him). Similarly, if I intentionally communicate that I have more grading than you by placing our stacks of papers side by side, and nudging you while pointing to the stacks, I don't technically mean that I have more grading than you. Showing, including showing by juxtaposition, is not a form of speaker's meaning.<sup>11</sup> And so, if metaphor relies on the same sort of connection between topics as juxtaposition does, it cannot be a case of meaning either.

I do think that part of what makes Jesus' and Whitman's utterances rhetorically effective is that they depend on showing rather than telling. But I don't think this puts them on a par with Herod's gesture, because the connections that their juxtapositions exploit lack the brutal objectivity of the connection between severed heads and death. Neither Jesus nor Whitman simply ostends the pair of bare situations and leaves it to their hearers to notice any similarities that might strike them. Rather, in each case it is our ways of thinking about the two situations that are juxtaposed. More specifically, we as hearers are engaged in the interpretive project of recovering the speaker's specific construal of the two

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<sup>10</sup> However, I don't think it follows from this that we should assimilate metaphor to 'what is said' (Camp 2006c) or to semantic meaning (Camp 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Simonin (2006)'s interesting remarks on ostensive showing in literature.

situations and the mapping between them that is relevant to his conversational purposes — just as in the interpretation of speaker’s meaning more generally.

This discussion of the relation between “intimation” and meaning thus raises the rather surprising possibility that not only metaphoricity, but also illocutionary force and even non-natural meaning itself may be matters of degree. Nathan clearly makes a palpable illocutionary commitment to David’s being a certain way, while Pound merely invites us to construe one situation in terms of another; Whitman’s poem falls somewhere in between the two extremes in terms of its assertive force. Herod clearly exploits a form of natural meaning to make his communicative point, while the aspects for thinking that Pound and Whitman offer us are highly novel constructions; Nathan’s parable falls somewhere in between the two in terms of how ‘natural’ the connection is.

Our discussion also suggests that speakers can have two competing rhetorical aims when they communicate by way of aspectual thought. On the one hand, the speaker may play a more passive role, inviting his hearers to make a connection between two domains for themselves, producing a greater sense of interpretive responsibility in them and leaving it more open just which connections they should make. On the other hand, the speaker may assume more active ownership of the connection. This lends the utterance greater assertive force and more specific content; but for precisely that reason, it may also make a recalcitrant hearer more likely to balk at or resist the comparison. As we’ve seen, juxtapositions tend to cluster on the passive end of the spectrum and metaphors on the active end; but the difference also depends significantly on the way that the speaker presents her utterance in the context of the particular conversation or text at hand.

## 2. Emblematic Truths

Although juxtapositions are better for our poor friend Bob than most metaphors, they still come at a cost. First, a literally false metaphor still hovers implicitly in the air, much as a metaphorical ‘is’ hovers implicitly between the first and second lines of Pound’s poem. If Bob really wants to play it safe, he might not be willing even to suggest such falsities. Second, although Bob can use juxtapositions to *hint* that there’s a connection to be made between two topics, he can’t come out and *assert* that the focal subject possesses certain properties, determined by reflecting on that connection, in the way that Nathan does or that Whitman would do in (12).

In fact, however, not all metaphors are off limits for Bob. Some metaphors, like (4) and (5), are literally true, and so technically pass his stricture. Nonetheless, we might feel that there’s a sense in which (4) and (5) do still violate the spirit of Bob’s rule. These metaphors are on a par with (1) through (3) in the sense that the literal meaning plays only an *instrumental* role in communication. Their literal meaning is either totally trivial, as in (4), or irrelevant to the particular conversation, as in (5). In either

case, that meaning is no part of what the speaker intends to commit himself to by his utterance. As contextualists like Recanati (2001), Bezuidenhout (2001), and Carston (2002) would emphasize, ordinary speakers are as unlikely to pay conscious attention to these true propositions as they are to attend to the false ones in (1) through (3). Bob's fetish forces him to attend to this level of meaning, though. If his fetish extends to having his "conversational scorecard" not merely not contain untruths, but actually reflect what he believes, then there's a sense in which (4) and (5) are still problematic for him.

In addition to "twice true" metaphors like (4) and (5), though, there are also what David Hills (1997, 130) calls "twice apt" metaphors: utterances of sentences, like

(13) Jesus was a carpenter.

that can be relevant on both their literal and their metaphorical interpretations simultaneously (Cohen 1976, 254). For some utterances of potentially "twice apt" metaphors, the speaker still doesn't much care about the proposition literally expressed. For instance, if someone uttered

(14) George W. Bush is a primate,

at a New York cocktail party, the proposition literally expressed might not be any more conversationally relevant than that of (4). But we can also imagine a context in which the literal meaning of (14) *is* relevant: for instance, when uttered by a primatologist in an address to the Union of Concerned Scientists, as the introduction to a sustained analysis of Bush's foreign policy in terms of dominance structure and territorial disputes. Similarly, we can imagine a context for (13), say a Bible study class, in which the speaker directs considerable attention to the ways in which Jesus was literally a carpenter.

Even given a pair of contexts in which each of (13) and (14) are "twice apt," I think there remains an important difference between them. If the primatologist's analysis of Bush's actions in terms of primate behavior were sustained enough, then (14) would stop feeling metaphorical. The speaker would no longer be saying one thing in order to communicate something different; rather, she would mean exactly what she says, but in a highly resonant or *emblematic* way. By contrast, even on a sustained elaboration of the literal and metaphorical interpretations of (13), a significant gap would remain between the two interpretations. As we might put it, the relation between the two sets of propositions in (14) is *symbolic*, while in (13) it is *allegorical*: it involves a rich mapping between two largely *disjoint* sets.<sup>12</sup>

This pair of examples demonstrates that it's not enough for an utterance to be metaphorical just that the speaker intend for it to evoke some sort of aspectual thought, where one thought frames and organizes the hearer's overall thinking about a subject, and where this cultivation of aspectual thought

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<sup>12</sup> One of Davidson's arguments against metaphorical meanings is that unlike with puns, which do involve two meanings, "in metaphor there is no essential need of reiteration; whatever meanings we assign the words, they keep through every correct reading of the passage" (1978, 35). But this feature depends upon the proposition literally expressed being unfit to play more than a merely instrumental role. When the literal meaning is sensible and contextually relevant, as in (13), then we can experience an extra dimension of understanding and pleasure from moving between the two interpretations, much as with a good pun.

also produces a further content to which the speaker is committed. In addition, metaphor also essentially involves a felt *gap* between the literal and intended meaning. In particular, even when there is no essential falsity — even when we don't think of one thing as something *else* — the two interpretations must still be largely disjoint; otherwise, our intuition of metaphoricity evaporates. I believe that this shows that contextualists are wrong to deny literal meaning anything but a theoretical role in the interpretation of metaphor, even at the level of reflective awareness. Even for conversational metaphors, which we process effortlessly on the fly, our sense of metaphoricity depends on some sort of awareness of literal meaning, and its incongruity with the intended meaning.

The case of (14) points us toward a larger class of symbolically resonant but non-metaphorical utterances, which I think of in terms of the “telling detail”: inherently trivial facts with the power to reconfigure our overall understanding of the focal subject. Imagine, for instance, learning about a rich and gregarious man, who often makes a show of paying for dinner and leaving a generous tip, that he sometimes surreptitiously pockets part of that tip on his way out. This small action, which might involve no more than \$20 and no real risk of punishment, will have an enormous impact on our sense of his true character. In this case, it seems plausible that this action merely *reflects* a deeper motivating character trait. In other cases, the detail itself may have more causal efficacy. For instance, the fact that Tiger Woods was introduced to golf by sitting in a high chair while his father Earl practiced his swing is both emblematic of and also at least partly explains Tiger's intense passion for the sport.

Telling details, like juxtapositions, play a key role in poetry and fiction, and produce their own distinctive rhetorical effects. In particular, the elevation of what Pound called “luminous details” is a key strand of Modernism, tracing back to the Imagists' (1916) advocacy of “direct treatment of the ‘thing’,” using “the exact word” rather than “vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous.” With the telling detail, the speaker means and wants us to dwell upon the very thing that she says, and not some other thing that must remain somewhat vague precisely because it is stated explicit.

Li Po's poem “The Jewel Stairs' Grievance” beautifully exemplifies the rhetorical virtues of the telling detail; and Pound's annotation of it brings out just how evocative and emotionally powerful a few details can be. At the same time, it also illustrates the rhetorical danger of employing telling details. Because they do give the hearer some positive cognitive content directly and explicitly, telling details tend to be less open-ended than either juxtapositions or metaphors. In these latter cases, the hearer realizes straight away that she can't get *anywhere* with the utterance unless she moves beyond what the speaker actually says. By contrast, without Pound's annotation of Li Po's poem, I would have been tempted to stop considerably shorter in my interpretive efforts, because I would have been satisfied with the cognitive effects and aesthetic pleasure I got from the images themselves. In part, this particular case results from a failure on my part to uphold the Cooperative Principle: Li Po could reasonably have

expected his audience to invest more attention to tracing out the aspectual effects of his details than I did, because this is an important part of the poetic tradition in which he wrote. But it also illustrates a general danger with communication by way of aspectual thought: readers may not take the speaker's intention to produce the open-ended cultivation of an aspect as seriously as she had hoped, and so they may miss out on part of her intended meaning.

In contrast to the fairly intimate, personal scope of Li Po's poem, Thomas Hardy's poem "In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations'" shows just how large a situation a "telling detail" can be emblematic of, and hence can serve as an aspect for thinking about. The poem cites three details from an everyday scene: a man and his horse, smoothing a field for planting; smoldering piles of weeds, presumably uprooted by the same man; and a young woman whispering with her beau. Hardy is concerned both to insist both upon the particularity, even triviality, of these details — they are "only" what they are — and also to draw out their larger significance: they, and events just like them, comprise the "this" that will "go onward the same" through political upheaval and war. The clear but unstated implication is that the fabric of real life is woven out of such trivial details.<sup>13</sup>

Hardy's poem is especially interesting for our purposes because it helps to throw into relief the specific brand of aspectual thought involved in metaphor. The poem's title, like many titles, plays a crucial role in framing the scene depicted in the poem, and specifically in setting up the opposition between ordinary life and the "annals" of politics and war. More specifically, just as Nathan's parable did, the title links two analogous situations by mentioning one in a context where the other is already salient. Contemporary readers of Hardy's poem, which was written in 1915, would have been all too aware of the current world war. But Hardy names their current time by alluding to another apocalyptic moment: the Lord's vengeance against Babylon, as in Jeremiah 51:20: "Thou art my battle ax and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations." Allusions, like metaphors, invite us to think of one thing in comparison to something it's not. At the same time, the poem's *content* also invites us to see the war in terms of something *else* that it's not: an ordinary country scene. In this latter case, however, our attention is directed to the differences rather than the resemblances between the two situations; and as a result, we have no inclination to describe the title as a metaphor *for* the country scene. Metaphor involves, not merely a mapping between two distinct domains, but thinking of one domain in the light of its *resemblances* to another one.

Hardy's poem also nicely exemplifies the way in which aspectual thought can produce cognitive effects beyond our explicit awareness. As with the juxtapositions in §1, Hardy's poem forces its readers

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<sup>13</sup> Notice, though, that it is only from the perspective of "dynasties" that these events seem trivial. To the man, getting his crops in and well-weeded matters immensely; while to the girl and her suitor, the rest of the world is a trivial blur. For these people, their small, ordinary futures are the entire world.

to construct the mapping between the two domains of war and ordinary life for themselves. But Hardy's poem is especially rhetorically effective because this construction takes place against a background of presuppositions that the hearer doesn't fully realize she is adopting. Because the poem is explicitly focused on ordinary life, and implicitly on the opposition between that life and the tumult of Dynasties, our interpretive efforts focus primarily on imagining the described scene, and on deciding whether we agree that ordinary life really is more important, and more permanent, than war. Because we buy into Hardy's presuppositions about how we should focus our attention, we are likely to neglect the willful nostalgia implicit in Hardy's selection and description of ordinary details. In fact, by 1915 industrialization had already encroached significantly into the traditional English agriculture and dialect. Industry, not war, is the real threat to Hardy's bucolic scene; and unlike war, does have a relentless all-pervasiveness that will not "pass" or "cloud into night." Indeed, if we look more closely at the passage from Jeremiah which supplies the title, we find that Hardy's appropriation of it is even more willfully selective. In that passage, the Lord doesn't just threaten to break the nations in pieces, but also to break "horse and rider," "man and woman," "old and young," "young man and maid," and "the shepherd and his flock." Where Hardy implicitly presents the allusion as to a specifically political conflagration, the original passage explicitly lumps dynasties and nations together with the humbler aspects of life that Hardy claims are immune to such vicissitudes.

Much of the rhetorical power of the "telling detail" derives from the fact that the speaker seems to merely point out a true, undeniable fact, and let that fact speak for itself. Thus, even more than with juxtaposition, it can feel like a form of natural meaning. But if we look closer, we discover just how much cognitive and conversational manipulation — both of what to focus on and of what to ignore — goes into making a "telling detail" appear like an obvious, emblematic instance of a more general kind. As with Pound and Whitman, part of Hardy's creativity lies in effacing the labor involved in framing his subject, so the meaning that the hearer derives appears as if it were lying there waiting to be discovered.

### **3. Mythical Fiction and the Return of Metaphor**

Given what I've said so far, someone might conclude that aspectual thought can be communicated and cultivated in two basic ways: by way of imaginatively engaging with a false proposition, in which case we have something in the general family of metaphor, or by way of engaging with a true proposition, in which case we have something in the general family of emblems, exemplars or symbols. This picture would fit well with Kendall Walton's (1993) analysis of metaphor in terms of make-believe (cf. also Hills 1997). On this view, in making a metaphorical utterance, a speaker evokes a game of make-believe within which that utterance would count as a literal assertion. For example, by uttering (1), Romeo evokes an imaginative game according to which we pretend that Juliet really is the

sun; and by calling that game to mind, he makes salient the actual circumstances that would justify this claim within the make-believe. In light of our discussion of “telling details,” then, someone might try claiming that both metaphor and emblematic truths invite the hearer to engage in aspectual thought, and that the only difference between them is that in the former case we must first pretend *that* the proposition literally expressed is true. On this view, there is no deep difference between the sorts of imaginative projects we invoke by relying on truths and those we invoke through metaphor.

In fact, we’ve already seen that this view can’t be right. At the very least, examples like (4) and (5) show that it is not necessary for an utterance to be metaphorical that the proposition literally expressed be actually false and merely pretended true. Examples like (13) show that the proposition literally expressed need not be true but conversationally irrelevant, either: even if a speaker explicitly focuses on the literal implications of the claim that Jesus was a carpenter, this does not make the metaphorical reading feel less metaphorical, because the two sets of propositions, associated with the literal and the metaphorical reading, are largely disjoint.

In this section, I want to show that it’s not sufficient for metaphor that a false thought be used to produce aspectual thought, by contrasting metaphors with another phenomenon in ordinary speech that’s closely related to the telling detail: the “just-so story.” Just-so stories are not actually true, nor are they presented as such, but they are presented as being so *apt* that it’s as if they are true at a deeper level. For instance, suppose that I describe an acquaintance’s personality by saying,

(15) It’s as if someone told Jane when she was a kid that the only way to get ahead is by cocking her head to one side and batting her eyelashes.

I might do this while fully realizing that no one ever said any such thing to Jane; rather I believe that the best way to capture how she really is, is to *pretend* that someone did tell her that. The quality I’m interested in capturing by pretending this might be quite open-ended: I might want you to use this thought to organize your thinking about how Jane exploits her gender in social engagements, for instance, and about her ways of dealing with success and conflict generally.

Walton’s and Hills’ theory predicts that (15) should count as a metaphor. In uttering (15), the speaker wants the hearer to imagine that Jane “just plain is exactly that,” as Hills (1997, xx) puts it: the hearer merely needs to pretend that *that very proposition* is true, and then, straight away, she will have arrived at the right way of thinking of Jane. But in fact, precisely because the intended understanding is so directly connected to the proposition expressed, we don’t have any intuitive inclination to classify (15) as metaphorical. By contrast, when I ask you to think of Juliet as the sun or of Bill as a bulldozer in order to interpret (1) or (7), the process of interpretation is considerably more indirect. And in particular, there are many properties of the sun or of bulldozers that you must ignore in order to cultivate the relevant



mapping. If you didn't ignore them, but instead altered them to make Juliet more literally like the sun, or Bill more like a bulldozer, you would arrive at an inappropriate interpretation of the metaphor.

Like juxtapositions and telling details, just-so stories are important poetic tools for inducing aspectual thought that don't intuitively seem metaphorical. Consider, for instance, William Stafford's poem "A Story That Could be True." The poem's initial assumption — that you were exchanged in the cradle — is false but could, as the title says, be true. (Indeed, many children fantasize that it is true when fed up with their silly parents and dull surroundings.) At first, this seems like just a cute flight of fancy into a counterfactual world. As Stafford conjures the specific details of how things would be in this case, though, the story begins to feel *as if* it is true, in a different and deeper sense. But still, the deep truth of the poem's final thought — "Maybe I'm a king" — doesn't intuitively feel like that of a metaphor. Rather than serving to express some alternative, actually true proposition, it seems that the proposition literally expressed is *itself* apt or appropriate, in just the way that (15) is. I do have the feeling that a metaphor is hovering in the vicinity: the moral of the story, which is merely intimated, seems to be that if I live as if the sentence is actually true, then ultimately it may come to be actually but metaphorically true: I may become genuinely *kinglike*. But this is not explicit in the poem itself, nor is it the primary reading of the final line.

We might describe this sort of imaginative project, of taking an absurd assumption seriously and working through the imaginative ramifications of that very assumption, as one of "surrealization." Perhaps the most common form of poetic surrealization is anthropomorphism. In "Eyes Fastened with Pins," Charles Simic takes up the familiar impulse to personify death, and thereby to render something vast and incomprehensible more concrete and less terrifying. Rather than simply appropriating the traditional image of Death in a hooded friar's sackcloth with a sickle, Simic imagines Death in contemporary America, as a stereotypical hard-working family man. Here too, it feels as if Simic is taking the idea of death working too *literally* for the poem to be metaphorical. Indeed, a large part of our interest in the poem lies in the sheer absurdity of playing out this imaginative conceit, for its own sake. However, as we go along imagining death engaged in the mundane acts Simic describes — imagining ourselves being not just the unfortunate residents of the "wrong address" in a "strange part of town," but the neighbors to death, even married to and pining for death — we also gain a greater feeling of our own actual intimacy with death. As with (15) and with Stafford's poem, then, we have an implicit upshot for the actual world, mediated by an open-ended imaginative project. But again, I feel no intuitive pull to describe the poem itself as a metaphorical expression of this realization.

So at least in some cases, there's a clear difference between metaphorical interpretation and directly pretending-true. However, if we push metaphors and just-so stories each to their respective

poetic extremes, then I think the differences stop being quite so clear. To see this, suppose that you and I are hiking in the hills and encounter a lakeshore filled with springtime flowers, and that I say

(16) Look at those daffodils dancing in the breeze.

You agree that the wind is causing the daffodils to toss about, and we walk on. My utterance is literally false — flowers have no legs, and don't dance — but it successfully communicates the proposition that the flowers are bouncing in a somewhat rhythmic fashion; I have chosen a slightly colorful, false, but efficient, means of pointing these features out to you. Now, suppose you encounter nearly the same sentence in Wordsworth's poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." We can easily interpret it, and indeed the entire poem, in the same basic way here as well. If so, we will conclude that Wordsworth has described a pretty if fairly common sort of natural vista by a string of florid "poetic" metaphors — precisely the sort of "merely decorative" language that the Imagists abhorred. We might read a similar poem in a junior-high literary magazine, for instance, and conclude that it was sweet but rather trite.

On the other hand, we can take the poem more seriously, and assume that Wordsworth did choose "the exact words" to express what he meant. In this case, rather than just identifying one or a few plausible respects in which the flowers' movement might be like dancing and moving on, I try to imagine the daffodils as actually possessing as many of the properties of dancers, or at least properties closely analogous to those properties, as I can. Crucially, this will include properties I would normally dismiss as beyond the bounds of what someone might plausibly mean. I might imagine, for instance, that the daffodils are filled with the "sap of life," as humans are filled with blood; that they stand on the earth with a jaunty stance, as humans do before a dance; and that they are taking positive joy in their massed companionship.

In effect, when I imagine all this, I use the proposition literally expressed by (16) to guide a project of imaginative surrealization; and the further I manage to immerse myself in this project, the more literal my interpretation of that sentence becomes. As I play out the imaginative implications of this and related propositions, like that literally expressed by "The daffodils competed with the waves to express their glee," I am led to imagine nature generally as animate and full of intention and emotion; ultimately, I end up cultivating the fairly radical vision of Romantic naturalism championed by Wordsworth. In this interpretive context, Wordsworth's description of himself as "wandering lonely as a cloud" becomes considerably more poignant: as my imagined understanding of daffodils, stars, and waves becomes more anthropomorphic, Wordsworth undergoes a reverse process of *de*-humanization. The daffodils are lively, sprightly, companionable, enthusiastic, and joyful; by contrast, he is amorphous, dull, passive, soulless and disconnected. Understood in this way, the daffodils' gift to him is much more than just the memory of a pretty scene; rather, they re-humanize him, transforming him back from an empty non-entity into "a poet" in the fullest sense of the term.

In this case, then, what is intuitively a paradigmatic metaphor becomes nearly literal. We might say that the difference between the imaginative projects called for by metaphor and by just-so stories is a matter of *direction* and *degree*. It is a matter of direction, in a sense articulated by Samuel Levin (1978, 1988). Normally, when we encounter a metaphor, we reconstrue our understanding of the *words* to fit our expectations about the *world*. But with a just-so story, and also with deeply meant metaphors like Wordsworth's, the direction of fit is reversed: we reconstrue our imagined sense of the world to fit a literal understanding of the speaker's words. As Levin says, "on this view, it is not the language that is remarkable, it is the conception; given the conception, the linguistic description of it follows straightforwardly" (1979, 133).

The difference between the imaginative projects called for by metaphor and by just-so stories is matter of degree, in the sense that the two projects begin in opposite places, but come closer together as they are each pushed further. In encountering Wordsworth's poem, we begin with our ordinary commonsense assumptions about daffodils and dancing; but we are gradually drawn into an alternative reality. With Simic's poem, by contrast, the reader steps into wildly alternative terrain from the start, and at first it seems as if we're *just* on a flight of absurdist fancy. But the more we inhabit that imaginative world, the more we are led to reconstrue our own actual intimacy with death. Of course, even when I am in the fullest grip of Romantic naturalism, there are many implications of the propositions literally expressed that I don't actively imagine to be true, or take Wordsworth to intend me to endorse: I don't, for instance, pretend that daffodils have legs and dance by contracting their leg-muscles, or that they get hot from their exertion and want to jump in the lake to cool down. Exerting the imaginative effort to pretend that these things were true would indeed lead me astray. Similarly, although my imaginative flight of fancy in reading Simic's poem alters my understanding of actual death and its role in our lives, there are many ramifications of Simic's surreal terrain that I don't map onto the real world. Crucially, the sorts of features that get ignored are different in the two cases: the absurd concrete details that Simic asks us to conjure up in imagining that death is a hard-working family man, or that we would come up with if we were really pretending that Wordsworth's daffodils are *dancing*, are precisely the sorts of details that would lead us astray in cultivating a metaphorical interpretation. Thus, there remains an important gap between the two imaginative interpretive projects even when they are pushed to their respective limits.

I believe that both of these imaginative impulses are essential for poetry, as for art more generally: we should both seek to understand the world as it actually is, and also explore wildly counterfactual terrain. This, I think, is one of the key lessons of Marianne Moore's poem "Poetry." Poets must be willing to embrace absurd counterfactual assumptions on those assumptions' *own* terms, by delving deeply into the imaginative worlds that they define, as Simic does. So too, we as readers must be willing to assume that poems may really express a radically alternative vision; we shouldn't sell

Wordsworth short by just translating “dancing” into “bouncing” and moving on. On the other hand, as Moore says, poets must also make “a place for the genuine” in these imaginative flights, by populating their “imaginary gardens with real toads.” That is, we as poets and readers need to be guided by our lived sense of gritty reality. Poetry shouldn’t flee the rough, incomprehensible and even prosaic aspects of reality for an erudite, “high-sounding” Platonic ether. If poetry concerns itself with a prettified, clichéd simulacrum of reality, then it is just “fiddle,” worthy of contempt. Instead, poetry should confront the baffling, eye-dilating, hair-raising aspects of reality head on — and it should do it by taking them seriously in imagination.

#### 4. Why metaphor, then?

I have argued for two main claims in this paper. First, I’ve argued that many of the effects we associate most closely with metaphor — in particular, open-endedness, evocativeness, vivid imagery, and affective power — are not distinctive to metaphor *per se*, but follow from using language to induce aspectual thought. An important consequence of this is that it’s not only metaphor that poses a challenge to finite paraphrasability and propositional, truth-conditional theories of meaning: parables, juxtapositions, telling details, and just-so stories also pose many of the same difficulties.

Second, I’ve argued that what’s distinctive about metaphor is its specific brand of aspectual thought, which involves cultivating a mapping between two *distinct* thoughts. All the uses of language we’ve discussed employ one crystallizing thought to frame our overall thinking about some subject. But only metaphor frames one thing or situation in light of its resemblances to something else. With both telling details and just so stories, the speaker asks her hearers to think of one thing or situation, *a*, in terms of *it* — that very thing, *a* — being *F*. In the “just so” story, the hearer must transform *a* in his imagination so that it “just plain is exactly” *F*. In metaphor, by contrast, the speaker doesn’t expect her hearer to transform *a* into being *F*. Rather, she merely asks him to think of *a* through *F*’s *lens*: to structure his understanding of *a* in terms of his understanding of *F*.

Apart from general theoretical concerns about semantics and “what is said,” this is an important reason not to assimilate metaphorical language to other uses of language that express *ad hoc*, context-specific concepts, such as loose talk and deferred reference (as in “I’m parked out back”). With metaphor, the contrast between the literal, conventional meaning and the intended way of thinking about the subject is relevant in a way it is not in those other cases.

But now we might ask why, if these other, broadly symbolic uses of language are so ubiquitous, we so often opt for metaphor. This is perhaps especially puzzling because metaphorical interpretation is so much more indirect, and thus carries a significantly greater risk for interpretive confusion. One reason is that metaphors are often especially striking rhetorically, because their literal incongruity makes the

resemblances we do uncover more surprising. A second, deeper reason is that metaphors can underwrite imaginative projects that simply can't be accomplished through telling details or "just so" stories, because the incongruity between *a* and being *F* is too great. For example, contrast (16) with (1). Both of these metaphors are literally false — even, depending upon one's metaphysical views, necessarily false. But if we take Wordsworth's metaphor seriously, we *can* start to get a grip on what it might be like if daffodils really did dance. By contrast, we have very little imaginative grasp on what it would be like if *Juliet* really were *the sun*: the gaseous body at the center of the solar system. Because being a person and being the sun are so utterly different, it is hard to see how the imaginative project of thinking of Juliet in the light of her resemblances to the sun could morph into imagining that she really *is* the sun.

Some aspects for thought are so distant, in the sense that the gulf between the sort of thing *a* is and the sort of thing that *F*s are is so great, that they can only operate "from the outside," by way of indirect resemblance rather than direct predication. As (13) and (14) nicely demonstrate, not all metaphors are like this. Nevertheless, I think the fact that metaphors can employ very distant aspects helps to explain how they can have such powerful imaginative consequences. Just a spark of perceived resemblance can be enough to get us started thinking of one thing in terms of another, where we would never even consider the possibility of its actually *being* that way. As we explore these resemblances, however, our curiosity may propel us to take that metaphor increasingly literally. And as we do, we may end up uncovering new and unexpected ways that the world itself actually is.

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*In a Station of the Metro*

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:  
Petals on a wet, black bough.

— Ezra Pound (1913)

*A Noiseless Patient Spider*

A noiseless patient spider,  
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,  
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,  
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament out of itself,  
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you O my soul where you stand,  
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,  
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,  
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,  
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

— Walt Whitman (1891)

*The Jewel Stairs' Grievance*

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.

— Li Po, trans. Ezra Pound

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.

*In Time of "The Breaking of Nations"*

I  
Only a man harrowing clods  
In a slow silent walk  
With an old horse that stumbles and nods  
Half asleep as they stalk.

II

Only thin smoke without flame  
From the heaps of couch-grass;  
Yet this will go onward the same  
Though Dynasties pass.

III

Yonder a maid and her wight  
Come whispering by:  
War's annals will cloud into night  
Ere their story die.

— Thomas Hardy (1915)

*A Story That Could Be True*

If you were exchanged in the cradle and  
your real mother died  
without ever telling the story  
then no one knows your name,  
and somewhere in the world  
your father is lost and needs you  
but you are far away.  
He can never find  
how true you are, how ready.  
When the great wind comes  
and the robberies of the rain  
you stand on the corner shivering.  
The people who go by –  
you wonder at their calm.  
They miss the whisper that runs  
any day in your mind,  
“Who are you really, wanderer?”  
and the answer you have to give  
no matter how dark and cold  
the world around you is:  
“Maybe I’m a king.”

— William Stafford (1977)

*Eyes Fastened With Pins*

How much death works,  
No one knows what a long  
Day he puts in. The little  
Wife always alone  
Ironing death's laundry.  
The beautiful daughters  
Setting death's supper table.  
The neighbors playing  
Pinochle in the backyard



Or just sitting on the steps  
Drinking beer. Death,  
Meanwhile, in a strange  
Part of town looking for  
Someone with a bad cough,  
But the address somehow wrong,  
Even death can't figure it out  
Among all the locked doors...  
And the rain beginning to fall.  
Long windy night ahead.  
Death with not even a newspaper  
To cover his head, not even  
A dime to call the one pining away,  
Undressing slowly, sleepily,  
And stretching naked  
On death's side of the bed.

— Charles Simic (1977)

*I wandered lonely as a cloud*

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the milky way,  
They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay:  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they  
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:  
A poet could not but be gay,  
In such jocund company:  
I gazed — and gazed — but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie,  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.

— William Wordsworth (1804)

*Poetry*

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond  
all this fiddle.  
Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one  
discovers in  
it after all, a place for the genuine.  
Hands that can grasp, eyes  
that can dilate, hair that can rise  
if it must, these things are important not because a  
  
high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because  
they are  
useful. When they become so derivative as to become  
unintelligible,  
the same thing may be said for all of us, that we  
do not admire what  
we cannot understand: the bat  
holding on upside down or in quest of something to  
  
eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless  
wolf under  
a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse  
that feels a flea, the base-  
ball fan, the statistician —  
nor is it valid  
to discriminate against “business documents and  
  
school-books”; all these phenomena are important. One must make  
a distinction  
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the  
result is not poetry,  
nor till the poets among us can be  
“literalists of  
the imagination” — above  
insolence and triviality and can present  
  
for inspection, “imaginary gardens with real toads in them,”  
shall we have  
it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand,  
the raw material of poetry in  
all its rawness and  
that which is on the other hand  
genuine, you are interested in poetry.

— Marianne Moore (1920)