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SHOWING, TELLING AND SEEING
Metaphor and "Poetic" Language

ABSTRACT: Theorists often associate certain "poetic" qualities with metaphor – most especially, producing an open-ended, holistic perspective which is evocative, imagistic and affectively-laden. I argue that, on the one hand, non-cognitivists are wrong to claim that metaphors *only* produce such perspectives: like ordinary literal speech, they also serve to undertake claims and other speech acts with propositional content. On the other hand, contextualists are wrong to assimilate metaphor to literal loose talk: metaphors depend on using one thing as a perspective for thinking about something else. I bring out the distinctive way that metaphor works by contrasting it with two other poetic uses of language, juxtapositions and "telling details," that do fit the accounts of metaphor offered by non-cognitivists and contextualists, respectively.

Consider the following literary metaphors:

(1)   Juliet is the sun.[1]

(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.[2]

(3)   The hourglass whispers to the lion's paw.[3]

When we read these sentences in their respective contexts, the effect seems to be clearly of a different kind than that of a typical utterance of a sentence like (4):

(4)   There's beer in the fridge.

While (4) communicates a certain proposition or thought, which is more or less directly expressed by the sentence that the speaker actually utters, the primary aim of these metaphorical utterances is to produce an overall *way* of thinking, one that is open-ended, evocative, imagistic, and heavily affective – in short, poetic.[4]

More specifically, many people have suggested that the poetic power of these metaphors consists in their ability to make us see one thing *as* something else, thereby providing us with a novel perspective on it. Of course, we don't literally see Juliet, or life, in any way at all when we hear (1) or (2); and we can't determine what is supposed to be seen as what simply by examining the sentence in (3). Still, the idea is that in these cases, something happens in thought that's a lot like what happens in perception when we shift from seeing the famous Gestalt figure as a duck to seeing it as a rabbit. In the perceptual case, when we shift between perspectives, different elements in the figure are highlighted, and take on a different significance: for instance, the duck's bill becomes the rabbit's ears. We are under no illusion that the figure itself – the arrangement of dots and lines – has changed, but its constituent elements now hang together in a different structure for us. Further, the difference in our perception is not just a matter of apprehending a new proposition: we already knew *that* the figure could be seen as a rabbit, and that those were supposed to be the ears, for instance. Rather, the difference is experiential, intuitive, and holistic. Similarly, the intuition goes, with metaphor: when Romeo tells us that Juliet is the sun, he is not primarily asking us to accept some particular proposition. Rather, he wants us to adopt a certain perspective on Juliet, which structures much of what we know about her in a holistic, intuitive, experiential way. And if we do adopt this perspective, even temporarily, then certain of Juliet's features – such as her beauty, her uniqueness, and the warmth with which she fills his heart – will be highlighted in our thinking, and will take on a new significance for us.

Theorists who take the poetic, perspectival effects of metaphors like (1) through (3) seriously often conclude from these observations that metaphors are simply in a different line of business from ordinary workaday utterances like (4). Metaphor is a *non-cognitive* phenomenon, they claim – not in the sense that metaphors don't have cognitive effects,

but in that a speaker doesn't *mean* any propositional content by them. Thus, Donald Davidson (1978, 46) claims that a metaphor is "like a picture or a bump on the head," in causing us to "appreciate some fact – but not by standing for, or expressing, the fact." Instead, he claims, metaphors work by "prompting," "inspiring," "provoking or inviting" us to appreciate some fact, by comparing one thing with another. And in doing this, metaphors aren't particularly distinctive – metaphor and its close cousin simile are merely two "among endless devices that serve to alert us to aspects of the world by inviting us to make comparisons" (1978, 40). Likewise, Richard Rorty holds that metaphors are like "scraps of poetry which send shivers down our spine, non-sentential phrases which reverberate endlessly, [and] change our selves and our patterns of action, without ever coming to express beliefs or desires" (1987, 285); they "do not (literally) *tell* us anything, but they do make us notice things...They do not have cognitive content, but they are responsible for a lot of cognitions" (1987, 290).[5] One way to motivate non-cognitivism about metaphor – though not one that either Davidson or Rorty themselves endorse – is to claim that sentences like (1) through (3) are so deviant if construed literally that they can't enter into the sorts of rational inferences that are essential for meaning; like bumps and birdsongs, they can only *cause* reactions in their hearers.[6]

Another influential view of metaphor takes the opposite tack. Contextualists and Relevance Theorists like Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1985; 1986), Robyn Carston (2002), Anne Bezuidenhout (2001), and François Recanati (2001) tend to focus on ordinary conversational metaphors, such as

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

These utterances clearly are used to make propositional assertions, much like literal utterances like (4). Given this similarity, they argue that metaphor isn't such a special use of language after all – or at least, that we get a distorted understanding of metaphor if we focus on the fact that sentences like (1) through (3) are false or otherwise 'deviant'. Instead, they think, when we hear a metaphor, we process it in just the same way we process other forms of 'loose talk', such as an utterance of

(6)   The steak is raw.

to communicate that the steak is undercooked. In both cases, the sentence's semantically encoded meaning serves as a skeleton for the construction of a new, context-specific meaning, which is what the speaker says.

I think that each of these views gets something importantly right about metaphor. But at the same time, because each assimilates metaphor to something else – bumps on the head and ordinary loose talk, respectively – they miss an important part of its distinctive workings and power. In §1, I'll argue against the non-cognitivist that the fact that metaphors can produce such rich, non-propositional, perspectival effects is fully compatible with their having a meaning in a perfectly standard sense of the term. And in §2, I'll argue against the contextualist that even though we do usually process metaphors more or less automatically, they still depend on a felt gap between what the speaker says and what she means. I will establish these problems with non-cognitivism and contextualism by contrasting metaphor with two other poetic uses of language – juxtapositions and "telling details". By seeing how these phenomena differ from metaphor, even though they also induce open-ended perspectives, we can see more clearly what is distinctive about metaphor after all.

1.   METAPHOR AND JUXTAPOSITION

According to the non-cognitivist, metaphors work like bumps on the head or flashes of light: they cause effects in their hearers, but they don't mean or stand for those effects. In particular, the non-cognitivist is committed to the claim that the predicative structure of (1) and (2) is irrelevant: according to him, we could achieve the same effect by dropping the copula and simply *juxtaposing* the two subjects – Juliet and the sun, or life and a walking shadow. And indeed, poets do often employ juxtaposition in order to produce precisely the sorts of perspectives that non-cognitivists point to with metaphor. For instance, in Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," we are invited to think of faces as flowers; indeed, we might say that a metaphorical 'are' floats implicitly between the two lines:

In a Station of the Metro

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

Likewise, in Walt Whitman's "A Noiseless Patient Spider," even though there's no missing 'is', we're clearly expected to compare the spider of the first stanza with Whitman's soul in the second:

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 an-
    chor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my
    soul.

The effect that Pound is after is largely imagistic: we're supposed to visualize a collection of faces, and see them *as* petals, or at least notice an affinity between the 'apparition' in our minds and the image of wet petals on a bough. By contrast, the 'seeing as' in Whitman's poem is less visual and more like the open-ended patterns of thought produced by (1) through (3). The spider serves as a frame that highlights certain features of Whitman's soul – for instance, his endless striving for meaningful connection; while downplaying others – for instance, the fact that these strivings are most likely pursued over tea and coffee and involve intellectual conversation.[7] Crucially, though, these poems achieve their perspectival effects without arousing any temptation to assign a hidden meaning to the poet's words: those words merely invite or inspire us to further thought. So too, the non-cognitivist maintains, with metaphor: we should abandon the inclination to speak of metaphorical meaning, and just talk about the cognitions and feelings that the metaphor prompts.

The question we need to ask is whether the non-cognitivist is right to assimilate metaphors to juxtapositions in this way. We can break this down into two subsidiary questions: first, is the non-cognitivist right to insist that neither juxtaposition nor metaphor involves meaning? And second, are juxtaposition and metaphor really equivalent: does juxtaposition do all that metaphor does?

I think the answer to the first question is 'no': both juxtaposition and metaphor do involve meaning. It's true that we don't feel the need to assign a special meaning to Pound's or Whitman's words; but that's not the only sort of meaning there is. Consider an utterance of (7), offered as a letter of recommendation for a job teaching philosophy:

(7)   Mr. X is punctual and has good handwriting.

By uttering (7), the speaker doesn't just try to implant the idea that Mr. X is a bad philosopher into her hearer's head, in the way that an advertiser might try to implant a desire for cigarettes by using product placement in a movie, or as Moe might try to implant the thought that Curley should go home by hitting him on the head with a two-by-four. Rather, the speaker of (7) intends for her hearers to think that Mr. X is a bad philosopher *because* they recognize that she uttered (7) in order to get them to recognize that that's what she's trying to get them to think. That is, (7) exemplifies the sort of self-reflexive intention that defines Grice's (1989) notion of speaker's meaning. But now, returning to juxtapositions and metaphors, it seems clear that they too exhibit this sort of self-reflexive intention. Whitman, for instance, is inviting his hearers to think about his soul in the light of a comparison with a spider, and to do so *because* we recognize that this is what he's inviting us to do.

A non-cognitivist might well concede this; but he would still object that there's a crucial difference between the *kind* of effect that the speaker wants to produce in (7) and the effect that Whitman wants to produce by his poem. With (7), the speaker intends to communicate a fairly specific propositional message: that Mr. X is a bad philosopher. By contrast, the effect Whitman is after is poetic and perspectival. And this, the non-cognitivist insists, isn't the right kind of thing to be considered meaning at all, whether as speaker's meaning or as sentence meaning. As Davidson puts it,

> 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 misses the real interest of his juxtaposition in particular and of poetry in general.

I agree with the non-cognitivist that the perspectives that are induced by both metaphor and juxtaposition aren't themselves suitable to be called meaning in a standard sense of the term, because they are essentially non-propositional (see Reimer, this volume, for a dissenting view). As we might put it, a perspective provides us with a *tool* for thinking rather than a thought *per se*. But this is compatible with the possibility that juxtapositions and metaphors also convey propositional messages. And I think they do. The Whitman of "A Noiseless Patient Spider" communicates, among other things, that he is lonely. Likewise, in uttering (1), Romeo communicates, among other things, that Juliet is the most beautiful girl in Verona. In saying (2), Macbeth communicates that the frenzy of jostling for power is fleeting, and that death ultimately takes us all. And so on. These messages clearly don't come close to exhausting the total cognitive and imaginative upshot of their utterances, and it's not clear that I've gotten these particular claims just right. But these worries often apply to paraphrases of literal utterances as well. Further, even if their total import is essentially open-ended, this doesn't imply that juxtapositions and metaphors don't express any propositional content at all, or that we can't make our paraphrases as nuanced and detailed as our current purposes demand (Camp, 2006a).

So I think that both juxtapositions and metaphors do produce speaker's meanings, in Grice's sense. What about our second question: are juxtapositions and metaphors equivalent? The fact that Grice himself (1975, 53) treated metaphor as a form of conversational implicature, on a par with the content communicated by an utterance of (7),

might lead us to expect that they are. However, I think that here too, the answer is clearly 'no'. We can see why by returning to (7). By expressing herself so indirectly, the speaker 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 given the context of utterance, it was perfectly obvious that the speaker meant that Mr. X is a bad philosopher. However, while this might well be obvious for many practical purposes, it is still open to the speaker to respond that it only appeared obvious to the hearer because he made additional assumptions about her communicative intentions, and to insist that those assumptions were unwarranted in this case. Indeed, it is precisely the desire to preserve the option of such a response that presumably led the speaker to express herself in such a roundabout way in the first place. While such a response may be disingenuous, it is one that politicians and diplomats offer regularly, and one that is not available in cases where the speaker has directly and literally stated her intended meaning (Camp, 2006b, 2007). Thus, implicatures offer a brand of communication with deniability.

Because juxtapositions merely place two topics side-by-side without explicitly connecting them, they offer a similar species of deniability. This is nicely evident, I think, in parables. Parables are a classic form of juxtaposition (indeed, the term "parable" derives from a Greek expression meaning "casting beside"). Specifically, consider Jesus' parable of the sower (Matthew 13: 1-9):

> The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, "Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some [seeds] fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth; and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them. But others fell into good ground, and brought forth

fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.
Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

This is all that Jesus says to the assembled multitude. The clear implication is that different people are better or worse equipped to receive the revelations of God's message: some are too distracted to hear it at all, some achieve only a superficial and fleeting understanding, but a few understand deeply and richly. If the parable's message is so obvious, though, why doesn't Jesus just say it outright? Immediately following his speech, his disciples ask him this very question; and Jesus responds:

> Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing
> see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they under-
> stand.

That is, much as with (7), the parable enables Jesus to communicate his message to his intended audience, but without coming out and saying it explicitly for just anyone to hear. By telling the story in a context that invites a certain analogy to those who are prepared to make certain interpretive assumptions, Jesus avoids making himself vulnerable to misunderstanding by those who are not ready. In particular, by leaving the crucial assumptions unstated, he avoids accusations of heresy by the religious establishment. Further, though, by leaving the analogy implicit, Jesus also forces his intended hearers – those who do have the metaphorical ears to hear – to make the relevant assumptions and to cultivate the relevant perspective for themselves. This in turn leads them to assume more interpretive responsibility for that perspective, and it makes the ultimate message itself seem more objective and less the idiosyncratic invention of a single individual, than it would otherwise. This is why parables are such good teaching tools: they present a message in a concrete, vivid form, which is highly memorable once it has been grasped, but which the hearer must actively construct for himself.

So juxtapositions work especially well for Jesus, given his particular rhetorical aims. In other communicative contexts, these distinctive rhetorical effects aren't so appropriate, and hence juxtapositions don't work as well. To see this, consider another parable: that of King David and the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel: 11-12). King David has summoned Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, who is a soldier in David's army, to the

palace to sleep with him. When she becomes pregnant, David orders Uriah to 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 the following story:

> 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. Nathan then says to him: "Thou art the man"; and David repents. As Ted Cohen (1997, 231-242) and Josef Stern (2000, 260-1) have argued, David repents because the story induces a shift in the aspect under which he thinks about his 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 generally wrong to take things without compensation; and so on. What the story does is to cause him to restructure 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 in a case where he has no vested interest, David becomes aware of Uriah's point of view in a new and palpable way.

This, again, is just the sort of open-ended, intuitive, emotionally-laden perspectival effect that is associated with metaphor. And Nathan *could* have produced this same effect even if he had left off his final line: he could have simply told the parable, and then mentioned how sad it was that Uriah, who so dearly loved his only wife, had been killed in battle. By juxtaposing the two situations, Nathan would have

intimated that there was an important connection between them. If he cast enough knowing glances, nudges and winks at David, he would likely have succeeded in causing David to see his own situation through the story's lens. Nathan could thereby have insinuated or implicated that David did a bad thing. According to the non-cognitivist, this is all that speakers of metaphorical utterances can ever do; the difference between juxtapositions and metaphors is just that the former "invite" us to make a comparison, while the latter "bully" us into making it (1978, 41).

However, I think it's clear that by saying "Thou art the man," Nathan does something more than just hint or insinuate. Although he speaks metaphorically, he still *asserts* something about David – even if it's hard to put that something into exact literal terms. And by doing so, Nathan puts himself in a palpably more dangerous situation than if he had simply juxtaposed the two situations, however much he'd nudged and winked. Assertion involves putting oneself down on record as committed to some content, and thereby makes one responsible for justifying its truth if challenged (Brandom, 1983; Green, 2000). By coming out and accusing David, Nathan puts himself on the line in the way that neither the writer of the damning letter of recommendation, nor Jesus with his parable, do.

This case brings out the difference between juxtaposition, as a form of implicature, and metaphor, as a form of assertion (or other speech act) especially forcefully. In other cases, the difference is less dramatic, but I think it's still real, 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 explicitly speaks about 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; as with Jesus' parable, this leads us to take more interpretive responsibility for the analogy, and makes it seem more natural. And even in the final lines, when Whitman does employ explicit metaphors, such as describing his attempts at emotional connection as "the gossamer thread you fling," these all still *presuppose* that basic metaphor of soul-as-spider – the basic metaphor remains implicit throughout.

Suppose, though, that Whitman had instead written the following lines as the opening of the second stanza:

> 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.

In that case, his primary communicative purpose would still have been the same: to invite us to use the spider as a perspective for thinking about his soul. But introducing an explicit predicative relationship between the spider and his soul would have made a substantive rhetorical difference. Whitman would now be responsible for defending the claim that his soul is a certain way, one which is determined by comparing his soul to the spider of the first stanza. It would now be possible for someone to object to this claim, for instance by pointing out that in fact Whitman had lots of bosom companions, or that he didn't even try to get out and see people. If these objections were sufficiently on point, then Whitman's revised poem wouldn't just be less illuminating or insightful. He would have asserted something false – even if it would be crass to insist on pointing out this falsity, on the grounds that it doesn't affect the poem's internal aesthetic merits. Thus, the question of what message a poet is trying to convey is not a bad one in the sense that it suffers from presupposition failure, because there is no such message; rather, it may be bad in the sense that it distracts us from features that matter more to the poem as an aesthetic object.

The fact that metaphors are in the same basic line of communicative business as literal utterances becomes even clearer if we turn our attention to metaphors that don't take the form of declarative sentences. Suppose Whitman were to ask: "Is my soul a spider on a precipice casting its thread, or a honeybee returning to his hive, laden with the fruits of discovery?" Then his question wouldn't just offer two different perspectives for thinking about his soul; it would also call for an answer. Or, suppose a friend were to exhort Whitman to social engagement by saying "Oh Walt, be a spider and cast out your thread! Linger not alone on the precipice!" Then he would not just be trying to cause Whitman to think about himself and his social interactions from a certain perspective. Rather, he would be recommending that Whitman undertake

certain actions, ones which might be difficult to specify in literal terms, but which have genuine conditions of satisfaction nonetheless.

Thus, I think we do have good reason to treat metaphors, not just as a form of indirect speaker's meaning on a par with implicature, but as genuinely undertaking speech acts of the usual sorts. As a result, I think we have good reason to reject non-cognitivism about even rich, resonant, poetic metaphors. As we might put it, metaphors don't just *show* us new and surprising features of things in the world – they can also, *pace* Rorty, *tell* us that things are a certain way.[8]

2. "TELLING DETAILS" AS EMBLEMATIC TRUTHS

In reaction to the excesses of non-cognitivism, the contextualist position may now seem especially inviting, with its emphasis on the continuity between metaphor and ordinary speech. In particular, the contextualist view nicely accounts for the fact that metaphorical utterances, unlike juxtapositions, genuinely commit the speaker to some content. Contextualists regularly point to the similarity between what a speaker does by uttering an ordinary conversational metaphor like (5) and what she does by uttering a literal sentence like (4) as evidence that in speaking metaphorically, a speaker really has *said* what she meant, and that her words have taken on a new, contextually-determined meaning – in marked contrast to the highly indirect communication exemplified by an implicature like (7).

Confronted with the non-cognitivist's insistence that poetic metaphors like (1) through (3) are much more open-ended, imagistic, affective, and so on than ordinary conversational metaphors like (5), contextualists can happily acknowledge this to be so, but insist that here too, we find continuity with ordinary discourse. For instance, a sentence like

(8)   Jane is a real woman now.

appears to be perfectly literal, but it produces the same sorts of perspectival effects as metaphor. Among contextualists, Relevance theorists in particular are committed to the claim that all communicative effects are propositional: what makes an utterance 'poetic', on their view, is that it weakly communicates a wide range of propositions rather than strongly communicates just a few (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995; Pilkington

2000; Wilson and Carston, this volume). Like Davidson, I think that perspectives can't be cashed out in propositional terms. But a contextualist could retain the essential core of her position while abandoning the commitment to exhaustive propositionality. This would seem to give us the best of both worlds, allowing us to acknowledge both the perspectival and the propositional uses of metaphor.

The contextualist might appear to find further support for treating metaphor as an instance of what is said from the fact that while most metaphors, like (1) through (3), are literally false, there are also plenty of what Cohen (1976, 254) calls "twice true" metaphors, such as

(9)   No man is an island.[9]

(10)   The sun blazes bright today; the clouds flee from his mighty beams.[10]

The difference between the literal falsity of (1) through (3) or (5) and the literal truth of (9) and (10) doesn't seem to make any substantive interpretive difference – indeed, it may take a moment to even notice the difference between them. This is just what we would predict if hearers directly and automatically constructed the speaker's intended meaning, without engaging in the kind of roundabout communication that typifies implicatures like (7).

I agree that "twice true" metaphors like (9) and (10) are functionally on a par with (1) through (3). But I think this is not because the literal meaning merely plays a behind-the-scenes role in the construction of a new, context-dependent meaning. On the contrary, I think that what unites these metaphors is that they all involve an intuitively felt *gap* between literal and intended meaning, where the first provides the perspective for constructing the second. And I think this demonstrates that the contextualist is wrong to assimilate metaphor to literal loose talk.

To see this, consider the following further pair of metaphors:

(11)   George W. Bush is a primate.

(12)   Jesus was a carpenter.

Unlike (9) and (10), which are merely "twice true," these metaphors are "twice apt" (Hills, 1997, 130): they can be not just true, but actually conversationally relevant and appropriate, on both their literal

and metaphorical interpretations. On the one hand, imagine someone uttering (11) at a Manhattan cocktail party, as a way of communicating that Bush is a thoughtless, aggressive dope. Here, the utterance seems like a standard metaphor, which works in the same basic way as (1) or (9); the speaker might have achieved the same effect by saying "Bush is a chimpanzee" or "Bush is a gorilla" instead. However, we can also imagine a context in which the literal meaning of (11) is conversationally relevant: for instance, if uttered by a primatologist to the Union of Concerned Scientists, as the start of a sustained analysis of Bush's foreign policy in terms of aggression, dominance and territory. So too, we can imagine an analogous pair of utterances for (12). On the one hand, someone might utter (12) metaphorically, as a way of communicating, roughly, that Jesus took the crooked timber of humanity and transformed it into something more useful and beautiful. On the other hand, we can also imagine a context in which the literal meaning is relevant: say in a Bible study class about Jesus' life and work, in which it's important that Jesus was a humble tradesman who worked with his hands.

In both (11) and (12), then, we have a sentence that is literally true, that a speaker could plausibly mean literally, and that can be used metaphorically to produce the sort of open-ended perspective associated with metaphor, and especially with poetic metaphors.[11] Further, we can imagine contexts for both utterances in which *both* the literal and the metaphorical readings are salient. However, I think there's a crucial difference between these two cases. If the primatologist continued her analysis of Bush's actions in terms of primate behavior, then at least to my ear, (11) would eventually cease to seem like a metaphor at all, even if the primatologist's overall point was the same as the cocktail attendee's – to communicate that Bush is uneducated, aggressive, and instinctually driven, and to communicate this by cultivating a perspective that's provided by (11). By contrast, I think that (12) would continue to feel metaphorical even on a sustained elaboration of both the literal and extended meanings.

Intuitively, (11) feels like a metaphor only so long as there remains a gap between what the speaker says and what she intends to convey. If the primatologist builds a persuasive case, then the intended meaning effectively becomes an entailment of the literal meaning itself. By

contrast, the reason (11) feels like a metaphor when it is uttered at the cocktail party is that the speaker is understood as meaning something *different* from what she said – where what she is understood as having *said* itself involves a contextual narrowing of the semantically encoded meaning from the full extension of 'primate' to a more stereotypical class, such as chimpanzees or gorillas. This contextually modified literal meaning is what provides the relevant perspective for thinking about Bush, which in turn generates the communicated content. Interpreting (11) as a metaphor thus involves an additional stage beyond loose talk, which simply adjusts the semantically encoded meaning to arrive directly at the content the speaker intends to be committing herself to.[12]

As we might put it, if we pay sufficiently sustained attention to both the semantically encoded meaning and the ultimately intended meaning of (11), then the relation between the two sets of propositions becomes *symbolic*: the proposition literally expressed is both a subset of, and provides a perspective for generating, a larger class of communicated propositions. By contrast, the relation between the two sets of propositions with (12) is closer to being *allegorical:* the sets are largely disjoint, and we are invited to use one thing as a perspective for thinking about something else. Likewise, "twice true" metaphors like (9) and (10) feel metaphorical because they ask us to think of one thing – mankind, Achilles – in terms of something else – islands, the sun. And finally, (11) feels metaphorical only so long as we construe the sentence uttered in such a way that it too provides a vehicle for thinking about the subject in terms of something else; if we think of Bush as something he actually *is*, then the perspective and the ultimate content are no longer metaphorical. The contextualist can't explain why this disjoint relation between two meanings should be required for metaphor but not for either symbolism or loose talk, since she maintains that in all cases the semantically encoded meaning simply serves as a springboard for constructing a further, extended meaning; and (11) on both of its readings, as well as (9), (10), and (12), all fit this pattern.[13]

We can see another respect in which metaphors are importantly discontinuous from utterances where the speaker means what she says if we return to the contrast between metaphors and juxtapositions in §1. There, I emphasized that metaphors differ from juxtapositions insofar as the speaker of a metaphor, but not of a juxtaposition, comes out

and commits himself to something by making his utterance; this is why Nathan puts himself on the line by making his final utterance in a way he wouldn't have if he'd simply told the parable. However, it's equally notable that by speaking metaphorically, Nathan leaves *in*explicit in precisely what respects David is like the rich man. By contrast, if he had actually said what he meant – perhaps something along the lines of "Like the rich man, thou hath taken unjustifiedly from one with little resources to enrich yourself without need" – then he would have put himself on record as committed to precisely those contents; and he could then be held liable for those particular claims, in a way he can't simply in virtue of having said "Thou art the man". Thus, as it stands, Nathan still preserves a restricted species of deniability about what he meant. If he is faced with an objector like the one we imagined to the speaker of (7), who insists that it is perfectly obvious that he intended to communicate that David was wrong to take Bathsheba to bed when he had so many wives already, Nathan can respond that this only appears obvious given further interpretive assumptions that he doesn't endorse, and that all he meant was that David is like the man in being rich and blessed with many visitors. In this case, of course, such a response would be disingenuous; but it is still possible in a way it is not for utterances where the speaker does mean what she says.[14] Further, in some circumstances the fact that metaphor leaves its intended meaning importantly indirect and inexplicit can have very practical consequences: as the Latvian Minister of Culture, Helena Demakova, said in her welcoming address to our conference in Riga, when repressive governments censor their citizens' speech, metaphor may be one of the only ways left for people to communicate, precisely because it preserves a species of deniability that is lacking for explicit utterances.

So we've now seen at least two reasons to reject contextualism. Metaphors are importantly discontinuous from utterances in which the speaker means what she says, insofar as they rely on a felt gap between what is intuitively said and what is meant, and insofar as they retain a kind of deniability about the specific content of the speaker's assertoric commitment that is unavailable for literal, direct, and explicit speech. However, if (11) were just an isolated counterexample to contextualism, it would only be moderately interesting. In fact, though, it is not so isolated: it points us toward a more general rhetorical trope, which

we might call the "telling detail" – particular facts that have the power to reconfigure our overall perspective on the focal subject. And once again, attending to this larger class of utterances helps to reveal more clearly the distinctive way that metaphor works.

Like juxtapositions, telling details are often exploited by poets and politicians, sometimes specifically in lieu of metaphors, for their distinctive rhetorical effects. In particular, although telling details are like metaphors and juxtapositions in producing open-ended perspectives, which are often evocative, imagistic, and affective, they involve a distinct mixture of commitment and deniability from that to be found in either juxtapositions or metaphors. The telling of a telling detail, like the utterance of a metaphor, involves explicit assertion rather than mere intimation; this gives it a greater communicative force than juxtaposition. However, unlike with metaphor, the speaker of a telling detail is actually committed to the truth of what she literally says. Further, the truth of that detail is *all* that she asserts. As a result, if she is faced with the sort of objection we imagined to an utterance of (7), where a hearer insists that the speaker must have meant some further content *P*, she can fall back on her assertion of the detail alone, and disavow responsibility for any further perspectives or thoughts the hearer might come to entertain from it. This gives the telling detail a level of deniability that is closer to that of a juxtaposition than of a metaphor. For instance, where Nathan must admit that he meant *something* other than what he said by uttering "Thou art the man," on pain of rendering his utterance entirely pointless, a cautious primatologist, faced with the analogous objection to (11), might defend herself by saying, "All I said is that Bush is a primate, which he is – you can draw your own conclusions from there." (Likewise, a conservative American pundit might say, "All I'm saying is that Obama's middle name is Hussein!") Further, because the truth of a telling detail is itself typically sufficient to render the speaker's utterance at least minimally cooperative, a telling detail shifts more of the interpretive responsibility for cultivating the perspective and for determining its implications onto the hearer. This, combined with the fact that the detail itself is actually true, tends to make the perspective feel more apt, and the extended meaning more objective, than with juxtapositions. As we might put it, where a juxtaposition enables a speaker to wink and nod at an unstated connection

between two things, and a metaphor actively asserts that something is a certain way but leaves that way to be determined indirectly by cultivating a comparison, the telling detail seems to speak for itself, with the speaker merely providing a microphone.

The fact that telling details mean just what they say made them especially attractive to Modernist poets like Pound. Pound (1915) and other Imagists elevated what they called "luminous details" as a key means for achieving "direct treatment of the 'thing'" – that is, a means which finds "the exact word" rather than indulging in the "vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous," that they accused Romantics of employing. Metaphors, by contrast, are especially vulnerable to magnificent vagueness: magnificent because they typically offer a surprising and vivid perspective on a topic, and vague because they leave the speaker's meaning inexplicit, and hence usually at least somewhat indeterminate.

In particular, Li Po's poem "The Jewel Stairs' Grievance" beautifully exemplifies how luminous details balance precision with rich evocativeness; and Pound's annotation brings out just how evocative they can be – even though Li Po's language is resolutely literal throughout.[15]

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 (1915)

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.

The poem and annotation also provide a palpable demonstration of how difficult it can be to formulate a complete and adequate paraphrase of even a fully literal utterance: although Pound's annotation provides the poem's readers with useful hints for developing an appropriately open-ended, imagistic, affectively-laden understanding of the scene being described, it doesn't aim to restate the poem's meaning in explicit and literal terms; and any attempt at a complete paraphrase would need to be considerably longer and more complex.

Finally, Li Po's poem also illustrates a rhetorical danger inherent in employing telling details to communicate. We saw that because they give the hearer some positive cognitive content directly and explicitly, telling details offer a distinct combination of commitment and deniability from either juxtapositions or metaphors. But for this very reason, they also tend to be less open-ended. With juxtaposition and metaphor, the hearer realizes quite quickly that the speaker has intentionally uttered something that can't be adequately interpreted unless he goes beyond what the speaker actually said; and once we're already in the realm of the unsaid but possibly meant, we're more prone to keep exploring. 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 the aesthetic pleasure I got from the images themselves. In part, this particular case results from a mismatch of cultural expectations, since Li Po's intended readers would have been more attuned to look for further meaning. But it also illustrates a general danger with communication that goes by way of cultivating a perspective: readers may not take the speaker's intention for them to cultivate that perspective as seriously as she had hoped, and so in turn they may miss out on part of her intended meaning.

3.   CRITERIA FOR A THEORY OF METAPHOR

Given the contrasts we've developed among metaphors, juxtapositions, and telling details, we are now in a position to extract several criteria for an adequate theory of poetic metaphor, and of metaphor more generally. First, by speaking metaphorically, a speaker undertakes a speech act, whose illocutionary force is typically given by the grammatical mood of the sentence she utters. In this respect, contextualists and

Relevance Theorists are correct that metaphors are continuous with or-
dinary literal talk. However, *contra* the contextualists, the content to
which the speaker commits herself by speaking metaphorically is dis-
tinct from the content of what she said: metaphor differs from loose talk
insofar as it depends upon a felt (albeit usually not explicitly processed)
gap between what is said and what is meant. In this respect, metaphor
contrasts both with juxtapositions, which don't explicitly commit the
speaker to any speech act at all, and with telling details, which explic-
itly commit the speaker only to the content that is literally expressed by
the sentence she utters.

Second, by speaking metaphorically, at least with poetic metaphors,
a speaker invites her hearers to cultivate an open-ended, holistic per-
spective on the topic, one which is often also imagistic, evocative, and
affectively-laden. In this respect, metaphor is just one among many
tropes, including juxtapositions and telling details, which give us tools
for framing our overall understanding of a topic, both by structuring
and coloring a host of specific thoughts, and by suggesting further
thoughts that fit with them. However, we can also say, more specifically,
that metaphors work by making us think about one thing *as* something
else: Juliet as the sun, for instance. In this respect, Davidson is right
that metaphors are precisely on a par with juxtapositions and similes as
devices that invite us to make comparisons – although he is wrong to
maintain that this is *all* that metaphor does. And in this respect, both
metaphors and juxtapositions differ from telling details, which provide
us with a perspective by providing us with information about the very
thing we are supposed to think about.

At a minimum, then, an adequate theory of metaphor needs to ac-
knowledge that metaphorical utterances both undertake speech acts
with assessable contents and induce perspectives for thinking about one
thing as something else. I haven't said much here about the relationship
between those contents and perspectives, except to claim that the con-
tent is propositional, even if somewhat vague and indeterminate, while
the perspective is importantly non-propositional. A full exploration of
these topics is well beyond the scope of this paper (see Camp 2003 for
details). Here, I simply want to suggest, first, that the speaker expects
her hearers to determine the content of her speech act *by way of* culti-
vating the relevant perspective: the perspective gives hearers the frame

they need for thinking about the subject in order to identify how the
speaker is claiming (or asking, or ordering) that subject to be. Second,
I want to note that we cannot always read off what we are supposed to
think about, and how we are supposed to thinking about it, from the
surface structure of the sentence uttered. As White (1996) and others
have emphasized, not all metaphors fit the simple '*a* is *F*' form exempli-
fied by (1) and (2). Even in more complex cases, however, the speaker
still expects her hearers to think of one thing (the topic) as another
(the frame). In some cases, such as (3), topic and frame are identi-
fied by way of some further trope, like metonymy. In other cases, as
with noun phrases used metaphorically, the frame is provided directly
by the words, and the topic is identified contextually. Indeed, some-
times the entire sentence forms a frame for thinking about a situation
that is merely implicitly identified. The fact that we comprehend such
complex cases as easily as we do is a testimony to just how nuanced our
powers of pragmatic interpretation are.

Perhaps the most important lesson to be drawn from our discussion,
however, is that we need to attend to the specific behavior of the lin-
guistic phenomena we are investigating. Language can be poetic – in
the sense of inducing evocative, open-ended, holistic, imagistic, and/or
affective perspectives – in a variety of ways. Just because metaphor
does this doesn't mean that it can't also accomplish the same sorts of
tasks as ordinary language. And conversely, just because metaphor falls
on a continuum with literal loose talk doesn't mean that it doesn't also
differ from it in crucial ways.

Notes

[1] from *Romeo and Juliet* II.ii.2.

[2] from *Macbeth* V.v.28-30.

[3] from Auden's translation of Sitnitsky's 'Our Bias'.

[4] Here I follow what I take to be ordinary (philosophical) use in lumping all of these
qualities together under the rubric 'poetic'. Not all metaphors in poetry exemplify these
qualities; and metaphors in fiction, politics, and ordinary speech sometimes do. Further,
these qualities don't always occur together; see my (2003, §5.3) for discussion.

[5] Other noncognitivists about metaphor include Ayer 1936, Carnap 1935, Cooper
1986, Reimer 2001, and Taylor 1989.

[6] I argue (2004) that syntactically well-formed but semantically absurd sentences are
meaningful and do express truth-assessable contents.

[7] By speaking of "Whitman's soul," I don't intend to beg any important questions about the relationship between the author and the poem's implied speaker; I mean this as shorthand for "the soul of the implied speaker of the poem."

[8] Unless the speaker is an actor on stage, practicing her rhetorical powers, being sarcastic, or otherwise only making as if to undertake the relevant speech act. Note also that a speaker may employ a sentence with one grammatical mood metaphorically, in order to undertake a speech act with a different illocutionary force, for instance by uttering a declarative sentence with an interrogative tone in order to ask a question. These possibilities don't differentiate metaphorical from literal speech, however.

[9] from Donne's *Meditation XVII*.

[10] from an imagined reworking of the *Iliad*, describing Achilles as he rages on the battlefield.

[11] While the perspective produced by the primatologist's utterance of (11) may be fairly open-ended, it may seem unlikely that it will be imagistic, evocative, or affectively-laden. I think that with sufficient rhetorical effort, even a primatologist's perspective could be poetic – in particular, it might highlight certain simian features of Bush's physiognomy. But even if this particular perspective is not poetic, this shouldn't affect the argument insofar as the imagined utterance of (11) does produce a perspective, and the lack of poeticness is not intrinsic.

[12] In speaking of a 'stage' of interpretation, I mean a step in an adequate rational reconstruction of how the speaker could have meant *that* by saying *this*, of the sort that an ordinary speaker might offer if challenged. This is not necessarily a stage that hearers explicitly go through in interpretation; see Camp 2006b for discussion. Insofar as Relevance theorists restrict themselves to claims about actual processing, there need be no disagreement.

[13] The contextualist may object that the salient difference between the two readings of (11) is simply that the cocktail party attendee's utterance, but not the primatologist's, is *loose*; since metaphor is a species of loose talk, only the former feels metaphorical. However, loose talk can also induce an open-ended perspective without feeling metaphorical, such as a hyperbolic utterance of (8) applied to a pre-teen. Here, the 'something else' we are asked to see the subject as is still too close to something that actually applies to the subject to generate a metaphor. Relevance theorists may be correct, however, that hyperbole grades into metaphor as the gap between the subject and its characterization increases (Wilson and Carston, this volume); nonetheless, differences in degree can add up to differences in kind.

[14] Loose talk and hyperbole fall between fully literal speech and metaphor in this respect.

[15] I assume that the stairs really are crusted with jewels, and the curtain made of beaded crystal.

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