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THE CHARACTER OF METAPHOR

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Resumo: Neste ensaio analiso como e o que as metáforas significam, o que constitui um argumento aplicável também a obras de arte em geral. Começarei por discutir a perspectiva que Donald Davidson tem acerca de metáforas, que este autor apresentou em 1978 no artigo 'What Metaphors Mean'. Depois de analisar e de apoiar a teoria de Davidson, irei relacioná-la com algumas passagens relevantes da Poética e da Retórica de Aristóteles sobre metáforas. O meu intuito final é o de mostrar que a interpretação não é redutível a um processo racional.

Palavras-chave: metáfora, interpretação, arte, racionalidade, significado.

Abstract: In this paper I analyse how and what metaphors mean, which constitues an argument that will also be applicable to works of art in general. I will begin by discussing the view Donald Davidson holds on metaphors, which he has put forth in a 1978 article entitled 'What Metaphors Mean'. After analysing and endorsing Davidson's theory, I will relate it with some relevant passages concerning metaphors from Aristotle's Poetics and Rhetoric. Ultimately, my aim is to show that interpretation is not reducible to a rational process.

Keywords: metaphor, interpretation, art, rationality, meaning.

I

We are not literally all ears nor all heart nor all fingers and thumbs. For that matter, it neither rains cats and dogs nor rules are golden nor little birds tell us secrets. To make it clear, the proposition "I'm all ears" is false just as the proposition "A little bird told me a secret" is; we have a lot more body parts other than ears and birds do not tell us anything at all, for they do not speak. Nevertheless, we hear and say these false statements rather frequently and we generally know what is being meant — and it can be true. Except when one is trying to make a pun or some other sort of witticism, the literal, false, sense of the said expressions is oftentimes irrelevant. And in most cases what we wish to mean, or what we interpret upon hearing such expressions, is not subject to any ambiguity, for their common use normally implicates only one clear meaning, not two or more. Linguistic habits do most of the work in those cases so that normally there is nothing to dwell upon as to what is being

conveyed. Those expressions are so ordinary we tend to regard them as plain and direct speech — and it normally is. In fact, all of the alluded expressions not only crystallized into a convention of oral discourse but are also contained in any good dictionary of the English language.

The expression "I'm all ears" has a common, conventional, use; and because it is already fixed it no longer is a full-blown metaphor, but a dead one. The more it becomes rigidly fixed, even a metaphor's *death* can be completely or quasi-forgotten, in which case we talk about different *literal senses* of a word or expression, rather than talk about its literally false meaning as opposed to a certain metaphorical use. I agree with Donald Davidson (2001, pp. 252-253) in that a metaphor's death or that forgetting about it is not exactly a matter of time, since a lot of old metaphors remain alive and kicking. Furthermore, just as one cannot predict when a particular metaphor's move into common literal use will occur, one cannot predict as well what that meaning will be. As Davidson writes: "[…] 'He was burned up' now suggests no more than that he was very angry. When the metaphor was active, we would have pictured fire in the eyes or smoke coming out of the ears" (Davidson 2001, p. 253).

Since there is a specific and fixed use for dead metaphors, they are part of a language, though the same sentence used in a dead metaphor can be used without any 'metaphorical' implication. "I'm all ears" could be used simply to describe the physical traits of someone or something, e.g., in a work of fiction. Therefore, a dead metaphor's *sentence* might be described as working in a way closely related to the way implicatures work. That is, an implicature lives on the context of the sentence's use, which allows for an interpretation of further consequences. A dead metaphor also lives on the context of the sentence's use, which implicates some meaning — in this case, a meaning normally established beforehand by convention. The most important difference, of course, is that a dead metaphor's sentence has a usually false and absurd literal meaning, whereas an implicature is normally obtained from a true sentence.

It should also be pointed out that much of what we say besides metaphor is literally false as well, but there can be a true point to it. Joking wouldn't be the same if it didn't allow for the absurd, the impossible, the caricature, and a whole lot of other forms of literal falsehood — though joking can make us see a true fact. But a sentence's literal falsehood is only a hindrance to some philosophers, not to interpretation; in fact, it is a commonly used way to get points across. To explain a joke rather than telling it can be as disappointing as to give an explanation of the 'metaphorical meaning' rather than saying the metaphor.

Generally, that kind of explanation is unwelcome and normally there is no reason to worry about literal falsehood. The literal meaning of "a little bird told me a secret" is surely insane, but precisely because of that it is not, usually, even considered — just as the literal meaning of "a golden rule", because rules are not *things*, thus they cannot be meant to be made of some material nor can they be meant to be coloured.

Normally, we do not hold the belief that we *are* all ears, nor do we expect other people to be that wrong about the world or themselves; it would be insane to be that uncharitable towards others or ourselves. Our initial presumption isn't that everyone is mad until proven otherwise; much less the presumption that *we* are mad until (somehow) we figure out we are not. That is why we do not rush into thinking that someone must be insane just because we do not understand immediately what that person is trying to say. A poor speaker of English, for instance, can have a lot of trouble in making himself understood through the use of that language, but that does not instantly mean he has some kind of mental disorder. When or if we don't get what someone is aiming at, we ask, if it is possible, or we try to figure out by ourselves the meaning of the words uttered.

I should digress a little further to add this: none of the previous options (asking for an explanation and reasoning by ourselves) can guarantee an agreement over the meaning of an utterance, for there are no infallible methods of understanding correctly. There is no special operation of the mind that enables us to understand what we did not, neither is there a particular mental signal or feeling or whatever else that will tell us when we are right or wrong. As to explanations, they can only be given by a further use of words, which again can be misunderstood. I could try to explain to someone who, again, is a poor speaker of English that what I meant with the sentence "I'm all ears" was that I was paying attention to whatever he was going to say. However, this person could take my explanation in an entirely different, and wrong, sense — the sense in which 'to pay' has also a common use in the context of buying and selling things. That is, this person could counter by saying that *paying* attention doesn't make any sense.

Now, is there any foreseeable end to this? Is there any kind of ultimate and infallible explanation of the meaning of an utterance? Obviously, there isn't. On the other hand, unless this person is a compulsive joker, or some kind of Humpty Dumpty[1] pretender, the

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[1] I am referring to the well-known character Humpty Dumpty as portrayed in Lewis Caroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*. See also Donald Davidson's 1989 essay 'James Joyce and Humpty Dumpty' in DAVIDSON, D. *Truth, Language and History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005, pp. 143-158.

explanation will *eventually* end, for if he speaks (whatever and however he speaks) and if he takes me as the kind of creature capable of meaning, then reaching an agreement over what I mean is a matter of time and patience. With luck, and depending also on the context, it may take no time at all. Given the context, for instance, of a fire in a building anyone could probably understand a cry in Uzbek language without any translation or explanation. And just because two people speak roughly the same language doesn't mean they will understand each other easily and immediately; sometimes, many explanations are in order.

Certainly, it can be argued that in practice between two speakers of roughly the same language mutual understanding is generally smoother; whereas between, let's say, me and someone speaking Uzbek there will be, generally, greater difficulties. This point can be granted. Overall, speakers of roughly the same language understand each other quite well and a language we don't know is very often an obstacle to intelligibility. Plus, there is the fact that in our daily lives we oftentimes interact with a lot of people we already know, in already known contexts, using language in already expected ways. We are not faced all the time with situations of radical interpretation. But this means that understanding an utterance is not strictly a matter of knowing a particular language; if mutual understanding can be easy or difficult that is a matter of what is, or isn't, familiar in a broad sense — contexts, people's beliefs, habits and traits, and so on. Whatever the language, familiar words used in familiar ways convey meanings normally hard to miss; whereas strange words used in strange, unknown, ways convey meanings normally hard to get.

Notice that a strange word can either belong to a foreign language or it can happen to belong to our own native language, though we didn't know it. Whatever it is, it is strange to *us*, so it makes little difference which language it belongs to. What is familiar is what is the same, or roughly the same, as what we have encountered before; thus I can understand, and be right about, a particular Uzbek utterance without a radical exercise of interpretation, for it can be the case that I've heard it before being said by the same person and I know already exactly what it means without having to know a particular grammar. To further emphasize that this is not strictly a matter of knowing a language, it can also be the case that we are familiar with someone's idiolect and other unique non-linguistic traits, and thus understand him immediately despite of the apparently unruly manner of his speech — that is to say, despite of the fact that the way he talks is incorrect, or eccentric, in the eyes of a linguist.

II

Regarding active, or living, metaphors, Davidson's major claim is that metaphors have no metaphorical meaning — i.e., no meaning but the literal; thus, Davidson refuses all of those theories that picture what we tend to find specially meaningful in metaphor to be *in the sentence*. Davidson wants us to see is that the meaning is *in us*, that is to say, the so-called metaphorical meaning is an interpretation of the point of the sentence by putting it under a description. This task is not governed by rules, in the sense that no grammar can tell what, or explain how, metaphors mean. In this sense, metaphors cannot be said to be English or some other language. The literal sentence of a metaphor is, of course, in some language, but what metaphor can accomplish is far beyond the literal meaning of words and the rules of grammar.

Theories claiming the existence of two kinds of meanings in metaphors (literal and metaphorical) normally rely on the following argument: there is a logical or structured connection between the literal meaning, or the properties of the explicit elements contained in the sentence, and the so-called metaphorical meaning of the sentence. This entails two untenable assumptions from the start: that the sentence is being used literally in metaphor; and that there is a special meaning hidden (somewhere) in the sentence. Now, the sentence of a metaphor *is not being used* literally since if it were it wouldn't be a metaphor in the first place. For that matter, normally nobody dwells on the literal meaning, and, moreover, the blatant falsehood of a metaphor's sentence offers us a relevant hint on what to do. As to metaphorical meaning, if metaphor is thought of as some sort of box with a content one must unpack to see, then the unpacking has to be explained — and by the way, the packing as well, i.e., one will have to explain the method of how to box a metaphorical meaning within a literal sentence. It is rather enigmatic how one can do that, for it requires the description of a system that actually works, and *that* is precisely *the* insoluble problem one invariably gets stuck with when assuming there is a different, special, kind of meaning *in there*.

Let us consider those claims about the existence of a regular and predictable relation between the properties of the things said and the special meaning. The example can be this: "She is a flower". Maybe my mentioning of this sentence has already made us think of one possible common feature, or a bunch of them, between her and a flower. Perhaps that both are beautiful, tender, delicate; that both smell good, both cheer up our days, and so on. The problem here is twofold, at least. Firstly, what rule can tell us it is irrelevant, or perhaps relevant, that, e.g., both her and a flower need water and oxygen to live? Is it something the metaphor means? How can we know what to rule in or rule out? Besides, there can be

disagreement as to what the properties of flowers, or of whatever else, actually are. Secondly, if one is inclusive and claims that the metaphorical meaning amounts to *all* of the possible commonalities one can find between the elements of a metaphor, then anytime someone says, "She is a flower", this means *all commonalities* — which is plainly insane. The list of common traits is endless, and so the idea that there is such a thing as the 'totality of meanings' is, at best, obscure. We intuitively know that "She is a flower" can prompt different thoughts in different contexts of use, and we intuitively know that a given metaphor is not being used in order to mean every single similarity someone could claim to have found.

Another equally wrong alternative would be to claim that each metaphor has only one definite meaning, though the mechanism according to which we can find it is still a mystery. This kind of claim, then, tells us there is the literal meaning plus the metaphorical one. But in that case, metaphors are simply ornamental, since *the* metaphorical meaning could have been said in clearer words. The problem of this claim — which Davidson calls the theory of new or 'extended' meanings — is that it fails to notice that if words would apply to some new or 'extended' meanings in metaphorical use, adding these to some sort of 'convention of the extraordinary meanings' of such-and-such words, then those meanings could only be said to be literal meanings, and no metaphor could be said to exist. To make it clearer, if there was, in metaphor, a designation of a *fixed* new meaning for its words besides the previous common ones, then all of those meanings, previous and new, would be literal. And if so, talk about metaphor is idle talk.

Fortunately, this is not the case. In fact, it is in the nature of metaphor to motivate discussion. In a sense, metaphors are mute, and rather than saying things, they want to be read and talked about. The illusion that metaphors have meaning besides the literal might come from the materials they are made of, i.e., words and sentences which have meanings established by ordinary use. Obviously, we need those materials, but what we do with them can be unique and new like a metaphor. The finite vocabulary and restrictive rules of a language can be nevertheless used, bent, broken, or transformed in infinite ways. This leaves the existence of linguistic conventions intact: words still have ordinary meanings and sentences still have propositional content, i.e., literal meaning. But metaphor is not *that* use of words, since if it were it wouldn't *be* metaphor. Notice that the same sentence one can use to lie, one can use to tell the truth. That is to say, the lie, just as the metaphor, is not *in the sentence*, but in the use of the sentence in a given context.

Scattered across the essay 'What Metaphors Mean' (Davidson 2001, pp. 245-264) there are comparisons between metaphors and works of art. The comparison, I think, is very fitting and illuminating, because metaphors, like works of art, are out-of-the-ordinary creative works that entice us to get hold of ideas. In that sense, all metaphors are artistic endeavours. This is why Plato is as hostile and suspicious towards metaphor as he is hostile and suspicious about art: for him, both were closely related to lies, or to falsehood in general. And that is also why Aristotle is so emphatic about metaphor's paramount importance in poetics and oratory, the art of public speech. For Aristotle, either of those are a form of art, a *technê*. Metaphors, however, (Aristotle writes in *Poetics*) "cannot be learnt from others" and "it is also a sign of genius" (Poet. 1459a6-7). That is to say, for Aristotle metaphors do not come from a particular skill one can learn and are, at the same time, the greatest achievement in the art of provoking certain effects with words: "[…] the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor" (Poet. 1459a5-6). Following the same line of praise, Aristotle writes in *Rhetoric*:

> […] we all naturally find it agreeable to get hold of new ideas easily: words express ideas, and therefore those words are the most agreeable that enable us to get hold of new ideas. Now strange words simply puzzle us; ordinary words convey only what we know already; it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh.[2]

Certainly, it is often argued that what Aristotle says in this passage is wrong (Davidson seems to be one of the accusers),[3] since we *can* find it agreeable to get hold of ideas with difficulty, not easily, and that ordinary words *can* obviously convey new ideas. But that is, I think, a mistaken understanding of what Aristotle is doing, and a mistaken understanding of the context in which he is doing it. Aristotle is talking about rhetoric, and I think it is reasonable to say that, in producing a speech, one should be clear and interesting. To be clear is to make others get hold of ideas easily, and to be interesting can be said to be better accomplished by a careful placement of metaphors in speech than to use always common ways of expression, since metaphors inspire a given audience's thoughts. What Aristotle is saying, I think, is that one must find a balance between being clear and being compelling, and that entails a balance between the ordinary use of words and the use of rhetorical devices, of which metaphor is the greatest.

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[2] Rhet. 1410b9-13.

[3] "Some [philosophers] stress the special insight metaphor can inspire and make much of the fact that ordinary language, in its usual functioning, yields no such insight" (Davidson 2001, p. 246).

Before going into Aristotle with more detail, let us take a short step back and bring Davidson's perspective on metaphor again into the discussion. Notice that Davidson is not so much interested in discussing the effects of metaphor as he is interested in showing that there is no such thing as metaphorical meaning. And the comparison between metaphor and works of art is very clarifying of the point in view.

A painting can represent the image of a person, of a landscape, of a building, squares and lines, and so on. But what is the message of these images supposed to be? Are we satisfied with the idea that a painting tells us "Here's the King of Denmark", or "Here's a river and a tree", or "Here's Notre Dame Cathedral", or even "Here's a bunch of squares and coloured lines"? Hardly, since to know this is only the starting point for the sort of interpretation a painting entices us to produce. This is precisely what Davidson notices:

> How many facts or propositions are conveyed by a photograph? None, an infinity, or one great unstatable fact? Bad question. A picture is not worth a thousand words, or any other number. Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture.
> […]
> Not, of course, that interpretation and elucidation of a metaphor are not in order. Many of us need help if we are to see what the author of a metaphor wanted us to see and what a more sensitive or educated reader grasps. The legitimate function of so-called paraphrase is to make the lazy or ignorant reader have a vision like that of the skilled critic. The critic is, so to speak, in benign competition with the metaphor maker. The critic tries to make his own art easier or more transparent in some respects than the original, but at the same time he tries to reproduce in others some of the effects the original had on him.[4]

What I wish to add here is that, if I see a particular point in a work of art — or, for that matter, in a metaphor — I cannot willingly forget about it, and the same goes for what a skilled critic successfully shows to me. If the critic's interpretation convinces me, if I see what he sees, then I cannot willingly forget about his view when I look at the artwork, or metaphor, for that view became mine as well. Can what I now see change again? Certainly, if I get hold of the point of another convincing interpretation. Until then, I cannot suppose what I see to be false or wrong, nor I can forget about the view I hold. But I'm willing to learn. If someone claims a given interpretation of mine is wrong, or incomplete, or inadequate, I will ask for reasons, and I will be willing to grasp his point. Grasping a point, however, is not

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[4] Ibidem, pp. 263-264.

exclusively a matter of reasons. If someone only sees a duck in Wittgenstein's 'duck-rabbit',[5] seeing the rabbit is not a matter of reasons, though, of course, reasons might help, as well as pointing to, explaining, etc. But if that person cannot see it, that's that. But the main point is this: if we stop posing the issue of finding *the* meaning of an artwork or of a metaphor, as well as the issue of the plurality of meanings as a matter of correspondence, or lack of it, with what is *in there*, a great deal of problems will disappear.

To interpret a painting or a metaphor is not to retrieve a hidden proposition, or a list of propositions. To interpret is to put 'x' under a description, and in the case of metaphor 'x' is the sentence. Of course, the sentence has a literal meaning, and it can be argued that understanding that meaning is essential to be able to get the metaphor's point. As for paintings, it can also be argued something similar: one must recognize representations of such-and-such in order to make further reasonable interpretations of the painting. This, I think, is right, though insufficient. Surely, the ordinary meaning of words has a role to play in understanding a metaphor — as I have discussed, not because of such reasons as special attributes a word can have, or gain, in a metaphorical use. However, a lot more can be needed to interpret a metaphor, namely all kinds of contextual information. The difficulty, again, is that we cannot know beforehand what is, or isn't, relevant to take under consideration when interpreting a particular metaphor, or work of art. Sometimes a piece of biographical information about the author can be found to be telling of what he was trying to aim at; sometimes it is the place, or the event, that prompts us to notice a particular insight of a given metaphor, which was uttered then and there.

At any rate, the descriptions we might put metaphors under are not apprehensions of a message, but expressions of our own understanding of the metaphor's point or insight. *That* we can surely discuss, perhaps even better than the metaphor's author ever could. Metaphorical meaning cannot be paraphrased because there isn't one, i.e., one cannot put in other words what is not there. Metaphors are a way to cause an effect, to entice interpretation, and that is to look for similarities.

Similarity, or resemblance, is also what similes are all about. That is why Aristotle equates metaphors with similes: "The simile […] is a metaphor, differing from it only in the way it is put; and just because it is longer it is less attractive. Besides, it does not say outright that 'this' *is* 'that', and therefore the hearer is less interested in the idea" (Rhet. 1410b16-19).

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[5] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, II, xi, §8.

I have already discussed why it is important for the art of speech to use metaphors, and in this passage Aristotle explicitly states that reason — to be interesting — while at the same time maintaining that metaphors are superior to similes in this respect. Now, both devices are obvious enticements for a search for similarities and I agree that at least some metaphors, depending on the context of use, can be 'converted' to similes or vice versa without loss of their point; although, that is not always the case — and here I have to agree with Davidson. First of all, it isn't always clear how the conversion is supposed to work. How do we make a simile out of "I'm all ears"? Could it be, perhaps, "I'm all like ears", or "I'm all as ears"? Can it be said to be the same thing? Secondly, the metaphorical use of the sentence, let's say, "He is a pig" might not prompt us to notice the same thing as the simile "He is like a pig". It certainly depends on the context as well, but to say "He is *like* a pig" could perhaps make us notice something about his physical traits, whereas to say "He *is* a pig" could perhaps make us notice something about his unhygienic behaviour, or some other probably worse trait (no offence meant to actual pigs).

I also agree with Aristotle (and Davidson) in that similes — at least, on their surface — are trivial, thus less interesting, than metaphors, since to say "this is like that" is always true. "This forest is like an ocean" is as trivially true as "This book is like a car" (both take me to places, etc). One can surely find a common trait in any simile; in fact, there is no foreseeable end to the list of common traits one can point to. In simile, the relation of similitude is all that is announced. And since it is such a trivial announcement, a simile is normally taken as demanding more than to read what it explicitly says, thus prompting interpretation. Otherwise, similes would be pointless and hollow, and someone using similes in such a fashion would certainly be insane. But Aristotle's statement that similes are the same as metaphors, with minor differences, cannot be read as an assertion over identity. While discussing metaphors, Aristotle introduces the sophist who said, "[…] in whatever words you put a given thing your meaning is the same", to which Aristotle argues, "This is untrue. One term may describe a thing more truly than another, may be more like it, and set it more intimately before our eyes" (Rhet. 1405b10-11). The same reasoning will lead to the conclusion that the difference between simile and metaphor is not merely aesthetic or a matter of length; it can make all the difference to put something one way or the other — namely the difference in setting something more intimately before our eyes.

It is too hasty, I think, to dismiss Aristotle's remarks as contradictions, and it is unfair to equate him with subsequent theories which press the notion of metaphorical meanings as

somehow related to a corresponding simile. First of all, Aristotle is clear about the uniqueness and paramount importance of metaphor, not of metaphor *and* simile. Secondly, and most importantly, Aristotle's analysis of metaphor in both crafts of language — poetics and rhetoric — is concerned with understanding words as causes of certain effects. From this point of view, metaphors are similes, since it is in the nature of both to provoke analogical reasoning.

III

As I have said before, Davidson is mostly interested in showing that there is no such thing as metaphorical meaning; whereas Aristotle is mostly interested in explaining words as causes of certain effects. If the latter philosopher might be wrongly read as contradictory and too prescriptive, the former might also be wrongly read as too negative and a relativist. That is, Aristotle could be read, wrongly in my view, as describing the rules governing the arts of speech, which translates into the rules governing the transference and grasping of ideas, just as Davidson could be read, wrongly in my view, as offering a fully and unconditionally permissive theory of interpretation.

Specifically concerning metaphors, Davidson writes more than once that metaphors do have a point and that it can be true. But he does not go into that discussion — for it isn't the *point* of his paper. Thus we still lack an explanation of the fact that, though there is no metaphorical meaning or rules to make and interpret metaphors, still we can and do quite often share the same view and still we can and do talk of metaphors as tasteless or tasteful, true or false, better or worse. We have the intuition that a particular metaphor cannot be interpreted anyway we like; nor a simile, for that matter, even if it is true that everything is like everything. We feel that there are better metaphors than others, depending on the context, and when we make a metaphor we do not expect someone else will turn it into a blank page to be filled with *anything* that happens to cross that person's mind. That would *not be* a simple misunderstanding, that would be plainly insane. When we make a metaphor we want to cause a certain effect, and when we interpret a metaphor we look for the effect, if it doesn't strike us immediately. We do not go about deciding unilaterally what this or that means, or what is or isn't the case.

Now, I think *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* should be understood as descriptions of what people feel in practice when appreciating certain linguistic constructions.

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Thus, in *Rhetoric* Aristotle writes: "The materials of metaphor must be beautiful to the ear, to the understanding, to the eye or some other physical sense"[6]. And in *Poetics* he writes:

> A too apparent use of these licences [of speech] has certainly a ludicrous effect […]; the rule of moderation applies to all the constituents of the poetic vocabulary; even with metaphors, strange words, and the rest, the effect will be the same [i.e., ludicrous], if one uses them improperly and with a view of provoking laughter.[7]

I will not digress with a further analysis of Aristotle's prescriptions, since I take them to be unproblematic and perfectly reasonable. I will focus my attention on an already quoted crucial passage in *Poetics*:

> the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars.[8]

Notice that if Aristotle is in fact describing in *Poetics* the universal governing rules of this particular art, or craft, it seems that he realizes nevertheless that "the greatest thing by far" cannot be explained in terms of a *technê*, a craft. That is to say, one can learn a craft and use the set of rules to produce an object, but one cannot learn to perceive similarity between different things — since that is "intuitive". In poetics, metaphor is the clearest illustration of the limits of "craft-knowledge", which Aristotle describes in *Nicomachean Ethics* as "a certain state involving reason, concerned with production [and] concerned with what admits of being otherwise" (N.E. 1140a). This means that reasoning according to a set of rules (although is *involved*) does not necessarily bring about, nor explains, the perception that, in some particular aspect, 'this' *is* 'that'.

To further emphasize what I wish to say, it is important to look at a passage from *Topics*, where Aristotle observes that the perception of the similarity [*homoion theôrein*] is also present in other forms of reasoning:

> The observation of likeness is useful with a view both to inductive arguments and to hypothetical deductions, and also with a view to the production of definitions. It is useful for inductive arguments, because it is by means of an induction of particulars in cases that are similar that we claim to induce the universal; for it is not easy to do this if we do not know the points of likeness. It is useful for hypothetical deductions because it is a

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[6] Rhet. 1405b18.

[7] Poet. 1458b10-14.

[8] Poet. 1459a5-8.

> reputable opinion that among similars what is true of one is true also of the rest.[9]

Therefore, understanding 'this' is 'that' is not confined to the domain of crafts, nor can it be fully accounted for in terms of logic or in terms of rules. However, it is something present and crucial for understanding in general, in anyone's life. And it seems to stem from a non-rational aspect of our nature, as Aristotle notices from the start of *Poetics*:

> It is clear that the general origin of poetry was due to two causes, each of them part of human nature. Imitation is natural to man from childhood […], he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns first by imitation. And it is also natural for all to delight in works of imitation. […] the reason of the delight in seeing the picture is that one is at the same time learning— gathering the meaning of things, e.g. that the man there is so-and-so".[10]

Thus we come to the conclusion that interpretation, to see in what way, or ways, 'this is that', is not an entirely rational event, since it cannot be explained in terms of rationality alone. As Aristotle puts it, interpretation has its origin in a natural ability for learning and in a *natural* delight in learning. Our mimetic abilities alone can explain how we interpret at all.

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[9] Top. 108b7-14.

[10] Poet. 1448b5-18.