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“Seeing beyond the Scenery’: Exploring the World through Metaphor”
--Responding to BobSweetman’s response at the ICS colloquium, Wed. Mar. 27, 2013

I am deeply grateful, Bob, for your gracious, playful, and serious response to this paper. Here are some further comments in response to some of yours.

1. “Positivist” and “anti-positivist.”

You wonder how these words are used in literary criticism. I might point first to M.H. Abrams, who in one of the ‘canonical’ glossaries for Lit. Crit. describes positivism as “the method of empirical investigation and proof developed in the physical sciences,” which aligns quite well with your comments. But Abrams goes on to talk about “the general extension of positivism into all areas of speculation and inquiry” in the Victorian age, which I think leads into what Terry Eagleton calls “positivist or dogmatic theology” (i.e. theology which emphasizes propositional truth); Eagleton also describes Comte as “grimly positivist” in breaking with metaphysical modes of inquiry. So, the methodological is *in there*, but I would say that the way I most often find “positivism” used in literary criticism is as a general descriptor for a rather simple kind of linguistic realism. And I am guessing that from a philosophical point of view, “positivism” is then problematic, as I have discovered that “realism” is too.

I love what you have to say about Aristotle and wonder as a response to mystery. This makes me want to read more Aristotle, which cannot be a bad reaction.

2. Icons

You suggest that icons work not just by semiotics but by actually bearing the presence of the divine. I felt you were saying more here than L’Engle, for whom, I thought, icons are windows and doors opening onto the numinous rather than numinous in themselves. I rather liked this opening-onto idea because it reflects the notion of metaphor-as-hinge that I go on to talk about in Zwicky (and Dickinson). But when I went back and checked the L’Engle essay, I found this: “An icon of the Annunciation, for instance, does more than point to the angel and the girl; it contains, for us, some of Mary’s acceptance and obedience and so affects our own ability to accept, to obey.” So, you were right. I find I want another metaphor, to describe this containing that also points and affects. Is it like a sunbeam that directs us to the source but also contains the dust of the world?

3. Ontological attention

I appreciate very much how you line up Zwicky with Reformational aesthetics. I regret, in particular given the audience for this paper, that I did not introduce the name of Seerveld at this point; it would have been fitting to do so. Because I have always had a bit of a problem with Seerveld’s “-ivity” terms, and wondered how to use them well, I found your own unwrapping of “allusivity” very helpful here. And yes, presumably what the icon-painter does in joining his

aesthetic function to his faith function to show the connections he sees can also be made by the faithful poet. Which may, in some mode, include Zwicky.

4. The “is not” gap, or silence

I think you have served Zwicky beautifully here. Yes, she respects the analytical, and yes, she holds the “is” and the “is not” in the play of a remainder. I checked back to *Wisdom and Metaphor*, and added the second sentence of the ‘pensée’: “The implied ‘is not’ in a metaphor points to a gap in language through which we glimpse the world. That which we glimpse is what the ‘is’ in a metaphor points to.” I think Zwicky is trying to show that “is” and “is not” can be coextensive, however, in her play with the duck/rabbit design on the one hand and, on the other, the diagram of the box that opens up and to the left as well as down and to the right, depending on how one looks at it. Here is another version: “The experience of the inadequacy of language to comprehend the world is the experience of the *duende* of language. And it is this that metaphor carries” (34L). Or, “A proof in geometry is a gesture that allows others to see what we have seen. Like a metaphor, it is a rhetorical strategy in the service of an ontological truth” (42L). There is much more in this vein, all of it in tune with your summary of Aristotle’s characteristic insight of “the world [as] a site of disclosure.” I am not yet quite persuaded that “gap” can be translated “silence,” because silence can be such a positive and full thing, whereas Zwicky is foregrounding a *lack* in language—but what you say about the *purpose* of the silence and its relationship to our language is, to my mind, spot on.

And finally, I would love to talk more about Zwicky with you as a philosopher—I have so much to learn. I realize that for a literary specialist to read a philosophical text, even of a philosopher-poet, is often to read with a kind of tone-deafness and colour-blindness, missing most of the resonance and the shading of philosophical tradition. And so, in reading your response, I feel a little as if I myself have seen through a gap to something mysterious. Thank you.
