

## Cognitive aspects of Aristotle's theory of metaphor

By PIERRE SWIGGERS, Leuven

Although much has been written about metaphor,<sup>1)</sup> and although Aristotle's theory of metaphor has received the attention of a large number of philosophers,<sup>2)</sup> no efforts have been made to analyse the linguistic, cognitive and cultural foundations of the Stagirite's astonishingly modern description of metaphorical processes.<sup>3)</sup> In the following I will try, on the basis of a close reading of the pertinent texts, to advance our knowledge on these points, although it must be said, from the very outset, that it is not my intention to say "the last word" on Aristotle's treatment of metaphor.<sup>4)</sup>

Aristotle's most important texts on metaphor are to be situated with respect to the two contexts in which they occur: the discussion of argumentation and argumentative techniques (*Poetics*, chapters 21 and 22) and the analysis of literary *poiesis*. In both these contexts, which deal with linguistic communication, Aristotle gives a prominent role to the *ὄνομα*,<sup>5)</sup> defined as a "compound meaningful

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<sup>1)</sup> For an analytical bibliographical survey see W.A. Shibles, *Metaphor: An annotated bibliography and history* (Whitewater 1971).

<sup>2)</sup> See especially J. Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris 1972) 274–292 and P. Ricoeur, *La métaphore vive* (Paris 1975) 13–61.

<sup>3)</sup> With respect to these issues, it may be worthwhile to stress the intimate link between linguistic (and literary) categories, cognitive processes and cultural categories. From the point of view of the study of linguistic universals this has been emphasized by H. Seiler "Universals of Language", *Leuvense Bijdragen* 61 (1972) 371–393 and „Zum Problem der sprachlichen Possessivität", *Folia Linguistica* 6 (1973) 231–250 (both reprinted in H. Seiler, *Sprache und Sprachen*, München, 1977); from the point of view of semantic theory, the same point has been made by W. Chafe, *Meaning and the Structure of Language* (Chicago 1970). For a sociolinguistic account of the abovementioned link, reference must be made to studies by Dell Hymes and William Bright; see D. Hymes, *In vain I tried to tell you . . .* (Philadelphia 1982) and W. Bright, "Literature: Written and Oral", in D. Tannen (ed.) *Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk* (Washington 1982) 271–283. The current fascination by formal-logistic methods in linguistics has caused a dramatic neglect of the cultural embeddedness of linguistic categories.

<sup>4)</sup> I will not discuss here the later history of Aristotle's views; for the impact of his *Poetics* on ancient, medieval and modern literary studies, see the survey by L. Cooper, *The Poetics of Aristotle* (Ithaca 1923).

<sup>5)</sup> For a study of the concept of *ὄνομα* in ancient Greek philosophy and grammar, see R.H. Robins, *Ancient & Mediaeval Grammatical Theory in Europe* (London 1951) 19–22, the same, "The Development of the Word

sound, without (expression of) time, and of which no part has a meaning on itself" (*Poetics* 1457a10–12: ὄνομα δ' ἐστὶ φωνῆ συνθετὴ σημαντικὴ, ἄνευ χρόνου, ἧς μέρος οὐδέν ἐστι καθ' αὐτὸ σημαντικόν). The *ὄνομα* takes its place in the relation between thought (*διάνοια*) and its enunciation (*λέξις*). Now, the study of the *διάνοια* and its modalities (see *Poetics* 1456a34–b19) is explicitly assigned to the domain of rhetoric (*Rhetoric* 1355b8–11, and 25–27), so that metaphor receives its place both in the study of cognition (expression of thoughts, argumentation) and in the study of argumentative *topoi*, from the rhetorician's point of view.

The *ὄνομα* constitutes one of the subdivisions of the *λέξις* (*Poetics* 1456b20–21), next to the letter, the syllable, the conjunction or particle (*σύνδεσμος*), the article, the case and the sentence (*λόγος*).<sup>6</sup> It is somewhat surprising that Aristotle, after having established the distinction between *ὄνομα* and *ῥῆμα* (*Poetics* 1456b21, 1457a10–18) exclusively mentions the *ὄνομα* when dealing with metaphor, although his examples of metaphorical expressions include verbal metaphors (e.g. *Poetics* 1457b10: ἔστηκε; 1457b14: ἀρούσας and ταμών). According to Jacques Derrida, a semantic shift would be involved here: "Onoma a certes deux valeurs, dans ce contexte. Tantôt il s'oppose au verbe (*réma*) qui implique une idée de temps. Tantôt il couvre le champ des verbes, puisque la métaphore, déplacement de noms, joue aussi, dans les exemples de la *Poétique*, sur des verbes. Cette confusion est possible en raison de l'identité profonde du nom et du verbe: ils ont ceci en commun d'être intelligibles par eux-mêmes, d'avoir immédiatement rapport à un objet ou plutôt à une unité de sens. Ils constituent l'ordre de la *phonè sémantikè* dont sont exclus, nous le verrons, les articles, les conjonctions, les prépositions, et en général, tous les éléments du langage qui, selon Aristote, n'ont pas de sens par eux-mêmes; autrement dit, qui ne désignent pas d'eux-mêmes quelque chose. L'adjectif peut se laisser substantiver et nominaliser. C'est dans cette mesure qu'il peut appartenir à l'ordre *sémantique*. Il semble donc que le champ de l'*onoma*—et par conséquent celui de la métaphore, comme transport de nom—soit moins celui du nom au sens strict (qu'il a acquis très tard dans la rhétorique) que celui du *nominalisable*."

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Class System of the European Grammatical Tradition", *Foundations of Language* 2 (1966) 3–19, and P. Swiggers, "Théorie grammaticale et définition du discours dans le Sophiste", *Les Etudes Classiques* 52 (1984) 15–17.

<sup>6</sup> For Aristotle's (rather vague) definition of the *λόγος*, see *Poetics* 1457a23–24.

Tout mot qui résiste à cette nominalisation demeurerait étranger à la métaphore. Or on ne peut nominaliser que ce qui prétend—ou qui dès lors prétend—à une signification complète et indépendante, ce qui est intelligible par soi-même, hors de toute relation syntaxique.”<sup>7)</sup> Derrida is certainly right when he extends the applicational field of *ὄνομα* so as to comprise also the nominal or nominalisable aspects of the verb. But one should also reverse the explanatory move and ask oneself how it comes that the verb can be subsumed under a strictly interpreted *ὄνομα*. I think this is only possible when abstraction is made of the feature that basically distinguishes the verb from the noun, viz. the expression of temporality. Making abstraction from this crucial feature is more easy in the absence of a syntactic context; more importantly, it is facilitated by the fact that in the metaphorical process the expression of temporality by the verb is no longer relevant, from the semantic point of view. Of course, this raises an interesting philosophical question: does time escape to metaphorisation?

Aristotle's treatment of the *ὄνομα* involves two distinctions, the first of which is morphological (simple vs. compound words, *Poetics* 1457a 31–37), whereas the second is sociolinguistic and stylistic: Ἄπαν δὲ ὀνομά ἐστιν ἢ κύριον ἢ γλῶττα ἢ μεταφορὰ ἢ κόσμος ἢ πεποιημένον ἢ ἐπεκτεταμένον ἢ ὑφηρημένον ἢ ἐξηλλαγμένον (*Poetics* 1457b 1–3). What is important in this division—of which the subparts are by no means mutually exclusive—is that metaphor receives an autonomous place, and that the metaphorical process is described in terms of linguistic categories. The passage just quoted is followed by the definition of metaphor: *Μεταφορὰ δ' ἐστὶν ὀνόματος ἀλλοτρίου ἐπιφορὰ* (*Poetics* 1457b 6–7). The transfer can be from genus to species, from species to genus, from species to species, or can be based on analogy (*Poetics* 1457b 7–9, with examples for the first three types in 1457b 9–16).

Philosophical and literary scholars have always, with a few exceptions, attributed to Aristotle, on the basis of this definition, a substitution theory or, at least, a monistic theory of the metaphor.<sup>8)</sup> Within a monistic theory, it is assumed that the metaphorically used words lose their normal referential capacity and acquire a

<sup>7)</sup> J. Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie*, o.c., 277–278.

<sup>8)</sup> J. Verster, *Die metafoor in die algemene taal- en literatuurwetenskap* (Bloemfontein 1975) 11–18; J.J.A. Mooij, *A Study of Metaphor. On the nature of metaphorical expressions, with special reference to their reference* (Amsterdam 1976) 29.

“new” reference. Opposed to this theory are various types of dualistic theories (comparison-view; interaction theory)<sup>9)</sup> in which metaphorically used words are assigned a double reference: these words maintain (at times, only partially) their literal reference, and add to it a new reference, resulting from their metaphorical use.

In the case of Aristotle's theory of metaphor, it seems to me very difficult to regard it as a substitutional theory: the transfer from genus to species still involves a generic connotation, and the transfer from species to species is realised through the corresponding genus. In the same way, the transfer on the basis of analogy (involving the proportion  $A : B :: C : D$ ) presupposes something more than a mere substitution, not only because of the reversibility<sup>10)</sup> (see *Rhetoric* 1407 a), but also because of the cognitive background involved in metaphorical processes (*Rhetoric* 1410 b 17–20, 1411 a, 1411 b 1–21). This cognitive background is constituted by Aristotle's theory of *mimesis*.<sup>11)</sup> As stressed by Aristotle, *mimesis* is a natural characteristic of human thought and symbolisation: *Τό τε γάρ μιμείσθαι σύμφυτον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐκ παιδῶν ἐστὶ καὶ τούτῳ διαφέρουσι τῶν ἄλλων ζώων ὅτι μιμητικώτατόν ἐστι καὶ τὰς μαθήσεις ποιεῖται διὰ μιμήσεως τὰς πρώτας* (*Poetics* 1448 b 5–9).<sup>12)</sup> It should be added to this that the theory of *mimesis* becomes meaningful only within a philosophy of rational thought (*λόγος*), which presupposes a twofold interaction: the interaction between *φύσις* and the human mind, which has “to

<sup>9)</sup> A dualistic theory of metaphor is espoused by M. Black, *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca 1962) and by I. A. Richards. See the latter's works *Principles of Literary Criticism* (New York 1924) and *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York 1936).

<sup>10)</sup> This reversibility was explicitly noted by Isidorus of Sevilla, *Ety-mologiarum libri XX*, Liber I, caput XXXVII: “Metaphora autem, aut partis unius est, ut, *fluctuare segetes*: non potes dicere *segetare fluctus*; aut antistropha est, id est, reciproca, ut *remigium alarum*. Nam et alae navium et alarum remigia dicuntur” (text in *Patrologia latina* 82, col. 113, and in the unpaginated edition by W. Lindsay, Oxford 1913).

<sup>11)</sup> See especially *Poetics* 1447 a 13–18, 1447 b 19–28, 1448 b 4–9 and 20, 1450 a 10–15, 1451 a 30–35, 1452 a 1–3, 1454 b 7–14, 1460 a 7–8, 1460 b 7–13, 1462 b 11–15 and *Rhetoric* 1371 b. On Aristotle's use of the notion of *mimesis* as a literary concept, see F. Sbordone, *Contributo alla poetica degli antichi* (Napoli 1969<sup>2</sup>) 21–28.

<sup>12)</sup> “Imitation is co-natural with humans from childhood on, and in this respect man differs from the other animals in that he is far more imitative and that he acquires his first knowledge by imitation” (translation mine). On this passage see E. E. Sikes, *The Greek View of Poetry* (New York–London 1931) 152–153.

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see the resemblances" (*Metaphysics* A 1) and, on the level of symbolic communication,<sup>13</sup>) the interaction between speaker and hearer.

I will first discuss the former type of interaction. As a linguistic act (see *Rhetoric* 1404a20–28), metaphor is the expression of a certain mimetical content, and presupposes an individual act of cognition. Whatever the type or modality of imitation (*Poetics* 1460 b 10–11),<sup>14</sup>) it is clear that metaphor always involves a cognitive act and, consequently, presupposes a reality which the speaker perceives in a particular way. This explains the inalienable character of metaphorical symbolisation: *πολὸν δὲ μέγιστον τὸ μεταφορικὸν εἶναι· μόνον γὰρ τοῦτο οὔτε παρ' ἄλλου ἔστι λαβεῖν εὐφύιας τε σημεῖόν ἐστιν· τὸ γὰρ εἶ μεταφέρειν τὸ τὸ ὅμοιον θεωρεῖν ἐστίν* (*Poetics* 1459a5–8: "By far the most important thing is the use of metaphors. That alone cannot be adopted from others, and it is a sign of genius. For making good metaphors means to have an eye for resemblances"; see also *Rhetoric* 1405a8–10, 1412a11–13). In the same line of thought, one must attribute to the "maker of metaphors" an act of recognition (*ἀναγνώρισις*, see *Poetics* 1452a29–1452b8, 1454b19–1455a22).

But metaphorical expressions also require an act of *ἀναγνώρισις* from the hearer (*Rhetoric* 1412a19–22), and this of course will imply that the maker of metaphors will speculate on certain expectation patterns in his audience (*Rhetoric* 1412a). But it should be noted that the hearer's (or hearers') recognition is not identical with the speaker's *ἀναγνώρισις*. As a matter of fact, the modalities of mimetical expression allow the speaker to represent reality as he sees or perceives it. In this sense, the speaker brings about a metaphorology of the mimesis, which is realised in the *ἐνέργεια* he creates by his speech. This metaphorically worded reality is placed before the hearer's eyes: *πρὸ ὀμμάτων* (*Rhetoric* 1411a26, 27–28, 35; 1411b4, 5–6, 8–9, 23, 24). *Λέγω δὴ πρὸ ὀμμάτων ταῦτα ποιεῖν, ὅσα ἐνεργοῦντα σημαίνει* (*Rhetoric* 1411b24–25: "I say that (setting) before the eyes means making things such as they manifest themselves").<sup>15</sup>) According to

<sup>13</sup>) On symbolic communication in general, and the function of linguistic expression in particular, see the thought-provoking work by N. Goodman, *Languages of Art. An approach to a theory of symbols* (Indianapolis 1968).

<sup>14</sup>) A person can represent things as they are (or were), or as he says they are (or seem to be, in his view) or as they should be: *ἢ γὰρ οἷα ἦν ἢ ἔστιν, ἢ οἷα φασι καὶ δοκεῖ, ἢ οἷα εἶναι δεῖ*.

<sup>15</sup>) My translation differs from those given by M. Dufour-A. Wartelle, *Aristote: Rhétorique*, t. III (Paris 1973), 67: "Je dis que les mots peignent

Aristotle, Homer owed his popularity to the fact that he, by his brilliant use of metaphors, could speak about inanimate things as if they were alive, thus creating an actuality (*ἐνέργεια*, *Rhetoric* 1411 b 31–1412 a 10).

For Aristotle, metaphor can only function in the context of linguistic interaction: metaphors which are not understood are not functional (*Rhetoric* 1405 a 34–37, 1406 b 5–19), whereas the functioning metaphor conveys knowledge and (its own) truth (*Rhetoric* 1410 b 13–15, 26–27; 1412 a 19–22).

In this article, I have tried to avoid any overhasty characterisation of Aristotle's theory of metaphor; rather, I have tried to analyse how Aristotle describes the functioning of metaphorical speech. To some scholars, Aristotle's theory of metaphor may seem too less formalised, or incomplete, but one must take into account that it was Aristotle's intention to understand metaphorical communication within its broader cognitive and even ontological context. Within such a view, metaphor cannot be reduced to an algebraic formula, or to a mere substitution of terms; rather, Aristotle has attempted to put before our eyes how he *saw* metaphor and its relation to dianoetic (re)cognition.

### Ionic *δνονημένα*

By DONALD A. RINGE, Jr., Annandale-on-Hudson (USA)

In 1924 Albert Rehm unearthed on Samos an inscription recording a dedication made at the Samian Heraion by two Perinthian colonists; in 1953 this was finally published by Günther Klaffenbach ("Archaische Weihinschrift aus Samos", *Deutsche Mitteilungen* 6, pp. 15–20). It appears in *SEG* XII (1955) as no. 391. Klaffenbach's text reads as follows:

[. .]νίσκος Ε[εν|ο]δόκο, Δῆμι[ς|ΙΙ]νθοκλέος ο|[ι]κήι{η}ι( ? ) Περ[ι]|<sup>5</sup>ν-  
θιοι τῆι Ἡρ|ηι ἀνέθεσαν| δεκάτην ἔρ|δοντες γορ|γύρην χρυσῆ||<sup>10</sup>ν,  
σερῆνα ἀργ|ύρεον, φιάλη|ν ἀργυρῆν, λυ|χνίην χαλκῆ|ν δνονημένα ||<sup>15</sup>  
σύνπαντα δ|[ι]ηκοσίων δυ|ωδέκων στατ|ήρων Σαμίω|ν σὺν τῶι λίθω|[ι].

quand ils signifient les choses en acte", and by J.H. Freese, *Aristotle: The "Art" of Rhetoric* (Cambridge-London 1975) 405: "I mean that things are set before the eyes by words that signify actuality".