

# same, same! pleasures and purposes of metaphor

Julia Kasdorf

*English 213: Introduction to Poetry Writing*

Metaphor is made of two parts, I tell them  
because I must say something: vehicle and tenor,  
and we should know the names of things we do by instinct,  
though I only half believe this. Not that kind of vehicle,  
not that kind of tenor, and yet their poems must move,  
must sing. It's confusing and hard. Aristotle said  
genius sees resemblance in difference. A car is not  
a metaphor, is a machine made of countless metal parts  
that keep us mindful of oil, coolant, a milk jug in the trunk  
in which to dilute it, mindful of all the ways a day can turn,  
pulling into Bloomsburg State, for instance, steam blowing  
from under the hood, I asked a student for the lecture hall,  
campus clock gonging the hour of my talk, but he said,  
"Look, something really bad is happening to your car."  
I have watched water run off my radiator  
as freely as the waters of birth. I have peered  
into the boxy chambers of my master cylinder, drained  
of break fluid, dark and divided as the human heart.  
Unable to start some mornings, I have loosened a wing nut,  
lifted the air filter, and jabbed a pencil stub  
into my butterfly valve, clenched like a catch in the throat.  
So when half the audience walked out of that reading  
to attend a memorial service for some boys, killed  
in a frat house fire, I did what any of us would do:  
paused until the room grew still, then continued.  
In towns like that, mechanics take only cash,  
but the folks who remained bought enough books  
to cover the cost of radiator hose, plus labor,  
that transaction as sweet and pure as the motion  
of any of our lubricious, invisible parts.

ROBERT FROST'S TERSE DEFINITION OF METAPHOR WAS:  
"saying one thing in terms of another." I. A. Richards called the two parts of a metaphor,  
"tenor" and "vehicle": the tenor is the idea being  
expressed, or the subject of the comparison, and the vehicle

is the image by which the idea is conveyed. So when Robert Burns wrote, "O my love is like a red, red rose," love is the tenor and rose is the vehicle. For the purposes of this piece, I gather under "metaphor" all types of figurative speech, such as image, trope, conceit, simile, metonymy, and so forth. By way of introduction and demonstration, I began with a poem of mine published several years ago in *The Common Review*.

Essentially this poem begins as a spoof of our work as teachers and thinkers. It claims the car is not a metaphor, yet belies that claim by drawing on the everyday American trope that compares cars to human bodies, often women's bodies, in order to generate an excessive run of machine/body metaphors. So, when the car breaks down, death can't be far away. But before the end of the poem, resurrection occurs through automotive repairs which are financed by the audience's purchase of books—salvation by means of consumer consumption. Or maybe grace incarnated through the economics of a temporary community created by the shared experience of language, that give-and-take of meaning as pleasurable as the huge maroon '78 Impala cruising along before it blew its hose. Overt and implicit metaphors drive the poem. Out of the play of metaphors, meaning—and maybe even a kind of healing or redemption—emerge.

THESE REFLECTIONS ON METAPHOR FALL INTO THREE parts: epistemology, pedagogy, and pleasure (a big topic divided into even bigger parts). I draw on evidence from different spheres of my experience as poet, professor, and mother of a small child, despite the fact that I haven't been entirely successful at integrating the distinct identities and kinds of work that produce art, flourish in academia, and nurture children. Most of the messages I've gotten are that, speaking on a purely practical level, these are probably mutually exclusive enterprises. At the Christian college where I used to teach—and I suspect this is the rule rather than the exception—family was supported, of course, but the teaching and service loads were so heavy, I wasn't sure I'd ever be able to keep my job and make art, let alone be a mother. I left that position for a research university, where the teaching load is much lighter and the money better, but where the dominant culture suggests that teaching is merely a distraction from the real work, research, which is what they call poetry, and as for

motherhood—well, if you have to do it, that is your own mistake to manage. In recent years, the AAUP and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* have published studies that reveal the dire situation for mothers in academia, as measured by dramatically lower tenure and promotion rates. The corporate university still has a long way to go to catch up with corporate America when it comes to enabling parents to succeed as workers.

Writing, teaching, and mothering can be (and maybe should be) full-time occupations; still, I'm a poet, a maker of metaphors, so I naturally resist exclusions and the will to contain things in neat categories. (And, at least now, it seems that I don't have a whole lot of choice in the matter.) Add to this the fact that I hate to do anything in a manner that, where I come from, we call "half-assed," which is a metaphor that means "partially." These are the particular pressures under which these notes were composed; it's a challenge that feels even more complicated than "integrating faith and learning," a phrase that, by the way, has always seemed kind of blasphemous to me, for I believe in a sacramental universe, that "all knowledge is God's knowledge," and that reason, belief, and thought are embodied. As a cradle Anabaptist, I know that faith and work are one; as a converted Episcopalian, I know that word and flesh are one. And I think that fretting and arguing about how faith and learning should connect seems to suggest some sort of prior, violent split between the two that I simply cannot admit.

### epistemology

On a bitter cold morning last November, a month before her second birthday, Amelia, my child who yanks off hats, kicks off covers, and screams at the sight of the sunscreen bottle, stood in the foyer, defiant. It was frigid outside, and she had to wear something on her hands. Braced for wails of refusal, I thrust a pair of thumbless, purple fleece mittens onto the ends of her arms. Stunned silence. She looked at the mitts for a long time, silently turning palms up, then down, then up again. Then, she finally looked up at me with a broad grin, and raising her hands to either side of her face, she pronounced with satisfaction, "Paws!"

In his aphorisms collected in "Adagia," Wallace Stevens writes, "All of our ideas come from the natural world: trees = umbrellas."

Ezra Pound said, "...the natural object is always the adequate symbol."

God commanded Adam to name the animals.

At the root of language is metaphor, the desire and human privilege to find names for the unknown. Metaphor is a means by which we apprehend the unfamiliar by calling it by a familiar term, one that may refer to the natural world. We say "the spine of a book," "the eye of a needle,"

"the foot of a mountain," to remind you of a few dead metaphors, figures that are so worn they no longer register as figures at all. Amelia knew that paws only belong to animals, but confronted with the fuzzy, blunt, purple objects, she needed a way to domesticate the strange. Hands inside mittens do look a little like paws, and lacking the new word, she found an old one. In this way, necessity transforms all toddlers and adult learners of foreign languages into poets.

---

*Metaphor  
makes the  
familiar  
strange on  
purpose,  
for fun.*

---

And the act doesn't really look that different for writers. The animals we struggle to name are inexplicable emotions or confounding experiences. Most times, the quickest way from experience to articulate feeling detours through metaphor. Metaphor means "transference," or "to carry over." I have been told that you can see the word "Metaphoros" painted across moving vans in Greece. In psychological terms, the qualities of one thing get transferred onto another; metaphor enables us to identify the tenor with the vehicle—often because the tenor is too difficult for our minds to grasp in its own terms—too unfamiliar or confounding or frightening. That difficulty is demonstrated by Yusef Komunyakaa, one of our contemporary poets who served in Viet Nam as a writer and editor for an Army newspaper, in a poem from *Dien Cai Dau* (1988). The entire poem enacts the mind's desperate attempt to figure the facts of a horrible memory into other terms:

"You and I are Disappearing" —Bjorn Hakasson

The cry I bring down from the hills  
belongs to a girl still burning  
inside my head. At daybreak  
she burns like a piece of paper.  
She burns like foxfire  
in a thigh-shaped valley.  
A skirt of flames  
dances around her  
at dusk.

We stand with our hands  
hanging at our sides,  
while she burns  
like a sack of dry ice.  
She burns like oil on water.  
She burns like a cattail torch  
dipped in gasoline.  
She glows like the fat tip  
of a banker's cigar,  
silent as quicksilver.  
A tiger under a rainbow  
at nightfall.

She burns like a shot glass of vodka.  
She burns like a field of poppies  
at the edge of a rain forest.

She rises like dragonsmoke  
to my nostrils.  
She burns like a burning bush  
driven by a godawful wind.

THE UNSPEAKABLE FINDS UTTERANCE THROUGH metaphor, but the temporary name is necessarily a lie. One review of my first book, *Sleeping Preacher*, noted with dismay a surprising absence of any real metaphors, which typically are essential elements of poetry, the plain-spoken quality of my narratives from family and community history, only sparked by irony and some occasional metonymy. I realized that this was true, and wondered whether I unconsciously avoided metaphors because I had internalized a taboo against those lies of transference. In my culture of origin, falsehoods and excessive uses of language, such as oaths, are strictly forbidden. Moreover, Anabaptists have a history of extreme iconoclasm, values that are not entirely unique among Protestant traditions as they have evolved in the New World. And I wonder whether language itself—because of its slippery, representational quality—might be the problem.

Here is a poem that expresses anxiety about the gap between words and things. Some time ago, I was reading an article that discussed the materiality of language, a way of thinking about language that does not split material from immaterial, experience from representation. It's one of those ideas I immediately liked in theory, but wasn't sure I believed in fact, until I considered it in terms of language acquisition, the way very young children who are just being initiated into linguistic conventions, chant the names of things as if to conjure up the object by magic. At the time I was teaching in Oregon, watching Amelia learn the names for things as I tried to figure out how to be a parent.

*The Materiality of Language at Lincoln*

*Truck, truck* she slurs then lunges  
toward a logger rumbling under a load  
of skinned trunks. At seventeen months,  
her words do not express any thing

but are things, as hard as the stones  
she hides in her fists or the sticks  
she yanks from the wood box.  
Who can say what charms her most,

a long stick or my sudden, *No!*  
*No sticks! You'll poke your eye!*  
as predictable as the blue gills which  
circle and lift while she chants *fish*

*fish, fish* over the mill pond.  
She is one-fourth, and I, one-half

my dad who said, *Stop talking.*  
*Let's sleep on it and speak again,*

as if anger would turn our words  
into swords that could never be bent  
into spades or thrust into fence posts.  
Better to bite our own tongues

than wound another. At twenty-one,  
I found that wrong—still do—  
but such lessons come later on.  
Now I need only to feed her hunger

for significant sounds, this one  
who sings *tractor, tractor* each time  
her finger finds a nut on the hub cap,  
*juice, juice, juice* to the grinning cup.

“Better to bite our own tongues than wound another,” sums up fairly well the ethic of articulation from my background. Language, as the medium of religion (swords and ploughshares), culture (sticks and stones), and charms, is a game of high stakes, with silence sometimes the wisest response, and what a wonderful confusion for a young person with literary inclinations to inherit.

pedagogy

After I had accepted my first job as a college professor, I read the syllabus from my predecessor for a course I would soon be teaching myself, and it spooked me. As a rationale for enrolling in the course called “Introduction to Poetry,” he argued that college students should learn to read poetry so that they can better understand the words of Jesus. I found this troubling, coming from an Anabaptist tradition of the Amish-Mennonite sort, which somewhere along the line must have been influenced by the great motto attributed to St. Francis: “Preach the Gospel at all times; use words if necessary.” Where I come from, it's usually not necessary to use words to express matters of faith; whatever you do in the world is witness enough. And things which are not necessary—and not practical or true in a literal sense—are to be avoided. So, I left Jesus off the syllabus when I taught “Introduction to Poetry” at Messiah College. However, I've since come to see my predecessor's point, and I appreciate his attempt to seduce to poetry even the fundamentalist students.

Metaphor must be the primary pedagogical method of the Hebrew and Christian literary tradition, after all. I'm no biblical scholar, but it seems that whenever God wants people to hear something they are unwilling or unable to grasp, God speaks through the most unreliable media: dreams, which get interpreted metaphorically, or prophets who tell strange stories that function as analogues of experience. Think of King David, “in the spring, at the time when kings go off to war,” who stayed back in Jerusalem

and there spied the beautiful Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite, bathing on a roof top. He sent for her, slept with her, and she conceived a child. After an unsuccessful attempt to get Uriah to surrender his soldier's sense of stoic duty and sleep with his wife, David had the Hittite placed on the front lines so he might be killed in battle. When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. But after the time of mourning, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. According to the text, "The thing David had done displeased the Lord." And so the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to David. Nathan told the story of two men—one rich, one poor. The rich man had many sheep, but the poor man had only one ewe which he loved and cared for as if it were his daughter. When the rich man needed to kill an animal for a feast, he took the poor man's only ewe. When David heard this story, he "burned with anger" and sought to punish the rich man. Then Nathan said, "You are that man!" (2 Sam 11–12:7)

Jesus continued in the prophetic tradition, teaching through analogue—whether they were pointed stories designed to rebuke an individual or outrageous metaphors to illuminate the nature of the kingdom of heaven. Only a few of those metaphors become flustering contradictions: the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed; no, it's like a pearl of great price; it's ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom; no, it's a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire two men, and so on. Like dreams, which can be bewildering or terrifying or utterly absurd, the prophet's tropes penetrate a mind's defenses and break meaning onto the consciousness, sometimes suddenly shattering, "That man is you!" or sometimes gently making the familiar strange enough to see. It's as if metaphor reminds us of something we had forgotten.

Metaphoric language enables us to see our experience anew, but with an excess of knowing. In 1913, Ezra Pound described the phenomenology of reading the new "image"—a kind of speeded up metaphor that was entirely immediate:

An "Image" is what presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time...[he was borrowing the word "complex" from the new realm of psychological study]. It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art."

Pound's famous example of the Imagist poem, also written in 1913, is "In a Station of the Metro." He had struggled for

months, drafting lengthy versions of a poem that might capture the flash of feeling when he saw a crowd of people emerging from a subway stop in Paris—those gorgeous faces before him in a moment of recognition that was both immediate and absolutely ephemeral. After many drafts, he abandoned any attempt to convey the transcendent moment and settled, instead, on an attempt to create the experience within his reader:

In a Station of the Metro  
The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Pound's terms—liberation . . . freedom . . . a sense of sudden growth—are ways of describing the instant of surprise and recognition that comes by means of metaphor. As Wallace Stevens put it, "Metaphor creates a new reality from which the original appears to be unreal." But in this sense of new creation, there is also a sense that metaphor must use materials from the known world. The flash comes not so much from seeing a novel thing for the first time, but the connection between here and there, that sudden surprise of something remote being immediate, intimate, and true.

---

*"Your poetry is a seeing eye dog that leads your blind self around in the world."*

---

Those moments of insight or excess-sight are the ones we retain over time. When I recall my college and graduate school education, I believe that everything that stayed with me was couched in metaphoric terms. "Your poetry is a seeing eye dog that leads your blind self around in the world," Yehuda Amichai, the late Israeli poet, said of that vision that comes with writing and finding the right metaphor in one's work. "Your memory is like a museum with a very selective curator," he said. "You must trust that every object that ends up there is beautiful and meaningful because your memory selected it to remain. Even the most terrible object—like the cross—will be the most beautiful." Showing up at poetry workshop each week at NYU, Amichai couldn't keep himself from sharing his linguistic pleasures. As a speaker of English as a third or fourth language, the embedded (or dead) metaphors, lost to native speakers, were still rich and vivid for him, and at the start of each class he shared a few with us. Once he said, "Listen to this: traffic jam. Traffic jam." Then he laughed and laughed, "Think of those cars smashed up in a jar like strawberries."

The force of Amichai's work (at least for those of us who read it in translation and, therefore, without the music of the original Hebrew) depends almost entirely on metaphor. And his metaphors, like the metaphors of many European writers, are extravagant—much wilder than figures of speech that typically appear in poems written in English. Just as our essay structure permits fewer departures from linear logic than essays written in Slavic or Asian languages, so the vehicles and tenors in English metaphors

must be more closely related in scale, the point of resemblance more obvious. I don't know how to account for this, but maybe blame lies in part with our instinct for practicality and in part with Aristotle, who valued art as a metaphor for nature, and cautioned against comparisons that were out of proportion and too far fetched. Or maybe it lies with American cultural values that extend back to the Puritans. During the second half of the twentieth century, some poets in this country found the plain-spoken idiom inadequate and thus began translating and reading the works of European and South American poets, and Amichai was discovered and translated during that period. But let me show you what I mean by offering one of his small poems from *A Great Tranquility: Questions and Answers* (reprinted and newly translated in *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*).

*Forgetting Someone*

Forgetting someone is like  
forgetting to turn off the light in the back yard  
so it stays lit all the next day.

But then it's the light  
that makes you remember.

We learn by seeing things in striking and new relationship with other things. The point of resemblance can be the point of insight, but I. A. Richards has observed that the point of difference is often the greater source of meaning, because it creates tension and forces discovery. The cognitive dissonance generated by difference animates the image. In dead metaphors, particularly, we nod at similarity and miss the difference. Those figures are so deeply embedded within our consciousness that they can structure our perceptions of reality and blind us. This is the point made by Lakoff and Johnson in their important early book, *Metaphors We Live By*.

When I was teaching "Introduction to Poetry" at Messiah College, I used to ask the students to really consider what it means that Christians metaphorically conceive of their church as a body. (Of course that's a perfect Lakoff and Johnson example because it explicitly grounds perception and reason in bodily experience.) The church is a body: so hierarchy is assumed because we generally associate being "up" with being happy and well; being "down" with being ill and depressed. Therefore, based on our physical experience of our own bodies, we know that the head should be on top. We also know that our bodies have an inside and an outside, and that if our physical boundaries are penetrated, it's usually a bad thing, resulting in pain, wounds, illness from infection, possibly even death. (That's leaving sex aside for a moment—probably that's never a good idea.) When asked to imagine the implications of a church being figured as a chunky stew or

salad, rather than a body, my students were distressed. Despite, or because of, their being saturated with Biblical language and texts, they hadn't recognized those metaphors as merely figures of speech, but how much more interesting—and open to change—things might be if they had. "Reality is a cliché from which we escape by metaphor," suggested Wallace Stevens. And it is also the case that metaphor is a means by which we may change reality because it enables us to change our minds.

In the following poem, the speaker, a bewildered teacher of poetry writing who resembles this author, is confronted with a difficult student text. Only after the fact, she responds to the situation by telling a story. And as the story unfolds, she finds her way by metaphor, like a prophet, to arrive at a clearer sense of both the student's situation and her own position.

*Bat boy, Break a Leg*

The student with two studs in his nose  
and a dragon tattoo crawling from his collar,  
who seems always ready to swoon  
from bliss or despair, now flits  
at my office door. I will look at his poem  
drawn onto a music score and find nothing  
to say about chance or HIV.

Only later I'll think to tell him  
the night before I left home, I slept  
sadly in our old house until a wing  
touched my cheek, tenderly as a breeze.

I woke to black fluttering at my feet,  
and a mind fresh from the other side  
said *don't turn on the light, don't*

*Wake the man, don't scream or speak.*  
*Go back to sleep.* The next morning

I remembered that people upstate  
whack them with tennis rackets, that  
the Chinese character for good luck  
resembles the character for bat—

both so unsettling and erratic—  
but it's bad luck to say good luck  
in China, as on stage where they say  
*Break a leg*, so delicate bats  
must be woven into silk brocade  
and glazed onto porcelain plates.

Next morning, I found a big-eared mouse  
with leather folded over his shoulders  
hanging from claws stuck in a screen.

All day, my work made me forget, but  
then I'd remember, passing the window  
where he slept, shaded under the eaves.

He was fine. I was fine. Then at dusk,  
he was gone, suddenly. Pale boy dressed in black,

Maybe the best that can be said for any of us is that  
once we were angelic enough to sleep with strangers.

He touched my cheek. I opened the screen.

He flew in his time. We did no harm.

That ending surprised me, too, calling up both Allen Ginsberg and the biblical Jacob. I now see that the poem moves toward its surprising conclusion in this way: the boy is like a bat; the bat is like luck; the bat is like a mouse; the bat is like the angel and the speaker is like Jacob; the bat is like a stranger; a stranger is like an angel; the boy is like a bat, and both of them will be safe. In each instance—as with all metaphors—the figure is made as the known gropes toward the unknown. I cannot claim that the boy is lucky, but I can say the boy is like a bat, and the bat is like luck. Metaphor must always keep one foot on the ground, which is a metaphoric way of phrasing what Aristotle knew: that metaphor falls midway between the unintelligible and the commonplace. The poem suggests that the encounter between teacher and student is like being touched by a bat, like Jacob grappling with the angel; it is that violent and strange.

pleasure (the shortest section, naturally.)

At around eighteen months, my daughter, Amelia, became obsessed with recognizing resemblance. She'd endlessly point out connections between things by shouting "Same, same!" The Winnie the Pooh in the storybook and the Pooh bear on her tooth brush handle. "Same, same!" The banana in the fruit bowl on the counter and the tiny wooden banana in her puzzle. "Same, same!" Colors, shapes, images, sounds—she never ceased delighting at the discovery of similitude, and it seemed an essential means of constructing the categories that enable us to learn language. I felt as if I were witnessing what Michel Foucault has called "the semantic web of resemblance" and identified as the primary epistemological method in the West. He claims that prior to the end of the sixteenth century, resemblance, in various complex forms, was used to construct knowledge: it guided exegesis and the interpretation of the text of the world or the book, organized the play of symbols, illuminated things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them. *Don Quixote* represented the first significant break with that way, according to Foucault, because suddenly in that novel analogues dissolve, words detach from things, and confusion ensues.

ALMOST AS SOON AS AMELIA HAD LEARNED THE CONVENTIONAL names for things, she began to call them by other names. Metaphor, which initially was a useful way of creating a "temporary stay against confusion," became a game, a pleasure, and the pleasure seemed mostly to derive from deliberate departures from the norm. Only a month after "paws" took the harm out of her encounter with a new pair of mittens, she held the cord of a pull toy beside her head and dangled a wooden cat on wheels. She looked up with a smile and said, "Ear ring!" Around the

same time she stuck her fingertip into a sliced black olive and, pulling it from the pizza, laughed "Puppet!" To the huge icicles hanging from the gutters outside my study window, she shouted "Rocket, Rocket!" In all of those instances, she knew the common names for things—cat or earring, olive or puppet, icicle or rocket—but by just two years old, as the human animal is still mastering basic vocabulary, we begin to call things by other names of our own making. Thus, metaphor makes the familiar strange *on purpose*, for fun. I can only imagine the pleasure that comes from a complex discovery: an olive is not a puppet, and yet it is. The pleasure of metaphor is the pleasure of transgression—breaking the law, but breaking it gently. The pleasure of metaphor is the pleasure of both invention and association—departing from tradition to make something new, but not deviating so far that others cannot follow the discovery.

At the same time, the pleasure of "same, same!" is compounded by all the ways the things are not the same, the pleasure of meeting as well as parting. Calling objects by another name creates a temporary coupling of two unlike things, and therefore Alicia Ostriker has called metaphor "the erotic element in language." Metaphorically casting the play of meaning between two unlike things, she writes in her "A Meditation on Metaphor," "... the pleasure we take in metaphor is a pleasure of consent, an agreement that the distance between two things is cancellable because of their likeness, whereby each illuminates some inner truth belonging to the other." To believe in metaphor, we have to believe, temporarily at least, as the ancients did, that the world is connected through some deep web of meaning—animate and inanimate, large and small, across different points in time and place. These, of course, are huge claims with profound political and spiritual implications, tending even toward peace. On some level, I think she's saying that not only is Robert Burns's love like a red rose, but that love *likes* red roses.

Even as I am happily and enthusiastically drawn to Ostriker's erotic sensibility, I must also consider the "poethics" of experimental poet Juliana Spahr. Spahr, whose poetics is at least partly shaped by the fact that she lives in the American colony of Hawaii, is troubled by the nature of relationship as structured through metaphor, or what she calls "the joined product." She asks, in "spiderwasp or literary criticism," whether the relationship between vehicle and tenor is one of "dominion and understanding" of one thing *over* another? How is it possible to embrace another without absorbing—and thereby erasing—her or him? Can we both join with the other and retain the distinct identities of both?

As a person who not long ago walked around with another person inside her own body, I do not know how to answer that question, but I recognize its urgency. So, I end where I began, with bewilderment and a baby—and one

more poem.

*Mother with Toddler in War Time*

The first soft day after  
an intractable winter

a child, conceived before  
the Towers burned but born

after, commands a flock  
of geese: *Do this! Do this!*

as her arms flap like wings  
under their scraping songs.

The only one more vain  
is the mother who knows,

more than thinks, that nothing  
on our worn earth matters more

than this one gesture, this  
kid this instant, this lifting.

The way images work in this poem creates a kind of slippage between vehicle and tenor, as often happens in metaphors. The child, who is imitating the geese, believes that the geese are imitating her. She "commands" them the way toddlers boss the world, but given that this is all happening during war time, "command" takes another meaning. The child is like a commander-in-chief, or the commander in chief resembles a toddler? You see how metaphors unsettle power structures and replace order with eros? And the mother, apparently incapable of caring for much more than this child during a war in a distant land, is somehow lifted up and out into the world through her attention to the one life, despite or because of all that is

fallen and burning on earth. If only the desirous attention for the one could translate into an ethic of care for many. In this way, pleasure and purpose would become one. ♣

Julia Kasdorf is the author of two collections of poetry, *Eve's Striptease* (1998) and *Sleeping Preacher* (1992). Her collection of essays, *The Body and The Book: Writings from a Mennonite Life* (2001) was named the book of the year by the MLA's Conference on Christianity and Literature. She is associate professor of English and Women's Studies and director of the MFA program at Penn State University. This essay was first presented at "fling yourself farther": Metaphor, Faith and Learning, the Fourteenth Annual National Conference of the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts at St. Olaf College. The author would like to thank Cynthia Clem who read a draft of that talk and provided useful suggestions for revision.

Poetry:

Yehuda Amichai, *A Great Tranquility: Questions and Answers* (1980) reprinted and newly translated in *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, eds. and trans. Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell (New York: Harper and Row, 1986).

Julia Kasdorf, "Bat boy, Break a Leg," *Shenandoah*, 51.4 (Winter, 2001).

Julia Kasdorf, "English 213: Introduction to Poetry Writing," *The Common Review*, 1.1 (Fall, 2001).

Julia Kasdorf, "Mother with Toddler in War Time," *Women's Review of Books*, XXI.12 (September, 2004).

Yusef Koomunyakaa, *Dien Cai Dau* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan, 1988).