



## Illustrating Metaphorical Purpose

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### Abstract

*Philosophers, for the past few decades, have been grappling with intrinsic metaphorical value, or whether such a thing exists at all. Many have argued that metaphors, given their figurative nature, lie outside formal semantics or defy any kind of theoretical explanation. Josef Stern pushes back on those arguments in his book *Metaphor in Context*, where his general thesis is that metaphors are indeed semantic phenomena. In this paper, I outline and defend the premise that, as semantic phenomena, metaphors are truth bearing entities that express propositions. Metaphors depend on literal meaning to bear truth values and to be intelligible, but I also argue for the nonexistence of literal paraphrase; the distinction between metaphors and the literal meaning they depend on has purely extra-linguistic qualities. Yet, I detail how those qualities support metaphorical truth conditions, despite being extra-linguistic, which elucidates a distinct purpose for metaphorical use. As a classical pianist, I illustrate that argument with examples of metaphors in classical music where composers choose to use metaphorical language in their work to specifically convey their musical intentions.*

## I. Metaphors and Interpretational Variability

To begin, I will first discuss what metaphors are and their interpretational variability. Metaphors are commonly known as figures of speech that denote certain attributes or meanings but are not interpreted as literally true. That seems like a roundabout way of conveying a declarative message or idea, but metaphors must have some distinctive purpose or else they would not be as widely used as they are. Philosophers of language like Donald Davidson, Richard Rorty, and George Lakoff and his school have argued that metaphors do not serve any distinct, linguistic purpose and thus lie outside formal semantics. However, other philosophers like Josef Stern in his book *Metaphor in Context* argue against that idea. Throughout his book, Stern argues that metaphors are truth-bearing entities that express propositions, so they are semantic phenomena. I will defend this premise as part of my larger argument to illustrate how metaphors have a distinct linguistic purpose beyond being a colorful play on language and evocation.

Stern's first and most ubiquitous example of a metaphor in his book is a hypothetical scenario where Shakespeare's characters from *Romeo and Juliet* became sentient beings and actually did everything told in the original story. At some point, Romeo utters,

(1) "Juliet is the sun."<sup>1</sup>

The literal translation of the sentence would mean that Juliet *literally* is the giant sphere of hot plasma in outer space. While that reading technically *could* be true in some context—perhaps the story of *Romeo and Juliet* could be re-written as a sci-fi / fantasy romance where Romeo is in love with the actual, celestial sun whom he has named Juliet—that would not make much sense in the story's original context.

From experienced sense impressions, one can form perspectives or judgments about the sun. Besides life, the sun gives people everyday pleasures like light, warmth, sunrises, and sunsets. In the Bible, the third verse from the Book of Genesis reads "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. . . . And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, and it was good."<sup>2</sup> The sun can be a positive, extraordinary entity that connotes characteristics like longevity and nurturing warmth; those are possible interpretations of what the metaphorical "sun" could mean.

But those are not the only interpretations. The sun, as a sphere of hot plasma, is also around 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit at its surface, and around 27 million degrees Fahrenheit at its center—to peoples' sense impressions, a ball of fire that is astonishingly hot. Fire, in any form and degree of heat, has the potential to burn and destroy people, animals, and most other things. The same fire that can give off warmth and light can also cause massive destruction. So, with those implications, "Juliet is the sun" could be a scathing insult that says she is capricious, filled with ruthless wrath, and has potential for the utmost devastation.

1. Josef Stern. *Metaphor in Context*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 1.

2. Gen 1: 1, 3-4 King James Version

With this variety in metaphorical interpretation and seeming lack of objective grounding, metaphorical truth conditions seem improbable. In the next section, I will explain Stern's premise that metaphors are indeed truth-bearing entities.

## II. Determining Metaphorical Truth Conditions

Stern states that his semantic theory of metaphor rests on the premise that metaphors are truth evaluable, "no different from literal sentences like 'snow is white.'"<sup>3</sup> Truth conditions with literal statements like that are evaluated with respect to standardized sense impressions. People can say "snow is white" and identify the statement as true because, on average, snow historically and at present appears to be white in color when it falls from the sky onto any surface. The color "white," then, is perceived as a standardized, inherent quality of snow that becomes commonly acknowledged. Therefore, the sentence "snow is white" is evaluated as true.

Stern supports his analysis of metaphorical truth conditions with David Kaplan's (1989) process for interpreting truth values of indexicals, also known as the character-content distinction. Kaplan's concept elaborates upon compositional semantic rules for a language without indexicals, but rather with other constructions that are interpreted in terms of possible worlds, like modalities.<sup>4</sup> Sentence  $f$  is a function that inputs a possible world and outputs a truth value, or some intension  $[f]$  of  $f$ . There are parameters that constrain possible worlds to distinct truth-values to  $f$ , which involve evaluating  $f$  with respect to some fixed world  $w$ . Therefore, the truth value of  $f$  can be interpreted with respect to  $w$ , which would be  $[f]^w$  of  $f$ . The character-content distinction involves a similar process, except it considers contexts instead of possible worlds. With indexicals, intension  $[f]$  of a sentence  $f$  is assigned a *character* as an outcome of its *content* fixed to a specific context; the content is akin to different interpretations within possible worlds, and the context—that takes times, places, and speakers into account—is akin to some fixed world  $w$ . In sum, contents are obtained from characters as characters are applied to contexts, and contents output truth values with respect to their characters.

With metaphor, the distinction and truth conditional analysis happens in two steps. Stern states that "the meaning of a metaphor is the rule that determines its content for each context, that is, its character."<sup>5</sup> The first step is recognizing the metaphor's "content." Stern summarizes content as a metaphor's "propositional component, or truth condition(al) factor."<sup>6</sup> A metaphor's content, unlike literal statements, does not directly delineate its meaning because it depends on some literal properties, but can be interpreted in a number of ways. The sun in (1) is used to compare Juliet to the celestial sun that has inherent qualities that people generally perceive—like "white" is to snow—such as being staggeringly hot and

3. Stern, *Metaphor*, 24.

4. Zoltán Gendler Szabó and Richmond H. Thomason, *Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 177.

5. Stern, *Metaphor*, 16.

6. Stern, *Metaphor*, 16.

a fiery, red star. From those qualities, one can derive value-laden properties of those qualities that the metaphor can portray. As I mentioned earlier in the paper, those value-laden properties—or the content—from (1) can be either laudatory or harsh slander because the sun’s literal attributes or qualities can be interpreted differently depending on the context from which the metaphor is devised. Those various properties are what Stern describes as being “m-associated”<sup>7</sup> with some metaphor “m” as a “literal vehicle”<sup>8</sup> to understand what “m” can mean. They are called “literal vehicles” because those value-laden properties contain the literal, lexical meaning that the metaphor directly depends on to be intelligible.

Here is where determining the character—the second step—comes into play, where it determines the appropriate content and classifies its truth conditions by designating the appropriate value-laden properties to the correct context. Character, as Stern puts it, “roughly corresponds to the (linguistic) meaning of an expression...that determines the content of the expression in each context of utterance.”<sup>9</sup> Characters are “nonconstant” in that they can determine different contents depending on the context.<sup>10</sup> (1) has Romeo stating the sentence, not anyone else, so the metaphor must be evaluated with respect to the time and situation Romeo specifically exists within as well as his intentions when he states the metaphor. Romeo is ardently infatuated with Juliet throughout the original Shakespeare story, so it can be assumed that at the time of utterance, he means to compare Juliet to the sun in a way that showcases his passionate feelings for her. Stern states that (1) is expressing the proposition that, to Romeo, the person Juliet is “the thing around which his life revolves, that she nourishes him, and that he worships her.”<sup>11</sup> That proposition contains the appropriate value-laden properties, or content of (1), with the determined character situated in the context of Romeo’s character established in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*.

In sentences, the correct metaphorical interpretation’s truth conditions are confirmed through Stern’s “Mthat” framework—a “metaphoricity” logical operator that directly displays the set of properties that are “m-associated” with some metaphor “m” in a given sentence such that the sentence is true in the appropriate context.<sup>12</sup> For (1), the Mthat operator would look like:

(1) Juliet Mthat [‘is the sun’]

<Juliet, *is exemplary and peerless, worthy of worship and adoration etc.* ><sup>13</sup>

Mthat is modeled on Kaplan’s (1978) similar operator “Dthat” used to determine truth conditions in demonstratives, like “I” or “Here”. The content of sentences with demonstratives can take on very different meanings depending on the context of utterance in a similar way to metaphors, Two different people saying (2) “I am here” contains the same propositional content, but two different people pose two different contexts of utterance.

7. Stern, *Metaphor*, 113.

8. Stern, *Metaphor*, 113.

9. Stern, *Metaphor*, 16.

10. Stern, *Metaphor*, 16.

11. Stern, *Metaphor*, 114.

12. Stern, *Metaphor*, 115.

13. Stern, *Metaphor*, 1.

Dthat outputs depend on interpreting the respective sentence's embedded information. Sentence (2), for instance, is interpreted by assigning the correct object or time correlated with the expressions "I" and "here". If I and another person uttered (2), the same sentence would have two very different meanings. The Dthat operator for me would look like:

(2) I [PEllen SirowerP] am here [Pmy family's apartment in New York CityP]<sup>14</sup>

For the other person, "I" would correspond to whoever they are, which is not me and could not be me. "Here" could be the exact same place as where I am situated, or it could refer to another location, but the sentence would have completely different Dthat outputs, regardless. Like metaphors, the demonstratives' contents from a sentence like (2) account for all interpretable possibilities. The character determines the correct content by evaluating the sentence's respective context and assigning each demonstrative to its appropriate, definite meaning.

Determining Mthat propositions depends on the presuppositions that are "m-associated" with the sentence in the given context of utterance. (1) can be ambiguous with all its possible, contextually variable interpretations, so determining the character for some statement that results in an Mthat operator output specifies what value-laden properties are true of the sentence in the appropriate context. With both metaphors and demonstratives, truth values are assessed as true-in-context. Therefore, as Stern assumed, metaphors are truth-bearing entities.

### III. Metaphors and Similes

Consequently, if metaphors are truth-bearing entities, do those same principles hold constant with similes? How are they different from metaphors?

While metaphors and similes may serve different rhetorical purposes, they are semantically identical with respect to their truth conditions. When two declarative sentences—one a metaphor, one a simile—use the same entity as a figurative descriptor by means of the same character, that figurative entity is interpreted metaphorically in both cases. That is, that metaphorical entity results in the same Mthat operator outputs in both cases. (1) could have easily been written with Romeo saying, "Juliet is like the sun," and the Mthat operator outputs from "sun" would be identical to those from the original text. The addition of "like" in the sentence does not change the respective character of "sun," given the identical context. Therefore, both the direct metaphor in (1) and its re-write in simile-form have identical truth values.

Shakespeare may have decided to use a metaphor instead of a simile because the metaphor is rhetorically more direct and characteristically impassioned than a simile in Romeo's case. Stern describes the "like" in similes like the rewritten (1) simile as a "hedge, or qualifier, on the content," which in turn alters the content's quality.<sup>15</sup> (1) is Romeo saying that Juliet wholly embodies the celestial sun's positive attributes, whereas its simile re-write is a

14. The [P<sup>PP</sup>] structure refers to the parenthetical contents as propositions.

15. Stern, *Metaphor*, 232.

scenario where Romeo is comparing her to those attributes. In that moment, the metaphor illustrates what Romeo is trying to express in a way that is much more compelling than the simile, even though the metaphorical “sun” holds identical truth conditions in both statements.

#### IV. Literal Paraphrasability vs. Metaphorical Use

Now, if metaphors can be traced back to their literal meaning through the properties in the respective Mthat operator, what is the point of using metaphors instead of the speaker just explicitly saying what they mean using literal language? Literal paraphrasability is the idea that “the meaning of a metaphor can be equivalently stated in literal words,” and it rests on the premise that metaphors are just colorful figures of speech that ultimately have no distinctive meaning in themselves because they can be traced back to a literal paraphrase.<sup>16</sup> Stern does admit that metaphors depend on literal meaning to provide the foundational knowledge for people to understand metaphorical truth conditions, hence the existence of Mthat operators. That kind of knowledge is what Stern calls “knowledge *of* metaphor.”<sup>17</sup>

Knowledge *of* metaphor is understanding the metaphor’s appropriate content by its character with respect to its truth conditions, which requires semantic competence to understand. People must have the semantic knowledge to be able to discern the metaphor’s character and distinguish the appropriate content from all the possible interpretations that are not aligned with the character. Therefore, peoples’ semantic competence allows them to comprehend the foundation for understanding the metaphor’s truth conditions and content. However, that is only one type of metaphorical knowledge. The other type—what Stern calls “knowledge *by* metaphor”—consists of the distinct, extra-linguistic qualities that are only grasped through the use of metaphor.<sup>18</sup>

Knowledge *by* metaphor is understanding a metaphor’s truth conditions that are “made sense of through a specifically metaphorical mode,” which is the specific *way* in which knowledge *of* metaphor is conveyed.<sup>19</sup> Knowledge *by* metaphor is gleaned from the sensory, envisioned qualities that result from specific metaphor choice. In (1), the “Mthat” properties refer to the celestial sun that modify Juliet, but those same properties could refer to some other object or event that could metaphorically denote those properties. For example, Romeo could have said that Juliet is the goddess Venus or is Heaven and the skies, yet the appropriate Mthat outputs for either of those metaphors could contain the same Mthat outputs for (1). Those properties are not necessarily bound to any one metaphor in themselves since they are conditionally true only by a specific character. Therefore, the metaphor choice determines the specific way those properties are perceived or conceptualized.

16. Stern, *Metaphor*, 262.

17. Stern, *Metaphor*, 19.

18. Stern, *Metaphor*, 20.

19. Stern, *Metaphor*, 266.

When the metaphor choice is made and its truth conditions are fixed, the metaphorical object triggers specific sensory associations that a literal paraphrase could not capture. Those associations can call to mind experienced phenomena where the metaphorical object is a significant feature. The sun, from (1), can conjure up visualizations from a perfect summer morning with the sun shining in a cloudless blue sky, to watching plants grow and feed off sunlight, to the recurring, everyday experience of waking up and going to sleep with the sun. Literal language alone cannot describe the affective feelings that those sensory associations can arouse—they can only be felt, or communicated with figurative language that represents those feelings. A literal paraphrase of metaphor thus could not exist. Metaphor is not an ornamental surface that can be “strip[ped] off” to reveal literal language that conveys its exact meaning.<sup>20</sup> As I have said before, metaphors indeed *depend* on some literal language and meaning—namely knowledge *of* metaphor—to determine its truth conditions and Mthat outputs. Knowledge *by* metaphor, as per the definition, is understood distinctly through the sensory associations uniquely triggered by metaphors.

## V. Metaphor in Music

Music is a practical example of how knowledge *by* metaphor is realized and experienced through metaphor. Metaphors used in musical, directional markings and piece titles highlight how the foundational rules of determining metaphorical truth conditions and knowledge *of* and *by* metaphor manifest in understanding appropriate musical interpretation.

Instrumental music without words especially relies on metaphors in titles and/or through various musical markings and terms in the score to guide musicians in the interpretive directions composers wish for them to express through the music. Italian musical terms like *cantabile*, which means “song-like,” are ubiquitous in classical music and are metaphorical in nature. *Cantabile* is an example of a simile, and a case where a simile is rhetorically clearer than a metaphor. Asking musicians to play as if they were singing is more coherent than asking them to directly “sing” on their instruments. Nevertheless, as I argued in section III, the expression is interpreted metaphorically.

Just as Juliet is not actually the celestial sun in (1), *cantabile* does not ask for an instrumentalist to make their instrument literally sing as if it had a voice box; the marking encourages the musician to play a melodic line like they were singing the line and imitating a human voice. Musical composers, for centuries, have used terms like those in their musical scores so musicians can engage with the score in a way that reflects how they should convey the musical interpretation to themselves and eventually to audiences.

Determining the truth conditions for metaphorical musical terms like these follow the same rules and steps as garden-variety metaphors do in sentences. *Cantabile* can be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on the context. For

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20. Stern, *Metaphor*, 263.

soft, lyrical passages, *cantabile* can denote properties like soft and gentle. For large, dramatic passages, *cantabile* can denote properties like powerful and roaring. All of those properties would be part of the metaphor's propositional content that are m-associated with *cantabile*. Just like in typical sentences, the character determines the appropriate properties in the content depending on the context the metaphor occurs in.

With those properties determined, composers technically could write in longer, interpretive markings using just literal language from the metaphor's true content to describe the specific, musical effect they want. However, those attempts at paraphrase would not entirely communicate all the properties that *cantabile* elicits. If a composer wrote out *exactly* how they wanted the piece to be played note-for-note, from the way every note should be attacked, to the subtle liberties with time by measure, to every slight dynamic and tempo change, to every last articulation over every note and phrase, all those details would take a whole lot of language and space to try to fully explain the entirety of what *cantabile* or any other musical term denotes. Even if the composer bothered to do that, outlining every detail would not only look incredibly messy, but it would also entirely lose the musical intention in all those words. A practical function of metaphor is its ability to denote layers of meaning in very few words, which partially explains why metaphors are so common in language. Not only can they elicit distinct, extra-linguistic qualities that are experienced specifically through metaphor, but they are also accessible due to peoples' semantic and interpretive competence. Therefore, not only does an attempt at literal paraphrase not account for the full meaning of a metaphor—given the existence of knowledge *by* metaphor—but such an attempt would be so prolonged that, even if hypothetically “successful” in exact paraphrase, its meaning would be lost in translation.

Metaphorical language in music, just like in sentences, connects the performers and their audiences to experienced phenomena that the music often attempts to conjure up. If a violinist is called on to embody a singer while they play a certain melodic line, they are telling a story in a way that can only be understood through the essence of conveying emotion through song. That essence can only be understood if the musician recognizes the distinct, affective sensations that singing triggers in that context. Audiences will only understand that story for themselves if the musician understands how that essence is translated to interpreting the music on their respective instrument. Musicians and audiences recognizing and perceiving that story, through every step, are phenomena that manifest knowledge *by* metaphor.

In addition to musical terms and markings, metaphorical titles are very powerful musical tools. Metaphorical titles convey the story and the expected evocative properties that the music is intended to communicate. In spring of 1993, Hungarian-Austrian composer György Ligeti composed a fiendishly difficult étude for piano that he entitled “L’escalier du diable” or “The Devil’s Staircase,” which is the thirteenth etude from his second book of piano études.



Ligeti specifically chose to title the piece “The Devil’s Staircase.” That specific metaphor, like most metaphors, can be interpreted in a variety of different ways. However, as the composer, Ligeti has a very specific interpretation for his title. Unlike (1), the metaphor is not assigned to a person like the sun is to Juliet. Instead, the metaphor is assigned to a piece, so the piece embodies the metaphor. However, determining metaphorical characters in musical pieces is a slightly different process than with typical sentences like (1). What the sun is to Juliet, the “Devil’s Staircase” is to the musical score. Additionally, what Romeo is to the sentence (1) is what Ligeti is to his composition as a whole, including the title. With examples like (1), the appropriate context depends on who is uttering the metaphor. (1) would denote entirely different meanings if Romeo and Count Paris uttered the same sentence, since each person would attach different properties to the metaphorical sun to describe Juliet.<sup>21</sup> However, Ligeti is the only one who wrote his specific composition, and he is the only one who could ever write his exact piece; a duplication would be plagiarism. His interpretation of that specific metaphor assigned to his specific piece is thus the only context that metaphor can be interpreted. Therefore, Ligeti’s specific metaphorical interpretation of “The Devil’s Staircase” is the character that determines the content, and the metaphor’s truth conditions are fixed with respect to that character.

Ligeti’s inspiration for the title “The Devil’s Staircase” draws from both the endless staircases from the Dutch graphic artist Maurits Escher’s work “Relativity” and from the Cantor function, a mathematical function also called the “devil’s staircase.”<sup>22</sup> Ligeti states that those inspiration sources denote the particular properties of “constant, immense, relentless, yet hopeless efforts that represent humanity’s struggle in vain” associated with endless climbing and a staircase that is impossible to summit.<sup>23</sup> The Mthat operator translated to this piece would approximately look like:

György Ligeti’s Étude No. 13, Book 2: Mthat [“The Devil’s Staircase”]

György Ligeti’s Étude No. 13, Book 2: *<constant, immense, relentless, hopeless efforts; humanity’s struggle in vain>*

The Mthat operator outputs represent the appropriate properties contained in the knowledge of metaphor. That knowledge is demonstrated through the technical construction of the piece. The piece is rife with ascending chromatic scales, recursive rhythmic patterns, and constant motion up and down the entire keyboard that demonstrate infinite, endless repetition and motion. The piece utilizes the Shepard scale, which is an auditory illusion of ever-ascending or descending pitches as a result of the same octave being played repeatedly. In the piece’s rhythmic construction, Ligeti composed a rhythmic “staircase” inspired by

21. In the Shakespeare play, Juliet refuses Count Paris’ marriage offer; Paris is not fond of Juliet.

22. *Explore the Score*. Klavier-Festival Ruhr. <https://www.exploretthescore.org/gyorgy-ligeti-piano-works-inside-the-score.html>.

23. *Explore the Score*.

the mathematical phenomenon of Cantor sets, where he subdivided the individual notes into a progression of subgroups repeated throughout the piece:  $2+2+3/2+2+2+3/2+2+2+2+3/2+2+3/2+2+3/2+2+2+3$ .<sup>24</sup> Additionally, when the piece reaches its summit at the very top of the keyboard, the register rapidly shifts to the low register and starts the continuous, rhythmic pattern from the bottom all over again. All of those technical details contribute to and illuminate that idea of spiraling, endless ascension, and directly map onto the Mthat operator outputs, or knowledge *of* metaphor.

The knowledge *of* metaphor describes and explains Ligeti's personal intentions behind the technical construction of the piece, and the characteristic idea that drives the piece's title and description. However, music is not experienced solely through the score alone. If that were the case, people would not choose to watch live performances, listen to recordings, or play music at all. People decide *not* to just obtain their musical fulfillment by studying the score and seeing how the technical construction is a product of the knowledge *of* metaphor and its truth conditions. An actual performance of the piece triggers sensory, extra-linguistic qualities that manifest the knowledge *by* metaphor that the title elicits. From a performance of "The Devil's Staircase," both the performer and audience member will emotionally respond to the music in a way that elicits distinct, affective sensations—like fear, tension, and anxiety—that are compatible with the appropriate properties within the knowledge *of* metaphor. As I have said before, the actual, sensory feelings of those affective sensations are experienced, but their essence cannot be paraphrased into literal language. However, given that knowledge *by* metaphor is derived from knowledge *of* metaphor, those extra-linguistic qualities support and are aligned with the metaphor's truth conditions, even though they are not plainly laid out like Mthat operator outputs.

Stern states that "if and when [metaphors] succeed in communicating, there must be a common understanding, and interpretation [the speakers and hearers] both grasp."<sup>25</sup> With music like Ligeti's "The Devil's Staircase," common ground exists between the composer and the performer, and subsequently the performers and the audiences. For performers, succeeding is when they understand and demonstrate Ligeti's intentions behind his metaphorical interpretation. Between the performers and the audiences, succeeding involves the performers conveying not only their understanding of Ligeti's interpretation, but the knowledge *by* metaphor they gleaned from the piece itself. A successful performer will make that common ground clear for their audiences, by inspiring them to construct their own knowledge *by* metaphor.

## VI. Objection: "Perfect" Interpretation

I will now put forth an objection to the element of my argument that, in music, performers and their audiences can have any interpretive freedom or agency

24. Cantor sets are used to define the Cantor functions. The function is created by filling in constant values for points not in the Cantor set.

25. Stern, 2.

in knowledge *by* metaphor if musical interpretation in relation to metaphor stays consistent with the metaphor's truth conditions. If there is interpretive freedom and inconsistent knowledge *by* metaphor in interpretation, then that shows that metaphors are *not* semantic phenomena just like literal sentences like "snow is white." No matter who is reading or uttering the sentence, that sentence holds the same interpretive meaning.

When Ligeti assigned the metaphor "The Devil's Staircase" to his *étude*, he made his knowledge *of* metaphor very explicit on paper. However, since knowledge *by* metaphor is extra-linguistic, Ligeti could only convey his emotional intentions through a performance of the piece. Performances that are considered "perfect interpretations" in contemporary music, like performances of Ligeti's music, are typically from performers who had the fortune to actually play for the composer and receive direct feedback on how to evoke certain feelings through proper execution. However, that means that the average performer of Ligeti's music is not in the position to both understand or present an exactly "perfect interpretation" of Ligeti's emotional intentions. In sentences like (1), Romeo had specific knowledge *by* metaphor that he associated with the sun, but that is not necessarily the same knowledge *by* metaphor that a typical Shakespeare reader would experience. Therefore, if knowledge *by* metaphor is not held consistent from creator or speaker to hearer, then at the affective level that is so important for metaphor, the metaphor can be misinterpreted.

## VII: Response

I will respond to the above objection in two steps. First, I will address the point that, if metaphors have interpretive freedom with knowledge *by* metaphor, then they are not semantic phenomena, such as sentences like "snow is white." The objection takes for granted that a sentence like "snow is white" is interpreted exactly the same by any speaker or listener, when in fact, even literal language meaning does not stay constant. That sentence would mean very different things to a person with sight versus a person who is blind. To the person with sight, they can say "snow is white" and confirm its truth conditions through their own sight. However, to the blind person, "snow is white" cannot be confirmed by their own senses. Instead, it is only something that was told to them or something they were able to read through braille. While "snow is white" is evaluably true, the means of understanding or interpreting literal language affectively can be very subjective.

Truth conditions are general parameters for understanding the foundational meaning of a metaphor, or any declarative statement. As I mentioned before, people have the semantic competence to recognize knowledge *of* metaphor. Of course, misunderstandings can happen. For example, with "The Devil's Staircase," one could think that Ligeti meant to symbolize a staircase that belonged to Satan, when Ligeti's interpretation does not have to do with Hell or the literal Devil at all. However, that misunderstanding is an issue of information access rather than semantic competence. Once Ligeti's specific interpretation is

known, people are typically well-equipped to derive the correct knowledge *of* metaphor.

Knowledge *by* metaphor is a product of knowledge of metaphor. Truth conditions are set within knowledge *of* metaphor, and given that knowledge *by* metaphor is gleaned from that, the sensory qualities associated with knowledge *by* metaphor do not all have to be identical to support the same truth conditions. Just like in literal language, there is room for individual, affective interpretation.

### **VIII: Final Thoughts**

From this discussion, I aimed to illustrate that metaphors have a distinct linguistic purpose through analyzing them propositionally. A propositional analysis is essential for classifying the intricacies of this figurative language, from its dependence on some literal meaning and language (knowledge *of* metaphor) to its affective, extralinguistic properties (knowledge *by* metaphor). Classifying metaphorical truth conditions confirms a correct interpretation of what value-laden properties the author or speaker attaches to a metaphorical object, which solves the problem of interpretational variability. Additionally, a propositional understanding of metaphor not only applies to language itself, but also to understanding musical interpretation in depth when analyzing metaphors *about* music.

As a musician for over seventeen years, I have noticed that language about music is often metaphorical, likely because both metaphor and music have significant ineffable properties. Metaphor theory and music is nothing new, but from my discussion, I demonstrate how musical interpretation and performance practice are directly influenced by a propositional approach to metaphor about music. By acknowledging metaphorical truth conditions, the interpreter can clearly understand and recognize specific properties and details that are apparent in the language and displayed in the music.

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