

What is a metaphor?

A & B performing two independent, interleaved monologues

A - The electron is a metaphor.

B - Love is a metaphor.

A - There really is no such thing as an electron. Not as you or I understand it.

B - There is no one thing called love, as celebrated by playwrights and poets

A - Even physicists use the term as an approximation, an abstraction.

B - The truth is more complicated than that, a lot more complicated.

A - Electrons appear in our measurements and our equations but we have no direct experience of them. We can't, they're too weird. Electrons aren't really particles, they aren't really waves. Their dynamics are dizzying.

B - No two people are the same. Love is a complex interaction between two complex individuals. They barely know their own minds and they can only guess what it is like for the other. And if they don't know, what chance do we have?

A - We have no experiences that that tells us about that type of existence. Everyday life follows different rules.

B - The best we can do is to get close. Translate everything we are told into our own private language, into our own experiences, comparing it to a memory we have or a previous story we have heard.

A - We have our models of the world and they work breath-takingly well.

B - Some things resonate so clearly that we know that it must be similar for others.

A - Yet they are metaphors for a phenomenon too complex to hold in our heads.

B - I bet Shakespeare based Juliet on some schoolyard crush.

A - I'm sure Stephen Hawking often thinks of tiny billiard balls pinging around in space.