★ I Is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World

James Geary. Harper, $19.99 (288p) ISBN 978-0-06-171028-5

"Metaphorical thinking is the way we make sense of the world" and neurological research shows that humans experience pleasure when performing the "cognitive gymnastics" of deciphering metaphors to connect two dissimilar things, asserts Geary (*The World in a Phrase*) in a delightful examination that borrows for its title from a poem by Rimbaud, whose writing aimed to "upset conventional orders of perception." Tests on people who do not understand metaphors, such as those with Asperger's syndrome, uncover the roles that "mirror" and "Gnostic" neurons play in conceptual comprehension and long-term memory. Geary also analyzes how metaphors are used in advertising, scientific discoveries, economics, and politics. "Metaphors, once forgotten or ignored, are easily mistaken for objective facts," he warns, showing how metaphor "surreptitiously infiltrates our purchasing decisions." Voters, consumers, and investors interested in knowing how their decisions may be influenced by well-planned metaphors will be fascinated by Geary's adept explication of the metaphor's role in defining perceptions. *(Feb.)*