

**Boys-Stones, George R. (ed., 2003): *Metaphor, Allegory and the Classical Tradition: Ancient Thought and Modern Revisions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 305 S.**

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The ten papers and the two introductory texts forming this collection are the proceedings of a seminar devoted to metaphor and allegory held in Oxford in 1997 by a group of Classics scholars. The main purpose of the seminar was to determine to what extent a combined study of metaphor and allegory might clarify the reasons why the ancient theorists – rhetoricians and philosophers – tended to define the latter in terms of the former. Not surprisingly, therefore, the various chapters make use of extensive quotations from Greek and Latin sources. However, not the least of the merits of the study is the way these ancient texts are cited in the original Latin or Greek followed by the English equivalent, in most cases extracted from standard, authoritative translations.

The book is composed of a list of contributors, a list of abbreviations specifying the sources of the rarer texts cited, an introduction and two parts of five papers each, one devoted to metaphor, the second to allegory. These are followed by a bibliography divided into ancient authors and modern authors, an extensive index of passages cited and, finally, a general index.

Not being a Classics scholar, in what follows I adopt the point of view of a linguist with a specialist interest in metaphor and allegory.

## **Synopsis:**

### **1. Introduction, G. R. Boys-Stones (1-5).**

In this short article, Boys-Stones, the general editor, sets out the thematic content of the papers to follow, evoking a) the replacement of metaphor as ornament by metaphor as fundamental to reflection on language usage and b) allegory as an exegetical principle. He also makes the interesting point that whereas in oratory metaphor can be recruited as an ornament, this is not the case with allegory since allegory is seen, e.g. by Quintilian, as “obscure”, and therefore not the sort of feature an orator would want associated with his speech. This functional asymmetry is, of course, a theoretical embarrassment for exponents of the view that allegory is simply extended metaphor.

**2. “Metaphor, Simile, and Allegory as Ornaments of Style”, Doreen Innes (7-27).**

This paper, as the title suggests, offers a brief review of the terminological problems to be examined by the papers that follow. Topics include the relation between metaphor and the principles of similarity and substitution, metaphor in relation to the distinction between style and content, the inherently lexical, ‘one-word’ view of metaphor held by the ancient theorists, and the consequent distinction between a primal, literal, meaning and derived and hence metaphorical meanings. The article concludes with a lengthy examination of the absence of references to metaphor and allegory in Horace’s *Ars poetica*. This contribution is valuable for its detailed bibliographical references, its thorough review of the basic concepts of classical conceptions of metaphor, but also for its extensive lists of primary textual sources.

**3. “The Harlot’s Art: Metaphor and Literary Criticism”, Christoph G. Leidl (31-54).**

This is the first of the texts devoted specifically to metaphor, in this instance metaphor in ancient literary criticism. Basing his study on the familiar distinction between source and target domains in the structure of metaphor, Leidl embarks upon case studies illustrating gender distinctions, and examines the ‘in’-‘out’ theme structuring metaphor in certain ancient texts, and its relation to, for instance, the metaphorical and allegorical possibilities involved in the female character of Rhetoric and the male character of Philosophy in Lucian.

**4. “Plato on Metaphors and Models”, E. E. Pender (55-81).**

Pender’s paper is of interest for the thorough review it provides of the way the two terms *eikon* and *paradeigmata* correspond in Plato to metaphor (not a term that Plato uses) and model respectively. Pender’s main concern is with the importance of these concepts for Plato’s theory of knowledge, and the author concludes that they were in fact a “second-best method” (not unpredictably, given Plato’s general antipathy towards third-order representations of reality). In coming to this conclusion, Pender shows how Plato’s conceptions of *eikon* and *paradeigmata* anticipate the contemporary “consensus on the point that metaphors and models are significant in that they stimulate new ways of understanding” (73-74).

**5. “Literary Metaphor and Philosophical Insight: the Significance of Archilochus”, Paul Crowther (83-100).**

Crowther’s stated purpose is to “focus on the role of metaphor as a kind of junction between rational articulation and perception. Its general argument will be twofold. First that the tensional structure of metaphor embodies a constant in human experience... and, secondly, that literary metaphor ... is the clearest exemplar of this” (83). Basing his study on a variation of the classic tension between source and target domains, and drawing on the work of Black and Ricoeur, Crowther emphasises the “sentential” or predicative role of metaphor in which tension is created by the incongruity predicated of a primary subject in terms of a label or secondary subject which is not literally applicable to it. It is this incongruity which provokes cognitive activity, a new awareness, and, claims Crowther, is most clearly observable in poetry, whence the attention he pays to the erotic poetry of the seventh-century Greek poet cum mercenary, Archilochus. While one would take issue with the idea that metaphor is most evident in poetry, or in literary discourse in general (they are simply the types of discourse in which tropes have been most thoroughly examined) Crowther’s article is stimulating if ultimately misguided, particularly in his discussion of the “gently” metaphorical nature of pictorial and sculptural representation (91-92).

**6. “The Problem of Metaphor: Chinese Reflections”, G. E. R. Lloyd (101-114).**

Lloyd’s paper examines the interesting proposition that metaphor as we now know it (‘*μεταφορα*, transfer, is far from being equivalent to our “metaphor” (101)) may simply be a specifically Indo-European, Western concept, not the “universal feature of language” it is generally assumed to be. He confronts the standard definitions and examples advanced principally by Aristotle in the *Poetics* with a series of potentially equivalent technical terms drawn from a number of ancient Chinese texts. Going beyond the strict confines of metaphor theory, Lloyd takes issue with the Procrustean nature of Western categories and dichotomies of the literal/metaphorical, strict/derivative type, and pleads for a halt to the cultural ethnocentricity which he believes bedevils metaphor studies: “To look for, and to fail to find, metaphor in ancient Chinese thought is to be hopelessly Eurocentric, a typical example of the disastrous parochialism that stems from the imposition of Western categories” (113). A thoroughly novel discussion marred only by the presumption of familiarity with the Chinese sources cited, though the paper concludes with a useful glossary of Chinese terms.

**7. “Metaphor and Metonymy: Aristotle, Jakobson, Ricoeur and others”, Michael Silk (115-147).**

Like Crowther, Silk suggests that poetry offers the paradigm instances of metaphorical discourse: “Aristotle, Jakobson, Ricoeur: all three theorise without consistent reference to the poetry and the experience of poetry which indeed will not, by itself, be sufficient, but which is plainly necessary for any adequate theory.” (144). The purpose of his paper is the investigation of deviance and substitution in the contemporary debate on metaphor, and above all a rehabilitation of the well-known Jakobsonian metaphor-metonymy polarity. Silk himself, upholding Jakobson, tends to the substitution view and in support of this analyses a number of poetic examples ranging from Pindar to Gerard Manley Hopkins. Interestingly, at one point (135 n.) he alludes to Jakobson’s reluctance to acknowledge his debt to the Saussurian relational distinction between syntagm and association (paradigm), which Silk sees as underpinning the metaphor-metonymy polarity. (It so happens that Jakobson was equally unforthcoming about the Peircean conception of metaphor in his vulgarisation of Peirce’s iconicity theory (Jakobson [1965]1971): restricting his presentation to image and diagram (cf. Jappy 1999 for a discussion)). Silk’s article is valuable for its review of Ricoeur’s critique of Jakobson, but the metaphor scholar will surely reject Silk’s plea that poetic language be accorded a central place even in what he calls the philosophical theory of metaphor (e.g. 146).

**8. “Figures of Allegory from Homer to Latin Epic”, Andrew Laird (151-175).**

This, the first of the allegory studies, seeks a) to show how allegory can be understood to be an intrinsic part of epic communication; b) to justify a certain terminological hesitation among ancient authorities; and c) to ‘demystify’ allegory by a close reading of certain poetic extracts. The method adopted involves looking through these texts for figures of allegory (e.g. Hermes the messenger as an allegorical figure for verbal communication, and indeed as an allegory of allegory (156)). The paper draws on the theory of allegory as a form of expression rather than the relationship between an image and its meaning to be found in Benjamin (1977), and in this respect is reminiscent of one of the most interesting contemporary statements on allegory, namely Owens (1984). Laird’s study is polemical, informative and never less than fascinating.

**9. “Allegory and Exegesis in the Derveni Papyrus: the Origin of Greek Scholarship”, Dirk Obbink (177-188).**

Obbink’s short, dense essay is surely of great importance to the Classics specialist, and discusses problems relating to commentary of the ancients by the less ancient, e. g. commentaries of Plato by fourth and third century exegetes, and more specifically to allegory as a programmatic heuristic. In view of the relatively late emergence of the term (according to which dating one accepts for the rhetorician Demetrius, the word ‘allegory’ itself is not found until the third or the first century BC), it is interesting to read that Socrates entertained the concept as a method of explanation under the rubric *υπονοια* (181). For a non-specialist, the most interesting feature of the paper, surely, is the historical account of the emergence of the term in ancient texts.

**10. “The Stoics’ Two Types of Allegory” G. R. Boys-Stones (189-216).**

The contribution of Boys-Stones, the general editor of the collection, is another specialist paper and examines the theoretical importance of (later) Stoic conceptions of allegory. As “the only major philosophical school of the Hellenistic period with any interest in allegory” (189), the Stoics came to believe that in addition to the ‘message’ of the allegory identified and studied by earlier schools it was possible to detect a certain ‘deliberate’ or intentional level of meaning, a development which has implications for the appraisal of the scope and nature of ordinary philosophical discourse. The author concludes with the observation that by the time of Cornutus, his exemplar of later Stoic allegoresis, the term allegory had come to acquire two different meanings: the first looked back through the work of the earlier Stoics to Aristotle, while the second anticipated the allegorical exegesis of Platonists and Christians. Neither, Boys-Stones claims, corresponds very closely to the definition of allegory to be found in rhetorical texts.

**11. “The Rhetoric of the *Homeric Problems*”, Donald Russell (217-234).**

Russell’s paper investigates the rhetorical theory of Heraclitus, the author of the *Homeric Problems* cited in the title, by means of a close textual analysis of the work’s Prologue and Epilogue. It would be both fastidious and presumptuous to detail the main stages of the enquiry, as this paper, too, is very much for the Classics specialist. Nevertheless, the analyses of the source and the general contextualisation of the topic make compelling reading.

## **12. “Origen on Christ, Tropology, and Exegesis”, Mark Edwards (235-256).**

This, the final text in the collection, is perhaps the most immediately comprehensible for the non-specialist, more especially as Edwards draws on authorities most allegory scholars are likely to have read, in particular Jakobson (1956). The perspective is theological, and the introduction and first “chapter” are in particular valuable for the definitions they offer, for the distinction drawn between ‘pagan’ allegory and ‘Christian’ typology (237), and for the succinct discussion of the indirect influence upon contemporary theology of the familiar Jakobsonian metaphor-metonymy polarity: “While Jakobson’s doctrines rarely find their way into theological discussion, they have helped to confirm the prejudice that allegory is the left hand of discourse, as antithetical to typology as error to truth or poetry to prose” (236). Edwards is also familiar with the poststructuralist aesthetic, and its importance within contemporary theories of metaphor and allegory: “The occidental mind has thought in threes since the times of Plato, except in the middle of the twentieth century, when Cartesian France began to cast her spell on other nations” (238). This remark is followed by a striking discussion of the functions of metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche as the basic tools of philosophical allegory. All in all, a most interesting, polemical contribution to the collection.

### **Critical evaluation:**

Clearly, in view of the work’s title, when immersing oneself in this collection one should not expect a revolution in the theory of metaphor and allegory, and this for several reasons. Firstly, the general scope of the texts included are as much concerned to bring out the variety and richness, hitherto neglected, of the ancient sources as to transform our understanding of the relation between, say, metaphor and mind, or metaphor and language. Secondly, the very diversity of the professional perspectives of the authors (literary, philosophical and even theological) precludes any possibility of a unified approach to such a theory. Thirdly, as one of the authors (Leidl) suggests, the contributors are obliged by the circumstances of their professional preoccupations and the nature of the corpora they work with to apply a “bottom-up” strategy to the problem, i.e. to work from close textual analysis towards general statements rather than to proffer an “original” theoretical vantage point from which to examine their data. Not surprisingly, therefore, most of the authors, with their backgrounds in often highly specialised exegesis of the Classics, are content to refer to the specialist studies familiar to all metaphor and allegory scholars (e.g. Black (1962), Jakobson (1956), Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Ortony (1993), Ricoeur (1978); and Fletcher (1964), Whitman (1987) in

the case of allegory). This is not to say, however, that our understanding of the book's twin topics is not enhanced and extended by the multifaceted effort at contextualisation undertaken by the participants in the seminar.

A more immediate cause for concern, however, is perhaps specific to the Peircean persuasion of the reviewer, and pertains to the expressed fundamental premise of the entire opus. As Boys-Stones notes in his introduction, over the past forty years, the status of metaphor has undergone a considerable reassessment, in which it has been promoted from a mere rhetorical ornament to a central element of language: 'Metaphor... belongs, we now believe, at the heart of thinking about language use in all its aspects – not sidelined as a form of "deviant" usage of primary interest only to students of literature.' (1). The problem here, then, despite the fact that many of the contributors make more or less direct references both to the "cognitive" status and functions of metaphor and to the familiar exponents of such views, is precisely this recently advanced *putative* fundamental relation between metaphor and language mentioned by the general editor—and the papers collectively reflect a general, uneasy hesitation between the two positions.

The American logician C. S. Peirce, to whom one of the contributors, Mark Edwards, alludes, was the author a theory of metaphor which has wide-ranging implications for current theories of cognition and language. For Peirce, metaphor, together with the image and the diagram, was one of three subspecies of icon: no sign, whether pictorial, linguistic or otherwise is perceptible without being structured, "informed" in the Aristotelian sense, by one or other of these formal configurations. In other words, given the hierarchical structure of Peirce's ten classes of signs, iconicity, metaphor included, is a necessary constituent of every class of sign, for all signs have structure, and many indeed, from paintings to syllogisms, have metaphorical structure. Since none of these classes of signs is linguistic in nature, as Peirce's rather forbidding terminology shows (e.g. qualisign, dicent sinsign, argument, etc., cf. Peirce (1931, volume 2 paragraphs 254-264), but rather classes of the constituents of *reasoning*, it follows that in this view metaphorical structure is a constituent of thought, and only features in linguistic (and pictorial or sculptural) representations as a by-product, as it were.

In view of the beautifully presented Greek and Latin extracts, it would be churlish to carp at the few typographical problems encountered. However, it should be noted that there is a certain hesitation between three types of chapter structuring conventions (uppercase Latin numbers to "chapters" (e.g. Silk), straightforward numbering (e.g. Obbink) or none at all (e.g.

Lloyd). There are also disfiguring misalignments of footnotes at 125 and 175, for example, plus some obscure phraseology or poor editing in the final sentence of Innes at 13.

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