

BOOK REVIEW

Plato's Similes: A Compendium of 500 Similes in 35 Dialogues. By JOHN E. ZIOLKOWSKI. Washington D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2014. Online Publication: <http://wp.chs.harvard.edu/ziolkowski>.

Nowadays, the digital-only launches of specific academic books have increased the chances of their content being immediately accessible and searchable. Ziolkowski's e-Compendium is significant in that it is a digital product that is adapted to the current demands. The Compendium contains a selection of 500 similes found in thirty-five Platonic dialogues; it is the first study that deals with the treatment of this subject by an ancient Greek prose writer, covering the entire Platonic corpus, which represents an accomplishment in its own right. It consists of six parts and a bibliography. However, there are some minor issues regarding the technical presentation of the book: First, on the contents page's horizontal navigation bars, the conclusion appears before the appendices (I followed this order when writing this review), but the conclusion is placed after the appendices on the vertical menu of contents. Second, the table of contents is not linked and, third, the navigation bars do not display a detailed menu when clicked, which makes navigation within the work difficult.

The introduction is divided into eight sections. In order to address the problem of defining simile, Ziolkowski examines Aristotle's relevant analysis in the Rhetoric (the term "eikōn" denotes the simile and "prothesis" its introductory word). However, when discussing modern scholarship, he does not explore the wide range of contemporary views on the subject. Part of the problem of defining simile is attributed to the predominant confusion concerning the distinction between simile and metaphor. Ziolkowski's approach is based on I. A. Richards' well-known indicators of "tenor" and "vehicle". Richards coined these terms in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* to describe the two parts of a metaphor: "tenor" is the literal subject of the comparison, whereas "vehicle" is the object, the image, idea or thing that the subject is compared to. Ziolkowski's definition is a slightly modified and broadened version of Aristotle's. However, more recent developments that adopt cognitive perspectives of metaphor – especially the 2003 edition of the book *Metaphors We Live By*, written by Lakoff and Johnson, the important book of Croft and Cruse *Cognitive Linguistics* (2004) and the detailed studies of Elisabeth

Camp, especially her articles “Contextualism, Metaphor, and What is Said” (2006) and “Showing, Telling and Seeing. Metaphor and “Poetic” Language” (2007) – could have been taken into account.

In terms of organizing his material, he does a good job in classifying the Platonic similes in four categories: conventional, alternative, implicit and denominative. Although the title of the seventh section, “Words for Simile in Greek,” is somewhat misleading, as it mainly explores the use of the word *eikōn* in Plato, this semantic investigation leads him to the important conclusion that Plato uses various terms and verbal forms to describe similes: “it would appear that there was no word specifically for ‘simile’ before Aristotle” (7§6). The final section discusses the types of comparison that have been excluded from the Compendium: “definitions”, “examples” and “factual information” (8§2), but the distinction between the two last types is not made clear. Overall, the introduction provides an informative overview of the various issues that arise when addressing such a perplexing theme. However, there are occasional typos in the transliterated passages and the manner in which sections are divided is not always consistent.

The body of the study presents the selected Platonic similes, which are listed alphabetically according to their English spelling. Each dialogue contains a number of similes with their tenors and vehicles highlighted. It is instructive and well-organized and it examines a variety of passages concerning different thematic fields. However, the original Greek text is absent, which is somewhat odd for a study that has diction as its primary focus. In addition, the parenthetical notes are often more confusing than illustrative. Finally, contextualization and a brief analysis of each simile would be beneficial in terms of promoting clarity.

The data are organized and displayed in seven charts that follow the main part. Each chart provides helpful information about the constituent parts of the similes (tenor, vehicle and prothesis) and additional details, such as the speaker and the addressee of each simile. Furthermore, useful statistical information, such as the number of similes spoken by each speaker or found within a dialogue, is also included.

The conclusion raises significant questions and summarizes the essential findings of the preceding discussion. The emphasis on Socrates’ humorous use of similes enriches Plato’s portrayal of the philosopher. The central question of the study (“why similes”) is treated carefully, but it would be better placed in the general introduction. The conclusion ends with two vital observations: Plato, despite his criticism of similes, uses them as stylistic devices and for clarifying statements.

The first two appendices discuss the general topics (“tenors”) that Plato describes with the help of similes (the figure of Socrates, soul, logos, laws, justice and gods), the objects of comparison (“vehicles”) and their linguistic construction. A presentation of other modes of comparison is provided in the third appendix, which serves a didactic purpose and offers a kaleidoscope of the different uses and colorings of the figurative language of Plato. General observations about similes and their function in Homer, Hesiod, Thucydides and Xenophon can be found in the fourth appendix. Plato’s orations and the Letters seem oddly placed here; they could be relocated to conclusion.

Within the Compendium some sections seem artificial and some titles are misleading. Grouping together certain sections would be helpful in terms of improving thematic flow and avoiding repetition. Additionally, the strategies and patterns used to connect the various themes addressed in the discussion remain implicit, as the specifics of the thematic arrangement are never discussed. Even so, it is an original study with an up-to-date bibliography and would be fundamental for anyone seeking an understanding of similes and their role in the Platonic texts. It succeeds in providing insight into Plato’s highly codified language and achieves its primary purpose, namely to reveal the “humorous, imaginative, and subtle” aspects “of Platonic writing” (Preface). The display of parallels from other ancient Greek authors may well prove useful to a diverse range of students and scholars, not only Platonists. Overall, this work represents a valuable contribution to classical scholarship and an inspiring point of departure for examining this challenging subject more profoundly.

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