

BOOK REVIEW

Greek and Latin Expressions of Meaning: The Classical Origins of a Modern Metaphor. By ANDREAS T. ZANKER. *Zetemata* Heft 151. Munich, DE: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2016. Pp. 274. Paperback, \$100.32. ISBN 978-3-406-68845-4.

The central thesis of this subtle and thought-provoking book is that the vocabulary of “meaning,” as employed for various kinds of literary criticism in Greek and Latin as well as in many modern languages, is polysemous: it has a range of application which encompasses, and easily moves between, both authorial intention and the significance of texts as objects in their own right. In effect, the book elaborates a historically and philologically adapted version of the distinction drawn in modern linguistics and philosophy between “speaker’s meaning” (which Zanker sometimes calls “I-meaning,” i.e. where the subject of a verb of meaning is an intentional agent) and “sentence meaning” (Zanker’s “S-meaning,” where the subjects of verbs of signification are words or texts themselves: 19). But Zanker goes further: he succeeds in showing that the vocabulary of “meaning” in question developed in Greek and Latin (which in turn influenced later languages in this respect) by a series of metaphorical transfers or extensions from persons to words. His enquiry leads him to the conclusion that while we cannot eliminate the complex problems of interpretation which attach to “the meaning of ‘meaning’” in literary criticism (and beyond), if we fail to recognise the conceptual roots of much disagreement in this area we will lock ourselves into dogmatic prescriptivism or simply argue past one another. Zanker’s aim, accordingly, is not to solve the big problems as such, but to offer a quasi-Wittgensteinian “therapy” (14-15) for some of our linguistic perplexities.

The core of the book, whose approach is partly influenced by cognitive linguistics, consists of the close, well-documented analysis of a large number of individual occurrences of the vocabulary of meaning/significance and related phenomena. Chapter 1 makes a general case for the ambiguity of expressions of meaning as applied to persons and words; it pays particular attention to some of the senses of Latin (*sibi*) *velle* from Terence to Servius. Chapter 2 traces the historical process of semantic extension from intentional agents to language itself

in the case of certain expressions of wanting (e.g. *boulesthai/velle*), thinking (*dianoia/mens*), speaking (*legein/dicere*), and equivalence (*einai/esse, dunasthai/posse*). Chapter 3 analyses the related process of transfer from animate to inanimate subjects with expressions of showing and sign-giving (*sêmeainein/significare, dêloun/indicare*). In Chapter 4, Zanker explains how diachronic extensions, of the kinds considered in the two previous chapters, give rise to synchronic polysemy and concomitant risks of confusion. All the ways (both ancient and modern) of describing the meaning of texts derive from ways of talking about agents: texts are metaphorical persons; “our vocabulary for what texts do is fundamentally metaphorical” (102).

Chapter 5 demonstrates that a transferred vocabulary of meaning is absent in early Greek (Homer and Hesiod) but fully established by the time of Plato: it may have been stimulated, Zanker thinks, by cultural and intellectual factors that included the use of writing, allegorical criticism and the development of philosophy. The book’s remaining chapters are very much concerned with ideas of metaphor and metonymy. Chapter 6 investigates various ways in which texts and books become figured as speaking/living persons; Chapter 7 studies the metonymic substitution of authors for texts, which helps to elide further the distinction between the two; Chapter 8 draws attention to the fact that the classical vocabulary of metaphor involves its own metaphoricity (mostly spatial), a fact of which authors like Aristotle, Cicero and Horace may, Zanker tentatively suggests, have had some meta-metaphorical awareness. Chapter 9 pulls the threads together, arguing the need for heightened sensitivity to the metaphorical elements in our own vocabulary and critiquing various examples from prominent classical scholars in which different senses of “meaning” get muddled or obfuscated.

As already indicated, Zanker’s guiding purpose in this book is predominantly clarificatory. Some may find his position relatively conservative in so far as he wishes to sidestep the so-called intentional fallacy (209) and to resist the more extreme forms of anti-intentionalist hermeneutics which have played a salient part in post-structuralist thought, including that of Barthes, Foucault and Derrida (all of whom are cited with respect, though overall Zanker thinks post-structuralism has “muddled the waters,” 19). Most readers, however, are (I suspect) likely to be enlightened by the book’s detailed and perceptive analysis of the lexicon of meaning, and to feel that its arguments strike an appropriate balance. We cannot simply jettison the entire notion of authorial intention (though Zanker does not address the philosophical complications of defining intentionality), but we also cannot restrict the interpretation of literary texts to a narrowly

intentionalist model. There is no escaping a constant dialectic in coming to terms with what we mean by meaning, a dialectic in which Zanker acknowledges that his own claims are caught up.

Despite the difficulty of the issues with which it grapples, the book is written with admirable clarity and makes it easy for readers to orientate themselves: the introduction, individual chapters, and epilogue all contain summaries of the argument; several matters are further documented in a set of appendices. The standard of accuracy is generally high; occasional slips include a mistranslation in an Anyte epigram (126–7) and the bibliography's misattribution of Richard Hunter's *Critical Moments in Classical Literature* to Richard Rutherford. Zanker has read widely, but one might have expected Malcolm Heath, *Interpreting Classical Texts* (2002), and H. Westermann, *Die Intention des Dichters und die Zwecke der Interpretation* (2002), to be cited. There is a good index locorum, an index verborum, but (regrettably) no general index. The book deserves to be carefully pondered by those interested in ancient poetics, hermeneutics and theories of language.

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