

Weapons are People: Cognitive Metaphor and Volitional Actions in Homeric Epic

Recent work in cognitive studies has favorably revisited Julian Jaynes' *The Origins of Consciousness and the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (1976) and his evolutionary account of consciousness, focusing in particular on Jaynes' view of metaphorical language as an index of human consciousness. Cavanaugh et al. (2007), for instance, summarize Jaynes' claims:

“consciousness is a conceptual, metaphor-generated inner world that parallels the actual world and is intimately bound with volition and decision. Homo sapiens, therefore, could not experience consciousness until he developed a language sophisticated enough to produce metaphors and analogical models” (11). Famously, Jaynes found a representation of an early human community not yet sophisticated enough to be self-consciousness—and, hence, one which operated without concepts of volitional action or responsibility—in Homer's *Iliad*.

In my talk I investigate the description of arrow, spears, and missiles in Homeric epic and argue that these descriptions provide us with the precise evidence of a metaphor-generated inner world. Such descriptions, I argue, open a window into the concept of intentionality in Greek epic through the conceptual metaphor I call ‘Weapons are People’ (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Zanker 2019). As Aristotle emphasized in his discussion of metaphor, Homer often represents inanimate objects like weapons as if they possessed human qualities of eagerness, desire, and appetite. According to Aristotle, Homer makes “the lifeless living through metaphor” (τὸ τὰ ἄψυχα ἔμψυχα ποιεῖν διὰ τῆς μεταφορᾶς [Arist. *Rhet.* 1411b32]) and “makes everything move and live” (κινούμενα γὰρ καὶ ζῶντα ποιεῖ πάντα [1412a9]). Aristotle focuses on those examples where Homer speaks of a weapon “leaping” from the bow (ἄλτο δ' οἴστος, *Il.* 4.125) and “eager” to fly through a throng of men (καθ' ὄμιλον ἐπιπέσθαι μενεαίνων, *Il.* 4.126), a spear “raging” in

a fighter's hands (ἐμὸν δόρυ μαίνεται ἐν παλάμησιν, *Il.* 8.111; cf. 16.75), "longing" to touch a victim's body (λιλαιόμενα χροὸς ἄσαι, 11.574; cf. 15.317), and even "desiring" to take its fill of human flesh (ἐγχεΐη ... ἰεμένη χροὸς ἄμεναι ἀνδρομέοιο, *Il.* 21.70). This metaphorical language appears not only in narrator speech, but in direct character speech as well (e.g., ἐμὸν δόρυ μαίνεται ἐν παλάμησιν, "my spear rages in my hands": *Il.* 8.111; cf. 16.74-75).

Many scholars have drawn attention to Homer's metaphorical descriptions as something more than mere personification, including Richard Janko's striking observation: "Spears are imagined to have wills of their own and be loath to stop; they 'long to be glutted with flesh' (11.574). ...We may dub this personification (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 3.1411b31ff.), but it amounts to animism" (Janko 1994: 102-103). It is my contention that through a conceptual metaphor likening weapons to people, the animated arrow, spear, and missile weapons provide us with a model for understanding human volitional actions in Homeric epic. The flight of each of these weapons has a point of origin, a specific trajectory, and a marked target/goal. For an archer or spearman to hit the mark (generally indicated by the verbs τυγχάνειν or βάλλειν) with a missile requires capability of vision and the ability to maintain one's attention (e.g., Seligman et al. 2016: 8). The caster sends his missile over a given distance with a specific trajectory, such that the weapon becomes a virtual extension of the caster and his body. The weapon takes on the characteristics of the actor; it becomes animated through the very concept of cause-effect relations inherent in throwing a spear or drawing and releasing a bowstring. The arrow/missile traverses the distance between shooter and target. If the shooter's aim—an index of his intention toward the future—and attention are true, the missile will strike the target with the eagerness, zeal, appetite of the shooter himself.

Bibliography

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