

Homer. And as tends to be the way when similarity is prized above difference, Louden's prose frequently slips into the concessive mode: 'Though the episode lacks some of the usual motifs ...' (53); 'Though the tone of the tale and the principal characters have little in common with Homeric epic ...' (61). There is a danger here that reading – close and committed reading, which cares precisely about the details of the text – becomes a spanner in Louden's work of comparison. Louden is of course right that, some 70 years after E. Auerbach's *Mimesis* (Berne 1946) (not in his bibliography), comparing Homer and the Bible is itself a gesture of political and cultural significance. But unless compelling readings ensue, this will be lost on most Homeric readers.

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BIRD (G.D.) *Multitextuality in the Homeric Iliad: The Witness of the Ptolemaic Papyri* (Hellenic Studies 43). Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010. Pp. viii + 119. \$19.95. 009780674053236.

doi:10.1017/S0075426914001426

As one of the first works of text-critical scholarship to be undertaken using Gregory Nagy's controversial 'crystallization' theory of Homeric textuality, this rather brief work is welcome. Its basic assumption – that orality needs to be seriously considered in Homeric textual criticism – is obviously correct, though the central argument may not convince.

Chapter 1 ('Textual criticism as applied to biblical and classical texts') is a general introduction to textual criticism, but it seems aimed at a complete beginner and could have been omitted *in toto*. Bird turns to the matter of the book's title only in chapter 2 ('Homer and textual criticism'), and argues that the evidence for variation in the Homeric *paradosis* is so great, and so difficult to discern qualitatively, that scholarship needs a radically different approach to Homer's textuality in order to account for it. In chapter 3 ('The Ptolemaic papyri of the *Iliad*. Evidence of eccentricity or multitextuality?') Bird then takes up the case of some of the Ptolemaic papyri. He opens with another (dispensibly) beginner's level of information about papyri and codices, before moving into a discussion of the amount and types of their variation from the 'vulgate' text.

Chapter 2 forms the methodological core of the book, wherein Bird argues that variation points back 'to a multiplicity of archetypes, a situation which arises from the oral nature of the transmission of Homeric epic' (28). As in chapter 3, he proceeds by taking a few sample cases, where the *paradosis* offers ancient and defensible variants, and argues that both or all readings are equally authentic and none is original; oral transmission (or recomposition? Bird is never quite definite about the dynamics) is the cause.

The questions begin to mount immediately. There are many cases in the transmission of ancient literature where equally good variants are recorded; is that alone enough to determine the authenticity of all readings, or should we propose oral transmission for all? What is needed is a demonstration that what is happening in Homer's case does not happen in the case of Sophocles or Apollonius (and why not, in the first instance, compare Hesiod?), but Bird does not give us that, and thus he does not substantiate the central claim that the Homeric *paradosis* 'presents us with a far different situation from that of purely written works' (59).

There is, furthermore, more than a suggestion of circularity in Bird's method (as evinced, for example, on page 39): 'if we consider these variants from the point of view of oral composition and performance, it seems natural that each reading ... can be considered "authentic", and the efforts to determine "originality" become irrelevant'. For Bird, any plausible or defensible variant proves oral 'multitextuality'; one suspects that the evidence is not leading to the conclusion of a multiplicity of archetypes resulting from oral transmission, but is always being interpreted in the light of that conclusion. Undoubtedly, Bird is right that previous textual critics have approached the problem from an *a priori* position, but he has simply replaced one extreme set of *a priori* assumptions with another.

In addition, Bird is evasive about precisely what is going on in the Homeric *paradosis*. For instance, even if we should propose oral transmission in the case of Homer, does that mean that notions of 'original' and 'copy' (against which Bird inveighs) are entirely irrelevant? After all, the alternation in this and other cases in chapter 2 (and even in chapter 3) is *very* small and precise, and suggests that the text is moving in fairly circumscribed ways. Something is being 'transmitted'. What is it? Bird never deals with this question, except in negative terms of what it is not, which is

apparently a written text or texts of any sort. Thus Bird is content with referring to Nagy's landmark *Poetry as Performance* (Cambridge 1996), but without addressing any of the numerous criticisms that work engendered; one would not know from Bird's citations that its theory was in any way controversial.

The real issue here is the amount and level of variation in the Homeric paradosis, for that is where the crucial evidence lies, and that is where Bird's discussion should have found its focus; but this book – surprisingly – deals with it relatively rarely. Moreover, there is very little here that is new: the examples in chapter 2 are drawn almost entirely from Nagy's previously published work, to which there is constant reference *ad nauseam*. In the end, therefore, this book is a missed opportunity, because it repeats without alteration or significant development the position (and style) of Nagy's 1996 book and it does not engage with the development of the field since then. It consistently fails adequately to discuss or detail the evidence which would lead to the author's conclusions or to place it within the larger question of the transmission of ancient literature. This is a particular disappointment to those – like the current reviewer – who firmly believe that orality needs to play a much larger role in the textual criticism of Homer.

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BUCHAN (M.) **Perfidy and Passion:**

Reintroducing the *Iliad*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012. Pp. xiv + 196. \$29.95. 9780299286347.

doi:10.1017/S0075426914001438

Buchan presents his book as a new interpretation of the *Iliad*, based on the ambiguity of the poem's characters and language. He identifies his work as a collection of essays, rather than a conventional scholarly monologue, defining himself against recent scholarship which focuses on the poem's conditions of production. After the 'Introduction' follow seven thematically arranged chapters, a 'Conclusion', four pages of notes, a bibliography, and index. The 'Introduction' sets up the interpretations to follow by discussing the proems to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; the latter takes the form of a riddle, and the protagonist is unnamed, while the former names its subject immediately. We are therefore presented with a defining contrast

between the two poems and their protagonists: Odysseus as trickster, Achilles as straight-talker. However, Buchan challenges this with his interpretation of Calchas' speech in *Iliad* 1, which complicates the clearly-defined subject of the proem. Buchan demonstrates that Achilles is not as straight-forward as we might think. The tragedy of the *Iliad* is 'the opacity of desire' (28) – the characters do not know what they want, and when they do discover their desire it is too late for it to be fulfilled.

In chapter 1, 'The tragedy of Achilles: the *Iliad* as a poem of betrayal', Buchan claims that most readings of Achilles fall into one of two camps: a 'romantic, existentialist view' or a 'historicist, culturalist one'. Instead, we should read the poem as 'a critique of the impasses of both, as the efforts of Homeric heroes to avoid their own subjective impasses lead to ruin' (52). In the case of Achilles, his deepest Lacanian desire is for Patroclus to be killed, but he does not realize this until after the latter's death. Chapter 2 sets up a dichotomy between human and divine spheres as tragic and comic respectively, which is then challenged with a study of laughter. Buchan makes use of Freud's theories on jokes to compare the laughter triggered by Hephaestus and Thersites, and then to interpret the scene of Agamemnon's dream as a joke. The war itself is read as a comic farce, an enormous waste of energy.

Chapters 3, 'The politics of poetry', and 4, 'The poetry of politics' examine Achilles' shield and then the funeral games for Patroclus as parallel works of art. The shield is a representation of a world in suspense, fragile and on the point of collapse. This is depicted in its proliferation of circular motifs, which are repeated in the funeral games by chariot wheels and race circuits. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on pairs in the poem. 'Couples: the *Iliad* on intimacy' looks at erotic language in the duel between Hector and Achilles, and compares this pairing with the relationships of Hector with Andromache and Achilles with Patroclus. 'Flirtations' then looks at the meeting between Glaucus and Diomedes; this is Buchan's most sustained piece of literary interpretation. Chapter 7, 'The afterlife of Homer', focuses on the endings of both Homeric poems and returns to Buchan's introductory assertion that the *Iliad* is a poem of ambiguity, not of truth.

Buchan's conclusion is the longest of all the chapters, which perhaps hints at one problem with the book – that it lacks a unified interpretation to bind the disparate readings together. The