

primary). The goal of drama is 'to remind the audience that the gods ultimately control human action and are determined to see that justice is done in the end' (p. 114). Next L. summarizes the plots of the *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Electra*, and Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes*, noting that gods do not attempt to relieve human suffering because 'suffering and misery are inherent in the condition of being mortal' (p. 137). L. summarizes the plots of several other tragedies, including Euripides' *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae*, which depend on the motif of the offended god. Apparently Attic dramas 'deliver explicit messages about the difference between divine and mortal ethics' (p. 137).

Turning next to Hellenistic literature, especially the *Argonautica*, L. finds that the gods still are in charge, but stand more behind the scenes. Their epiphanies are more strange. In comparison to their power, mortals are 'ignorant, vulnerable, and morally flawed' (p. 170).

The following chapter on the *Aeneid* seems to slip outside a study of 'Greek gods', or at least raises complex problems about the relationship between Roman and Greek religion and literature. Finally, L. considers myths in Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, which belongs to Greek myth only with qualification.

I cannot be sure who is the audience for this book. Classicists will find limited interest in the bald plot summaries, unless to crib a lecture, and the bare academic style will not hold the general reader. Most troublesome is the author's refusal to face directly the immense complexity of myth and religion, or how it changed over time. Rather, she views 'myth and religion' as a unity divorced from history. L. does not really mean myth anyway, but rather the 'plots' of surviving major literary works. Religion, too, is not just 'things having do with gods'. The real, living religion of ancient Greece, the practice of cult and magic, had only a rough and ready relationship with plots of literary works, but of this the author seems unaware. One wonders if the moral drawn from her study is worthwhile, that 'mortal life is fragile, threatened, uncertain, and never consistently happy'. Is this what we are meant to learn from the study of Greek gods?

In the concluding paragraph, L. holds that ancient worshippers did not expect to receive compensation for their devotion; why, then, did they burn millions of thigh pieces on the altars of the gods? Mortals, she says, cannot find comfort from these gods, but must look to other mortals; true, but how does Greek religion differ from every other religion of evolution? She says that 'despite its realism and its clear difference from any of the religions we are now used to, these same stories can still offer a reliable guide to life in our own time' (p. 239). That we should grin and bear it, realizing that our well-being is of little interest to the divine powers around us? In any event, familiar religions of the Indian subcontinent and other places are remarkably similar to Greek polytheistic religion, and 'religion' and 'stories' remain very different things.

Madison

BARRY B. POWELL

NYMPHS

J. LARSON: *Greek Nymphs: Myth, Cult, Lore*. Pp. xii + 380, ills. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Cased, £48.50 (Paper, £22.50). ISBN: 0-19-512294-1 (0-19-514465-1 pbk).

Until the appearance of Larson's *Greek Nymphs*, no book had been published in any language specifically addressing the nature and function of nymphs. Larson's focused

The Classical Review vol. 54 no. 2 © The Classical Association 2004; all rights reserved

and detailed study thus fills a lacuna in scholarship on Greek religion and cult practices. She begins by dealing with the conceptual and physical contexts in which nymphs appear, and continues by analyzing nymphs' rôles in Greek myth and cult practice. L. provides a near-encyclopedic catalogue of nymph lore throughout the Greek world, and ends with an archaeological section describing caves that served as nymph worship sites. Her evidence covers mainly the eighth century B.C.E. through the Hellenistic period, but she occasionally cites later sources when they provide information too important to omit from a major study of Greek nymphs, such as Porphyry's Neoplatonic *On the Cave of the Nymphs in the Odyssey*.

That no study had previously been devoted to nymphs is not surprising, since, as L. points out, nymph cults were often rural and less likely to have civic functions than the urban cults of goddesses and heroines, and scholarship on Greek religion has largely focused on the city. Nymphs, in contrast to heroines, were often associated with natural features of the Greek landscape such as springs, rivers, mountains, and caves. This is not to say that heroines were never associated with nature, or that nymphs never had any civic functions; examples of such overlap include Pindar's emphasis on the connection between local nymphs and civic identity (p. 39). But nymphs were inseparable from the landscape in a way that heroines and goddesses were not, and on this point Chapter 1 cites abundant evidence from Greek literature.

Chapter 2 addresses problems in the continuity of nymph lore between ancient and modern Greece, taking a comparative approach to questions of typological similarities including the sexual behavior of nymphs. This chapter is perhaps not as helpful as others, as L. points out that many nymph folktale types are not unique to Greek, or even to Indo-European, culture—not that anyone would have thought so in the first place—and hopes that modern material can shed light on ancient beliefs about nymphs, which is less than convincing. Still, L.'s discussion of the interactions between mortals and nymphs provides much interesting material on sexual contact with nymphs and the dangers of displeasing them, citing the stories of Daphnis, Paris, and Rhoikos, among others. This chapter also discusses the particulars of tree nymphs, but L. may have missed a humorous opportunity for further exploring the psychosexual significance of such stories by omitting Lucian's take on hamadryads in *Vera historia* 1.8. L.'s knowledge of nymph lore does, however, provide a particularly convincing reinterpretation of the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (p. 83), and she points out that in stories of nymphs and mortals, the sexual double standard of ancient Greece is turned on its head (p. 90)—though why the male authors of these stories might have been interested in such a reversal is not sufficiently explored.

In Chapter 3 L. examines nymphs' interactions in myth and cult with other deities, such as Dionysos. Particularly interesting is her discussion of the differences between nymphs and maenads, in which she adduces evidence to conclude that the companions of silens on Attic vase paintings should be considered nymphs rather than maenads. L. mentions the problem of red figure vases depicting females resisting the advances of silens, which would be uncharacteristic of nymphs, but says 'the vase painters might simply have tired of the archaic cliché about the lusty nymphs' (p. 95), which is not entirely convincing, particularly considering that the paintings rarely include iconography typically associated with nymphs. L. points out that nymph worship became especially popular in Attica after the battle of Marathon, when the Athenians installed Pan's cult and its attendant nymphs in a cave on the Akropolis. This chapter also discusses the association of nymphs with female rites of passage, particularly marriage and the rôle of ritual bathing.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed and somewhat dry catalogue of nymph lore arranged

geographically rather than diachronically, starting with Attica and moving outward through the rest of Greece, then to the Near East, north Africa, and Magna Graecia. It reads rather like Pausanias or Strabo had they concentrated solely on nymphs, and focuses on three basic themes: the nymphs' presence in the landscape, rites of passage associated with nymphs, and local genealogies of nymphs. Here L. includes details about the Klepsydra spring in Athens and cults of female pluralities in Boiotia; about the nymphs associated with the oracle of Zeus in Dodona; and about the nymphaion at Mt. Mieza in Macedonia that served as a school for Aristotle and his pupil Alexander. Readers may need a Homeric love of genealogies to get through the minutiae of this chapter, but they will be well rewarded. One wishes, however, that the chapter included a map of the main nymph cult sites.

Many caves used for nymph worship remain unexcavated, including three in the Mieza area. L.'s last chapter, which summarizes the work of archaeologists, focuses on the few *excavated* caves known to have hosted nymph cults. The most spectacular finds come from the Korkyrian cave on Mt Parnassus, near Delphi; cult activity here definitely dates from the sixth century B.C.E. down to the second, and it is also the most frequently mentioned nymph cult site in ancient literature. Artifacts include terracotta figurines, pottery fragments, seashells, jewelry, coins, thousands of *astragaloi*, and inscriptions to Pan, the nymphs, and Apollo Nymphaetes.

If L.'s book is at times dry and occasionally unconvincing, it is nevertheless a well-researched, often engaging study that should prove invaluable to classics scholars interested in Greek myth and religion. Purists may quibble with certain details—L.'s constant description of silens as equine, when, at least from Hellenistic times, they were also caprine; her choice of 'Philippides' rather than the preferred ms. reading 'Phidippides' in discussing Herodotus 6.105–6. But this book, which followed naturally from L.'s previous study, *Greek Heroine Cults*, further establishes her as an expert on the rôle of female figures in Greek religious practices.

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

D. FELTON

IMAGES OF YOUTH

G. FERRARI: *Figures of Speech. Men and Maidens in Ancient Greece*. Pp. viii + 352, pls. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002. Cased, US\$60/£42. ISBN: 0-226-24436-9.

This book is half theory-rich discussion of how to combine the evidence of images with that of texts, half exploration of the lives and representation of young men and women. The eight chapter titles (e.g. 'The Thread of Ariadne', 'The Manly Aphrodite') give little indication of their contents, and there is no conclusion. The opening draws attention to the wealth of imagery on Athenian pottery, but despite the 149 plates and the twenty-five-page catalogue of pots, only the first two chapters are substantially concerned with that imagery. F. claims that the book is united by the hypothesis that both words and visual figures are projections of thought and that the two modes meet in metaphor, but the dominant impression left on the reader is less of methodological issues advanced than of F.'s desire to expound (interesting) views different from those currently widely held on a collection of points about the lives of young persons in Athens. For all that it has been long in the making, this seems a distinctly unfinished enterprise. What the whole picture of men and maidens in classical Athens (the subtitle is misleading, there is practically no interest here in

The Classical Review vol. 54 no. 2 © The Classical Association 2004; all rights reserved