

## SUBJECT REVIEWS

### *Greek Literature*

Let us begin, as is proper, with the gods rich in praise – or, more precisely, with *The Gods Rich in Praise*,<sup>1</sup> one of three strikingly good monographs based on doctoral theses that will appear in this set of reviews. Christopher Metcalf examines the relations between early Greek poetry and the ancient Near East, focusing primarily on hymnic poetry. This type of poetry has multiple advantages: there is ample primary material, it displays formal conservatism, and there are demonstrable lines of translation and adaptation linking Sumerian, Akkadian, and Hittite texts. The Near Eastern material is presented in the first three chapters; four chapters examine early Greek poetry. Two formal aspects are selected for analysis (hymnic openings and negative predication), and two particular passages: the birth of Aphrodite in *Theogony* 195–206, and the mention of a dream interpreter in *Iliad* 1.62–4. In this last case, Metcalf acknowledges the possibility of transmission, while emphasizing the process of ‘continuous adaptation and reinterpretation’ (225) that lie behind the Homeric re-contextualization. In general, though, his detailed analyses tend to undermine the ‘argument by accumulation’ by which West and others have tried to demonstrate profound and extensive Eastern influence on early Greek poetry. Metcalf finds no evidence for formal influence: ‘in the case of hymns, Near Eastern influence on early Greek poetry was punctual (i.e. restricted to particular points) at the most, but certainly not pervasive’ (3). His carefully argued case deserves serious attention.

Near Eastern parallels are treated less cautiously in Stephen Scully’s *Hesiod’s Theogony*:<sup>2</sup> he speculates that Hesiod might have learned of the *Enûma elish* ‘perhaps through his contacts at Euboea, or via Delphi, or even through his family history at Cyme in [sic] the Asia Minor coast’ (51). Three chapters survey the *Theogony*’s reception in the archaic and classical periods, its Hellenistic and Roman ‘echoes’, and Byzantine, medieval, Renaissance, and Miltonic ‘shadows’. The scope is broad and the execution correspondingly thin: the treatment is often little more than descriptive and there is no clear over-arching thesis, except perhaps that the *Theogony* has had a wide and varied reception. The first chapter includes a comparison of the *Theogony* and *Genesis*. Scully does not quote *Genesis* 1.2, ‘the earth was without form, and void’, which surely casts doubt on the claim that ‘for a Christian or a Jew, nothing

<sup>1</sup> *The Gods Rich in Praise. Early Greek and Mesopotamian Religious Poetry*. By Christopher Metcalf. Oxford Classical Monographs. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xiv + 288. Hardback £60, ISBN: 978-0-19-872336-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Hesiod’s Theogony. From Near Eastern Creation Myths to Paradise Lost*. By Stephen Scully. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xiv + 268. 11 illustrations. Hardback £55, ISBN: 978-0-19-025396-7.

could be more absurd than to hear that the world began from Chaos' (154). There are other faults in fact-checking: Plato's *Cratylus* is dated to the end of the fifth century (100), and E. E. Pender is referred to as 'he' (116). Typographic errors are numerous: for example, 'Gasper Griffin' (14); 'Cyro-Minoan' (51); 'ala' for 'à la' (90); 'formerly' for 'formally' (96); 'conviviales' (152); 'Iliads's' (174); 'De sublime' and 'Cyrpia' (204). I was disappointed.

Helen van Noorden's *Playing Hesiod*,<sup>3</sup> the second of my triad of ex-doctoral monographs, shows how much more illuminating reception studies can be with the aid of a coherent focus and agenda. The focus in this case is on the myth of the races in *Works and Days*, and the agenda is to explore the interest which later appropriations show in the relationship of Hesiod's story to the ethical argument of its Hesiodic context. An extended analysis of Hesiod's presentation of the myth is followed by a long and conspicuously thoughtful chapter on Plato, engaging with *Protagoras*, *Republic*, and *Statesman*. The chapter on Aratus is the book's pivot: 'Aratus' bold re-inscription of Hesiod's metallic narrative in his own universe prompts further, different, appropriations of Hesiod's poetry in Roman literature' (203). Illustrations are drawn from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the *Octavia*, and Juvenal's *Satire* 6. The book is sometimes frustrating: van Noorden devotes disproportionate space to telling us what she is going to say, and her style of argument often combines demanding density with elusive obliqueness. But, in saying that, I do not endorse the hyperbolically negative evaluation of this book's style and substance that I have seen in another review. Persistence will be rewarded.

Kirk Ormand<sup>4</sup> aims to locate the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* 'in the broad ideological changes that we see throughout Greece in the sixth century' (4), arguing that it is 'a reactionary text...an aristocratic text in the face of an emerging ideology of the middling man, and of all the *polis*-centered ideas that come with him' (84). The case is set out in chapters on *hedna*, Mestra (with shape-shifters and the epiklerate), Atalanta and Alcmene (providing examples of interaction with other archaic hexameter poetry), and Helen. This is certainly a significant addition to the literature on the *Catalogue of Women*. But I had some reservations. Ormand acknowledges that 'it might be useful to discard the somewhat troubling term "ideology", which, on some understandings... indicates a coherent and consistent mode of behavior, and instead speak of middling and elitist modes of *discourse*' (26). He is still willing to infer 'ideological conflict' (36) from discursive differences and to speak of 'sharp competition' between modes of discourse (38). But modes of discourse typically shift according to context (who is addressed? to what end?), so caution is needed in diagnosing 'conflict' and 'change' from discursive variation. And then there's intertextuality. Ormand sees in the expression 'astonishment held those who were watching' (F75.8) a 'subtle and significant support' (147) for his reading of Atalanta's race with Hippomenes as 'an eroticized version of the battle between Achilles and Hector' (148): 'in the Homeric epics', he says, 'it is a formula used to describe the reaction of onlookers to a terrific battle'. In

<sup>3</sup> *Playing Hesiod. The 'Myth of the Races' in Classical Antiquity*. By Helen van Noorden. Cambridge Classical Studies. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. x + 350. Hardback £70, ISBN: 978-0-521-76081-2.

<sup>4</sup> *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women and Archaic Greece*. By Kirk Ormand. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. x + 350. Hardback £64.99, ISBN: 978-1-107-03519-5.

two of the formula's five Homeric occurrences, the reaction is to those who are about to engage in one-to-one combat on two occasions (*Il.* 3.342, 23.815); on another, it is to a manifestation of Athene, taken as presaging either combat or friendship (*Il.* 4.79). To effect an extension to *Il.* 24.482, where onlookers react to the non-combatant Priam's appearance, the initial misstatement is modified: 'in every instance of the formula in Homer, there is an element of highly charged danger, of violence that is just below the surface or about to happen' (148). In the *Iliad*, violence just below the surface is like a fortune-teller's cold reading. But how does that apply to Nestor's hospitality in *Od.* 3.372 (also reacting to a manifestation of Athene's divinity)?

It is not that I am closed to intertextuality in principle: but my openness is not infinitely elastic, and when stretched too far the recoil makes me (perhaps overly) sceptical. The recoil was quite powerful when Seth Schein<sup>5</sup> extracted an 'allusion to traditional battle narrative' in the *Hymn from Aphrodite* from the observation that λύω can be applied to dying warriors' knees, as well as to girdles (62). *Homeric Epic and Its Reception* gathers twelve papers, spanning forty-five years. Nine are revised, and in some cases expanded; most were first published in *Festschriften* and other collective volumes, which tend to be less accessible. Three are new: on cognitive metrics, Kakridis and neoanalysis (one of the three roots of Schein's approach, alongside Parry and Fränkel), and reception (Weil, Bernal, Oswald, Logue). The chapter on cognitive metrics, which is concerned with violations of Hermann's bridge and their interpretative implications, begins and ends with some multiply otiose neuroscience. The discovery of ERPs (event-related potentials) shows that the detection and processing of cognitive anomalies involves neural processes – which (surely?) we would have assumed, anyway. Unable to cite experimental data showing ERPs in response to metrical anomalies, Schein simply 'posits' them: which is reasonable, but not 'objective evidence' (98). Neuroscience would, in any case, only tell us that an anomaly is being processed, not how it is resolved, still less how it should be resolved. Neuroscience is not interpretation. Nor is neoanalysis. Hypothesizing an allusion is empty without an account of its significance. Schein's discussion of *Il.* 24.58–63 (106–10) offers a binary choice (allusion or *ad hoc* invention) that does not exhaust the options. If we approach the *Iliad* as narrative, we might recall that Hera is not beyond tendentiously manipulating facts – an internal feature of the narrative that seems to me more relevant and more significant than Schein's inferred allusion to the cosmic power of Thetis in the past. Yet the same chapter contains a fine analysis of *Il.* 24.1–45; and Schein's sensitivity and attention to detail made me glad to have read these essays.

My third ex-doctoral monograph is Lilah Grace Canevaro's *Hesiod's Works and Days. How to Teach Self-sufficiency*,<sup>6</sup> and this was the one I most enjoyed. Canevaro is interested in the composition of the poem, and in the way that its composition embeds 'seeds' of an intended reception. The poem lends itself to two different modes of reading: one linear, one open to excerpting and repurposing. That is achieved through two structuring tendencies: units of teaching are formulated in a way that makes them detachable, while at the same time being 'tethered' to his own programme of instruction.

<sup>5</sup> *Homeric Epic and Its Reception. Interpretive Essays*. By Seth L. Schein. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. xiv + 225. Hardback £45. ISBN: 978-0-19-958941-8.

<sup>6</sup> *Hesiod's Works and Days. How to Teach Self-sufficiency*. By Lilah Grace Canevaro. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xiv + 269. Hardback £55, ISBN: 978-0-19-872954-9.

By leaving gaps and using forms of communication in which the message is only implied, Hesiod challenges his audience to think for themselves: ‘the diverse elements of the *Works and Days* have a meaning for everyone – but you have to look for it’ (83). This didactic strategy is tailored to the needs of an Iron Age audience: they need to become self-sufficient, and ‘Hesiod would not be teaching this lesson if he gave his audience all the answers’ (166). Hence the two modes of reading:

On the one hand, experiencing the poem in continuous performance is akin to the didactic model in which teacher teaches, student learns and listens. On the other, excerpting and reusing puts into practice the self-sufficient ideals Hesiod endeavours to instil; teacher encourages student to discover and decode information independently, and apply it in new contexts. (217)

This summary does not do justice to the subtlety of Canevaro’s argument, nor to her many excellent interpretations of detail; but it may give a glimpse of the impressive coherence of the network of mutually supporting ideas that she constructs. This is a wonderfully intelligent book, organized and written with exceptional clarity and precision. I have not seen a more illuminating account of how the *Works and Days* works.

Hesiod’s Muses declared their propensity to tell falsehoods resembling truths. Perhaps they inspired the preface to Stephen Halliwell’s first volume of Aristophanes translations (containing *Birds*, *Lysistrata*, *Assembly-Women*, and *Wealth*), which promised *Acharnians*, *Knights*, *Wasps*, and *Peace* for the second volume. That was in 1997: somewhat later (one suspects) than envisaged, we have instead *Clouds*, *Women at the Thesmophoria*, and *Frogs*.<sup>7</sup> The format is the same: a lengthy general introduction (the preface says it is ‘substantially’ the same as in the previous volume, but there are many minor changes, and some changes of substance: for example, on the size of the fifth-century theatre) and bibliography (updated); introductions to each play; and limited but helpful notes, aided by an index of names. There is also an appendix on the lost plays of Aristophanes. Geoffrey Arnott assessed the first instalment positively (*G&R* 45 [1998], 226–7):

H.’s style is lively, modern, and generally effective, closer perhaps in its presentation of the complexities of Aristophanic detail and reference than most of his rivals. . . He is virtually always accurate without being over-literal, and far more often graphically idiomatic than flat.

The second instalment lives up to that standard. Let’s hope that we will not have to wait another eighteen years for the political plays.

Meanwhile, we have a new commentary on the *Wasps*,<sup>8</sup> jointly authored by Zachary Biles, author of a stimulating monograph on Aristophanes (*G&R* 59 [2012], 252), and Douglas Olson, whose prolific scholarship includes commentaries on *Acharnians*

<sup>7</sup> *Aristophanes. Clouds, Women at the Thesmophoria, Frogs*. Translated with introduction and notes by Stephen Halliwell. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xcvi + 298. Hardback £55, ISBN: 978-0-19-814994-1; paperback £8.99, ISBN: 978-0-19-282409-7.

<sup>8</sup> *Aristophanes. Wasps*. Edited with introduction and commentary by Zachary P. Biles and S. Douglas Olson. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. lxxxvi + 530. Hardback £110, ISBN: 978-0-19-969940-7.

(*G&R* 50 [2003], 244–5) and (co-authored with Colin Austin) *Thesmophoriazusaē* (*G&R* 52 [2005], 251–2). So you would expect an indispensable commentary – and you will, indeed, get one. But you will get some unexpected things, too: for example, the impossible translation of ὑποκειμένης [*sic!*] ὑποθέσεως as ‘imaginary premise’ (hyp. 1.25–6n.); or the denial of Aristotle’s authorship of the *Poetics* (‘[Aristotle]’; 57n.) alongside an unchallenged attribution of the *Physiognomonica* (‘Arist.’; 74–6n.). The introduction discerns a ‘crisis of hesitation affecting *Wasps*’ (xxix): ‘the poet might reasonably feel diffident’ (xxxiii). I don’t detect diffidence in (for example) 1029–35; and a comedian who writes a pause for audience reaction into his script (134: blurred in the commentary, which shuffles Aristophanes’ words into a different order) can’t have had too much of ‘a sense of distrust of the audience’ (xxix). *Wasps* presents a ‘political argument’ (lx); *Knights*, too, ‘argues’ (xlvi); more cautiously, *Acharnians* and *Knights* ‘appear to argue’ (xlvi); both ‘insist’ (xlvi). Some may wonder how making up a fantastic fiction can constitute *arguing*, and doubt whether appearing in a fictional text is sufficient evidence of factuality (‘the text of the *Wasps* itself makes clear that. . .’; lxi). But it is perhaps understandable that the bar is set low in a context in which ‘arguably’ and similar locutions are routinely used as substitutes for actual argument (xxxiii, xliii, xlvi, xlix, lix). But what is (arguably?) most shocking is the editors’ characterization of what they take to be the argument of *Wasps*: ‘the play is broadly “democratic” in orientation, but in ways that challenge the notion that the *dēmos*’ best interests. . . are best served when the people are directly involved in deciding what is good for the city’ (xlvii–xlviii). So excluding the *dēmos* from political decision-making is ‘broadly’ democratic? No! It is ‘profoundly democratic’. In what sense? ‘. . . in the sense that Bdelycleon and the poet both insist that they are devoted to the good of the people’ (lix). That is exactly what Bdelycleon says the people he’s opposed to say about themselves (666–7). And while I’m feeling grumpy, I would like to make a suggestion to commentators in general: *be useful*. Tell us what we need to know; if you tell us something, tell us why we need to know it – what makes this information significant? Though you will need to subcontract some of that work to others who have treated a topic more fully, that is no excuse for stuffing primary and secondary references into your notes with no hint of what one might gain from looking them up. Readers who look up the first reference in ‘For swords. . . see Olson on *Ach.* 342, Austin-Olson on *Th.* 140’ (166–7n.) will find a small amount of basic information and three secondary references, and may conclude that their time has been wasted; they will certainly be wasting their time if they go on to look up the second, which is a subset of this first – no information, and the same three secondary references. The more often users find references useless, the less they will bother to follow up references on the off chance that they *might* be useful; the less they follow up references, the more commentators will be wasting their time in supplying them. But don’t get the wrong impression. Biles and Olson do give lots of useful commentary. The note on 1035, for example, knocks spots off MacDowell and Sommerstein with its informative account of camels’ arseholes.

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