

SUBJECT REVIEWS

(* denotes that a book is specially recommended for school libraries; ** that it is suitable for advanced students only; ^B that a bibliography is included.)

Greek Literature

Prime position in this issue deserves to go, if only for the ambitiousness of its title, to Nick Lowe's ^B*The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative*,¹ an attempt both to refurbish the concept of plot (out of fashion in much recent criticism) with theoretical sophistication, and to trace the ancient origins of techniques of plot-making that have dominated western artforms right up to contemporary novels and films. Lowe's model of plot draws on the schemas of narratological analysis, some ideas from cognitive science (plots exploit the 'underlying cognitive apparatus' we use to make representations of real-world experience), and an analogy between plots and games: plots are narrative ways 'of coding worlds into games'. On the historical side, Lowe undertakes a fresh, incisive look at how the workings of 'classical plotting' (which he construes in terms of a strong sense of formal closure, conveyed via 'economy', 'amplitude', and 'transparency') were established by Homeric epic, fifth-century tragedy, New Comedy, and the Greek romance (with a little help from Aristotelian criticism and hellenistic scholarship), despite the challenges and alternative modes of plotting explored by, for instance, lyric poetry, Old Comedy, and Callimachean 'poetics'. Lowe shows himself a shrewd, clever critic in dealing with questions of time, place, causality, character movement, and other features of narrative structure in his four 'classical' genres; he also manages to write about heavyweight issues in a style marked by wit and élan (if also by a slight penchant for jargon and occasional algebra). I detected an incompletely resolved tension in Lowe's enterprise between plots as 'games' and as 'life' (or surrogate worlds). Plots do not just engage our cognitive equipment, they also exploit (and affect) our general interpretation of experience, and cannot therefore be convincingly regarded as 'closed systems', as Lowe sometimes claims. This is none the less an original, zestful, and thought-provoking book.

Festschriften are certainly not noted for 'classical plotting'; their aims are too diffuse for that. The esteem felt for the Greek scholar Dimitris Maronitis is, however, reflected in the bulk of a volume in his honour, ^{**}*Euphrosyne*,² which comprises twenty-six contributions (eleven in German, one in French) on Homeric themes, extended by some contributors to include later influences, both ancient (Vergil, Apollonius, among others) and modern (Joyce, Walcott). A good scholarly cast produces work of variable but interestingly diverse character; keen Homerists will want to consult the collection, though the lack of an index will not help them.

Two new monographs on Homer come at the poems from highly different directions. Michael Clarke's ^{B**}*Flesh and Spirit in the Songs of Homer*³ is an intensely sustained examination of Homeric conceptions of human identity. Clarke thinks a Christianized dualism of body and soul has distorted previous approaches to the subject; he aims, by scrutiny of the usage of key Homeric terms (including *psuchê*, *thumos*, *nekus*) to reconstruct part of the 'world-view' embedded in the epics. At the core

of Clarke's enquiry are the claims that the human person in Homer is an indivisible whole, that this whole is irreducibly physical, that *psuchê* is not a discrete mental entity (as it was later to become) but only the final expiration at death, while its supposed flight and entry into Hades are 'creative images' for corporeal dissolution (though such images, at their fullest elaboration, take on a heightened, independent mythological status). Clarke's 'physicalist' picture of the unity and continuity of the Homeric person is defended vigorously through close, penetrating analysis of many passages. His book throws down an important challenge. But apart from some points of tension within the discussion (above all regarding the relation between *psuchê* as dying breath and underworld wraith, where a distinction between 'sublunary' and 'mythological' domains is uneasily maintained), his case rests on incomplete foundations. Part of Clarke (perhaps his *thumos*) believes that we can only grasp Homeric concepts in Homeric language/ideas; but if that principle were followed to the hilt, we would not be able to talk/think about Homer at all in English, let alone continue, as Clarke does, to use a whole array of concepts (including 'emotion', 'thought', 'mind') that do not lock directly onto Homeric language. The problems of interpretation, here as elsewhere, cannot be reduced, as Clarke suggests, to letting 'words speak for themselves' (47); a picture of Homeric 'man' cannot be confined to the study of individual terms. If Clarke's book attempts to get inside the skin of individual existence in Homer, Johannes Haubold's ^B*Homer's People*⁴ paints a bigger, social picture, arguing the somewhat counterintuitive thesis that the *laos* (or *laoi*), the 'people' at large, is crucial to understanding of the epics. Moving from formulaic expressions to larger narrative patterns, Haubold contends that in the *Iliad* the inadequacy of individual leaders, who fail in their role as 'shepherd of the people', together with a lack of effective social structures, results in the destruction of the *laos*, though he finds some mitigating indication of the possibility of greater social cohesion in the last two books. In the *Odyssey*, by contrast, both companions and suitors (neither being equivalent to the people) die in the interests not just of Odysseus but also, ultimately if only implicitly, of the *laoi* – for the promise of 'a new and better world'. Finally, Haubold interprets the performance of Homeric poetry at the Panathenaea as a matter of one people's response (that of 'the founding people' of Attica, within a context of ritual, festive celebration) to the images of another's instability and suffering; Homer's people, Haubold maintains, would have 'resonated' with the Athenians' sense of their own institutional solution to the problems of social life. This is an attempt, then, to go beyond the heroic 'foreground' of epic and to relate the poems to larger conceptions of social structure and even the possibility of social progress. It is a tersely reflective book, which reads the poems from an oblique angle that opens up some intriguing but not wholly cogent considerations. Its main weakness is the tenuousness of some of its claims, not least about Panathenaic performances, where the argument amounts to one huge speculation. The prize (ideally some sort of tripod) for the most handsome book in the current batch must go to Peter Wilson's ^B*The Athenian Institution of the Khoregia*,⁵ a large, many-sided investigation of the system by which Athens financed the festive organization and performance of 'choruses', including the staging of tragedy and comedy. Deftly combining literary, epigraphic, and visual sources of information, Wilson explores every aspect – practical, economic, symbolic, political, celebratory – of a set-up that required wealthy individual citizens to finance the festivals of the democracy and, in return, to affirm elite status for themselves. Around the technical details (from choice of choregoi to the tripod

monuments of the winners) Wilson builds an elaborate commentary on the whole 'choral culture' of classical Athens, a culture he sees as woven into the fabric of civic life and identity (the leitourgic system 'put the security of the city's choral culture on the same footing as that of its naval power', 4) and as badly underestimated by 'Aristotelian' accounts of the history of Attic drama. The result is a carefully argued (if, at times, just a shade prolix) and scrupulously documented work that will be of major interest to anyone dealing at a serious level with dramatic and choral performances in Athens, with the organization of the city's festivals, or more generally with the complex interplay of democratic and elite values in the city's life.

The most wide-ranging of this issue's works on tragedy is Elizabeth Belfiore's ^B*Murder Among Friends*,⁶ a study of tragic plots that centre on kin-killing (actual or averted) and other serious infractions of *philia* relationships. Taking its impetus from Aristotle *Poetics* chapter 14, the book gives individual attention to Aeschylus, *Suppliants*, Sophocles, *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, and Euripides, *Andromache* and *I.T.*; but almost half the work consists of three appendices that survey and categorize the evidence of all extant and most fragmentary plays (the treatment of the latter being a substantial reference resource in its own right) in terms of the types of *pathê* they involve(d). Belfiore allows the notion of *philia* to cover, in addition to kinship and marriage, all 'formal reciprocal relationships', especially those involving suppliants and guest-friends; she even stretches it, in her chapter on *Ajax*, to accommodate suicide – a salient case, this, of trying too hard to fit everything into a single typology, notwithstanding the complex web of friendship and enmity that gives the suicide its context. It is in regard to the conceptualization of kinds, degrees, and nuances of *philia* that Belfiore's thesis leaves most room for disagreement; but her overall emphasis on the importance of violated *philia* to tragedy is well justified, and in supplying such comprehensive documentation on plot-patterns in the genre she has provided a helpful framework for further analysis and argument.

John Harrison's **Euripides, Medea*⁷ and David Franklin's **Euripides, Bacchae*⁸ are the first of a new series, 'Cambridge Translations from Greek Drama', aimed at Classical Civilization and Drama students. The hallmark of the series is an all-in-one study package, coupling a translation with a facing 'commentary' that comprises short notes and bullet-point suggestions (sometimes erring on the trite side) for discussion; there are also synopses, maps, timelines, some illustrations (ancient vases, modern productions), and a short 'Introduction to the Greek Theatre' by Pat Easterling, but no bibliography to each play. The translations (Harrison's in verse, Franklin's, except for lyrics, in prose – no series policy on this fundamental matter) avoid archaisms, though they tend to buy contemporary clarity at the price of thinning out the poetic texture of the Greek. Given the obvious usefulness to sixth-formers and first-year undergraduates, it is deplorable that marginal line-numbers do not keep step with the standard Greek numeration; anyone using secondary literature (or comparing other versions) will have to make a numerical conversion, via the bracketed references at the foot of each page.

Drama students are also a target audience of David Wiles's ^B*Greek Theatre Performance*,⁹ an introduction to Athenian tragedy and comedy whose 'materialist' approach downplays authors and language, and plays up performers, audiences, and the culture (myth, ritual, politics, gender) as a whole (it was 'social conditions' more than individual ability, Wiles states [173], that produced the three great tragedians). The best thing about Wiles's book is that it is lively, unconventional, adept at juxtaposing ancient and modern perspectives, and informed by expert familiarity with theatrical production; it certainly ought to

stimulate the reader who 'knows nothing about ancient Greece' (1). Wiles's commitment to historical and cultural relativism is, however, combined with a great deal of confident assertion (cf. my reaction to his previous book, *G&R* 45 [1998], 88), and he is better at letting ideas run together than at scrutinizing them critically: witness his too easily assumed view of theatre as ritual and ritual as theatre (as a fan of Brecht he should have confronted the latter's remark that theatre comes into being by separation from ritual). Moreover, Wiles is not always reliable: he is happy, for example, because it suits his scholarly iconoclasm, to perpetuate the myth that Aristotle had a 'dislike of performance' (170), but when he touches on a passage from the *Rhetoric* in which Aristotle praises, from first-hand experience, the qualities of the star actor Theodorus, Wiles simply misunderstands the text (167). Such qualms apart, this is a stimulating guide to cultural and performance aspects of Greek theatre, though its own methodology inevitably makes it less instructive for text-based study of the plays.

With the difficulty of indefinitely multiplying commentaries on Greek tragedies, recent years have seen an increase in monographs on individual plays. William Alan's ^B*The Andromache and Euripidean Tragedy*¹⁰ is certainly one of the best yet to have appeared. Like Judith Mossman's study of the *Hecuba*, it is a converted Oxford doctoral thesis; like that predecessor it organizes its treatment according to basic categories (myth, structure, characterization, rhetoric, gender, chorus, gods) but uses this framework to develop a closely woven, cumulative reading of the play, stressing, for example, how the work's supposed disjointedness reflects its evocation of a dislocated, chaotic 'post-war' world in which different characters' tragic fortunes are surprisingly 'meshed' together, or how Euripides creates a pair of contrastingly unhappy female characters in such a way as to expose 'the distinctive tragic potential of women's constrained experience'. In every chapter, moreover, Allan succeeds in situating his reading within a broader view of Euripidean dramaturgy. This is a humane and unostentatiously subtle book.

STEPHEN HALLIWELL

NOTES

1. *The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative*. By N. J. Lowe. Cambridge U.P., 2000. Pp. xiii + 293, with 7 figures and 17 tables. £37.50.

2. *Euphrosyne*. Studies in Ancient Epic and its Legacy in Honor of Dimitris N. Maronitis. Edited by J. N. Kazazis and Antonios Rengakos. Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 1999. Pp. 367. DM.152.

3. *Flesh and Spirit in the Songs of Homer*. A Study of Words and Myths. Oxford Classical Monographs. By Michael Clarke. Oxford U.P., 1999. Pp. xv + 378. £48.00.

4. *Homer's People*. Epic Poetry and Social Formation. Cambridge Classical Studies. By Johannes Haubold. Cambridge U.P., 2000. Pp. xv + 240. £37.50.

5. *The Athenian Institution of the Khoregia*. The Chorus, the City and the Stage. By Peter Wilson. Cambridge U.P., 1999. Pp. xv + 435, with 31 illustrations. £55.00.

6. *Murder Among Friends*. Violation of *Philia* in Greek Tragedy. By Elizabeth S. Belfiore. Oxford U.P., 2000. Pp. xix + 282. £36.50.

7. *Euripides, Medea*. Cambridge Translations from Greek Drama. A New Translation and Commentary by John Harrison. Cambridge U.P., 2000. Pp. viii + 115, with 3 illustrations, 2 figures, and 1 map. £4.95.

8. *Euripides, Bacchae*. Cambridge Translations from Greek Drama. A New Translation and Commentary by David Franklin. Cambridge U.P., 2000. Pp. viii + 104, with 6 illustrations, 2 figures, and 2 maps. Paper £4.95.

9. *Greek Theatre Performance. An Introduction.* By David Wiles. Cambridge U.P., 2000. Pp. xii + 243, with 19 plates and 20 figures. Hardback £35.00, paperback £12.95.

10. *The Andromache and Euripidean Tragedy.* Oxford Classical Monographs. By William Allan. Oxford U.P., 2000. Pp. xii + 310. £40.00.

Roman Literature

With the notable exception of Virgil's Dido, the role of female characters has been somewhat underplayed in the critical literature on Roman epic. Alison Keith's ^B*Engendering Rome: Women in Latin Epic*¹ sets out to rectify this omission; her slim volume is, however, something of a disappointment. One of the weaknesses of classical feminist analysis has been a propensity to crude generalization and a concomitant blindness to subtle distinctions and nuances; and K. has not entirely freed herself from these defects. A tendency to draw broad, general conclusions on the basis of too few examples is apparent throughout the five chapters; it may well be true, for example, that Ennius' Ilia is a passive figure, appropriately 'absorbed' into the male-dominated landscape of Italy by her immersion in the Tiber (42–6), but the same is certainly not true (39–40) of Lucretius' *Natura* (in many ways a more active, dominant figure than the 'heroic' Epicurus). K. argues in her fourth chapter that women are repeatedly represented in epic as responsible for the outbreak of war, and that this strategy allows a displacement of male anxieties about warfare onto the female; again, however, she has elided some important distinctions (between the active Dido and the passive Lavinia, for example), and also ignored further complicating factors such as the role of Cacus (a male analogue for the female Allecto?) or the notorious difficulties surrounding the motivation of Turnus. Ultimately, nothing very startling emerges here: Roman men are dominant and aggressive, Roman women are passive and disempowered; only occasionally does K. hint at ways in which epic might have sought to challenge or subvert the dominant ideology of patriarchal Roman society.

Another topic neglected in recent scholarship – according to Emma Gee – is the astronomical aspect of Ovid's *Fasti*. G.'s monograph ^{B**}*Ovid, Aratus and Augustus: Astronomy in Ovid's Fasti*² looks at the astronomical passages from a number of different angles, with particular emphasis on their relation to Augustan political discourse and to the Stoicism of Aratus' *Phaenomena*. She has interesting things to say about Ovid's 'fragmentation' of Aratus' unified cosmos, and about the poet's playful (or playfully subversive?) treatment of Julius Caesar's catasterism. The book still bears the marks, however, of its origin as a doctoral thesis: the mass of detail does not really add up to a coherent whole, and it is often hard to see where the argument is going. It is not always clear whether G. is arguing for a 'subversive' or a straightforwardly Augustan reading of the poem; her analysis of particular passages, too, is sometimes rather strained (I was not convinced, for example, by the argument [32–3] that divination and astrology are mutually opposed in Propertius 4.1). G.'s scholarship is nevertheless impressive, and her book will undoubtedly be of value to students of Aratus as well as Ovid.

A more traditional, formalist approach to the *Fasti* is adopted by Elena Merli, ^{B**}*Arma canant alii: Materia epica e narrazione elegiaca nei fasti di Ovidio*,³ who inclines to reject the currently popular view of the poem as subversive in either the political or the literary sphere. Ovid's 'pacifism' and rejection of *arma* need not be seen – she argues – as either oppositional or parodic; rather, these tendencies are symptomatic of a rejection of old-style, Ennian epic