

SUBJECT REVIEWS

Greek Literature

‘Who, pray, had previously collected literary references to cucumbers?’ Martin West once again hits highly quotable form in his commentary on the Trojan poems of the Epic Cycle (50).¹ (The answer, of course, is no-one – so Athenaeus’ evidence is unlikely to be derived from a secondary source.) A characteristic boldness of hypothesizing is also on display. For example, West puts a name (Phayllus) to the (pre-Aristotelian) compiler who assembled and summarized the epics of the cycle. Since he credits Phayllus with conjectures about the names of the poets (27), one might expect a certain fellow-feeling on the part of West. But the naming of the poets, ‘not based on any established consensus or firm tradition’ and drawn from sources that ‘cannot have been unanimous or decisive’, is described in terms that sound reproachful: ‘bluff assertiveness. . . bold constructionism’. καὶ κεραμεὺς κεραμεῖ κοτέει καὶ τέκτωνι τέκτων, / καὶ πτωχὸς πτωχῶ φθονέει καὶ ἀοιδὸς ἀοιδῶ (‘So potter is piqued with potter, joiner with joiner, / beggar begrudges beggar, and singer singer’). Which of Hesiod’s rivalrous professions (*Op.* 24–5) has most affinity to scholars engaged in conjecture is, perhaps, open to debate; but the ἀοιδὸς (‘singer’) peeks out from West’s own exercises in creative writing. Admittedly, he provides only one extended piece of Greek verse composition (201–11), but prose summaries are supplied on at least ten occasions (e.g. 183: ‘It is possible to imagine a defiant speech on these lines: “Leaders of the Achaeans. . .”). Acknowledging that his ‘imaginative reconstructions’ are ‘highly speculative, a flight of fancy’ (281), West pleads that they ‘serve to illustrate how the thing could have been done’. But since it could have been done otherwise, these reconstructions also serve to plant in readers’ minds an insidiously vivid but possibly misleading image. As West observes in another context, ‘the reconstruction of Wilamowitz. . . goes too far beyond the evidence’ (94). The same could be said, for example, of West’s identification of passages in the *Iliad* and *Aethiopsis* that are ‘variants on the *Iliad* poet’s original, unwritten account of Achilles’ death’ (149): West’s own confidence in this hypothesis fluctuated in *The Making of the Iliad* (*G&R* 59 [2012], 245–6) between confidence (‘doubtless’, 346) and caution (‘may have’, 390). On a point of detail: Aristotle does not describe the *Cypria* and *Little Iliad* as ‘episodic’ in *Poet.* 1459a37 (60): he explicitly says that they are about ‘a single action’, a judgement which excludes ‘concatenation. . . without organic connection’ (166). Yet, whatever one’s reservations, West’s scholarship is, as always, profound, original, and indispensably provocative. Moreover, this book provides an added bonus in the form of an exercise in another of West’s

¹ *The Epic Cycle. A Commentary on the Lost Troy Epics.* By M. L. West. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. x + 334. 3 figures. Hardback £70, ISBN: 978-0-19-966225-8.

areas of expertise: readers must become textual critics, transposing a misplaced line of text (308) and emending the puzzling reference to an ‘undermined species of stingray’ (309).

There is more. The second instalment of West’s selected papers² contains thirty-one essays on lyric and drama. ‘My selection focuses on items that treat questions of literary history or longer passages of text rather than those concerned with individual textual problems’ (v); the inclusion of a one-paragraph note on the orthography of the name of Alcaeus’ brother suggests that the criterion was not applied with unbending rigour. Some of the items are excerpted from larger publications, or are compilations of such excerpts. One paper has been revised; supplementary notes are added in other cases. A previously unpublished lecture, ‘Zeus in Aeschylus’, is also included. The added bonus in this case consists of some *παρονομασία* (titbits), mostly in Greek verse. Cassandra’s reaction to an Oxford college feast is particularly ingenious and amusing.

To return to epic: Deborah Beck’s *Speech Presentation in Homeric Epic*³ combines narratology and linguistics (speech act theory and, especially, pragmatics) to provide a systematic account of the techniques for presenting speech in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*: both the range of such techniques and also their integration into a ‘cohesive, unified system’ (4–5), in which distinctive functions are assigned to direct and indirect speech, to free indirect speech (a category which Beck argues has been unjustly neglected in Homeric scholarship), and to speech mention. Attention is given to differences in the use of speech presentation modes between the main narrator and characters, as well as between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. I have doubts about some aspects of the theoretical framework. The very idea of a typology of speech acts (11) seems odd (their being *speech* acts doesn’t stop them being *acts*, and a meaningful typology of things that people can do is hard to envisage); moreover, categories such as directives (‘speech about action’) and emotives (‘speech about feelings’) do not constitute a typology of speech *acts*: speaking about one’s emotions can be a way of giving a directive. Sometimes, inevitably, I disagree with an interpretation. Nausicaa’s speech at *Od.* 275–88 is read largely in terms of her self-expression (‘these details... give an appealingly vivid picture of a teenage girl’s ageless concerns in matters of love’, 55). That, surely, underestimates the subtlety of Nausicaa’s oblique communication, which adroitly puts everything she cannot say into the mouths of others, leaving only impeccable sentiments of disapproval in her own mouth: she communicates without saying. The presentation could have been improved by the use of tables: numerical data is less easily grasped, and more prone to ambiguity, when embedded in continuous prose (e.g. 26, and frequently). Overall, however, this is a thorough and illuminating investigation of an important aspect of Homeric narrative technique, and Beck is commendably cautious in drawing her conclusions. The book will provide a solid basis for further research (though I doubt whether questions about the ‘implied author’ [194] furnish the most fruitful line of enquiry).

Beck favours ‘seeing the Homeric poems both as orally based poetry and as fundamentally human and accessible forms of behavior’ (3). This perspective, if not absent

² *Hellenica. Selected Papers on Greek Literature and Thought. Volume II. Lyric and Drama.* By M. L. West. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xii + 408. Hardback £85, ISBN: 978-0-19-960502-6.

³ *Speech Presentation in Homeric Epic.* By Deborah Beck. Austin, TX, University of Texas Press, 2012. Pp. xii + 256. Hardback £37, ISBN: 978-0-292-73880-5.

from David F. Elmer's *Poetics of Consent*,⁴ is at least muted by a lexical focus that distracts attention from substantive aspects of scenes of deliberative decision-making. A key lexical item is the use of *epainos/-ein* as an expression of 'fully efficient' consensus in descriptions of the response to a deliberative speech. In the absence of a reference to silence or *epainos*, a 'hypothetical individual familiar with the Greek epic tradition' would be 'at a loss, unable to determine on the basis of prior experience how events are likely to proceed' (73). But even when *epainos* is present, the future course of events cannot be reliably predicted: on Elmer's own evidence, 'there are instances in which the expression of *epainos* does not produce the expected result' (35), that is, it is not 'fully efficient'. One might also question whether guessing what will happen next, rather than attending to the contents of the speeches and assessing their political and practical merits, is the most worthwhile investment of interpretative effort. It is symptomatic that a discussion of Achilles' speech to Thetis shows no interest in *what Achilles says* – only in what the fact that he is saying it signals about 'Achilles' special status as a speaker' (76). Hence no attention is given to what this 'retelling' omits from the primary narrator's account of the quarrelsome assembly, and what the significance of Achilles' suppressions might be. In Book 9, we are assured, 'the ambassadors conclude their mission when Ajax, recognizing that Achilles will make no concession to any claim of obligation to the group, declares that their project of restoring solidarity will not succeed' (122), as if the embassy (like Elmer's quotation) ends at line 627. In reality, the envoys depart only after Ajax's powerful restatement of Achilles' obligations has elicited the first sign of flexibility. None of this is to deny the intelligence and subtlety of Elmer's argument; but those resources are too often diverted into patching up the problems generated by the limitations of his starting-points. To take just one example, the final instance of collective *epainos* (23.539) is rendered ineffectual by Antilochus' protest. Yet this 'provisional *epainos* is of critical significance at the broadest level of the poem's architecture' (194): the poem still follows 'a trajectory leading from the violation of the norm to its eventual restoration', but 'that trajectory reaches its fulfillment only in the interaction between the Homeric performer and his audience'. Elmer thus appeals from the observable data of the text to a hypothetical (and nebulously formulated) transaction outside the text. A simpler conclusion is that Elmer's construction of a 'norm that *epainos* ought to bring into effect the utterance it ratifies' is mistaken: no norm is violated when Antilochus lodges his protest against the collective *epainos*, or when Achilles makes a decision regarding his own possessions. Elmer's reading of Chryses' supplication (63–7) already failed to consider whether collective *epainos* is, or ought to be, as determinative of decisions about an individual's possessions as about collective action. Failing to distinguish between entitlement and power (which might be exercised legitimately but imprudently), or between the power to maintain a unilateral position in ordinary circumstances and in the crisis created by a virulent plague (65), makes it possible to postulate a general norm – but that norm is insensitive to the multiplicity of variables with which realistic deliberative debate must deal.

⁴ *The Poetics of Consent. Collective Decision Making and the Iliad*. By David F. Elmer. Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. Pp. xvi + 313. Hardback £28.50, ISBN: 978-1-4214-0826-2.

Stuart Lawrence⁵ aims at ‘a more comprehensive and systematic’ account of ‘moral awareness’ in Greek tragedy: by this he means tragic agents’ recognition of and ability to reflect on moral issues, ‘and, in some cases, their consciousness of so doing’ (1). His approach is largely through narrative rehearsal of his sample of plays, with interspersed interpretative comment. Used judiciously, that can be an effective presentational device; applied to fifteen plays over 250 pages, it becomes wearisome, and the big picture is hard to discern. Moreover, key interpretative positions may be infiltrated rather than explicitly defended. That ‘emotion obstructs moral judgement’ in Philoctetes’ case is asserted in a peremptory parenthesis (194), but should have been argued. It is not self-evident that, on the advice of a youth who has behaved erratically and whose current attitude remains unintelligible (1362–6: it is unintelligible because Neoptolemus is, in fact, still concealing things from him), morality requires Philoctetes to expose himself to personal risk (1358–62) and set aside a principled refusal to associate with people who have (as he sees it) shown him no loyalty, justice, or compassion. To speak of ‘emotion’ effaces the difference between justified moral outrage and petulant annoyance. Lawrence never fully comes to terms with the moral significance of emotions: though he acknowledges that a lack of emotional engagement ‘impoverishes our moral understanding’, he declares this ‘paradoxical’ (22). That is not the only weakness in the preliminary matter. For example: ‘Autonomy cannot apply to this spontaneous emergence of mental events in consciousness... Autonomy can only begin to apply when consciousness reacts to these events’ (32). By ‘reaction’, Lawrence means an ‘agent’s conscious reflection on these spontaneously emerging events’ (Lawrence does not specify what he means by the contested term ‘conscious’). The implication that someone who unreflectively performs a characteristically generous action has not acted ‘autonomously’ is puzzling; but if autonomy is so conceived, it cannot be a ‘critical factor in moral responsibility’ (31). Still, the discussions of individual plays contain some shrewd and illuminating observations. Lawrence is not entirely free of the unreasonable censoriousness to which (as is common in scholarship on tragedy) disengaged observers passing judgement on people acting under extreme stress in complex situations are prone; but he keeps a surer grip on the complexity of the situations than one finds in many interpretations. I have little doubt that this is a book I will visit repeatedly.

The idea that oratory was eclipsed in post-classical Greece, always incredible, has come under increasing pressure in recent decades; a concerted attempt to do justice to oratory in the Hellenistic period is overdue. The volume edited by Christos Kremmydas and Kathryn Tempest⁶ would therefore be welcome, even if it were less successful than it is: there are some weak pieces, but the overall quality is high. I wish, though, that Graham Shipley’s afterword had avoided clichés such as ‘all the tricks of the orator’s trade’ (365), where the choice of words (why ‘tricks’, not ‘techniques’?) implicitly endorses the ‘cynicism about rhetoric’ from which he initially

⁵ *Moral Awareness in Greek Tragedy*. By Stuart Lawrence. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. x + 335. Hardback £75, ISBN: 978-0-19-965975-3; paperback £25, ISBN: 978-0-19-65976-0.

⁶ *Hellenistic Oratory. Continuity and Change*. Edited by Christos Kremmydas and Kathryn Tempest. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. x + 420. Hardback £90, ISBN: 978-0-19-965431-4.

seemed to distance himself (361). John Thornton's remark that 'in order to impose their political judgements on the readers' audience, the two historians [Polybius and Phylarchus] had behaved as orators in a court, or in front of an assembly' (37) reveals a similar tendency to think of rhetoric as merely presentational. No-one, surely, believes that orators attempting to persuade a court or assembly can 'impose' their judgements (are their hearers unable to think for themselves?). But it is also unrealistic to assume that persuasion and judgement can so easily be disentangled. The way one perceives, and therefore judges, situations can hardly fail to be influenced by the techniques for analysing a situation's persuasive resources internalized through rhetorical training: what one thinks probable, and what one finds plausible, exercise a reciprocal influence.

*Greek Comedy and the Discourse of Genres*⁷ achieves an even higher average standard, and several contributions are exceptional. In such a strong collective performance, picking out individual stars may be invidious. But since my last batch of reviews (*G&R* 60 [2013], 317) chided Michael Silk for an exasperating absence of articulate analysis, I must in fairness acknowledge that his chapter ('The Greek Dramatic Genres: Theoretical Perspectives') marks a return to his brilliant best (an accolade which does not necessarily imply agreement). Eric Csapo ('Comedy and the *Pompe*: Dionysian Genre-crossing') also impressed, as did Richard Rawles on Aristophanes' Simonides. Matthew Wright opens his 'Comedy Versus Tragedy in *Wasps*' with the opening of *Wasps*: 'It is the middle of the night, and two slaves are sitting outside a house... this all sounds distinctly like a tragic scenario' (205). That made me wonder: how unlike a tragedy can a comic scene be and still be "doing" tragedy? That is a genuine question, and Wright recognizes that he is primed to see the phenomenon he describes (213): his subtle discussion is thoughtful and thought-provoking.

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Latin Literature

First up for review here is a timely collection of essays edited by Joseph Farrell and Damien Nelis analysing the way the Republican past is represented and remembered in poetry from the Augustan era.¹ Joining the current swell of scholarship on cultural and literary memory in ancient Greece and Rome, and building on work that has been done in the last decade on the relationship between poetry and historiography (such as *Clio and the Poets*, also co-edited by Nelis),² this volume takes particular

⁷ *Greek Comedy and the Discourse of Genres*. Edited by Emmanuela Bakola, Lucia Prauscello, and Mario Telò. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xvi + 404. Hardback £65, ISBN: 978-1-107-03331-3.

¹ *Augustan Poetry and the Roman Republic*. Edited by Joseph Farrell and Damien P. Nelis. Oxford, Oxford University Press. Pp. xi + 393. Hardback £80, ISBN: 978-0-19-958722-3.

² D. S. Levene and D. P. Nelis (eds.), *Clio and the Poets. Augustan Poetry and the Traditions of Ancient Historiography*, *Mnemosyne* Supplement, 224 (Leiden, 2002).