HESIOD VINDICATED

S. NELSON: *God and the Land. The Metaphysics of Farming in Hesiod and Vergil* (with a translation of Hesiod's *Works and Days* by David Grene). Pp. xvi + 252. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Cased, £45. ISBN: 0-19-511740-9.

This is a comparative account of two poems about farming, *Works and Days* and *Georgics*, predicated on the very valid assumption that both of them are indeed about farming, the agricultural practices they describe being emblematic of the bigger picture rather than symbolic. There is an obvious rationale to the coupling of these texts, although it encourages a simplification of the relationship between Hesiod's and Virgil's *Ascraea carmina* which N. does not fully resist: neither the self-conscious complexity of the literary ancestry of the *Georgics* (which encompasses much more than Hesiod) nor the question of what Hesiod had come to represent in the interim are considered at any length: Callimachus is mentioned once, in a quotation within a footnote with which N. disagrees (p. 197 n. 1).

With Hesiod N.'s aim is to build upon the recent scholarly trend to acquit the author of *Works and Days* of compositional incompetence. The work is not the 'mishmash of barely related information' (p. 42) it has been perceived to be by such as M. L. West, N. holds, but a coherent and unified whole, the main unifying principle being the overarching dispensation of Zeus, imposing order on mankind in the shape of the necessary hardship of human existence and the strict code of behaviour it demands of mortals in response. This dispensation works itself out equally on the farm, at sea, and in the wider world which is the context of the instructions at the start and end of the poem and of which the agricultural life is a kind of microcosm. Furthermore some of the apparent imbalances and incoherences of the text can be explained, N. argues, by Hesiod's desire for vivid dramatization. Thus the sixty lines devoted to the grim month of Lenaion and the fewer than ten lines covering spring to harvest, far from being a case of poor organization, in fact dramatize the contrast of the 'long, frustrating wait of winter . . . with the bustle of spring' (p. 56). The argument is made through detailed readings of the text, which must be judged individually, but the impulse to recuperate Hesiod through a fuller appreciation of the implications of his agricultural theme is a sound and promising one, and the explication of passages such as the connection of 41–2 (pp. 126–7) extremely compelling. Hesiod will undoubtedly remain some way short of flawless in most readers' eyes (even N. cannot redeem satisfactorily the inept image of Hope trapped in Pandora's jar, pp. 66–7, for example), but that does not diminish N.'s achievement in elucidating the poem as a whole.

Hesiod receives by some distance the better treatment of the two authors. N.'s reading of the *Georgics* represents a fairly standard rehearsal of the current orthodoxy (Virgil offers a 'multiplicity of visions', p. 94). Her last section on Virgil naturally addresses the Aristaeus epyllion, but the form and style of the argument, an *ex cathedra* exposition of a reading with minimal acknowledgement of the numerous other theories about this controversial passage, begs the question why this interpretation should be preferred to any other. It should be noted, however, that this is a criticism N. anticipates (pp. xi–xii).

N.'s aphoristic style can yield some pleasing turns of speech: 'Vergil deliberately puts his small beer into a crystal goblet' (p. 92) is a nice way of describing the collision of poetic form and mundane content in the *Georgics.* But too often also it tends to the

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glib or downright false (thus p. 34: the 'greatest exploit' of the Myceneans 'was the Trojan War. It was also their last.'). Her remarks on the performability of the Hesiodic poems (pp. 42–3) are equally ill-informed: it is not true to say that 'Hesiod's poems, like Homer's, are too long for a single performance', and N.'s tentative use of formulaic theory at this point to explain the (ostensible) discontinuity of *Works and Days* is a non-starter which she rapidly abandons. To some extent such lapses can be explained by the intended audience of N.'s book, one wider than 'professional Classicists' (p. ix); hence N. claims to be relegating her allusions to more strictly academic debates to the very extensive footnotes. There may be doubts as to whether N. has really succeeded in making Hesiod accessible to the general reader, or fallen between academic and popular stools.

Grene's translation of the *Works and Days*, with which the main body of the book begins, captures the ruggedness of the original well, although I can see no grounds for his claim (p. 7) to be replicating Hesiod's metre.

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ALCAEUS

G. LIBERMAN (ed., trans.): *Alcée*. Fragments (Collection des Universités de France publiée sous le patronage de l'Association Guillaume Budé). Pp. cxxvii + 95; 96–279 (1–195 double; 2 vols); 2 pls, 1 map. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1999. Cased. ISBN: 2-251-00476-9.

Since Edgar Lobel set new standards in the 1920s, the Lesbian poets have been fortunate in their editors. The *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta* of Lobel and Page (Oxford, 1955) still stands as a gaunt landmark with only slight signs of erosion. Eva-Maria Voigt's monumental *Sappho et Alcaeus* of 1971 has remained unchallenged as the edition of first recourse, while D. A. Campbell's Loeb (*Greek Lyric* i, 1982) reproduces most of its virtues at a much lower price. Now, to replace the long outdated Budé volume by A. Puech (after T. Reinach), we have an outstandingly good Alcaeus from Gauthier Liberman. Here is an editor in complete command of his material, one who is not only extremely well informed but has a mind of his own and good judgement to match: *rara auis in terris*.

The long and rich introduction begins by sketching the situation of music and poetry at Lesbos in the seventh century and noting the dominance of Ionian epic, which is such as to constitute 'un arrière-fond' of Alcaeus' and Sappho's poetry. Next the events and chronology of Alcaeus' life are examined; the view that he, Sappho, and Pittacus are to be down-dated to the time of Croesus is firmly rejected. Then the character of his poetry is discussed, and the circumstances of its production and transmission. L. rightly concludes that it was predominantly sympotic in origin, enjoying some oral diffusion, but necessarily (for survival in such quantity) collected in writing at an early stage. Theophrastus and Phaenias, as natives of Lesbos, perhaps played a rôle in stimulating Peripatetic study of the poems and so giving them passage to Alexandria (pp. xxxviiif.), where they were imitated by Theocritus and edited successively by Aristophanes and Aristarchus. The orthography of the Alexandrian edition may have reflected that of a fourth-century Lesbian text (pp. xliii–xlv). The poems were not arranged by metre or genre; there are perhaps signs of an attempt to

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