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SUBJECT REVIEWS

(* denotes that a book is specially recommended for school libraries.)

Greek Literature

When a new translation of the *Oresteia* reaches the Underworld, Aeschylus (I'm told) first checks to see how faithfully it renders his carefully explicit parallel between the Furies' and Athene's ideologies: μήτ' ἄναρκτον . . . μήτε δεσποτούμενον (*Eum.* 526f.), μήτ' ἄναρχον μήτε δεσποτούμενον (*Eum.* 696). Shapiro and Burian[1] don't do too well on this test: 'praise no life that no law reins, no life a tyrant rules' and 'revere neither tyranny nor anarchy', muffling the echo to secure the neat but gratuitous rein/rule pun. In general, though, that same linguistic dexterity makes this a distinguished, sometimes brilliant, rendering. Its merits, including Burian's skilful introduction, will keep it in the land of the living and out of Aeschylus' hands for some time yet. But I'm reluctant to adopt it for my *Oresteia* course. If I ask students to compare *Eumenides* 526 and 696, I don't want them comparing 'Queen Athena, let me speak first' with 'I trust him; and my father will help me from the grave'. Constant exhortations to ignore meaningless marginal line-numbers are annoying to all concerned; but capitulation won't help students cope with references in the secondary literature. When we have a globally comprehensible system for identifying passages from tragedies, why do translators insist on sowing confusion by inventing mutually incomprehensible alternatives? It's crazy. There are graver crimes. Even the laid-back Sophocles, εὔκολος μὲν ἔνθαδ', εὔκολος δ' ἐκεῖ, might be annoyed to find a translator turning ἄκλαυτος, ἄφιλος, ἀνυμέναιος (*Ant.* 876) into 'no one to weep for me, *my friends*, no wedding-song'. That's Fagles. Robert Bagg[2] offers 'no friends, no mourners, no wedding songs': infinitely better, but lacking the force and linguistic sensitivity of 'unwept, unwed, unfriended'. That's Storr's Loeb, which just goes to show that you can't judge a translation from a single line. And my sample from Bagg is not entirely representative: he is usually tauter and rhythmically more effective. But success is intermittent. For example, he conspicuously fails to rise to Oedipus' terrifying curse on Polyneices. Why, exactly, is 'some things that won't make him happy' less menacing than the corresponding understatement in Sophocles (*OC* 1352)? Readers of Brad Levett's introduction to *Trachiniae*[3] won't need a translation: there's a 6-page synopsis to spare them the trouble of reading the play. But let's not be too grumpy: this is an excellent addition to a strong series. Levett provides economically informative contextualization, and chapters on plot (surprisingly short), character (much longer, with good reason: grasping the complexities and ambiguities of motivation is crucial in this play), performance, theme, and

[1] *The Oresteia, Aeschylus*. Translated Alan Shapiro and Peter Burian. Oxford UP, 2004. Pp. x + 285. Paperback £6.50.

[2] *The Oedipus Plays of Sophocles: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Kolonos, Antigone*. Translated by Robert Bagg. University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2004. Pp. xiv + 269. Paperback £16.95.

[3] *Sophocles: Women of Trachis*. By Brad Levett. Duckworth, London, 2004. Pp. 155. Paperback £10.99.

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(unsurprisingly short) reception. Methodological issues are raised in an admirably lucid and thought-provoking way. Not everything convinces. Levett reads the play as exposing inconsistencies in the ideology of family and desire. How? 'In particular', because it suggests that sexual restraint is needed in men as well as women (91f.). Was the destructive potential of male sexuality really a novel and subversive insight in fifth-century Athens? This is another study of Greek tragedy which fails to persuade me that a dramatization of catastrophic norm-violations should be read as a critique rather than a confirmation of the norms. Of course, *we* can legitimately find confirmation in the plays of *our* repudiation of those norms. But we should be wary of assuming that what is, for us, a truth *about* Greek culture was also a truth *for* Greek culture. That way lies a confusion of horizons, rather than a fusion – to adapt Gadamer's slogan, invoked by Levett in another context (113). Gorgias notoriously argued that nothing is; or, if it is, it cannot be comprehended; or, if it can, it cannot be communicated. A philosophical response would not be content with rejecting the (obviously self-refuting) conclusion, but would engage with Gorgias' arguments. That requires hard thinking about fundamental concepts. If, on the other hand, Gorgias had just presented some far-fetched make-believe and said, 'So nothing can be communicated', no philosophical response would be needed: 'you made that up!' would suffice. Matthew Wright[4] argues that Euripides adopted the latter approach, and would have us believe that this should be taken seriously as philosophy – indeed, that Euripides was improving on Gorgias, 'doing something which did not occur to Gorgias' (277). But Gorgias could hardly have failed to realise that, in the absence of evidence, any set of alleged facts can be challenged; that philosophically shallow point is certainly less interesting than the possibility, explored in the *Encomium of Helen*, that any set of facts taken as given can be reinterpreted. Wright claims that 'Euripides is directing his audience towards a definite conclusion about the nature of human knowledge' (228). Yet he does not seem entirely sure what that conclusion is: '*much* of human action is based on delusion', '*all* appearances are *potentially* deceptive', 'there is . . . *only* illusion and delusion' (280, 285, 337: my emphasis). Which is it to be? The slippage would perhaps make sense if Euripides' intentions are 'unknowable', as Wright declares (356). Puzzlingly, he thinks he can tell us what those unknowable intentions were: 'the reason for Euripides' having composed these . . . tragedies' (386f.), the 'basic seriousness' of his intention (157), and the nature of his 'message' (156). I embarked on this book with high hopes, but was in the end frustrated by the many deficiencies in consistency, clarity, and rigour in its argumentation. And while I am not especially squeamish about robust polemic, accusing scholars with whom one disagrees of wilful dishonesty (230 n. 16, 344) strikes me as injudicious. Tragedy also figures in the first of two volumes on myth in Greek literature, covering the archaic and classical[5] and the Hellenistic and imperial[6] periods respectively. They are the belated fruit of conferences held in 1994 and 1995. The delay is regrettable: a postscript to Richard Buxton's thoughtful essay on tragic myths and the Athenian *polis* notes that the discussion has moved on. Other

[4] *Euripides' Escape-Tragedies.* A Study of *Helen, Andromeda,* and *Iphigenia among the Taurians*. By Matthew Wright. Oxford UP, 2005. Pp. viii + 433. Hardback £70.

[5] *Mitos en la literatura griega arcaica y clásica* . Edited by Juan Antonio López Férez. Madrid, Ediciones Clásicas, 2002. Pp. 606. €32.88.

[6] *Mitos en la literatura griega helenística e imperial*. Edited by Juan Antonio López Férez. Madrid, Ediciones Clásicas, 2003. Pp. 579. €30.50.

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interesting contributions include Jaume Pòrtulas on Amphion and Bernhard Zimmermann on dithyramb; the editor contributes, not just a book-length (156 pages) treatment of Euripides, but also a substantial (70 pages) essay on Galen – not an author I expected to meet in this context. That reflects the wide range covered by the 45 papers. I almost wrote 'admirably wide': but, as often with such collections, one is left uncertain whether the disparate contents add up to a sufficiently coherent whole to make the enterprise worthwhile. I had similar doubts about *Homeric Megathemes*.[7] This collects ten papers, some new, some not readily accessible, none previously available in English. Yet at an average of 14 generously formatted pages they are rather slight: megathemes, but mini-essays. The author repeatedly declines opportunities for a more expansive treatment, even where he declares detailed examination 'necessary' (37). And there are curious oversights: a discussion of unexpected features of the 'outcome' of the first battle of the *Iliad* (21f.) ought to notice that the battle continues beyond the end of book 4. The 'megathemes' are war, homecoming, and *homilia* ('communicative exchange', 3). The stated aim is 'to emphasize the comparative and distinctive affinities between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*' (1); but are these very broad concepts fine-grained enough to reveal *distinctive* affinities in an epic tradition that also included (for example) the *Little Iliad* and the *Nostoi*? By contrast, *The Resonance of Epic*[8] is less concerned with distinctive affinities than with 'the place of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* within the wider epic tradition' (8), including Hesiod as well as the cycle and the hymns. 'Resonance' is used to encapsulate the 'ability to evoke a web of associations and implications by referring to the wider epic tradition' (9). The term provides a useful handle on a phenomenon that is not, surely, as unfamiliar to scholarship as Graziosi and Haubold sometimes imply. How we are to conceive this resonance is another question. Here the conception is ambitiously expansive: 'we have used the term resonance to describe the connection between traditional words and phrases and the overall shape of the cosmos' (61). Epic in its totality is seen as presenting a cosmic history. And, despite the opening exhortations to distinguish ancient from modern conceptions of truth and fiction, this idea is developed in a systematizing way perhaps more characteristic of scholars, ancient and modern, than of archaic audiences: a tangled web of variants is converted into an orderly network. If the gods are depicted differently in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the authors want to explain the differences 'in terms of a gradual development in the history of the gods and their relationship with mortals' (75). But think of how we use proverbs: systematization would raise all sorts of problems (why don't many hands spoil the broth? or many cooks make light work?) irrelevant to our unsystematic use of a reservoir of resources that the experience of generations has found useful for articulating the demands of unpredictably diverse situations. The very notion that early audiences thought of Homeric poems as 'a reliable and authoritative account of the past' (42), though in some sense right, risks assimilation to familiar notions of what constitutes a reliable and authoritative account and distraction from the evidence in Homer and Hesiod of a sophisticated awareness of the deceptiveness of poetry. In their discussion of *Theogony* 27f. the authors do their best to avoid this trap, but end up in a precariously unstable balancing act: 'we may not expect every song that *seems*

[7] *Homeric Megathemes*. War-Homilia-Homecoming. By D. N. Maronitis. Translated by D. Connolly. Lanham MD, Rowman and Littlefield, 2004. Pp. xiv + 186. £53.

[8] *Homer. The Resonance of Epic*. By Barbara Graziosi and Johannes Haubold. Duckworth, London, 2005. Pp. 176. Paperback £16.99.

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true to be so in fact. However, we would certainly expect a reliable account to bear signs of its truthfulness' (47). In other words, false accounts may seem true, but only reliable ones have signs of truthfulness. Overall, then, I was unconvinced. But many stimulating and illuminating ideas make this lucid and concise study a book well worth reading. Carlos Megino Rodríguez[9] undertakes an exhaustive semantic study of the key terms for the psyche in the *Iliad*. He aims to clarify the semantic field of each term and the connections between them, and concludes that Homeric humans are unitary beings with a distinct sense of identity. This is a sober and careful approach to a subject that has produced some wildly implausible theories. Predictably, the terms display partial synonymy to such an extent that the criteria of word-choice in any context are not purely semantic. So the detailed findings are likely to contribute relatively little to the interpretation of particular passages. The absence of an *index locorum* will in any case be a serious obstacle to those whose interest lies in that direction, though specialists interested in the systematics of the reconstruction of Homeric psychology will find the analytic table of contents useful. Homer stands at the upper end of the chronological range explored by J. C. B. Petropoulos in a study of erotic motifs and images in ancient, medieval, and modern Greek popular tradition.[10] He aims, among other things 'to delineate further the vast penumbra of popular song . . . which presumably underlay and fertilised many literary genres in antiquity' and 'to define more precisely the hypothetical corpus of traditional material that makes up the inheritance of medieval and modern folk poetry in general' (viii). After a brief discussion of methodological issues raised by the reconstruction of popular culture from literary sources and by the investigation of possible cultural continuities, he devotes the longest chapter to nuptial praise, both in its formal aspects and its characteristic contents and motifs. Shorter chapters discuss nuptial blame, harvest imagery and the apple motif, and amatory wishes. The main text is relatively short: more than half the book is taken up with supporting material – illustrative texts in English translation ('testimonia'), appendices, addenda, and extensive endnotes. This makes for a cumbersome read: one has to refer simultaneously to text and testimonia (often cued in text only by a cryptic code, so that one cannot tell what is being referred to without checking the testimonia) and end-notes. But the ordered assembly of so much material will make this a useful resource for future research. Gideon Nisbet[11] investigates Greek skoptic epigram in the early centuries CE. None of the epigrammatists he discusses is a familiar figure, unless (a plausible hypothesis) Loukianos is Lucian; but even he is not familiar in this role. The book provides a welcome, if often inevitably (and unapologetically) inconclusive, introduction to material little (if at all) known to most of us; but if there had been more of it, I would have welcomed it even more. The exposition is too often elliptical; the author perhaps forgets that others know less about the subject than he does, and in many passages more information was needed to help readers grasp the point of a fleeting allusion or passing assertion. Arguments are often not developed as fully as they should be; awareness of the limits to what argument can achieve sometimes

[9] *El pensamiento de Homero sobre la realidad psicológica en la Iliada*. By Carlos Megino Rodríguez. Madrid, Ediciones Universidad Autonoma de Madrid, 2003. Pp. 327. Paperback.

[10] *Eroticism in Ancient and Medieval Greek Poetry*. By J. C. B. Petropoulos. London, Duckworth, 2003. Pp. xiv + 206. Hardback £45.

[11] *Greek Epigram in the Roman Empire*. Martial's Forgotten Rivals. By Gideon Nisbet. Oxford UP, 2003. Pp. xviii + 217. Hardback £50.

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topples over into insouciance. If you think the 'cheap and nasty' book-production of papyrus fragments of Nicarchus significant enough to merit repeated mention (xvi, 74f., 114), shouldn't you tell your readers something about the nature of this evidence? If you are dismissive of biographical readings, should you allow your distaste for certain poems to lure you into speculation about a poet's 'personal hang-ups' (90)? If you have argued at length (and persuasively) for a symposiastic setting for skoptic epigram, can you also maintain that 'skoptic epigram comes from nowhere' (209)? And, to indulge a pet peeve, if you say that a first-century author 'catches the mood of a dawning age of Greek culture, the Second Sophistic' (16), does it make sense to footnote Philostratus, whose second sophistic dawned at the end of the fourth century BC? Nisbet writes in a very individual style, expressing the hope that the book 'will be more or less fun to read' (xvii); it is, more or less. But the highly figured language risks alienating both readers who don't know what 'zinesters and webmonkeys' are (xvi), and readers who do know what 'reverse engineering' is (114).

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Latin Literature

The first book in this collection is a reprint of Van Sickle's *The Design of Virgil's Bucolics*[1] originally published in 1978. Since then, much has been written on the topic and consequently the author has devoted a preface of thirty pages to revisit the issues and, with a fair amount of autobiography, to accept or dismiss more recent work. But the central idea, that the *Eclogues* are a unified piece of work, remains unchallenged. Pedants will notice that the introduction of a new preface has played havoc with the pagination. There must be some question as to whether we need another translation of the *Aeneid*. Whether or not we do, Stanley Lombardo[2] has prepared one. As so often with modern translations, no attempt has been made to tie the translation to the line numbers of the text. To illustrate his style, I offer his version of Dido's speech at 4.305–41:

> But the Queen (are lovers ever really fooled?)
> Had a presentiment of treachery. Fearing all
> Even when all seemed safe, she was the first
> To detect a shift in the wind. It was evil Rumor
> Who whispered that the fleet was preparing
> To set out to sea.
> She went out of her mind,
> Raging through the city
> *as wild and furious*
> *As a maenad when the holy mysteries have begun,*
> *Her blood shaking when she hears the cry 'Bacchus!'*
> *In the nocturnal frenzy on Mount Cithaeron,*
> *And the mountain echoes the sacred call.*

[1] *The Design of Virgil's Bucolics* (Second edition). By John B. Van Sickle. Bristol Classical Press, 2004. Pp. xxxvi + 254. £18.

[2] *Virgil Aeneid*. Translated by Stanley Lombardo, Introduction by W. R. Johnson. Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2005. Pp. lxxi + 355. Hardback £24.95; paperback £7.95.

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