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SUBJECT REVIEWS

Greek literature

Those of us who spent February glued to coverage of the Milano-Cortina Winter Olympics will find much that is relevant in Heather L. Reid and Phillip Mitsis' book *How to Compete: An Ancient Guide to the Virtues of Sports.*[1] We find in Lucian's *Anacharsis*, introduced and translated by the authors, a familiar kind of bewilderment. The dialogue, written in the second century CE but set in sixth-century-BCE Athens, stages a debate at the Lyceum between Solon – lawgiver and sports superfan – and Anacharsis, a Scythian visitor who cannot fathom why anyone would submit to such indignities. Anacharsis surveys the gymnasium, appalled by what he sees: young men grappling in clay, throttling one another, 'slithering through one another's hands just like eels' (5). When Solon explains that the winners receive crowns of wild olive, pine, and wild celery, Anacharsis bursts out laughing. 'As if', he says, 'it isn't possible for anyone with a desire for apples to get them without trouble, or to be crowned with celery or pine without their face being smeared with mud or being kicked in the stomach by their antagonists' (17). I suspect Anacharsis would have found kindred amusement in the fact that the Milano-Cortina medals kept detaching from their ribbons: the trappings change, the absurdity endures. So too does the spectacle itself: Spanish figure skater Tomàs-Llorenç Guarino Sabaté spent the season performing in a Minions costume to a medley of *Despicable Me* songs, only to discover, days before the Games, that Universal Pictures had not cleared the music for Olympic broadcast. The crisis was resolved; the Minion skated; the IOC's dignity survived, just.

And yet Solon's defence of Greek athletics – that through suffering the body is purged, tempered, made fit for both civic life and war – finds its modern counterpart in the extraordinary stories that emerged from the Dolomites. Federica Brignone, the Italian alpine skier, arrived at her home Games just ten months after a crash that left her with multiple leg fractures, a torn ACL (anterior cruciate ligament), and what she described as injuries that 'normally take more than two years to recover from'. She won two gold medals. Lindsey Vonn's comeback, by contrast, ended with a high-speed crash and an airlift to hospital, but from her recovery bed she insisted 'the ride was worth the fall'. Solon tells Anacharsis that athletes must 'become accustomed to enduring exertions and to stand up to blows and to not turn away for fear of wounds' (75–7). The translation into twenty-first-century terms proves disturbingly literal.

Solon's case rests on more than individual endurance. Athletics, he argues, prepares citizens for war: the man who has learned to grapple slippery opponents will carry wounded comrades from danger and heave enemies over his head (87–91). The gymnasium is a rehearsal for the battlefield. This argument sits uneasily with the modern

[1] *How to Compete: An Ancient Guide to the Virtues of Sports. Lucian.* By Heather L. Reid and Phillip Mitsis. Princeton/Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2026. Pp. xxiv + 169. Hardback $18.95, ISBN: 978-0-691-28140-7.

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Olympic ideal of peaceful competition between nations: and Milano-Cortina exposed the tension. Ukrainian skeleton racer Vladyslav Heraskevych was disqualified for refusing to remove a 'helmet of remembrance' bearing the images of twenty-four Ukrainian athletes and coaches killed in the war with Russia. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) cited its 'athlete expression guidelines' which prohibit political statements; Heraskevych replied that there are things 'more important than medals'. Here the ancient and modern conceptions of athletics collide. For Solon, honouring the war dead would be entirely consonant with the purpose of sport; the gymnasium exists precisely to produce citizens capable of defending and dying for their city. The IOC's insistence on political neutrality represents a rupture with this tradition, an attempt to cordon sport off from the world for which it was once, on Solon's account, integral preparation. Whether that rupture is admirable or evasive remains, perhaps, the sharpest question the Games left unanswered.

There is, however, a dimension which the dialogue does not quite reach. The *Anacharsis* is preoccupied with those who are to be seen: the athlete before the assembled Greeks, the crowned victor paraded before the spectators. But sport also depends upon those who are *not* seen: the invisible infrastructure that makes the spectacle possible. At the Predazzo Ski Jumping Stadium, dozens of workers armed with industrial leaf blowers worked in perfect harmony to clear the track between jumps (one of them, insufficiently attentive, caught ski jumper Ben Loomis on the shoulder as he began his descent). We also mustn't forget Nazgul, the Czechoslovakian wolfdog who wandered onto the cross-country ski course and crossed the finish line alongside the elite skiers, earning the biggest cheer of the day. These intrusions from the margins are what philosophical accounts of sport tend to exclude: the labour, the accident – the cheerful indifference of dogs. They remind us that the gymnasium, like the Olympic venue, is embedded in a world that does not much care for its distinctions.

The *Anacharsis* ends in *aporia*: the visitor defers his response, promising to think quietly over what Solon has said, and the dialogue closes without resolution. Whether sport educates, whether it benefits communities, whether we take it too seriously – these questions remain suspended. But perhaps the aporetic form is itself instructive. In one of the dialogue's most striking images, Solon compares athletic strength to the Hydra: 'when one of her heads is cut off, two others always spring up instead' (111). The claim is that exertion produces more force than it expends: that the body, unlike a jar of wine, does not empty with use. It is an optimistic physiology, and a suggestive metaphor for the arguments themselves. Every answer Solon offers generates new objections from Anacharsis; every justification for athletics opens fresh grounds for scepticism. The contemporary debate is no different. We argue about commercialization and corruption, about nationalism and neutrality, about broken bodies and broken medals, and the arguments proliferate faster than we can resolve them. I think Lucian would not have been surprised. He gave Anacharsis the last word, and the last word was a deferral; he needed to go home and have a think.

'Living well is probably a goal that anyone reading a how-to book has already adopted and even recommitted to many times in their life, perhaps as recently as last New Year's Eve', Jeffrey Beneker observes in his introduction to his new translation of Plutarch's *How to Listen*, again for the 'Ancient Wisdom for Modern Readers' series (xi):[2]

[2] *How to Listen: An Ancient Guide to Learning from Others. Plutarch.* By Jeffrey Beneker. Princeton/Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2026. Pp. xxv + 122. Hardback $18.95, ISBN: 978-0-691-26558-2.

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'If living well is our destination, then according to Plutarch, listening well puts us on the right path.' The formula is neat, and the book that follows is disarmingly practical: advice addressed nearly two thousand years ago to a young man named Nicander, who was about to begin the serious study of philosophy. Nicander, Beneker suggests, is 'the equivalent of today's first-year college student' (xv). Today we might be tempted to add: 'and likely to be scrolling through his phone during the lecture'.

The comparison is not frivolous. Plutarch's essay is a meditation on attention: how to cultivate it, how to protect it, and what corrupts it. This starts early: '[W]e should protect children from corrupting types of speech, until the beneficial type, nurtured by philosophy and embedded in their character, has taken command like a guardian over those aspects of character that are especially malleable and easily seduced.' (9–11) This arrives with peculiar force as I'm reading this book in March 2026, while the UK government consults on whether to ban social media for children under sixteen: a measure already adopted in Australia and under consideration across Europe. The debate turns, as Plutarch's does, on what enters through the ears and eyes of the young, and what it does to them once inside. One teenager, quoted in a parliamentary debate, pleaded: 'Help – I just can't stop.' Plutarch would have understood. Desires, he warns Nicander, are released from their chains once parental authority recedes. Unless reason takes their place, the young man will find himself ruled by masters harsher than any schoolteacher (3).

But *How to Listen* is not simply a warning; it is a manual. Plutarch catalogues the varieties of bad listener: the diffident, the lazy, the contemptuous, the over-enthusiastic who makes a nuisance of himself, the over-confident who asks questions only to show off. The envious listener is particularly singled out. He cannot pay attention to what is being said because his mind is elsewhere, 'evaluating its own skills, to see if they fall short of the speaker's talents' (25), then scanning the audience for signs of approval. The description fits the seminar room; and it fits, *mutatis mutandis*, the relentless self-comparison of social media feeds. So what does good listening require? Plutarch's answer is neither passive nor permissive. The student must learn to distinguish substance from style, to resist the seductions of eloquence, to commend what deserves commendation and criticize what deserves criticism – but always with courtesy. He must ask questions, but not too many, and not to show off. He must endure reproof without collapsing into self-pity. Above all, he must recognize that he is not a container to be filled but kindling to be ignited (105).

Plutarch's advice is genuinely demanding. He warns Nicander that he may find himself in a chaotic learning environment, unable to assume that his fellow students will behave or his instructor will keep them in line; to succeed, he must find ways to maintain focus regardless. This is not spoon-feeding. It is the 'teach a man to fish' school of pedagogy: the insight that learning is not transmission but construction, and that the learner must put in the work. It concerns transferable skills and graduate outcomes and intended learning objectives and all those things. So, should we assign Plutarch to our first-years? I am increasingly inclined to think so. The questions he raises – about attention, about authority, about the relationship between hearing and character – are not going away. The government consultation closes in May, and the arguments will only multiply. In the meantime, we could do worse than to hand our students a short, sharp manual on how to sit still, pay attention, *and* think for themselves. They might even put down their phones.

Pantelis Michelakis' *Encounters with the Plague in Homer, Sophocles, and Thucydides* brings together three of the earliest and most influential accounts of plague visitations in

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Western literature:[3] Homer's *Iliad* Book 1 (1–487), Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, and Thucydides' account of the Athenian plague in Book 2 of his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. What unites the plague accounts in these otherwise disparate texts, Michelakis argues, is not simply the subject matter but the narrative function: all three are one-off, high-impact events (2) that foreground crisis (death, disorder, uncertainty: 4) and mark turning points in their larger narratives (5). The question at the book's core is 'how a destructive force within narrative becomes a creative force for narrative itself' (1).

This is a compelling formulation, and Michelakis pursues it through thematic chapters on language, space, time, knowledge, emotions, and politics. Plague, he argues, functions as both a 'disruptive force that breaks down distinctions between and across … networks' and a 'generative force that shows the capacity of narrative to expose the heterogeneous parts of such networks and the complex interconnections within and between them' (1). The analogy between biological contagion and textual transmission runs throughout, in the transmission of disease as running parallel to the transmission of ideas, concepts, emotions, and culture itself (3). In this account, plague becomes 'a problem that not only threatens human bodies but has a wider impact on social, political, and cultural systems, as well as systems of knowledge and affect' (3).

There is much here that resonates with recent work on narrative agency. Joel Christensen's *Storylife* that I discussed in my last review argues that stories are living things with their own capacity to replicate and spread, with both beneficial and harmful effects.[4] Michelakis offers a more rigorous theoretical grounding for similar claims. His concept of 'literary contagion' explicitly 'concerns transmission as a non-human type of agency operating on the margins of the known, poorly understood but strongly felt and intensely imagined' (13). Where Christensen's analogies between narrative and biological life remained largely metaphorical, Michelakis pursues what he calls 'a return to ancient anxieties about the power of narrative to spread in ways that cannot be fully controlled or understood' (13). The invitation is to 'think of the generation and circulation of canonical narrative through the transmission of contagious disease': a mode of analysis that operates 'outside rigid disciplinary divides between history, narrative, and poetics' (13).

The chapter on time is particularly striking. Michelakis argues that the 'plague's reset button makes it possible to look into the temporal moment as an overwhelming, chaotic, and discontinuous temporal space of diverse and concurrent temporalities', while also providing 'attempts to confront, map, and contain that moment' (96). Having lived through the recent pandemic, readers will recognize the dual pull: lockdown as its own epoch, with its own rituals and temporalities – the weekly clapping for the NHS on a Thursday evening in the UK, or our local variant: 'Gin by the Bins' on a Friday for a socially distanced drink. The ancient texts, Michelakis suggests, provide early articulations of how crisis both disrupts and generates new forms of temporal experience.

Perhaps most significant for current theoretical debates is the book's engagement with agency. In the Afterword, Michelakis states plainly: 'Agency is no longer associated only with human activity' (191). This positions the book in relation to the new materialisms and other posthumanist approaches that question anthropocentrism.

[3] *Encounters with the Plague in Homer, Sophocles, and Thucydides*. By Pantelis Michelakis. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2025. Pp. viii + 250. Hardback £99, ISBN: 978-0-19-884410-5.

[4] See my review in *Greece & Rome* (2026), 73.1, on J. P. Christensen, *Storylife: On Epic, Narrative, and Living Things* (New Haven, 2025).

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The parallel with Timothy Morton's work on toxicity and hyperobjects is particularly suggestive: plague, like climate change, operates on scales and through networks that exceed human comprehension and control, yet demands response. The central political question Michelakis poses – 'what needs protecting?' – has lost none of its urgency. In foregrounding the plague as an agent in its own right, acting upon and through human and non-human networks alike, this book makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing conversation about materiality, narrative, and the limits of the human.

Duncan F. Kennedy's *The Emergence of Ontological Styles of Thinking in Ancient Greece*, also in the Classics in Theory series, shares Michelakis' interest in non-human agency and the limits of anthropocentrism.[5] Kennedy asks a fundamental question: how do the things we think about come to exist for us in the first place? The book surveys the intellectual culture of 450–350 BCE – Herodotus and Thucydides, Parmenides and Protagoras, the tragedians, the early geometers – not as philosophers or sophists in the later disciplinary sense, but as thinkers grappling with emergent questions about being, becoming, and presence. Kennedy aims to rescue these figures from what E. P. Thompson called 'the enormous condescension of posterity' (vii), and to read them outside the metaphysical framework imposed retrospectively by Plato and Aristotle.

The theoretical orientation is drawn from the 'ontological turn' in the Humanities, particularly Bruno Latour's work on modes of existence. One of Latour's provocations proves especially productive: 'What were microbes before Pasteur?' And another: 'Did Ramses II die of tuberculosis?' These questions are not diagnostic but historical and ontological. Can our present perspective legitimately overwrite the experience of those who lived before certain concepts existed, or is this, as Greg Anderson, quoted by Kennedy, puts it, 'a kind of retrospective political violence, a historical imperialism' (16)? Kennedy extends this to ancient thought: human beings develop fresh conceptual schemata, and '[i]t is not unlikely that many things that affect us now beyond our notice will become apparent to future generations'. (23) We are not the endpoint of intellectual or ontological history; we are somewhere in the middle, surrounded by things we cannot yet perceive.

This connects to Kennedy's interest in distributed, relational selves and Latour's mantra that 'we are what we are attached to' (4, 22). 'The question of being', Kennedy writes, 'is not what exists … but *how* what exists exists' (20). One unexpected part of this book is its discussion of fiction, which you might not see coming in a work about existence. Again following Latour, works of art (or fiction) make us what we are as our sense of being in the world is fashioned by them at the same time as we use them to shape our world (144). 'The self may be distributed across many attachments, known and unknown, but through the fictions it encounters it seeks out the sense of its being.' (145)

The book is dense and demanding, but it opens up genuinely new ways of reading familiar texts by attending to ontological assumptions that, as Kennedy notes, 'lie more or less dormant in so many areas of our thinking about our world and what is in (and beyond) it' (vii). For those willing to follow the argument, the payoff is considerable: a defamiliarized classical Greece in which demarcated disciplines we take for granted – history, philosophy, mathematics – are still emerging as 'distinct ontologically inflected styles of thinking' (or viewpoints, 102), and in which the boundaries between human and non-human, subject and object, remain excitingly unstable.

[5] *The Emergence of Ontological Styles of Thinking in Ancient Greece*. By Duncan F. Kennedy. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2025. Pp. vii +246. Hardback £99, ISBN: 978-0-19-898505-1.

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Those unstable boundaries between human and non-human find their most vivid ancient expression in stories of metamorphosis: bodies becoming stone, tree, river. Esther Eidinow's *Metamorphosis, Landscape, and Trauma in Greco-Roman Myth* takes up precisely this territory,[6] asking what happens when we read myths of bodily transformation not as aetiologies for features of the landscape but as narratives of 'the role of the body, and the embodied experiences of emotions' (2). The book is organized around the four classical elements – earth, air, fire, water – and within each grouping Eidinow traces the interrelationships of human, non-human, and more-than-human entities, starting from the premise that the human body was understood to be composed of the same substances that comprised the landscapes into which it could be transformed (3).

Underpinning this architecture is a sustained engagement with trauma theory. Eidinow reads metamorphosis as conveying 'bodily experience of extreme emotion, one that shocks a body into change' (67), and maps the spectrum of traumatic response – freeze, flight, fight, fright, flag, faint (26) – onto her four elements. Earth transformations (Niobe petrifying into stone, Daphne rooting into laurel) correspond to fright; air transformations, in which the body is somehow 'removed', to flagging or fainting. Readers of Daisy Johnson's short story collection *Fen* (2016) will recognize the territory:[7] Johnson's stories, set in the English Fenlands, explore the shifting borders between people, animals, and landscape – a girl who starves herself into becoming an eel, a boy who turns into the foxes he chases. The landscape itself generates the stories: a wetland constantly drained, flooded, and remapped, a liminal space that spawns tales of metamorphosis. Johnson went on to rework the Oedipus story in her 2018 novel *Everything Under*, another tale of slippery landscapes and identities. Eidinow's ancient metamorphoses and Johnson's modern ones share a common intuition: that the body is not sealed off from its environment but continuous with it, and that transformation is what happens when that continuity is violently forced into the open.

Fire, Eidinow argues, works differently: people do not become fire, but are afflicted by it, and it wreaks change as an active, divinely indexed agent (108). The traumatic response here is fight. The chapter is bookended by Pandora and Thetis as female figures whose relationship to fire is anything but passive, and I am reminded of a more recent fiery sisterhood:

> Small town women ain't built to get along,
> But you burn one boy, you burn us all.
> We'll be here drinking 'til the smoke is gone.
> Bonfire at Tina's, oh-oh-oh.
>
> 'Bonfire at Tina's'
> by Ashley McBryde, Pillbox Patti, Caylee Hammack, and Brandy Clark
> (*Lindeville*, Warner Music Nashville, 2022)

Water metamorphoses, finally, involve the creation of rivers (men) and springs (women), and here the governing themes are remembrance and (through the sea)

[6] *Metamorphosis, Landscape, and Trauma in Greco-Roman Myth*. By Esther Eidinow. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2025. Pp. xi + 215. Illustrations. Hardback £84, ISBN: 978-0-19-880773-5.

[7] D. Johnson, *Fen* (London, 2016).

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rebirth. Throughout, Eidinow is alert to gender: the 'experiences of the risks perceived as inherent in human-human and human-divine relations' (4) map differently onto male and female bodies, and these differences structure each chapter's argument.

As the contributors to the recent A. G. Leventis conference 'Telling Bodies' showed,[8] embodied communication necessarily shapes our engagement with antiquity, and thinking *through* the body rather than despite it has consequences for how we read ancient narratives of corporeal crisis. Eidinow's book resonates with this approach. It refuses to treat metamorphosis as merely figurative: these are stories about what bodies do under extremity, and the elements are not ornamental but constitutive. The body changes because it was always made of the stuff it becomes. At the conference we asked: what tales does the body tell? Eidinow's answer is that the body tells tales of extreme emotion – and that metamorphosis is the form those tales take when the emotion exceeds what a human body can contain.

If Eidinow asks what the body *becomes*, Afroditi Angelopoulou's *The Body and the Senses in Greek Tragedy* asks what the body *does* – to those watching it.[9] Her subject is the corporeality of Greek drama: not the body as theme or symbol, but the body as a medium through which meaning is constructed between performers and audience. The book sits at the intersection of theatre, performance theory, and embodied cognition, and it is explicitly 'in conversation with research into cognitive approaches to classical literature and theatre, as well as into embodied aspects of performance from different but complementary angles, such as posthumanism and materialism' (3–4). Readers of Melissa Mueller's *Objects as Actors*, which reoriented the study of tragic staging around the agency of props and material elements, will find a natural companion here, as Angelopoulou extends the materialist turn from objects to bodies themselves.[10]

Angelopoulou proposes 'an embodied cognitive relationship between spectators and performers', a process in which the audience is invited to 'mesh their mind and body with that of the internal audience and characters on stage, by means of performance and a kind of language that is deeply rooted in corporeality' (19). Gesture, interaffective response, intercorporeality: these are the mechanisms through which tragedy does its work, especially in key intersubjective relationships such as that of *philia*, and Angelopoulou traces them through select plays by Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles. The discussion of the *Oresteia* is particularly effective: she shows how the bodily experience of revulsion – viscerally felt, physically registered – is transformed across the trilogy into a powerful political instrument, a case study in how 'morality and ethics cannot be disentangled from the body' (21).

The third part of the book turns to trauma, and here we have another connection with Eidinow: both authors are interested in what extreme corporeal experience does to narrative, and in the ethical dimensions of representing it. But where Eidinow reads metamorphosis as the body's response to overwhelming emotion, Angelopoulou keeps us in the theatre, asking how the staged, traumatized body acts upon the spectating body. The body, she argues in her conclusion, should be considered 'not only as an

[8] https://hca.ed.ac.uk/updates-events/events/2025-leventis-conference-telling-bodies

[9] *The Body and the Senses in Greek Tragedy.* By Afroditi Angelopoulou. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2025. Pp. xi + 228. Hardback £64, ISBN: 978-0-19-777706-0.

[10] M. Mueller, *Objects as Actors: Props and the Poetics of Performance in Greek Tragedy* (Chicago, 2016).

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object of inquiry but also as a hermeneutic tool' (177): a claim that deserves to be taken seriously well beyond the study of tragedy.

There are books one reviews and books one simply announces. The new Cambridge 'Green and Yellow' commentary on Hesiod's *Theogony* by Jenny Strauss Clay and Athanassios Vergados falls squarely into the second category – though I shall try to say something useful about the introduction, since the commentary proper needs no advocate beyond its own existence.[11] We have been waiting for this. Martin West's 1966 commentary has served as the indispensable companion to the *Theogony* for sixty years and, while its brilliance is undimmed, Hesiodic studies have moved on considerably. The authors set out to produce a book that reflects that progress (vii), and they have succeeded, and then some. Throughout, Clay and Vergados draw on their own extensive body of published work, with the footnotes to the introduction pointing outwards to a broader research programme of which this commentary is a culmination. They write in their Preface that: 'It has been a ball and proves, we think, that two heads are better than one' (viii). The co-writing of the commentary puts it in illustrious company, along with, for example, the *Iliad* Book VI commentary by Graziosi and Haubold:[12] and it more than merits this position.

The introduction opens with Hesiod's biographical tradition (the Lives preserved in Proclus and Tzetzes) and with the poem's relationship to Near-Eastern wisdom literature and myths of succession. This is now-familiar territory, but treated with welcome nuance. The parallels with the Kumarbi Cycle, *Enuma Elish*, and Sanchuniathon's *Phoenician History* are set out clearly but, crucially, contextualized within a broader cultural environment rather than reduced to a narrative of borrowing. Differences are given their due alongside similarities: the prominence accorded to female divinities in Hesiod, for instance, has no straightforward Near- Eastern parallel (10), just as the brother-to-brother model of teaching in the *Works and Days* is unattested in the comparative wisdom tradition (4).

The discussion of Hesiod's Chaos is particularly compelling. Clay and Vergados acknowledge that multiple interpretations are possible, but their point is sharper than mere pluralism: the Hesiodic text, they argue, *invites* us to wrestle with these questions (20). The same is true of other passages that 'challenge us to ask questions and to think actively about the gods and the cosmos' (20). This quality is not confined to the *Theogony*: it is central to the *Works and Days,* too, where Hesiod's didactic persona is constantly provoking his addressee (and his audience) into active reasoning rather than passive reception.[13] And it's not by chance that I keep referring to the *Works and Days*. The commentary is anchored in the minutiae of the *Theogony*, but it reaches out across the Hesiodic corpus, enacting on multiple levels the cohesive reading of the 'diptych' of poems that Clay has long promoted.

On structure, the introduction offers what amounts to a guided map through one of archaic poetry's most intricate compositions. The core narrative – the succession myth – is interwoven with genealogical catalogues, and the authors trace a pattern of increasing complexity: a 'complex web of associations and interconnections' in which Hesiod exploits

[11] *Hesiod* Theogony. Edited by Jenny Strauss Clay and Athanassios Vergados. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2026. Pp. xi + 407, 8 figures. Paperback, £26.99, ISBN: 978-1-107-48348-4.

[12] B. Graziosi and J. H. Haubold, *Homer* Iliad *Book VI* (Cambridge, 2010).

[13] L. G. Canevaro, *Hesiod's* Works and Days*: How to Teach Self-Sufficiency* (Oxford, 2015).

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the linear medium's inability to represent simultaneity, using narrative density to intimate both the complexity of divine time and the interconnectedness of the divine world (26). The treatment of the so-called digressions is especially welcome. Where earlier scholarship tended either to excise these passages as interpolations or to explain them through biographical speculation, Clay and Vergados read them as integral: the catalogue of monsters, for example, showcases 'what an anti-cosmos might look like while highlighting Zeus's benevolence' (27), and the Styx passage 'demonstrates the limitations of the genealogical structure and offers an alternative, spatial arrangement' (27). The introduction's guide to the poem's labyrinthine structure is then supplemented by further maps in the commentary, such as the outline of the proem (102–3) and the invaluable genealogical charts (362–7) – no longer will we be stuck in the Chaos of the primordial forces.

The introduction closes with discussions of oral and written composition – the authors incline, persuasively, towards the view that Hesiod used writing both in composition and transmission – and of language, metre, and the manuscript tradition, including a useful list of their departures from West's text. I have said little about the commentary itself, and deliberately so. It is the kind of work that does not need to be described; it needs to be used. For anyone working on Hesiod, on early Greek cosmological thought, on the ancient Near East or Comparative Literature, or on archaic or hexameter poetry more broadly, this is now an essential point of reference. Get it, and use it.

A final book that deserves a mention, if not a full discussion here given space constraints, is *The Oxford Critical Guide to Homer's* Odyssey.[14] This is the 'companion' book to the parallel *Guide to Homer's* Iliad, which I could not include in a review as I had participated in it (with my chapter on *Iliad* Book 14). I take the opportunity here to note that the pair of volumes constitute a substantial contribution to Homeric research and particularly teaching, and the editors – Joel Christensen in the case of the *Odyssey* and Jonathan Ready for the *Iliad* – are to be thanked for corralling so many Homeric scholars (a few of whom pulled a double shift in contributing to both works) and producing such accessible and engaging guides. Proceeding book-by-book with each divided into Plot Summary, Themes, Poetics, and Internal Cross-References and Further Reading, these Guides run parallel to one another and unfold in a consistent way that helps orientate the reader and allows for dipping in and out. Next time I teach a course on a specific book of Homer, I will certainly be happy to have these books on my shelf and top of my course bibliography.

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[14] *The Oxford Critical Guide to Homer's* Odyssey. Edited by Joel P. Christensen. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2025. Pp. x + 348. Hardback £119.00, ISBN: 978-0-19-284410-1. Paperback £25, ISBN: 978-0-19-898509-9.

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