

E. Minchin, ed., *Orality, Literacy and Performance in the Ancient World. Orality and Literacy in the Ancient World*, vol. 9. Leiden, Brill 2012. Pp. xviii + 268. ISBN 978 90 04 21774 4 (hardback).

The papers included in this volume represent a selection of original papers presented in the ninth conference on 'Orality and Literacy in the Ancient Greek and Roman World: Composition and Performance' that took place at the Australian National University in Canberra in June–July 2010. The volume is divided into two parts, the first dedicated to 'Poetry in Performance' and the second to 'Literacy and Orality'. Before dealing in brief with each chapter, I would like to say up front that this is a coherent, well organized, and inspiring piece of work with many new insights on several different topics.

In Part One ('Poetry in Performance') there are four chapters devoted to Homer and one on Hesiod.

Adrian Kelly ('The Audience Expects: Penelope and Odysseus') revisits the famous recognition scene between Penelope and Odysseus in *Odyssey* 23. The thrust of Kelly's oralist argument is based on the fact that the Homeric audience was composed of people who were familiar both with the continuation of the story (they would know that Penelope would recognize Odysseus) and with "the theme of recognition itself as a traditional narrative sequence" (5). By a minute analysis of the episode at hand Kelly explores the performative strategies employed in order to attract the listeners' attention and create dynamic engagement that can take the form of suspense, misdirection, excitement etc. For Kelly, and this is a point he stresses in ring form in his chapter, it is the manipulation of the traditional structural grammar in the context of composition in performance that is key for appreciating this truly memorable scene.

Deborah Beck ('The Presentation of Song in Homer's *Odyssey*') aims at showing that the *Odyssey* distinguishes speech by bards from speech uttered by any other character both with respect to theme and manner of presentation. In an overview on the presentation of song in the *Odyssey*, Beck shows that no professional bard is directly quoted both when speaking and singing: Demodocus in his second song (8.266–366) is quoted directly but never in conversation. Phemius, on the other hand, is quoted directly when speaking (22.344–353) but never while singing. Beck explains the unique occasion of direct quotation of the song by a professional singer (Demodocus' second song) in light of its subject matter that is removed from the world of the *Odyssey*.

The next paper is devoted to the Homeric Simile ('Comparative Perspectives on the Composition of the Homeric Simile'). Drawing on comparative material from the Yugoslav *guslars* and the Bedouin tribes of Saudi Arabia, Jonathan Ready argues that we need to make a distinction between 'idiolectal' similes that are particular to the performances of individual singers, 'dialectal' that are unique to a regional tradition and are shared by sub-categories of the same branch, 'supra-dialectal' that are common to different branches of the same group, and 'pan-traditional' similes containing elements that are shared by bards belonging to different groups. Ready's

analysis in full of new insights and he has to be praised for being very careful to accommodate the comparative material to the constraints imposed by the lack of comparative material we are faced with in the case of Homeric epic. His main point is that ‘Homer’ as an oral poet “generated both idiolectal and shared similes so as to display to his audience his competence as a performer” (81).

Anna Bonifazi and David F. Elmer (‘Composing Lines, Performing Acts: Clauses, Discourse Acts, and Melodic Units in a South Slavic Epic Song’) use Alija Fjuljanin’s epic song to study how a singer articulates his song and punctuates the progress of his narrative. They then use Egbert Bakker’s insightful analysis of Homeric epic as speech, as well as the correspondence between metrical colon, intonation unit, and the ‘one idea principle’ of Wallace Chafe to argue that performative units render syntactical ones null and void or at least subsume them. In Homer, syntactical relationships can only determine the function of the verbal part at the syntactical level. I found their concluding remark about the need for us to develop a reading strategy based on the narrative and *visual* relevance of each subsequent clause illuminating. Perhaps, a cognitive approach to such issues could work in a complementary way and shed more light to the way the bard ‘sees’ his narrative unfolding.

Ruth Scodel (‘*Works and Days* as Performance’) takes for granted that the *Works and Days* is an oral poem composed for performance and argues that it contains features of all three performance modes: at times the speaker is presented in the manner of an epic poet who performs but does not address his external audience; he is also like a lyric poet who directly addresses his listeners; and he can also be like “a man who is speaking in the theater of the mind” (125).

Part Two (‘Literacy and Orality’) consists of six papers that focus on literacy and its relationship to orality.

McComas Taylor (‘Empowering the Sacred: The Function of the Sanskrit Text in a Contemporary Exposition of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa’) examines a public oral performance of a written Sanskrit text in Modern India and distinguishes four functions of the written text: (a) it enhances ritual action, since it is ‘honored’ by gifts from the people who participate in the week-long oral performance; (b) it provides both the general content and organizational principle for the performance; (c) it is used for silent reading, for which there is even the technical term *pārāyaṇa*, in order to give authority and a sense of completeness to the oral performance to follow; and (d) it is the source of various verses the exponent employs in his own performance. This case study shows that a written text can serve to increase the authority and value of a performance and, of course, its reception by the audience.

James Henderson Collins II (‘Prompts for Participation in Early Philosophical Texts’) studies Platonic dialogue and Isocratean speeches from a narratological point of view and argues for a dynamic form of textuality in an early fourth-century philosophical and rhetorical contexts. Without doubting that Platonic dialogues originated as recollections of dramatized philosophical discussions, he lays emphasis on their performative strategies that aimed to turn bystanders into active participants. In the case of Isocrates’ *Panathenaicus*, the reading of a text or texts becomes a prompt

for performances and reperformances that are used so as to give feedback to the text by alterations, corrections, and revisions.

Patrizia Marzillo ('Performing an Academic Talk: Proclus on Hesiod's *Works and Days*') studies Proclus' commentary on Hesiod's *Works and Days* in order to explore how an oral lesson can evolve into a form of systematic writing on a given author and work. The reading of the actual text before the process of explanation, even if students had it in front of them, the lemma-structure, the systematic *allegoresis*, the differentiation between divinely inspired, didactic, and mimetic poetry so as to leave space for the study of poets like Homer, Hesiod, and Orpheus, are typical strategies employed by Proclus the Neoplatonist in his aim to resurrect pagan culture.

Mathilde Cambron-Goulet ('The Criticism –and the Practice– of Literacy in the Ancient Philosophical Tradition') examines the well-known paradox of philosophical criticism and practice of literacy. By observing that scholars have not considered that philosophers do acknowledge certain advantages of reading and writing (the former is an imitation of orality, the latter to communicate in time and space), she maintains that criticism and practice of literacy belongs to a 'cultural continuity' that survives even in our times. Orality is a much more complex phenomenon that we often think and so deeply rooted in human communication that literacy can hardly cause its extinction.

Jeroen Lauwers ('Reading Books, Talking Culture: The Performance of *Paideia* in Imperial Greek Literature') presents a fascinating case for the interrelation between literacy and orality. In the context of the Second Sophistic, orators had to display their skill and knowledge of ancient texts by keeping in mind both the knowledge of their audience and the constraints imposed by the particular performative context they were dealing with. Different levels of canonization existed in different contexts and reference to reticence about a given work or author should not be always taken as proof that the orator knew or ignored that text respectively. Bluffing, oblivion, or other contextually determined factors may have played their role.

Niall W. Slater ('Eumolpus *Poeta* at Work: Rehearsed Spontaneity in the *Satyricon*') studies how Eumolpus in Petronius' *Satyricon* aims at showing off as an important oral poet and fails big time. His performances of written texts reveal to what extent literacy exercises its influence on him: "his epic is empty of action" (263).

Overall, this volume lives up to the high standard set by previous volumes in this series. There are a number of new insights, while the way of presentation (each paper framed by abstract and conclusion) works quite well for a collection of papers. Each reviewer having, unavoidably and perhaps subjectively, his preferences, I will now state my own: Ready's analysis of the Homeric Simile in Part I and James Henderson Collins II's presentation of prompts of participation in Part II break new ground and will generate new ideas in the future.

CHRISTOS TSAGALIS
ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI