

Floris Overduin, *Nicander of Colophon's Theriaca: A Literary Commentary* (Mnemosyne Suppl. 374) (Leiden: Brill, 2015). ISBN: 9789004271210. xiv, 578 pages.

This sets out to be a 'literary' commentary on the longer of Nicander's two extant didactic poems. That means 'matters of narratology, mythology, aetiology, diction, genre, tradition, poetic self-awareness, and aesthetics' (p. 1), as opposed to herpetology and the *Realien* of the poem. The idea is to redress the balance which, in the author's view, in the commentary of J.-M. Jacques (*Les Thériaques. Fragments iologiques antérieurs à Nicandre*. Paris: Belles Lettres, 2002), inclines too far towards the technical.¹ But the great merit of Jacques' commentary is that he avoids separation and refuses to drive a wedge between the two aspects of Nicander's activity (p. xlix 'à la fois poète et médecin'). Overduin, in contrast, sees the compound as inherently fissile, and finds merit in privileging the former element over the latter. Indeed, precisely by including so much material from iological writers, Jacques was at pains to illustrate how much 'surplus' value Nicander has added to the bare prose treatises from which he drew his material. Overduin's total lack of interest in the iological writers (his index includes no entry for Nicander's major influence Apollonius of Alexandria, nor any of the technical writers treated in the first section of Jacques' introduction) deprives us of that resource, and instead constructs a different genealogy for Nicander, the more familiar one of Hesiod and Aratus. These are well-trodden texts; they are equipped with excellent modern commentaries; there is also an increasingly large literature devoted to the morphology of the didactic genre itself. Overduin's approach is thus primed to what Katharina Volk's *The Poetics of Latin Didactic* (Oxford, 2002) put on the agenda, especially to the structure and organisation of the text and the construction of narrative voice and its relation to the addressee. Overduin is also at pains to emphasise the world-view that Nicander insinuates in his poem. Jacques, sensitive as he was to the poem as literature, did not quite go so far as this, though he did describe Nicander's ethos as realist (lxxxvi), and suggested that that 'realism' was a vision of a 'bitter reality'.² Overduin goes well beyond this, stressing the darkness of Nicander's vision, the construction of a world, not of accidental or unthinking violence, but of calculated malevolence and human vulnerability.

'Literary' matters thus include literary history (§ 3), narrative (§ 4), structure (§ 5), various aesthetic and stylistic matters (§ 7–8), and reception (§ 9); they do not exclude language and metre (§ 6), though philological matters *per se* are not at a premium. Textual criticism is all but excluded (cf. p. 1). It is in his interest in narratology (§ 4)

¹ Cf. Overduin, p. 3: 'a literary view of the poem is never separated from (and sometimes hampered by) technicalities of the *realia*. Metre, diction and poetic descriptions are thus always functional, serving to complement the contents of the poem, rather than serving poetic purposes in their own right'.

² J.-M. Jacques, 'Médecine et poésie: Nicandre de Colophon et ses poèmes iologiques', in *La médecine grecque antique. Actes du 14^{ème} colloque de la Villa Kérylos à Beaulieu-sur-Mer les 10 & 11 octobre 2003* (Paris, 2004), 118: 'on se trouve en présence d'une poésie assez prenante, que l'on peut bien appeler réaliste, car elle reproduit sans fard les conditions de l'âpre réalité'. cf. also *Nicandre*, i. lxxxvi–lxxxvii: 'la vérité de la vie', 'une certain poésie de la réalité', 'tableaux qui semblent pris sur le vif', 'une observation attentive de la nature'.

where Overduin really begins to pull apart from Jacques. There is a particularly good opportunity to contrast them in § 4.1, where Overduin makes a fourfold distinction between aspects of the narrator that are relevant to the *Theriaka*, and offers a complex analysis of the *sphragis* in the two final lines (neither the historical Nicander, nor the didactic voice pitched at either the internal or external narratee, but the historical author's construct of an ideal persona). Turn to Jacques, who simply provides a footnote reference to the *sphragis* of Timotheus' *Persae* (lxxi n. 161), where the poet refers to himself and his homeland at the end of his composition. No narratology, but an almost perfect analogue in terms of technique, which is left to speak for itself.

The section on structure (§ 5) offers some good remarks on what Overduin describes as the 'pseudo-associative principle'; personally I would like to have seen pursued the compositional feature that Dionysius Periegetes seems to have picked up from Nicander, namely the trade-off between comprehensiveness and selectivity, (pseudo-)encyclopaedism and sketchiness.³

On the linguistic and literary background (§ 6), Jacques' treatment of the influences, archaic and Hellenistic, on Nicander is wider-ranging and more discursive. It is disappointing to find Hesiod relegated to a *praeteritio* in Overduin's n. 278, while the bare-list narrative-order treatment of Homeric *hapax legomena* (p. 70) is a good deal less satisfactory than Jacques' wider coverage of (e.g.) Nicander's relation to the Homeric text and sensitivity to the minutiae of Homeric syntax. On the other hand Overduin's treatment of earlier Hellenistic authors (he prefers a later second-century date for the didactic Nicander) — while more selective than that of Jacques — is more thorough in the authors he does treat (Antimachus, Euphorion, Callimachus, Lycophron — why that order?). But neither account is comprehensive. A minor omission, indicative of the reduced interest in specifically philological matters, is that Overduin has nothing to match Jacques' treatment of dialectal glosses (xcv–xcviii). However, the ensuing sections on style are useful and informative, with good material on etymologies and puns (§ 6.6; contrast the brevity of Jacques, p. civ), kennings (§ 6.7), word patternings (§ 6.8; again contrast Jacques' parsimony in this respect, pp. civ–cv), *variatio* and synonymity (§ 6.10). The section on metre (§ 6.11) has no pretensions to comprehensiveness, but is still slightly fuller than that of Jacques, offering more detail on verse patterns with dactyls and spondees.

With its eye to rhetoric and poetics, the commentary is often enlightening on matters outside Jacques' range of interests (conjunctions: 616 ἰδέ; transitions: 21 ἀλλά σύ γε, 51 ναὶ μὴν; narrative devices: 10 εἰ τεὸν περ; 230 ἐπικλείουσιν). A weakness, however, is a *penchant* for speculation, e.g. on 12, that Nicander disapproved of Hesiod's Muse-encounter ('an improper story, not doing justice to Hesiod's own talents'); or on 3, the conceit that Nicander is speaking to *the* Hermesianax of Colophon, the third-century poet, back in the past: this one is a particularly sticky wicket, given that the named addressee is supposed to benefit from Nicander's wise teaching in becoming an

³ J. L. Lightfoot, *Dionysius Periegetes* (Oxford, 2014), 94.

efficacious doctor in his own right. (What would be more enlightening here would be a remark on the lengthening of φίλ', and the remark that it happens in Homer precisely in connection with addresses to a kinsman: *Il.* 4.155, 5.359, 21.308.) And Overduin is so wedded to his intertexts that if and when an apparent verbal echo fails to summon up a matching context, meaning is sought in deliberate contrast between model and imitation instead. This pays no dividends in, say, l. 17 (where an alleged parallelism/contrast between Talos and Orion actually involves Aratus' Orion rather than Nicander's), and results in absurdity in l. 349, which echoes Call. *Hec. fr.* 76 Hollis σύν ὁ πελαργὸς ἀμορβεύεσκεν ἀλοίτης. What we *need* is a remark on the conversion of Callimachus' intransitive verb into a factitive one (ἀμορβεύοντο λεπάρῳ | δῶρα). What we *get* is a frankly ridiculous suggestion that the gift of Youth was entrusted to asses, in Nicander's story, rather than storks (the context in Callimachus) because storks were too just to carry an inherently unjust gift.

One last illustration of the difference in approach between Overduin and Jacques is their treatment of Nicander's claim to be 'Homeric' (957). Whereas Jacques made the interesting but limited observation that the form Ὀμηρείοιο did not seem to be paralleled in the sense '*follower* of Homer', Overduin overleaps that and instead ranges across the 'big' topics of literary imitation, Alexandrian attitudes to Homer, and Homer's connection with Nicander's own homeland of Colophon.

In sum — many will find Overduin's approach a gain; it certainly responds to much contemporary scholarship on didactic poetry. For others, the effect may be to inflate, or overcomplicate, points that Jacques had treated more economically, or discounted as self-evident. There are indices of passages discussed and of subjects and names (much more satisfactory than the usual useless general index generated from a search-engine and confined to proper names), but none of Greek words. The English is far from infallible and includes misspellings ('spondaic', 'in a slapstick vain', 'reknown'), odd prepositions ('influential to'), confusions of adjectives and adverbs ('lively', 'cowardly'), malapropisms ('irreverant of the fact'), and occasional bizarreness ('to obviate the addressee').

J. L. LIGHTFOOT
NEW COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.