

BOOK REVIEW

Homer's Allusive Art. By BRUNO CURRIE. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. xiv + 343. Hardcover, \$110.00. ISBN 978-0-19-876882-1.

Allusion is one of the most hotly discussed issues in the world of Homeric studies. Bruno Currie's book delves into this most significant debate in a systematic and thoughtful manner. It represents a major contribution and indispensable reading for all those interested in Homer and archaic Greek poetry at large.

The book is divided into 6 chapters: Homer and Allusive Art (1), The Homeric Epics and their Forerunners (2), the Archaic Hymns to Demeter (3), Pregnant Tears and Poetic Memory (4), Allusion in Greek and Near Eastern Mythological Poetry (5), and Epilogue: traditional Art and Allusive Art (6). The last chapter contains no fewer than six appendices on various specific issues pertaining to the subject of the book (A: Proclus' Summaries of the Cyclic Epics; B: Translation of the Berlin Papyrus [Commentary on the *Orphic Hymn to Demeter*], C: Allusive Doublets and Inconcinnities, D: Pindar, the Aethiopsis, and Homer, E: Prospective Lamentation, and F: Typologically Generated Repetition versus Specific Reprise).

First, an outlook at the subject of the book. With few exceptions of analytical (e.g. D. L. Page and H. van Thiel) or unitarian tinge (M. L. West), the vast majority of modern Homerists belong to two different groups with respect to their approach to Homeric poetry: the Oralists and the Neoanalysts. The former believe that Homeric poetry is traditional poetry composed and shaped by generations of singers, only to achieve crystallization at a later stage. For them, this kind of song-making allows only for internal referencing (intratextual allusion), as specific mechanisms can be employed to direct the audience to something that has happened earlier in the plot or something that will happen later. In such an 'oral poetic universe', external cross-referencing (intertextual allusion) is not possible.

The Neoanalysts, on the other hand, claim that Homeric epic is the result of the creative genius of a single poet, who is using the storehouse of traditional epic but goes well beyond that. By inventive reworking of various sources from earlier, pre-Homeric epics he rises above the tradition and constructs an elaborate and highly allusive work of art. He can achieve this result in the course of a lifetime

through the use of writing. There is also a third group of Homerists, who may be called (for lack of a better term) 'Oral Neoanalysts'. These scholars cut a middle ground between the two aforementioned theories. They reject the use of writing as an indispensable prerequisite for the composition of Homeric poetry but believe in a form of developed orality that comes close to poetic literacy. For them Homeric poetry is post-traditional and in such a medium external allusion is very much at home: it amounts to a fundamental mechanism through which Homeric epic allows to glance at the process of its shaping.

In light of this brief presentation of the theoretical framework pertaining to allusion in Homer, we can now turn to Currie's book, which situates itself at the very center of this *Problematik*. The author, an adherent of the Neoanalytical school of thought, contributes to the current debate about the allusive nature of Homeric epic by focusing his attention on three of its most crucial aspects: (i) the traditionality of Homeric poetry on the basis of the analogy with the South-Slavic paradigm; (ii) the argument about postulating earlier texts that have influenced 'Homer' on the basis of later ones; and (iii) specific allusion and the written medium.

With respect to (i), Currie revisits the argument on analogy that is often reiterated by oralists, who claim that Homeric epic is traditional. By using the work of Georg Danek and Zlatan Čolaković, he stresses the fact that South-Slavic epic contains different strands and that there are numerous examples testifying to the use of specific references to individual stories or parts of stories in both Serbian and Bosnian-Muslim songs. In the footsteps of these two scholars, Currie rejects one of the most basic tenets of oral theory and makes a case that Homeric poetry is post-traditional and as such is ideally suitable to nest specific allusion to other epic poetry.

The second (ii) vital aspect of Currie's analysis evolves around the criticism raised by oralists with respect to the postulating of earlier, unattested pre-Homeric epics by the advocates of Neoanalysis. Currie ingeniously uses a case-study, i.e. a rare example where we can 'test' the neoanalytical methodology, since we have two texts on the same topic that form part of the same genre: the *Orphic* (P. Berol. 13044) and *Homeric Hymns to Demeter*. After offering a detailed study of the relevant material, backed up by sound methodology, Currie shows that a whole set of narrative structures, motifs and even phraseology shared by both hymns have their primary contexts in the *Orphic Hymn to Demeter* and their secondary contexts in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter. The emerging conclusion is that the *Or-*

phic Hymn is not just a forerunner but also a 'source' of the *Homeric Hymn*. Central to Currie's analysis is the application of the basic neoanalytical methodological tool of discerning primary from secondary contexts, which has been 'attacked' in the past by oralists. But this time things are more clear-cut: we cannot simply treat the common features shared by both Hymns as purely accidental. Reprise is both specific and intentional.

The third aspect (iii) of the debate concerning allusion in Homer that is discussed by Currie is partly based on the second. If the *Orphic* and *Homeric Hymns to Demeter* seem to offer too 'narrow' a field for 'testing' the allusive nature of early Greek hexameter poetry, Currie makes a vigorous breakthrough and extends our research horizon to Near Eastern mythological poetry. By surveying various Near Eastern poems, he is able to show that early Greek epic does not simply share with Near Eastern poetry motifs, narrative structures and stylistic features but also an entire 'allusive art' consisting in quotation, motif transference, opposition in imitation, *contaminatio fontium*, *ad hoc* invented mythological examples, source citation, scenes involving simultaneously intratextual and intertextual allusion (213). The result is impressive: ancient Near Eastern poetry offers a very early, fully measurable, and analogous framework for testing the *arte allusiva* of Homeric epic.

All in all, this is a rewarding and thought-provoking book. Currie is commended for his sound methodology, his step-by-step unraveling of his thought as he directs his reader with admirable precision and help through labyrinthine turns of arguments difficult to grasp: a true *sine qua non* for all scholars interested in early Greek hexameter poetry.

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