

BOOK REVIEW

Early Greek Hexameter Poetry. By PETER GAINSFORD. Greece & Rome. "New Surveys in the Classics", No. 43. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (Published for the Classical Association), 2015. Pp. x + 150. Softcover, \$29.99. ISBN 973-131-6608883.

This volume of the "New Surveys in Classics" series offers an overview of early, non-Homeric, Greek hexameter. Deferring to an earlier volume on Homer in this series (Rutherford, 2013, 2nd ed.), Peter Gainsford exposes readers to a smaller body of early hexametric poetry that exists outside of the Homeric epics. Homer is not ignored, but the Iliad and the Odyssey enter the discussion to highlight relevant interpretative issues and methodologies. Hexameter oracles and inscriptions receive some attention in Chapter One, but, throughout, the Hesiodic poems, the Homeric Hymns, and the fragments of the epic cycle are the main focus. As a result, for a comprehensive understanding of early hexameter, one will need to consult additional resources. What Gainsford does provide is a solid, basic survey of this poetry that achieves the two aims set out in the introduction (iii). First, he offers an awareness of the broad array of early, perhaps lesser known, hexametric poetry that existed beyond, and alongside, Homer; second the careful demonstration of some basic interpretative concerns emphasizes that our remains of these hexameters are a mere shadow of what actually existed.

Gainsford walks readers through the fundamentals needed to read this poetry over six chapters. The first ("The Poems") presents the range of non-Homeric, hexametric poetry composed from the Hesiodic corpus, the Homeric Hymns, the epic cycle, oracles, and epigraphy. The Hesiodic corpus receives the bulk of the attention, but a solid foundation of basic information is given for each of the categories. Chapters Two through Four define features of this poetry. Chapter Two ("Genre") is a survey of thematic, stylistic, and formal features used in modern scholarship for understanding early hexameter as a poetic category. Chapter Three ("Tradition and Legend") explores interactions between hexameter and tradition, construed as both narrative material and the metrical system which conveys these narratives. This chapter presents most fully issues raised by orality in

terms of content and formulaic language. Chapter Four (“Performance”) describes the realities of performance by reviewing instruments, manner of performance, and performance contexts. Chapters Five and Six offer basic information needed for reading this poetry. Since a great deal of early hexameter is fragmentary, Chapter Five (“Fragments”) is an elementary explanation of the types of fragmentary evidence and how to read this evidence in modern collections. Chapter Six (“Relationships between Poems”) confronts how to read the relationship between hexameter poems in two ways. First, it surveys modern approaches to these relationships and categorizes them as either readings concerned with historical actualities, represented by neoanalysis, or “a more purely literary kind of criticism” (109), represented by the readings following Gregory Nagy that consider Homeric epics as complementary within a closed system, and studies that broaden this system to include all hexameter poems, exemplified here by the readings of Jenny Strauss Clay. Second, copious examples of where our texts in some versions were spliced together or cropped (i.e. abbreviated) demonstrate how ancient manuscript traditions have influenced our texts and have blurred the lines these poems. This chapter highlights a thematic undercurrent of the volume, namely that a broader interrelatedness exists within early hexametric poetry that is lost to us because of the meagerness of our remains. The volume concludes with a useful, comprehensive appendix of modern editions for authors and works of early Greek hexameter.

Overall, much recommends this volume. It gives basic starting points for approaching early, non-Homeric, hexametric verse. The list of editions in the appendix and, for epigraphy, in Chapter One will prove valuable; the fundamentals on authorship, dating, manuscript tradition and performance contexts will also be useful critical starting points. Moreover, the interpretive emphases, such as the difficulties of authorial persona in early Greek literature (vi-x) and the complex relationship between the pictorial representations and our poetic remains (60-3), highlight the various pitfalls posed by early poetry. Gainsford is a sensitive reader and offers various approaches to these verses. Ultimately, this volume achieves its goal of exposing readers to less familiar texts and the incompleteness of our evidence, while also introducing a variety of interpretive challenges and scholarly methodologies for engaging with early hexameter.

There is, however, an unevenness that makes the audience difficult to discern. The discussions of linguistics (Chapter 3) and rhythm, pitch, and melody (Chapter 4), while introductory, are dense. It is hard to square the audience for these sec-

tions with the reader who would need step-by-step instructions for reading modern collections of fragments (Chapter 5). Moreover, the categorization of scholarship (Chapter 6) may puzzle advanced readers and mislead introductory ones. It is not accurate, or fair, for example, to categorize Nagy as a purely literary approach or to imply an exclusive distinction between the neoanalytic approaches and literary ones. Furthermore, no general image of early hexameter as a poetic category emerges. The discussions of genre and tradition apply to oral lyric and elegy as much as they do to early hexameter. Chapter One introduces epigraphy and oracles, but this poetry is not linked elsewhere to the other poems discussed. While scholarly approaches to Homer are usefully employed, it does not become clear how all of this poetry, Homeric and non-Homeric, may be a poetic category beyond their shared meter. The result is a partial picture of early hexameter, focused on Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns and the epic cycle, as either an extension of or a parallel to Homeric epic. Finally, some organizational details, such as the combination of scholarly approaches and the ambiguities of the manuscript tradition in Chapter 6, will raise concerns. That said, parts of this volume will serve as a useful introduction to early, non-Homeric, hexameter poetry for novice readers; other parts will serve well slightly more advanced readers who are looking to get their bearings on the various interpretative challenges presented by this poetry.

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