

BOOK REVIEW

Yearbook of Ancient Greek Epic, Volume 2 (*YAGE 2*). Edited by JONATHAN READY and CHRISTOS TSAGALIS. Leiden, NL and Boston, MA: Brill, 2018. Pp. vii + 220. Hardback, €116.00. ISBN: 9789004376908.

This is the second volume of the *Yearbook of Ancient Greek Epic* (*YAGE*) edited by Jonathan Ready and Christos Tsagalis; the volume's main focus, as the first instalment of this journal, continues to be the Archaic Greek *epos* with a range of different approaches and topics. *YAGE* welcomes papers on any aspect of the epic tradition, and especially here encourages those on the theme of "Ancient Greek Epic and Ancient Greek Tragedy": Scholarship has explored the influence of Homeric epic on Attic tragedy. However, in the words of the editors, this collection of seven essays does not only explore Homer and the Greek tragedians, but contributors "look elsewhere as well: to Hesiod, to Empedocles, and to ancient mythographers" (vii).

The opening article, Joel Christensen's "*Eris and Epos: Composition, Competition, and the Domestication of Strife*" (1-39), examines the interrelationship between *Eris* and early Greek epic to argue that *Eris* impacts the development of individual poems both as a theme and as a cultural aesthetic that drives poets to rival one another. Scholars noted a deep complementarity in the worlds created by Homer and Hesiod, and the author's approach here to the problem of *Eris* is that it is teleological. Within the epic tradition the two basic takes of strife have been codified as part of a cosmic history that explains the natural state of *Eris* as emerging from scarcity within potential human relations. The author then proposes that Greek poetry in general is itself a product of shifting and developing strife – or competitive strife due to a Greek agonistic culture (cf. Hes. *Theog.* 224-32, *Op.* 11-26). *Eris* appears to pervade early Greek epic, a fact that, given the content of war and successions, should come as no surprise; hence, lexical terms (*neikos*, *dasmos*) are connected to compositional themes (cf. *Cyp. fr. 5, Il.* 3.87 etc.). The author suggests that the *Iliad* and the *Theogony* emerge from converging poetic traditions which deploy the *Eris* theme in competitive and complementary iterations. In the

Iliad the conflict over honor (e.g. 23.490-94) that unfolds operates in the arena of Hesiod's destructive Eris (a zero-sum game). Finally, the author introduces the positive-sum game in Hes. *Op.* 27-41, where good strife enables neighbors to compete with each other and create greater wealth than they might have in isolation.

In the next contribution, "Ritornell and Episodic Composition in Empedocles" (40-77), Xavier Gheerbrant explores Empedocles and his use of poetic structures that he inherited from the epic and didactic poems. Gheerbrant draws our attention to certain structural features of Empedocles' compositional tools. The poet makes use of the *Ritornell* composition and episodic composition (poem formed of argumentative units or episodes connected with paths). *Ritornell* encompasses lines in nonlinear and non-circular patterns, and by this technique Empedocles invited his audience to reconstruct the relationship between the episodes. Empedocles also engaged in a meta-poetic reflection on the role of repetition in his poem (cf. fr. 25 DK), though no fragment explicitly lays out the relationship between episodic structure and repetition. The author concludes that Empedocles adapted *Ritornell* and episodic composition to his specific needs when composing his cosmological work; thus, he allows his listener or reader to interpret the relationship he builds between the different parts of these accounts that compose his poem.

The following essay, Ahuvia Kahane's "The Complexity of Epic Diction," is a revised interpretation of the relationship between form and meaning in Greek epic hexameter diction, binding our understanding of traditional language and idioms as well as patterns and their exception within a single systematic approach. Kahane first mentions that Homeric diction contains a mix of formulaic and non-formulaic elements, that orality and literacy can coexist, that modalities of performance, reception, and cognition can be interlaced, that in some ways all language is formulaic and that repeated phraseology can resonate with traditional themes, situations and meanings. The author then states Parry's view that oral epic traditions led to the development of formulaic systems that provided the bard with several distinct metrical variants for expressing a single essential idea (e.g. X spoke to him); formulaic diction thus made possible rapid and efficient production of well-formed verse in performance. Last but not least, Kahane observes that Homeric men do tend to speak more frequently among themselves than Homeric women. By their gendered epic nature within the framework of grand epic narratives

themes, they are also more prone to verbal disagreement of the type expressed by the formula “X spoke to him.”

Lynn Kozak’s contribution “Searching for Homeric Fandom in Greek Tragedy” (118-150) investigates Fan studies which combines several distinct issues that we wrestle with in Classics and Classical reception, including audience response, intertextuality, meta-poetics, authorship and affect. First, the author explains the so-called fanboy auteur that stands as a compelling analogue to the Athenian playwright and occupies both a fan space and an auteur space – their fan role places them within and makes them beholden to a broader fan community, while their auteur role gives them producing authority, to such an extent that they might even transform canon. Kozak then mentions Euripides’ strongest extant case for his Iliadic fandom that comes in the parodos of his *Iphigeneia in Aulis*; its heavy intertextuality with both the *Iliad*, the *Cypria* and earlier tragedies about the House of Atreus, most notably Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* which depicts Iphigeneia’s sacrifice in its parodos. The author concludes that Euripides’ parodos of *Iphigeneia in Aulis* suggests two of the elements of fandom that make it distinct within reception forms: affect and community; Euripides seems to claim himself a Homeric fan and understand his audience, or at least part of his audience, as also being fans.

Bruce Loudon’s piece “Healing, Healers, Nestor, and Medea” (151-164), questions whether the Homeric epics were aware of an Argonautic epic; some commentators posit that an earlier *Argonautica* would have been fairly complete, while others questions whether Medea would have been part of it. Loudon explores Book 11 of the *Iliad*, which sets the stage for this side of Medea in its sustained focus on six wounded Greeks. The *Iliad* here implies a supernatural reason for Nestor’s preternatural longevity. Two minor female characters, Hekamede and Agamede function as instantiations of Medea’s traditional character. Their names are compounds fashioned on the same root as hers. The author suggests that the *Iliad* draws on a template of the figure of Medea to highlight and explore certain healing and restoration potentials that arise particularly in this book.

The following piece “Penelope as a Tragic Heroine: Choral Dynamics in Homeric Epic” by Sheila Murnagham (165-189) draws attention to the ways in which Homeric epic is shaped by its engagement with choral lyric, revealing continuities between epic and tragedy that go beyond tragedy’s mythical subject matter and

the characteristics of tragic dialogue. Murnagham claims that the chorus is generally not considered to be part of tragedy's epic inheritance (cf. de Jong, I.J.F., 2016, "Homer: The First Tragedian", *Greece & Rome* 63:149-162). However, the author suggests that some events in the epics resemble the plots of tragedies in being fictionalized re-workings of the occasions of choral performance (cf. the paean by the Achaeans in *Il.* 1.472-74). Penelope in the *Odyssey* is considered to represent an extended reworking and distortion of a choral configuration in the context of a fictional plot. For example, in the *Od.* 23.141-47 the heroine is portrayed throughout in ways that indicate that she is a displaced chorus leader (note the resemblance with the nightingale in *Od.* 19.512-24 and the tale of the mourning nightingale in Aelian's *De Natura Animalium* 5.38).

The final piece, Polyxeni Strolonga's "Variations on the Myth of the Abduction of Ganymede: Intertextuality and Narratology" (190-217), explores the verbal and the mythological intertextuality of the archaic Greek sources that relate the abduction of Ganymede and either omit or overemphasize the compensation of horses provided by Zeus to Ganymede's father. The author first explores two cases in the *Iliad* (5.263-273 and 20.230-235) and Apollodorus' *Library* (2.5.9, 3.12.2) in order to trace the evolution of the myth of Ganymede's abduction and its adaptation in different narrative contexts; the focus here depends on the focalizer's emphasis either on the special value of the compensation or on the exceptional fate of Ganymede. Then, Strolonga mentions the version of the *Little Iliad* (PEG F29 = F6 Davies = F6 West) that may reflect a different account of Tros' compensation, perhaps according to a pre-Iliadic oral tradition that is not incorporated into the *Iliad*. Finally, the author concludes that the two strands of the abduction story (Ganymede's transference to Olympus and the compensation for his abduction) are united in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (202-206), which follows thematically and verbally the Homeric version (*Il.* 20), though highlights the complications of immortalization, and Homeric resonances probably allude to an earlier oral tradition.

In conclusion, the papers presented above clearly explore variable aspects of the archaic epic tradition mixed with Greek tragedy, ancient mythographers, Empedocles and the concept of Fandom and Fan studies. There is much more in this volume of *YAGE* to provoke further thoughts and reflections about archaic Greek epic poetry. It is a well-structured, though quite difficult survey, as it requires much

time to comprehend fully the complex intertextuality and the different aspects of reception of the archaic epic poetry to other genres, such as Greek tragedy. However, there is coherence and power to the method in general, and it is a valuable series journal, not only for scholars or students, but also for anyone who wants to investigate thoroughly epic reception from archaic to late antique literature.

MANOLIS SPANAKIS

University of Cyprus, spanakis.emmanouil@ucy.ac.cy