

BOOK REVIEW

Homer in Performance: Rhapsodes, Narrators, and Characters. Edited by JONATHAN L. READY and CHRISTOS C. TSAGALIS. Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 2018. Pp. ix + 430. Hardback, \$55.00. ISBN: 978-1-4773-1603-0.

This multidisciplinary volume *Homer in Performance*, edited by Jonathan Ready and Christos Tsagalis, examines both the rhapsodes who performed the Homeric poems and the narrators and characters within them. Before they were written down, the poems attributed to Homer were performed orally, usually by rhapsodes (singers/reciters) who might have traveled from city to city or enjoyed a position in a wealthy household. As they recited the epics, the rhapsodes spoke as both the narrator and the characters. This volume consists of an introduction by the editors, and of two main parts: the first part examines a detailed history of the rhapsodic performance of Homeric epic from the Archaic to the Roman Imperial periods and explores how performers might have shaped the poems. The second part presents the Homeric narrators and characters as speakers and illuminates their interactions within the epics.

In their introduction (1-26), the two editors explain that this new volume is based on the audiences of Homeric epics in ancient Greece, who watched a “flesh – and – blood person,” a rhapsode, perform and watched him perform in the guises of the narrator and the characters. The stitching element in the term *rhapsoidos* indicates continuous recitation provided that “stitching” is understood as the combination either of different kinds of song, such as a hymn and a song, or of the different parts of a more extended epic composition that was recited continuously but not in its entirety. The editors then note the main differences between the singer and the rhapsode: the former performs at the suggestion of his host, and the latter in public competitions; the former composes and performs his own songs, while the latter’s work is closely attached to the poetry of other individuals. When the invocation is complete, the inspired poet begins to tell the tale in the guise of the narrator, and soon after we hear from the characters. Some scholars see an “ironic distance” between poet and narrator, while others challenge the

applicability of the typical narratological approach that would distinguish between poet and narrator, and others posit a relationship of “subordination” (the narrator quotes the speeches of the characters). Finally, the editors point out that characters, whether speaking to themselves or to others, whether in public or in private, frequently emerge as performers out to display their verbal skill.

The opening chapter “Performance Contexts for Rhapsodic Recitals in the Archaic and Classical Periods” (29-75) by Christos Tsagalis, presents a panorama of the occasions and places of rhapsodic performances throughout the Greek world from their beginning to the end of the Classical period. The author structures the chapter by place and assigns the material to three separate categories: *horkoncours* performance (such as symposium for noncompetitive rhapsodic recitals); funeral games (cf. Hes. *Op.* 646-659); and public festivals, by far the most common venue for the recitation of epic poetry and suitable for displaying its often agonistic character. Indeed, the rise of the polis created a new context for the performance and dissemination of Archaic epic and Homeric poetry. Finally, Tsagalis sorts the data by geographical location considering it necessary to distinguish within a specific region, such as Asia Minor, the various sites where rhapsodic recitals were held.

The following chapter “Reading Rhapsodes on Athenian Vases” (76-97) by Sheramy Bundrick, collects all the black and red – figured Athenian vases that, based on certain criteria, likely feature a rhapsodic contest. Chronologically, they fall at strategic points during the history of the Panathenaic festival and offer a view into contemporary attitudes toward the event. The author especially examines a unique black figured pelike depicting Odysseus and Aias, on which Odysseus is making his case for being given Achilles’ armor. Some scholars assert that this scene was inspired by contemporary oratory, although Bundrick suggests that it was inspired by *rhapsoidia*. The author concludes that rhapsodes were more challenging to portray and simply may not have been as interesting to painters, compared to performers with musical instruments or athletes; the excitement of the primarily verbal and aural art of the rhapsode would presumably be difficult to convey in a way that was easily recognizable and visually appealing.

Chapter 3 “Performance Contexts for Rhapsodic Recitals in the Hellenistic Periods” (98-129) by Christos Tsagalis, explores recitations of Greek epic poetry during the Hellenistic period, although a slightly different picture emerges as far as performances are concerned. The author generally makes six concluding remarks

about rhapsodic performances in the Hellenistic period: rhapsodes do not operate as free agents but tend to belong to guilds of artists; mobility increases; rhapsodic competitions take place at all major festivals and all over the Greek world; under the influence of dramatic performances, rhapsodes intensified their attempts to make their recitals livelier for the audience; serious changes characterize the content of epic recitals after the Classical period; and as for the length of these rhapsodic recitals, certainly the rhapsodes recited selected parts from the Homeric poems.

Chapter 4 “Rhapsodes and Rhapsodic Contests in the Imperial Period” (130-150) by Anne Gangloff, investigates rhapsodes in the Imperial period and claims that they still performed epic poems, most notably those of Homer, and to a lesser extent, those of Hesiod, but their numbers appear to have decreased considerably. The author first offers an inventory of all the traces of their activity that remain in epigraphic and literary texts. Gangloff then examines the participation of rhapsodes in contests and their distribution in space and time in order to determine the cultural and social functions fulfilled by these artists. The lack of documentary sources may distort the picture, but no records exist as regards Athenian rhapsodes in the Imperial period. The term rhapsodes is only to be found in agonistic catalogues and appears to have been rarely used – or subsumed – under the more general category of “Homerist.”

Chapter 5 “Formed on the Festival Stage: Plot and Characterization in the *Iliad* as a Competitive Collaborative Process” (151-177) by Mary Bachvarova, examines how the repurposing of episodes, the diversions off the straight narrative path and the nuanced characterization of the heroes on both sides of the conflict cater to an aesthetic originating in a festival setting in which bards competed by performing one after another discrete episode, and which the author localizes in time and space to pre-8th century BC Troad. The author discusses ethnographic evidence from central Asia for performing discrete episodes from an epic tradition in festival settings and the evidence from ancient Greek for similar performances. She then goes on to explain some episodes in the *Iliad* in light of an aesthetic that derives from the appreciation of serial performances of episodes in a single epic tradition by multiple bards. The re-characterization of Hector presented in the Iliadic poem originated as the natural byproduct of the various allegiances of bards

performing in the Troad before the story of the fall of Troy dominated the festival stage of the Panionia.

The final Chapter of part one, “Did Sappho and Homer Ever Meet? Comparative Perspectives on Homeric Singers” (178-202) by Olga Levaniouk, offers some suggestions about performers of epic in ancient Greece that cannot be proven but seem reasonable in light of evidence from other traditions. Levaniouk looks at the variability in individual performance styles typical of modern oral traditions and speculates about the non-rhapsodic female singers who may have sung epic poetry in ancient Greece. The key piece of evidence is Sappho’s fr. 44 and Aeolic or, more specifically, Lesbian forms that are part of Homeric diction and testify to the well-organized role of Lesbos in the evolution of Homeric poetry. Sappho would have been familiar both with Homeric hexameters and with the living Lesbian epic tradition, which could have featured songs for the kithara in lyric meters. The author reaches the conclusion that creative engagement with Trojan myth hardly would have been a one-way street, and there were certainly occasions when women’s songs and performances of epic by men came into contact (cf. weddings and Andromache’s wedding in Sappho fr. 44 and *Il.* 6 and 22).

The opening Chapter of part two, “Odysseus Polyonymous” (205-229) by Deborah Beck, describes the different Homeric formulas that give voice to Homeric speech in several senses at once; within the Homeric poems we find several types of speakers of the artistic language described as Homer-ese. Different formulas appear and are used in different ways in the narrative in the *Odyssey* as compared to that of the *Iliad*. Beck considers especially the example of Odysseus and the formulas associated with him provide a rich case study for understanding how formulas are used by the full range of Homeric speakers in the Homeric epics. This chapter suggests the construction of a formulaic system for Odysseus by grouping the formulas for him into three related sets: nominative name – epithet formulas in introductory verses in speech; the full verse vocative formulas used by characters who address Odysseus; and finally the epithets that Odysseus uses to refer to himself in his own speeches.

Chapter 8 “Embedded Focalization and Free Indirect Speech in Homer as Viewpoint Blending” (230-254) by Anna Bonifazi, examines Homeric instances of the phenomena called “embedded focalization” and “free indirect speech”; these two phenomena are considered from a cognitive perspective and are interpreted as instances of viewpoint blending. The author first introduces the notion

of blending (or conceptual integration) independently of the notion of viewpoint. An analysis of Homeric passages argues that a viewpoint of blending reading makes sense of the fuzzy boundaries of interpretation that such terms as “focalization” and “free indirect speech” do not and cannot clarify.

Chapter 9, “Speech Training and the Mastery of Context: Thoas the Aetolian and the Practice of Muthoi” (255-277) by Joel Christensen, uses the information provided within the Homeric epics to isolate immanent assumptions about education and action; this investigation offers an object lesson on what a Homeric narrator does not tell; for example, “aspects of the cultures that influenced the Homeric epics are occluded by the passage of time, basic narrative economy, or the aesthetics of Panhellenic leveling” (256). The author explores the associations of Thoas’ introduction (*Il.* 15.281-285) in particular to sketch out how the cultures implied within the Homeric poems might approach training in public speech. Christensen focuses on how Thoas’ introduction engages with the political concerns of the *Iliad* and the agonistic character of Greek culture. He considers then the resonance of his introduction with other educative movements in Homer, especially Telemachus. Finally, he concludes with brief comments on how the deployment of this pattern (education of a public speaker in comparison to other non-literate societies) fits within the epic in contrasting with Trojan practices and in anticipating Achilles’ return.

Chapter 10, “Diomedes as Audience and Speaker in the *Iliad*” (278-298) by James O’Maley, examines internal performance and conversational strategies, but it does so through an examination of Diomedes, whose function as a narrator and conversationalist is inextricably linked to his role as an audience to other internal narrators. O’Maley argues that Diomedes’ development as a speaker in the poem is a successful response to his father’s portrayal by Athena and Agamemnon as an ineffective speaker but formidable actor. Diomedes is a persuasive speaker and a successful narrator but he also proves himself an attentive and astute audience to other characters’ narratives.

Chapter 11, “Hektor, the Marginal Hero: Performance Theory and the Homeric Monologue” (299-319) by Lorenzo Garcia, examines Hector’s monologue at *Il.* 22.98-130 as a performance that characterizes Hector and informs the representation of heroism in the *Iliad*. Hector’s long monologue is presented as a demonstration of his character as it is caught between heroism and anti-heroic

escapism. The monologue itself contains elements of different genres of speech and shift between them as he considers various options of action. The author aims to show that in Hector's performance he finds himself straying from the very genre of epic itself. His speech marks him as a kind of poet of the peaceful and the pastoral who is out of place in war-torn Ilium. The flights of fancy in which he indulges during his monologue are indicative of his vulnerability as a mortal hero.

Chapter 12, "Performance, Oral Texts, and Entextualization in Homeric Epic" (320-350) by Jonathan Ready, describes the model of entextualization and then applies it to the Homeric epics in order to shed light on the performances depicted in the poems and on the Homeric poet's own performance. By introducing a statement, the performer draws attention to the pre-existence of the formulation to its character as already constituted text. This pre-existence implies portability and transportability; it implies that the utterance could be repeated in a different setting. This detachability is at the heart of entextualization. The author uses the model of entextualization to elucidate both the representation of performance in the Homeric epics and the performance of the Homeric epics. Ready focuses solely on discursive modes of entextualization and investigates the existence and creation of oral texts in the world of the Homeric characters. He then looks briefly at the narrator text and the poems *tout court* before drawing an inference about the poet's own desire to entextualize.

The final Chapter of part two, "Homer's Rivals? Internal Narrators in the *Iliad*" (351-377) by Adrian Kelly, explores direct speech in Homer that has been often studied, although the author here focuses on a slightly different and neglected aspect of this well-known phenomenon: how frequently the poet has his characters summarize or retell his narrative and, more specifically, how this common practice adds tremendously and largely *e silentio* to Homer's narrative authority. This chapter illustrates one way in which Homer gets us, his external audience, to trust his story by reinforcing its events from the incidental to the crucial, with a constant parallel and reflective commentary delivered by his characters. We grant authority to the poet's original version compared to the flood of contextual detail that dominates a character's retelling. The priority of the poet's telling becomes reinforced by an unspoken sense of its accuracy, as the privileged external audience – scholarly or not – is lured into using it as a check text for the unprivileged characters within the story.

Overall, this lengthy volume breaks new ground by bringing together all of the speakers involved in the performance of Homeric poetry: rhapsodes, narrators and characters, as well as its external audience, us – scholars and students – that wish to understand deeply and thoroughly the way Homeric performers acted in antiquity. The contributors include scholars versed in epigraphy, the history of art, linguistics and performance studies, as well as those capable of working with sources from the ancient Near East and from modern Russia. Thus, this interdisciplinary approach makes the volume useful to a spectrum of readers – undergraduates and professors – as well as readers of classical studies and folklore.

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