

BOOK REVIEW

Homeric Imagery and the Natural Environment. By WILLIAM BROCKLISS. Hellenic Studies 82. Cambridge, MA and London, UK: Centre for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University Press, 2019. Pp. x + 283. Paperback, \$28.50, £22.95, €25.50. ISBN 978-0-674-98735-7.

In *Homeric Imagery and the Natural Environment* William Brockliss examines early Greek poetic metaphor, specifically that which draws upon floral and vegetative imagery, in order to glean new readings of the Homeric poems.

The study adopts a novel approach by drawing upon developments in the cognitive study of metaphor, in particular the works of Lakoff, Johnson and Turner that identify conceptual associations as grounded in physical experiences (i.e., a movement from concrete to abstract). Thus, Brockliss seeks to demonstrate that vegetative imagery is created in response to the local flora of the Greek poets' immediate surroundings. The book's tripartite structure (with each part consisting of an introductory preamble and three chapters) explores this thesis within the context of three distinct poetic themes: (1) eroticism, (2) order/chaos and (3) death/mortality. This inquiry is framed, in turn, as an exploratory case study that provides a new methodology for analyzing how a poetic corpus engages with the natural environment.

The introduction provides an articulate and concise defence for Brockliss' otherwise unique approach to Homeric metaphor – one of this study's crowning achievements. The methodology is presented as carefully balancing a series of tensions inherent within its subject matter: for example, the (competing) roles of poetic intent and audience reception; changes (due to the passage of time) between ancient and modern environmental landscapes; and the differing paradigms required by ancient (poetic) sources and modern scientific evidence. Within this framework, the paradigm of Lakoff et al. emerges as a fitting equilibrium for the study's two primary poles: Homeric poetry (and metaphor) and the "reality" of the natural environment. This said, Brockliss emphasizes how the approach of Lakoff et al. is merely a starting point for his own methodology and, consequently, their model remains subservient to the subtleties of Homeric poetry (and thus, for example, their definition of metaphor is broadened to better fit

Homeric sensibilities).

Part 1 (Chapters 1-3) establishes the structure of Brockliss' methodology and examines how floral metaphors interact with the theme of eroticism, in particular the notion of the "erotic gaze." The first two chapters contrast the constructions of eroticism within early archaic lyric poetry (Chapter 1) and Homeric epic (Chapter 2). This comparison demonstrates that while both forms of poetry conceptualize the object of one's desire in terms of floral metaphor, the ways in which this theme is expressed differs significantly between the two genres. Building upon the paradigm of Mulvey and Lacan's studies of (filmic) gaze, Brockliss argues that archaic lyric, on the one hand, presents erotic bodies as evaluative objects dominated by the gaze of the viewer/desirer; Homeric epic, on the other, contains a more dynamic perspective in which the viewer/desirer is seduced/deceived regarding the true nature of the erotic body (and thus the viewer is presented as lacking control over their situation). Chapter 3 then presents the characterization of this abstract concept via the audience's concrete experience of the fleeting beauty of "real world" flowers which, in the Homeric context, is framed via the related concept of *ποικίλον*.

Parts 2 (Chapters 4-6) and 3 (Chapters 7-9) repeat the successful format of Part 1 but with respect to the themes of cosmic order and civilization in arboreal imagery and of youth and death in floral imagery. Each section also selects a unique counterpoint to Homeric epic, rather than archaic lyric: Hesiodic epic (Chapter 4) and elegy (Chapter 7) respectively. These comparisons further demonstrate the unique and often pessimistic perspective of Homeric poetry with its negative treatment of floral imagery (thus, for example, the Homeric usage includes challenges to the cosmic order and the monstrous "otherness" of death, which do not appear in the same way within their relevant poetic counterparts). The third chapter of each part (Chapters 6, 9) demonstrates once more how these abstract concepts can be traced to a concrete experience of the sudden bloom of the Greek spring.

As with any study of this kind, Brockliss has had to be deliberately selective in his choice of illustrative passages which can result in a constrained feel to certain parts of the discussion. For example, while Brockliss devotes whole chapters to considering how the relevant poetic imagery interacts with Greek flora in Homeric contexts (Chapters 3, 6 and 9), the same does not occur regarding the poetic counterparts. While the conclusion touches upon this to a limited degree, this is – rightfully so – not the place for developing such discussion. Further, Chapter 3's analysis of archaic lyric includes choice passages from Ibycus,

Anacreon and Sappho but could easily be expanded to include additional poets/fragments such as Archilochus (196a) or Alcaeus (196b). Of course, given that the book's primary focus is Homeric epic, it must be acknowledged that these readings are intended to be supplemental and illustrative rather than comprehensive. Thus, these limitations are not weaknesses per se; to the contrary, they demonstrate the effectiveness of Brockliss' readings and broader methodology.

Suffice to say, this book will be of value to scholars and students alike. Thanks to its novel approach, Brockliss' readings of ancient Greek poetry (both Homeric and the other genres) contain novel insights, providing a breath of fresh air into texts that too often suffer from being either well-trodden or neglected. Furthermore, as Brockliss correctly surmises, this book provides a stable foundation upon which those interested in further exploring the interaction of poetic corpora with the natural environment may build.

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