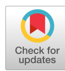

Fiktion in der Briefsammlung von Nilus Ankyranus' by L. Bossina, analyses the vast correspondence historically attributed to Nilus of Ancyra. Bossina starts off by concluding that a large part of the corpus is not written by Nilus – a reasonable position given the vastness of the epistolary collection. The chapter then questions the goals of this epistolary fiction (p. 199), beginning with a long excursus on Petrarch, a thread that Bossina follows through the rest of the chapter to its detriment: it is not necessary to rely on Petrarch to argue that the author of the letters is using editorial excerpts from his treatise *De monastica exercitatione* and authors such as Basil of Caesarea (p. 205). Bossina's textual comparison and analysis is sufficient to show the ties between Nilus' letters and other works, and the inclusion of Petrarch's text does nothing to illuminate the relationships between various works that intertextual theory cannot do on its own. The chapter does, however, end on a high note with the assertion that in all questions of authenticity, fiction should not be a hindrance to valuing and studying epistles (p. 220).

While several chapters work together symbiotically (most notably those of Hodkinson and Morrison), many do not treat the theme of authorship or authenticity that Marquis highlights in the introduction and chapter divisions. While the volume's thematic focus is ultimately unsuccessful, and the chapters do not as a whole work together to present any significant discourse on authenticity and fiction in Greek epistolary collections, there are a few standout chapters in both sections that are important contributions to scholarship on epistolary fiction in antiquity and should be read by anyone working on ancient epistolography.

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APPROACHES TO ORALITY

ERCOLANI (A.), LULLI (L.) (edd.) *Rethinking Orality I. Codification, Transcodification and Transmission of 'Cultural Messages'*. (Transcodification: Arts, Languages and Media 1.) Pp. x + 239, b/w & colour ills. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2022. Cased, £84.50, €92.95, US$107.99. ISBN: 978-3-11-071395-4. Open access.

ERCOLANI (A.), LULLI (L.) (edd.) *Rethinking Orality II. The Mechanisms of the Oral Communication System in the Case of the Archaic Epos*. (Transcodification: Arts, Languages and Media 2.) Pp. x + 218, b/w & colour figs. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2022. Cased, £84.50, €92.95, US$107.99. ISBN: 978-3-11-075074-4. Open access.

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This is a conference publication. Indeed, it is so much a conference publication that the final summarising chapter, by F. Montanari, addresses the conference itself and not the published volumes, which it treats as still in the future. The contributions do not engage with each other. This may not be a real problem, since the entire publication is open access – people can easily consult the chapters that interest them, and the abstracts that precede

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each chapter should enable readers to decide whether to read on. When this reviewer downloaded the EPUB version, the space labelled for footnotes was blank, so the PDF is recommended.

This volume offers many excellent papers, but it also shows two problems with the genre, one becoming far more common in recent years, the other long familiar. First, most of the contributors are not native speakers of English; the majority are Italians. Since most Anglophone scholars do not read as much in Italian as they should, publishing in English made sense as an exercise in communication. No native speaker, however, has edited the pieces. Some of the papers are written in excellent English; some contain only trivial errors; some generate only entertaining but manageable oddities like 'vascular painting' or 'Conclusive remarks and Open Questions'; but there are passages that are almost incomprehensible, even for a native speaker of English who knows enough Italian to recognise, sometimes, an underlying expression. It must be even harder for someone who is not a native speaker of either English or Italian, and it is not fair to thoughtful scholars to publish their work in a form that makes it difficult to understand. That is the inevitable result if they write in a language in which they are not fluent and if their contributions are not carefully edited. De Gruyter should not have published the volume without editing, or chapters should have been published in Italian with only the abstracts in English.

Second, as often happens with such conference publications, the topic of 'rethinking orality' is very open, and there is only limited additional benefit in reading the various chapters together. The effect of this collection on an American Homerist also reflects a gap between how the study of early epic appears in Italy and in the United States. Ercolani's paper (pp. 89–90) expresses a concern that archaic epic is now widely understood as 'a unitary phenomenon based in writing'. While Homerists certainly debate when and why written texts were created, and to what extent the texts that we have are not straightforward recordings of the oral tradition, scholarship positing a 'literary' Homer, although it appears and is reviewed and cited, is not influential in the Anglophone world right now, while in this publication the work of G. Nagy and his students, and of for example C. Tsagalis and J. Ready, is significantly less salient than it would probably be in the US. On the other hand, I found references several times to Italian scholarship that I should have known but did not.

The introduction and opening chapters give the impression that the 'Rethinking' of the title will be in particular the application of cognitive approaches to orality. There is a series of chapters from a philosopher and scientists – on epistemic states (S. Gozzano), the origins of language (P. Pecere), on epigenetics and cell memory (G. Simonetti), on the opposition between speech and writing in Western linguistic thought (F. Albano Leoni, observing how ordinary language has been wrongly subordinated to the tidier model provided by written texts) and on sign languages (O. Capirci and C. Bonsignori). These are interesting in themselves (if sometimes difficult going for a philologist), and they are certainly relevant to human language and hence in a general way to orality, but they do not demonstrate how they apply to questions likely to be of concern to those interested in the orality of early epic or Greek literature more broadly. Some later chapters do use cognitive approaches, but even these do not refer to the topics previously introduced in the work itself. For example, Ercolani, one of the editors, discusses how the saddleback (a bird from New Zealand) learns and varies songs, as a possible model for oral poetry. It is fascinating that birds have their own oral traditions, but I am not convinced that the birds teach us anything about how performers learn, vary and transmit songs that the comparative study of oral traditions has not, although a study at the level of brain pathways

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might be revealing, since it appears that, although birds do not have a neocortex, recent research indicates that their brains work more like human brains than we imagine.

The first volume includes a chapter by M. Giordano that directly considers neuroscientific support for the Homeric model of learning through epic performance – the audience is silently attentive, enchanted (they experience transportation), and they feel pleasure. The performances in Homer are idealised, and 'learning' is surely too narrow a description of what epic did for its audiences (especially those who heard a narrative they had often heard before) – but it would surely be a good thing if modern students were sometimes more like the Phaeacians listening to Demodocus. Other chapters address questions about orality but without any cognitive aspects.

Also in the first volume L. Del Corso looks at *paideia* and the place of epic in Greek education. One point is the disappearance of epic from scholastic competition in the Hellenistic period, although Homer is still foundational in elementary education; the power of rhetorical education and rhetorical thinking is a recurrent theme of the work. This chapter also makes a convincing argument that literacy was not as limited in classical Athens as many people believe. L. Sbardella treats the apprenticeship of the *aoidos*. This chapter offers a model not just for the apprenticeship of the *aoidos*, but for the development of the tradition overall. She defines three stages: Mycenaean, with short songs, not exclusively in hexameter, musical accompaniment, learning from one individual, performance in the palaces; from *c*. 1100 to *c*. 650, performances for a wider public, creativity in generating songs and expanding the formulaic system, exclusive use of the hexameter, learning within a group; *c*. 650–500, mostly memorisation rather than creation, formation of professional guilds. This is surely too schematic, and assumes a linear development, but it is valuable precisely because its clarity and simplicity invite further thought and disagreement.

Other chapters by Hellenists, such as an argument by M. Tulli that Plato's *Menexenus* should be read without irony, are contributions to traditional philological debate (worth reading even though I am, again, unconvinced), but their relevance to orality is unclear. R. Palmisciano on the Greeks' interest in birdsong as an origin of human song could be linked to broader issues of orality in Greek song-culture, but the chapter does not make these connections. D. De Sanctis on female 'supremacy' (which seems to be roughly synonymous with 'excellence' in the *Ehoeae* and consists in the women's ability to produce a heroic line; it is not political power) makes a few remarks about orality and is the only contribution to address gender. De Sanctis apparently believes that both the *Ehoeae* and the Homeric epics must be literate works. (The chapter cites K. Ormand's *The Hesiodic* Catalogue of Women *and Archaic Greece* [2014], but does not really respond to it.)

The second volume addresses the methods of communication in archaic Greek epos. E. Minchin uses 'motor resonance' to examine how Homeric landscapes work cognitively, and then suggests that the way in which emotion affects memory can help explain why Achilles is so ready to let his comrades suffer (but we should also notice the hints that he is angry at everyone for not joining him in opposition to Agamemnon). E. Bakker looks at how formulae function even in the written text, both as aiding in performance and in referring to other uses of the formula. He interprets some of the 'wild' Ptolemaic papyri as such meaningful repetitions, and he seems to be proposing a maximalist text, in which all attested verses would be included. A. Cesare Cassio offers a delightful chapter arguing that the epithet πρόφασσα is an archaism that belongs to an unrecognised type-scene (male addresses goddess), while the transmitted athematic forms εἴπατε should not be emended away; the oral tradition both retains and innovates.

C. Bozzone looks at three features of epic speech: formularity, metre and artificial language ('Kunstsprache'). The first section tends to confirm that oral composition explains

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formularity. Although everyday speech is highly formulaic, its units are significantly shorter than those of Greek epic. For metre, the chapter compares Homeric metre with the prosodic regularisation found in sportscasting; by limiting choices, such patterning makes the cognitive burden on the speaker lighter. Finally, the chapter looks at Brit Pop pronunciation, where singers such as Adele adopt features of the performance tradition in which they see themselves as performing, but do not completely assimilate to it. The claim is not that metre is irrelevant to the features of epic dialect, but that the dialect also had a social and aesthetic value. This point is not entirely new, but the modern comparanda are. This chapter is an abbreviated version of the author's Habilitationsschrift, *Homer's Living Language*.

The next two chapters address connections between the *Odyssey* and Cyclic material from an oralist perspective. Although the concluding comments by F. Montanari regret that the oralist adaptation of Neo-Analysis is represented in only one chapter, both these contributions are indebted to such approaches. G. Scafoglio argues that interpenetration of related tales was so much a part of epic technique that we should not see the many references to the *Oresteia* (the return of Agamemnon and the vengeance of Orestes) in the *Odyssey* as originally moralising paradigmata; rather, the return of Odysseus was always embedded in the broader context of the Returns, and it is the *Oresteia*'s influence that moralised the Odysseus-story. This reviewer is not convinced. J. Burgess discusses the ambiguities of Tiresias' prophecy of the aftermath of the killing of the suitors and the death of Odysseus, and how audiences who knew other traditions would have reacted. My own assumption has always been that, if a performance is successful, a transported audience does not at the moment concern itself with other versions unless something prompts the memory of an alternative (audience members may discuss such variants later). Tiresias' ἐξ ἁλός (*Od.* 11.134) might be such a prompt; so the ambiguity should not be ignored. This is a discussion where cognitive studies might have helped, if in fact relevant research has been conducted.

S. Quadrelli discusses traces of orality in Herodotus (where both Homeric influence and oral performance are already familiar scholarly topics): the patterning of battle scenes, with their frequent catalogues, and the dynamic function of speeches, which often drive the action (rather than contributing mostly to interpreting it, as often in Thucydides). Quadrelli defines Herodotus as a transitional figure. There is surely more than the development of rhetoric at work in the differences between speeches in Herodotus and Thucydides; they have different views of human psychology and of historical causality.

Lulli examines how ancient literary criticism, especially the *De sublimitate*, recognises and understands orality – not surprisingly, from the listener's perspective, since the audience of the treatise read from within the system of rhetorical education. R. Hunter points to an interesting passage in Athenaeus in which Musarius (XIV, 631d), in a very Platonic discussion of the history of music, says that Homer composed verses that were metrically faulty but did not care because he used melody (Hunter is not here interested in how frequently oral poets use music to repair metrical irregularities, but they do). Gnomic/didactic poets, in contrast, not composing for musical performance, laboured to make their verses correct. Hunter points to the similarity with the distinction in Longinus between the daring and sublime poets, like Pindar, and the flawless but tamer poets, like Bacchylides, and he sees some anticipation here of our distinction between 'oral' and 'literate' poetry. The similarity is real, but it is not obvious that we learn much from it about how to appreciate or understand oral and oral-derived texts. Finally, S. Zeman offers comparisons between Homeric epic and Middle High German epics, which themselves belong to distinct heroic and courtly branches, the first probably transmitted orally before being written, the second composed in writing from the start. Zeman helpfully points out that in the study of orality issues that are related but distinct

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become confused – authorship and originality vs communal property; improvisation vs prepared composition; distance vs presence. This chapter is difficult to summarise, because its value lies in detailed analyses and comparisons on specific points. So, for example, while sentence length and reliance on the intonation unit are markers of medial orality (that is, how the work is composed and transmitted), deictics and interjections create an impression of immediacy and belong to the relationship between performer and audience.

Cognitive approaches have great potential value for Classicists and for students of archaic epic, but at present the distance between what science knows about brains and what they can learn about the workings of minds is still considerable. For the present, cognitive psychology is likely to be more helpful most of the time than neuroscience. It is important to remember that epos was a complex cultural product; and while an understanding of everyday communication can aid understanding, epic performance was not a simple message from sender to recipients.

Homerists, although they will learn from most of these papers, are not going to be inspired to profound rethinking of orality, because they are familiar with these methodologies already. Those who are less familiar with recent work in the area can use this work as a guide before reading more deeply. The chapters that address later authors or issues peripheral to orality will find their own audiences.

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THE BASLER KOMMENTAR IN ENGLISH

WESSELMANN (K.) *Homer's* Iliad*: the Basel Commentary. Book VII*. Translated by Benjamin W. Millis and Sara Strack and edited by S. Douglas Olson. Pp. xii + 237. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2023. Cased, £100, €109.95, US$126.99. ISBN: 978-3-11-068763-7.

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This translation of the 2020 German commentary by W. is a valuable supplement to the ongoing edition of the English version of the renowned *Homers Ilias. Gesamtkommentar* (also known as *Basler Kommentar*), launched in 2000 by J. Latacz and A. Bierl. By now most Classicists are well acquainted with the series' format: four graphically differing tiers addressing different categories of readership, from the general commentary to the comprehensive philological commentary followed by a more specialised discussion and, finally, by the elementary grammatical commentary to be used by school and university students. These and other conventions are explained in the 'Notes for the Reader' and the '24 Rules Relating to Homeric Language', which conveniently precede the text.

Book 7 is one of the books of the *Iliad* that are least favoured by both scholars and the reading public, and it is not difficult to see why. It falls into two unequal and loosely connected parts, the Duel of Hector and Ajax and the Burial of the Dead, and it concludes with the building of fortifications of the Achaean camp (the so-called Achaean Wall), poorly motivated and more fitting the beginning of the war rather than its tenth year. Most commentators agree that, as M. West put it, '*H* in particular falls below the standard

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