Abstracts

JOHN F. GARCÍA, “Symbolic Action in the Homeric Hymns: The Theme of Recognition”

The Homeric Hymns are commonly taken to be religious poems in some general sense but they are often said to contrast with cult hymns in that the latter have a definite ritual function, whereas “literary” hymns do not. This paper argues that despite the difficulty in establishing a precise occasion of performance for the Homeric Hymns, we are nevertheless in a position to identify their ritual function: by intoning a Hymn of this kind, the singer achieves the presence of a god before participants in a public festival. The key mechanism by which the hymnist does this is the evocation of a god via the elaboration of a typical unit of traditional hymnic discourse, what I call the “theme of recognition (before revelation).”

The pragmatic operation of narrative such as this is similar to the device known in the study of magical texts as the _historiola_, or short narrative that serves as a verbal model for a desired outcome in the patient’s world. This kind of operation is called, in this paper, “symbolic action,” a term borrowed from the rhetorician Kenneth Burke. The theme of recognition is traced in the fabric of the expansive Hymns (II-V, VII), and the paper further argues that an important generic marker in the Hymns, the greeting of the god (χαῖρε), discloses their pragmatic function, the hymnist’s skillful deliverance of the god before his hearers.

JOHN HENDERSON, “A Doo-Dah-Doo-Dah-Dey at the Races: Ovid Amores 3.2 and the Personal Politics of the Circus Maximus”

Ovid’s two versions of his encounter with a woman at the races in the Circus Maximus (Amores 3.2; Ars Amatoria 1.135-70) are re-read together as celebrations of the spectacle of the spectators in the arena. The analytical approaches of “Everyday Life” collage
and “Foucauldian panopticism” structure are shown to “over-achieve.” Ovid dramatizes personal politics at the Circus in a sustained display of the self-reflexive poetics of erotic metaphor. When elegiac amor is acted out as a race, victory and favor are eroticized, steering between crude explicitness and bland circumlocution, into an expert triumph of sexual asymmetry. Ovid finds a version of feminineus amor which brings his poem to a climax, and a climax to his poem, in spite of public decency and myriad spectators. Every quirk, routine, or landmark of the ludi circenses, including the parade of the gods, is included as a challenge for Ovid’s poetic chariot, another lap in the race–or another race, re-run according to a fresh strategy. Re-playing the meta-literary terms of poetic genre, Amores 3.2 gives an “epinician” turn to Amores 3, playing games on Callimachean strategies for re-starting a work on a new lap.

CHARLES MCNELIS, “Greek Grammarians and Roman Society during the Early Empire: Statius’ Father and his Contemporaries”

Statius’ Silvae 5.3 is a poem written in honor of the poet’s dead father. In the course of the poem, Statius recounts his father’s life and achievements. Prominent among these accomplishments are the years the elder Statius spent as a teacher of Greek poetry—a grammarian—in Naples. Statius tells us which Greek poets his father taught and to whom. The content and audience of Statius’ father’s instruction form the basis of this paper.

A number of the Greek poets taught by Statius’ father are not obvious candidates for inclusion in a course of instruction in Greek poetry. Lycophron, Corinna or Epicharmus, for instance, are not commonly found in other accounts of Greek education in Roman Italy during the early empire. The elder Statius’ pedagogical activity has thus been viewed as a Neapolitan peculiarity. Yet, I argue, the same authors taught by Statius’ father were the focus of grammarians who were working in Rome itself. The curriculum of Statius’ father is thus representative of Greek intellectual activity in early imperial Rome.

The pedagogical activity of Statius senior is relevant to Roman intellectual history in a second way. His students consisted of aristocrats from around the Bay of Naples and southern Italy. Some of these students were likely Roman. So too the students of the Greek grammarians working in Rome likely encountered young Romans. How did the study of some mainstream and some recondite Greek poets fit into the élite discourse of the early empire? I argue that knowledge of the poets taught by the elder Statius was geared towards marking off the élite from the non-élite. Students of grammarians such as Statius’ father were given the tools to engage in aristocratic discourse, which constituted a claim for prestige and honor in early imperial Rome.

VASSILIKI PANOUSSI, “Vergil’s Ajax: Allusion, Tragedy, and Heroic Identity in the Aeneid”

This essay attempts a reevaluation of the use of Greek tragedy in Vergil’s Aeneid, drawing on recent advances in the study of literary allusion and on current approaches to Greek drama which emphasize the importance of social context. I argue that extensive allusions to the figure of Ajax in the Aeneid serve as a subtext for the construction of the personae of Dido and Turnus. The allusive presence of Ajax attests to the existence of a tragic register in the epic, which intersects with and complicates the multiple allusive registers within the poem. Moreover, I propose that a detailed examination of Vergil’s
The manipulation of tragedy’s articulation of socio-political and ideological problems may in turn illuminate the Aeneid as a national epic and its much-contested relationship with Augustan ideology.

More specifically, I argue that issues of identity and moral action explored in Sophocles’ Ajax are crucial in the cases of Dido and Turnus, who similarly find themselves in conflict with and unable to adapt to the new social and political structure of Aeneas’ new order. Like Ajax, Dido and Turnus define themselves through constant reference to their relationship with their people. All three, however, engage in action which pits them against the interests of their communities and which results in their complete isolation. Unable to adjust their behavioral code to ensure their survival, Dido and Turnus embody a heroic ideal which, though laudable, can have no place in Aeneas’ Roman future. Vergil thus mobilizes a tragic allusive register in order to illustrate the tension between the celebration of this ideal and the realization that social change has rendered it obsolete. At the same time, the loss of the ideals that Dido and Turnus represent necessitates the articulation of a comparable, if not superior, ethical code which Aeneas is called on to embody. Allusive evidence linking Aeneas to the tragic Ajax, however, seems to indicate Aeneas’ failure to emerge as a superior moral force in the poem.

Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi, “Mixed Pleasures, Blended Discourses: Poetry, Medicine, and the Body in Plato’s Philebus 46-47c”

In Plato’s Philebus the last section of the discussion on the falseness of pleasure is dedicated to those pleasures intrinsically mixed with pain. This paper focuses specifically on bodily mixed pleasures, an analysis that extends from 44d to 47c, while its focal point is 46-47c. By adopting the anti-hedonists’ methodology, Socrates cunningly transforms his entire analysis of bodily mixed pleasures into a discourse on human disease, in which medical terminology prevails. Two major points are made in the reading suggested here. (a) Despite Socrates’ quasi-medical language, a substratum of poetic discourse is underlying his analysis. Thus, a network of poetic associations—probably promptly recalled by Plato’s audience—not only reveals the intertextual encounter between medical, philosophic and poetic discourses but also contributes to the interpretation of Socrates’ analysis. Hence, the pathology of love as expressed through poetry illuminates the meaning, questionable in straightforward medical terms, of passage 46c6-d2, while it also reveals the unfolding unity underlying Socrates’ analysis, otherwise thought to comprise three distinct medical cases. (b) Ancient medical lore is important for the understanding of passage 46d7-47a1 on the affliction of knēsīs and psōra, not only because it confirms the analogy between the physiology of knēsīs and that of sexual arousal and climax, but also because it illuminates the specific medical treatment Socrates is describing. Thus, in the crucial debate about whether Plato uses the term aporiais or pyriais in 46e2, medical evidence seems to support the latter. The reading pyriais makes this complicated paragraph more comprehensible in terms of meaning and syntax, while stressing the importance of heat in the processes of both the curing of knēsīs and of human orgasm. Besides, it further confirms the intertextual encounter between the Phaedrus and the Philebus.