

CANEVARO (L.G.) and O'ROURKE (D.) (eds) **Didactic Poetry of Greece, Rome and Beyond: Knowledge, Power, Tradition**. Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2019. Pp. vi + 307. £60. 9781910589793.

doi:[10.1017/S0075426922000544](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426922000544)

In part anticipated by Servius' observation that didactic poetry necessarily includes instruction and the persona of both teacher and pupil (*ad Verg. G. 1.pr*), this highly engaging volume explores the didactic tradition, broadly conceived, by exploring three themes: (1) didactic poems as a source of knowledge; (2) the poet's effort to exert control, authority and power; and (3) the tradition through which the genre is formed. More a thoughtful guide than an exhaustive study of the didactic tradition, the volume offers a variety of theoretical tools and exempla to hew our skills as readers of the genre.

The editors in the introduction discuss the porous borders of the genre before they explain the rationale of the volume and its division into three parts: Theory, Tracing Tradition (a diachronic picture of the Graeco-Roman tradition) and Comparisons and Continuations (a discussion of texts beyond the conventional bounds of the tradition, including the Sibylline oracles, Babylonian didactic literature, Kalanga oral wisdom literatures from southern Africa and Scottish neo-Latin didactic poetry). In all, the ten essays in the volume are well integrated and do an excellent job of illuminating what is distinctive about didactic poetics.

Theory. Through close readings of Hesiod's *Works and Days*, Nicander's *Theriaca*, Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, Vergil's *Georgics* and Manilus' *Astronomica*, Donncha O'Rourke's extremely engaging essay draws heavily from Foucault's 'analytics' of knowledge and power to argue that dominant periods of didactic poetry coincide with periods of sociopolitical change and epistemic shifts. He also discusses how the tradition grows, always building on Hesiod. Examining the *Works and Days* through the lens of cognitive behavioural therapy, Lilah Grace Canevaro argues that Hesiod 'is good for thinking' (54), encouraging autonomous thought and championing practical self-sufficiency. The poet's/educator's instruction is subtle, rather than overt, as he shifts registers from myth to proverb, to riddle and calendar.

Tracing Tradition. In a splendid essay discussing songs by Demodocus, Achilles, Phoenix and the bard left behind to guard Clytemnestra, David Sider places Homer within the didactic mode, observing that 'Homer himself composed in the knowledge, or at any rate the hope, that he had the power to alter men's perception about themselves for the better' (75). Jumping to the Hellenistic period, when prose treatises, not the Muse or the poet himself, were the source of knowledge, Floris Overduin describes how didactic poets writing in hexameter crafted pieces of wisdom 'into aesthetically gratifying poetry' (97), but her central focus is on a new didactic elegy from the first century AD. These poems, filled with pharmacological recipes and riddles infused with Homeric allusions, challenged the reader more than the pupil, in poetry that 'reflect[ed] the joy of a common literary past in an elite culture of playful learning, in the context of imperial power' (115). Writing on puns and acrostics in didactic poetry, Monica R. Gale describes how the genre, while still building on Hesiod, 'develops more complex and subtle strategies of authorization' (124), again challenging the reader, as the activity of reading itself parallels the poet's reading of nature's subtle signs. After familiar examples from Aratus, Nicander and Lucretius, Gale concludes with a possible acrostic on Vergil's name in the *Georgics*, where interpretation is particularly challenging. In the final essay of this section, Elena Giusti argues that Ovid's *Ars amatoria* reworks Horace's *Ars poetica* as both poems reveal the 'incompatibility between technicality and poetry, *ars* and *ingenium*' (166) and make clear that instruction about poetry or love cannot produce real poetry or attain true love.

Comparisons and Continuations. Writing on the Jewish/Christian Sibylline Oracles, Helen Van Noorden identifies apocalyptic narratives within the didactic tradition and reveals how the Sibyl, while reworking Homer and Hesiod, is closer to the Muse herself than a mortal poet. Often prophesizing rather than preaching and speaking to nations rather than to a single addressee, these poems reveal as much through ‘shock and awe’ (193) as through instruction. When looking at the Babylonian *Poem of the Righteous Sufferer* (*Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*), Johannes Haubold makes the essential point that we should seek to identify Babylonian perspectives within their own terms rather than mine them for antecedents to Greek texts; in this case, the sufferer comes to understand that he has learnt nothing about the gods but that in his pain he has felt the hand of god, a knowledge unique to humans. Discussing living (but endangered) Kalanga oral wisdom literature, Madhlozi Moyo interprets such proverbs and metaphors as gendered focalizations and as models (mostly negative) about human behaviour that teach us how to live and not to live. The volume concludes with David McOmish’s charming essay on the vibrant literary culture in early modern Scotland where humanists of many stripes composed neo-Latin verse to express their views on medicine, Newtonian science, theology and moral philosophy in an effort, much like Lucretius, ‘to teach kings and challenge vested interests’ (249).

In sum, all are fine essays, combining close readings and broad commentary, making an informative, clear and insightful volume.

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GRETHLEIN (J.), HUITINK (L.) and TAGLIABUE (A.) (eds) **Experience, Narrative, and Criticism in Ancient Greece: Under the Spell of Stories** (Cognitive Classics). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp xi + 340, illus. £79. 9780198848295.
doi:[10.1017/S0075426922000556](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426922000556)

Back in the 1980s, Jane Gallop, following Adrienne Rich’s injunction towards ‘thinking through the body’, recalled how reading Rousseau’s *Julie* as a graduate had made her cry; reading the Marquis de Sade, she continued, made her masturbate. How does literature, she pondered, produce different bodily fluids? Gallop is only one – for me, still the funniest and sharpest – of a string of feminist theorists who strove to understand literary *jouissance* – the bodily, engaged experience of writing and reading. Moving, powerful, engaged criticism. When *Experience, Narrative and Criticism in Ancient Greece* claims novelty, 40 years later, because it brings to the fore ‘the embodied aspects of the recipient’s experience’ (4), based on the insight that ‘accounts of simple bodily movements seem to trigger our sensorimotor system with particular strength’ (5), it is dispiriting that it is impossible to find a single reference to this hugely influential tradition of feminist work on the reader’s bodily experience. Indeed, the very idea of erotics is largely absent, for all the references to ‘ecstasy’ taken from Stephen Halliwell’s important study of ancient criticism (*Between Ecstasy and Truth: Interpretations of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus* (Oxford 2011)). We get instead studies of asyndeton. (Only [dis]connect ...) It is not merely erotics that is signally lacking here. The single most obvious occasion when an audience loses its self in the ‘literary experience’ is the overwhelming burst of laughter. It is reported that neither Plato nor Jesus ever laughed precisely because this disruptive loss of control was so alien to their respective ideals. It is the clearest *physical* experience of literature humans have, individually and, of equal importance, collectively: the collapse into tears of uncontrollable laughter. There is not a single discussion of comedy here. Nor is there adequate discussion of what difference it makes to be in an audience of more than one person. There