

WILLIAM ALLAN, *Greek Elegy and Iambus. A Selection*, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, x + 338 pp., £ 24.99 (pb), 2019, ISBN 978-1-107-55997-4.

This edition, published as a volume of the famous “green and yellow” series, brings together the strongest and most distinctive elegiac and iambic poems composed in the Archaic and early Classical periods by ten poets (Archilochus, Semonides, Callinus, Tyrtaeus, Mimnermus, Solon, Theognis, Xenophanes, Hipponax, Simonides). Although a selection always means narrowing the material one has access to, this anthology, compared to others that are available on the shelves, broadens, to some extent, readers’ outlook on matters by the inclusion of texts quite recently recovered from the papyri (Simonides’ Plataea Elegy and Archilochus’ Telephus Elegy). As William Allan (hereafter WA) rightly stresses in the *Introduction*, the process of selection “can affect our perception of individual poets” (p. 19) and give us “a selective and biased picture” of genres. He refers both diagnoses to the ancient process of transmitting the texts which influenced the survival of Classical literature, but they can certainly also be related to his own selection. While there is no need to express my occasional disagreements over which poems were worthy of inclusion in the volume, a certain distance from some decisions which have significant influence on readers’ perceiving the development of both genres must be kept and expressed here. WA omits, for reasons of space, as he declares in the *Introduction* (p. 3)¹, all poets living after Simonides who is the latest author in the selection. Mentioning an evolution of elegy and its popularity in the Alexandrian period, he points out (p. 3) Hellenistic poets’ debt to the fourth century elegy, but does not supply any material which could explain the thematic or artistic continuity between learned ‘scholar-poets’ and seemingly simple ‘pipe-singers’. The presence of elegies composed by Dionysius Chalcus, Euenus or Critias (at least one poem of each) in the volume would be a good example of the appearance of the forerunners of later trends in the elegy as early as in the Classical period. The presentation of this *vinculum* that binds the early and the Hellenistic stage of Greek elegy would be most useful, also because the existing selections of Hellenistic poetry do not include it (for obvious chronological reasons) so that a gap is created which belittles the importance of poems offering a great contribution to the development of the elegiac genre. A link between the Archaic and Classical iambus and, generally, Hellenistic features of poetry could convincingly be illustrated with Ananius’ non-aggressive Fr. 5 and his passion for catalogue structure.

¹ One can say that WA carries on the tradition of “ritually lamenting” the limitation of size or space occurring in almost all introductions to the anthologies, as André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and Manipulation of Literary Frame*, London-New York 1992, 124, ironically concludes, justifying at the same time this practice. He says: “Publishers invest in anthologies, and publishers decide the number of pages they want to invest in”.

The edition of the Greek text and commentary on it is preceded by the *Introduction* (pp. 1-20). It is very well constructed and written in an attractive, readable way. It consists of six concise parts (1. Elegy and iambus as poetic forms, 2. Performance and mobility, 3. Poets and personae, 4. Society and culture, 5. Language, style, metre, and 6. Transmission of the text) providing excellent guidance for conceptualizing elegiac and iambic genres in the predominantly oral culture of Archaic and early Classical Greece. The approach offered by WA intends to make the reader sensitive to the flexibility of features identified as typically elegiac or iambic and diversity of their performance contexts. The general recognition of the importance of being constantly in flux for some elegiac and iambic characteristics and, consequently, defying tidy categorization of both genres successfully shows the need to approach archaic poets as directly conversant with the problems of their society which they wanted to influence. Considering the symposium as a forum for early Greek poetry WA sketches important issues arising from the socio-cultural situation in the Archaic age (such as expansion and contact with foreign cultures, social and political revolution, sexuality and gender) and shows how they are reflected in elegiac and iambic poems presented in the sympotic setting. The aesthetic merits of poems are not missed by WA in the *Introduction*, but the numerous useful observations on a range of poetic techniques employed by the poets and their *modus operandi* are presented in the commentary on individual poems. The enumeration of the poetic figures on pp. 15-16 provides the prelude to a great extension of this theme successfully provided in the commentary proper. The *Introduction* is a very satisfactory part of the book. It clearly defines elegiac and iambic distinctive features and places poems in their contexts.

In the *Notes on the Text* (p. X) WA indicates the conventions the Greek text features, recording editors' usual practice connected with the publication of papyri. No attempt has been made to clarify the question of the accentuation of final oxytones, the primary concern being to ensure intelligibility of the editorial symbols used. There is no point in denying that this detail, perhaps posing little problem to the readers who primarily focus on the content of poems, is a problem that faces editors of Greek poetry. Editors' usual practice was to print the final syllable of an oxytonon as grave at the line-end, where no punctuation occurs. WA retains this convention. There is, however, in recent editions of Greek texts a tendency to revise this standard rule. Since Martin West in his edition of Aeschylus' tragedies² diagnosed that even if at a line-end *sententia nullam pausam facit, versus pausam facit*, and, consequently, perceived the final oxytones as having an acute accent, scholars began to follow this principle and print the acute at the line-end³. While in case of stichic metres this editorial rule may appear to convince

² M. L. West, *Aeschyli tragoediae cum incerti poetae Prometheus*, Stuttgart 1990, XXXI. See also *Homeri Ilias*, t. I: *Rhapsodiae I-XII*, rec. M. L. West, Stuttgart-Leipzig 1998, t. II: *Rhapsodiae XII-XXIV*, Stuttgart-Leipzig 2000, and *Homerus. Odysea*, rec. M. L. West, Stuttgart-Leipzig 2017.

³ See J. Danielewicz, *Antologia liryki hellenistycznej*, Warszawa 2018 (with his remarks on West's notation and the only exception to this accentual rule in the case of proclitics

the scholars⁴, some editors of strophic / melic poetry use it with reservation, only in such instances where the line-end coincides with the period-end, otherwise printing a grave⁵. When it comes to the elegiac distich which is (strictly speaking, as WA rightly points out in the footnote 58 of the *Introduction*) an epodic strophe, the end of a hexametric line always coincides with the period-end. It requires, then, according to the above mentioned rule, an acute, even if there is no sense-break between a dactylic hexameter and the so called pentameter. The same is true with the epodes of Archilochus and Hipponax, which are strophic forms. WA retains graves in all these cases (see Archil. 42.1; Callin. 1. 8, 18; Tyrt. 12. 39, 41; Mimn. 2. 4; 12. 3; 14. 9; Solon 4. 24; 13. 9, 17, 47, 74; Theognis, 41, 57, 251, 805; in the epodes see Archil. 172.3; in the stichic iambic trimeter see Solon 36. 10, 11; Semon. 1.11; 7.30, 36, 41, 67, 71, 94), making an exception (why?) for Simon. 11.19, where he puts the acute accent at the line-end without punctuation (υιέ without a sense break with the κούρη at the beginning of the next line)⁶. Since the issue of the accentuation of final oxytones has recently returned in scholarly discussions, I would expect a clear explanation of the author's position on this matter and a justification of his choice in the *Introduction*.

In the *Commentary* each poet is introduced with an overview concerning his life and reputation. Then WA moves on to the commentary proper on all poems included in the volume. It helps the reader to navigate through the complexities of elegiac and iambic patterns and make sense of what may seem unclear or puzzling. The great advantage of the commentary is that it provides - besides rich and valuable material concerning numerous details which make a commented passage much more comprehensible and lucid - a proposal of a synthetic interpretation of each poem. It still makes sense to believe that the words, phrases and sentences used by poets contribute to an intelligible whole, which some recent commentators focusing on *singula* seem to forget about. WA's commentary is excellent in this respect and the reader finds its consultation highly rewarding. Also in considering the traditional motifs used by elegists or iambic poets WA never appears too enthusiastic about the idea of the poem's indebtedness to another poem, but prefers to speak about "using [by a poet] a commonplace idea for his own ends" (see e.g. p. 124 on 'men and leaves' theme in Mimnermus 2) or a poem being influenced by an artistic pattern, not by an individual piece of poetry (see e.g. p. 218 on Hipponax's targeting the epic tradition as a whole, not the poems of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*). Generally speaking, categories such as "influence" or "sources", highlighted in studies in the Book Culture repertoire, with reference to literature composed and transmitted orally must be treated differently to be fruitful for interpreting Archaic and early Classical Greek poetry. WA in his commentary illuminates the different facets of 'oral intertextuality', bringing out their values for producing early elegy and iambus.

occurring at line-ends).

⁴ See N. Hopkinson, *Greek Poetry of the Imperial Period*, Cambridge 1994 (esp. a note on final oxytones, p. IX).

⁵ See F. Budelmann, *Greek Lyric. A Selection*, Cambridge 2018.

⁶ Also an explanation is needed, why in Archil. 181.4 the acute was used.

WA presents in Part 3 of the *Introduction* some accurate observations on poets and personae, arguing that “the goal of the ancient poet is not to reflect on his own experience, but to construct a persona which the audience will find both credible and engaging” (p. 9) and he usefully shows the way in which “a single poet can deploy a variety of personae” (p. 10). However, in the course of the commentary the problem of constructing the poetic “I” appears, in some instances, a less satisfactory element of this excellent work. WA rightly speaks about playing the roles of someone else by the poet (e. g. a good soldier, beggar, seducer, embittered aristocrat), but in the commentary he is inconsistent, it must be noted, in naming who is speaking in a poem. He emphasizes for example Archilochus’ asserting various roles by calling *persona loquens* ‘the speaker’ (pp. 59, 61, 62, etc.), whereas in the commentary on Theognis (I would prefer the term *Theognidea* in some places) he seems to ignore the centrality of persona in elegy and underlines the poet’s personal voice focusing on particular aspects of aristocratic values (“The poet fears”, “Theognis condemns, laments, complains, describes, prays, explains”⁷). This may pose little problem to the reader.

Part 6 of the *Introduction* includes remarks on transmission of the text. WA is right when saying “Some poets may have composed with the aid of writing” (p. 20) and that “Theognis’ famous *sphragis* or ‘seal’, for example, is intended to ward off those who would meddle with the written text” (*ibidem*). Nonetheless it would perhaps be safer if he used the verb “were composed” or “were created” instead of saying (p. 110) that Tyrtaeus’ martial elegies “were written for recitation” and (*ibidem*) “were written for performance at public festivals”. Do we possess the arguments in favour of using this medium by this poet? One should not, however, protest against the phrase that “Semonides wrote ‘elegiacs’” (p. 86) since WA repeats the information given by the Suda (“The Suda reports that”) in this place and renders the ἔγραψε used by its author, which is not decisive on the matter of original oral or written form of a work, but simply designates the act of creating / composing a poem.

Throughout the commentary WA makes suggestions concerning the completeness of poems survived, with a special reference to shorter pieces, but sometimes does not support his view with arguments limiting himself to judgment calls like ‘may be stand-alone piece’ (p. 58), ‘could be a stand-alone piece’ (p. 59), ‘is probably complete’ (pp. 90, 146), ‘may be a complete poem’ (pp. 123, 185). He also mentions several times the occurrence of an inceptive δέ (e.g. at the beginning of poems of Mimnermus, 1 and 2, and Solon, 4), but I wonder whether he believes in this function of the particle in Archilochus 1 in the case of which a stand-alone piece seems to be little more than a guess. He does not comment on this δέ. WA rightly explains the aim of employing the inceptive δέ as ‘giving the opening a conversational liveliness’ (p. 122 on Mimn. 1) and creating ‘a sense of spontaneous performance’ (p. 136 on Solon 4). But let us quote from Campbell’s treatment⁸ of this matter which adds an important aspect of using δέ in

⁷ Verbs occur respectively on pp. 167-8, 171-3, 176-7.

⁸ D. A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric Poetry. A Selection of Early Greek Lyric, Elegiac and*

this place: "... a poet might have used a particle to make an implicit contrast: if Solon began with ἡμετέρα δὲ πόλις, he may have left his readers or listeners to supply the μὲν clause, 'other cities may perish'⁹; similarly Archilochus with εἰμὶ δ' ... ἐγὼ ...".

Since the book is addressed also to undergraduate students and intends to promote wider use of elegy and iambus in teaching¹⁰, it is obvious that it brings in some - from the point of view of advanced readers - more elementary explanations concerning grammar (identifications of some verbal forms, remarks on functions of the cases and on moods and tenses, etc.) and prosody. It is, however, to be asked why he does not comment on the so-called Attic correction in Hipponax 115.1 (its presence may be treated as one of quite strong arguments against Archilochus' authorship of this poem¹¹), whereas mentioning it in Mimnermus 2.10 where it does not possess such a decisive power. WA notes synizesis twice, both within the word (Semon. 1.15, p. 89, and Solon, 36.14, p. 160), omitting any mention of it when final vowels of the word are slurred together to make a long syllable (e.g. Tyrt. 12.6, Mimn. 2.2, Sol. 1.2, 4.2, 13.72, Xenoph. 1.24). Do such omissions reveal WA's opinion concerning what is too familiar or obvious for students to be included in a commentary?

Generally speaking, the commentary offers very careful analyses of elegiac and iambic poems. WA weaves together numerous observations on a variety of interpretative issues concerning the content of poems and their aesthetic merits, and clearly (without unnecessary accumulation of details) synthesizes scholars' critical assessments relating to them, which is very important in the case of periodic fashions on some kinds of poems in modern studies - newly discovered (e.g. Simon. 11) or on shocking (in some people's opinion) themes (e.g. Archil. 196a), the number of papers on which is growing like an avalanche.

Of course there are particular instances in the commentary which I would treat differently, but the choice of themes and issues to be commented as well as putting emphasis on some aspects of poems' content or form, and omitting others, is always a decision of the author of a commentary.

The book is supplemented by a map of Greece (pp. XIV-XV), including the birthplaces of poets (I am not sure if the suggestion made here that Sparta was Tyrtaeus' birthplace is not too daring), list of (predominantly written in English) works cited (pp. 237-250), and index (pp. 251-254). Misprints are very few and minor (e.g. on pp. 85 and 125 Greek fonts are bigger than elsewhere in the commentary).

To conclude, the book makes easier reading of Archaic and early Classical elegies and iambs. With fresh perspective, it shows a diversity of contents and tech-

Iambic Poetry, Bristol 1982, 141.

⁹ On the solemn, almost hymnic (by no means informal) tone of the beginning of Solon 4 see K. Bartol, *Liryka grecka. Jamb i elegia*, Warszawa-Poznań 1999, 266.

¹⁰ As WA declares in the *Preface*.

¹¹ It is strongly avoided in the iambs of Archilochus (see M. L. West, *Greek Metre*, Oxford 1982, 17, esp. n. 31). The εἴβουξε in Archil. 42.2, accepted by some scholars, is uncertain. See Bartol, *Liryka*, 195.

niques used by early Greek poets, who often are perceived as remaining under great melic artists' shadow. WA's book brings them out from under it. Readers with WA's book in hand will be well equipped to deal with the riches of Greek elegy and iambus.

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