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Reviewed Work: Aspects of the Epic by Tom Winnifrith, Penelope Murray, K. W. Gransden

Sheila Murnaghan
University of Pennsylvania, smurnagh@sas.upenn.edu

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At the time of publication, author Sheila Murnaghan was affiliated with Yale University. Currently, she is a faculty member at the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania.

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Reviewed Work: *Aspects of the Epic* by Tom Winnifrith, Penelope Murray, K. W. Gransden

**Disciplines**
Arts and Humanities | Classics

**Comments**
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integrated group within a large naiskos. The handshake, whose meaning con-
tinues to baffle and which became more prevalent than ever at this time, is not
according to Schmaltz a reunion of the living with the dead, or of arrival vs. de-
parture, but a simple expression of the everlasting bond which unites all mem-
bers of a family whether dead or not. The world which surrounds them is ideal
and unspecified.

In the Hellenistic period grave reliefs from Asia Minor, especially from
Smyrna, are much more modest in size, and background objects and dress tend
to emphasize domestic reality and bourgeois values. The members of the family,
though still incorporated into the one relief, are nevertheless frontal and alone.
Family "togetherness", so prominent in the later fourth century, is revived in
the ubiquitous banquet reliefs from Samos of the second century B.C.

There is almost no issue pertaining to Greek grave reliefs ignored in this
volume. Yet it is fast-paced, and because of the central Hegeso thesis it is far
from being an ordinary survey. But intriguing as this thesis is, it is weakened by
the slimness of evidence from other archaeological sources. Many more family
plots are needed to build a convincing theory. Nor is enough made of the repeti-
tive nature of the later classical reliefs. Was there a model "nuclear" family?

Only key illustrations are included, but they are quite sufficient. This informa-
tive book deserves to be translated.

Vassar College CHRISTINE MITCHELL HAVELOCK

CW78.3 (1985)

Tom Winnifrith, Penelope Murray and K. W. Gransden (edd.). Aspects of the

This book is a collection of lectures on the European epic tradition, delivered
at the University of Warwick in 1980 and aimed at “those just begining a study
of the epic.” They are thus not so much new contributions to ongoing scholarly
and critical debates as introductions to aspects of the study of epic that exemplify
the preoccupations and assumptions of much current British writing in this field.

The collection focuses on Homer as the source of the epic tradition, and traces
that tradition in Byzantine and modern Greek as well as western European liter-
ature. Two essays on Homer deal with the problems of authorship that still dog
Homeric scholarship. Penelope Murray argues that the recent trend towards uni-
tarianism enforces a new interest in Homer’s biography; surveying the portraits
of bards in the Odyssey and the ancient biographical tradition, she provocatively
concludes that Homer, by including apparent self-portraits in depictions of
Bronze Age life, himself deliberately invented the Homeric question. G. S. Kirk
continues to develop criteria for distinguishing those sections of the poems that
are attributable to the monumental composer from those that are traditional; he
here he uses the test of close connection to other episodes judged to be Homeric
on grounds either of participation in the large-scale plot or of “brilliance” to
show that Book 5 as well as Book 6 of the Iliad is “Homeric in the fullest sense.”
K. W. Gransden’s treatment of Iliadic themes in the second half of the Aeneid illus-
trates how such comparative studies can bring out the distinctive characteristics
of a poet who reworks traditional material.

The remaining essays all touch on what has become, especially since the work
of Northrop Frye, a major question in genre study: the extent to which designa-
tions of genre can be based on thematic rather than formal characteristics. John
Gould identifies continuities of theme and technique between Homeric epic and Athenian tragedy despite the differences of form and intellectual climate that separate them. John Bayley locates what he considers a definitive feature of epic—its accommodation of the incongruous through treating both the highly spiritual and the lowly animal sides of human behavior—in Tolstoy and Shakespeare as well as in Milton. Similarly, Paul Merchant finds the legacy of Homeric epic in the works of a range of contemporary Greek poets. Finally, Tom Winnifrith deals with the same question from another angle as he considers what makes the Byzantine Digenis Akritas qualify as an epic. Indeed what value this volume has as a general introduction to the European epic lies more in this encouragement to consider how the genre should be defined than in the conclusions of the individual essays.

Yale University SHEILA MURNAGHAN
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