

Zitierhinweis

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Chet A. VAN DUZER, *Duality and Structure in the Iliad and Odyssey*. Lang Classical Studies 8. New York, Washington, Bern, Frankfurt, Berlin, Vienna and Paris: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996. ISBN 0 8204 2845 0. Pp. 384. \$59.95.

'There is a river in Macedonia, and, look you, there is a river in Monmouth. It is called the Monnow in Monmouth.' So Fluellen proved the essential identity of the dual heroes, Alexander the Great and Henry V; van Duzer uses very much the same method, for over 360 pages, to prove that things in the Homeric poems often come in pairs, that some passages resemble other passages (in more or less significant respects), and that this is very important for understanding the poetic techniques of the poems' author - for van Duzer is a totally hard-line unitarian. In addition, in almost every section of both poems there are either 'saving devices', such as Leucothea's veil, which saves Odysseus from drowning, or 'saving device parallels', which in some way or other share some or all of the characteristics of 'saving devices'; and these also are very important. Finally, in many scenes of the poems, the place of the chief actor or actors is taken by 'ritual substitutes.'

Often, of course, van Duzer is right: there are many places where there is duality - sometimes the duality of similarity, sometimes of contrast - and it is significant for the action; there are 'saving devices', which the heroes sometimes use, and sometimes do not; and it may increase our understanding, and even our enjoyment, of the poem to see, for example, Thersites in *Iliad* II as an 'anti-king' and 'ritual substitute' for Agamemnon, if one likes to put it that way. But van Duzer presses his investigation with monotonous, if not monomaniac, determination, until one realises that his method interprets everything, and therefore interprets nothing. Worst of all, he nowhere explains just what the function of his dualities, devices and substitutes are; we can see, for example, how ring composition certainly could help an oral poet keep track of his composition, and perhaps also helped his audience follow the story, and how Homeric formulae helped the poet with improvisation, and his audience with quick characterisations of persons or scenes. But we never hear how, for example, duality helped either the poet with telling the story or the audience with understanding and enjoying it; in fact, van Duzer often gives the impression (no doubt unintentionally) that when Homer composed the *Odyssey* he had a complete *Iliad* in front of him, to

which he continually referred in order to create significant dualities, and when he composed the *Iliad* he had a complete *Odyssey*. And though van Duzer of course claims to believe that both poems are oral compositions, it is very difficult to imagine how any poet could have put in so many cross references so relentlessly without using writing, and impossible to imagine any hearers, without benefit of a written text in front of them, noticing more than a tiny fraction of them. It would, in any case, be difficult to believe that a basic characteristic of Greek epic poetry had been unnoticed for three thousand years; when also it is difficult to see what purpose it could serve, disbelief must follow.

Yet van Duzer, despite his relentless pursuit of duality, does miss some instances which could further exemplify his theme. For example, he rightly notices that Homer emphasises the contrasts between Agamemnon's two Greek opponents early in the *Iliad*, Achilles as 'the best of the Achaeans', Thersites as 'the worst', so creating a duality (65 n. 47). Later (192 n. 106) he adds, 'Thersites is bow-legged, i.e. wide below the waist, and narrow-shouldered and pointy headed, i.e. narrow above the waist', so giving another duality. Despite these insights he misses the two most obvious dualities, Thersites has two shoulders (emphasised by the dual, II 217-8), and not only has two feet, but one is lame, the other not, so creating not merely a duality but a *coniunctio oppositorum*, which for van Duzer is always extremely significant. At least he has noticed some dualities about Thersites. He never even mentions the description of Telemachus at the beginning of *Odyssey* II: 'But when early-born rosy-fingered Dawn appeared, Odysseus' dear son rose from his bed, put on his clothes, hung a sharp sword from his shoulder, bound his beautiful sandals under his bright feet, and went out from his chamber, appearing like a god.' Here we are at one boundary, the beginning of a book (van Duzer claims to prove that practically all the current book divisions are part of the poet's design); a second, the dawning of a new day; a third, the passage from one room to another; all of these, when they appear elsewhere, even singly, are highly significant for van Duzer, so it is strange that he missed such a concentration. Then there are the dualities: divine Dawn and human Telemachus; Dawn rises from the divine stream of ocean, Telemachus from his mundane, indoor and dry bed; Telemachus' two sandals to fit his two feet; Telemachus' human nature but divine appearance. Also the rebirth motif: Telemachus not only comes out from his bed, but from his chamber, and his appearance

is totally changed, he is now godlike, a very plain rebirth motif - again, always highly significant. Finally, there is the binding of the sandals: binding is an infallible indication of a saving device parallel. Yet though van Duzer discusses Telemachus at length, his book has not a single word about the first half of *Odyssey* II. Plainly, there is scope for another 360 pages of sequel.

Despite scepticism about van Duzer's central points, it would be wrong to dismiss his book. Van Duzer quotes many passages from both poems, and gives clear, accurate and often excellent translations. He discusses many more passages, and often has interesting, illuminating, and sometimes even convincing, remarks about them. In short, no one interested in the technique of Homeric poems should fail to consult this book.

It is therefore regrettable that the author is so economical with cross references (for example, on page 185 he writes 'I will show . . .' three times, 'we have seen . . .' twice, and 'I have discussed . . .' and 'I have shown . . .' once each, with not a single page reference), and that the 'Index of passages discussed', though quite long, is far from complete. The general index is even worse: 'duality,' 'saving devices', 'parallels', have no entries, nor do 'boundaries', 'cosmic tree', 'phallic symbol' or 'golden chain' (this last can be found under 'Zeus'), though all these are important concepts in the book; and, for example, there are significant discussions of Athene, Helen, Hermes and Menelaos which are not listed. However, this book should be in university libraries, to be consulted by anyone seriously interested in Homer, though I doubt if many of those who consult it will be tempted to read it through.

'All good things have an end,' says Judge Parry in *The First Book of Krab*, 'except for a roly-poly pudding, which has two.' Here we have duality, exclusiveness (another highly significant feature), a boundary, a ritual substitute (as Krab obviously is). To use one of van Duzer's favourite expressions, 'it is tempting to suppose' that Judge Parry wrote the Homeric poems - or perhaps that Homer reappeared in nineteenth-century Manchester to write *The First Book of Krab*.

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