

"Because those who teach and study Greek and Latin literature have lost the sense of its importance for humanity, the study of those literatures has declined, and will decline until they quit their philological isolation and again join in the movement of current human thought", Milman Parry said in a speech quoted as motto in the book. R.'s book certainly does not break through the walls of esotericism, but within these safe walls it constitutes a competent contribution, a memento, and a challenge.

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*Paolo Vivante: The Epithets of Homer. A Study in Poetic Values. Yale University Press, New Haven & London 1982. X, 222 p. £19.95.*

Professor Vivante, author of *The Homeric Imagination. A Study of Homer's Perception of Reality* (Indiana University Press, 1970), claims in his new study that Homeric poetic expression is characterized by the principle of imaginative focus, and that the study of Homeric verse should be concerned, in the first place, with establishing this point of focus or qualitative identity. The epithet is chosen, because it is a syntactic unit which most naturally embraces the range of implicit meaning characteristic of poetic language. Moreover, and here is the crux of Vivante's provocative argument, the Homeric epithet has been used in the past to posit a peremptory differentiation between literary and oral poetry; Vivante dismisses the fashionable notion of "oral aesthetics", which, he contends, is based on the misinterpretation of Parry's studies of the formulaic epithet.

The book is of considerable interest not only to the student of Homer but also to those concerned with poetic theories. It is divided into three sections which examine the epithet in poetic language, the syntax and semantics of the Homeric epithet (this is the section most directly dealing with the close textual analysis of Homer), and the section discussing theories of the epithet from the historical and philosophical aspects. What emerges is a detailed investigation of the function of the Homeric epithet, in which Vivante is able to show, rather convincingly, how it functions within the compass of the experienced moment, and is not ornamental or rhetorical, but concrete in character and of imaginative focus. The book is also an impassioned plea for Homeric originality. Homer's epithets represent a lyric element, rather than epic heroic, as Parry, for instance, has argued. Tradition in Homer has not supplanted thought, as the studies of the "oral school" of Homer would easily lead us to believe; thus Vivante becomes one of the strongest modern defenders of the view that the Homeric epics demonstrate a certain perceptive principle and one poetic intelligence at work. This may well be the dominant emphasis in Homeric studies for some time to come — up to now reviewed in J. P. Holoka's 'Homeric Originality: a Survey', *Classical World* 66,5 (1973) 257—93.

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