A RECENT BOOK:-


This book is a 'slightly extended' version of the Macmillan Brown Lectures that Professor Thornton gave in the University of Otago in 1986. John Macmillan Brown, Professor of English, History, and Classics, on his retirement in 1895 'turned to the exploration of things Maori and Polynesian'. Professor Thornton in her retirement has done the same; and this book is not the first fruit of that.

She does not want 'to bend Maori literature into the forms of early Greek literature' (p.9). She is interested in features of oral literature that Maori literature has in common with Homeric and Hesiodic poetry. But her first object is to explain some of the terms, the forms, and the contexts of Maori literature itself. So for example in 'Te Uamairangi's Lament for his House' she analyses very finely a rich and complex poetic construction of traditional lament, ritual, spells, and myth (pp.23ff.). She refers to Greek literature here to compare Diomedes' attacks on Aphrodite and on Ares in *Iliad* 5 (pp.30f.); but those attacks are extraordinary ('gewaltige, ja frevelhafte Bravourstücke, die in der ganzen Ilias nicht ihresgleichen haben', H. Erbse, *RhM* 104(1961),156). What Professor Thornton stresses at beginning and end is the need to 'edit, translate, and publish all that [Maori] literature lying silent in the libraries' (p.86).

Most classicists however will read this book with a classicist's interests; and those interested in oral literature will find much comparative material in it. (Ruth Finnegan in her encyclopaedic *Oral Poetry* does indeed quote a Maori lyric, but refers chiefly to the social context of Maori literature.) Professor Thornton examines a descent to the underworld and a cosmogony. The actual relation between similar stories and ideas in different cultures is usually obscure ('(1) borrowing, (2) polygenesis (i.e. like conditions producing like results), or (3) cognation (genetic inheritance, transmission, diffusion)', G.K. Gresseth, *TAPhA* 109(1979),71; Professor Thornton steps delicately (pp.13,54f.). She describes the formal features of oral literature that appear in the Maori works (repetition, balance, symmetry), the modes of presentation (genealogy and narrative) in Hesiod's *Theogony* and Te Rangikāheke's cosmogony, and the appositional style of both Te Rangikāheke's narrative and Homer's, which she refers to the same time perspective, in which what is before the narrator is the past. The versions of Te Rangikāheke's cosmogony are especially interesting. One was written for the Governor, Sir George Grey, the other to be read by the people of Hawaiki. The version for the people of Hawaiki preserves features of oral literature that the version for Grey does not.

In the printing of the book the only error that might confuse seems to be that at the bottom of p.53 'Hawaii 2' has been printed apparently for 'Hawaii 1' (and *vice versa*?).

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