was the particular target of abuse, because he was the most clearly deviant from the Romans' expected norm. Hence, in abuse, this behaviour is often alleged, but does not, to my mind, provoke laughter: not even effective mockery.

The last chapter is a 'political history of wit', largely Cicero on Pompeius and Caesar, but mostly from letters and the reports of later writers. So their effect as humiliating is restricted by their currency. One witticism, however (not Ciceronian but reported by him) shows that humour does not always denigrate: Cn. Pompeius was sent (against Sertorius) not as proconsul but as pro consulibus—as deputy not for a consul but for the consuls. I remain unconvinced however that Caesar Octavianus would have protected Cicero from Antonius had he not made the quip that he (Caesar) should be 'praised, honoured and lifted up—and away' (so C). Not even relatives were spared in that purge. This section is spoiled by the mistranslation 'this is not the time' for non est locus; 'there is no room' (SB) must be right. There is also a serious misprint (I hope) on page 215. The Second Philippic was not published late in 43, when Cicero was dead. Read 44.

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In this exceptionally important book F analyzes chapter by chapter the reception of Homer by the Classical and Hellenistic critics, Apollonius, Naevius and Ennius, Vergil, Ovid's Metamorphoses, the historical epics of Lucan and Silius, and the mythological epics of Valerius and Statius. From this overview it should be clear that the book's main thrust is Roman epic, but F fully acknowledges the importance of the Greek contribution. The Greeks' reception of Homer and Hesiod is accorded a lengthy and
interesting treatment, and the (excellent) chapter on Apollonius presents that poet as initiating the work of epic ‘destabilization’, which constitutes a central theme of the book.

In his first chapter F traces the various ways in which epic and its gods, who are ‘at the cutting edge’ (3) of the problem of poetic authority, were read in Greece, proceeding concisely and elegantly from the scoffing of Xenophanes, through the allegorizing and rationalizing approaches, and the denunciations of Plato, to Aristotle’s discovery of the autonomy of poetry in achieving its special significance, with Aristotle’s position being taken over by the bT-scholia, ‘our Michelin’ (35). F demonstrates that ‘the quintessence of the epic effect qua epic was felt to be located in the mythic elements which were imposed upon the “facts” of history and fiction’ (45), and offers a timely counterblast to modern novelistic criteria of verisimilitude by pointing to the scholiasts’ views of the gods as capable of heightening human action, credibly resolving impasses, rendering human achievement ‘spurious’, or actively working on emotions already present in humans. F is at pains not to straitjacket criticism by his appeals to the scholia, and freely allows that Vergil and the others were ‘far more canny and insightful readers of epic’ (56); the various readings of Homer are to be elicited as and when F considers that the context requires.

The chapter on Apollonius’ Argonautica is shot through with fine aperçus, as F draws attention to the indirection of human prophets like Phineus, the uncertainty surrounding the will of Zeus, and the un-interlocked nature of human and divine experience. The gap between human and divine knowledge, F convincingly argues, bespeaks a ‘complex pessimism’, a ‘destabilizing’ which makes literary matters like realism ‘acutely problematic’, but the actions of deities like Cupid and Hera should be given their full weight unless we are to trivialize their effect on their unwitting human subjects. Together with this disconcerting efficacy comes a fracturing of the poet’s authority: in the proem to Book Three, for example, the poet and Erato stand
as equals, where in that to Book Four the poet needs the Muse for authentification.

The brief analysis of Naevius and Ennius is chiefly intended as a lead-in to Vergil, so F concentrates matters like Naevius' employment of aetiology, whereby the Roman achievement is presented as the planned outcome of divine design, and his expansion of the epic device of prophecy. F also highlights Ennius' admission of the Homeric gods, their partialities carried over, with Hera's concession over Romulus' deification being only a temporary affair, and Ennius' primacy in suggesting that the struggle between Rome and Carthage was one for rule over the whole world.

A major preoccupation of F's discussion of the *Aeneid* is to show how the gods play as 'real' a part as Aeneas or Dido (187). F substantiates his claim by showing how much we impoverish our reading of the *Aeneid* by rationalizing the gods out of the action. It is through Juno, for instance, that the poem reflects on the fact that 'the Roman order is founded on institutionalized violence' (150), so that Juno's reconciliation on the mythical level is offset by her rôle in Roman history. Jupiter's emphasis on the historical perspective in his speech for Aeneas in Book Four is the only way that the full force of Aeneas' struggle between his person and his people's aspirations can come out. Other excellent insights abound, as when F explores the interstitiality of Hercules, Aeneas and Augustus in their hazardous progress beyond human categories, or when he demonstrates Vergil's re-assertion of epic narrative control after the pessimism of Apollonius, the Muses at 1.8 and 7.37 standing significantly alongside the poet (*cano*, 1.1; *expediam*, 7.40).

The fine chapter on the generically uncategorizable *Metamorphoses* shows Ovid aware of the need for the suspension of disbelief and belief, which puts his depiction of the epic gods at the 'sharp edge' of authenticating anything (229). This awareness, F shows, has ramifications for the morality of his
deities, whom he shows to have a *licentia* based on power, which
leads to the ‘restless and anxious’ realization that there are other
forces at work in the world than human morality, that morality is
in fact relevant to humans alone, and that the workings of the
world cannot be assimilated to human norms. With these finds, F
is able to argue convincingly that the comparisons of Augustus
with Jupiter (1.199-205, 15.855-60) are Ovid’s expression that the
virtually godlike prerogative of an Augustus can be ‘arbitrarily
and unpredictably devastating’ (223). It is in the course of his
discussion of such ‘destabilizing’ effects that F shows most clearly,
if only implicitly, how his whole project effectively offers a key
to the entire *Weltanschauungen* of all the epics he surveys; we
should be grateful indeed for this service.

The chapter on the historical epics of Lucan and Silius argues
that ancient literary thought held that the only real demarcating
feature between history and epic was that epic was expected to
include the gods as characterful agents in the narrative (this is an
extension of F’s earlier demarcation, based on the ancient division
between ‘history’, ‘fictitious story’ and ‘myth’ [31, 42-4], and will
not convince everybody). It is in this respect, F argues, that Lucan
was at loggerheads with Petronius’ Eumolpus, and it is the gods’
failure to act, together with the substitution of malevolent chance
for Stoic Providence, that is essential for the whole effect of the
*Bellum Ciuile*. Here I miss a confrontation with the traditional
thinking about Fortuna, who is certainly presented as
characterfully active in favouring Caesar (*BC* 1.226, 264, 319ff.,
4.121, 5.582ff., 665-8, 696f.) and hounding Pompey (*BC* 8.21ff.,
600ff.); she would certainly have helped F drive in the wedge
between the *Bellum Ciuile* and the *Aeneid*. F’s brief section on
Silius argues how, by contraries, Silius fails by not making
anything more than ‘floating motifs’ of the gods, as ‘Jupiter’s
motives oscillate meaninglessly between purgative zeal and
protective concern’ for Rome (307).

F’s final chapter finds that Valerius’ *Argonautica* reasserts
poetic control and the knowability of Fate, whereby Jupiter will
bring in the Iron Age and test Roman dominion. F explores the way in which against this serious backdrop Valerius indulges in a 'pervasive generic tussle' (320) as he introduces his love-story, a 'creative transgression' which is sharper than in Apollonius because of the interim invention of love-elegy and the rigidification of epic's generic expectations. While Valerius stresses the 'ameliorative', F argues, Statius in the *Thebaid* is preoccupied with the fragmentation of divine authority, as Tisiphone is presented as more efficacious than Jupiter, Jupiter forfeits all claim to moral authority, and the gods in general are threatened by the foregrounding of allegorical personifications like Mars at 3.218-61. F's whole inquiry into Statian allegory is a model of perceptive argumentation, and forms a fitting conclusion to his book. F carefully measures Statius' achievement in this regard against those of his predecessors, and persuasively argues that allegorical personifications like Tisiphone and Megaera have roles as direct agents, who can, however, universalize human emotions. F then traces the fading out of the allegorical personifications as the humans are increasingly isolated, and the spirit of Clementia is left only the human realm in which to exist.

The *Gods in Epic* is a monumental achievement. It not only offers a magnificently perceptive analysis of its announced theme, powerfully championing the integrality of the gods to the genre. It offers precious insight into ancient epic's whole means of presenting myth, the gods posing the greatest 'problem'. It offers bravura interpretations of the several epics' views of the world. It brings us to the heart of post-Homeric epic.

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