SEVEN FATAL FLAWS IN THE ATTEMPT TO DERIVE THE DACTYLIC HEXAMETER FROM AEOLIC COLA

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SETE FALHAS FATAIS NA TENTATIVA DE DERIVAR O DÁTILO HEXÂMETRO DA COLA EÓLICA

RESUMO: A tentativa de M.L West de desconsiderar e desacreditar meu livro em resenha é aqui respondida no que é necessário e fático. Segue-se então uma crítica de propostas de se encontrar a origem do Hexâmetro datílico a partir de pequenas e tardias frases métricas líricas. Essa abordagem tornou-se uma ortodoxia, captaneada por West e G. Nagy.¹

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Dátilo Hexâmetro, Cola Eólica, Metro grego, Cesura, Dança grega.

ABSTRACT: M. L. West’s attempt to dismiss and discredit my book is here answered with the useful and the substantial. There then follows a critique of attempts to ‘generate’ the dactylic hexameter from smaller, and historically later, lyric metrical phrases. This approach has become an orthodoxy, whose champions include West and G. Nagy.

KEYWORDS: Daclylic Hexameter, Aeolic Cola, Greek Meter, Caesura, Greek Dance.

... the syrtós, supposed to be of immemorial antiquity.

The national dactylic dance of Greece no doubt is of immemorial antiquity, but the memorial that I in fact cite is an inscription from Boeotia of the 1st century CE, at which time it was called the ‘dance of the forefathers’ (104).

The ring of dancers revolves making one longer and two shorter steps, with regular pauses and retrograde movements, from which David derives the hexameter with its caesurae.

I actually make no claim about the dance having a pause, since it need not have had one (108-9), and the association of ‘caesurae’ with ‘pauses’ in this ostensible summation is misleading. West is confusing the dance and its accompaniment. From the perspective of the dance—and catalogue poetry was in my view composed, and only justified aesthetically, as a summoning agent in revenant dance ritual (138-41, 208-9)—the verbal phenomenon which produces caesura marked a point of turn which was the beginning of a retrogression. The diaeresis, a conjunction of new word and new foot—as at the beginning of a line—marked the end of the chiastic retrogression (abc-cba), and a resumption of rightward movement. West nowhere mentions the diaeresis or my interest in it (15-16, 94-5, 114-15, 125-6), unless he has mistaken all such word-divisions for ‘caesurae’. Regular diaeresis near the end of a stichic line is in fact a curious anomaly; why after all an inceptive cue, a ‘kick-start’, just before the closing cadence? No other stichic line shows this. The caesura-diaeresis interval in the midst of an hexameter line in fact marks a closed circle of retrogression within a revolving hexameter dance.

S. G. Daityz has argued that there should not be a pause in recitation at the caesura (American Journal of Philology 112: 2 (1991) 150-60), and I agree when one is considering danced performance, or recitation that is true to dance. The caesura is in origin a point of orchestic turn, not rhythmic pause, and it is possible to demonstrate the effective performance of even non-catalogic verse without a mid-line pause. But within Homer there is on occasion the depiction of heroic song sung independent of dance, and in Odysseus’ lyreless tale of wandering, perhaps even the depiction of a rhapsode. I think it likely that in the development that led to the histrionic use of