

MACKENZIE (T.) **Poetry and Poetics in the Presocratic Philosophers: Reading Xenophanes, Parmenides and Empedocles as Literature.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. xiii + 238. £75. 781108843935.  
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This book considers Xenophanes, Parmenides and Empedocles *qua* poets, rather than as ‘mere versifiers’ (6), by applying literary critical methods to their texts. In the wake of recent studies of the Presocratics aimed at positioning the first philosophers within their cultural milieu (J. Bryan, *Likeness and Likelihood in the Presocratics and Plato* (Cambridge 2012); S. Tor, *Mortal and Divine in Early Greek Epistemology: A Study of Hesiod, Xenophanes and Parmenides* (Cambridge 2017), and – I would add – A. Bernabé, B. Berruecos Frank and S. Giombini (eds), *Parmenide: Tra linguistica, letteratura e filosofia* (Baden-Baden 2019)), Tom Mackenzie explores the oral cultural context of the texts and the ‘emotive and immersive’ (9) effect of such poetic texts on the audience. This power proves that the texts qualify as poetry *tout court*, and that through the ‘experience’ of poetry, the Presocratics accompany the audience in decrypting and deducing new philosophical meanings.

Chapter 1 focusses on Xenophanes, an itinerant rhapsode who, as Tom Mackenzie argues, performed his own texts, and employed hexameters systematically in order to undermine the authority of earlier poets on matters of the gods (29). Fragments D49 and D50, Mackenzie argues, reveal Xenophanes’ epistemological pessimism, which is reflected in the language of his poetry. Indeed, humans cannot attain any knowledge of objective reality, for all that hexameter poetry works as its fictional reproduction (*cf.* D41). Mackenzie contends that Xenophanes encourages metaphorical interpretation by manipulating hexameter through allusions to other poets writing in the same metre. Fragment D26, for instance, evokes the Hesiodic teaching that we descend from Gaia and Ouranos (*Theog.* 154), thus transforming a cosmogony based on sexual union between anthropomorphic bodies into one based on the mixture of elements. Moreover, the hymnic style of B16, which, for Mackenzie, recalls the hymn to Zeus of *Op.* 5–8, advocates piety and reverence to the new one-god. Xenophanes seemingly criticizes *muthoi* only to the extent that they promote impious beliefs or immoral behaviour (D8, 9, 10). Although set in the present day, elegies too contribute to dismissing stasis-inducing topics (D59), and to contrasting common opinion with the poet’s personal and more useful knowledge (D61).

In chapter 2, Mackenzie analyses Parmenides’ manipulative representation of traditional poetic landscapes, which served to subvert the audience’s expectations, and thus create new meanings (66). His poetry was arguably performed at public festivals. The *Doxa* section, featured as a ‘*kosmos* of words’, denotes the poet’s self-conscious admission, following other poetological models, that poetry is fictional and deceptive (for example, the Muses in *Theog.* 25–27, or the sirens of *Od.* 12.186). In contrast to these models, *doxastic* words record facts accurately, but still fail to represent reality truthfully (*Aletheia*). Mackenzie argues, however, that although our sensory experience and language are deceptive, the immersive power of Parmenides’ poetry leads the audience to contemplate true reality. The proem contributes significantly to this effect, since it matches the auditor’s perspective with that of the *kouros* (the poem’s addressee), and leads him (and the audience) along a visual journey to the limits of the world. By leaving the journey’s destination and the goddess’ identity unclear, Parmenides portrays his quest as a potentially terrifying journey to the afterlife. The imagery of the roads, and the language that recalls that of incantations and oracles, arguably reinforces this interpretation. This poetic experience owes the ‘symbolic significance’ of trespassing mortal limits, and foreshadows the notion of *mimēsis* later theorised by Plato.

In chapter 3, Mackenzie argues that, contrary to Xenophanes and Parmenides, Empedocles equates true reality with mortal sensory experience. In Empedocles’ view,

daimonology and cosmology were part of a singular project, which was performed publicly in a rhapsodic form. Empedocles, in Mackenzie's view, does not consider poetry to be deceptive – a view affirmed by the poet himself, perhaps in response to Parmenides, when speaking of the 'undeceptive expedition of (his) account' (110). Rather, Empedocles elevates the status of the poet, considering it the highest form of earthly incarnations of the soul, thus granting his own narrative voice superior knowledge (the Muses just 'stand by' the poet). Mackenzie contends that Love in Empedocles is a cosmic principle responsible for both the activity of mixing elements (D77 and D61) and the activity of the poet, which is assimilated to the painter's ability to mix colours (D60). Poetry thus guides the auditor through an aesthetic and ethical journey, through the narrative of the *daimon* in exile, and from the higher perspective of the self-proclaimed divine (*theos*) poet. Empedocles stages the story of the *daimon*, the story of all human beings, in the first person, dramatically merging the mythical level with the present one.

The conclusion to this book highlights the influence of the Presocratics on later dialectics and the role of poetic mimesis in philosophical contexts. Indeed, Theagenes, Pherecides, Metrodorus, Anaxagoras and Democritus all display embryonic ideas of the psychagogical role of poetry, and the parallelism between language and the world – ideas that would later be developed by philosophers such as the Sophists and Plato. Mackenzie's 'holistic' view of the Presocratics constitutes an enriching contribution for scholars of both ancient Greek poetry and philosophy.

CHIARA RAFFAELLA CIAMPA  
King's College London  
Email: [cchampa@gmail.com](mailto:cchampa@gmail.com)

GALGANO (N.S.), GIOMBINI (S.) and MARCACCI (F.) **Livio Rossetti *Verso la filosofia: Nuove prospettive su Parmenide, Zenone e Melisso*** (Eleatica 8). Baden-Baden: Academia Verlag, 2020. Pp. 305. €59. 9783896659262.  
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This volume collects three lectures given by Livio Rossetti in 2017 on the occasion of the tenth conference in a series dedicated to various aspects of Eleatic philosophy ('Eleatica'). These lectures attempt to place Parmenides, Zeno and Melissus within the same tradition of thought, reflecting Plato's attitude towards the Eleatics in the well-known section 242d of the *Sophist*. In a nutshell, in the first lecture Parmenides is not reduced to the classic 'philosopher of being', but is described as a multifaceted thinker, skilled in argumentation and able to exploit this ability to make his philosophical message as effective and convincing as possible. In the second lecture, Zeno is interpreted in the same 'rhetorical' perspective, instead of the usual (*stricto sensu*) 'logical' approach to his renowned paradoxes. The strategy of the paradox, which presents itself as a puzzle and strains, even frustrates, but simultaneously stimulates the listener's cognitive capacity, is understood as a standard form of communication in the Greek culture of the fifth century BC. Finally, in the third lecture, the analysis of Melissus' thought also seems to focus mainly on terminological and linguistic features. Rossetti, however, claims that the communicative strategies in Melissus' 'ontological' poem differ from Zeno's paradoxes in that they aim to convince the listener of the seriousness of the object of philosophical discourse.

The second part of the volume is devoted to other scholars' critical commentary on the aforementioned lectures. For reasons of space, I will focus only on the comments of two great scholars, Jaap Mansfeld and Alexander P.D. Mourelatos, whose objections raised to the lectures I, for the most part, share. Mansfeld, in particular, criticizes the attempt to put the two parts of Parmenides' *Peri phuseōs* (*On Nature*) on the same level: without denying