

ANCIENT CRITICISM

HUNTER (R.) *Critical Moments in Classical Literature. Studies in the Ancient View of Literature and its Uses*. Pp. viii + 217. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Cased, £50, US\$95. ISBN: 978-0-521-51985-4.

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If a book is expressly not ‘intended to be another survey of “ancient literary criticism”’ (p. 8) and its author instead has ‘been concerned to show how themes and ideas constantly reappear over time and in different genres ..., thus suggesting a more fruitful way of studying critical traditions than the more usual narrative history’ (ibid.), the reader should not expect an overarching argument and the reviewer should resist the temptation to construe one. This book’s selectivity is programmatic and has the advantage of not pressing the notoriously fragmentary evidence into a coherence and interdependence that have been recognised as problematic or at least conjectural. At the same time, the polyvalent title ‘Critical Moments in Classical Literature’ indicates that the selection of texts and topics is by no means random.

All six chapters take their cue from a central text, the critical potential of which is explored: (1) Aristophanes, *Frogs*; (2) Euripides, *Cyclops*; (3) Plutarch, *Comparison of Aristophanes and Menander*; (4) Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Imitation*; (5) ‘Longinus’, *On the Sublime*; (6) Plutarch, *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry*. With the exception, perhaps, of *Cyclops*, there are no surprises here. All these texts have long been recognised as fundamental to the study of ancient literary criticism, and they have been the cause of a considerable bibliography. H. manages to add important strokes to the picture. His impressive familiarity with the texts of Graeco-Roman antiquity (including many that are not often cited) enables him to establish connections, several of which have not been made before, at least not from this particular angle. Moreover, his insistence that the critical texts must not be severed from the literary texts that they are commenting on yields a rich harvest.

In Chapter 1 H. identifies in *Frogs* a number of distinctions and dichotomies that were to play an important role in subsequent criticism. These include not only the known distinction between styles (e.g. grand vs simple, exemplified by Aeschylus and Euripides respectively), but also the relative importance of choral odes and speeches, with the former increasingly losing ground to the latter. Both distinctions contain a diachronic element: the (implicit) writing of a literary history on the one hand, and a form of classicism on the other. Furthermore, H. connects Aeschylus’ and Euripides’ mutual scrutiny with the well-known method of raising problems (ζητήματα) and offering solutions (λύσεις), though it may be worth adding that the *ἀγών* in *Frogs* seems to be largely dominated by the former. He shows that the particular pride which Aristophanes’ Euripides takes in his realism and in teaching the audience to judge tragedies accordingly prefigures, among other things, Aristotle’s principle that plots ought to be constructed in accordance with ‘probability or necessity’.

The book’s selectivity is particularly felt in Chapter 3, ‘Comic Moments’, partially reworked from two previously published articles and dealing with Greek and Roman views on comedy and related genres such as satire. The absence of an overarching argument is balanced by a wealth of observations, many of which are based on a juxtaposition of passages that is illuminating and often original. H.

succeeds, for example, in exposing the social, political and, not least, moral agendas that underlie many a comment, even though they might pose as a disinterested critic's analysis of, say, style. Another key feature is his ability to detect traces of what he calls 'developmental narratives' and to point out their flaws. And when this kind of narrative is described as 'more an art form than a science, a set of "facts" to be manipulated to the service of an argument' (p. 95), the reader senses why H. himself refrains from writing such a narrative.

Chapter 4 explores the fragmentary treatise *On Imitation* by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, especially the opening of Book 2 (as preserved by the epitome). There Dionysius argues that a good writer must extensively study the great works of literature of the past because the lasting impact this will have on his soul will allow him to practise a convincing form of eclectic emulation/imitation. In addition to tracing back several of Dionysius' concepts (especially to Plato) or locating them within the framework of Augustan criticism and poetry, H. effectively demonstrates that Dionysius' text itself is an example of such eclectic emulation/imitation, mostly in the form of literary allusions.

The chapter on 'Longinus' first returns to *Frogs*, which is identified as an early source for the concept of the sublime. After treating cases where 'sublimity' is threatened or destroyed by instances of mannerism, H. goes on to discuss how 'seeing the gods' (\approx epiphanies) contributes to sublimity. It must be said, however, that the paraphrasing argument on p. 142 suggests rather more than I can detect in the passages from 'Longinus' that are referred to. The remainder of this section and the next ('Size matters') attempt, as it were, to fill in the gap left by 'Longinus' when he dismisses Apollonius of Rhodes as a non-sublime author without arguing the point. The chapter is rounded off with the distinction between writers who are flawless but essentially 'small' and those who are sublime but admit flaws. The latter concept is read against the backdrop of the 'problem-solution' pattern discussed already in Chapter 1. A strength of this chapter is its fleshing out examples in 'Longinus' by looking beyond the verbal limits of his quotations.

The centrepiece of the final chapter is a detailed analysis of how Plutarch responds to the fundamental objections raised against poetry by Plato. Not least because he regularly uses the same examples, Plutarch can be seen as undertaking the formidable task of creatively rewriting Plato in *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry*; it 'is a virtuoso performance to turn *Republic* 2–3 into an argument for the admission of the classics of poetry into education, albeit under certain strictly controlled conditions' (pp. 186–7). The conditions of this education are well expounded in the surrounding sections, again with an eye to their social agenda. This clearly focussed chapter succeeds in elucidating many of the points that Plutarch addresses in this treatise.

Chapter 2, on *Cyclops*, first demonstrates that Euripides has his characters act and speak as if they had all carefully read, so to speak, the Odyssean script, which they are thus rewriting. It goes on to locate the play within the framework of more or less contemporary theories of civilisation. While the argument is instructive, it is less clear whether *Cyclops* is rightly considered a form of 'criticism'. H.'s objections to the 'disciplinary straitjacket that "criticism" imposes' (p. 8) notwithstanding, to treat Euripides' 'reading' of Homer as a form of literary criticism in a way forces us to do likewise with other artistic responses to Homer (or any other 'classical' author). Such an extension of 'criticism' to the entire *Rezeptionsgeschichte* risks blurring its focus.

H. is a widely read scholar who is well in control of the relevant literature, ancient and modern. His expert treatment might at times pose a problem for less expert readers, who are expected to be familiar with a particular problem and its bibliography. But this is an elegantly written book which is a pleasure to read.

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ALEXIS

LUKINOVICH (A.) *Mélo die, mètre et rythme dans les vers d'Alexis. Le savoir-faire d'un poète comique*. Pp. 501, figs. Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon, 2009. Paper, €30. ISBN: 978-2-841-37250-8.
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At a metrics conference held in 2000 participants listened to a text-to-speech program reading two texts. One was a column from a daily paper; the other, an excerpt from Racine. The difference in quality between the two was remarkable: the synthetic voice was far less convincing for the newspaper column than for the alexandrines. It was suggested that the poet, unlike the journalist, had crafted his words so that it was difficult to read them poorly. This, in essence, is the idea underlying a new study by L., a specialist in Greek metrics and comedy, who tells the anecdote in her introduction. Alexis embedded 'instructions' for interpreting his lines by linking the different textual levels – semantic, pragmatic, rhythmic and melodic.

The book, based on a doctoral thesis (University of Geneva, 2006), argues for a correlation between the accentuation and the meaning and 'character' (*ῆθος*, sc. of the speaker) of Alexis' trimeters. It offers the new theory that accents have a different effect depending on their metrical position. When the end of a pitch excursion (a high-to-low 'turn', labelled a *tropos*) falls on a metrical *longum*, the accent fits the rhythm of the line; when it ends on a short or *anceps* position, it works at cross currents with the rhythm. Accents in the first group (basically, circumflexes *in longo* and acutes in *breui/incipiti*) are 'rhythmic'; the latter, 'emphatic' (circumflexes in *incipiti* and acutes *in longo*). (Resolved shorts work like circumflexes when the acute is on the first syllable; graves and enclitics are excluded.) After examining every fragment of six lines or more, L. concludes that emphatic accents occur more frequently in words that are semantically or pragmatically important and that clusters in the second and third metra (along with paired shorts in the first metron and medial or no caesurae) typify the speech of *βωμολόχος* characters such as slaves, cooks and parasites.

The Introduction lays out this thesis, with a meticulously detailed overview of Greek pitch accent and the iambic trimeter. What follows is a metrical and accentual commentary on 50 fragments, approximately 500 lines. Each is translated with a brief discussion of the context and speaker (where known) and subdivided into two–five line 'sense units' which form the basis for analysis of accents, caesurae, paired or optional shorts and syllable quantities. L. is interested in patterns, particularly where they reinforce meaning, and unusual distributions. It is impossible to do justice here to the wealth of nuanced observations (these are not limited to metrics: one elegantly informative note, for example, distinguishes *μάγειρος* as the marked form against *ὄψοποιός*, p. 209 n. 270). Her focus is quite different from