

her central arguments, more clarity would have enabled this reader to follow her more easily.

What is clear are the worthy goals she sets for herself: ‘to illuminate how a Classical text is read differently in response to the demands of different eras of scholarship’, and ‘to change the terms on which Pliny is approached by readers today’. The first goal she achieves by taking us through some fascinating discussions of Pliny’s reception; the entertaining story of Diderot and his passionate defence of Pliny as an intellectual revolutionary is a shrewdly chosen example with which to obtain her second goal of rehabilitating the classical author.

As for ‘changing the terms’ of Pliny’s current reception, D. contributes the provocative suggestion that the *Natural History* was an innovative work of scholarship in its own time. The view of Pliny she espouses, that the work possesses a logical integrity, an aesthetic coherence and a peculiarly winsome quality, is one that others (notably Trevor Murphy) have been stressing in recent years. D., through her new method of reception, gives us another eloquent advocate of an author who has been regrettably ill-regarded in recent times.

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PERSIUS

RECKFORD (K.J.) *Recognizing Persius*. Pp. x + 240. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009. Cased, £30.95. ISBN: 978-0-691-14141-1.

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This slender, well-edited and eminently readable volume combines R.’s previous work on Persius with new thoughts and a broader perspective, and it forms a powerful argument for the value of Persius. R. wants Persius to be recognised at several levels: as one of the great Roman satirists, alongside Horace and Juvenal, but also as an honest searcher for truth, and ultimately a poet who passes on his moral challenge to the reader. As regards method, R.’s book is an authoritative and balanced New Critical analysis, refreshed with an interest in performance theory. Unlike some of the scholars of this brand, however, R. insists on the importance of Persius as the real person behind the satires, and on the value of historical information. Without requiring much previous knowledge, R. offers a lucid and informative approach to a notoriously obscure poet, with expert close readings of all six satires, detailed discussions of allusion and a generous portion of his own thought.

After an introduction where method and overall plan are set out, the book is organised in four chapters; an epilogue considers how some of Persius’ themes were developed by Juvenal. The first chapter presents a rich reading of *Satire 1*, drawing on ancient literature alluded to (Old Comedy and Horace’s *Satires* and *Epistles*) as well as on later intertexts by kindred spirits, such as John Donne and T.S. Eliot. Comparisons between Persius and Modernist (or Modernist-like) poets have been drawn before, but here it is done with particular verve and precision. When R. combines Persius’ image of whispering his satire into a hole in the ground with Eliot’s line ‘he’ll dig it up again!’ (*The Waste Land*, v. 75; R. p. 25); or when he compares Persius’ wordplay on *auriculis* to the ambiguous title of John Lahr’s

biography of Joe Orton, *Prick Up Your Ears* (p. 190 n. 51), he surely leads us to as happy epiphanies as any literary scholar can hope for. Throughout, much stress is put on the necessity of reading Persius aloud, so that the satires' 'different voices' may come to life. The tension between the need for satire and the impossibility of it, R. argues, lies at the basis of Persius' writing, especially in *Satire* 1, which is seen as a private kind of anti-performance, or 'nonperformance'.

In his second chapter, R. focusses on an analogous tension between literary composition and Stoic self-composition in *Satires* 2 and 3. Two arguments are the highlights of this chapter: a revised version of an earlier article on how images of 'the sick body' challenge philosophy's ability to recompose the self (*Arethusa* 31 [1998], 337–54), and a persuasive comparison of Persius' moral teaching with that of his later fellow-Stoic Epictetus.

Chapter 3 moves on through *Sat.* 4, Persius' savage diagnosis of the crisis in social intercourse and in satire, to *Sat.* 5, where R. traces Persius' rewriting of the Horatian theme of friendship/patronage. It is well known that in his many allusions Persius deconstructs Horace, making the ironical serious again. Here, R. shows us exactly how it is done when Persius substitutes his own relationship to Cornutus for that of Horace and Maecenas. The subtext is, R. concludes, that while the friendship between Horace and Maecenas is ultimately material and so can be described with irony, 'Cornutus is the spiritual patron that Horace never had' (p. 114). In the last part of *Sat.* 5, Persius dives into comical satire and turns the philosophical conflict between freedom, avarice and luxury into a farcical battle. It is an attractive argument that the Stoic tenet 'Every Fool a Slave' is thus transformed into the fools and slaves of Roman Comedy; it is more difficult to see why this play should also be 'Aristophanic', as R. goes on to claim. The chapter is rounded off with an excursus into real-life politics, in which Persius' anti-Neronian stance is scrutinised, and acknowledged as small-*d* dissidence, for, as Václav Havel said of another dark time, all 'ordinary citizens who were able to maintain their human dignity' made a difference (quoted by R., p. 127).

In his fourth chapter R. broadens his focus to include a biographical portrait of Persius. R. combines the *libellus* of satires with the *Vita*, but also travels to Persius' native Volterra for a walk through its museum's row of Etruscan funerary chests. On one of these, the sculptured relief of an old couple, with their 'wonderful craggy faces' (p. 133), makes R. pause and imagine that they might have been Persius' great-grandparents, radiating the same strength of character as the young satirist. As R. continues with a reading of the images of children and adults, what he calls the Ages-of-Man theme, in all Persius' satires, it truly reads as a monument over the poet, just a touch more logical than the one he raised himself. Here the movingly deep involvement of the scholar with his material is prominent. In several places R. speaks of the 'implicated author', a term that, unlike the *implied author*, refers to the poet as a real, flesh-and-blood human being, who always includes himself in the ailing audience to be cured by Stoic satire. Persius not only preaches to others, but also practises his moral soul-searching upon himself. Yet should there not also be an 'implicated reader' at the other end, one who rises to the moral challenge of Persius' satire? Few people read Persius in this responsible way (*uel duo uel nemo* he himself prophesied, P.1.3), but R. certainly is such a reader. He shows us not simply Persius-read-by-Reckford, but rather the two in dialogue, reading each other (cf. p. 13).

This feature of the book is not entirely satisfactory. Since R. trusts Persius, he is willing to overlook the occasional trite sentiment (p. 62), or fill in a thought

left incomplete. Heeding Persius' call to look within oneself, R. must, in the final layer of his interpretation, leave literary territory for the inner expanses of the soul, and at this point the reasoning is no longer analysis, but a personal story.

This monograph is quite as exciting as J. Bramble's *Persius and the Programmatic Satire* (1974) once was, and much easier to read. Since new scholarship is taken into account – including non-English works such as the commentary by W. Kissel (Heidelberg, 1990) – it can be recommended to students and teachers, as well as to the community of classicists. Students of latter-day satire, too, may find it useful. And although one may not agree with all the aspects of Persius-recognition recommended by R., his own book should be justly recognised as an excellent work.

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PLINY THE AESTHETE

LEFÈVRE (E.) *Vom Römertum zum Ästhetizismus. Studien zu den Briefen des jüngeren Plinius.* (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 269.) Pp. 332. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009. Cased, €89.95, US\$139. ISBN: 978-3-11-020874-0.

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This is a book about nostalgia. L. is disappointed with most recent work on the younger Pliny, a string of 'trivial' and 'banal' contributions. Having dispensed due scorn (pp. 13–18), he administers his remedy, mostly reheated servings of seven 'Plinius-Studien' published in *Gymnasium* between 1977 and 1996. The method is close reading of single letters, 68 in total, arranged in five sections: 'Exempla antiquitatis' (portraits of Verginius Rufus and his ilk), 'Verfall der alten Formen' (the decline of liberty, of the senate and of eloquence), 'Vom Römertum zum Ästhetizismus' (Cicero, Uncle Pliny, Silius, Tacitus, Martial, Suetonius), '*humanitas*' (Pliny's treatment of provinces, slaves, women and death), 'Der Lebensraum des Ästheten' (villas, *studia*, hunting, the 'nature' letters). A closing 'Tableau' consolidates these five themes in turn, and ends with some general comments on the *Epistles* as art-form.

In so far as the book has an argument, it makes the following claims: (i) Pliny's letters are minutely crafted literary jewels; (ii) Pliny should be taken at his word in all things; (iii) Pliny is nostalgic for the republic and disappointed even with Trajan; (iv) Pliny is a degenerate 'aesthete'. Let us consider these in turn.

(i) The first claim is not contentious, but close attention to detail at the level of clause, of letter and sometimes of book, is L.'s principal virtue. He expounds his readings methodically, taking us through each letter line by line with (ample) *précis*, Latin and comment: one imagines oneself in a rather dusty lecture room. The observations are often sound and sometimes sharp, and they amply justify his manifesto for close reading. One problem recurs: having identified assonance, chiasmus and the rest, what to say about it? Often L. settles for safe cliché ('das Asyndeton ... hat Gewicht', p. 77), elsewhere he is more adventurous, and less convincing ('wieder verraten die Alliterationen die innere Spannung', p. 121). There is no straw at which he will not clutch: we are asked to believe that 1.22.10 ... *commune cum multis, deliberare uero et causas eius expendere, utque suaserit ratio, uitae mortisque consilium* ... is marked by *c* alliteration which 'verleih[t]