

DEPICTION OF CHARACTER IN GREEK LITERATURE

DE TEMMERMAN (K.), VAN EMDE BOAS (E.) (edd.) *Characterization in Ancient Greek Literature. Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative, Volume 4.* (Mnemosyne Supplements 411.) Pp. xvi + 705. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018. Cased, €154, US\$178. ISBN: 978-90-04-35630-6.

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This is the fourth volume in the series *Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative*, with the stated purpose to investigate the forms and functions of the main devices that narratology has defined for us. As the editors explain, contributors were asked to examine ‘by whom, when and, mainly, how characters are constructed’ (p. ix). The collection contains 34 contributions, which cover more or less the entire spectrum of Greek literature from Homer to the Imperial era, and an introduction and concluding section by the editors. The introduction carefully maps the ground for the collection, raising the main questions on characterisation and alerting the reader to the possibilities of different methodological approaches. A glossary of relevant terminology at the beginning was an excellent idea, as it encourages some consistency in the use of terms and may prove helpful as a methodological tool in future studies on the subject.

In the opening article I. de Jong successfully resists the traditional view that Homeric characters lack in depth and development, and argues that much of the thrust in the creation of those very memorable characters in Homeric epic comes from implicit characterisation and plot development, rather than the often stereotypical epithets given to the heroes. In her second contribution to the volume, on the Homeric Hymns, De Jong argues against R. Parker that the role of the mortals is crucial for the characterisation of the gods. H. Koning concludes that characterisation techniques in the Hesiodic works vary according to purpose and pace. In her entry on Apollonius of Rhodes, J. Klooster underlines the subtlety of the author’s techniques and points out that through these he can create characters that are literary, but, at the same time, lifelike. In her entry on Theocritus she argues that his characterisation techniques work ‘with the tension between awareness and delusion, naivety and insight, empathy and irony’ (p. 131). A. Harder, discussing the Erysichthon episode from Callimachus, concludes that, although the characterisation may appear to be simple, intertextuality and other such methods generate a much more complex technique.

Part 2 contains a series of excellent entries on historiography. M. de Bakker presents a thorough and insightful analysis of characterisation in Herodotus, but some readers may disagree with his thesis that Herodotus presents the free Greek world as not much different from oriental despotism. T. Rood’s entry on Thucydides insightfully stresses the historian’s assumption of a shared human nature, but I found it rather surprising that Cleon is only mentioned in passing, even though he is a centrally important and intricately constructed character, and perhaps the most ‘human’ among the characters of Thucydides, one might think, because in this case the historian himself was strongly motivated by very human emotions, like deep-seated anger and resentment. In his entry on Xenophon’s historical works Rood draws attention to the biographical interests of the author and the complexity of techniques he employed in his characterisations. L. Pitcher also emphasises the importance and complexity of characterisation in the Polybian narrative. In his excellent contribution on Appian, Pitcher draws our attention to a contrast between a promise to study the

characteristics of Roman virtue and a much more flexible account of characterisation in the rest of the *Rhomaika*, to conclude that ‘the *Rhomaika* is a much less staid text than it originally seems’ (p. 220). In his entry on Cassius Dio, Pitcher reaches the conclusion that the historian’s preferred method of characterisation was through the actions and words of the characters. In his entry on Herodian, Pitcher emphasises that the preferred method of characterisation for this author was through comparison and contrast. J. Van Henten and L. Huitink argue that Josephus interprets his characters through a moral prism, and his sophisticated rhetoric of character breaks down virtue into many component parts, to create complex characters. M. Pretzler in her article on characterisation in the *Periegesis Hellados* of Pausanias rightly emphasises that none of the characters are allowed to take centre stage; their role is rather peripheral, but nonetheless important. For this reason the technique of Pausanias is to focus on significant details, which illustrate a character as he/she makes their quick appearance.

In Part 3 B. Currie concludes that, although in epinician poetry characterisation is typically less intricate than in drama, in those instances where a more elaborate characterisation is desired, an impressive array of techniques can be observed. Van Emde Boas opens Part 4, ‘Drama’, with an entry on Aeschylus. He argues that the most important indicators of character in his plays are decisions taken in moments of extreme pressure, while the reader will readily agree that some of his characters like Eteocles, Agamemnon, Cassandra or Clytemnestra are truly fascinating. In his entry on Euripides van Emde Boas emphasises the multitude of techniques that Euripides employed, such as internal conflict or frequent reference to the rhetorical, philosophical and intellectual discourses of his time. M. Lloyd, in his fascinating entry on Sophocles, successfully illustrates that his characters elude full understanding or definite assessment. A. Bowie argues that Aristophanes places characterisation a distant second to humour in most of his plays, except the *Ecclesiazusae* and the *Plutus*, where characterisation becomes more consistent and takes centre place. P. Brown in his entry on Menander focuses on the relationship between characterisation and narrative, while he declines to engage in this instance with the better-known aspect of Menander’s characterisation technique of presenting stock characters in surprising ways.

M. de Bakker opens Part 5, ‘Oratory’, with a discussion of the characterisation techniques of Lysias. Given the importance and complexity of the Lysianic characters, de Bakker successfully narrows down the technique to the employment of a few important moral qualities presented with clarity. N. Worman curiously lumps together Aeschines and Demosthenes, emphasising their contrasting differences. While Aeschines is traditional and mainstream, Demosthenes is innovative and mocks his opponent’s traditionalism. The reader might have some reservations about this simplified approach. Both orators are masters of characterisation in their own ways, but the picture is much more complex and nuanced. In my opinion a separate entry on each author, independently outlining their strengths and techniques, would have better served the purposes of this collection.

K. Morgan in the first entry of Part 6, ‘Philosophy’, argues that Plato does justice to the idiosyncratic as well as to universal aspirations in his characterisations. L. Huitink opens Part 7, ‘Biography’, with an article on Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*, where he argues that the power of the work lies in the staged conflicts between its ideal leader and the far from ideal world around him. J. Mossman, quoting Erasmus, recognises a ‘mosaic’ quality in Plutarch’s work, where often a small detail can be very telling of a character’s moral qualities (p. 502). K. Demoen in his work on Philostratus makes an important contribution to the collection by outlining the fact that ‘characterization in literature, be it of mythological, historical or fictional figures, is always selective and perspectival’ (p. 520).

D. Kasprzyk in the opening entry of Part 8, ‘Between Philosophy and Rhetoric’, concludes that Dio Chrysostom employs a large number of characters, many borrowed from

previous literature, whom he adopts to suit his ethical objective. O. Hodkinson engages in the colossal task of exploring characterisation in the corpus of Lucian and expectedly highlights the rich variety of characters parading through his works. Among those, the most important is the narrator himself and his alter-egos, chastising, criticising, exposing and censuring.

The final part of this collection, on the novel, opens with an article on Chariton by De Temmerman, where he argues that, unlike other genres, Chariton needed to build his characters ‘through bottom-up dynamics’ (p. 576). An important observation is the fact that the characters themselves often use characterisation for a variety of effects. By contrast, in his entry on Xenophon of Ephesus De Temmerman recognises ‘top-down dynamics’ (p. 589) as more prominent and emphasises that Xenophon is less visible as a narrator, since he avoids direct characterisation. In his entry on Achilles Tatius De Temmerman emphasises the complexity of the characterisations in this author and stresses that ‘in the many inversions and perversions of topical novelistic characterization Achilles Tatius most clearly pushes the boundaries of the genre’ (p. 607). J.R. Morgan emphasises that in Longus the characters are meant to be part of an allegory for every human being, but at the same time the themes and emotions of the characters necessarily introduce characterisation, which the author handles with skill and finesse. In the entry on Heliodoros, Morgan draws our attention to the infinite complexity of the characters and techniques of this author. In a brief epilogue the editors offer answers to some of the questions asked in the introduction, and highlight the ultimate goal of the collection to contribute to a growing understanding of Greek narrative, as part of the *SAGN* series.

Anyone interested in characterisation, in any area of Classical literature, will find this volume highly beneficial, not only for its content but also as an important methodological tool. The terminology and investigative techniques on characterisation have a clarity and unity of purpose that recommend them for future studies. Undoubtedly, this is a valuable collection which will be useful to a broad range of scholars, classicists, literary critics, students of rhetoric, authors and anyone interested in the intricate techniques involved in the portrayal of character, within the wider context of any purpose-built narrative.

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HOMER AND THE UNDERWORLD

GAZIS (G. A.) *Homer and the Poetics of Hades*. Pp. xii + 253. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Cased, £60, US\$80. ISBN: 978-0-19-878726-6.

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Descending into Hades is a long-accepted trope of epic writing and one from which heroes return in a state of affirmation. G.’s volume seeks to present the ‘realm of darkness and invisibility par excellence’ (p. 12) as an alternative poetic space wherein the traditions and characters of the epic genre are rewritten, re-spoken and discussed anew. In this realm, the integral value of *kleos* is no longer the defining heroic impulse, with personal narratives of loss taking the centre focus. G. acknowledges Hades as a storehouse of the epic tradition filled with the shades and their vaporous stories that are dying to be told; ‘[t]hose stories, however, are not like those that unfold under the Homeric sun’ (p. 14).