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The Homeric Narrator by Scott Richardson

Review by: Rosaria Vignolo Munson

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elegists expressing themselves, or creating selves? Are Augustan poets sincere, ironic or ambivalent when they praise? Is it Petronius or Eumolpus who lampoons Lucan? Is Lucan a Stoic poet, or Johnson's grim joker? Does Apuleius undercut his narrator Lucius' final conversion?

With regrettably little discussion of other Roman authors, Frischer asks questions like this of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, which Frischer suggests is a "mock-didactic poem" that presents "not. . . Horace's sincere declaration of poetic belief, but. . . the monologue of a fictional *grammaticus*, unsympathetic to contemporary poets and talented at composing. . . only tedious ramblings on poetics." Surprisingly, given its advertisements, this is not Frischer's book on the *AP*, but some arguments deemed too technical for some later, grander book. Frischer discusses the poem's name (*Ars Poetica*, not *Epistula ad Pisones*), place in the *corpus* (not with the *Epistles*), date (24-20 B.C.), addressee (L. Calpurnius Piso Caesonius, cos. 58, and two children, one the consul of 15, the other an unknown son or daughter), and genre (not a letter, but a *sermo*). Frischer's dating rests in part on computer-assisted statistical analysis (complete with 44 tables) of Horace's use of *nec*, *sed*, *per*, and *ad*. He uses "persona theory" to argue that the speaker's scorn for the painted monster in *AP* 1-4, and praise for Maecius Tarpia in 385-90, mark him as a conservative "ignoramus" out of touch with contemporary art and literature.

Frischer's ideas about the *Ars Poetica* are interesting and potentially attractive, but the arguments in this volume are incomplete and unsatisfying. The later book, which will present a "new interpretation of the poem as a parody of Peripatetic poetics," must include complete discussion of both the poem itself (only a few lines are treated here), and the contemporary Roman taste for mock-didactic or otherwise ironic or ambiguous poetry. This book's title refers rather grandly not to Horace but to itself, but paradigms rarely shift before full and persuasive arguments are made.

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JAMES J. O'HARA

Scott Richardson. *The Homeric Narrator*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1990. Pp. x, 279. \$24.95. ISBN 0-8265-1236-4.

Through this lucid and accessible book the Greekless student of literature will discover the distinctive features of Homeric narrative against the backdrop of other types of fictional narrative. The numerous Homeric quotations are all translated and set side by side with references to other traditional stories (Icelandic Sagas), film (Hitchcock) and, most frequently, with passages from classic novels, from Tolstoy to Tolkien.

Richardson examines the ways in which the Homeric narrator—who practically coincides with the implied author of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, but is distinct from the real author(s)—gives us access to the *story* by means of *discourse* and signals his presence in the latter. (The basic assumption that the two poems speak with the same narrative voice is however not sufficiently confirmed: most examples in the text come from the *Iliad*, and the *Odyssey* provides a proportionally large number of exceptional cases, although a representative long passage from the *Odyssey* is analyzed according to Richardson's method in the Appendix.)

The first four chapters excellently describe how the Homeric narrator manipulates the story through summaries, pauses (character introductions and object descriptions), indirect speech, and by rearranging the sequence of events. The study of these phenomena, of the ways in which the Homeric narrator exploits his omnipresence and omniscience (Chapter 5), and the survey of the narrator's comments *on the story* (Chapter 6) concretely demonstrates his self-effacement, aimed at maintaining the illusion that we are watching the story without mediation and only tempered by the need for clarity or to increase the poignancy of a scene.

The narrator's commentary on his own discourse (treated in the last chapter) is the most important and problematic testimony of his relationship to the world of the narrated. Here Unamuno and Diderot seem to have persuaded Richardson to attribute to the Homeric narrator an excessive degree of self-consciousness as the "master of the story," and he does so by straining categories and distinctions he has himself put in place. This however does not compromise the seriousness of his endeavour and its value for future studies of ancient narrative.

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G. R. Stanton. *Athenian Politics c.800-500 B.C.: A Sourcebook*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Pp. xiii, 226. \$74.50 (hb.), \$17.95 (pb.). ISBN 0-415-04060-4; 0-415-04061-2.

The primary purpose of this book is to illustrate, in Stanton's own words, "how we know about what happened in the distant past." What, specifically, are the sources at our disposal for constructing a narrative of the Archaic Period in Athens? Inevitably, the main concentration is on the sixth century (the entire pre-Solon period getting less than thirty pages). The ancient sources (literary and archaeological, contemporary and later) are arranged chronologically under six broad headings and numbered consecutively for easy reference. Stanton precedes each group of sources with a brief historical summary of the period/event and adds copious explanatory notes for each individual source. His purpose is not merely to provide a handy reference work for historian and student. By including contradictory accounts, fragmentary material, and archaeological interpretations, Stanton forces the reader to evaluate these sources—to assess their reliability, bias, etc. Hence, this becomes an effective teaching/learning tool for determining how conclusions are reached. Stanton provides plentiful citations of relevant secondary sources, both for more detailed explanations and contrary opinions.

This is a sourcebook with a theme, one candidly admitted by the author at the outset. According to Stanton, the key to understanding the politics of the Archaic Period in Athens is the on-going rivalry and conflict between the aristocratic clans, each with its own supporters and dependents at the lower levels of society, and each attempting to increase its power. Stanton's fullest exposition of this theme is in his discussion of the reforms of Cleisthenes. I have no problem with this combination of sourcebook and theme because the primary material is judiciously chosen and annotated, the author's own views openly expressed, and numerous references to contrary views are provided. (Besides, in the main, I agree with his interpretation.)