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Review on Marchesi

Halla-aho, Hilla

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ILARIA MARCHESI: *The Art of Pliny's Letters. A Poetics of Allusion in the Private Correspondence*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008. ISBN 978-0-521-88227-9. XII, 278 pp. GBP 55.

This book is about intertextuality in the private correspondence (Books 1–9) of Pliny the Younger. The author's aim is to study the letters as pieces of literary art through the identification of allusions to other texts. According to her main argument, the allusive technique gives a structure to the whole private correspondence and marks it as a coherent work of literary art, at the same time being an instrument in the contemporary debates on literature, oratory and history in which Pliny engages himself.

In Chapter 1 ("The semiotics of structure"), the author argues that poetic allusions were a means by which Pliny organized parts of his collection, a collection that is seemingly put together haphazardly, without arrangement according to chronology or addressee. For example, allusions to Virgil (*Aen.* 6,129) connect the successive letters 1,2 and 1,3, and allusions to Catullus (Catull. 8) connect letters 1,12 and 1,13.

Chapter 2 ("*Sed quid ego tam gloriose?* Pliny's poetics of choice") tackles the question of Pliny as a poet. Marchesi proposes a new reading of the epistle 7,4, suggesting that the letter is to be read as a parody, as "a playful declaration of modesty" (p. 88), written by a person possessed by a poetic *furor*, rather than taking it at face value and exemplifying Pliny's vanity and naivety in expressing it (a judgement passed on the letter by previous scholars).

Chapter 3 ("The importance of being *Secundus*: Tacitus' voice in Pliny's letters") has as its centrepiece a letter to Tacitus (*epist.* 1,6). Marchesi's discussion proceeds from the long-recognized allusion of Pliny's phrase *motuque corporis excitetur* (*epist.* 1,6,2) to Tac. *dial.* 36,1 (*motibus excitetur*). On the surface, the letter makes a point about the advantages of bringing writing-tablets on a hunting trip. Inspired by the physical exercise of the trip, the gentleman hunter sitting by the hunting nets in the peace afforded by the surrounding nature and solitude can return home with *plena cerae*. In Marchesi's reading, motivated by the Tacitean intertext, Pliny takes here a clear position on those statements on the decline of oratory that were expressed in the *Dialogus*: "In Pliny, intellectual *cogitatio* is opposed to physical *agitatio* and the paradoxical *quies* of hunters like him is opposed to *motus*: the best thoughts are produced by the mind of someone who sits beside the nets, surrounded by woods, solitude and silence." [...] "Developing Tacitus' point in a new direction, Pliny's text insists that rhetoric does not need, even as a premise to be negated, the political dissensions of old time." (p. 128)

Chapter 4 ("Storming historiography: Pliny's voice in Tacitus' text") discusses Pliny's double role as a potential author of history and as an actor in history written by others. In her analysis of Pliny's famous description of the relationship of, and differences between, oratory and history (*epist.* 5.8, p. 151ff), Marchesi presents the view that Pliny in fact sees the two as closely related, and almost identical (p. 169): "The final remark on the dichotomy, like the one that opened the letter, is formulated in terms that suggest the existence of a profound continuity if not identity between the two. Instead of finding a final element of distinction, Pliny gives them the same qualification, one word in the superlative: *ea dissimilia et hoc ipso diversa, quod maxima*." There is some confusion in Marchesi's discussion on the passage, concerning the notoriously surprising use of the demonstrative pronouns *haec* and *illa* (on which the interpretation of the passage depends). In the course of her discussion, the author seems to assent to the majority opinion on the referents of *haec* and *illa*, *haec* to mark the textually more distant

element (oratory), and *illa* to mark the textually closer referent (history). However, the table that she produces (p. 167) has the situation reversed, so that as the attributes of oratory appear those that Pliny links with *illa* (= history in the majority opinion).

Chapter 5 ("Overcoming Ciceronian anxieties: Pliny's *niche/nike* in literary history") is about Pliny's relationship to the towering figure of Cicero. In Marchesi's reading, Pliny tries to convince his readers that at least in one respect, that of publishing a well-edited and -arranged collection of epistles, he is the superior of the two. Part of this argument is based on a rather speculative interpretation of letters 9,2 (to Sabinus) and 2,2 (to Paulinus). According to Marchesi (p. 229ff), the recipient of letter 9,2 (Sabinus) would have read letter 2,2 (to Paulinus) in its published form, then written to Pliny using phrases and lines of thought from this letter, and finally received the letter 9,2 from Pliny as a response with again the same themes and vocabulary (the wish of receiving long letters, the mutual affection that causes the absence of such letters to be considered an offense and the futility of any excuses for not writing). This is supposed to underline the fact that Pliny's epistles circulated in published form, and thus lifted him above Cicero as a person publishing an epistolographical corpus.

Assessing the process of identifying allusions is difficult in the absence of criteria as to what constitutes an allusion and what does not. Therefore, the acceptability of the proposed instances of intertextuality depends ultimately on the reader's willingness to believe the author's literary reconstruction, and less on anything that would come even close to such concepts as argument, or even less, proof. Allusions differ as to their status. Some are well established and have been acknowledged for a long time, while others are new ones suggested by the author. Certainly, there can be no doubt that intertextuality played a substantial role in Pliny's literary technique, as this volume among others shows. But proving the reconstruction of Pliny's presumed line of thought behind the allusion is a different thing from simply recognizing the intertext, and one where this study does not quite succeed. Usually the invited reading departs too far from what actually stands in the text to be plausible (as in the passage on hunting and writing in letter 5,8, in Marchesi's treatment turned into an argument about the state of oratory, or in the alleged recycling of fairly commonplace epistolary motives in letters 9,2 and 2,2). Furthermore, at times the author seems determined to read in the text the exact opposite of what Pliny actually writes (on oratory and history [p. 169], and the parodic interpretation of 7,4 [p. 78ff]). To scholars working on intertextuality this book undoubtedly has much to offer, but its argument is on most occasions too tenuous to be of much interest to the general reader.

Hilla Halla-aho

DAVID RUHNKENIUS: *Elogium Tiberii Hemsterhusii*. Edidit H. NIKITINSKI. Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana. K. G. Saur Verlag, Monachii et Lipsiae 2006. ISBN 978-3-598-71322-4. IX, 41 pp. EUR 32.

David Ruhnken, origine Ruhneken, latine Ruhnkenius (1723-1798) Pomeria oriundus, Lugduni Batavorum studiis grammaticis duce Tiberio Hemsterhusio imbutus verus Batavus fit et ad altissimum gradum Parnassi ascendit. Fit princeps criticorum, quam nobilem dignitatem servare scit, praecessor philologorum Germanorum aetatis aureae motus neohumanistici, qui a Friderico Augusto Wolff initium cepit. Quod ei philologia fuit, apparet ex eo quod ei praestantissimus