

Habermehl, P. 2006. *Petronius, Satyrice 79-141. Ein philologisch-literarischer Kommentar*, I: *Sat. 79-110* (Texte und Kommentare, 27/1). Berlin/New York, Walter de Gruyter. lxxi, 488 S. Pr. € 128.00/US\$ 172.80.

Once or twice during an academic career, a reviewer comes across a new book, leafs through the volume and can only wish that he had written it himself. This rare, but delightful sensation I experienced with the new commentary on the second half of Petronius' *Satyrice* by Peter Habermehl, the first part of which has now been published.

Any major commentary on any part of the *Satyrice* is welcome beforehand. In spite of the great scholarly interest in the ancient novel, particularly the Roman novels by Petronius and Apuleius, which has come up since roughly 1970, no general commentary on the *Satyrice* is available. In fact, only the well known *Cena Trimalchionis* (c. 27-78) can be studied with the help of a standard commentary, a modest volume published by Martin S. Smith as long ago as 1975. Among other contributions, I mention an Italian edition with commentary on the Quartilla scene (c. 16-26) by Aragosti, Cosci and Cotrozzi from 1988 and a separate edition of the poems by Edward Courtney from 1991. Several major commentaries on Petronius have been announced (e.g. by Conte & Labate and Sullivan), but none of them seem to be even near completion. Habermehl has accepted the challenge posed by this situation, and undertaken to fill an important gap in Petronian studies by supplying readers with a substantial commentary on the scenes immediately following the *Cena*, for which little help is available at all.

Being welcome in any case, the commentary can, fortunately, also be called a success in every respect. First, it has the virtues of philological precision and thorough attention for the text that must be the basis of any valuable analysis of an ancient text. The standard text chosen here is the 1995 Teubner edition by Konrad Müller (with changes on some twenty places, as listed on p. xxvii; no running Latin text is supplied). Textual variants and scholarly proposals for emendation are discussed whenever this seems necessary. Likewise, the precise meaning of difficult words and phrases is carefully determined, often with the help of lexica and parallel places. This may all seem fairly obvious, but every classicist knows modern commentaries that simply do not provide such essential help.

Second, this commentary offers excellent interpretations of the literary dimensions of the *Satyrice*. This ranges from brief explanations or paraphrases of what is going on in the text, as well as literary *topoi* in the novel and related genres, to observations on the narrative as a whole and the characterization of its protagonists. Larger sections, such as the poem on the *Troiae halôsis* (c. 89) are duly introduced in separate sections, with much attention for the abundant scholarly literature on Petronius. Habermehl does not support a specific, one-sided view of

the *Satyrica*, but steers a sensible middle course between taking it either too seriously or too lightly: Petronius offers a fair deal of amusement, H. rightly argues, but his work also seems to imply some criticism of his age. The work may be seen as “ein in Prosa gesungenes Lied des zeitgenössischen Alltags, bevölkert von Anti-Helden, die in einer desillusionierten Gegenwart nach epischer Statur hungern und gerade so die Armut und Leere ihrer Welt umso entlarvender in Szene setzen” (p. xxxv). Petronius offers us comic relief, according to H., and thereby finds his own way as a writer, which quite diverges from those of his contemporaries Seneca and Lucan. In short, H. regards Petronius as the predecessor of Cervantes, Rabelais, Swift and Sterne (p. xxxv).

In keeping with this general view on Petronius, H. always has an eye for Petronian humour, even in sections that require discussion of various particulars of the text and its structure, such as may be expected from a good commentary.

To illustrate this point, I refer to H.'s notes on one of the most interesting tales in the novel: the erotic tale of the boy from Pergamum (c. 85-7). (For reasons of space, I assume that the reader of the review is familiar with the tale and its contents.) To accompany this tale, which measures some three pages of text, H. presents us with 32 pages of commentary, preceded by three pages of general introduction on the tale, its structure (a ring composition) and references to major contributions in secondary literature. He rightly highlights the surprising role of the teacher Eumolpus, posing as a stern philosopher, and of the boy entrusted to his care: the boy actually appears to be the seducer in this little game. The text also throws new light on the roles of Eumolpus and Giton in the main narrative. H. is perhaps slightly overstressing the ‘darker sides’ of the tale, referring to the inherent loss of moral decency and sexual innocence, but fortunately he does also refer to humouristic play by Petronius here: the passage is, among other things, a funny parody of Plato's *Symposium*.

H.'s ample notes on every Latin sentence provide full information about everything a reader may need to know to appreciate Petronius' text, including links with Greek homo-erotic literature and Roman poetry. Each stage of the erotic action is also carefully explained with a refreshing touch of irony. I particularly liked the prudent notes on ambiguous terms (such as *patienti* in 86.1 or *satis fieri sibi* in 87.1) or euphemistic language (in every phrase referring to sexual acts, e.g. *irrepsi* (87.3), explained as ‘writhing around’ the boy like a reptile, rather than penetrating him), and on formal and juridical expressions which add to the irony in a context such as this.

Of course, there is no need to agree with H. about every detail, but on the whole his commentary is both informative and inspiring. The two main fields of philology and literary analysis easily intermingle in quite a natural way, and so as to really make the book to what it professes to be: a philological and literary

commentary. It is extensive enough to offer practical help on all levels for various students of the Latin text, while its dimensions remain such as allow it to be a manageable tool for readers. The book is well printed in a layout that is clear and helpful. H.'s keen sense of Petronian wit and irony pervade the whole commentary and so invite the reader to share in the fun of the ancient text.

In short, Habermehl's important book is a great pleasure to use and an excellent and most welcome addition to Petronian studies and to Latin literary studies in general. The volume is simply essential for any serious classical library. Merely one major complaint may be lodged here: the second volume, covering c. 111-41, will take another two years to appear in print. However, with this first volume in our hands we may be sure that it will be well worth the wait.

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