

Hunter, R., Russell, D. 2011. *Plutarch, How to Study Poetry (De audiendis poetis)* (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics). Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. ix, 222 pp. Pr. £21.84 (pb). ISBN 9780521173605.

Richard Hunter and Donald Russell have produced an excellent volume in the Green and Yellow series, which will be warmly welcomed by both students and specialists. Plutarch's essay *How to Study Poetry (De audiendis poetis)* is an important piece of ancient literary criticism, because it casts light on the fascinating reading strategies of teachers and students in Hellenistic and Imperial education. In this moralizing essay Plutarch explains how poetry should be read in order to be a useful preparation for philosophy: in reading Homer, Hesiod and Euripides, young men need to learn techniques that help them to recognize and to avoid the dangers of poetry, as well as to find the morally most beneficial interpretation of each passage. Plutarch's observations on individual lines from archaic and classical poetry are sometimes surprising for modern readers, but they reveal how teachers used to interpret the poets: this essay is not about professional philology or literary theory, but about the moralizing interpretation of poetry in the context of education.

We must be grateful that two of the most learned specialists in the field have collaborated in making this important text accessible to a wide audience. Hunter and Russell provide an 'eclectic' text (p. 25), the readings of which are based on a number of existing editions. The introduction (pp. 1-26) offers useful information on various aspects of the text, particularly on the three most important influences on Plutarch's ideas about poetry: (1) Plato, whose criticism of poetry may be regarded as the point of departure of Plutarch's essay, (2) the Alexandrian commentators whose ideas are preserved in the scholia on Homer (the D-scholia and bT-scholia being especially relevant), and finally (3) the Stoics: the title of Plutarch's essay in fact resembles the title of a lost book by Chrysippus (*Concerning How to Study Poetry*). Plutarch's use of Stoic terminology seems to indicate that Chrysippus' work was an important source for him.¹⁾

The introduction of this edition also includes an illuminating discussion of the complex structure of the treatise, which has been the object of scholarly debate.²⁾ Finally, it offers some useful remarks on Plutarch's language and style, which may indeed be difficult for the inexperienced undergraduate and graduate students at whom the Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics series is primarily aimed. In

¹⁾ Aristotle is of course also relevant. To the literature on Plutarch's use of Peripatetic theories (p. 2 n. 12) one could add one title that is absent from the bibliography: Sicking, C.M.J. 1998. *Plutarch's Literary Theory*, in: id. (ed.) *Distant Companions* (Leiden/Boston/Köln), 101-13.

²⁾ See esp. Schenkeveld, D.M. 1982. *The Structure of Plutarch's De audiendis poetis*, *Mnemosyne* 34, 60-71.

general, it will be rewarding to read the introduction of this volume in close connection with Richard Hunter's chapter 'Reading for life: Plutarch, "How the young man should study poetry"' in his *Critical Moments* (pp. 169-201).³⁾

Plutarch's essay consists of thirteen chapters (the division is modern). The commentary (pp. 70-209) contains short summaries of the argument of each chapter, which helpfully guide the reader through the text. The annotations are exceptionally rich and thorough, providing information on the background of the numerous poetic examples, Plutarch's grammar and style, and the tradition of literary interpretation in ancient education. Hunter and Russell frequently adduce relevant parallels, not only from Plutarch's other works, but also from the scholia to Homer and various ancient critics, such as Philodemus, Dionysius, pseudo-Dionysius, Longinus and Horace. Helpful annotations also explain the technical terminology that Plutarch borrows from both Stoic philosophy and Alexandrian scholarship.

I will illustrate the merits of the commentary from one intriguing passage of Plutarch's essay. In chapter 8, Plutarch deals with the problem of poetic characters behaving badly. Some passages must be censured, but other passages can be explained as fitting in their specific context. An example of the latter category is *Iliad* 9.458-61 (cited in 26f), a passage that is absent from the manuscript tradition of Homer: Plutarch is our sole source for these lines, in which Phoenix reports that he once considered killing his own father, when one of the gods put an end to his anger (παῦσεν χόλον). Plutarch claims that Aristarchus 'removed' (ἐξείλε) these lines from the Homeric text, 'out of fear' (φοβηθείς). Plutarch himself disagrees with the Alexandrian scholar: 'these lines are right in view of the occasion (ἔχει δὲ πρὸς τὸν καιρὸν ὀρθῶς), because Phoenix is teaching Achilles what sort of a thing anger is and how many reckless deeds men are ready to do by anger' (translation adapted from Babbitt).⁴⁾

This complex passage calls for various sorts of explanation, and Hunter and Russell succeed admirably in giving all the necessary information in a few succinct annotations (pp. 150-1). First, they explain that Plutarch's claim about Aristarchus is problematic, since Aristarchus usually did not 'remove' lines from the Homeric text but employed the method of athetesis. References guide the reader to the relevant literature on Alexandrian textual criticism. Second, it is pointed out that Plutarch's remark about Aristarchus' 'fear' is enigmatic: the text may indeed be corrupt, for one expects a μή-clause after φοβηθείς (the reference to Hartman in

³⁾ Hunter, R. 2009. *Critical Moments in Classical Literature. Studies in the Ancient View of Literature and its Uses* (Cambridge).

⁴⁾ Babbitt, F.C. 1927. *Plutarch, Moralia* I (Cambridge, MA).

the note on φοβηθείς is wrong: the correct name of the commentator is Heirman).⁵⁾ Third, Hunter and Russell comment on Plutarch's defence of the text, which leans on the rhetorical idea of *καίρως*: a helpful explanation of that concept is followed by some relevant parallels in the scholia on the *Iliad*. Finally, the commentators interestingly note that Plutarch's interpretation of this passage should be connected with his general interest in education in this essay: Phoenix 'here plays the rôle of P[lutarch] and Achilles that of one of P[lutarch]'s students' (p. 151). In all these notes the commentary is a model of both clarity and brevity, so that reading the commentary next to the Greek text is a true delight.

One detail that is brought out in Hunter's parallel discussion in *Critical Moments* (2009, 196-7) is intriguing for readers who are interested in the Homeric citation: Plutarch's reading in 9.459 (παύσεν χόλον) differs from his reading of the same line in *Coriolanus* 32.5 (τρέψε φρένας). In the commentary, this difference is briefly mentioned (p. 150) but not explained. Following the reference to Hunter's chapter, one will find that Plutarch seems to adapt his citations to the contexts in which he is citing them. His choice of παύσεν χόλον in 26f makes Phoenix' speech respond to Achilles' controlling of his anger in *Iliad* 1 (see esp. 1.192: χόλον παύσειεν), the passage that is discussed immediately before the Phoenix passage (in 26d Plutarch cites *Iliad* 1.220-1).

The passage from chapter 8 discussed above is exemplary for the entire commentary: Hunter and Russell offer numerous interesting observations on a difficult text, which are helpful and instructive not only for Plutarch specialists, but also for scholars working on the history of the Homeric text, ancient education, and literary criticism. This edition with commentary will greatly contribute to our understanding of Plutarch's *How to Study Poetry*, and without any doubt it will stimulate further research on this fascinating essay.

Leiden University
Classics Department
Doelensteeg 16
Postbus 9515
2300 RA Leiden
The Netherlands
c.c.de.jonge@hum.leidenuniv.nl

Casper C. de Jonge

⁵⁾ Heirman, L.J.R. 1972. *Plutarchus, "De audiendis poetis". Introduction, Translation, Commentary* (Diss. Leiden). Heirman's dissertation can be found in the bibliography, but with the wrong initials L.R.H. (p. 213).