them more fully intelligible for others. But in such a large book so extensively concerned with the literary critical inheritance, the lack of sustained reflection on the stakes of reading seems a missed opportunity. Despite its disinclination to theorise, however, its scope and detail make this volume an ideal tool with which readers can consider for themselves the political, ethical and institutional consequences of the approaches to literature that H. articulates.

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ANCIENT AND MODERN VIEWS ON NARRATIVE

G R E T H L E I N (J.) *Ancient Greek Texts and Modern Narrative Theory. Towards a Critical Dialogue*. Pp. viii + 199, fig. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Cased, £85, US$110. ISBN: 978-1-009-33959-9.
doi:10.1017/S0009840X24000994

In this book G. addresses what he sees as an imbalance in the application of narratological theory to Classics. This is not to say that he is hostile to theory *per se* – he continually refers to areas where narratology has been useful. His approach is best summed up by a comment in his acknowledgements (p. vii):

> There can be no doubt about the rich fruits of narratology in Classics, and yet the application of narratological categories, while letting us see the complexity of many texts with fresh eyes, has also occluded the distinct quality of ancient narrative and its understanding in antiquity.

The goal of the book is not to present a new theoretical framework, but to start a conversation – the approach to unpacking ancient attitudes is standard textual analysis of the sources available. Readers looking for a perspective on how ancients viewed narrative may find this useful as a starting point, but it is not intended as an all-encompassing new theoretical approach and should not be taken as such. It is worth stating at the outset that the book is not well-suited to an audience that is not already familiar with narratology; terminology is not explained in-text, and G.'s knowledge of the subject leads him to detailed critiques that necessitate some knowledge of narratology.

The book is structured into six chapters. Each of the first five tackles a different theme from narratological analysis and its (in)significance to the ancients. The final chapter takes the elements discussed in the preceding chapters (and the insight offered into ancient attitudes) and contrasts them with postmodern examples to underline the peculiarities of ancient literature. This provides a neat conclusion to G.'s overarching argument for highlighting the unique characteristics of classical literature.

The structure is straightforward: each chapter starts with an appraisal of the existing narratological literature on the chosen topic, which both illustrates G.'s familiarity with the existing scholarship and provides a useful summary of recent scholarship; he then analyses select examples to demonstrate the differing perspective or priorities of the ancients.

Chapter 1: this opening chapter outlines the fundamental issue, as G. sees it, with narratology: it is based on the modern novel and therefore highlights the similarities between

modern and ancient literature, obscuring the uniqueness of ancient literature. He also explains his approach: rather than focusing on the parts that already fit the narratological framework, he will isolate ancient examples that raise issues and use these 'fault lines' (p. 13) to distinguish the 'ancient' from the modern. Thereby he aims to 'invite scholars of narrative to reconsider some of their concepts in the light of ancient material' (p. 17).

Chapter 2: there are two strands to this chapter: the ancient concept of fictionality and arguing for its marginality compared to concerns of morality and immersion. Starting from an analysis of fiction in ancient literature (including Odysseus' lying tales and Lucian's *True Stories*), he re-examines Aristotle and Gorgias as providing potential theories of fiction. While accepting the existence of the concept of fictionality in ancient literature, G. argues that it is far less important to the ancient than to the modern mind, and that other concepts such as immersion and morality were the focus of much more attention. By nature of being an overview, the chapter does not have space to dive too deeply into its examples. However, especially in the case of Lucian, this is something of an omission, given that his *True Stories* is explicitly satirising 'the truth-falsehood dichotomy' (p. 33) – and thus, to an extent, fictionality. For Lucian at least, fictionality seems to be a topic of interest; and while there are always exceptions to rules, it would have been useful to see if Lucian fits with the suggested prioritisation of morality and immersion over fictionality.

Chapter 3 focuses on voice, specifically on how the modern model of levels of voice (author, narrator and character) differs from the picture shown in the ancient texts. Based on a survey of ancient sources across genres (rhetoric, philosophy, comedy etc.), G. highlights areas where a character's speech is taken as the author's and where the author is conceptualised as impersonating the characters, rather than being on a separate level from them. This would be a major change in narratological approaches and is likely to be controversial. G. also introduces modern cognitive theory as alternative to discussions of metalepsis, arguing that it echoes ancient concerns with immersion and adopting the perspective of characters.

In Chapter 4 G. critiques the centrality of Theory of Mind ('mind-reading') in narratology and asserts the *Ethiopica* as a counter-example to show that '[t]ime is the primary dimension of narrative' (p. 114), since '[i]t is not the consciousness of the characters but the temporal dynamics of narrative that pulls the reader into the story' (p. 88). Again, this is not a dismissal of Theory of Mind, but a re-evaluation of its centrality in the discourse, expanding the argument from Chapter 2 about the importance of immersion and morality for ancient readers. This is the most narrowly focused chapter, moving from *Ethiopica* to critics of literature (Dionysius, Plutarch, Aristotle and scholia on the *Iliad*). While the selection makes sense in this context, it would be a stronger argument if it also discussed texts where misunderstandings (and therefore Theory of Mind) are prominent or even central to the plot – particularly New Comedy (i.e. *Samia*).

Chapter 5 deals with motivation, and it benefits (as does Chapter 4) from an extended case study, this time of Penelope in books 17–19 of the *Odyssey*. This is probably the archetypal example of unclear or confusing motivation in ancient texts, and the comparison G. makes with the 'retroactive motivation' of medieval and early modern narratives (p. 124) is an excellent illustration of his central thesis about different narrative priorities across time, foregrounding the unique characteristics of ancient literature. This discussion does not preclude any exploration of psychological motivation, but convincingly argues for the possibility that apparently contradictory motivations would not be confusing or unusual to an ancient audience.

In Chapter 6 the arguments from earlier chapters are compared with similar features in postmodern literature; in each case, G. argues that this similarity is superficial, stemming from very different attitudes. For example, in Chapter 2 he asserted fictionality's 'marginal

place in ancient reflections on narrative' (pp. 152–3). In Chapter 6 he contrasts this with postmodern literature's blending of fiction/fact: 'Deconstruction is a parasitic operation … the deconstructed concepts remain powerful points of reference' (p. 153). A particular strength of this chapter is the discussion of the similarities between ancient and medieval concepts of narrative, which merits development in further scholarship.

In this book G. offers original re-appraisals of narratological concepts to identify distinct characteristics of ancient literature; the intention of this work is part of an existing tradition of reasserting the uniqueness of ancient literature, as G. acknowledges (p. 16). Much of the evidence used comes from scholarly, philosophical or grammatical works that discuss literature – Aristotle is a prominent figure throughout. This is inevitable when tackling this topic, but may not be fully convincing to all readers, given that there is often a distinction between theory and practice – and this is where further case studies would help to develop these ideas. Whether or not his observations are fully convincing is a matter for individual readers, but the argument is clear and well-supported, given the limited nature of our evidence for ancient perspectives on narrative. In this thematic approach G. provides the prospect of developing further interesting conversations around both narratology and our assumptions about ancient literature.

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ANCIENT GREEK CURSE TABLETS

LAMONT (J.L.) *In Blood and Ashes. Curse Tablets and Binding Spells in Ancient Greece.* Pp. xxviii + 404, ills, maps. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. Cased, £71, US$110. ISBN: 978-0-19-751778-9.

This monograph provides an extremely detailed and interesting analysis of curses from 750 to 250 BCE, is the first work to explicitly focus on the 'development and dissemination of cursing', and fills several gaps in previous scholarship. Throughout, there is good use of illustrations, which are often difficult to come by in many books on curse tablets. It is particularly valuable to have images of the tablets alongside drawings. The inclusion of hitherto unpublished translations of tablets is extremely important to the continued development of the discipline. The translations are well done and considered. It is, however, a shame that there was no attempt to unify the conventions used when reproducing texts from previous editions.

The book is divided into three parts: 'The Beginnings of Greek Curse-Writing Rituals'; 'The Early Spread of Curse Technologies, 500–250 BCE'; and 'Orality and Text: Curse Practice in the Realm of Binding Spells and *Arai*'. It places curse tablets within their proper wider context, with issues of geopolitics, the import of silver, the epigraphic habit, and what other documents were being inscribed upon being brought in to build up a picture of how the creation of curse tablets fitted into the wider cultural context. This will prove especially helpful to those engaging with curse tablets for the first time. At points the book uses curse tablets as a springboard from which to engage with a myriad of different topics and issues.