



THE LAYERS OF THE TEXT

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This monumental book testifies to prodigious productivity: the more than 40 essays reprinted here complement the seven monographs and commentaries that H. authored and co-edited during the period which the volume covers. Part of what has enabled such productivity, as H. notes with characteristic modesty in the preface, is an ‘institutional structure’, which has enabled him to do research ‘in [his] own way’ and without ‘constraints’ (p. v). His self-presentation as a latter-day Philotas pursuing his ‘driving questions (and obsessions)’ is wryly self-deprecating, but the emphasis on Cambridge as a distinctive environment also hints at the pressures to which such a model of scholarly endeavour is subject in the contemporary university system. Against that background, and at a time when scholarly specialisation and its often unwelcome consequences are hard to avoid, the volume testifies to the literary critical benefits of ranging widely across periods, genres and modes.

Some chapters find H. re-treading familiar ground. In Chapter 18 (originally published 2021) he returns to the interactions between *Od.* 9 and Theocritus, abundantly treated in his ‘Green and Yellow’ commentary on Theocritus, and considers whether a consciousness of Sicily as a locus of ‘bucolic song traditions’ informs Homer’s composition of the *Odyssey* (p. 332). Numerous fresh insights emerge. Drawing on Eustathius (*Hom.* 1638.56–7), H. detects ‘a wry twisting of formulaic language’ in *Od.* 9.444–5 (specifically *πικνὴ φρονέοντι*) and countenances the possibility that ‘Odysseus creates the kind of ironic and distanced *de haut en bas* empathy with which we are familiar from later pastoral literature’ (p. 333). One might wonder, though, about the claim that the ‘pity’ created in such passages is ‘always the result of a sense of readerly superiority’. H. does not give examples, but *Th. Id.* 4.50–7 and still more obviously Meliboeus’ lament in *Verg. Ecl.* 1 imperil the notion that readers can securely feel themselves ‘superior’ to the herdsmen of the pastoral realm; it would also be helpful to hear more about what this ‘superiority’ consists of and how ‘pity’ can ‘result’ from readers’ sense of themselves and their activity. Nevertheless, the invitation to find a distinctively bucolic irony, or at least its beginnings, in Odysseus’ words, together with what might almost be considered a proto-Hellenistic, ‘learned’ play on multiple meanings in *πικνὴ φρονέοντι*, typifies the suggestiveness that H.’s attention to texts can generate.

Another theme of the book, again familiar from H.’s earlier work but perhaps more prominent in this volume, is a concern for the material realities and historical contexts of literary production. The former is especially evident in discussions of inscribed poetry (Chapter 14 [2019]), while in Chapter 9 (2011) H. considers the particularism of Hellenistic cult aetiology as an alternative to Homeric and Hesiodic strategies (p. 185). Characteristic of this mode of reading are the reflections on the pan-Cretan dynamics of Callimachus’ aetiology of the Dictynna cult (*H.* 2.189–204; p. 182), which exemplify H.’s claim that Callimachus’ poems should not be seen as self-reflexive literary *Spielerei* (p. 190). The drift of these reflections is of a piece with much recent work on Hellenistic poetics.

Perhaps the volume's signature concern, however, or at least the one that most differentiates it from the work produced by H. in the first two decades of his career, is its preoccupation with the lines of influence detectable within ancient critical culture. Some contributions examine the influence of scholarly writing on rhetorical prose: the discussion of Dio Chrysostom's *Trojan Oration* (Chapter 27 [2009]) is a fine example. Elsewhere H. considers the role played by classical authors in setting the terms for later critical debate. Plato is an especially important figure in this respect. Representative are Chapters 28 (2011) and 34 (2016), which consider the *Ion* and the *Hippias Minor*. Each make the case for the influence of the discussions that these texts stage and the terminology that they employ, as well as contributing to longstanding interpretative debates about the dialogues themselves.

In the activities and self-representation of the *Ion*'s titular protagonist H. finds a foreshadowing of Hellenistic conceptualisations of critical activity: *Ion*'s emphasis on the effort that his work on Homer entails (530c7–8) anticipates the exhaustive researches of Philitas (and one might also be reminded of Callimachus' sleepless Aratus in *Ep.* 27). Considering issues that have preoccupied previous commentators, H. argues that δῖάνοια should be understood in the *Ion* primarily as referring to 'meaning' *qua* authorial intention, rather than to a specifically allegorical subtext (pp. 512–13). When assessing the dialogue in relation to Plato's corpus, he observes that the *Ion*'s treatment of poetry is made distinctive by its focus on 'the person of the interpreter and his relation with the poet', rather than poetry's communal effects: 'what *Ion* can do for Homer (and *vice versa*)' is the primary subject (p. 516). H. then examines the place of *Hippias Minor* in literary history and emphasises, among other things, the role that it (along with *Antithenes*) plays in establishing the pejorative interpretation of πολύτροπος to which later scholars responded (p. 645). Also interesting is the suggestion (p. 656) that Aristotle may have responded to the *Hippias Minor* and specifically its opposition between Odysseus and Achilles, in the *Poetics*.

Similar approaches to literary influence characterise H.'s reading of Euripides' *Ion* (Chapter 5 [2011]). Beginning from reflections on Nietzsche's dichotomisation of the Bacchic and the Apolline, H. compares and contrasts *Ion* and *Bacchae*: as well as being preoccupied with Apollo and Dionysus at the level of plot, the plays employ formal devices that capture distinctive features of their two gods. To the ecstatically communal parodos of *Bacchae* H. compares *Ion*'s opening monody, finding in both that song (p. 86) and his use of the broom (p. 90) a concern with individual experience and the (apparently) bounded self. The teleological, divinely dictated plot of *Bacchae* is deftly juxtaposed to that of the *Ion*, in which 'human weakness and ignorance' play a significant shaping role, with the result that the plot is characterised by 'narrative "surprises"' of the kind that the *Bacchae* does not create. On the basis of these observations H. proceeds to document the *Ion*'s 'juxtaposition and interplay of analogous divine and human patterns' as an anticipation of the structuring principles of New Comedy.

These brief overviews, needless to say, can give only a rough indication of what might be gleaned from a collection as large, varied and richly detailed as this. Notwithstanding its many insights, however, the volume is not without its frustrations. One is H.'s tendency to adumbrate but not pursue conceptual issues. He rightly points out, for instance, that, in the *Hippias Minor* Plato prompts questions about literary characters that remain pressing: 'What kinds of questions are we to ask of what they say? How are we to move from what is said in epic or drama to the ethical situations which we ourselves face?' (p. 653). H., however, does not offer a response to these questions (or indeed sketch out what 'we' might consist of). One rejoinder to this absence would be to point out that the goal of H.'s literary historical method is to open up those questions and to make

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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