THE *POETICS*

P. L. Donini: *La tragedia e la vita. Saggi sulla* Poetica *di Aristotele*. (Culture Antiche, Studi e Testi 18.) Pp. 133. Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2004. Paper, €14. ISBN: 88-7694-735-3.

This handsomely printed *libellus* makes a distinguished contribution to scholarship on the *Poetics*. It collects seven essays of D.'s, four of which (two-thirds of the book's bulk) have been previously published and are reprinted with only minor revisions. D. brings to the treatise an estimable expertise in Aristotle's wider philosophy, especially ethics and metaphysics. He writes, moreover, with concision, lucidity, and elegance. His arguments illuminate the central issues of the *Poetics*; they always merit close consideration, even when (rarely, for this reviewer) they prompt disagreement.

Chapter 1 provides D.'s general perspective on the treatise. First published as an introduction (to Valgimigli's reprinted translation) in the Biblioteca Universale Laterza Aristotle series, it offers a guide to the key concepts (*techne*, form, necessity, the nexus of character and action, universals, cognition, and emotion) which shape Aristotle's approach to poetry. D.'s ability both to elucidate and (sometimes) criticize Aristotle's rationalism makes his writing rewarding. I have reservations, however, about D.'s talk of a *transition* ('passaggio', pp. 26–7, 32) from emotional pain to intellectual pleasure in the experience of tragedy: 1453b12–13, together with the argument of *Poetics* 4 (which D. rightly takes very seriously), points to something more like a complex fusion of emotion and understanding.

The following chapters refine and in one respect significantly extend D.'s readings. Chapter 2 stresses that the causal 'necessity' of unified human action stems in part from the universal human pursuit of *eudaimonia*. Chapter 4 argues that the kind of ethical understanding which tragedy can promote is that of *phronesis*. Chapter 5 challengingly contends, against the grain of much recent work, that the tension between *Poetics* 13 and 14 really is radical, that the latter is a sort of 'correction' of the former, that *agnoia* in 14 should not be simply identified with *hamartia* in 13, and that Aristotle's dilemma reflects a conflict between his critical system and critical 'instincts'. Chapter 6 insists that the *Poetics* does not exclude coincidences from tragic plots (both the favoured *OT* and *IT* contain them) but requires them to be integrated plausibly into the unified structure of action. Chapter 7, a brief epilogue, finds the *Poetics* suspended between a Platonic 'past' and a future (of literary criticism) which Aristotle was trying to adumbrate.

This leaves D.'s boldest thesis. Chapter 3 argues that tragedy 'completes' or 'crowns' (D.'s construal of *perainein*) a catharsis that substantially occurs outside tragedy, in the audience's prior experience of cathartic music. This position allows D. to preserve Bernays' interpretation of catharsis in *Politics* 8.5–7 but without transferring it to tragedy. After a musical purging of emotional excesses, tragic theatre provides a more intellectual pleasure—if anything, complementing rather than completing catharsis. Hence the startling upshot that catharsis 'ceases to be the essential, proper function of tragedy' (p. 63). But why, then, is it in the definition of the genre? D. never quite confronts this basic objection, though he tackles others. I also find that he here pulls understanding and emotion uncomfortably apart. Furthermore, his suggestion that the back-reference immediately before the definition of tragedy is to *Politics* 8 itself is extremely strained (I would say near-impossible): the *Poetics*—as its independent opening, starting from first principles, shows—is no straightforward continuation of *Politics* 8.

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Despite D.'s unconvincing account of the catharsis clause, this book offers instructive formulations and shrewd observations on almost every page. All advanced students of the *Poetics* will need to reckon with it. There is a short bibliography of works cited (but, alas, no index). D. is judiciously selective in his attention to the extensive secondary literature, though his ironic surprise (p. 53) that no one has treated the catharsis clause as an interpolation needs revision (see G. Scott, *OSAP* 25 [2003], 233–63). Misprints are rare: but on p. 50 read '1386a'; and Bernays' famous *Grundzüge* (1857) is misdated to 1858.

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THE CREAM OF WISDOM

H. TAKAHASHI: *Aristotelian Meteorology in Syriac. Barhebraeus,* Butyrum Sapientiae*, Books of Mineralogy and Meteorology*. (Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus 15.) Pp. xx + 724. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004. Cased, €199, US$249. ISBN: 90-04-13031-4.

Greek sciences and philosophy had a tremendous impact on many variegated cultures. Their influence on Rome (illustrated in the adage *Graecia capta victorem cepit*) and the subsequent Western tradition during the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and beyond is well known to most classicists; however, Greek thought was also the basis for the development of different philosophical and scientific traditions in the Islamic world. Moreover, the reception of Greek ideas in the Latin West and the Arabic East did not occur in isolation; rather, the twain did meet on the different shores of the Mediterranean, and entertained a lively intercultural exchange, which was crucial for the evolution of Western civilization. The series Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus, in which the present book appears as Volume XV, pays homage to this interchange by tracing the steps of different Aristotelean texts in Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, and Latin; in the present case, Takahashi investigates the reception of Aristotle's meteorology in the Syriac tradition, notably by editing the relevant sections from Barhebraeus' (1225/6–1286) *Cream of Wisdom* (*ḥêwaṯ ḥeḵmṯa*). This work, generally known by its somewhat surprising Latin title *Butyrum Sapientiae*, is a kind of encyclopaedia and handbook in one, dealing with the different branches of philosophy in the larger sense as present in Aristotle's work, such as logic, physics, metaphysics, natural sciences, ethics and politics.

In the introduction, Takahashi discusses Barhebraeus' life and works, with specific emphasis on the *Cream*; investigates the sources on which the *Cream* is based—most prominently Avicenna's *Šifā'* (*Cure*); reviews the manuscripts employed in the edition; and outlines the development of meteorology in the preceding Arabic and Syriac traditions. Then follow the text, with full critical apparatus, and the translation, arranged on facing pages (as is usual in the series). The commentary is mostly concerned with locating the sources on which Barhebraeus draws; in each instance, they are cited in full in both the original Greek, Arabic, or Syriac, as well as in English translation. Through typographical means such as underlining or italicizing, Takahashi highlights those parts of the sources which resemble the corresponding passage in the *Cream* particularly closely. This meticulous analysis affords us an interesting insight into the world of ideas of a thirteenth-century polymath in an

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