MORE ON COMMENTARIES

M.-O. GOULET-CAZÉ (ed.): *Le Commentaire entre tradition et innovation. Actes du Colloque International de l'Institut des Traditions Textuelles (Paris et Villejuif, 22–25 septembre 1999)*. (Bibliothèque d'Histoire de la Philosophie.) Pp. 583, ills, pls. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2000. Paper, FFr 295. ISBN: 2-7116-1445-X.

Maybe Hegel was right after all and it is only with the coming of dusk that the owl of Minerva spreads its wings. Scholars have been writing commentaries for millennia, in Greek and Latin and in all the modern European languages, but also in Akkadian, Hebrew, and Egyptian, to say nothing of Arabic, Sanskrit, and Chinese. Yet it is only within the last few years that conferences and collaborative volumes on the theory and history of commentaries in the European classical tradition have started to flourish: the book under review is one of at least five such that have appeared within the last five years.[1] Of course earlier commentators were not spending their time simply fumbling in the darkness and waiting for modern theoreticians to finally discover the light switch. Commentators have always theorized more or less consciously about their practice; but for thousands of years this theorization tended to take the form of tacit knowledge, oral report, and personal anecdote. The recent flurry of publications which attempt to transform this hands-on know-how into something more public and systematic, less intuitive and private, coincides with a growing skepticism among publishers, professors, and hiring and evaluating committees about the value of commentary as a form of scholarship. Perhaps for the first time in a hundred generations, the commentary is no longer being taken for granted as self-evidently the noblest expression of the study of texts. Is this mere coincidence? Be that as it may, this gives us an opportunity not only to complain that the end of our world is nigh but also, more interestingly, to understand better some of the forms commentaries have assumed and the purposes they have served. As the shadows lengthen, the contours become clearer—at least for a while.

This volume, like the conference which gave rise to it, is divided into three large sections. The first comprises thirteen articles devoted to the material aspects of the transmission of commentaries on literary, philosophical, medical, theological, and legal texts in antiquity (only Greek, not Latin) and in the Greek and Latin Middle Ages. The focus is upon the presentation and objective analysis of data regarding such

[1]The others are G. W. Most (ed.), *Commentaries—Kommentare* (Göttingen, 1999), cf. M. D. Reeve, *CR* 54 (2004), 5–12; R. K. Gibson, C. S. Kraus (edd.), *The Classical Commentary: Histories, Practices, Theory* (Leiden, 2002), cf. *CR* ibid.; W. Geerlings, C. Schulze (edd.), *Der Kommentar in Antike und Mittelalter. Beiträge zu seiner Erforschung* (Leiden, 2002), cf. I. Sluiter, *CR* 53 (2003), 472–4; and W. Geerlings, C. Schulze (edd.), *Der Kommentar in Antike und Mittelalter. Band 2. Neue Beiträge zu seiner Erforschung* (Leiden, 2003). Cf. also on a closely related theme V. Fera, G. Ferraù, S. Rizzo (edd.), *Talking to the Text: Marginalia from Papyri to Print. Proceedings of a Conference held at Erice, 26 September–3 October 1998, as the 12th Course of International School for the Study of Written Records* (2 vols, Messina, 2002). Among older collaborative publications on related subjects, see especially J. Assmann, B. Gladigow (edd.), *Text und Kommentar.* Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation 4 (Munich, 1995); also G. Mathieu-Castellani, M. Plaisance (edd.), *Les commentaires et la naissance de la critique littéraire, France/Italie (XIV^e–XVI^e siècles). Actes du Colloque international sur le commentaire, Paris, mai 1988* (Paris, 1990).

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physical features as layout, handwriting, systems of reference, and spatial and temporal diffusion. The authors frequently point out key procedures (extraction, selection, abridgement, enrichment, transcription) and such crucial transformations as those from roll to codex and from the commentary as a separate book to its inclusion in the margins of the text commented on; but only very rarely (with the exception of Holtz) do they consider seriously the various social functions of different kinds of commentaries, which could throw helpful light on such mechanisms. The second section is made up of four articles on biblical commentaries and a round table on interpretations of *Gen*. 2:24. The articles are remarkably heterogeneous in character and level, even by the generous standards of this volume; particularly valuable are Dorival's brief remarks on the similarities in hermeneutic methods between Jewish and Christian biblical interpreters, and Dahan's profound reflections on the fundamental assumptions of medieval biblical exegesis. The four contributions to the round table gather and present much of the rich exegetical material devoted by Christian and Jewish scholars to this celebrated verse; the data are fascinating, but one wishes there had been more discussion, comparison, and synthesis. The final section on scientific and philosophical commentaries takes the lion's share, with eleven articles and two round tables. Most of the articles focus usefully on specific exegetical relationships (Galen on Hippocrates; Plotinus and Proclus on Plato; Syrianus and Simplicius on Aristotle; and Averroes and Albert the Great on Aristotle); exceptions are Jolivet's and Hulin's sketchy surveys of the Arabic and Indian traditions of philosophical commentary respectively. The first round table lays the groundwork for future study of the important rôle played by commentaries in Greek, Arabic, medieval Latin, and Renaissance alchemy; the work presented is largely descriptive and preliminary, but some interesting links with Renaissance literature and medieval and modern philosophical commentary are also suggested. The other one attempts with rather less success to differentiate the rôle of commentaries in the history of science from those in philosophy and other disciplines; it is limited to Arabic commentaries on Ptolemy, Euclid, and Aristotle, and is far too narrow in material and nebulous in conception to answer such a wide-ranging and difficult question. The volume is concluded by useful indices of papyri, manuscripts, passages, and personal names (but it lacks what would have been most useful of all, an index of topics), biographical presentations of the authors and English summaries of their articles, and twenty-three illustrations of uneven quality.

As will be obvious even from this brief account, this volume can hardly be accused of suffering from an excess of homogeneity in conception and approach. The four institutes which organized it may well be housed in the same building, but their members evidently have very different ideas of what commentaries are and how they are to be studied; one wonders what their conversations around the coffee machine are like. With disarming candor, the editor suggests in her preface 'The notion of commentary would be worth studying specifically in its own right' (p. 6): such a task was evidently thought not to be a necessary preliminary to a volume like this, but something that could be postponed until later. The result is a scholarly version of the Ottoman Empire: a loose conglomeration of diverse domains with a high degree of local autonomy, in which the parts are far greater than the whole. But given the fact that such studies are in their infancy, this may not be such a bad thing, and certainly is preferable to an attempt at a rigorous theoretical systematization, which would surely be premature and might well prove mistaken. Regrettable, if anything, is not so much the heterogeneity of the parts as the evident lack of communication amongst them.

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Still, there is here, if not something for everyone, then much for many, useful stimuli for reflection on some general questions and many particular ones.

The history of commentaries remains to be written; we are still far from the time when it could reasonably be undertaken. In the meantime, two kinds of preliminary work will be necessary. One is represented by books like this one: patient, scrupulous, cautious assessments of various forms of commentary within the Greco-Roman classical tradition. That is hard enough, but the other is even more difficult: comparison with other traditions than the European classical one. Neither approach will guarantee a better praxis for any scholars who might still happen to write scholarly commentaries in the future (though they probably will not do them any positive harm either). But only together will they help us to understand what it was like, once upon a time, to live in a culture in which most people seem to have really believed that the wisdom they needed for their lives was deposited in ancient authoritative texts and that these stood in need of commentaries if they were to become fully effective.

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TWO HANDBOOKS OF MYTHOLOGY

R. HARD: *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology*. Based on H. J. Rose's *Handbook of Greek Mythology*. Pp. xx + 753, maps, ills. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. Cased, £120. ISBN: 0-415-18636-6.

S. PRICE, E. KEARNS (edd.): *The Oxford Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion*. Pp. xl + 599, maps. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. Cased, £25. ISBN: 0-19-280288-7.

Classical mythology is one aspect of the ancient world that remains popular today. TV shows such as *Hercules* and *Xena: Warrior Princess* have cult followings among teenagers, and books on classical mythology abound. One has only to browse through bookstores or do a subject search on an online bookseller's website to see this. Given this enduring interest, it is welcome to have two new books on classical mythology providing accurate and up-to-date information for students, scholars, and the general public alike.

Hard's handbook, like Rose's *Handbook of Greek Mythology*, is 'an accurate account of Greek mythology in accordance with the results of modern research' (p. xv); although H. states that it 'is substantially longer and so different in much of its approach and content that it cannot be regarded as a replacement or substitute' for Rose's (p. xvi). While H. follows Rose's basic outline, he expands and refines Rose's categories. Whereas Rose discusses the heroes lumped into 'The Cycles of Saga', 'Troy', and 'The Legends of Greek Lands', H. splits them up by geographic region, family, or the individual hero's name, in keeping with his goal of expanding Rose's comparatively brief treatment of heroic myth (p. xv). In addition, H. names chapters in a way that more clearly reveals their contents; hence, Rose's 'Italian Pseudo-Mythology' becomes H.'s 'Aeneas, Romulus and the Origins of Rome'. Finally, H. eliminates Rose's rather charming Chapter 10, 'Märchen in Greece and Italy', in favor of including select information from it within other chapters (e.g. H. excerpts Apuleius' tale of Cupid and

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