

BOOK REVIEW

Direct Speech in Nonnus' Dionysiaca: Narrative and rhetorical functions of the characters' "varied" and "many-faceted" words. By BERENICE VERHELST. Leiden, NL: Brill, 2017. Pp. xi + 330. Paperback, €138,00. ISBN 9789004325890.

The book under review continues a most fruitful line of research driven by the author's 2014 PhD thesis and neatly complements another book from the same Leiden stable, Geisz 2018 reviewed for this journal on 2018.07.08. The latter concentrates on narrator-text with the former subjecting character-text to scrutiny.

A detailed introduction reminds the reader of the issues surrounding Nonnian study *viz*, how the pagan *Dionysiaca* is to be reconciled with the same author's Christian *Paraphrase of the Gospel of St John*; discussion of the lack of unity in Nonnus as a departure from traditional epic practice; a historical overview of Nonnus' critical reception in modern times; preliminary remarks and comparative statistical data on the use of direct speech in Homer, Apollonius Rhodius, Quintus Smyrnaeus, and Nonnus; and, finally, a full outline of the author's methodology. The remainder of the book is split into two investigative parts followed by the conclusion and other back-matter. The main thrust of these two central investigations is delivered through multiple astute and elegant analyses of the rhetorical techniques employed by Nonnus in the *oratio recta* of his speaking characters.

Part 1, "Epic Speech in Transformation," is a collection of case studies that inquire into the extent to which Nonnus works within traditional epic parameters and in doing so highlight the extent to which he does not. Particularly revealing are diachronic studies on the comparative uses of battle exhortations and on the use of speeches within speeches. These speeches are the so-called "potential *tis*-speeches" in which a character exclaims, "Somebody seeing this would say that..." This archaic literary device was all but ignored by later poets—as far as we can tell from extant works, a sole example in Apollonius' *Argonautica* (3.793-7) and none in Quintus' *Posthomerica*—until being revived by Nonnus.

Part 2, “Rhetoric and Narrative,” studies the effect of various rhetorical strategies on our reception of characters and their speeches as well as how and especially why these speeches are presented. Three chapters each take on a broadly defined focus: in the first chapter the three speeches in Book 8 where Hera plans to kill Semele are unpacked in order to understand the rhetoric of deception; an exercise in the contemporary *progymnasmata*, which became a commonplace of poetry in Late Antiquity, was writing *ethopoiai*, and in the second chapter the speeches of fleeting minor characters are studied along with the mechanics of the birds-eye view speeches made by immortals; the final chapter looks at the speeches of Dionysus attempting to seduce Beroe in Books 41 through 43, where deconstructing persuasive strategies is naturally to the fore but, far more importantly, the reasons why they are not successful (which as a poetic *topos* is most unusual) are illuminated.

In absorbing all of the information which is available the attentive reader will find herself prompted to ask even more questions than this volume asks of itself, which is not to say that the author’s conclusions are in a way lacking but rather that her individual analyses will form the catalyst for wider and deeper research. In this case, the monograph serves a valuable purpose. While many scholars since Wifstrand in the 1930s have commented upon direct speech in the *Dionysiaca*, Verhelst provides the most complete, dedicated study to date. Clearly the primary focus is on the poetry of Nonnus; however, it is a pleasure to note that the extensive cross-referencing to Homeric, Hellenistic, and early late antique antecedents means that those scholars whose (present) interests lie primarily with archaic epic can also glean much from the list of references by type. As Verhelst admits, her study is based on using case studies as paradigms for further study, and most helpfully the full database which fueled this monograph has been made available online at <http://www.dsgep.ugent.be/>.

A useful seven-page appendix summarizes the 48 books of the *Dionysiaca* in sufficient detail so as to put parts of the text under consideration into context. A large bibliography covers all of the fundamental material plus that which is specifically pertinent to the precise subject matter, and it is up-to-date including studies as recent as Zuenelli 2016 and Geisz 2018. Although the general English index is limited, the *index locorum* is agreeably complete. Production quality is high, as we can expect from this publisher, there being no noticeable typos (in fact I only spotted the loss of one errant possessive apostrophe). If a reviewer really must find a niggle, I venture to suggest that a faint shadow of the PhD-thesis genre falls over the book. The footnotes are often very discursive and expansive; for exam-

ple, the long footnote about Alexandrian footnotes on page 161 (note 44), while certainly interesting in itself, adds nothing to the point under discussion. Elsewhere similar, albeit equally appealing, diversions do for Dr. Verhelst's train of argument exactly what some of Nonnus' direct speeches do for his reader ... they delay in order to gaze upon a point tangential to the main story-line. In this respect the fine study walks a path parallel to its subject, which may or may not be to everybody's taste. I wonder if somewhat more vigorous editing should have been advised. However, I finish on an emphatically positive note in affirming that this richly-packed volume will repay many inquisitive re-visits.

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