

BOOK REVIEW

Roman Satire and the Old Comic Tradition. By JENNIFER L. FERRISS-HILL. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. x + 302. Hardcover, \$95.00. ISBN 978-1-107-08154-3.

Inspired by Horace's claim that Lucilius "hangs entirely" from Old Comedy (*Sat.* 1.4.6) and Quintilian's implicit pairing of Old Comedy and Roman satire in book 10 of the *Institutio Oratoria*, Ferriss-Hill argues that Roman satire "should be understood as an extended Old Comic parabasis" (44). To prove this thesis she explores the connections between Old Comedy and its Roman offspring as embodied in the work of Lucilius and Persius, and in all of Horace's hexameter poetry—*Satires/Sermones*, *Epistles*, and *Ars Poetica*. Ferriss-Hill argues that Juvenal, who never explicitly connects himself to Old Comedy (19), turns instead to tragedy as a source of satiric inspiration (cf. *Juv.* 6.634-8) and thus rejects laughter (derived elsewhere in satire from Old Comedy's parabolic claims for "truth telling through laughter," 17) in favor of a serious tone when declaring his truths. Thus, she claims (although it is impossible to prove), any traces of the Greek genre in Juvenal likely derive from imitation of his Roman predecessors.

Ferriss-Hill's first and longest chapter ("The Poet in Tension") discusses the tensions inherent in the *artifex* or poet's self-representation in Old Comedy and Roman satire before Juvenal. The poet presents himself as simultaneously confident and abject, "both wise and flawed, essential yet unappreciated" (45). Sections on the urban, didactic, misunderstood, physically or socially abject, law-breaking, and chef-like aspects of the poetic persona draw on examples from Aristophanes and all four satirists, though Juvenal often proves the exception to the rules established by his predecessors. While Ferriss-Hill focuses on the two genres' continuity of theme and approach, she also discusses how Roman satire's more parsimonious approach to food (compared to Old Comedy's celebratory feasts) derives from its smaller, elite, and private audience.

Chapter 2 ("Defensive Poetics") traces the spread of a defensive stance linked to a stance of abjection—one pens a counterattack because one has been wrongly attacked by others—from Aristophanes (especially *Wasps*) through

Callimachus' *Aetia* preface and Terence's prologues to Lucilius, Horace, and Persius. Juvenal, however, writing less (explicitly) programmatic and more agonistic satire than his predecessors (166, 168), seems to compose satire in response to his surroundings rather than to any criticism of his work. Only Juvenal's decision to adopt a tragic mode (6.634-8) provides any clue to potential attacks of his work.

The third chapter ("Literary Criticism") takes up Old Comedy and Roman satire's unusual shared interest in literary criticism, both of their own genre as well as other genres. The perceived connection between the style and quality of a work and the "essence" of its author (Ferriss-Hill cites Seneca *Epistulae Morales* 19.114: *talis... oratio qualis vita*) is the basis for such comic and satirical judgments (171). Ferriss-Hill proposes that the "frenetic intellectual" contexts in which the Old Comic poets and the four surviving Roman satirists worked provided the material for "these naturally omnivorous genres" to ingest and construct their poetry with (216). Here, as elsewhere, I would have liked to see more reflection upon the Roman satirists whose work did not survive due to its exclusion from the canon by Horace, Quintilian, and others. But Ferriss-Hill is following the precedent established by her satirical subjects: Horace both shapes the genre and converts Old Comedy's synchronic agon into a diachronic one by choosing Lucilius as his satirical model while "perform[ing] *damnatio memoriae* on any number of others" (243). Both decisions influence Persius and Juvenal in turn: Lucilius looms large in the poetry of both while both fail to mention any contemporary poets—and Juvenal even fails to mention Persius while simultaneously imitating his work (184).

Since Roman satire inherits Old Comedy's critical attitude (a product of its agon and parabasis), the targets of Old Comedy and Roman satire provide the subject for the fourth and final chapter ("Criticizing the *Komodoumenoi*"). Such targets include people, professions, language, and virtually anything of interest to the poet. Additionally, Ferriss-Hill maintains that both genres are marked by "acquisitiveness," since information must constantly be gathered (even from one's predecessors) to provide the material for new poetry (241). Several fascinating pages (222–224) outline how Horace, Persius, and even Juvenal recycle the same names for the targets of their satire.

Finally, Ferriss-Hill concludes by noting that while Old Comic elements are distributed throughout Roman satire, they are especially visible in satire's parabolic and agonistic moments, in programmatic passages that debate the lim-

its of the genre, and in the “exposed and self-exposing” satirical poet. She also argues that Aristophanic elements contained within Horace *Satires* 2.5 (*Plutus* and *Clouds*) and Persius 4 (*Clouds*, *Women at the Thesmophoria*, *Frogs*) can help to illuminate both of these unusual and neglected poems.

This is a thought-provoking book, useful for scholars of Roman Satire and those interested in Roman reception of Greek literature more generally. I noted only a few minor errors and one bewildering footnote that implied none of Plautus’ comedies survived complete (129, note 24). I am sympathetic to Ferriss-Hill’s overall argument and approach, though sometimes she stretches the evidence too far by claiming parallels between Aristophanes and the Roman satirists where only the most tenuous connection exists. For example, Persius 4.42 *praebemus crura sagittis* (“we offer up our shins to arrows,” in Ferriss-Hill’s translation) does not in fact “loosely translate” *Thesmophoriazousae* 895: βάλξε τοῦμὸν σῶμα βάλλουσα ψόγω (“bark at me, pelting my body with blame”) as she claims (248). But these small excesses should not detract from the value of the work as a whole.

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