

BOOK REVIEW

A Study of the Narrator in Nonnus of Panopolis' Dionysiaca: Storytelling in Late Antique Epic. By CAMILLE GEISZ. Leiden, NL: Brill, 2018. Pp. 282. Paperback, \$127.00. ISBN 978-90-043553-30.

This fascinating and very full study builds on the author's 2013 Oxford DPhil thesis of the same title and perfectly complements her chapter in *Brill's Companion to Nonnus* (2016, ed. Accorinti), "Narrative and Digression in the *Dionysiaca*." The author can fairly be called a member of the "Leiden School of Classical Narratology" (if I may be allowed to posit such a school) with Prof. Irene de Jong's presence being felt happily throughout the monograph. The study of Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*, or indeed any poetry from Late Antiquity, from a narratological viewpoint is to be greatly applauded for bringing, as it does, fresh insights into structural and compositional techniques.

Set out in the introduction is a (sensibly) brief introduction to Nonnus, his oeuvre and his literary milieu as understood through the context of earlier scholarship. This is followed by a similarly brief introduction to the history of narratology in Classics and an explanation of what benefits may be expected from this mode of interpretation. Geisz outlines her intention of demonstrating the narrator's persona via her stated methodology in brief summaries of each of the book's sections. By the end of the introduction at page six the reader is fully prepared for what follows. What does follow is the body of the discussion in which these four parts are further broken down into smaller and more manageable thematic units, each of which is fully introduced, very carefully worked through, and supplied with a summary. The titles of these parts give an indication of Geisz

and her multi-layered approach to witnessing the rôle of the narrator throughout the poem, seeing him in various guises.

In Part 1, “The Narrator-Author’s Engagement with his Predecessors and with the Tradition of Epic Storytelling,” the nature of Nonnus’ narrator is compared to the Homeric, Pindaric and Hellenistic narrators. Through close readings of the first and second proems and the multiple invocations to the Muse(s) similarities and differences from earlier practices are highlighted and, more importantly, the effect of this tension on the *Dionysiaca*. Part 2 is entitled “A Narrator-Scholar with an Innovative Approach to Epic Storytelling” and investigates new ways of telling a story, drawing on conclusions from Part 1 and the beginnings of the narrator’s personality are developed. The narrator’s gender is confirmed by his use of the self-referential masculine participle *telesas* in the second proem, Book 25.8. Geisz shows that he is a self-aware researcher who gives multiple versions of a myth but who through careful choice of diction can reassure his narratee which version he considers to be the “true” one to be carried forward into the subsequent story-telling. Part 3, “A Narrator-Storyteller in Dialogue with his Audience” and the narrator builds a relationship with his narratee which is studied through the use of the various addresses: the second person *ē tacha phaiēs* + a verb of perception, which Geisz understands as meaning “you seeing/hearing this, would have said that you saw/heard ... (if you had yourself been there at the time),” (125). Parallels are adduced from Homer, Apollonius Rhodius, Quintus Smyrnaeus and Imperial didactic epic before all twelve relevant instances in *Dionysiaca* are investigated individually. In a similar vein, indirect third person addresses such as *ēn de noēsai* (“it was possible to perceive”), *a mega thauma* (“What a great marvel!”) and *ou nemesis* (“it is no shame”) are identified and explored. In the final Part 4, “A Narrator-Character Becoming Part of His Own Narrative,” the author introduces the concept of *metalepsis* where an external narrator interacts with his characters. The nature of apostrophes in Homer (*Iliad* 19x, *Odyssey* 15x) and Apollonius Rhodius (8x) is used as a touchstone by which to gauge the seven in

Nonnus; the first two Nonnian apostrophes address Actaeon and Persephone respectively and display traditional Homeric structure and purpose in eliciting pity; another three examples break from earlier tradition entirely in addressing the main character and show the narrator's admiration and compassion for, and even amusement in, Dionysus. The last sub-section investigates instances of the narrator becoming a reveler himself.

In a perfectly measured example of ring-composition, the six-page conclusion draws together all of the section summaries through the book and the expectations of the introduction are realized.

Despite much of the discussion being very technical, the author has been careful to build her arguments *ab ovo*. All Greek is presented from modern editions; for *Dionysiaca* that is Budé 1976–2006 in nineteen volumes edited by Prof. Francis Vian; however, on a less positive note the studies of, *inter alios*, M. L. West (*Iliad*), A. S. F. Gow (*Bion*), and R. Pfeiffer (*Callimachus*) are missing in favor of Loeb volumes. Translations which accompany the Greek text are by the author herself, quotations quoted from scholars in modern European languages being left untranslated. While some researchers will find plenty attractive to them in this book "as is", less specialized readers will gain benefit since the basics of narratological studies are laid out in such clear terms, encompassing a wide range of literature from archaic through Hellenistic epic to poetry of the Imperial period and Greek novel.

The back-matter consists of a modest glossary of narratological terms, a bibliography, an *index locorum* and a general index. Throughout the book citations are provided meticulously alongside much hard statistical data, both of which ideally need to be (re-)located easily; however, since the *index locorum* and general index are by their own admission not full, I do wonder if the volume's overall usefulness has been somewhat compromised. Production quality is high with no noticeable typos.

The author and publisher are to be congratulated for having brought to press and having made available for review in 2018 a monograph which not only includes some very recent bibliography (e.g., "Colluthus" Cadau 2015 and "Direct Speech in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*" Verhelst 2016) but even interacts with it. Its place as a trailblazer within Nonnian studies in particular and of literary criticism of literature from Late Antiquity in general will assure this book a satisfied readership for a long time to come.

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