**BOOK REVIEW**

*Plutarch’s Rhythmic Prose*. By G. O. Hutchinson. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xii + 339. Hardback, £75.00. ISBN 978-0-19-882171-7.

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*lutarch’s Rhythmic Prose* develops Gregory Hutchinson’s long-standing commitment to reading prose more closely than most, applying his rare breadth of expertise as a commentator and interpreter of Greek and Latin poetry and prose alike, on a text more usually read in panorama mode than with zoom lens deployed: Plutarch’s *Lives*. The great quantity of rhythmic closes in this work (revealed by Hutchinson’s scansion of the entire text) will be eye-opening to all but a very few readers of Plutarch, as will the variety of the effects they achieve. After setting out methods and background (“Rhythmic prose in Imperial Greek literature,” 1-32), the book contains two specifically Plutarchan scene-setting chapters (33-85), using shorter examples to further illustrate the procedure and explain the goals of the following analysis. The main focus is “the occurrence of passages where rhythmic closes are packed together with particular density” (67): thus Chapters 4-17 (87-255) are a series of “sort-of-commentaries” (83) each on such a passage in the *Lives*; then, for comparison, on passages in two rhythmic novelists, Chariton and Achilles Tatius, and one who wrote unrhythmically, Heliodorus (Chapters 18-25, 257-304). Readers are invited to hear Hutchinson reading all Greek passages discussed on an extensive companion website (www.oup.com/hutchinson).

The results are highly illuminating: a necessary reminder to modern readers of later Greek prose that the ancient reader’s experience of such densely rhythmic passages in particular was nothing like our experience reading biographies or novels, standing far closer to poetry in their use of rhythms to separate and focus attention on numerous individual words and phrases (though Hutchinson is careful throughout to distinguish this phenomenon as *tertium quid*, not “*poetic* prose” or the modern “prose-poetry”). Necessary, because compared with Latin prose, very little research has been undertaken on rhythms in Greek prose, either systematically or of individual authors, and without intensive ground-work of the sort undertaken by Hutchinson for Plutarch, scholars of many later Greek authors have often treated this aspect of their subject only in brief asides, even in commentaries. But just as “a reader who learns to look at enjambement in Statius’ epics is picking up a signal, and learning how to read Statius better,” so “In reading Plutarch rhythmically, we are learning to read Plutarch more closely and responsively” (46).

Hutchinson avoids circularity by always applying non-metrical analysis alongside metrical to explain other means of, and reasons for, the author drawing attention to rhythmic phrases or passages: so, the Plutarchan passages that turn out to be rhythmically dense are often in a *Life*’s final chapter, at the death of its biographical subject, or other key moments, including where the subject is compared with another person. At the heart of the book (and companion website), then, Hutchinson recovers for most modern readers a forgotten way of reading Plutarch, which in very important respects is far closer to that of his contemporary readers.

The lack of any substantial modern study on the Greek side means that this book’s applied methods and its first chapter will be of great interest also to scholars of later Greek prose in general, beyond Plutarch (and the novel). With characteristic modesty Hutchinson ventures that the book “might even be of interest for the study of prose more widely” (35); undoubtedly, it suggests both starting points and methods for studies of countless other texts and authors. The background work draws initial conclusions based on a large quantity of data—and evidently a great many hours of scansion—in presenting a “vista of Imperial prose” and a list of Greek authors ordered by the frequency with which they use rhythmic endings, from Chariton to Xenophon (i.e. the Athenian; in a sample of 400 random non-consecutive sentence-endings from each author). Statistical tests show any sceptics that the probability of the higher frequencies occurring by chance range from infinitesimal to 1 in 10,000; indeed, the methods employed exercise great caution throughout, and many hints towards an even more forceful case for the prevalence and significance of prose rhythm in Plutarch and beyond are not followed (e.g. by excluding from all statistics potentially rhythmic closes that include hiatus), in the interests of keeping as many readers as possible on side.

One area that might have merited more than a few words—more in Chapters 18-25 than those on Plutarch—is the development and possible coexistence of stress accent-based rhythms, only alluded to: “Traces of rhythmic writing, in our sense, have not yet been detected in Greek after AD 300; a new accentual system becomes important from the fourth century on” (25). A series of articles by Michèle Biraud (some dozen, so far; not mentioned by Hutchinson) argues that this new system develops rather over the first three centuries of the Empire; they find examples in a wide range of texts including Chariton, and in many cases in the same text as rhythms formed using the older system. The two systems are, of course, separate objects of study, so that the focus of this book would not have been changed by them; but this possibility of coexistence within the same text, and their being found in Chariton, might have called for some engagement.

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