

GRACIELA ZECCHIN DE FASANO, *Odisea: Discurso y Narrativa*, La Plata, EDULP, 2004, 226 pp.

Odisea: Discurso y Narrativa, by Graciela Zecchin de Fasano, is the most sophisticated and convincing interpretation known to me concerning the varied and complex roles played by direct speech in Homer's epic. In this wide-ranging and lucidly written work, Dra. Zecchin de Fasano combines a deep knowledge of modern narratology with a rigorous philological examination of all the major speeches in the poem. The result is an impressive contribution to the literature on Homeric poetics, one which offers fresh readings of a number of scenes and a persuasive overall thesis about the complex interaction of narrator and character "speech." It is a pleasure to recommend this fine book.

From the beginning, it is clear that Dra. Zecchin de Fasano has gone far beyond the purely formalist examinations of Odyssean discourse (such as that by C. Larrain, 1987). Her introductory overview of the bibliography on the topic is clear-sighted and fair: most critics have written on either narrative, as a whole, or speeches—without taking account of the intricate connection between these spheres. Also useful is her categorization of contemporary writing on larger issues of Homeric poetry, into works generally "narratological"; anthropological; deconstructive; or genre-specific. She is able to discuss each mode in turn, penetratingly and without jargon. One consequence of this clarity is that the book will be of use to students not only of Classics but also in comparative literature and rhetoric.

Her own work is itself divided into four interesting sets of analyses: on Telemachus; Odysseus; the speeches of gods; and speech in recognition scenes. By avoiding a lengthy or purely mechanical examination of speech features, she allows her discussion of all four areas to range easily, from micro-level readings of phraseology within a given speech, to macro-level issues of plot, propriety, "myth", narrative necessity, characterization, and performance. Chapter One, on Telemachus, begins with a tour de force reading of the *Odyssey* proem, on which Dra. Zecchin de Fasano has especially interesting observations concerning the creation of empathy, the highly particular selection of named episodes, and the moralizing tendency of the passage. As she can show, the proem sets up a complicated "dialogic" relationship among poet, Muse, and audience, which ends up being self-reflexive: e.g. the adverb *hamothen*, in the directive to the Muse to tell the story "from whatever point", is seen right away as motivation for the selection of an otherwise odd episode, the Cattle of the Sun. Of special interest are her remarks on the power relationships that the proem models by way of its deictic strategies. This is the most thorough analysis we have yet had of the narrative pragmatics of the proem.

A number of attractive insights mark the analyses of Telemachus' speeches and interactions with figures from Ithaca, Pylos and Sparta. For example, Penelope's call in Book 1 for the bard to stop singing the fate of the returning Achaeans is neatly juxtaposed with Helen's ability to stop painful recollection in Book 4; the special semantics of the *nostos*-theme are found to shape the major speeches in the first books, as well as to extend into the narrative structure; the elaboration of marriage and ritual scenes are tied into the larger patterns uniting the stories of Telemachus and Odysseus; and the narrative "duplicity" of Helen is meticulously explicated. The final point—that the poet/Muse relation is mirrored by the interactions of characters within the first four books—is both surprising and persuasive.

Chapter Two expands the field of vision by showing, first, how various are the speech strategies of seemingly similar discourses, one we move beyond the limits of individual formulas or simple structural models. With the focus on Odysseus now, the author is able to

demonstrate how character “thought”—internal monologues that are dramatized by the poet—motivates plot elements, which in turn generate further character monologues—in other words, the dialogic again emerges as a mainstay of Homeric technique. It should be said that the author does not overwhelm her text with references to Bakhtin, keeping the technical superstructure minimal. Her rewarding close study of Odysseus’ speeches at the level of phrase, particle, and sentence types reveals new interconnections among such episodes as the Nausicaa, Cyclops and Laestrygonian scenes. A cornerstone for this chapter is the author’s success in overcoming the somewhat simplified “epos” vs. “Märchen” distinction dear to *Odyssey* critics of the past few generations. In place of this binary division, she offers a much more flexible model of “styles” in speech and narration that are closely tied to “themes”: *apologos*, catalogue, and *nostos*. I find this much more organic and authentic, in terms of the actual categories given us by the text itself. Once again it is difficult to sum up all the innovative individual readings of particular scenes: suffice it to say that the authors’ combination of literary critical and philological skills shows itself to excellent effect in this chapter.

Turning to a set of figures in chapter three (instead of highlighted individuals), Dra. Zecchin de Fasano poses the question: what is the mimesis of unreal beings—of gods? She is careful to distinguish those elements that make divine discourses look like mortals’ from the unique elements arising out of the special advantages and viewpoints enjoyed by Homeric gods. Athena’s early speeches; Hermes’ rhetorical strategy in speaking to Calypso; the similarly solipsistic discourses of Poseidon and Odysseus; the marked use of vocatives and desiderative expressions—all come in for careful and revealing treatment. Since this topic could swell to become a book in itself, the author should be congratulated for saying *multum in parvo*.

The final chapter takes yet another daring turn in strategy, examining this time speeches associated not with particular set of characters but with a motif—recognition. One might have thought that pretty much everything had been said on this, after the book by Murnaghan and articles by several others in recent years. Yet Dra. Zecchin de Fasano manages to say new and interesting things. She reintroduces Aristotle into the discussion, as she makes a valuable distinction between the process and the result of recognition. The feature of “autoanagnorisis” leads her into a useful discussion of variation within the motif—a refreshing relief from formalist analysis that focuses only on similarity within type-scenes. In this chapter, the author is able to make a number of important corrections of the work of her predecessors (including myself—cf. p. 195 note 184). The conclusion regarding the “tragic” quality of the recognition by the suitors, and the interplay of gender, power within recognition, is creative and successful. A more general concluding section restates the importance of confronting narrative discourse with speech and dialogue in order for us to gain the fullest appreciation of Homeric art. From this double view, the poem emerges, in her vision, not as a neat static structure but as a dynamic structure held together by competing tensions—the potential for narrative chaos vs. prolepsis (in the form of prophecy) and the contending forces that put Odysseus at the center of a web of relations (with his wife, father, son, crew, suitors, nymphs, and monstrous beings). It is a vision very much in tune with the liveliness and life-likeness of a masterly poetic composition.

It remains to note that Dra. Zecchin de Fasano is perfectly up-to-date in terms of her grasp of the relevant—and vast—bibliography both on Homer and on narratology. She has read and absorbed a great amount of work. Her own book perfects and adds to this body of criticism significantly.

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