

REVIEWS  
RESEÑAS



G.B. CONTE, *Ope ingenii: Esperienze di critica testuale*. Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2013, 123 pp. ISBN 978-88-7642-477-9.

Since the first advances of modern critical method began amidst the intellectual fervour of the Italian Renaissance, Classical scholars have been keen to collect, codify and critique rules and precepts for how to emend ancient texts; with the subsequent, but markedly slower, development of codicological and cladistic principles, the possibility of bringing between two boards all the tools one needs to correct works of literature with a commendable degree of success seemed to many a realisable prospect. The twentieth century therefore witnessed more than a dozen books that claimed to summarise and explicate the practice of textual criticism step by step. The best of these, however, were well aware that they could only take the reader so far: good critical method is predicated on the understanding that the intellect, however learned, must make one or more leaps by lateral thinking – and sometimes by instinct alone; the worst, by contrast, seemed assured that the devoted pupil and practitioner of their *aurea dicta* could thereby restore the *ipsissima uerba* of any text, however corrupt or even lacunose it had become in the course of its transmission. Needless to say, could such a book truly be written, it would long since have achieved quasi-biblical status in the world of scholarship, and the romanticism of textual emendation would have perished at a stroke.

With few (and notable) exceptions, the greatest textual critics of the post-Lachmannian era have tended to say little about critical method, and to have been understandably wary of anything announcing itself as a handbook; indeed, some of the most impressive emendators never wrote a word on the matter of method. It is therefore true to say that, in the twenty-first century, there is little pressing need for a new volume on textual criticism and its practice, since the aspiring critic can already consult the better parts of existing volumes with profit: Maas's *Textkritik*, West's *Textual Criticism and Editorial Technique*, Willis' *Latin Textual Criticism* and Pasquali's *Storia della Tradizione e Critica del Testo* – to say nothing of reading the masterly work of critics in action.

It is therefore very welcome that Gian-Biagio Conte has sought not simply to add to the series of such (often ill-guided) manuals of the past in his attractive little volume. Instead, what has been gathered, from over half a century's immersion in the studied correction and exegesis of Greco-Roman literature, is a treasure-trove of critical gems that have particularly impressed Conte by their ingenuity, skill and presumed veracity. Many of

the emendations contained in this collection are well-known showpieces, and have been discussed for generations by wide-eyed and admiring scholars across tables in pubs, tavernas and cafes; yet a small number are new ideas from Conte himself, which are hereby offered to the world afresh for judgment.

The volume is divided into three chapters that survey different categories of the text-critical enterprise: (i) Punctuation (pp.17-38), (ii) Interpolation and athetesis (pp.39-78), (iii) Corruption and conjecture (pp.79-110). These three sections are preceded by a brief preamble (pp.13-15) and rounded off by a short epilogue (pp.111-17). There is a broad coverage of authors on show, both Greek and Latin, prose and verse. Although the field of Latin poetry reflects Conte's career in providing the lion's share of examples, the overall range on show is commendable: alongside Lucretius, Catullus, Vergil, Ovid, Manilius, Seneca, Lucan, Martial and Juvenal, engaging examples are presented from Cicero, Petronius, Homer, the Attic tragedians and (among the more outré selections) Naevius, the *Priapea* and the New Testament.

In the introductory remarks Conte compares his selection to a philological 'museo' [9]. The term is well chosen: not only does it highlight the necessarily subjective aspect in curating such a collection of text-critical *spicilegia*, but it also suggests that those who engage with the collection can not only admire but also learn from the expertly selected and arranged offerings. Conte is candid about the freedom he has enjoyed in his selection: admiration for the conjectural work of (for the most part) other scholars has been his guiding principle. He hopes that the book will promote further work by scholars on textual problems, and that *crucēs* which currently stand as *loci nondum sanati* may be at last healed by present and future generations.

*Ab Ioue principium*: the anecdote that opens the collection calls to mind no less a figure than Scaliger. Confronted with an unmetrical and unmeaning EOBET in a funerary inscription, the younger Conte saw that an error of capital script had unwittingly corrupted FORET. Similar reflections on the misreading of capitalis script had led Scaliger four centuries to unearth QVAME ALIVS from QVAM FALLIVS at Cat. 68.41, and when applied to the context of Greek majuscule script in Latin had prompted Housman's palmary correction of Mart. *Lib. spect.* 21.4. Here as elsewhere in the volume Conte shows both a healthy respect and careful caution towards palaeographical arguments, comparing such a method to marriage: "multi lo rifiutano, multi lo sconsigiliano, ma inevitabilmente molti finiscono sposati" (15).

The first chapter starts, appropriately, with the minutiae of punctuation. Classical scholars are generally unduly subservient to the commands of printed punctuation: raised in a modern world where such typographical demarcations are made to do work in lieu of careful and clear sentence construction, scholars are liable to place inappropriate importance upon the particular punctuation they encounter in any given edition. Yet, for ancient texts, which were almost always devoid of punctuation, the onus for correct

interpretation should lie with carefully formed word order and syntax, which should leave the meaning of the utterance just as clear to a reader as the author desired it to be. It is therefore true to say that the incorrect punctuation of ancient texts is a common and regrettable vice of modern critics, and that corrections of such universally mistaken interventions deserve to be regarded as emendations in their own right: since it is very rare that any transmitted punctuation has ancient authority, each editor (and indeed reader) should be prepared to approach each and every sentence with an open mind.

It is therefore welcome that Conte's first chapter focuses attention upon this major – but comparatively unglamorous – area of criticism. Many of the suggestions on offer are well known, such as Housman on *Cat.* 64.243 and Soph. *OC* 981 (after Maehly), and Heyne on *Aen.* XI.18. Some newer ideas deserve serious consideration, however: Mario Martina's clever separation of *nec forti* (thus leaving the latter word to bear its proper force with *Aquilone recepto*) deserves serious consideration at *Luc.* IV.584; Conte suggests punctuating after *pia*, so as to refer the adjective to the household, at *Ov. Met.* VIII.631 (*sed pia Baucis anus*), which has already been implicitly accepted by at least one Ovidian.<sup>1</sup> Some ideas are perhaps a little more questionable: at *Ov. Am.* III.9.37 the text reads (without punctuation) *uiue pius moriere pius cole sacre colentem | mors grauis a templis in caua busta trahet*. Conte rejects the vulgate punctuation (*uiue pius; moriere pius; cole sacra; etc.*) and follows the punctuation usually attributed to Johann Jahn (but actually first suggested by Valckenaer *ad Eur. Hipp.* 1346), *uiue pius, moriere; pius cole sacra; etc.*; if this is indeed correct, an interesting question arises for how Ovid could be confident that the reader would reject the natural balance and rhythm of the line, which suggests uniting *moriere pius*, and instead opt for this chiasmic arrangement; if he could not have confidence, does this matter for our reading of Latin poetic texts? Conte also approves of the bold repunctuation of *ps-Sen. Oct.* 195, which reanalyses *nempe [sc. metuit eam] praelatam sibi* as a quick jibe from Octavia, interrupting the nurse's flow; this change of speaker was first suggested by Bothe (who continued the comment to verse 197) but was refined to three words by Torkill Baden (not, as usually claimed, Ritter). At the awkward crux of *Verg. Geo.* I.181, a good defence is made for indicative *inludunt* over *inludant*, although no mention is made of the perfectly sensible *inludent* (as conjectured by certain *recentiores*). One might have hoped in this lively chapter for some brief and general discussion of the question of ancient punctuation; since this is admittedly not the ideal place for a detailed treatment, some pointed bibliography (such as Rudolf Müller and Otha Wingo) could have assisted the less well informed reader.

<sup>1</sup> A. Ramírez de Verger, *Cuentos de un Filólogo (La Palabra y los Textos)*. Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2013, 12.

The second section turns to treat interpolation and athetesis, a notoriously thorny topic. The question of interpolation is always complex, since there are so many distinct reasons that could prompt the addition of material to a text, and even if some material is incorporated, it is possible that it was never actually intended to expand or increase the text into which it came to be included. Furthermore, in cases where supposedly interpolated text is attested in all manuscript witnesses, it is often difficult to establish criteria that will find widespread critical support for the proposed athetesis. Conte embraces the categorisations suggested by Tarrant in his influential 1989 paper ‘*Toward a typology of interpolation in Latin poetry*’ but well explores many of the nuances and overlaps that complicate this framework.

The particularly interesting case of the opening lines of Euripides’ *Phoenissae* and Sophocles’ *Electra* are treated lucidly and informatively, along the compelling lines of Michael Haslam. A number of good suggestions are offered on the text of Ovid’s *Met.*; in particular, a good case is made for defending *Met.* II.266, the concluding verse of the poet’s list of mountains set ablaze by Phaethon, against Tarrant’s proposed deletion. In considering Lucretius, healthy scepticism about interpolation is demonstrated: III.474-5 is rightly understood to be an incorrect incorporation rather than an active interpolation, and ‘II.43b’ is soundly rejected as an accidental conflation by Nonius or his source.<sup>2</sup> Although Juvenal is given some brief treatment (including Reeve’s prudent deletion of X.356) it would have been fascinating to hear Conte’s thoughts on the vexed ‘Oxford fragments’. Some broader sensible remarks are offered (pp.62-3) regarding method, predicated on the correct notion that “un’edizione critica d’altronde è solo un’ipotesi di lavoro”. It is important to reinject this notion into classical scholarship that each scholar is duty bound to challenge and question the text they seek to investigate: a good critical edition should provide the primary materials for such a scholar to proceed with confidence as they choose.

The third chapter moves to the wider and more multi-faceted category of corruption and conjectures, and there is some fine material on offer here. The chapter begins on an excellent note – salvaging Politian’s splendid emendation at *Lucr. DRN.* I.122, which apprehends that the Pythagorean souls should *permanent* (rather than *permaneat*), but which has been absurdly rejected by so many generations of scholars. Celebrated emendations of Scaliger (*Cat.* 61.189-91), Bentley (*Aen.* X.704, 705 and 710), Porson (*Eur. Ion.* 1427-8) Diggle (*Eur. Suppl.* 508-9) and Delz (*Stat. Theb.* IV.452) are deftly disussed. At *Verg. Aen.* III.360 Silvia Ottaviano’s elegant *tripodas laurusque Clari* is

<sup>2</sup> On interpolation in Lucretius see my ‘*Lucretius auctus?* The question of interpolation in *De Rerum Natura*’ in J. Martinez (ed.), *Fakes and Forgers of Classical Literature: Ergo decipiatur!*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, 15-42; and on the question of ‘fragments’ preserved by the indirect tradition see my *The Early Textual History of Lucretius’De rerum natura*, Cambridge: CUP, 2013, 101-35.

supported for the transmitted *tripodas Clarii et laurus*; Mackail's *tripoda ac Clarii lauros* is spoken of in positive terms, but *ac* before a guttural is simply unacceptable; Schaper's most elegant rearrangement of *Aen.* III.464, *auro grauia sectoque elephanto*, to *auro grauia ac secto elephanto* is also rightly praised. Conte's own suggestion closes the chapter, at *Geo.* III.159, where the problem of connection and gender posed by *et quos* is removed by *si quos*, a cunning suggestion that removes many difficulties – and one that was actually first made *en passant* by Heyne himself.

The brief epilogue turns to survey the major contribution to textual criticism brought about by refinement of metrical knowledge: a few illustrative examples from Hermann, Porson, Ussing and Housman demonstrate that this area of scholarship must remain a vital part of the Classical scholar's expertise.

The book is appropriately dedicated to Adriano Prosperi and Michael Reeve, whose range of learning has laid the foundations for so many other scholars. Throughout this book Conte's tone is affable, his pace leisurely and his museum-tour packed with interest; the book's breadth of readership may well be extended by the simultaneous publication of an English translation.<sup>3</sup> Although the work requires a healthy amount of prior exposure and experience to problems of classical literature, those keen to scrutinise texts will profit from this expert arrangement of material. Let us hope that the twenty-first century will see scholars exercise their intellectual powers to similar ends with similar zeal.

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<sup>3</sup> G.B. Conte, *Ope Ingenii: Experiences of Textual Criticism*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013.

