

BRILL

Review

Reviewed Work(s): The Poems of Petronius by Edward Courtney

Review by: V. J. Chr. Hunink

Source: *Mnemosyne*, Apr., 1994, Fourth Series, Vol. 47, Fasc. 2 (Apr., 1994), pp. 262-264

Published by: Brill

EDWARD COURTNEY, *The poems of Petronius*. Atlanta, Georgia, Scholars Press, 1991. 77 p. Pr. $ 13,95 (paper).

The poetry of Petronius may be divided into two groups: (1) some 30 poems and poetical fragments in the extant parts of his *Satyricon*, including the longer poems *Bellum Civile* (c. 119-124) and *Troiae Halosis* (c. 89); (2) a number of poems not included in the *Satyricon*, but attributed to Petronius. The number of poems in the latter group varies, due to uncertainty about their authenticity. In the case of fragments quoted by ancient grammarians or Fulgentius (6th cent.) and explicitly attributed to Petronius, authenticity seems beyond a doubt. But things are somewhat different with the other poems, quoted in two 9th century MSS from Leiden (Leid. Voss. Lat. Q. 86 and Leid. Voss. Lat. F. 111) and in a lost MS of Isidorus from Beauvais, from which Binetus has published a number of poems allegedly by Petronius in his collection of epigrams of 1579. Whereas editions of Petronius have generally included most of these poems, K. Müller in his edition of 1961 (reprinted in 1965 and 1983) has omitted no fewer than 22 of them.

Mnemosyne, Vol. XLVII, Fasc. 2 (1994), © E. J. Brill, Leiden

Now for the first time, a separate edition with a commentary of nearly all of this poetic material has been published by Mr. Edward Courtney, who is well-known for his extensive commentary on Juvenal of 1980. The main aim of the book is to discuss the Petronian character of the poems of group 2, in particular those excluded by Müller. The poems from group (1) serve as comparative material in this analysis (only the two longer poems and four fragments—5; 34, 10; 55, 3 and 132, 11—have been left out).

In his introduction, Mr. Courtney discusses the sources of the poems in question and argues for the authenticity of most of those omitted by Müller. In the other cases, non-Petronian material seems to have been mixed with Petronian material. In the final section of the introduction, Mr. Courtney argues that Epicurean echoes in the *Satyricon* do not prove that Petronius is a devotee of Epicureanism, as had been defended in O. Raith's *Petron, ein Epikureer* of 1963. Instead, Petronius seems to poke fun at all philosophies. Most pages of the book are devoted to the poems, of which Mr. Courtney provides a text, textual notes and a brief commentary. A very concise index concludes the volume.

Given the aim of comparison with group 2, it seems quite fair to isolate the poetical fragments of group 1, especially if we consider the fragmentary nature of what is left of the *Satyricon*. For the general reader, this may further raise an interesting question: if we possessed only the poetical fragments of group 1, would we be able to form an adequate image of what the rest of the work was like? I hardly think so. This should make us very cautious in speculating about the lost contexts of the fragments in group 2.

Generally speaking, Mr. Courtney's discussions are sensible and convincing, and contain many stimulating ideas. Thus, AL 473 R. (*sic et membra solent auras includere ventris*), a humorous comparison of flatulence to a vulcanic eruption, is said to be a parody of the *Aetna poem*.

But the notes of the commentary are sometimes extremely brief. In addition, they put perhaps too much emphasis on concrete matters of style and metre, which form the basic arguments for Mr. Courtney's acceptance or rejection of Petronian authorship of a poem. In some cases, this seems too strict. For instance, the note on the well known AL 699 R. (*sit nox illa diu nobis dilecta Nealce*) opens rather abruptly: "This poem is also not by Petronius", even before discussing the metrical arguments, that is, certain types of elision and pentameter endings. Surely, less 'concrete' elements

such as the content, the general atmosphere and the possible ironical or satirical intention of such a poem should at least be considered. Even if we accept metrical arguments as decisive, we should be very careful: would it not have been possible for Petronius to vary his poetical practice and style according to his satirical aim, as has obviously been the strategy in his prose? Mr. Courtney hardly seems to allow for this possibility.

Still, this book will be of great use to both scholars and readers of Petronius. Considering the absence of a modern commentary on the complete *Satyricon*, and the lack of attention for the Petronian poems found outside it, this edition with commentary on all of the poems fills a large gap. It is further justified by the high literary quality of many of these poems. Now that Mr. Courtney's concise edition has drawn attention to them, perhaps we may expect a full-scale commentary in the near future.

6525 HT Nijmegen, Erasmusplein 1 V.J.Chr. Hunink

Mnemosyne, Vol. XLVII, Fasc. 2 (1994), © E. J. Brill, Leiden