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(R.B.) Branham (ed.) *The Bakhtin Circle and Ancient Narrative*. (Ancient Narrative Supplementum 3.) Pp. xxiv + 349. Groningen: Barkhuis Publishing & Groningen University Library, 2005. Cased. ISBN: 978-90-77922-00-2.

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BAKHTIN

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Ancient Narrative's latest supplement on Bakhtin and the novel radiates enthusiasm for a theoretically-informed approach to ancient literature but is also tinged by a palpable sense of disappointment. The volume illustrates the dilemma of theory-friendly classicists who welcome the idea of engaging in modern critical approaches only to find that their chosen theorist has flattened out their object of study beyond recognition. So often, the complaint goes, the classics appear as a jumping-off point for the ideas of the theorist – a kind of exercise in what Richard Fletcher calls genealogy – rather than a deeply reflected engagement with the complexities of the ancient world. Many of the most brilliant thinkers of the last 200 years – starting with Hegel, Nietzsche and Marx but extending well into the twentieth century with Freud, Heidegger and Lévi-Strauss – have developed crucial axioms of their thought with reference to the ancient world; yet these same thinkers, who pioneered some of the most radical and ground-breaking ideas about modernity, often appear to reproduce conventional and one-dimensional depictions of antiquity. In one sense, this volume performs the task of liberating Bakhtin from his own writings on antiquity. It manages to show how Bakhtin's rather dismissive comments on the ancient novel can be subordinated to his wider theoretical framework. Professional scholars of the novel thus redeploy Bakhtin's own ideas to reveal how he missed the potential richness of ancient fiction (and a number of other genres) for exploring precisely those Bakhtinian concepts of heteroglossia, dialogism and complex temporality which he had denied to the ancient period. Part of the reason that this exercise proves successful, is that Bakhtin's preoccupations with genre, citation and dialogue are so closely matched by the indigenous concerns of classical scholarship. It seems unsurprising that Bakhtin's theories of the novel have been more wholeheartedly embraced than the work of say Georg Lukács, whose preoccupations with 'historico-philosophical dialectic' seem so much more alien to the world of the classical academy. The strength of this volume derives not just from the many insightful individual readings of ancient texts but also from its productive reflection on the difficult relationship between a generalised theory and the act of reading.

The volume is divided into three sections. The first, 'Genre: Theory and Practice', comprises four essays which approach the issue of genre from a variety of perspectives. Branham provides a subtle reading of Bakhtin's theory of genre by exploring the relationship between Menippean satire and Greek romance in Petronius. The following three essays are devoted to the practice of Bakhtinian analysis. Kevin Corrigan and Elena Glazov-Corrigan produce a dazzling

multi-layered reading of the *Symposium*, arguing that it exhibits precisely the sort of dialogic qualities which give it a claim to being ‘the first novel in history’. Ahuvia Kahane challenges Bakhtin’s famous contrast between the epic and the novel by searching out a dialogic moment in Homer. Gary Saul Morson applies the Bakhtinian principles of genre analysis to the aphorism. The next section, ‘Rereading Bakhtin on Ancient Fiction’, opens with a very challenging essay by Tim Whitmarsh which makes important remarks about the tension between centripetal and centrifugal concepts both in the Greek romance and, most intriguingly, in Bakhtinian theory. Jennifer Ballengee writes with sophistication about materiality and the gaze and uses Bakhtin to develop an analysis which will be helpfully supplemented by Helen Morales’ recent book-length study of visuality (*Vision and Narrative in Achilles Tatius’ Leucippe and Clitophon*, Cambridge, 2004). Steven Smith’s exploration of the chronotope and adventure time engages with the central issues of time and temporality, one of the most interesting themes developed in the volume as a whole. The section concludes with Maria Plaza’s comparative analysis of dialogism in Petronius and Dostoevsky. Richard Fletcher’s essay which opens the final section (‘Centrifugal Voices’), is the most methodologically self-aware piece in the volume and raises the important genealogical question of Bakhtin’s reception by the French post-structuralists Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes. Francesca D’Allesandro Behr and Christine Mitchell each use specific examples to explore the insights of Bakhtinian theory for readings of ancient texts. The final essay by Francis Dunn returns to the problem of temporality and tackles the questions of agency and change which are at the heart of modern critical theory.

In his introduction, B. exhorts us to move beyond thinking of Bakhtin as a mere ‘literary theorist’ and return him to the exalted status of ‘thinker’ and ‘philosopher’. For B., Bakhtin has things to teach us which go well beyond the narrow field of philology and literary analysis. Too often classical scholars have tended to domesticate theorists such as Bakhtin. By parading the shortcomings of their particular readings of classical texts we frequently miss the grand-scale challenges their work can offer to the study of antiquity.

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