

Tarrant, R. 2016. *Texts, Editors, and Readers: Methods and Problems in Latin Textual Criticism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. xii + 192. ISBN 9780521766579 (hbk.), US\$ 84.99.

This elegant volume on Latin textual criticism aims 'to offer critical assessments of the current state of the field and some thoughts on the challenges and possibilities facing it in the near future' (p. xi). It also touches on a range of other issues, including the history of textual criticism and key questions of methodology. It focuses consistently on classical Latin, drawing most of its examples from texts that are widely read. Well argued and rich in detail, it is bound to offer new insights to the advanced scholar, even if some of its recommendations may prove controversial. It also aims to 'serve as a way into textual criticism' for those without any previous experience of the field (p. xi), but it seems too dense and advanced to do so.

The Introduction (pp. 1–17) presents key concepts such as scribal error, stemmatic analysis (also known as the method of Lachmann), and contamination. The first chapter, 'Textual criticism in a post-heroic age' (pp. 18–29), offers a sketch of the current state of textual criticism, which 'is still recognized as a basic discipline within the study of Classics' and yet 'is becoming increasingly arcane to most professional Classicists' (p. 18). Tarrant contrasts this with the age dominated by authoritative and productive 'heroic editors' such as Lachmann and Housman. What are the causes of their demise? Tarrant implicitly links it to the decline of 'nineteenth-century German classical scholarship' (p. 23), but he also blames 'the [current] absence of consensus on how classical texts should be edited' (p. 24). In fact there might be another reason as well. After stemmatic analysis was developed in the early nineteenth century, "heroic editors" such as Lachmann, Buecheler, and Baehrens could apply it to a broad range of texts and create editions that were often far better than all previous ones. There has been no such methodological jump in textual criticism since then, so more recent editors have only been able to make incremental improvements on the work of their predecessors.

The second chapter, 'The rhetoric of textual criticism/textual criticism as rhetoric' (pp. 30–48), is based on the assumption that textual criticism is 'a form of rhetoric', since '[t]extual critics cannot prove that their choices are correct; the most they can hope to do is to lead their readers to believe that those choices are the best available ones' (p. 41). This makes it especially important to understand what kind of rhetorical strategies are employed. Tarrant observes that '[t]extual criticism ... has gravitated towards images of crime and disease' (p. 31) and critics have often denounced their peers vigorously in a rhetorical tradition that culminated in the ferocious invective Housman directed at lesser scholars, or those he regarded as such. Implying a confident grasp of the truth, this vein of rhetoric was well suited to the 'heroic editors'. But it is not the unique rhetorical model on offer; Tarrant contrasts it with the positive and probing critical discourse of Nicolaus Heinsius and his 'willingness to entertain two or more solutions to a textual problem' (p. 46). He regards Heinsius's 'rhetoric appropriate to a post-heroic textual criticism' (p. 47).

It is a salutary recommendation that textual critics should reject Housman's brilliant venom in favour of a more polite discourse. Apart from being hurtful, taunts and jeers are simply not valid arguments. Yet it is hard to accept Tarrant's view of textual criticism as a kind of rhetoric. He is clearly right that there exists no absolute proof in this discipline (nor indeed in many others); textual criticism aims to reconstruct lost versions of ancient texts, and since no external sign indicates when it has achieved this goal, its results can only be judged by their internal plausibility. It is also true that convincing one's colleagues is an important mark of success here as in most areas of academia. But these conditions are not sufficient to establish that textual criticism is nothing more than rhetoric. In fact many of its products are strikingly devoid of

arguments; one should think of an austere critical apparatus in which conjectures appear alongside the name of their author, followed on rare occasion by an editorial comment such as *fort. recte*. Even in those cases, it is left to the reader to assess the conjecture. This implies that conjectures have inherent (and detectable) qualities that make them more or less plausible, such as meaning, style, and conformity to regular usage. And where a conjecture has been backed up by arguments, an experienced critic will not just assess the rhetoric that has been marshalled in its favour, but (s)he will try to make up her own mind about it. The rhetoric of textual criticism matters not because it is all that there is to this field, but because it is how we talk about it, and we are well advised to exercise tact, prudence, and circumspection.

Three chapters on the practice of editing classical Latin texts, richly illustrated with practical examples, constitute the core of the book. The first one, 'Establishing the text 1: recension' (pp. 49–64), offers an erudite account of the process of surveying the manuscripts and other textual witnesses, drawing up a *stemma codicum* if possible, and choosing between the readings that they transmit. The second one, 'Establishing the text 2: conjecture' (pp. 65–84), is devoted to correcting the transmitted text. The third of these chapters, 'Establishing the text 3: interpolation, collaboration and intertextuality' (pp. 85–104), describes interpolation, the insertion of inauthentic words and passages into the text. Tarrant is an authority on this often misunderstood phenomenon, and he dispels the myth that it tends to involve a conscious act of forgery.

The chapter 'Textual and literary criticism: the case of Propertius' (pp. 105–123), is worth reading on its own. It addresses a notorious problem in Latin textual criticism: the controversy about how the elegies of Propertius should be edited. Should we stay close to transmitted text, with all its quirks and oddities, or should we emend and transpose freely, as radical editors¹ such as Giardina, Goold, and Heyworth have done? This is an example of a key methodological problem in textual criticism. Classical Latin literature has to be reconstructed from the surviving textual witnesses. One particular difficulty is posed by their anomalies and irregularities; are these due to the stylistic peculiarities of the original, or to textual corruption? Whether we correct these anomalies or we accept them as genuine, we risk falling into circular reasoning by drawing our criteria for reconstructing the original from our reconstruction of it. Our reconstruction cannot be tested against any outside evidence, but only against itself (and other texts that have been reconstructed in a similar way). The solution is to check each textual reconstruction for logical consistency, which is what Tarrant does for Propertius. Radical critics have held that the obscurities in the transmitted text of his poems are the result of textual corruption, but Tarrant shows that some passages that have never been suspected by anyone display similar features, which indicates that these are probably genuine. In sum, this chapter should be read not only by textual critics, but also by literary scholars working on Propertius.

The following chapter, 'Presenting the text: the critical edition and discontents' (pp. 124–144), is devoted mainly to how a critical apparatus should be drawn up. Tarrant contrasts the minimalist apparatus of the Oxford Classical Texts with the maximalist approach, which 'tends to multiply the number of manuscripts reported and to be more inclusive in reporting variants of all kinds' (p. 130). It is not surprising that an Oxford-trained editor such as Tarrant should express a preference for the former approach, but the uncharacteristic vehemence with which he attacks maximalist editors (p. 134, cf. 161) seems excessive. In fact both approaches have their dangers; maximalists can clog

¹ Tarrant calls radical interventionist critics 'sceptical' (pp. 25, 146, etc.) or 'sceptics' (pp. 108, 110, etc.). These terms are widely used, but they are arguably inadequate; they introduce an implicit bias into the debate between radical and conservative textual critics by suggesting that the former are more astute; and they could well be applied to both parties, as there is reason to be sceptical not only about the reliability of medieval scribes, but also about the ability of modern scholars to guess what an ancient author must have written.

down their apparatus with irrelevant data, while minimalists risk excluding even 'manuscript readings ... that are essential for representing the testimony of the tradition' (p. 139). Paradoxically, Tarrant's brilliant epigram that '[t]he traditional format of a critical apparatus conveys a false appearance of objectivity and certitude' (p. 141) is especially apt to the minimalist apparatus that he favours.

Tarrant starts the final chapter, 'The future: problems and prospects' (pp. 145–156), by setting out some kinds of texts that are in especial need of a new critical edition. He proceeds to offer perspective on digital editions, from the unreliability of many texts that are currently available online to potential future uses of digital technology. One can only approve of his cautious final note that '[w]hatever changes the future may bring in the methods of editing classical texts, at the heart of the process will always be a scholar who applies his or her fallible judgement to the improvement of a text that can never be completely recovered' (p. 156).

The volume closes with the helpful appendix 'Reading a critical apparatus' (pp. 157–169), and a set of indices. Its style is generally lucid and elegant, though on occasion perhaps a little too dense. There are a handful of mistakes and typographical errors, some of which significantly affect the text.² All in all, this is a rich and thought-provoking volume that is well recommended to every textual scholar.

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² Tarrant knows 'of no text that survived in manuscript form to the age of printing that did not eventually reach print' (p. 7). But many surviving medieval texts have never been printed. As for classical Latin, the library of Angelo Decembrio, stolen near Toulouse in 1465, may have included the last surviving copy of Rabirius's *Carmen de bello Actiaco*: see M. D. Reeve in *Itinerari dei testi antichi*, ed. O. Pecere (Rome, 1991), 127. I owe this reference to Pierluigi Leone Gatti. At *Panegyrici Latini* 3(11).20.4 *eorum qui precabantur* (p. 69) read *quos*. Ov. *Met.* 12.433 *Tectaphon Oleniden* is not 'Tectaphon, son of Olenus' (p. 91). Out of the two sigla 'P' in the stemma reproduced on p. 159, the upper one of which should be a 'p'.