



Review: [untitled]

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Costas Panayotakis. *Theatrum Arbitri: Theatrical Elements in the Satyricon of Petronius*. Mnemosyne Supplement, 146. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995. Pp. xxv, 225. \$60.00. ISBN 90-04-10229-9.

Panayotakis' book, a 1993 Glasgow doctoral dissertation, has the markings of its species: a graceless and prolix style of presentation, needless display of erudition, and exaggerated interpretive claims.

The *Satyricon* has eluded an altogether satisfactory generic designation. Panayotakis enters the breach in the wake of several (carefully documented) earlier critics: "it will be demonstrated how the author of the novel does not confine himself to mimic techniques as his sole source of laughter, but experiments also with the conventions of Plautine farce or, broadly speaking, with methods common to all kinds of comedy, from Aristophanic slapstick and the humorous indecencies of Atellan farce to role-playing in New Comedy and the organisation of games in Roman amphitheatres." Panayotakis proceeds by "a scene-by-scene theatrical reading of the whole novel."

Some portions (or "acts" or "scenes") of the *Satyricon* do reward scrutiny *sub specie theatri*. A fifty-seven-page treatment discloses in the *Cena Trimalchionis* a "diligently composed sequence of theatrical events that are interconnected through Trimalchio's stage directions and aim mostly at the impressive presentation of his not so impressive food." To prove, however, the validity of this position with reference to every passage in Petronius, Panayotakis overextends the semantic field of "theatrical" or "dramatic" to include everything that involves any action whatever and of "spectacle" to include everything vividly described. Further, his zeal to recast Petronian characters as traditional *personae* of popular mime and comedy has an impoverishing effect on them.

In short, a hit-and-miss book that provides a useful approach only to some of the episodes in the *Satyricon*.

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Louis Auchincloss. *La Gloire: The Roman Empire of Corneille and Racine*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996. Pp. 90. \$19.95. ISBN 1-57003-122-3.

Did Corneille see in the history of the Roman Empire and its rulers an adherence to the concept of civic and military *gloire*? Did Racine share his views? Did the playwrights seek in Roman history examples of political struggles, military conquests, and amorous intrigues that mirrored France under the reign of Louis XIV? Does the concept of *gloire* present any relevance to the modern reader? The author raises, but never seriously pursues, these questions.

Auchincloss reviews twelve tragedies by Corneille and three by Racine. He repeatedly labels Corneille a "realist," but fails to define the term. There are some timid attempts at equating contemporary historical events with the dramatic situations under discussion, such as the Horaces and Nazi Germany, Pompey and Mussolini, Othon and the CIA, Tite and Berenice and the Windsors. The concept of *gloire* is, at times, completely forgotten, especially in the succinct attention paid to Racine.

In a laconic conclusion on *Surena*, the last play discussed, Auchincloss suggests that the main character, contrary to other Corneillian heroes, does