

A.D. Morrison, *The Narrator in Archaic Greek and Hellenistic Poetry*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2007. Pp. xii, 358. ISBN 978-0-521-87450-2. Hardback. £66.

In this book, A.D. Morrison investigates the construction of the narrator (otherwise known as the main speaking voice, the poet, the speaker or the persona) in Greek poetry, and the various relationships of these narrators to their authors. Morrison prefers the term ‘narrator’, as his approach is to a large extent narratological. Nevertheless, his use of technical language is restrained and he avoids unnecessary jargon.

As Morrison points out in his introduction, while Homer’s narrator avoids drawing attention to himself, the Hellenistic poets often employ more “intrusive” narrators, who are modeled after narrators in Archaic lyric as opposed to epic. This subject—also known as the “crossing of genres”, a term about which Morrison has some reservations—is not a new one, but here it is treated systematically and a large corpus of texts is examined: His survey of the narrators in Archaic (mainly lyric) poetry is followed by a close examination of the works of Callimachus, Theocritus and Apollonius Rhodius.

One way in which these intrusive narrators draw attention to themselves is through what Morrison terms ‘pseudo-spontaneity’, e.g. in the form of break-offs and self-corrections. Interestingly, he notes, such ‘pseudo-oral’ features are lacking in the Homeric epics, while they are “most common in poems furthest removed from spontaneity,” such as Pindar’s (72). Another hallmark of the genre is the use of “seemingly private references” to the poet and his audience. This, Morrison argues, is a sign that the poems were composed for repeated performance, since such ‘pseudo-intimacy’ makes the poems more appealing to secondary audiences (41).

Pseudo-spontaneity and pseudo-intimacy are both forms of ‘quasi-biography’, which may sound as if it means the use of the author’s own biography, but which Morrison defines as “any reference to an ‘external’ or extratextual life for the narrator beyond a straightforward capacity to tell a story” (30). This term is used throughout in reference to the biographically grounded personas of Archaic lyric, the anonymous narrator of the *Argonautica*, and even the character-speech of monologues such as *Idyll 2*, although only the first of these can be said to have an extratextual life in any real sense. Furthermore, the term includes not only the narrator’s references to himself and his audience, but also the way he tells his story, including “the use of emotional and evaluative language by the primary narrator” and “the depiction of the narrator’s relationship with the Muses” (36).

In my view, the use of the term ‘quasi-biography’ underplays the profound difference between the self-affirming first person of Pindar’s epinicia and the nameless (although emotional) narrator of the *Argonautica*. While Pindar’s literary persona is dependent on the author’s social persona, the same is not true of the narrator of the *Argonautica*. This difference is a crucial one, and one of which Morrison himself is aware, since he argues

that the author's social persona (and thus his biography) is relevant to the interpretation of some poems but not to others. He also discusses how the various first person statements in Pindar should be interpreted, arguing that "when Pindar declares that girls often sing to the Great Mother and Pan before his door at night, this is not evidence that there was a shrine next to his house. The criterion for such statements is not truth but plausibility" (32). This is an important observation concerning Pindar. The *Argonautica* (understandably) does not prompt such discussions.

The analysis of these differences would have benefited from sharper distinctions based on the use of *deixis*, i.e. language that points to something as present. Deictic language may refer to things and persons actually present at the performance, but it need not, and the interpretation of such language is crucial to our understanding of Greek poetry and its performance. The term *deixis* is briefly mentioned a few times, but there is no discussion of this subject, in spite of its importance to the book's thesis and the substantial body of literature that exists on it.¹ Instead, all forms of deictic language are treated as 'quasi-biography', including that of Pindar's *Nemean* 1 (227) as well as that of Theocritus' Simaetha in *Idyll* 2 (247).

There is an important distinction between *deixis ad oculos*, which points to extra-textual facts, and *deixis ad phantasma*, which does not. The matter is further complicated by the possibility for reperformance (which might change the meaning of the deictic language) and by the "necessary fictionality"² of any text composed in advance of its performance.

These distinctions are particularly important for the interpretation of the so-called "mimetic hymns" of Callimachus. Morrison uses the term "mimetic" of "a narrator who does not stand in the conventional relationship of narrator to audience in a hymn, but appears as a fictional character who addresses himself or other fictional characters". (109) This definition ignores the difficulties inherent in deciding when a voice is fictional: As Morrison argues, the narrator of the *Argonautica* is fictional, but so is the 'Sappho' constructed in Sappho's poems; she is not identical to the author. Morrison's definition of the term also depends upon the performance of the poem, as he makes clear with his claim that in Pindar's *Nemean* 3 "the first-person statements proclaiming a chorus awaiting a song from the Muse" became mimetic only when the poem was re-performed monodically (113). It follows that deictic language can be made mimetic by the performance of the poem, and that "mimeticism" is therefore not a feature of the text but of its performance.

¹ Such as N. Felson, ed., *The Poetics of Deixis in Alcman, Pindar and other Lyric. Arethusa* 37:3 (2004), to which Morrison refers (110) but without discussing the subject.

² See G.B. d'Alessio, "Past future and present past. Temporal deixis in Greek Archaic lyric", in Felson (2004), 269.

This definition of the “mimetic” is too wide to capture the originality of the poems that occasioned the term, which is neither the fictionality of their voices and addressees nor the circumstances of their performances, but the way these voices interact with the fictional scene and audience which they both describe and address. Morrison briefly touches on this in his discussion of Callimachus’ *Hymn to Apollo*, when he states that “this portrayal of a reaction to the developments in the setting of the poem is again unlike anything in the *Homeric Hymns*, but bears some resemblance to the pseudo-spontaneous reactions in Archaic poetry” (126). Unfortunately, he does not elaborate upon this further, and his two examples from Archaic poetry are of the narrator reacting to his own words, not to developments in the setting of the poem.

In spite of these objections, the book has much to recommend it. It is lucid, well written, and firmly based on examination of the texts. It has interesting discussions of such subjects as the ‘crossing of genres’, the similarities between Archaic and Hellenistic poetry, the relationship between author and narrator, and of the relationship between narrator and Muse. In addition, it offers many useful observations on the various poems which it discusses.

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