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Metamorphosen und die Frage der Ironie, Heidelberg,
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J. Krupp, *Distanz und Bedeutung. Ovids Metamorphosen und die Frage der Ironie*, Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter, 2009

In the world of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the discontinuity, constantly reaffirmed, between signifiers and signifieds is the agent of an essential questioning addressed to things and men ; that questioning is supported by a poetic *ingenium* a major character of which is an art of distancing based on the practice of *variatio* which often carries with it ironic effects. The question of irony (« die Frage der Ironie ») hence becomes for this text of the utmost importance. Yet, that question has never been directly and exclusively addressed by the critics. The book under review hence appears to fill a gap and open up an exciting field of study. It does so in an intelligent and courageous manner, beginning with its title, which underlies the essential notion of distance and presents irony not as yet another theme among others, but as a question asked by Ovid to his reader.

The book reads quite pleasantly : it is materially elegant, organized and written in a clear manner, and comes with simple and efficient indexes. It, however, calls for a few remarks and, before we come to them, for a methodological reservation which will help us explain why the book remains too often, in our opinion, short of the new and exciting perspective it points out. If there is no doubt that it stands as piece of research full of pertinent observations, nevertheless one could have wished for a personal and argued global vision — a thesis, in other words — on the subject announced, a subject which, curiously, seems to be at times forgotten. In order to make our argument more clear, these are the three reflexions inspired by that very promising study.

1. The first concerns the author's rather disturbing tendency to abandon Ovid's text in favour of developments about critical theory, in the form of often anachronistic and/or incongruous references. The long general introduction opens quite convincingly with the affirmation of both the importance and the difficulty of the topic and with the connection between the concept of irony and the field of rhetoric. But we are quickly led into a puzzling theoretical excursion which, dealing almost exclusively on irony, relies mostly to authors that have little or no connection with Antiquity. Plato, Aristotle and Quintilian are too quickly disposed of, in favour of much later references. Interesting as they are, quotations from Schlegel, Fichte, Jean Paul, Hegel or Kierkegaard give the impression of a rash jump in time. As for the more recent theories, as those of H.-G. Gadamer and P. de Man, they mislead more than they enlighten. The bulk of the book will indeed concern irony in the *Metamorphoses*, but its introduction will have put it at a disadvantage.

2. When, with the opening of the first chapter, we plunge abruptly in the Lycaon episode, we fear the book will apply to the poem theories that have nothing to do with it. Yet, the five central chapters, abounding with accurate observations on the passages examined, show that such is not the case. If there is anything that one can object to in those chapters, it is a tendency to fragmentation. Such a topic would call for a global approach and an exhaustive study of the instruments of irony in the *Metamorphoses*. Instead the author has opted for the sampling method. Five aspects considered as essential in the Ovidian irony (the deconstruction of Ovid's text through the multiplicity of its codes ; the role of vision ; the link of irony with illusion ; the ability of the narrative discontinuity to produce irony ; the connection between irony and parody) are dealt with through five episodes considered as particularly representative of each aspect (Lycaon, Acteon, Narcissus and Echo, Adonis and Atalanta and the « Ovidian *Eneid* »). That is a considerable amount of material, but the double selection effected here is too restrictive to allow for a global view. However, we did enjoy reading that central part of the book, which is rich with exciting and relevant observations.

In « Die Codes der Textes : Lycaon », we found excellent remarks (on the instability of Ovidian narrative codes, the narrator's status, or the excesses of an ironic reading), a sense of striking formulas and a remarkable capacity to make a balanced and inclusive assessment of a particular question. The only thing that might be objected to is a certain shortsightedness in the analyses and the dubious use of such expressions as « transparency », or « strangeness » when applied to the Ovidian text.

The next chapter (« *videre/videri* : Acteon ») is in our eyes the most convincing on several grounds : a good preliminary study of the Greek sources for the episode ; a rich and convincing

analysis in support of the connection established between irony and the gaze ; a subtle study of landscape ; the consideration of the irony generated by omissions ; a demonstration of the relation between irony and tragedy.

The next section (« Illusion und Ironie : Narcissus, Echo ») includes useful reflexions (on the link between εἰκωνεῖα and *illusio*, or on the role of intertextuality in the ironic character of the episode) and good occasional remarks. But one may regret to see the relevance to the subject of the book become loose (cf. 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6) or to find nothing on the connection of irony with that other crossing of a boundary represented by metamorphosis or with the exploration of human passions.

« Ironie und die Aufhebung der Linearität : Adonis, Atalanta » goes back to Schlegel and de Man as well as to the writings of J. Hillis Miller and G. Genette to define irony as an alteration by the text of its own « narrative line ». We are quite far from the *Metamorphoses* ; furthermore, a sometimes excessive attention is given to minor points, and some developments appear ill-timed (pp. 142-146, about the Hellenistic tradition, come too late). However, this chapter contains a number of accurate remarks (on the underlining of the narrative act ; on the place of that episode in the overall structure ; on the role of the treatment of time in the emergence of irony and on the slanted echoes between the apparently parallel stories of Orpheus, Venus and Atalanta). It also includes exciting passing commentaries (on the representation of Adonis's beauty, of the role of the kisses in the deconstruction of narrative linearity, on the narrative of Atalanta's run).

The last chapter, « Ironie und Parodie : Die *Aeneis*-Episode », bears on a minor aspect of Ovidian irony, i.e. its relation with parody. The notion of parody seems to us questionable when dealing with the transformation Ovid effects of the Virgilian heritage, which is a poetic creation going far beyond parody and irony alike and constitutes *in fine* a tribute, even though it claims difference and originality. In this chapter, which again tends to go astray of its subject and lose itself in a critique of critical writings, we nevertheless enjoyed the subtlety of thought and expression, particularly in the definition of the *Metamorphoses* as a text essentially open and always commenting on itself. We also appreciated the use of Gérard Genette's notion of the hypertext, the reference to K. Galinsky's study of the episode and the critique of the opposition between epic purity and generic hybridization.

3. Finally, what is not sufficiently made clear in this book is a global dynamics. Reading the conclusion, a short summary followed by a puzzling proposal for a reshuffling of the whole, confirms the impression we have of a juxtaposition of insights rather than an intellectual progression. The « question of irony » in the *Metamorphoses* does not call for a single answer ; it is even possible that this continuous poem (*perpetuum carmen*) which depicts a world itself continuous (that, unified by metamorphosis, of « universal contiguity » as defined by Italo Calvino) might be, in the last analysis, fundamentally non ironic if, as J. Krupp does, we define irony as a « moment of discontinuity » (p. 123). It seems to us that the complexity of this literary problem needs to be fully embraced, by studying in all its different aspects the relation of the Ovidian poem with irony, defined according to Greek and Roman criteria, by relying on as exhaustive a perception of the forms it takes as possible, and more importantly by asking what meaning can be given to such a powerful presence of irony in a text which owes to it so much of its novelty, grandeur and power of suggestion and even provocation. On those grounds, J. Krupp's book is not quite satisfactory. Its merits however must be acknowledged, and it is possible to look at it as the welcome and high standard start of a series of studies of irony in Ovid.

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