

*ern Philology* 53 (1956) 145–178. Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy* (Oxford 1994). Annette To-marken, *The Smile of Truth* (Princeton 1990). R.M.I.

## Comic Books

The parallels between gods and superheroes make the history of comics a long improvisation on classical legend, but some books explicitly use classical themes or figures.

Classic Comics (1941–1947), created by Albert Lewis Kanter, adapted literary works for young readers, but almost none were classical. The first title in the renamed Classics Illustrated series was Edward Bulwer-Lytton's Victorian take on Roman imperial excess, *The Last Days of Pompeii* (issue 35). Later came Homer's *Iliad* (77) and *Odyssey* (81), followed by *Caesar's Conquests* (130). An adaptation of Virgil's *Aeneid* was published in Britain, but not in the United States.

The most exuberant use of classical material is the French comic *Astérix*, first published in the magazine *Pilote* (1959), then in volumes beginning in 1961 with *Astérix the Gaul*. Thriving on elaborate multilingual puns and welcomed in language classrooms, the series tells of a tiny, mustachioed Gaulish rebel traveling a world that combines elements of the classical with satire on the modern. Much use is made of Latin tags and allusions to Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, though Tacitus sneaks in when the Roman legions complain about their retirement plan (*Astérix and Caesar's Gift*, 1).

The British novelist Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* (Vertigo 1988–1996) mixes classical stories with those of other historical periods. *Sandman's* 75 issues spiral around Sandman, Oneiros, and Morpheus, the “shaper of forms.” In *Calliope* (issue 17), a present-day novelist (in 1927) captures Calliope, the ancient Muse of epic poetry, with moly (a mythical herb) and fuels his creative inspiration by imprisoning and raping her; eventually (in 1986) he sells her to a younger novelist. She calls on the Camenae, and on Melete, Mneme, and Aiode, who invoke Oneiros, the father of her son Orpheus. Threatened by Dream, the offending novelist pleads: “I need her. If I didn't have her I wouldn't be able to write. I wouldn't have ideas.” Justly tortured by an avalanche of ideas, including “a man who inherits a library card to the library in Alexandria,” he finds that all ideas cease with her freedom. The modern writer has stolen and brutalized what the epic poet Homer prayed to—or perhaps Homer once did the same. Orpheus tells the bard's tragedy, amplified by that of Dream, who kills his son, and in the multi-issue collection *The Kindly Ones* (1996) is punished for it by three Hecatae, set on him by Hippolyta Hall, known as Fury on the 1980s DC Comics team Infinity Inc.

Classical figures pervade American comics. Shazam, the wizard's name that when uttered turns young reporter Billy Batson into Captain Marvel, is an acronym for Solomon's wisdom, Hercules' strength, Atlas' stamina, Zeus's power, Achilles' courage, and Mercury's speed. These powers, along with Prometheus, Vulcan, Ajak, Aegis,

Gaia, Ganymede, Hyperion, Icarus, Roma, Polaris, Triton, Venus, Antaeus, Andromeda, Arion, Orpheus, Artemiz, and Hero and Leander (a gay couple), fight for good; Calypso, Ares, Cybelle, Nox, Phalanx, Thanos, Proteus, Selene, Agamemno, Nemesis, Naiad, Nero, Elektra, and Lacuna (who creates gaps in time) fight for evil. (Characters whose names sound Greek or Latin are more frequently evil than good.)

DC Comics' *Wonder Woman* (1941–present) reflects the classical world almost obsessively. Princess Diana belongs to an Amazon tribe protected by Aphrodite, part of whose girdle made their Lasso of Truth. Enamored by Eros imitating an American intelligence officer, Diana enters World War II, confronting Ares, Herakles, and the sorceress Circe; at the end of the 1960s Diana resigns her powers, then regains them (at Gloria Steinem's urging) after undergoing twelve trials. One Amazon queen, Antiope, falls in love with the series' Theseus character. The great strength of *Wonder Woman*, and of comic books' use of classical themes in general, is how their creators revel in classical material, while adapting it first for World War II, then Vietnam, and recently for a world of computers and conflict ruled not by Zeus but by Athena and Ares.

BIBL.: Brian Walker, *The Comics: Before 1945* (New York 2004) and *The Comics: Since 1945* (New York 2002).

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## Commentary

Commentary is nearly as ancient as writing. The Phoenician writer Sanchuniathon, whose works were given currency in Greek by Philo of Byblos (2nd cent. CE), thought that Taaut (whom the Egyptians called Thouth, the Alexandrians Thoth, and the Greeks Hermes) invented both letters and “the writing of commentaries” (Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 1.9.24). We cannot confirm or rebut this conjecture, but we do know that the oldest preserved commentary on a Greek text appears in one of the oldest written documents in Greek, the Derveni papyrus. The unidentified author of this document, composed in the 5th century BCE and copied in the 4th century, explicates an Orphic text as commentators have explicated other works for millennia after him: by atomizing it. He divides it into short quotations and then comments on them, citing parallels. His work uses most of the techniques of explication that later became standard in the Hellenistic world in commentaries on Homer and other canonical authors, and that also appear in many other premodern traditions, from China and India to Persia.

Today some of the same techniques are still in regular use, though readers often encounter them on computer screens rather than in books. A beginning student of Latin or Greek can call up a text from a database and use online resources to parse, translate, and explain the syntactical function of every word, just as readers 500 or 1,000 years ago learned to do, though they relied on Greek *epimerismoi*, or parsings, of classical texts or on the immense, line-by-line commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid* by

Tiberius Donatus (early 5th cent.). The vast range of commentaries produced in the ancient world offered vital resources and models for post-classical readers of Greek and Latin texts, as they still do for scholars. The labyrinthine processes by which they were preserved, reworked, and emulated were as long, complex, and rich in historical interest as any other chapter in the history of the classical tradition.

Ancient commentaries took many forms and addressed a wide variety of subjects. Originally the commentator was a parasite. He nested in and tried to dictate the uses of an existing text that claimed authority in some field. Day by day and school by school, teachers explicated the classics that schoolboys needed first to master and then to emulate. They buried the texts in glosses that explained grammar, syntax, usage, and prosody, identified mythical and historical characters, places, and events, and warned the young not to imitate the liberties that the mighty dead had taken with the normal rules of grammar and taste. Literary and philological specialists explicated and corrected canonical classics like the works of Homer. Teachers of rhetoric explained the ancient customs and identified the ancient people mentioned by orators like Demosthenes and Cicero. Philosophers elucidated the works of Plato and Aristotle. The character and quality of these enterprises varied radically. But the industry of their makers established commentary as the standard medium for elementary and advanced instruction in a vast range of subjects, and the materials that they collected were used and reused in fascinating, complex ways by the learned poets of Alexandria and Rome.

But commentators, like sheep in trees, could be dangerously ambitious. Many wanted to do more than preserve and protect their authors. Pergamene commentators explained Homer's apparent breaches of taste and decorum as clues to a higher meaning. From the 3rd century CE onward, philosophers used the form of running commentary on their canonical texts to carry out a novel fusion of Platonic and Aristotelian methods.

Students of the natural world regularly used the genre of commentary to revise, as well as to explicate, the knowledge offered by texts. In the 2nd century BCE Hipparchus drew up a commentary on the astronomical work of Aratus in which he sharply criticized his predecessor and insisted on the superiority of his own data. Galen, in the 2nd century CE, wrote extensive commentaries on Hippocrates in which he presented the older writer as the model of a medical man; but he also updated Hippocrates' work in the light of later schools of medical thought and his own experience in practice and dissection. Didymus, working at Alexandria in the 1st century BCE, addressed (and misinformed) an audience of his fellow specialists as he explicated the speeches of Demosthenes. Lawyers spun endless webs of commentary around the rules and applications of the Roman law, a process that the emperor Justinian vainly tried to bring to a stop by creating a mammoth anthology of older works, the *Corpus Iuris Romani*, and forbidding further interpreta-

tion. In Hellenistic Greece and in the Greek and Roman culture of the imperial age, commentary was a recognized literary genre that sought to demonstrate the commentator's, as well as the author's, profundity, originality, and erudition. For two millennia to come, commentaries would do more than explicate existing forms of knowledge. In fact, they became and remained a genre whose authors produced new knowledge, and one of the most prominent ones at that.

Many ancient commentaries had at least a few formal properties in common. In an age of rolls, they were normally written out not on the margins of the texts they explicated but on separate rolls of their own. Many of them began with some form of introduction, in which the commentator addressed general questions about the work in question: its author, its genuineness, its purpose. In other respects, however, they varied radically. Some, like the philological commentaries of the Alexandrian scholars Aristarchus and Zenodotus, dealt with a narrow band of selected problems and were clearly presented as the intellectual property of one author. Others, like the Virgilian commentaries of Aelius Donatus (4th cent. CE), ranged widely in content and claimed to offer their readers not one single interpretation but rather a range of possibilities. The intelligent reader, said Donatus, must test these and accept or reject them as a skilled money changer tests currency (see Jerome *Contra Rufinum* 1.16)—a definition of commentary that found favor with later authors, from Donatus' pupil, the Christian scholar Jerome, to the 16th-century Jewish philologist and exegete Azariah de' Rossi.

Some commentaries, like those of the 1st-century Roman grammarian Asconius Pedianus on the speeches of Cicero, were brief, pointed, and impersonal in tone. Others, like those of Galen, made room for long digressions on everything from the nature of commentary itself to the author's life and experiences. Some made every effort to defend the text they explicated, as some Homeric commentators did, by using allegory to explain away apparent offenses against taste and reason. Others challenged and even refuted the arguments they presented, as the 6th-century scholars Simplicius and Philoponus did in their commentaries on Aristotle's *Physics*. The commentary could be a textual lichen, a moldlike growth that could flourish only in the crevices of a grander, more lasting text. But it could also become a freestanding work that proclaimed its author's originality. Some commentators, like Galen, proudly proclaimed their authorship: others complained that students had put notes on their lectures into circulation and forced them to publish what they had meant only for limited circulation. The possible variants of this protean form were endless.

Not all those who studied and emulated these commentators applied their methods to pagan texts. Greek-speaking Jews and Christians learned the fundamentals of grammar and the higher arts of interpretation from the classical commentaries that they too mastered in school, and soon new bodies of commentary grew up around the Old and New Testaments. The 3rd-century Christian

scholar Origen, for example, composed elaborate critical commentaries on Old and New Testament books. He followed the Jewish writer Philo (1st cent. CE), who had Hellenized the existing Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis, and the Neoplatonists of his own day when he insisted that the Bible had a higher sense which only allegorical exegesis, rather than the literalism he ascribed to the Jews, could unlock. But he also emulated the philologists of Alexandria when he collected variant versions of the biblical texts and laid out four Greek versions of the Old Testament, as well as the Hebrew and a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew, in parallel columns in his Hexapla. Jerome continued Origen's enterprise in the Latin world; Augustine agreed, and he made clear to Christian readers in his authoritative books that the Christian scholar needed to apply the methods of ancient scholarship to Christian sacred texts. Thus, the practices of the ancient commentators survived, partly because they served entirely new purposes.

As ancient culture and society were transformed in the 4th through 6th centuries, the conditions of scholarship and teaching underwent radical changes of their own. In the Greek world the vast bodies of commentary that had accumulated around Homer, Hesiod, Demosthenes, and the tragedians were gradually abridged into far shorter compilations, most of them anonymous, and entered as scholia, or marginal notes, in codices like the famous Venetian MS A of Homer. Though many details of this process are known, its larger history remains obscure. It was probably connected with the transition from the roll to the codex, or modern form of book, in which commentaries could be entered more conveniently in the margins of the text they dealt with, and perhaps also with the gradual change from majuscule to minuscule script that took place in the 8th and 9th centuries. At all events, the appearance of the scholia marked a slow but radical transformation of the enterprise of exegesis. In Byzantium, the new center of the Greek world, students continued to use these shorter commentaries to master the ancient Greek which they still tried to write. New commentaries were chiefly devoted to the Bible and the works of the Fathers. Philosophical and scientific commentary continued into the 6th and 7th centuries, but it too seems to have ceased in the Greek world after the emperor Justinian closed the philosophical schools of Athens in 529 CE.

These older genres were actively continued, however, in the new world of Islam, as scholars in Baghdad and elsewhere, most notably the Nestorian Hunain ibn Ishaq, translated and explicated ancient texts, for the most part Greek philosophical, medical, and scientific works. Galen's own commentaries on Hippocrates and the later commentaries of Porphyry, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Simplicius on philosophical and scientific texts proved essential to Muslim scholars, some of whom found these systematic, step-by-step commentaries more cogent and useful than the texts they explicated and thus decided that they must master the full body of commentaries before they could surpass the ancients. Abū l-Faraj Abdallāh (Ibn

at-Tayyib), for example, explained in his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* that according to Hippocrates, "the arts develop in the following way: an original creator transmits what he has devised to a follower, and this follower tests it critically and improves it to the best of his ability, and matters continue in this way until the art reaches completion." In accord with this schema he noted: "I have followed the trail of my predecessors and done my best to understand their works well. In addition, I have discovered a number of ideas in connection with their unclear remarks and explanations, and these go beyond what they said. Therefore, I would like to add my own few remarks to their numerous ones and set down all of this material in a single commentary. This will spare the user the great effort involved in having to consult the older commentaries." Though he offered the reader a *variorum*, he also professed that "since I love the truth and prefer to use the method of the ancients, we must begin as they did. All commentators have concerned themselves, before studying the *Categories* of Aristotle, with the ten chief categories."

Commentary in the Islamic world took many forms, especially when scholars set out, as many did, to explicate the Koran, with its rich content and relevance to so many topics. Commentaries on technical and mathematical works, however, were faithful, to a considerable extent, to the systematic, technical model forged in the late antique schools, and they preserved and discussed a vast amount of classical scientific and philosophical matter.

In the Latin world, commentary changed phase and style when the Roman Empire fell. The 4th and 5th centuries saw the production of immense and exemplary commentaries on Virgil by Servius and by Tiberius Donatus. Calcidius' translation of and commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* became a primary source for Western understanding of the Platonic (or Neoplatonic) universe. On the whole, though, the Christian scholars who created the Western tradition of monastic learning made relatively modest efforts to carry on these enterprises. They drew up commentaries on the Bible, but when they turned to ancient learning they found encyclopedic guides to all the disciplines more useful than line-by-line investigations of individual ancient books. Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (mid-5th cent.), with its overview of the universe and the forms of human learning, won widespread popularity because it did not resemble most other commentaries but instead offered a coherent and appealing vision of the cosmos.

In the middle and later centuries of the first millennium, scholia wreathed the margins of some classical Latin texts, such as Ovid's notoriously obscure *Ibis* and the *Satires* of Juvenal. Readers were guided through Virgil by the 4th-century commentary of Servius, and through Horace by that of pseudo-Acro. One enterprise of this transitional period would prove transformative in the long term. Boethius, in his commentaries on the logical works of Aristotle and Porphyry, drew heavily on Porphyry's own exegesis. He introduced into the Latin world a basic con-

ceptual apparatus, a formal terminology for logic and semantics, and a model for technical commentary that focused on argument rather than style. For the moment, however, his work had only a modest effect. The great Carolingian scholars who practiced a sophisticated, critical study of the Latin classics, such as Lupus of Ferrières, wrote few new formal commentaries on literary or historical texts. Fewer still were compiled in the 9th and 10th centuries, when Europe's borders came under attack from many directions and the production and study of all classical texts declined.

Gradually, commentary of a different form, Latin commentary on the Scriptures, began to take shape. Theological controversies over the nature of the Eucharist and other technical problems forced clerics to explicate the biblical text. And though every great question continued to spark controversy, consensus grew about the form that commentary on the Bible should take and the technical functions that it should perform. A standard set of glosses and explanations took shape, between the lines and in the margins of the Bible: this came to be known, and vested with authority, as the *Glossa Ordinaria*. When scholars began to read ancient medical texts at Salerno and the *Corpus Iuris Romani* at Bologna, and when they collected and began to interpret the Church's own canon law, they configured these authoritative ancient texts as their clerical predecessors had treated the Bible and equipped them with standard glosses of their own. Elaborate specialized commentaries showed how to apply each of these texts to the contemporary world, often using creative anachronism to make them fit changed circumstances.

As population and trade revived and education spread in the 11th and 12th centuries, monasteries and cathedral schools began to foster the study of the classics as well. Once again Western scholars began to read ancient texts with ancient commentaries. Calcidius' 4th-century Latin rendition of Plato's *Timaeus*, with his Latin commentary, became particularly popular in the Holy Roman Empire and in France. Over time the two texts began to be studied separately and for different purposes, and new glosses were drawn up to explicate both the ancient author and his translator and commentator. Calcidius had used diagrams to explicate Plato's vision of the universe and the musical harmony that ruled it, and these received elaborate visual commentaries of their own.

In the long run, Boethius proved the most influential of models. The new approach to theology, law, and medicine emphasized the application of formal dialectic to authoritative texts. It soon reshaped the study of the ancients as well. Texts that could play a role in an education that culminated in the study of formal philosophy and theology, such as the late antique Aristotelian commentaries and their Islamic continuators, now found their way into Latin and the curriculum. A rich body of commentaries grew up around such core texts of the new scholastic curriculum as the medical *Canon* of Avicenna and Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. Commentaries on the Greek and Roman writers began to diverge from the ancient models,

though in doing so they normally adopted ideas and methods from other sectors of the ancient world. For example, commentators began to emulate Boethius and offer lucid, rigorous accounts of the authors they planned to explicate. What came to be called the *accessus ad auctores* fell into two forms: either the commentator inquired into the authorship, authenticity, and matter of his text, as ancient writers of prolegomena had done, or he analyzed the work at the outset in the Aristotelian terms of the four causes. Commentaries on the ancients developed, in part, into inquiries into argument and meaning that looked not at all like their ancient predecessors, at least at the start.

Yet ancient models of commentary also began to enjoy a revival. In the 14th and 15th centuries Humanists across Europe began both to study the ancient commentators with a new interest in historical and philological details and to compile new commentaries of their own on ancient authors. Members of the mendicant orders in France and Britain ransacked Servius, Macrobius, and other late antique authors for the materials which they could arrange into their own erudite commentaries on Livy, Ovid, and other ancient writers. Petrarch, the most influential of the early Italian Humanists, used as his working copy of Virgil a magnificent, large-format manuscript (now in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan) in which the comments of Servius surrounded the text, which was written in much larger letters. In the margins he entered his own commentary: not mere notes, but complex responses to both the poet and his commentator, carefully written and designed to be preserved. As Petrarch read other classics, he emulated Servius to the fullest extent of his abilities, filling the margins of texts as radically different as Propertius, Livy, and the *Chronicle* of Eusebius and Jerome with rich comments of his own. Later scholars (most famously, Lorenzo Valla) studied many of these partial commentaries intensively.

As Humanistic schools took shape across Italy and teachers offered formal instruction on a wider and wider range of texts, commentary in the late antique style became popular once more. In schools and university arts courses, teachers presenting texts that had been the backbone of the medieval curriculum often recycled the work of their medieval predecessors. Commentaries on the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and Cicero's *De inventione* show a continuity of content that sometimes seems out of keeping with the Humanists' claims that they were offering revelations, to those willing to pay the price of entrance, about the wisdom and piety of the ancients—and certainly reveals how exciting it seemed, in a newly sophisticated urban world, to revive the secular system of education that had presumably produced Cicero and Virgil themselves. Much duplication and triplication took place: not just the normal recycling of glosses from lexica into commentaries and then back into a new generation of lexica, but the formal, and almost literal, repetition of lectures and glosses, sometimes for generations. As late as the 16th century, when Erasmus drew up his in-

novative, philologically precise commentary on the New Testament, his work included a striking number of observations drawn from the *Glossa Ordinaria*.

For all the mind-numbing repetition of facts and anecdotes, experimentation flourished. By the middle of the 15th century some scholars were addressing commentaries to texts deliberately chosen because they had previously lain outside the standard curriculum, or even for their difficulty. Lorenzo Valla commented brilliantly on Quintilian's rhetoric, drawing on his own independent reading in history, dialectic, and rhetoric rather than on the predigested tags of earlier scholiasts. Domizio Calderini attacked Ovid's difficult, demanding *Ibis* as well as his more accessible, if allusive, *Epistolae Heroidum*. Poliziano lectured on Suetonius, Quintilian, and the *Silvae* of Statius and sharply defended these nonstandard choices: texts different from the most famous canonical ones, he explained, were not necessarily less worthy.

Eventually a more focused and technical form of commentary began to emerge. When the ambitious, learned, and polemical Calderini and Poliziano lectured on Roman poets, they concentrated on identifying the Greek sources from which Virgil, Ovid, and Statius had drawn and adapted so much. When the philosopher and philologist Ermolao Barbaro commented on the greatest of ancient encyclopedias, Pliny's *Natural History*, he concentrated on questions of textual criticism as well as the text's relation to Greek sources. Filippo Beroaldo the Elder deliberately produced a hybrid commentary and monograph on Virgil. He chose only passages on which he disagreed with Servius and made them the object of sharp, erudite discussions that cumulatively challenged the authority of the most influential ancient commentator.

Commentary could even provide, as Galen had shown, an unlikely but effective forum for that almost Californian self-revelation that is so central a theme in Renaissance literature. Professors at the 15th-century University of Rome filled their courses not only with grammatical and philological observations but also with anecdotes of witches they had seen burnt, healing springs they had discovered in the Roman Forum, and complaints (modeled on those of their ancient predecessors) that students were putting notes on their lectures into circulation and forcing them into print against their will. By the end of the 15th century formal innovation had produced some masterpieces, difficult to tie to any ancient model, such as Niccolò Perotti's *Cornucopiae*, a commentary of some 1,000 folio pages on one book of Martial, which concerned itself almost exclusively with lexical matters. In the same period a number of ancient Latin writers whose students had no body of antique commentary or medieval glosses to draw on (notably Catullus, Propertius, and even Apuleius) were equipped with individual commentaries or, in some cases, complex, contentious bodies of exegesis.

Not many of the Greek texts translated in the course of the 15th century came with commentaries that could readily be adapted into Latin use. Leonardo Bruni worked

out a Humanistic version of Aristotelian commentary, concentrating on historical and moral issues, to accompany his own new version of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Oeconomica*. Lorenzo Valla attached translations from the scholia to Thucydides to his own Latin translation, adding only a few new remarks of his own, as when he noted that the ancient revolution in Corcyra, and the consequent degradation of political language throughout Greece, recalled revealing parallels in his own time (Vat. lat. 1801, 66v).

But in the second half of the 15th century commentators began to tackle Greek writers who almost demanded more explication and who in some cases came already encased in ancient exegesis. Marsilio Ficino drew on Proclus and other late antique Neoplatonists as he elaborated his discursive Latin commentaries on the *Timaeus* and other Platonic texts, learned works that became so popular and authoritative that, for a century and more, most readers in the Latin West encountered Plato through the veils that Ficino wove. Regiomontanus, similarly, drew on Proclus as he finished an epitome, or running paraphrase, of Ptolemy's *Almagest* that had been a major work in progress by his teacher Georg Peurbach (d. 1461). This work, first published in 1496, reached a far wider public than Regiomontanus' formal commentary on the text, which spent more time thrashing the Latin version by George of Trebizond than explaining planetary theory. The *Epitome Almagesti* gave Copernicus and all other astronomers of the late 15th and early 16th centuries a rigorous, accessible version of Ptolemaic planetary theory.

The middle and later decades of the 15th century thus became an age of commentary. Manuscripts and printed editions of the classics, especially the Latin classics, took on a set form, modeled on the manuscript biblical and legal commentaries of the later Middle Ages. At the center of each page, a few lines of the text in question appear, set in a large font. In manuscripts or printed editions meant for schools, the lines are separated by blank spaces, in which the student could enter a prose paraphrase dictated by the teacher. Around the text wound one or more formal commentaries, closely written or printed in tiny letters. Editions of Virgil, by the end of the 15th century, came with seven of these, a format that proved so attractive, in an age of glossators, that Jewish scholars and Christian printers replicated it when they created the canonical form of the Rabbinic Bible. In all these texts the margins of the page invited the student or reader to enter a teacher's remarks or his own personal responses.

Commentary, in fact, became so fashionable that it provoked criticism and debate. Battista Guarino, son of the great teacher Guarino of Verona, noted that critics had appeared "who deny that, given the vast supply of books that the marvelous and speedy method of printing has made available in a few years, scholars have any need of this sort of precise, detailed commentary, since by working at it they could have done a better job of mastering these questions on their own. . . . Moreover, they say, this kind of reading actually harms the mind, since it loses the

taste for carrying out inquiry on its own, devises no hypotheses, and creates nothing worthy of a free intellect." The appearance of dissenting views like these was only natural, given the uniform appearance and sometimes turbid content of the commentaries that had filled the Muses' gardens like so much learned kudzu. They may also have been inspired by one especially and diabolically suggestive commentary: the massive one in which the Dominican Annius of Viterbo wrapped a vast range of supposedly ancient historical texts, almost all of them his own forgeries, in 1498. This pullulating mass of glosses fitted its exegesis so transparently to the texts that Beatus Rhenanus condemned the work with one devastating quotation from Erasmus: "One of them milks the he-goat, the other holds out the sieve."

Battista himself disagreed with the critique he described, and he offered a panoramic account of Italy's great commentators in support of his view that commentaries were valuable, even necessary, for the ordinary reader of the classics. Others, like Beroaldo, Calderini, and Poliziano, disagreed more or less forcefully. These men began to write short, miscellaneous series of observations on textual cruces and interpretative problems about which they had something new to say, a specialist form of classical scholarship modeled on the work of Gellius, and one that made it easier for an author to stand out from the herd. Often given such titles as *Miscellanea* or *Variae lectiones*, these works represented a transition from full-text exegesis to a more monographic form of scholarship with its own classical models.

But the commentary was far too useful to abandon, and in the 16th century both Italian and northern scholars imaginatively extended its forms. Erasmus made a specialty of one particular kind of commentary: a massively learned, even encyclopedic essay that expanded on a single line or phrase. He tried both to explicate ancient texts and to show their direct relevance to modern political and moral questions. Guillaume Budé applied the Humanist method of erudite commentary (and a great deal of material drawn, often without acknowledgment, from earlier Humanist commentators) in his learned, digressive commentary on the 6th-century Digest, which appeared in 1508 and marked the beginning of radical change in legal scholarship. Many other practitioners of the so-called *mos gallicus* would emulate Budé, drawing up commentaries on the Corpus Juris Romani designed not only to draw out the current relevance of each law or juridical statement but also to set it back into its original historical context. Valla and Erasmus, for their part, used the methods of classical commentary to explicate the New Testament, thus initiating a process of transformation which would last through the next two centuries, even as the Reformation definitively split the Catholic Church. Both Protestant and Catholic scholars did their best, in the centuries to come, to explicate the historical sense of the Old and New Testaments, using philological and historical evidence to fix the meaning of every disputed word and line—only to discover, in the end, that history and phil-

ogy could define the scope of interpretative problems but could not solve them.

Pierio Valeriano, meanwhile, turned his own *Corrections and Variations in the Text of Virgil* (1521) into something like a formal critical apparatus: not a text, but materials for creating one, in the form of a line-by-line record of the readings of the great Roman manuscripts of Virgil, which he studied systematically in the Vatican Library and elsewhere. Valeriano's precedent did not find consistent emulation, but he did help to inspire such systematic and businesslike textual critics as Beatus Rhenanus (editor of Tacitus and Velleius Paterculus), Piero Vettori (editor of Cicero), and Gabriele Faerno (editor of Terence) to concentrate on textual matters in their commentaries. When the young Joseph Scaliger, in the 1560s and 1570s, produced a series of commentaries on Varro, Ausonius, Festus, Catullus, Propertius, Tibullus, and Manilius, he generally followed Valeriano's model, concentrating on textual questions rather than the wider range of literary ones canvassed, for example, in Denis Lambin's immense and influential commentaries on Horace and Plautus. Yet Scaliger also added elements from the work of legal Humanists to the mix, making his notes on Ausonius a fascinating study of the late antique Roman Empire and the ways of education and literary life cultivated there.

The forms of commentary traditionally practiced in universities continued to flourish alongside the philological exegesis of the Humanists. Throughout the 16th century medical men wrote massive commentaries on the *Canon* of Avicenna, and the Jesuits of Coimbra produced the most searching and meticulous of all commentaries on the works of Aristotle. Like the Humanists, however, these commentators often knew a wide range of classical texts in Greek and Latin, and their methods often amounted to a synthesis of Scholastic and Humanist methods that brought ancient forms of exegesis together in radically new ways. In medical commentary, for example, the formalized questions and disputations of the medieval university made way for more essayistic forms of exegesis. No one plied this genre more energetically, or found more readers, than the medical man and polymath Girolamo Cardano, who drew on both Scholastic and Humanistic traditions as he developed Galen's self-reflexive and digressive model of scientific commentary into a rich and flexible medium—one with which he sought to prove that Hippocrates offered a better model than Galen for medical theory and practice.

Of the many experiments in commentary that the 16th and early 17th centuries witnessed, two proved especially influential. A long series of commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics*, beginning with those of Francesco Robortello and Pier Vettori, encased that short, endlessly fertile text in a vast mass of exegetical amber. Every word was examined, corrected, translated, compared with the evidence about Greek tragedy, fused with related or apparently related passages from Horace, and argued over, again and again. Clunky and immense, these commentaries, which

basically applied the discursive model of late antique philosophical commentary to literary ends, still made the *Poetics* live—just as academies began to revive and stage Greek tragedies and modern plays modeled on them. The 16th-century commentators succeeded in drawing attention, more systematically than any of their predecessors, to the need to lay a philosophical foundation for the practices of writing and criticism in the classical tradition. The lesson was not lost on Racine, who loved and annotated these editions, or on the other creators of 17th-century classicism.

If the commentaries on Aristotle filled one stately shelf, those on the ancient historians, especially Tacitus, proliferated into whole libraries. In the 1520s and 1530s, acute observers of contemporary politics felt the need for a new kind of commentary on ancient historians, one that would draw the practical lessons that ancient statesmanship and military practice had to offer without worrying about philological questions or confining itself to the straitjacket of line-by-line exegesis. Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* (1513–1517, the first of his works to be published, and the only one to appear in his lifetime) offered a new model: topical discussions of political, social, religious, and military matters, in the form of substantial essays that orbited around narratives from Livy, rather than normal glosses. Tacitus and Polybius (especially the former) materialized on cue as the preferred objects of this sort of commentary. By the end of the 16th century scholars and political specialists all over Europe had realized that, as Francesco Guicciardini pointed out, Tacitus had much to teach both absolute rulers and their rebellious subjects. Elaborate discourses like Machiavelli's and pungent series of aphorisms drawn from Tacitus' work and laid out in deliberately meaningful groups circulated everywhere. Commentary on Tacitus became the core of an up-to-date training in politics. It could even become subversive, as Isaac Dorislaus found when he drew what he saw as the republican implications of Tacitus in his history lectures at Cambridge in the 1620s, only to be silenced and deprived of his office by the authorities. But Tacitean commentary remained the common currency of political discourse until new kinds of treatise replaced it in the 17th century.

Through the 16th and 17th centuries commentary played a major role in philosophy as well as in philology. Both naturalists and philologists strove to explicate Pliny's *Natural History*. Humanists and Scholastics alike produced massive exegeses of Aristotle and Plato, and mathematicians continued to equip the works of Euclid and Archimedes with ever more up-to-date commentaries. Johannes Kepler, William Harvey, and Giambattista Riccioli all combined substantial scientific arguments with the exegesis of ancient texts.

Even in the 16th century some scholars worried about the vast glossematic hedges that now lined (and obscured) the highways and byways of ancient literature. The influential Parisian educational reformer Petrus Ramus argued that commentators needed to follow a single textual

thread if they and their readers were to arrive at the mystery in the heart of each text. Ignore all questions of style and format, he suggested, and treat all texts, poems as well as speeches, plays as well as histories, as arguments, as working examples of dialectic. Close attention to the writer's argument, accompanied, whenever possible, by formal diagrams, could make commentary rigorous in a way that the endless proliferation of information and argument in traditional commentaries could not. Many a Ramist in Paris and Cambridge enlightened his students and lightened his labors by explaining Horace's *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* as a formal refutation of the argument that it might be preferable to flee the battlefield and seek safety rather than stand fast and die in glory. Yet Ramus's views, like their author, remained controversial, especially after his brutal death at the hands of Catholic rioters on Saint Bartholomew's Day in 1572 made him a Protestant martyr.

Above all, commentary grew—and grew. Printers in Holland specialized in what the book trade came to call variorum editions, in which multiple commentaries, or selected bits from multiple commentaries, accompanied the reader through a text, thus dispensing with the need to buy a library before attempting to read Cornelius Nepos or Sallust. Later in the 17th century, Pierre-Daniel Huet created a series of editions, comprising the Greek poet Callimachus and 62 Latin writers down to the 6th century CE, for the dauphin of France, for whose capacities the bulky variorum editions were at once too demanding and too informative. Each of these Delphin editions, as they were called, came equipped with a Latin prose paraphrase of the text as well as a running commentary, often partly derivative. A bibliophilic and pedagogical success, the Delphin collection was reprinted as late as the early 19th century. Yet even Huet's ingenuity was not sufficient to save the commentary as a modern literary form.

By the middle decades of the 17th century the commentary had finally begun to lose its roles in the presentation of contemporary ideas. Scientists and philosophers, as their work departed slowly but definitively from ancient models, held that textbooks and treatises written from a coherent, modern standpoint could present a subject more effectively than a commentary on any ancient text. Many propagandists of the New Philosophy, most notably Bacon, Galileo, and Descartes, insisted that knowledge of nature was the most important of all studies and that textual study could never yield new or effective knowledge in the sphere of nature. Political thinkers of the era still referred constantly to the ancients: Hobbes drew much of his understanding of human nature in and outside society from Thucydides, whose histories he translated brilliantly into English. But Hobbes, like Grotius before him and Locke after him, cast his work in the new form of the treatise on politics, a genre that insisted on its coherence, originality, and independence from existing models. On the whole, the most sophisticated classical scholars (Richard Bentley, for example) concurred. The ancient texts belonged to an older world, one that could be studied for

aesthetic or ethical purposes but could never again be brought back to life. Commentary, in this context, was necessarily a second-order discipline. It served, at best, to correct and explicate—to stand and wait, rather than to make statements of its own.

Many of Bentley's contemporaries were even more scathing. Alexander Pope reissued his great satire the *Dunciad* as a self-embellished *Dunciad Variorum* (1735), a vast denunciation of scholars in general and commentators in particular, which took the parodic form of a poem equipped with massive, point-missing notes. For Bentley, so Pope held, choosing to live in the margins of a great text meant not finding a privileged place from which to understand one's own world, but rather retreating from it into dry-as-dust obsessions and sterile pedantry. Satirists have continued to find this theme attractive, notably Vladimir Nabokov, whose *Pale Fire* (1962) includes the deadliest parody of a commentary since Pope, and David Lodge, one of whose characters dreams of creating a literary commentary on the novels of Jane Austen so rich with every possible interpretation that it will silence all other critics.

For all its polemics against excess and trivial glosses, the Enlightenment was no more able than the age of the New Philosophy had been to do away with the commentary entirely. Indeed, the genre moved, once again, into new realms. As scholars began to apply the techniques of classical philology, suitably modified, to the national classics of the modern European nations, commentaries on modern national literatures flourished like grass in a rainy spring. Shakespeare became the object, first of many quarrelsome individual scholars, and then of a variorum commentary all his own. Goethe's *Faust* and Montaigne's *Essays* almost disappeared under the weight of erudition brought to bear on them, line by line, in editions and commentaries. French secondary schools adopted as their central exercise a formalized *explication de texte*. Students learned to use set passages from canonical classics, ancient and modern, as the objects of both literary evaluation and encyclopedic exegesis, neatly conveyed in essay form.

If classical scholarship lost prestige and support in much of 18th-century Europe, ancient and medieval commentaries reoccupied a position of special prominence in what remained of the field. Scholars in Holland and Germany, in particular, honed and polished the tools with which they dissected scholia. They made themselves expert at separating medieval commentaries into their earlier and later components. They mined older scholia for new fragments and used their evidence to reconstruct the assumptions and methods of ancient scholars. In 1788, when D'Ansse de Villoison published the first edition of the Venice A and B scholia on the *Iliad*, Christian Gottlob Heyne, Friedrich August Wolf, and others as well leapt on the new material. Wolf used it as the principal basis for the radical arguments he advanced in his 1795 *Prolegomena*, about the nature of the Homeric text. The apparent

unity of the text, Wolf insisted, in fact resulted not from the inspiration of a single author but from the critical talents and efforts of generations of Alexandrian scholars. Wolf took as his model for the analysis of the Homeric scholia the work that biblical scholars had done on the Jewish textual commentary to the Old Testament, the Masorah, and later biblical scholars emulated what they saw as his iconoclastic, fiercely historical approach to a canonical text. Scholia and their analysis continued to be at the center of the Homeric question for decades after Wolf wrote, though they served scholars only as sources, not as models.

Classical texts of all sorts continued to be taught and edited, and the edition with commentary continued both to serve as the mainstay of school and university instruction and to attract scholars toward crafting new models for the study of texts. Some of the greatest classical scholars of the 20th century, figures as diverse as A. E. Housman and Eduard Fraenkel, devoted the best of their lives and work to massive commentaries on difficult texts. Others, like Robin Nisbet and Margaret Hubbard, have continued to set new standards for what a formal commentary can do. All of this activity, however, like the vast majority of critical writing not cast in the form of commentary, takes place within the world of higher education and professional scholarship. Not only has the commentary on secular texts, ancient or modern, ceased to function as a scientific genre, it has also ceased to play any role in the intellectual lives of ordinary educated men and women once they leave school or university. "Commentary," in current American English, often refers not to a written text at all, but to oral reporting on or reaction to a public ceremony or athletic contest: a fancy way of saying "comment."

Within the world of humanistic scholarship, however, the commentary has begun to occupy a distinctively new position, especially since World War II. The historicist scholars of the 19th century (even Wolf and his pupils) generally regarded ancient commentaries and scholia less as works to be studied in their own right than as sources from which the critical scholar might retrieve new fragments of lost authors or new historical information. Byzantine and Western medieval commentaries were ransacked for the information they might provide about lost ancient predecessors or sources. Few scholars made much effort to think themselves into the mind of an ancient or medieval commentator, or to use such works as evidence for larger historical questions.

Since the 1930s this branch of scholarship has changed radically. Philologists have provided new editions of the Homeric scholia, Servius, Eustathius, and other major bodies of commentary. Historians have begun to use these texts, moreover, as something more than quarries. Henri-Irénée Marrou, Louis Holtz, Nigel Wilson, Robert Kaster, and others have drawn from ancient commentaries and scholia the evidence for their histories of ancient education and its social and political setting. Medievalists have



devoted close scrutiny to the fates of Calcidius and other ancients in medieval schools and the rise of the *accessus ad auctores*, and now treat them, in the manner of their classical colleagues, as evidence for cultural and intellectual history. Byzantinists and Arabists have also found new ways to appreciate the meanings and uses of commentary in premodern societies. Students of Renaissance and later intellectual history have also begun to treat the commentaries produced in their periods as substantial intellectual achievements and to study them in detail. Much remains undone: notably a systematic, comparative, and collaborative study of all premodern commentary traditions. But in the world of scholarship, at least, the genre of commentary, with its millennial history and multiple functions, no longer demands the adjective *mere*.

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## Concord, Philosophical

The concept that there is a fundamental agreement between all or, at any rate, the most important philosophical beliefs and systems has roots in classical antiquity. It was

developed during the Middle Ages by Western and Arabic thinkers and came to have a profound influence on Renaissance and early modern thinkers and the ways in which they interpreted earlier philosophical texts.

The tradition has its beginnings in the question of the relationship between the philosophical doctrines of Plato and his most famous student, Aristotle, which was perceived as closer than is commonly accepted today, perhaps on the basis of lost works by Aristotle, especially his dialogues. The earliest claim of the overall agreement between Plato and Aristotle may be that of the Middle Platonist Antiochus of Ascalon (130/120–68 BCE), whose student Cicero repeatedly states that the Academics and Peripatetics "differed in words while agreeing in fact" (*Academica* 1.17; *De finibus* 4.5).

Following Antiochus, Platonic–Aristotelian concordism became more prevalent, though it did not win universal approval. The 2nd-century CE *Didaskalikos* (*Handbook of Platonism*), sometimes attributed to Albinus, argued for the fundamental agreement of Plato's theory of transcendent Forms with Aristotle's concept of immanent forms within physical bodies. This work was translated into Latin by the Italian Renaissance Platonist Marsilio Ficino in the 15th century and appeared in several printed editions, contributing to the resurgence of interest in concordism in early modern Europe.

With the development of Neoplatonism the question of Aristotle's relation to Plato became a major issue. Could Aristotle's philosophical and scientific writings, far preferable in an instructional context to Plato's dialogues, be properly used as texts within a Platonic setting? Plotinus (3rd cent. CE), the leading figure in early Neoplatonism, was ambiguous on this point. His student Porphyry, however, was one of the major proponents of Platonic–Aristotelian concordism in the classical world; his treatise *That the Doctrine of Plato and Aristotle Is One* influenced many thinkers, perhaps surviving among Arab scholars as late as the time of Al-Fārābī (ca. 870–950). Spurious works of a Platonic character that circulated under Aristotle's name in the Arab world and were transferred to the West in Latin translation—such as the *Theology of Aristotle* and the *Book of Causes*, based on Plotinus and Proclus (5th cent.) respectively—also helped to make concordism seem plausible.

Among classical Latin authors who adopted a concordist position, the most influential was Boethius. In his longer commentary on Aristotle's *De interpretatione* (*Patrologia Latina*, 64:43c–d), he announced that he wished "to reduce the opinions of Aristotle and Plato to a single concord and demonstrate that they, unlike most, do not disagree about everything, but rather agree to a great extent on the majority of subjects which comprise philosophy." The six centuries following the death of Boethius, whose concordist project never got beyond its early stages, saw little direct study of Plato and Aristotle in the Latin West. In the 12th century a brief reference by John of Salisbury indicates that Bernard of Chartres and his

# THE CLASSICAL TRADITION

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