

REVIEW

THE NEW GREEN-AND-YELLOW OF *AGRICOLA*

Anthony J. Woodman, ed., with Christina S. Kraus, *Tacitus: Agricola*. Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. xi + 358. Paperback, £23.99. ISBN 978-0-521-70029-0.

This is an invaluable addition to the Green and Yellow series. For too long readers of this small masterpiece of Latin prose have had to rely on Ogilvie and Richmond (Oxford, 1967), more historical than literary in focus and now very dated (with some of the material in the notes dating back even further to Furneaux–Andersen 1922 and Furneaux 1898). Readers with German could turn to Heubner 1984, sometimes a surer guide to the Latin, but narrowly philological in its approach. Now at last we have a new, literary commentary—and one written by the doyen of Tacitean studies. (Although originally envisaged as a joint project with Christina Kraus, the commentary is almost entirely Woodman’s work, with Kraus contributing a meaty thirty pages on the geography and ethnography of Britain at *Agr.* 10–12). It has all the merits of W.’s other commentaries on Velleius and Tacitus: penetrating analysis of the Latin, sensitivity to the texture woven by metaphor and allusion, and a knack for reading familiar language in new ways—not to mention a taste for upsetting comfortable consensus.

Like all the best contributions to the Green and Yellow series, this commentary aspires to help readers of all levels—not just the undergraduate and graduate students at which the series is nominally aimed. That is of course a tall order, but it is a goal worth striving for. Good students benefit from the informed analysis of leading scholars, while substantive scholarship is often all the better for the economy of expression imposed by the format. In this case the balance is tilted somewhat towards the needs of more advanced readers. At almost 360 pages it is a weighty volume by Green and Yellow standards (though still fifty pages shorter than Ash on *Histories* II). It is also unusual in presenting an entirely new edition of the text, complete with apparatus and full discussion of the textual problems in the commentary. The commentary provides some basic help, including glosses, but also in-depth analysis of T.’s language and style. This Green and Yellow punches well above its weight.

I

Overall context is provided by a thirty-seven-page introduction divided into six sections covering (1) the problem of genre, T.'s life, and the purpose of the *Agricola*, (2) the character of T.'s approach to ethnography and geography, stressing the importance of texts and tradition rather than maps or autopsy, (3) T.'s treatment of Roman imperialism, arguing against suggestions that the *Agricola* is critical of Roman imperialism or that we are supposed to sympathise with Calgacus in his famous speech (more on this below), (4) the *Agricola*'s limited value as a historical source, (5) T.'s style, and (6) the manuscript tradition.

The commentary proper comes to 266 pages, half again as long as Ogilvie and Richmond (and without their extensive archaeological excurses) and almost twice the length of Heubner. In an important departure from Ogilvie and Richmond, W. disavows any intention of writing a historical commentary. The focus is on explicating the text itself rather than the events it describes, though scholarship on Roman Britain has advanced in the meantime and W. does draw on that research where it illuminates the text. Paradoxically, this will make it all the more important reading for those interested in the history of Roman Britain, since it powerfully demonstrates the *Agricola*'s limits as a 'source', showing the many ways in which the narrative owes more to T.'s reading of Caesar, Sallust, and Livy than to the actual conduct of Agricola's campaigns.

As one would expect, the commentary excels in the close analysis of the text, explicating how the Latin is to be construed with close attention to context and usage, always unswayed by received wisdom. Readers will find extended and penetrating discussions of all the difficulties on which readers have stumbled—and not a few passages where W. thinks earlier commentators have not fully appreciated the difficulty of T.'s Latin. As well as weighing up the merits of various published interpretations, W. regularly produces entirely new suggestions of his own. To cite just a handful of examples, I was particularly struck by his suggestions on *medio rationis atque abundantiae* at 6.4 ('a middle course consisting of X and Y, not 'between' them as both Ogilvie–Richmond and Heubner gloss it), *quod initium uenturae mox fortunae* at 13.3 (suggesting that the *uentura fortuna* is Claudius' success in Britain, not Vespasian's rise to power), and *ducis boni imperatoriam uirtutem* at 39.2, where W. wonders why everyone has been so sure that the predicate is *imperatoriam* rather than *ducis boni*. He points out that 'a commander's prowess belonged to the Good Leader' is if anything the more natural reading. He must be right that the 'palindromic' quality—the fact that the sentence makes sense both ways—emphasises its message by illustrating the close link between military command and the position of *princeps*. Readers long familiar with the

text will find that re-reading it with W. continually opens up new interpretive possibilities.

W. is also an excellent guide to the networks of mutually supporting metaphors that undergird T.'s narrative. I especially liked the note on the string of arboricultural metaphors in the account of Agricola's administrative reforms at 19.1–4: Agricola 'cutting down' the causes of war (*causas bellorum ... excidere*), 'keeping back' his household (*domum suam coercuit*) and 'cutting off' extortionate schemes (*circumcisis quae ...*). *Coercere* is often used of disciplining slaves, so it is quite at home with *domum suam* as its object, but its horticultural sense is also activated in proximity to *excidere* and *circumcidere*. The representation of Agricola as an *agricola* is yet another example of the ludic side of T.'s writing to which W. has repeatedly drawn attention. Also acute is the analysis of the imagery of Agricola's *hortatio* at 33–4 as it shifts from the domain of hunting (*e latebris suis extrusi, contra ruere*, etc.) to that of the arena (*pulchram et spectabilem uictoriam ederetis*), anticipating the arena image in the battle narrative proper (*grande et atrox spectaculum*, 37.2). The sequence is particularly apposite since so many wild animals were hunted in order to be slaughtered in Roman amphitheatres in so-called *venationes*.

II

The commentary prints a new text—'considerably more open to conjecture than others currently available' as W. himself puts it (vii). I counted forty-five variations from the text of Ogilvie's OCT (excluding mere changes in punctuation) or almost two per page. In some places, W.'s editorial method reflects informed conservatism: W. finds new grounds to defend the paradosis at seven points where Ogilvie saw fit to emend the text or follow a marginal reading; in a further four places, he obelises rather than venturing a solution. Elsewhere, he is more radical. He emends in twenty-nine passages where Ogilvie printed the transmitted text (including the two passages obelised by O.). In five other places, he adopts a different emendation to O. No less than fourteen of the emendations printed are novel conjectures of his own.

W. is persuasive on most of the well-known cruxes in the text. On the notorious problem of the shape of Britain as described by Livy and Fabius Ruscicus—transmitted as *oblongae scutulae uel bipenni* (10.3)—W. and Kraus make a compelling new case for Lacey's *scutulo* ('little shield'), rather than Ogilvie and Richmond's *scapulae* ('shoulder blade') or MS *scutulae* ('dish'). On the basis of Cic. *ND* 1.82, they suggest that *scutum* was the *mot juste* for Juno Sospita's shield, which appears on coins as a figure-eight shape—not unlike a double axe (*bipennis*).

Potentially more contentious is W.'s readiness to emend in places where previous editors have seen no problem with the text. He has an eagle eye for

inconsistency, *non sequitur* and questionable Latin, identifying many problems in the text that previous readers have glossed over or ignored. He deals with them ruthlessly. The solutions proposed are always plausible and often compelling, but I was not always convinced that the transmitted text was so clearly defective as to require intervention. A single, but prominent, example is the very end of the work, where Ogilvie printed the transmitted text (46.4):

quidquid ex Agricola amauius, quidquid mirati sumus, manet mansurumque est in animis hominum in aeternitate temporum, fama rerum; nam multos ueterum uelut inglorios et ignobilis obliuio obruet: Agricola posteritati narratus et traditus superstes erit.

As W. points out, *fama rerum* always refers to an individual's deeds rather than history or memory and so cannot be construed as coordinate with *animis hominum* and *aeternitate temporum* (i.e. live on in memory) with *in* supplied or understood. Both O-R and Heubner explain it as an instrumental ablative: Agricola's admirable qualities will live on through the fame of his deeds. W. rejects this explanation on three grounds: (1) the juxtaposition of two different types of ablative (in *aeternitate* and *fama*) is awkward, (2) the reference to *fama rerum* would be redundant after *quidquid ... mirati sumus*, and (3) the qualities referred to in the two *quidquid* clauses are personal rather than public and the *animi hominum* in which they will live on are those of Agricola's intimates, whom T. has just exhorted to follow his example (42.2-3); hence the following *nam* clause, which attributes their survival to T.'s biography, is a *non sequitur*: those close to Agricola do not need a biography to remember his admirable qualities. W.'s solution is to insert *ut* before *in aeternitate* and repunctuate:

quidquid ... mirati sumus, manet mansurumque est in animis hominum, <ut> in aeternitate temporum fama rerum: nam ...

This creates a clear distinction between Agricola's personal qualities (*quidquid ... mirati sumus*), which will survive through imitation by his intimates, and his public renown (*fama rerum*), which will survive thanks to T.'s biography. The resulting text produces an attractively tight sequence of thought. But I am not convinced that the paradosis is obviously defective.

On the question of redundancy (2), one might see a distinction between Agricola's admirable qualities (the two *quidquid* clauses) and the deeds (*rerum*) through which they were made manifest. As for the *supposed non sequitur* (3), one can easily read the *quidquid* clauses as encompassing not just his amiable personal qualities but also the qualities that made him a great commander and read *animis hominum* with a much wider reference, extending beyond

Agricola's intimates to all those who will encounter him through T.'s biography rather than in person. That leaves the undeniably awkward juxtaposition of different types of ablative. But is that sufficient grounds to change the text? A countervailing argument for keeping the paradosis is the parallel use of *fama rerum gestarum* in exactly the same context at Livy 25.38.8 (noted by Ogilvie–Richmond and Heubner, but not by W. here). In a speech in which L. Marcius is exhorting his troops to remember and imitate the recently deceased Scipio brothers, he assures them that they are not dead, but live on through their deeds: *uiuunt uigentque fama rerum gestarum*. Whether we posit a direct connection between T. and Livy here or a wider *topos* of funerary writing, the parallel supports the conventional reading of *fama rerum* as an instrumental ablative.

This is an extreme example, where the case for intervention seems relatively weak. In many other places, W.'s arguments are more convincing—including the decision to emend the odd future *obruet* towards the end of the passage just quoted (46.4), by printing Haupt's *obruit* (where Ogilvie had printed the transmitted text). But it is indicative of where W. sets the threshold for intervention. This is, as W. himself notes, a relatively radical new text. As such it is entirely in keeping with W.'s career-long determination to provoke readers to read T. with fresh eyes.

III

My one significant reservation about the commentary is its approach to ambiguity and ambivalence, which many readers have seen as defining features of this text. It is typical of W.'s method not just to identify difficulties of interpretation in the text, but also—as far as possible—to resolve them. Interpretations are discarded one by one based on careful analysis of Latin usage and the sequence of thought in the passage, until a single, best reading remains. Although W.'s arguments are usually compelling, the mode of reading obscures the possibility that ambiguity might be an essential and productive feature of the text. The problem becomes more urgent as one raises one's gaze from particular sentences to the larger questions raised by the work as a whole—questions about the new regime, the merits of political quietism, and the imperial project in the provinces (to note three related but distinct issues).

In the preface, for example, W. works hard to close down the notorious uncertainties of chronological reference which complicate any attempt to see a clean break between the Nerva/Trajanic present and the Domitianic past. *Clarorum uirorum facta moresque posteris tradere ... ne nostris quidem temporibus quamquam incuriosa suorum aetas omisit* (I.1): 'T's reference [is] to his own times, by which he means the principate of Domitian' (my emphasis). At *nunc narraturo mihi uitam defuncti hominis uenia opus fuit quam non petissem incusaturus* (I.4): *fuit* in the

first sentence, W. argues, probably refers to the past from the point of view of the writer rather than the reader and ‘refers to Domitian’s reign’, not the time of writing. *Tam saeva et infesta uirtutibus tempora* (1.4): ‘The elided verb is *erant* [not *sunt*], referring to the reign of Domitian.’ W. gives good grounds for his interpretation. *Inter alia*, he suggests plausibly that *uenia opus fuit* in the second sentence quoted means ‘needed a reprieve’ (from what he saw as the duty of writing his father-in-law’s biography) rather than ‘had to ask pardon’ (from the reader, for writing a biography—as Heubner reads it) or ‘had to seek permission’ (from Domitian, as Ogilvie and Richmond suggest) and means that T. had started to write the biography under Domitian but had to abandon it after the executions of Rusticus and Senecio. For W. the problem seems to boil down to the question of whether or not T. is sincere in his praise of the new regime later in the preface (see pp. 75, 84). But it is not necessarily a criticism of the new emperors to suggest that the age is still hostile to virtue and that biography still requires an *apologia*: it is hardly their fault if deep-rooted ills in Roman culture have not been entirely cured by the change in regime. In any case, trying to narrow down the interpretive possibilities takes the focus off what is perhaps most striking about the text—the ambiguity of its chronological references. That ambiguity seems carefully crafted: notably through the juxtaposition of present references (*nostris temporibus, nunc*) with past verbs. It could easily have been avoided, not least by supplying the desired tense of *esse* in the last sentence. As it is, the text leaves it to the reader to make the critical decision of either including or excluding the immediate present from the pessimistic assessment of *nostra tempora*.

Similar issues arise with regard to the speech of Calgacus. W. takes the time to rebut those (myself included) who have been tempted to sympathise with Calgacus’ rhetoric: ‘The exhortation [to imitate Agricola at 46.2] loses all point if T.’s admiration and devotion have been directed primarily not at Agricola but at his enemy Calgacus’ (25). Put so starkly, that must be true. But W.’s dichotomy unduly restricts the interpretive possibilities. As W. presents it, we must conclude either that Calgacus is a ‘mouthpiece’ for T. (23), ‘somehow representing the author himself’ (22), or that his arguments are without merit and deserve no sympathy (22–3, 256–7). Is it not possible to find elements to admire in *both* Agricola and Calgacus? Might not Calgacus embody some potentially attractive characteristics (uncompromising commitment to *libertas*, defiance of tyranny in both word and deed) that Agricola lacks—because they no longer have a place in imperial Rome? To suggest this is not to imply that T. is criticising Agricola or failing to live up to his promise to write out of *pietas* (3.3). The *Agricola* is hardly a covert critique of T.’s father-in-law or of the new regime. Nor is it an anti-imperialist tract. But that does not mean that it has to be a simple or straightforward text. I have always seen it as an ambitious work that aspires to be not just a laudatory bi-

ography of his father-in-law, but *also* a deep meditation on the pressing political and cultural questions of its time, which avoids giving trite or easy answers. Its idealisation of Agricola's pragmatic quietism in Rome is tempered by ambivalence. Ambivalence is not the same as criticism or subversion; it is a recognition of complexity and compromise.

In any case, interpretive openness seems once more to be the most salient feature. The ambivalence that I and many others have sensed in the work derives from unsettling resonances within the text that seem to complicate or qualify (but not, I think, subvert) its overt praise of quietism. It is left to the reader to ignore them (as Ogilvie–Richmond and Heubner did), explain them away (as Woodman does), or allow them to inflect one's overall reading of the work (as many other readers, myself included, have done).

Of course I have a vested interest here, being committed to a reading of the *Agricola* as an ambivalent text. Others may find W.'s scepticism a breath of fresh air at a time when readers of Latin seem to find ambivalence and irony everywhere. In any case, it is somewhat unreasonable to dwell on these broader questions of interpretation (which are well covered by the literature cited by W.), since the real focus of this commentary is on the careful explication of meaning at the micro-level. It is an invaluable guide to the problems of interpreting individual words, phrases, and sentences and following the sequence of thought. Its novel insights should help readers long familiar with the *Agricola* to read it afresh. It should also make it much easier to introduce students to this wonderful text. The *Agricola* offers an ideal first taste of Roman historical writing—short enough to be read in its entirety, but still possessing much of the complexity and depth of Tacitus' later, longer works.

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