An Aristarchean Maxim

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The Classical Review, New Ser., Vol. 21, No. 2. (Jun., 1971), p. 172.

The Classical Review is currently published by The Classical Association.

comes in the first or second line of the poem, and in three of these instances the friend has attributed to him some action or behaviour affecting the poet:

> Quid mihi tam multas laudando, *Basse*, puellas
> mutatum domina *cogis* abire mea?
> (4. 1 f.)
> Tu, quod saepe soles, nostro *laetabere* casu,
> *Galle*, quod abrepto solus amore vacem.
> (13. 1 f.)
> Qualis et unde genus, qui sint mihi, *Tulle*, Penates,
> *quaeris* pro nostra semper amicitia.
> (22. 1 f.)

In the light of these examples it is not difficult to recognize in 'Prisce, iubes' a Propertian cliché. Love-elegy, in any case, had never been the same after Ovid had finished with it, and the elegies of Propertius himself cannot have had great attraction for the Roman of a century later, let alone laborious imitations which reproduced the mannerisms without the fire. Javolenus Priscus was surely wide awake and knew exactly what he was doing. He was adopting an unorthodox but highly effective method of protesting against the artificial imitation of what he probably considered an artificial genre, and against his own name being used as an element in that artificiality. If an important function of the *recitatio* was literary criticism, here we have a fine, astringent example of its exercise.

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AN ARISTARCHEAN MAXIM

One of the best-known principles of literary scholarship developed by the Alexandrians is the maxim that each author is the best commentary on his own usage, or in Greek Ὅμηρον ἐξ Ὁμήρου σαφηνίζειν. Aristarchus used to be given credit for the formulation of the idea, but Pfeiffer[1] has shown that it is not stated in so many words by any authority earlier than Porphyry in the third century, and that the word σαφηνίζειν is not used in the scholia to mean 'interpret'.[2] However, as Pfeiffer himself does not question, the maxim describes the character of Aristarchus' work accurately, and since writing my review of Pfeiffer[3] I have discovered evidence which tends to reinforce the traditional view.

In Aelian's *Varia Historia* xiv. 13 an anecdote describes how the poet Agathon responds to a friend's criticism that his poetry is too full of antithesis, which ought to be removed. Agathon's reply was to say that by deleting the antithesis he was unwittingly removing the genuine Agathon from Agathon's work, and the Greek runs λέληθας σεαυτὸν τὸν Ἀγάθωνα ἐκ τοῦ Ἀγάθωνος ἀφανίζων. The linguistic analogy with the maxim is too close to be disregarded. Despite the lateness of the source the story may well be authentic; as early as Aristophanes we find (fr. 326) criticism of Agathon's antitheses. If the joke was known in Hellenistic literary circles we may imagine that Aristarchus adapted it in order to formulate his principle, and the assonance between ἀφανίζειν and σαφηνίζειν explains his choice of a word not normally used by the critic in the sense required.

Two possible objections to this interpretation should be mentioned: the sense of the preposition ἐκ undergoes a change, and the anecdote has a certain affinity with the story about Ovid in the Elder Seneca, *Contr.* ii. 10; but neither seems to me to have much weight.[4]

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[1] *History of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford, 1968), 226–7.

[2] There is a prima facie case in schol. h on *Iliad* i. 279, but this is probably not an early stratum of the scholia.

[3] *C.R.* lxxxiii (1969), 366–72.

[4] I am indebted to Prof. R. Kassel for his observations on this note.

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