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The publication of Indra McEwen's Review of my book, *The Symbol at Your Door* [2008] is to be welcomed for several reasons. That an exploration of medieval architectural design should be reviewed in a journal of classical philosophy and science suggests an encouraging breadth of interest in the subject and recognizes the interdisciplinary intent of the book. The Journal's policy to invite authors to respond to reviews acknowledges that critics should be as accountable as the authors and publishers of the work reviewed, a reciprocation which is much needed and long overdue. Of obvious value is the opportunity to discuss matters raised or omitted by critics and the critical methodology used. All this is most welcome.

Three-quarters of McEwen's review is devoted to a full summary of the book, which should be helpful to readers, and is generally well understood and objectively written. McEwen rightly identifies one of the fundamental questions addressed by the book as being the nature of the connection between medieval theory and practice in architectural design, for which there is believed to be little hard evidence [but see [Hiscock 2009](#)]. Arising from this apparent lacuna, she is clearly uneasy with the speculation necessary for exploring this connection, seeing it as a substitute for 'genuine scholarship'. Surprising though this may be, coming from a background of classical philosophy, it is to be understood rather by the quest for certainty which is the imperative of much modern scholarship. This often results in propositions which cannot be proved being ruled out, even for discussion. Yet there has to be a place in scholarly argument for distinctions being made between the possible, the probable, and the definite, and for examining what the evidence may permit when not amounting to proof.

A greater problem with this review arises from the penultimate paragraph which, in only 10 lines, surprisingly pans the book. It accomplishes this brevity by leaving all but one of the criticisms

completely unsubstantiated, raising serious questions about critical rigor. Some of the claims, that the book is ‘unwieldy’ and ‘overly long with far too many quotations’, relate to a perceived need for further editing. To be credible, this needs to be demonstrated by example. Where is there superfluity? Which quotations could be cut? Other claims that the book is anachronistic and redundant are left entirely unexplained. What examples are there to support this? How can a book be redundant and, at least in part, ‘impressive’ in its evidence, ‘convincing’, ‘compelling’, ‘well-documented’, while it ‘raises interesting questions’, and is ‘of potential value’ for its case studies? Equally baffling is the accusation that the book is ‘clumsily written’, given the quantity of writing successfully published by the present author. As it stands, this suggests a liberty being felt to write anything without constraint. Yet a basic requirement of criticism is no different from that of the work being reviewed. The critic needs to make a case, demonstrate it, and leave the reader to judge on the basis of the evidence provided; otherwise the piece will be little more than an exercise in mudslinging.

Finally, the book is accused of displaying ‘weak scholarship’ on two counts, both of which beg important questions. The first count relates to the absence of certain works from the bibliography, and is based on a *non sequitur*. It is a feature of much current scholarship that footnotes and bibliographies are packed with references that are mainly there to reassure readers that the author has read, or is aware of, writings pertinent to the work in question. This practice may be required of a review article or a historiography but it is not the purpose of citation in an academic thesis. Here reference should only be made to works that are directly cited in an argument. It does not follow that a work that is not cited has not been read. If any such omission is to be challenged, the critic must demonstrate its relevance, for example, of ‘Polyclitus and Pythagoreanism’ [Raven 1951] or the Augustan background to Vitruvius [McEwen 2003], to the design of medieval churches, although to complain about the omission of one’s own work almost inevitably risks compromising the appearance of impartiality. The second count relates to the use of translations held to be outdated; but later translations are not always better, or even wholly better. It is up to an author to be discriminating in choosing which translation to use, and a critic to

avoid an indiscriminate blanket approach to reception and to show where and how a particular quotation falls short.

To conclude, just as it is important that critics should be as accountable as authors and publishers, so the grounds for criticism should be, to at least an equal degree, as substantiated as the work being reviewed. In both cases, this leaves the reader with the means to gauge the respective merits of the work and its review. Mere assertion is not enough.

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