

SUBJECT REVIEWS

Greek Literature

Asya Sigelman can write spectacularly well.¹ Recently I've been spending a lot of time with Longinus (a.k.a. almost anyone but Longinus), and there were points in *Pindar's Poetics of Immortality* which made me think: Longinus would have appreciated that! It helped that Sigelman's theme is immortality – which she rightly insists does not, for Pindar, mean indefinite temporal extension: it is realized in a perhaps momentary achievement of god-like excellence (2–3). And prophecy is 'not simply accurate prediction' but the 'god-like vision' with which poets, as well as prophets, are endowed (5), along with the ability to share that vision: 'it is just such sharing that we encounter in Pindar's epinicians' (6). Longinus, too, speaks of the vision of godlike authors (35.2). But the line of argument which reading Longinus had primed me to expect is not the one the one that Sigelman actually takes. She sets her face firmly against 'extrapoetic' circumstances and objectives (9), and insists on reading 'intrapoetically' (11). She is concerned with how all that is extrapoetic 'becomes the stuff and substance of immortality within and by means of the ode, right before the eyes of the song's audience, regardless of which epoch this audience belongs to' (10). (Note, in parenthesis, 'eyes': Sigelman only once remembers that audiences have ears [136]: a very un-Longinian oversight.) One might ask: can the conditions of reception really be disregarded? The question turns out to be otiose (or, rather, the prompt to the question turns out to be misleading), since Sigelman's poet, victor and audience are 'exclusively... intrapoetic characters' (11). From this we can infer that when she says that 'Pindar structures his adjectives and myths in such a way as to keep constant focus on the song's ongoing work of crafting itself from within' (14), she is not referring to *Pindar*, but to an intrapoetic homonym. Yet if the *song* is crafting itself from within, what structuring is left for the intrapoetic poet (a product, presumably, of the song's self-crafting) to do? 'The epinician is always... structured as an address of the intrapoetic "I" of the poet to the intrapoetic "you" of the concentric, progressively widening circles of victor, family, clan, polis, and Hellas' (56). The intrapoetic poet has a structuring function only as one of the structuring devices that the poem uses to compose itself. And the poem is strikingly self-obsessed: 'the core underlying structure of Pindar's song is preoccupied with revealing and displaying the creative poetic effort whereby the song comes to be' (83): that is (since this Pindar is *ex hypothesi* intrapoetic), whereby the song brings itself into being by means of its own 'perpetual self-construction' (84). When 'Pindar lays bare and demands appreciation of his arduous poetic labor' (85), it is not easy to believe that Sigelman is keeping her exclusively intrapoetic promise. But acquitting her of inconsistency entails convicting her of the ontological extravagance of a poem that is

¹ *Pindar's Poetics of Immortality*. By Asya C. Sigelman. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. x + 200. Hardback £64.99, ISBN: 978-1-107-13501-7.

‘a living creature engrossed in the ongoing process of creating itself’ (120), which, as Aristotle impishly said of Plato’s Forms, is ‘empty verbiage and poetic metaphors’ (*Met.* 1.9, 991a20–2) or meaningless ‘tum-ti-tums’ (*An. post.* 1.22, 83a32–4). Nor, I confess, could I make much sense of her account of the semantics of attributive and predicative adjectives (22–3), which leads to the claim that

a story cast in the shape of an attributive adjective (i.e. as a relative clause) is not really a narrative. Semantically, such a story *unfolds itself*, much as how in the phrase ‘beautiful woman’ the beauty of the woman is not something we are informed about by an external agency, but something that the noun ‘woman’ discloses about itself. (27, emphasis in original)

For all my disagreements at a conceptual level, when Sigelman is talking more directly about the texture of Pindar’s poetry she is an attentive and subtle reader (e.g. 78–83), and certainly courageous: she could not have chosen more challenging case studies than *Pythian* 11 and *Pythian* 4. Some excellent, hard thinking has gone into her interpretation of vexing passages (e.g. 98–100). She is impressively sensitive to the force of compound adjectives, and her translations are striking and often revealing. This is certainly a book that should not be left to perform its own self-creation intratextually: it deserves to have readers who will appreciate its extratextual author’s achievement.

Scholarship on Greek tragedy in recent decades has tended towards extreme Athenocentricity: tragedy, it has been argued, is inherently and distinctively democratic, and therefore Athenian. The argument is somewhat circular, to the extent that the democratic reading of tragedy is premised on its being Athenian. This construct has achieved a kind of canonical status: ‘it would seem silly, indeed, for anyone nowadays to seek to undo or contradict completely the scholarly efforts of these last few decades’.² Yet there is evidence, not only of Athenian tragedians producing plays outside Athens, but also of non-Athenian tragedians producing plays, and at least one non-Athenian actor performing in them, in fifth-century Athens. In a dialogue with a dramatic date between 424 and 418, Laches speaks of tragedians presenting their works in other cities: Athens is distinctive only in being the venue the best tragedians aspire to appear in (*Pl. Lach.* 183b–c). The thesis of Edmund Stewart’s refreshingly provocative and well-evidenced *Greek Tragedy on the Move*³ is that ‘tragedy did not become Greek, or “Panhellenic”, but was so from the very beginning’ (9): Panhellenic in its subject matter, in its development from a long-standing Panhellenic song culture, and in its dissemination through established networks that facilitated professional mobility (18). Already in the fifth century, tragedies were being imported into, not just exported from, Athens (91).

² M. Griffith, ‘Introduction’, in D. M. Carter (ed.), *Why Athens?* (Oxford, 2011), 6. The continuation of this claim tendentially restricts the alternatives to interpretations that ‘insist’ on ‘any single...“meaning”.’

³ *Greek Tragedy on the Move. The Birth of a Panhellenic Art Form c.500–300 BC.* By Edmund Stewart, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xvii + 261. Hardback £65, ISBN: 978-0-19-874726-0.

Tragedy was always political in the sense that the *polis* took a major interest in its performances and a stake in the organization of its festivals, on which it lavished substantial sums of money. The notion of a later apolitical theatre derives from a misconceived notion of the relationship between tragedy and politics in fifth-century Athens, one that has tended to characterize the genre as inward-looking and reflective of internal Athenian politics. (169)

This is a book with important implications both for the history of tragedy and for the interpretation of fifth-century Athenian tragedies.

Important, too, is the demonstration in Evert van Emde Boas's *Language and Character in Euripides' Electra*⁴ that modern linguistic theory has the potential to enhance more traditional resources for the literary interpretation of Greek tragedy, and for interpretation's always necessary co-requisite, textual criticism. There is no suggestion that we should abandon more traditional aids to linguistic interpretation (though the reminder that comfortingly familiar standbys such as Denniston's *Greek Particles* are no longer state of the art is salutary); but 'we may ask whether those classic works should be the end point or the point of departure for our enquiries' (269). Specifically,

modern linguistic approaches...offer more than terminological gimmickry: it is not...just a question of giving new names to familiar concepts...[but] a fundamentally different way of looking at language: instead of a collection of symbols that bear meaning according to certain rules, language is a social activity, a *doing*; it acquires its meaning in a process of communication between interactants, each with his/her own background and knowledge, aims and desires. (269, emphasis in original)

Accordingly, van Emde Boas introduces us to conversation analysis, relevance theory, sociolinguistic approaches to gender, politeness, and power, the uses of gnomic language, and discourse cohesion. He does this with admirable clarity, and provides a helpful glossary of technical terms (which are asterisked in the body of the book to remind us that help is available). The first three chapters show how the analysis of linguistic behaviour can throw light on the characterization of the Peasant, whose 'nuanced individuality' (80) is 'drawn with meticulous care. The contours of his characterization are found not only in what he says, but also in how he says it' (79); of *Electra*, whose 'use of language is shaped by her underlying motives, by her past, and – crucially – by her gender' (81); and of *Orestes*, with particular attention to his use of gnomic expressions, and an insistence that their relevance must be interpreted 'in the context of the communicative setting (particular speakers, particular addressees, particular aims)' (186): here van Emde Boas argues 'for a new way of looking at *Orestes*' moralizing passages in the early scenes and against the excessive distrust that these passages...have so frequently aroused' (6). The following three chapters focus on different forms of speech. The treatment of stichomythia, with an investigation

⁴ *Language and Character in Euripides' Electra*. By Evert van Emde Boas. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xvi + 354. 6 b/w illustrations. Hardback £75, ISBN: 978-0-19-879360-1.

of problems of line division and speaker attribution in 671–93 and 959–87, convincingly illustrates how modern linguistic theory can augment the textual critics' toolset: the analysis shows that the manuscripts are 'more reliable than many editors give them credit for' (228). The chapters on the messenger speech and the *agōn* are shorter, and in the latter I was uneasy with the part-by-part comparison of Clytaemnestra's and Electra's speeches (250–60): precisely because language is 'doing', speeches should be read as single actions, not as an assemblage of parts – and these speeches (especially Electra's), as the author acknowledges (258), do not comfortably fit the template he applies. In general, though, I found van Emde Boas's analyses convincing and illuminating. His book combines an excellent contribution to the interpretation of this play with a methodological demonstration that ought to prove influential.

Bloomsbury's *Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy* now cover the whole of the *Oresteia*, with C. W. Marshall taking charge of *Libation Bearers*.⁵ The structure broadly follows the sequence of scenes in the play, but thematic sections are inserted into the sequential exposition. This interweaving of narrative and theme produces some slickly alliterative chapter headings, but also sometimes some structural arbitrariness. The combination of the *recognition* scene with *re-performances* in the 420s has an obvious logic, which the following section on post-classical performance and adaptation ('Further Libations') lacks. With more than thirty examples, from Seneca to *The Empire Strikes Back*, this seven-page section is in addition seriously over-stuffed and under-informative. Marshall is hostile to 'insistence on a single linear interpretation' (compare Griffith, n. 2), which he says 'limits discussion and makes Aeschylus seem more primal than he is' (12). I'm fairly confident that I don't think Aeschylus is at all 'primal' (I'd be more confident if I thought I knew what that meant); but those who do think so are likely to see Marshall's dogmatic denial as an attempt to limit discussion. When I read 'must recall...one would expect...we must assume...I presume' within a few lines of each other (93), even I can't help sensing a smidgeon of insistence. I don't know whether that's insisting on a 'single linear interpretation', because I don't know how the three criteria are meant to relate. Are multiple linear interpretations allowed? Or a single non-linear interpretation? What is a 'linear' interpretation, anyway? And isn't insistence on a single interpretation just as likely to provoke dissent, and thereby promote discussion? I agree, however, that in a book of this kind newcomers should be introduced to a range of interpretative possibilities; and in this respect Marshall generally does a good job. But at times I fear he may lead his target readership astray. For example, the implication that female slaves never talked to each other ('in real life, slave women would be silenced', 107) is unrealistic. There is a modal inconsistency between the way in which a list of twelve elements 'in which the *potential* for humour *may* be thought to exist' (127) is introduced, and the way it ends: 'all of these examples *are* funny' (129, my emphases). That claim is untrue, since in an ancient Greek context there is nothing intrinsically funny in etymological 'puns' (the term is potentially misleading), which are not in any sense 'transgressive to the genre of tragedy' (129). So far as I can see, the claim that the fabric of the tapestries on

⁵ *Aeschylus. Libation Bearers*. By C. W. Marshall. *Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy*. London, Bloomsbury, 2017. Pp. xii + 181. 3 tables. Hardback £40, ISBN: 978-1-4742-5507-3; paperback £16.99, ISBN: 978-1-4742-5508-0.

which Agamemnon walked was the same as that used for the enveloping net in which he died and which is displayed at the end of *Libation Bearers* (132–3) is not supported by any evidence. Marshall states in his text that ‘the actor is being asked to perform a lighting costume change’ after 889 (120): enigmatically, the associated endnote quotes without comment Knox’s statement that ‘there is ample room for a change of costume’ (165, n. 22). The risk of readers being confused by that is, however, mitigated by Bloomsbury’s regrettable reversion to a layout that deters consultation of the endnotes by maximizing the difficulty of navigating from cue to note (see *G&R* 61 [2014], 264, and the premature celebration at *G&R* 64 [2017], 70).

*Creative Lives in Classical Antiquity*⁶ is concerned with creative life-writing (a less restrictive category than ‘biography’) about lives that were creative (poets, predominantly): ‘rather than attempt to reconstruct the “real” lives of any ancient poets, artists or creators’, it ‘takes as its subject...the mesh of fictional biography’ (3; ‘mesh’ derives from a quotation from Stoppard). The stodginess of the prose in the editors’ introduction (the author of *On Sublimity*, invoked on p. 18, would not have been impressed) almost put me off reading further. But I’m glad that I eventually returned to the volume, since it turns out to be full of interesting things. The chapters collectively range widely, and the layering of creators means that many individual chapters range similarly widely: Barbara Graziosi on Malcolm X and Homer, and Theocritus and Anacreon, and Petrarca on Homer, and Salvatore Quasimodo on Aeschylus, is a striking example. A necessarily brief overview cannot do justice to everything on offer here: Constanze Güthenke on biography in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship; Andrew Laird (the only Latin-focused contribution) on Virgil, Petrarca, and numerous others; Anna Uhlig on Pindar as his own and earlier poets’ life-writer; Johanna Hanink on Euripides, subtly reflecting on a little-known anecdote (one that ‘leads a parallel life as a popular historical factoid in the mycologist community’, 139); Polly Low on epigraphic biography; Mary Lefkowitz on biographers of poets and Plato, with special reference to bees; Kurt Lampe on the pseudepistolographic Aristippus (a beautifully constructed paper); Richard Fletcher on dead philosophers in Diogenes Laertius’ epigrams (though there was not, it seemed to me, very much on that); Pauline Le Ven on Ann Wroe’s *Orpheus* and echoes of Orpheus in ancient accounts of other musicians; Verity Platt on ‘the artist as anecdote’ in ancient and modern art history; Miriam Leonard on Freud on Leonardo da Vinci; and John Henderson’s characteristic *envoi*, which Longinus would perhaps have received eagerly as a source of illustrations to stand alongside the passages from Plato and Xenophon in *On Sublimity* 5.4–7.

Readers familiar with Peter Rhodes’s large-scale commentary on the *Athenian Constitution* attributed to Aristotle⁷ or his Penguin translation⁸ will not need me to

⁶ *Creative Lives in Classical Antiquity. Poets, Artists and Biographers*. Edited by Richard Fletcher and Johanna Hanink. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. x + 373. 4 illustrations. Hardback £75, ISBN: 978-1-107-15908-2.

⁷ P. J. Rhodes, *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia* (Oxford, 1981; reissued with addenda 1993): ‘astonishingly thorough, reliable, and up-to-date’ (*G&R* 29 [1982], 204).

⁸ P. J. Rhodes, *The Athenian Constitution* (1984; reissued with corrections 2002); ‘accurate and reliable’ (*G&R* 32 [1985] 90).

tell them that *The Athenian Constitution Written in the School of Aristotle*⁹ displays the same depth of expertise and is as lucid and precise in its exposition as its predecessors. The introduction and ‘more up-to-date but more modest’ (v) commentary are based on his contributions to a recent Italian edition; the Greek text is accompanied by a new and ‘more punctilious’ English translation. This journal’s re-categorization of the work from Greek history to Greek literature may seem surprising; but I, at least, see no reason to complain.

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Latin Literature

The dullest book of the *Aeneid*? Certainly not, insist Stephen Heyworth and James Morwood in their commentary on *Aeneid* 3.¹ There can’t be many students at school or university level who cut their teeth on epic Virgil with his third book, but Wadham College, Oxford, where H&M were colleagues, has been the glorious exception for a quarter of a century, and the rest of us now have good reason to follow suit. I don’t just mean the ‘thrilling traveller’s tale’ (so the dust-jacket) that carries us from Polydorus to Polyphemus by way of such episodes as the Cretan plague, the Harpy attack, and a pointed stop-off at Actium, nor the ktistic and prophetic themes that give this book such weight in Virgil’s grand narrative. There’s also the simple matter of accessibility. *Doctissimi lectores* of *Aeneid* 3 can consult Nicholas Horsfall’s densely erudite and wickedly overpriced Brill commentary, but others have had to make do with one of R. D. Williams’ more apologetic efforts.² (True, there is an efficient student edition by C. Perkell, but that seems to have made little headway in the UK, at least.)³ Now Aeneas’ odyssey takes a place among the few books of the *Aeneid* for which undergraduates and others can draw on commentaries which are at once accessible, sophisticated, and affordable.

H&M found a winning formula with Propertius 3, subject of their last palmary collaboration,⁴ and they reproduce it here with great fidelity: a substantial introduction, a glossary of critical jargon, handy maps, a newly constituted text, the commentary itself, a long ‘appendix of major intertexts’, and a select bibliography (far more is cited throughout). The volume is fifty pages down on Propertius, so no jokes from me à la

⁹ *The Athenian Constitution Written in the School of Aristotle*. Edited with an introduction, translation, and notes by P. J. Rhodes. Aris & Phillips Classical Texts. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2017. Pp. xii + 441. 2 b/w illustrations. Hardback £75, ISBN: 978-1-78694-070-4; paperback £19.99, ISBN: 978-1-78694-837-3.

¹ *A Commentary on Vergil Aeneid 3*. By S. J. Heyworth and J. H. W. Morwood. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xii + 327. 4 b/w illustrations. Hardback £80, ISBN: 978-0-19-87278-11; paperback £22.95, ISBN: 978-0-19-872782-8.

² N. Horsfall, *Virgil, Aeneid 3. A Commentary* (Leiden, 2006); R. D. Williams, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Tertius* (Oxford, 1962).

³ C. G. Perkell, *Vergil. Aeneid. Book 3* (Newburyport, MA, 2010).

⁴ S. J. Heyworth and J. H. W. Morwood, *A Commentary on Propertius, Book 3* (Oxford, 2011).