

THE DITHYRAMB IN RUSSIA

LAHTI (K.) *The Russian Revival of the Dithyramb. A Modernist Use of Antiquity*. Pp. vi + 374, ills. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018. Paper, US\$39.95 (Cased, US\$120). ISBN: 978-0-8101-3669-4 (978-0-8101-3670-0 hbk).

doi:10.1017/S0009840X18002482

It is unsurprising that Russian modernism should have been so attracted to the figure of Dionysus and the unruly passions unleashed in his name. Well before the *fin de siècle*, authors had challenged the cosy norms of bourgeois culture, attuning themselves instead to violence, destruction and death. A frequent recourse to seductive notions of collective identity, as well as a deeply held scepticism about individualism and individuation, meant that primitive rites and mysteries could be easily co-opted into existing notions of communal identity, just as Russian literature's mythologisation of the writer as prophet meant that the figure of the *exarchon* could be readily domesticated too. Finally, claims that the cult of Dionysus was rooted in the worship of the Thracian gods Sabazios and Zalmoksis lent legitimacy to those who would see Dionysus not as some far-off, foreign deity, but as the very incarnation of Slavonic spirituality. Vyacheslav Ivanov, one of the most articulate figures in the revival of Russian interest in antiquity and certainly a candidate for the role of Russia's most ardent Dionysian, was not alone in seeing Dionysus as 'our, barbarian, our, Slavic, god' (cited p. 21). The wonder was that much of the discussion should have taken place in the salons and lecture halls of St Petersburg – a city of neoclassical grace and elegant, even tyrannical Apollonian order. Yet as Pushkin, Gogol and Dostoevsky had long suggested, St Petersburg was also a city of madness, nightmares and annihilation – a city made, then, for the enactment of tragedy.

In this volume L. offers a detailed account of a key moment in the modern reception of the Classics, a field that has proved especially rich when it comes to, say, English, French or German literature, but which has yet to be so thoroughly explored in the case of Russian culture (although L. rightly signals her debt to scholars such as P. Davidson and M. Wachtel). Her study is capacious, learned and rich, and brings to light a single form – the dithyramb – in which many leading Russian artists chose to experiment. In order to do so, L. mines a prodigious range of sources, including 'Russian classical textbooks and reference works, lectures given in Russian, scholarly works by Russian classicists, foreign textbooks and reference materials about Greece that were translated into Russian, and lastly foreign textbooks, reference materials, and academic works that were cited in major Russian books and articles dealing with Greece' (p. 8). In terms of methodology (although L. is less explicit on this point), the volume borrows elements of philology, literary criticism, the history of ideas, reception studies and cultural history.

L. organises her material into eleven chapters (as well as a brief introduction and conclusion), the first of which traces the history of Russian scholarship on the dithyramb (paying particularly attention not just to Nietzsche, but also to the work of E. Rohde), and which is followed by an account of its revival within the broader context of interest in primitivism and evolution. Six chapters follow devoted to key practitioners of the dithyramb as a literary genre – including the aforementioned Ivanov, Fyodor Sologub and Vladimir Mayakovsky. Then come two chapters exploring the way in which the dithyramb was taken up in dance (most notably in the Russian cult of Isadora Duncan, but also in the round-dances, *khorovery*, which figure in Matisse's *The Dance*, Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and Fokine's *Bacchanal*) and in the experimental dramatic practices of Nikolay Evreinov and Vsevolod Meyerhold, although, as the dithyramb was always conceived

of as a synthesis of word, music and action, earlier chapters necessarily allude to its performative aspects. A final chapter examines the afterlife of the dithyramb in the early Soviet period, building on existing scholarship on the Russian reception of both Nietzsche and Wagner by B.G. Rosenthal and R. Bartlett.

The advantages of L.'s approach are many. Her capacious sense of what counts as the Russian 'Silver Age' (as the extraordinary revival of culture around the turn of the century has come, in retrospect, to be known) facilitates the inclusion of a catholic range of creative individuals and artistic groups and helpfully challenges conventional, if lazy, distinctions between symbolists and futurists, the *fin de siècle* and the avant-garde. Her inclusion of dance and drama, as well as poetry and scholarship, similarly widens the purview of what counts when it comes to the study of classical reception. Her writing style is clear and unfussy, although it is periodically punctuated – appropriately enough, given its subject matter – with bursts of enthusiasm and even ecstasy. Certainly there are many leads here that both Russianists and Classicists will want to pursue. Nonetheless, despite L.'s claim that '[t]he subject of our study is the dithyramb form per se' (p. 105), there is a conspicuous lack of detailed commentary on the actual dithyrambs written by Russian poets themselves, or, indeed, their ancient models. To be sure, many are mentioned, and some are summarised, but it can be hard to get a sense of the peculiar texture of the Russian dithyramb, not least because those that are given tend to be presented solely in English translation. For all that L. attends to a substantial and impressive body of Russian scholarship on ancient ritual, the dithyrambic texts themselves are marginalised. Thus, for instance, Ivanov's translation of an ode by Bacchylides (rediscovered on an Egyptian papyrus in 1896) is described, but readers will have to look elsewhere for either the Greek text or Ivanov's Russian version, despite being told that it 'strove to be faithful to the original' (p. 123). Similarly, a Russian translation of six of Nietzsche's *Dionysos-Dithyramben* is cited, but not glossed in any detail. It is indicative that the adjective 'dithyramb-like' figures frequently throughout L.'s monograph, and whilst her inclusive approach to her material brings to light much fascinating, if unfamiliar material, it can be at the expense of detailed exegesis (although her account of the poetry of Mayakovsky is an exception here and constitutes one of the book's most thoroughly worked chapters).

Much of what L. describes will be familiar enough to scholars of the Cambridge Ritualists (Jane Ellen Harrison crops up periodically throughout), and L.'s insights into drama and dance recall work by E. Hall and F. Macintosh that has made a powerful case for the importance of performance as a category within classical reception studies. By comparison, music is a field in which L. feels less comfortable, despite the fact that it is here that the legacy of the Russian dithyramb has been most productive and long-lasting. Aleksandr Scriabin is omitted entirely (other than a glancing reference on p. 286), yet many of his works are suffused with the power of the dithyramb, not least his final, unrealised *Mysterium* (a word sometimes used to render the Greek *drômenon*). Equally, works such as Prokofiev's *Fiery Angel* (based on a novel by that noted dithyrambist, Valery Bryusov), Karol Syzmanovski's *King Roger* (composed under the influence of Tadeusz Zieliński's writings on primitive cults and the sociology of religion) or even Stravinsky's *Perséphone* (the subject of a brilliant 'thick history' by T. Levitz [2012]) await interpretation in the light of L.'s findings. Readers might also have benefited from a more explicit statement of where dithyrambic revivalism fits within the broader field of classical studies in turn-of-the-century Russia. What was the status of a classical education in late Imperial Russia, who had access to classical languages, what role was played by the Classics in the formation of modern literary and intellectual culture? Such topics are touched on but implicitly here, and whilst they may be familiar enough to some

Russianists, a greater engagement with them would have made the book more directly relevant to Classicists more generally.

Wadham College, Oxford

PHILIP ROSS BULLOCK
philip.bullock@wadham.ox.ac.uk

REACTIONS TO LATE ANTIQUITY

SCHOTTENIUS CULLHED (S.), MALM (M.) (edd.) *Reading Late Antiquity*. (Bibliothek der klassischen Altertumswissenschaften, Neue Folge, 2. Reihe, 156.) Pp. 267, colour ill. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2018. Cased, €48. ISBN: 978-3-8253-6787-9.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X1800210X

The period between AD 250 and 750 is not just a time of decline and fall: the redefinition of the time span as Late Antiquity emphasised the cultural liveliness of the period even as the structures of the state were disappearing. This volume captures this vision and, through-out three sections and thirteen articles, develops it. Through a careful selection of essays, the volume expands dramatically not just the canon of works linked to Late Antiquity, but also the contexts of reception. Thus, Late Antiquity is a complex period, and its afterlife not just the product of western scholars and statesmen who appropriated the decline and fall of the Roman Empire and the Early Middle Ages. The book is the product of a conference ‘Reading Late Antiquity’, hosted by the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities in the spring of 2015.

The first part, ‘Theoretical Outlooks’, focuses on the ‘theoretical and methodological implications of reinterpreting Late Antiquity’ (p. 10). The first contribution, by J. Uden, concerns the *Pervigilium Veneris* as it is constructed in Walter Pater’s novel, *Marius the Epicurean* (published in 1884). Uden forces the reader to reconsider Late Antiquity: Pater’s reception of the second-century *Pervigilium Veneris* is late-antique indeed, caught in time between the archaisms of late-antique literature and the novelty of the ideas promulgated with a new age. In his contribution, ‘Fragments, Allegory and Anachronicity: Walter Benjamin and Claudian’, M. Formisano urges the reader to embrace anachronism. In Formisano’s article, Walter Benjamin’s conception of allegory in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* becomes a tool with which Formisano analyses Claudian’s *De raptu Proserpinae*. Formisano states that ‘to adopt an allegorical interpretation implies on the one hand a focus on the individuality and singularity of events and objects, and on the other, a radical subversion of the literal meaning by evoking a multiplicity of extra-linguistic meanings’ (pp. 41–2). This definition in hand, Claudian’s *De raptu Proserpinae* becomes Benjamin’s allegory, especially in the tale of Proserpina’s weaving, which she left unfinished. That Arachne completes the tapestry indicates further discontinuity, an allegory in the sense of Walter Benjamin. The broader conclusion of Formisano’s article is that anachronicity can, in fact, shed new meaning: in an act of inversion, it is the modern text that becomes received by Antiquity. The last article, by J. Hernández Lobato, ‘Late Antique Foundations of Postmodern Theory: a Critical Overview’, returns to more traditional themes, namely the attraction of postmodern thinkers like Derrida and Lyotard to Late Antiquity. Hernández Lobato focuses on the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the