

## SUBJECT REVIEWS

### *Greek Literature*

Lucian figured twice in the previous set of reviews, for better (Peter Thonemann's scintillating *Alexander, or the False Prophet*) and for worse (a posthumous completion of Diskin Clay's *True History* marred by a slew of editorial errors). Now Joel Relihan has furnished us with a trilogy of Menippean fantasies: *Menippus*, or *The Consultation of the Corpses*; *Icaromenippus*, or *A Man above the Clouds*; and *The Colloquies of the Corpses (Dialogues of the Dead)*.<sup>1</sup> Relihan's brief reflective Foreword reminds us that his deep and long-cultivated knowledge of the tradition of Menippean satire extends well beyond the Lucian of the second century. A slightly longer General Introduction explains the specific goals and general principles of Relihan's translation. Then each of the three Lucianic texts is given its own (longer and illuminating) introduction, with footnotes providing a modest commentary. It soon becomes clear that Relihan's ideal interlocutor is not Lucian but Menippus the Cynic. Lucian's subordinate status becomes even clearer when Relihan makes reference to 'Lucian's evolving (*in fact, ever more constricted*) understanding of the potential of the person, productions, and purposes of Menippus the Cynic' (xiv, my emphasis). Relihan's seven-page Afterword is still more disparaging: 'Lucian drained the blood out of Menippus' (156). His conclusion is that 'Menippus in Lucian is good for telling Menippus stories but, after a while, Menippus needs to be put in his place and left there' (159). On the assumption that the Menippus in question is not the Cynic but Lucian's Menippean puppet, I concur. And as I worked my way through the thirty vignettes of *The Colloquies of the Corpses* I realized that I was confronted with an entirely unexpected phenomenon: Lucianic tedium.

From the slender trilogy of works by Lucian we turn to a trilogy of scholarly blockbusters. The first is the massive multi-authored and multi-edited *Reconstructing Satyr Drama*: 'the first collaboration on satyr drama written by experts in multiple fields, aiming at an increased coverage of the genre' (x).<sup>2</sup> Andreas Antonopoulos introduces the volume with a basic question, 'What Is Satyr Drama?', and provides an excellent introductory survey of the field. Thirty-four contributions follow: on genre (four); on language, style, and metre (four); on textual transmission and criticism (five); on 'reflections' on the plays (ten); on satyric influences (three); and on the

<sup>1</sup> *Lucian. Three Menippean Fantasies*. Translated, with Introductions and Notes, by Joel C. Relihan. Indianapolis, IN, and Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 2021. Pp. xviii + 166. Hardback £44.99, ISBN: 978-1-64792-026-5; paperback £13.99, ISBN: 978-1-64792-000-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Reconstructing Satyr Drama*. Edited by Andreas P. Antonopoulos, Menelaos M. Christopoulos, and George W. M. Harrison. Berlin, De Gruyter, 2021. Pp. xxviii + 890. Hardback £136.50, ISBN: 978-3-11-061677-4.

archaeological evidence (eight). The editors and contributors have produced a volume abounding in first-class scholarship that throws new light on many hitherto elusive issues. This collection of papers is an impressive achievement that is sure to provide a stimulus to satyric scholarship.

The reconstructed satyrs occupy 929 pages. But Sappho outstrips them in the bulky form of Camillo Neri's *Saffo, testimonianze e frammenti*.<sup>3</sup> With a 96-page introduction, 308 pages of fragments and testimonia, an Italian translation in 124 pages (page 448 is well worth a visit), 414 pages of commentary, and an 88-page bibliography, along with a multiplicity of lesser *subsidia*, this heavyweight volume delivers its payload in a hefty 1,138 pages.

The third blockbuster is not, on the face of it, quite so imposing: it commands a mere 884 pages – slightly shorter, therefore, relative both to Sappho and to the satyrs. But this is only the first of three volumes that, taken together, will in due course consolidate Ewen Bowie's *Essays on Greek Literature and Culture*.<sup>4</sup> The first volume, comprising thirty-six papers devoted to Greek poetry before 400 BCE, presented in their order of publication, opens with a twenty-page narrative introduction that lucidly tracks and explains the sustained evolution of Bowie's engagement with early Greek poetry. The second and third volumes, which will include Old Comedy and the Greek literature and culture of the Roman Empire, will be worth waiting for. Watch this space!

Robert Fowler's *Pindar and the Sublime. Greek Myth, Reception, and the Lyric Experience*<sup>5</sup> is a profound, erudite, and stimulating book about Pindar, about myth, and about the reception and experience of lyric poetry. It is also about sublimity – or, as more commonly expressed, about 'the sublime': I'll come back to my reservations with regard to that formula in due course. But I am in complete sympathy with Fowler when he says that 'what I missed more and more... was discussion of Pindar as a poet, which is, after all, how he had been read for millennia before' (vi). When Fowler turns to Gerard Manley Hopkins as an analogue to Pindar, I duly concur. Or, at any rate, I concur up to a point. But it is best not to forget that an obvious instance of theological sublimity, 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God', sits between the existential terror of 'No worst there is none...' and the playful frivolity of 'You ask why can't Clarissa hold her tongue...'. Consider, too, how many disparate ways there are in which one might conceive 'the sublime'. Did Cowley, Boileau, Herder, Burke, Kant, Schiller, and Hölderlin all hold the same conception of 'the sublime'? If not, what different phenomena were they conceiving? Is 'the sublime' a thing? Is there a singular concept of *the* sublime? Or would it not be more realistic to think of diverse *instances* of sublimity strategically deployed within the larger context of a poem, or of a forensic, deliberative, or epideictic speech? And what is the rationale that underpins Fowler's throwaway declaration that 'without uncertainty, sublimity is mere delusion' (160)?

<sup>3</sup> *Saffo, testimonianze e frammenti. Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commento*. By Camillo Neri. Berlin, De Gruyter, 2021. Pp. xiv + 1,124. Hardback £136.50, ISBN: 978-3-11-073936-7.

<sup>4</sup> *Essays on Ancient Greek Literature and Culture, Volume 1. Greek Poetry before 400 BC*. By Ewen Bowie. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. xviii + 866. Hardback £135, ISBN: 978-1-107-05808-8.

<sup>5</sup> *Pindar and the Sublime. Greek Myth, Reception, and the Lyric Experience*. By Robert L. Fowler. London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. Pp. xiv + 261. 1 b/w illustration. Hardback £65, ISBN: 978-1-7883-1114-4; paperback £19.99, ISBN: 978-1-3501-9816-6.

Would Longinus agree that the combination of sublimity and certainty is necessarily and ‘merely’ delusive?

I cannot claim to be a huge fan of Philodemus. Indeed, I’m not even a minor fan of that Epicurean philosopher. It would, of course, be unfair to fault him for the obstacles posed by the state of the papyri; but it would be perfectly fair to find fault with him when it is his own expository manner that becomes an obstacle. Yet I do not react to the notable obscurities and opacities of philosophers that I greatly admire (Aristotle, for example, or Plotinus) in the same way: I experience them more as a challenge than as a frustrating obstacle. Why, then, am I so disinclined to declare myself an admirer of Philodemus? Am I unduly unfair to him? Fortunately, I now have the assistance of a trustworthy guide. Michael McOsker’s *The Good Poem According to Philodemus*<sup>6</sup> summarizes the state of Epicurean poetics before Philodemus; Philodemus’ technical terminology and polemical targets; his views on poetry’s utility; the substance of his aesthetics; and his own poetry. What should we make of this? That Philodemus ‘largely denies Aristotle’s statements rather than discussing them’ (99) reveals an inclination to polemical and dogmatic closure. He maintains that ‘poems are not useful *per se* and truly didactic poetry is an impossibility’ (149); and ‘though Epicurean *technai* might normally produce something useful, poetry does not: kinetic pleasure, which poetry does provide, is...not “useful” in the relevant sense’ (149); at best, poems may serve as ‘storehouses of examples or representatives of beliefs that the Epicurean ethicist can discuss or rebut as necessary’ (149); ‘poems and music...are pleasant but totally expendable’ (220). Dogmatic closure and aesthetic insensitivity are not an appealing combination. Let us, then, set the crabby Epicurean dogmatist to one side and turn our attention elsewhere.

Jessica Lightfoot’s *Wonder and the Marvellous*<sup>7</sup> ‘aims to open up the subject of ancient wonder as a more comprehensive and coherent field of inquiry in the modern world for the first time’. In fact, it has a twofold aim: ‘to put *thauma* on the critical map and to demonstrate that wonder and the marvellous are concepts which we can – and should – take much fuller account of when considering Greek culture more broadly’ (2). But isn’t *thauma* already a familiar element in the ancient cultural mind-map? Chapters 2–4 aim to systematize *thauma* in relation to art (‘Nature, Artifice and the Marvellous’), reading (‘Paradoxography and the Textual Collection of Marvels’), and sound (‘Music and the Marvellous’). Chapters 5–7 likewise address cognitive aspects of the experience of *thauma* (‘Cognition, Recognition, Wonder and Disbelief’), near and distant marvels (‘Defamiliarising *Thauma*’), and the making of marvels (‘*Thaumatopoiia* and *Thaumatourgia*’). Lightfoot has certainly accumulated a great deal of marvellous material, but I’m not convinced that the marvels have been organized and interpreted in the most effective way.

And finally, there is Greta Hawes’s *Pausanias in the World of Greek Myth*:<sup>8</sup> a book of exquisite subtlety, eloquence, and precision; a book that is not designed for piecemeal

<sup>6</sup> *The Good Poem According to Philodemus*. By Michael McOsker. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. xvi + 307. Hardback £64, ISBN: 978-0-19-091281-9.

<sup>7</sup> *Wonder and the Marvellous from Homer to the Hellenistic World*. By Jessica Lightfoot. Cambridge Classical Studies. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. x + 260. Hardback £75, ISBN: 978-1-316-51883-0; paperback £29.99, ISBN: 978-1-009-00914-0.

<sup>8</sup> *Pausanias in the World of Greek Myth*. By Greta Hawes. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. viii + 237. 11 b/w illustrations. Hardback £75, ISBN: 978-0-19-883255-3.

cherry-picking. For example: ‘myths are stories which are retold, never merely told; they are a kind of cultural patrimony, absorbed from childhood. And yet they belong, too, to the world of intellectual achievements’ (2); ‘the imagination does not roam on its own but is housed in a living person who moves about the world’ (3); ‘there is nothing mechanical about the way [the *Periegesis*] works...Pausanias, for all his rhetorical stylings, is in the end a craftsman putting Greece into words, and the fabric of Greece is woven tight with *paideia*’ (19); ‘Heracles’ panhellenism rested on diffuse, decentralized knowledge rather than any one particular mechanism... The reader thus oscillates between a common repertoire of panhellenic facts and the new possibilities of local knowledge. But this is an over-simplification... In practice, mythical knowledge is diverse’ (55–6); ‘we can know a lot about places we have never visited... To put it another way we can have knowledge of places we have not experienced because places exist in any number of ways’ (118); ‘we can indeed take epichoric informants seriously as indications of local storytelling so long as we do not slip into making them avatars of actual local *storytellers*. Pausanias’ locals...are products of storytelling infrastructures which fuse local opportunities to trans-local ambitions, chauvinism with outward-looking self-consciousness’ (162–3); ‘I have sought to show that what Pausanias has to tell us about Greek myth is not reducible merely to those things he says about it’ (202). A rich and profoundly rewarding book.

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doi:10.1017/S0017383522000080

### *Latin Literature*

There have been very many exciting books on Latin literature in the past six months; here is at least a small selection. J. N. Adams presents an impressive volume on asyndeton in Latin literature.<sup>1</sup> Based on a thorough examination of different types of asyndeta, with a special focus on *asyndeta bimembra* (‘asyndeta with two members’), Adams discusses ‘grammatical’ and semantic types of asyndeta, as well as their characteristic structural patterns, followed by a discussion of genres and texts, from laws and prayers over asyndeta from texts of the early Republic to the Augustan period. For historiography, Tacitus’ *Histories* and *Annals* are included as well. In the course of his discussion, Adams debunks some long-held beliefs about Latin asyndeta, which, he shows, are not predominantly a feature of sacral or legal language, as has often been claimed. He also argues that asyndeton, rather than evoking speed or rapidity, may instead invite a reading that is slow and deliberate, with meaningful pauses between the individual words (that most famous Latin asyndeton, which is printed on the dust jacket and discussed on 77–8, *veni, vidi, vici* [‘I came, I saw, I conquered’], works very well as an example).

<sup>1</sup> *Asyndeton and Its Interpretation in Latin Literature. History, Patterns, Textual Criticism*. By J. N. Adams. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. xxix + 751. Hardback £130, ISBN: 978-1-108-83785-9.