

Socratic Daemon' by Stefano Mecci. The final section, (IV) 'Socrates' Reception', offers papers looking at Socrates through the lenses of Aristotelian philosophy, the Epicurean tradition, and Cicero's Socrates. Authors in this section include Marta Jimenez, Esteban Bieda, Dino De Sanctis, and Matthew Watton.

DANIEL VÁZQUEZ

Mary Immaculate College, Ireland

Daniel.Vazquez@mic.ul.ie

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Reception

We have two volumes in Bloomsbury's Classical Receptions in Twentieth-Century Writing series edited by Laura Jansen, namely, *Derek Walcott and the Creation of a Classical Caribbean* by Justine McConnell, and *J. R. R. Tolkien's Utopianism and the Classics* by Hamish Williams.¹ Both texts have three main chapters to which is devoted one aspect of the author's reception of the classical world. In the former, McConnell identifies three recurring approaches or processes in Walcott's creation of a 'classical Caribbean', often drawing on postcolonial theory. These are: non-linear or non-colonial temporalities (explored under the heading 'Time'), 'Syncretism', and 'Re-creation'. At the same time, McConnell not only analyses the St. Lucian author's relationship to classical culture and education, but situates his work within that of other Caribbean writers. McConnell paints a cohesive picture of Walcott's (self-)positioning in these entanglements of times, places, and traditions, and makes a number of useful observations about classical reception more broadly.

In 'Time', McConnell wrangles several conflicting and sometimes ineffable models of temporality. On the one hand, Western notions of time have simultaneously emphasized linearity and regularity, while, on the other, those same notions put non-Western cultures at a temporal distance, somehow untouched by the same processes of development and progression that Westerners see in their own societies. McConnell argues that, contrary to this model, Walcott's view is that 'the "New World" is simultaneous with the "Old"' (38). While this might seem unremarkable at first glance, Walcott's work must be understood within a variety of temporal traditions. McConnell, for example, compares his work to Antonio Benítez-Rojo's evocation of an 'aquatic [culture], a sinuous culture

¹ *Derek Walcott and the Creation of a Classical Caribbean*. By Justine McConnell. London, New York and Dublin, Bloomsbury, 2023. Pp. viii + 193. 2 illustrations. Hardback £75.00, ISBN: 978-1-474-29152-1; *J.R.R. Tolkien's Utopianism and the Classics*. By Hamish Williams. London, New York and Dublin, Bloomsbury, 2023. Pp. xiii + 206. Hardback £75.00, ISBN: 978-1-350-24145-9.

where time unfolds irregularly' (41).² The co-eval nature of the 'Old' and 'New' Worlds, then, extends to classical antiquity. Here, as throughout, 'simultaneity' is the key concept for the connections Walcott draws between the twentieth-century Caribbean and the Graeco-Roman world. However, in his *Haitian Trilogy*, which takes inspiration from Greek drama in its portrayal of the Haitian Revolution, Walcott – somewhat controversially – 'posits a cyclical view of history in which violence and tyranny continue to be a catalyst for each other no matter who is wielding power' (50). Time is connected not just to history and anthropology, but also to myth and, ultimately, to forms of epistemology.

In 'Syncretism', McDonnell continues on the theme of simultaneity in a broad conceptualization of the titular concept. McDonnell links the cultural syncretism of the Caribbean to Walcott's merging of different literary traditions. However, as McDonnell stresses, this is not a straightforward enterprise for the author, and she traces his development as writer, arguing that in his early works there is failure to 'achieve a syncretic wholeness', which only comes with his maturity as a writer. Again, McDonnell portrays Walcott as an artist who is deeply invested in storytelling and navigating his own heritage, but refusing to engage in hard binaries. In the fifties and early sixties, he is deemed to 'resist direct oppositions of colonizer and colonized', despite British rule in St. Lucia (79); in staging of the *Odyssey*, his use of Bernal's *Black Athena* (1987) is 'not an Afrocentric manoeuvre on Walcott's part, but rather an illumination of the syncretic nature of the ancient Mediterranean' (94). However, this does not mean that there is no aim to decolonize, but rather, various of his strategies, including his foregrounding of Bernal, contribute to his own nuanced anticolonial literature. Especially interesting here is the argument that his portrayal of Penelope's shock at Odysseus' violence towards the suitors can be read in line with the work of Aimé Césaire in *Discourse on Colonialism* (1959). McDonnell argues that Odysseus' descent into mass killing reflects what Césaire sees as the dehumanization of the colonizer that inevitably follows his dehumanization of others.

'Re-creation' is the shortest of the three chapters but builds on the previous two. McDonnell continues to discuss Walcott's continued engagement with Homer, and at the same time we are privy to his creative trajectory. Re-making becomes a way of understanding Walcott's approach both to his own previous works (and even his job as a Latin teacher) and to the classical tradition. As throughout, Walcott's reception of the classical world is envisaged both synchronically and diachronically. Additionally, McDonnell continues her exploration of the relationship of Caribbean culture to her author. Drawing on her earlier discussion of non-linear time, she argues for the recurrence of an 'Adamic figure' in the guise of Robinson Crusoe and Philoctetes across his work at the point of creation and re-creation. This theme is inseparable from narratives of colonialism, once again highlighting the complexity of Walcott's relationship to this topic.

While McDonnell's chapter topics can be understood as processes of reception, Williams has assigned a type of narrative to each section. However, just as McDonnell's themes double as ways of understanding cross-cultural dynamics in

² Quoted from Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island. The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, second edition, trans. by James E. Maraniss (Durham, NC, and London, 1996), p. 11.

the Caribbean more broadly, Williams' choice of storylines not only reflects a sense of place, too, but highlights Tolkien's Catholic faith and his politico-spiritual worldview. Following a brief introduction to concepts of utopia and an overview of Tolkien's intellectual history, the first chapter is on the lapsarian narrative. Williams builds on a pre-existing scholarly interest in Tolkien's use of 'the fall' in his discussion of classical influences on his portrayal of decline in Middle Earth utopias. These influences are mainly Plato's story of Atlantis and Augustan Rome. Williams identifies the ill-fated Númenóreans with the former, along with Plato's critique of Athenian immoderation and Orientalization. Meanwhile, Augustus' programme of reform and rebuilding is compared to that of Gondor, which undergoes a decline and a '*pax Augusta Gondorea*' (48). Williams also equates the ancient reception of Augustus by, for example, Ovid with other characters' view of Aragorn. In this, therefore, a range of sources are used to elaborate on the extent of Tolkien's classicizing world-building, from poetic and historiographical texts to the design of the Ara Pacis.

Tolkien's narratives are not only inflected with classicism and Christianity, but also his specific historical moment. As he does at several points in the monograph, Williams broadens his discussion by considering other similar and contrasting narratives in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including in film. Tolkien's interest in decline is contextualized with early twentieth-century fascination with the excavations of Sir Arthur Evans and Minoan Crete. However, Williams emphasizes the differences in Evans' and Tolkien's positions as 'two quite different generational worldviews', in which Evans exhibits a 'more expansive, progressive Victorianism', and Tolkien a 'more reclusive, anti-modernist, post-imperial Edwardianism', arguing that the decline of the Atlantean Númenóreans is a comment on British foreign policy (56).

Williams also compares Tolkien's attitude to that of other twentieth-century thinkers in his discussion of 'Hospitality Narratives' in the next chapter. Although accepting that Tolkien's xenophilia may have grown from many diverse sources, he argues that classicism is key. In doing so, he alludes to a range of xenophilic texts that refer to Greek culture and especially to Derrida, whose model of 'absolute hospitality' is sharply divergent from Tolkien's 'conditional, reciprocal model of hospitality' (94). Using an approach from folklore studies, Williams argues that the *Odyssean* Cyclops episode is a key template for *The Hobbit* in its depiction of hospitality gone wrong. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Tolkien has dispensed with all other influences in his exploration of guest-friendship, with the lapsarian narrative also relevant here. Williams claims that Rivendell as the closest approximation to a 'true paradise-home' in the same sense that the Catholic Church is for man having been exiled from Eden (77).

The third chapter considers the sublime, in both a 'material' and a 'spiritual' sense, containing a strong focus on nature. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a key source here, and there is a particularly interesting section on Tom Bombadil as an Orpheus figure who guides the hobbits into experiences a woodland sublime. However, this reception is, according to Williams, mediated through the *Birth of Tragedy* (1872) of Nietzsche. Once again, though, Tolkien's faith colours his articulation of a musical context here. Drawing on a more explicit discussion of musical order in *The Silmarillion*, he argues that, in *The Lord of the Rings*, 'the musical, natural arena of the Old Forest acts as a kind of symbolic microcosm for key theological principles of Tolkien's universal mechanics' (129).

Both of these monographs, then, use their cumulative discussion of three aspects of classical reception across several texts in a way that accounts for the myriad other influences with which Tolkien and Walcott engage. From this, the two authors are able to make larger claims. McConnell explores some tendencies within Caribbean culture's relationship to its history and to other literary cultures, while Williams situates the role of classicism in the utopianism which he claims is 'the blueprint for modern fantasy' (141).

Queering Medieval Latin Rhetoric by David Townsend is the first publication in the 'Cultures of Latin' series, edited by Catherine Conybeare.³ This series aims to restore 'a sense of the Latin tradition as continuous and culturally significant across the *longue durée* from antiquity to the present moment' (ii). While focusing on medieval and late antique texts, this short work certainly contributes to the series' objective, drawing on both specific references to and rhetorical strategies from classical authors, including Cicero, Juvenal, and Ovid. Central to Townsend's overall argument is the rhetorical technique of preterition. This is defined as 'a forensic device which both imputes scandal and claims not to utter it' (3), but the term becomes increasingly capacious in its usage across the work. Both the usage of this device and its theorization by rhetoricians such as Quintilian form part of his study into its deployment by writers conveying 'sexual heterodoxy'.

The main form of 'sexual heterodoxy' in this work is men's desire for other men. However, it also discusses 'coercive heterosexual incest' as another form of 'illicit sexuality' in texts about Apollonius of Tyre (73). These difficult phrases and equivalences themselves reflect the challenges inherent to naming and discussing sexualities across time. In his 'Introduction', Townsend examines different approaches to this topic and sees preterition as central to understanding queer identities in history. He comments on influential theses by Foucault, Halperin, and Sedgwick regarding the continuities and ruptures in queer identities, wherein the ability to name a sexual orientation (or not) can be understood as another kind of preterition. One theorist to whom Townsend returns on several occasions is José Esteban Muñoz, whose expression of a utopian 'queer futurity' is seen as 'not strictly' a form of preterition, but nonetheless as having something in common with the device, due to its reliance on an audience that fills in the lacunae (16). This dynamic and, at times, intimate relationship between author and audience is also one of identification that is necessarily personal. Townsend, who starts with a 'dedication to those silent for generations long before Stonewall', claims his own 'investment' in the project, as a 'gay man' who has 'spent decades cruising texts for hints of heterodox desire that might resonate with my own' (1). The potential for feelings of recognition is rendered with particular power by Townsend in his discussion of Aelred, but emotional reverberations between antiquity, the middle ages, and the present day are found throughout.

The first and fourth chapters both discuss Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis*, an epic on the life of Alexander the Great. In chapter one, Townsend paints a picture of an unstable text, demonstrating strategies of omission that take on a multiplicity of

³ *Queering Medieval Latin Rhetoric. Silence, Subversion, and Sexual Heterodoxy*. By David Townsend. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. ix + 120. Paperback £17.99, ISBN: 978-1-009-20687-7.

meanings when viewed in relation to various commentaries and the source material in Quintus Curtius Rufus. Ostensibly a panegyric, the poem invites its readers to consider and perhaps judge Alexander's desire for Bagoas and other men. Chapter four, meanwhile, examines the passage in which Talestris, queen of the Amazons, meets Alexander. Townsend argues for a destabilizing of binaries in the sex-gender system through Walter's emphasis on somatic signifiers of sex and their concealment through clothes. Townsend both engages in a close, grammatically aware reading and draws on psychoanalytic theory. Chapter two explores how the prose of Aelred of Rievaulx is suggestive of his homosexuality. By turns explicatory and reticent, Townsend argues that not only does Aelred have something of Augustine's confessional tone, but also a touch of Juvenalian satire in his repudiation of vice. Indeed, he claims that '[t]he paradox and instability of satire thus runs conversely to the instability and paradox of preterition' (63). The remaining chapter, on Apollonius of Tyre, expands on the meaning of preterition significantly. In the text's evasiveness regarding Antiochus' lust for his daughter, Townsend sees a mirroring between the 'deep structure of the device' and the narrative in general, claiming that the text's bizarre plotting is mostly a result of the enforced silence around this sexual abuse (85). Indeed, Townsend's arguments are often intricate and perhaps most suitable for those already familiar with the main case studies. However, he also offers a number of interesting approaches to thinking about the long tradition of Latin literature and rhetoric.

Lastly, *Greek Tragedy and the Digital* comprises chapters by scholars from a range of disciplines, including Classics, digital humanities, and theatre studies.⁴ Overall, this collection is concerned with subjectivity and agency, the transformation of society by technology, and continuities and disconnects between ancient and modern approaches to performance. In the 'Introduction' the authors create a narrative of technological innovation, starting in antiquity, drawing on the work of Derrick de Kerckhove, who links the innovation of the phonetic alphabet to the innovation of Greek tragedy. They claim that 'the directors of digital theatre with the special stage writing that they develop, beyond and above that of the text, appear like present-day poets' (7). Similarly, they assert that the technology of the ancient stage, such as the crane, is akin to modern, electronic equipment, in the sense that humans outsource functions to be carried out automatically by both types of tools.

Following this provocative opening, the work is structured into three main sections on intertextuality and intermediality, the chorus, and augmenting reality. These are bookended by a 'Prelude' and 'Postlude' and, finally, an 'In Memoriam' to Michael Cacoyannis by Marianne McDonald. Greek tragedy plays a number of different roles throughout this work; it is a source text, of course, and a historical performance form with certain material and formal attributes, but it is also frequently a trans-historical idea that merges with 'the tragic', often, but not always, denoting certain emotions, or becomes partially co-extensive with popular concepts of myth as a transcendental phenomenon. The 'Prelude' and 'Postlude', by David M. Berry and Paul Monaghan respectively, are clearly engaged with the theorization of tragedy and the tragic. Berry

⁴ *Greek Tragedy and the Digital*. Edited by George Rodosthenous and Angeliki Poulou. London, New York and Dublin, Methuen, 2023. Pp. ix + 226. 4 illustrations. Hardback £85.00, ISBN: 978-1-350-18585-2.

argues that modern ‘computational societies’ could be viewed as tragic in themselves due to their exertion of contrary forces (30). He also shares with McDonald a positive appreciation for digital tools, such as those for corpus linguistics, in making sense of ancient texts.

Meanwhile, taking up some similar philosophical perspectives, Monaghan considers non-human actors in tragedy. He asserts that many later thinkers who wished to remove certain aspects of the actor’s presence as a person independent of the character they portray, for example Edward Gordon Craig, were inspired by ancient tragic masks. He therefore suggests that recent attempts to use digital avatars and other similar features are bringing us closer to the ancient performance style, stating that ‘perhaps there has never been a time when our experience of being post-human is so close to that of the 5th century BCE tragedy’ (208). Digital avatars are also the focus of Giulia Filacanapa and Erica Magris, who, from their own performance practice, find several contiguities between ancient masks and modern motion-capture.

The first section gives an impression of the array of different digital technologies available for stage, their multisensory functions, and their capacity to change the dynamics of an actor’s presence on stage. In chapter one, George Sampatakakis traces a line from the technology of the ancient Greek theatre, such as the *ekkyklema* (roll-out machine), through to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total artwork) of Wagner to the advent of the camcorder and invention of digital sound equipment. In a discussion of modern stage adaptations of tragedy using film, the author says that digital screens can be considered as modern *ekkyklema* by virtue of their ability to reveal information or character. Angeliki Poulou finds other equivalences between ancient and modern, suggesting that when tragedy is analysed in relation to myth and epic it can be seen as rhizomatic, much like digital media. Avra Sidiropoulou, on the other hand, refers to the ways in which technology is used to modernize tragedy, almost as standard. A particularly startling production is discussed here: Wooster Group’s *To You, the Birdie!* (2002), which has its origins in Paul Schmidt’s translation of Jean Racine’s *Phèdre*. This production has Hippolytus in a badminton match with Venus as the referee on a screen. The use of audiovisual equipment reframes the presence and subjectivity of the onstage cast.

The second section posits various ways of conceptualizing and drawing parallels between ancient and modern choruses. Estelle Baudou responds to claims that the digital is employed to ‘demonstrate the fragmentation of the world and the self’ by stating that the digital can be used in the “invention” of the ancient chorus without condemning its communality to fragmentation’ (101). Chloé Larmet and Ana Wegner discuss a project they worked on, in which a ‘singing synthesiser’, the Cantor Digitalis, was used in an adaptation of the *Bacchae* to explore the ‘irrational and mysterious part of each voice’. What is described is that the complex relationship between actors and the synthesizer, or ‘machine-coryphaeus’, allowed actors to understand the use of their own voices more profoundly. Sebastian Kirsch’s was probably the most theoretical chapter of this section and returns us to some of the political questions of the ‘Prelude’, by considering today’s surveillance society and its processing of information in relation to the ‘environmental knowledge’ accessed by seers such as Tiresias in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in addition to the shepherd (140).

Section 3 offers several other conceptually dense but stimulating chapters. Julie Wilson-Bokowiec is also interested in prophecy, but here in relation to the *Oresteia*. The author discusses her own cybernetic project that reflected on the transmission

and mediation of oracles. Mario Telò analyses Akram Khan's performance piece based on *Prometheus Bound*. We have an in-depth reading of both Khan's depiction of an Indian soldier recruited by the British Empire in the First World War and of Aeschylus' text, both contributing to an exploration of colonialism and the body that offers thoughtful comments on both the ancient tragedian and modern performance. This is only a glance at the many insights of this collection. While the attitudes and approaches to ancient culture and material are borne from a variety of disciplinary conventions, they will prove both challenging and useful to classicists with an interest in reception.

Also of interest may be a special edition of the open access journal *Clotho* on Classics in the Soviet Bloc. This reviewer chaired a panel at the original workshop and so declares too close an interest to review it.⁵

RHIANNON EASTERBROOK

Royal Holloway, University of London, UK

Rhiannon.Easterbrook@rhul.ac.uk

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General

In our recent faculty meetings here in Virginia, issues regarding ChatGPT and its uses were often broached, for reasons both good and bad, and this November, as I am writing these lines, turbulences in the AI sector are making the news. In papyrology and epigraphy, we have been relying on advanced digital technologies for a while now, and there's no doubt that recent advances in generative AI will soon bear fruit for all text and image-based disciplines in the humanities. Hence, I will open this general review with four exciting books on ancient science and technology.

'Science is' indeed 'at the centre of modern society', as Liba Taub states in the first paragraph of her *Very Short Introduction* to ancient science.¹ Taub focuses on ancient science rather than technology, and takes her reader on a whirlwind tour through cosmology, astronomy, physiology, maths, geometry, medicine, and more, always careful to provide intellectual and cultural contexts for her observations and to educate the reader in the most economic and efficient fashion. The twelve chapters cover fourteen centuries of Greek and Roman science and its legacy (starting with the eighth century BC) and provide an excellent starting point for anyone interested in the topic, all the more since the author also provided a very helpful selection of further readings.

Technology is not entirely absent from Taub's book, and the reader does get acquainted with highlights such as astrolabes, armillary spheres, and, of course, with the Antikythera mechanism, an endlessly fascinating object, a true marvel of ancient technology. Fascination with technology is also a hallmark of modern society, and Maria Gerolemou's timely new book provides a synoptic overview of the three key

⁵ David Movrin, Elżbieta Olechowska, and Henry Stead, *Clotho* 4.2 (2022).

¹ *Ancient Greek and Roman Science. A Very Short Introduction*. By Liba Taub. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. 154. Paperback £8.99, ISBN: 978-0-198-73699-8.