

## RECEPTION OF GREEK EPIGRAM

NISBET (G.) *Greek Epigram in Reception. J.A. Symonds, Oscar Wilde, and the Invention of Desire, 1805–1929*. Pp. viii + 389. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Cased, £80, US\$125. ISBN: 978-0-19-966249-4. doi:10.1017/S0009840X14002807

N. has produced a thoughtful and thought-provoking examination of the ‘ostensibly “minor” ancient literary genre’ (p. 2), the Greek epigram, broadly applying ‘the Cultural Materialist model of subversion and containment’ (p. 267) in analysis of the epigram’s reception over more than a century. His approach facilitates exploration of personal, cultural and political motivations of not only editors, scholars, translators and emulators of this genre but also readers and reviewers of key works in its long history. This book will be of special significance to those with an academic interest in the Greek epigram generally (and in particular its transmission through permutations of the ‘Greek Anthology’ in English translation) and scholars of the British writer John Addington Symonds (1840–1893). The volume is also a useful addition to reference studies of the Classical Tradition and Victorian Studies, and readers with no specialisation in epigram or Symonds will find contextual information provided by N. helpful. Inclusion of Oscar Wilde as Classical scholar, reader of Symonds’s published works and later correspondent, and the man whose very public 1895 trial and imprisonment for homosexuality provoked a ‘dramatic influence on how Greek epigram was subsequently received’ (p. 218) brings this work into the realm of Wilde studies as well.

The introduction establishes N.’s methodological approach to Victorian Hellenism, especially in sections 1 and 2. A cogent paragraph on the ‘broad thrust’ of the book (p. 11) establishes that the ‘subversion and containment’ to be discussed will centre on the homoerotic elements of Greek epigram in terms of appropriation, dissemination and backlash. Sections 3–9 of the introduction provide a concise overview of the textual transmission of the Greek epigram from antiquity to 1806 alongside context on how published English translations of Greek epigram to be considered and reactions to these may inform our understanding of the beginnings of ‘identity politics’.

Part 1 is divided into two chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on the anonymously published *Translations Chiefly from the Greek Anthology: with Tales and Miscellaneous Poems* (1806) by the ‘gentleman-amateur’ (p. 39) translators Robert Bland, John Herman Merivale and Francis Hodgson and the later (1813, 1833) *Collections from the Greek Anthology*. These *Collections*, which were editorially acknowledged as the work of Bland and Merivale respectively, included the work of a growing number of translators and interpreters, and collected increasingly long titles indicating ongoing inclusion of ancient Greek texts well beyond the content of surviving manuscripts which make up the Greek anthologies proper. N. outlines for the reader the malleable nature and content of published ‘Greek Anthologies’ to be considered later in the book. He also offers a heady but cogent primer on British social systems and politics of the era, which places the reviews and reception of his considered epigrammatic volumes, here and to come, in useful context. This chapter also invites the reader to consider broadly the Greek epigram in reception in light of Winkelmann’s ‘stylistic schema’ of Greek art history as a ‘bell curve’ of ‘growth, maturity, and decline’ (pp. 44–5). Chapter 2 focuses on three ‘Anthologies’ published 1849–1864 as examples of continuing editorial efforts to ‘bring home a naturalized classic’ (p. 77). Problems of selection, scope, size and arrangement are discussed alongside issues of audience and the epigram’s place in pedagogic tradition.

Part 2 highlights Symonds's life and works especially his role in promoting the Greek Anthology as a link 'between the Classic and ordinary humanity' (p. 142). Chapter 1 stimulatingly addresses his views on 'actions and desires' expressed in the Greek Anthology as 'common' to humans in all ages and morality as subjective to realities of 'a particular time and place' (pp. 142–3). Concluding commentary on how 'Symonds's Anthology recuperates gay male desire as a cultural good – indeed, as a national ideal' (pp. 168–9) neatly returns readers to the idea of Anthology as 'naturalized classic' and sets the stage for contemplation of the appropriation, dissemination and backlash covered in Chapter 2. At the forefront here are Symonds's *Studies of the Greek Poets* (First Series, 1873; Second Series, 1876). Two interwoven reactions are considered: the politically motivated conservative policing of Symonds's homoerotic subtext and the appeal of *Studies* to a 'daring new generation' (p. 209) including Wilde. Sections 5 and 6 give brief, observant attention to Wilde as the poet who 'put Uranian and Pandemic eros in the dock' (p. 214) at a 'pivotal cultural moment in the emergence of modern identities' (p. 215).

In Part 3 N. weaves a garland of his own, surveying responses to Symonds and tracing the Anthology's 'lure' (p. 280) well into the twentieth century. This aspect continues into the conclusion and leaves readers with intriguing questions 'raised by epigram's strange modern back-story' (p. 338). An appendix highlights Symonds's practice of referencing epigrams as gems of precious stone. The bibliography and index are generous and helpful. This volume is an apt addition to the Oxford University Press *Classical Presences* series.

Wilde scholars may find concern in N.'s misidentification on page 1 of the introduction of the book's opening quotation as 'Oscar in court, 1895'. This quote, beginning 'What you call vice ... is not vice', is correctly cited by N. as from H. Montgomery Hyde's *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*, pp. 312–13; however, Hyde is himself quoting from the controversial Frank Harris's 1916 *Life and Confessions of Oscar Wilde* a statement Harris reports Wilde having made to Harris in late 1898 or early 1899. 'What you call vice, Frank, is not vice' (Harris, Chapter 24). The elision of 'Frank', which is present in Hyde's citation, is troubling; but, the convoluted transmission of Wilde's reported statement merely raises a small flag of caution that does not overshadow the value of this lively and accessible study of the Greek epigram and its variously-motivated readers.

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## SPARTANERN

ROCHE (H.) *Sparta's German Children. The Ideal of Ancient Sparta in the Royal Prussian Cadet Corps, 1818–1920, and in National Socialist Elite Schools (the Napolas), 1933–1945*. Pp. xiv + 306, figs, ill., maps. Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2013. Cased, £45. ISBN: 978-1-905125-55-5.

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Academic scholarship on Antiquity in National Socialist Germany became a subject of necessary scrutiny relatively early after the Second World War and was considered a critical part of what would later be called German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past). This is especially true of research on Sparta. The role of Sparta in the military elite schools of Prussia and the Third Reich was not explored in the process,