

and early translations of Bacon's mythography (pp. 156–61), a section that lays the groundwork for further research on the reception of Bacon across seventeenth-century Europe. With Chapter 5, H. turns her attention to Henry Reynolds, whose 1632 *Mythomystes* is interpreted for its fluctuating and, at times, murky debts to both neo-Platonism and Pythagoreanism, especially that of Iamblichus, in order to establish how and to what extent Reynolds understands pagan myth as a precursor of Christian truth. This chapter concludes with a marvellous reading (pp. 190–201) of Reynolds's account of the Narcissus and Echo myth that explicates Reynolds's transformation of his classical and Renaissance sources while also demonstrating his hermeneutic methods as an interpreter of ancient myth. Equally successful is the book's final chapter, on the prolific Scottish writer and controversialist (and early translator of the *Koran*) Alexander Ross, which interprets his several mythographic writings in light of his views on civil theology, on ceremony, and on heresy and idolatry. The final two chapters in particular are exemplary scholarship on minor figures worthy of greater attention for their pivotal role in the re-interpretation of classical mythology and pagan religion in the decades leading up to the English Civil War, and it is thus not surprising to find far greater attention paid, in these two closing chapters, to the ways that myth could be wielded to support conflicting political ideologies and doctrinal positions.

Methodologically, the book is a happy mixture of close intertextual reading, a bit of book history and a good bit more reception theory, with an introduction that might serve some Anglo-American readers as a useful introduction to the distinct critical discourse of German reception theory. Throughout, H. is attentive to the ways in which classical mythology, for its Renaissance readers, is thoroughly mediated by early Christian and patristic writers, Augustine especially. The work is largely free of typos and errors of fact, although the reference to the philosophical dialogue between 'the emperor Augustus and the philosopher Epictetus' (p. 66) erroneously translates from the Latin title (*Altercatio Hadriani Augusti et Epicteti philosophi*), since the Stoic philosopher's purported interlocutor in this fictional work is the early second-century CE emperor Hadrian, and not Augustus, who lived a century earlier.

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LESSING'S *LAOCOON* IN CONTEXT

LIFSCHITZ (A.), SQUIRE (M.) (edd.) *Rethinking Lessing's Laocoon. Antiquity, Enlightenment, and the Limits of Painting and Poetry*. Pp. xxxiv + 411, ill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Cased, £80, US\$110. ISBN: 978-0-19-880222-8.

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One way to step into the astonishingly vibrant, multifaceted, unsteady world of late eighteenth-century German thought is to join the narrator of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laocoon* (1766) on what he characterises as that project's casual 'stroll' (opening of Chapter 20) – a sequence of observations and polemics that turn out to engage philology, aesthetics, archaeology, philosophy and psychology and that have irritated and inspired in the two and a half centuries since their first publication. If the text has both delighted and maddened its readers, this has undoubtedly had something to do with the question of whether – or rather, how – to take its wanderings seriously. In his preface,

Lessing defends his publication of these 'unordered notes' by noting dryly that Germany suffers no lack of 'systematic books', suggesting instead that his thoughts offer a salutary freshness in the very looseness of their form. A newcomer to the discipline of Classical archaeology who frames his essay, in the first lines of its opening chapter, as a critique of Johann Joachim Winckelmann's influential analysis of ancient Greek aesthetics and cultural norms, Lessing presents a disruption to disciplinary tradition that makes of his polemic affronts something of a 'gay science' *avant la lettre*, one that assuredly possesses its own rigour and vitality. On the other hand, Lessing's polemic spirit itself and perhaps the compulsion to prove himself in a new field lead the text at times into lengthy and pedantic discussions of current and past theoretical positions in an attempt to extract and highlight a new idea.

Accordingly, the *Laocoon* has from the beginning provoked readings that alternatively endeavour to evaluate the text's relation to eighteenth-century thought, to later intellectual traditions or to the Classical materials on which it is largely focused; or, either in addition or instead, readings that have sought to underscore the *Laocoon*'s relevance or limitations as a source for contemporary theory. The current anthology, which is the first one focused on Lessing's essay to have been published in English, marks the 250th anniversary of the *Laocoon*'s first publication with a rewarding combination of these approaches.

The volume is appropriately interdisciplinary, bringing together 'a motley crew of classicists, intellectual historians, philosophers, literary critics, and historians of art (among others)' (p. 3), including a number of names that will be familiar to anyone who has been following research on the *Laocoon* in recent years as it has been conducted in particular in Germany, Britain and the US. Roughly speaking, its contributions reflect the following concerns, which align with the observation above about the *Laocoon*'s reception in general: (1) examination of the text's historical connections with the thought of antiquity, of the Enlightenment and of the present; and (2) consideration of what the text has to say today, especially in aesthetics and media theory. Additionally (3), one notes the recurrent concern, which has played a small but decisive role in scholarship of the past 25 years or so, with the text's performative modelling of the forms of thought that it analyses.

W.J.T. Mitchell and D.E. Wellbery stand at the threshold of the collection, as two scholars who have had a particular impact on readings of the *Laocoon* since the 1980s, and discussion in this volume of Lessing's importance within media theory and within Enlightenment culture organises itself in part in response to ideas that they have elaborated in their work. In his foreword, 'Why Lessing's *Laocoon* Still Matters', Mitchell relates Lessing's attempt to separate the arts of space (the plastic arts) from the arts of time (*Poesie*, which Lessing understands first and foremost as a narrative form) to the distinct categories of Kantian intuition. However, he reiterates the important point (articulated in his 1986 *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*) that the essay's enduring achievement is not to have realised a clean disentanglement of the arts, but rather to have elaborated the difficulties that face such an attempt, and in so doing to have outlined a theory of 'intermediality' (p. xxix) more nuanced and productive than that allowed by the stark demarcation announced in Lessing's subtitle: 'An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry'. Wellbery, whose 1984 *Lessing's Laocoon: Semiotics and Aesthetics in the Age of Reason* proved seminal in illuminating eighteenth-century semiotics and media theory, relativises the centrality of these concerns both within the text itself and in current debates about the arts: he argues that the larger contribution of the *Laocoon*, which the work articulates discursively and at the same time enacts performatively (p. 64), is to demonstrate the function and importance of critical judgement, as the act of mediating between individual instance and general rule. At a time when 'theory' has largely sidelined 'criticism' as the name for

our engagement with the arts, Wellbery argues (p. 61), the *Laocoon* shows us what it means to establish the validity of theoretical concepts in the first place (p. 63). Lessing's text, he suggests, makes this case in showing how we reach moral judgements in particular through the representation and evaluation of actions. To understand Lessing's principle of the 'pregnant moment', say, is to understand a more general point about how the arts represent what it means to be human (p. 78).

Where the opening contributions – including the extensive introduction by Lifschitz and Squire – frame the anthology's overall discussion, the following chapters each adopt a narrower focus. Several do so by taking on specific theoretical insights of the *Laocoon* and considering their value for contemporary thought. In L. Giuliani's reading, for instance, Lessing's text highlights a 'fundamental difference' between texts and images that results from their respective abilities to steer the process of their reception (p. 139). Giuliani elaborates the nature and consequences of this distinction and then shows how it can be applied in order to yield new insights into ancient Greek iconography. J. Grethlein presents a different way in which Lessing's distinction between the arts remains useful. In particular, Grethlein argues, if we reframe Lessing's division as one between 'narrative' and 'picture' (p. 313), we can compensate for a deficiency in the aesthetic theory of Kendall Walton, namely the failure to account for differences in the way that 'make-believe' functions in different media. Citing Richard Wollheim's principle of 'seeing-in' and Husserl's notions of retention and protention, Grethlein makes the case for using the *Laocoon* to differentiate between spatial and temporal forms of aesthetic illusion. J. Trabant's essay similarly regards Lessing as a collaborator in ongoing theoretical discourse. Specifically, he describes the work of his own Berlin research group, 'Symbolic Articulation', as elaborating forms of commonality between language and image that are signalled in the *Laocoon*'s depiction of the sister arts, in Chapter 18, as 'friendly neighbours' who both respect each other's property boundaries while also acquiescing to the occasional necessary incursion. Lessing's achievement is to have 'liberated the old *paragone* from the sterile enmity of image and word' (p. 363) by revealing an iconicity that word and image have in common. This 'common ground', Trabant writes, has wider implications: 'it consists in an anthropological parallelism of human cognitive activity and of the embodiment of thought' (p. 363).

Most of the volume's chapters adopt a more emphatically historical perspective. Squire shows how closely Lessing's privileging of the arts of the word over those of the image corresponds to a Protestant paradigm that the eighteenth century inherits from the German Reformation. F. Beiser investigates the influence of Lessing's friend Moses Mendelssohn on Lessing's attempts to defend his hierarchical understanding of the arts, showing the similarities and differences of the two thinkers' responses to the rationalist aesthetics of Christian Wolff and his successors. K. Harloe looks at how Lessing engages with Adam Smith in developing his own understanding of pity as a 'quintessentially moral and social emotion' (p. 159). She argues that considerations of tragic pity are central to the conception of the *Laocoon*, that Lessing carefully reads Smith's work and adopts many of its key ideas, but also that Lessing builds significantly on Smith's theory. Lifschitz and J. Gaiger organise their analyses largely in response to Wellbery's 1984 book. Lifschitz rejects that study's presumption of an overarching Foucauldian episteme that informs eighteenth-century semiotics. He argues instead that authors of the time present widely divergent approaches to the idea of the 'natural' sign and suggests that the *Laocoon*'s discussion of 'natural' and 'arbitrary' signification reflects this diversity. Gaiger's argument is related in that he too argues for a plurality of philosophical influences with which Lessing's *Laocoon* engages. His chapter, which organises itself in a more sustained and focused manner as a critique of Wellbery's book, argues that, by presenting Lessing as committed

to the idea of the transparent sign, Wellbery insufficiently recognises in Lessing an analysis of the ‘specific achievements and effects’ (p. 280) that each medium as such enables.

Among those that are least focused on Lessing’s text itself, R. Robertson’s chapter takes the *Laocoon*, and Goethe’s response to the work, as a starting point for a consideration of the representation of pain in Goethe’s writing in general and at the end of *Faust I* in particular. D. Fulda examines a topic that has hardly been discussed in criticism of the *Laocoon* – the text’s relevance to Enlightenment philosophies of history writing: Fulda makes a case for Lessing’s influence on the historian Johann Christoph Gatterer’s attempts to employ the rhetorical tradition’s principle of *dispositio* to achieve writerly vividness by constituting the proper ordering of information from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. In his closing ‘Envoi’, H.U. Gumbrecht reflects on the collection’s mediation between historicist approaches to Lessing and attempts to engage him as a contemporary. The volume itself, he suggests, may represent a more general sense of uncertainty, as we examine Lessing’s engagement both with his contemporaries and with antiquity, in making sense of our own ‘post-historical’ culture (p. 371).

I have mentioned that this volume also examines ways in which the *Laocoon* performs aspects of its own theory. This is a dimension of Wellbery’s chapter. It is also the central concern of É. Décultot’s, which adapts Lessing’s theory of poetic action to argue that Lessing practises a form of ‘critical action’ (pp. 253–4). The theme reappears in P. Kottman’s thesis that the *Laocoon* attempts to ‘earn its status as a work of criticism or critical judgment’ (p. 332) by enacting an encounter between the roles of the amateur and the critic cited by Lessing in his Preface.

The essays that make up this volume are well worth reading. They are written by individuals who have important things to say about the *Laocoon*, and collectively they offer to an English-speaking audience a good overview of the concerns currently driving discussion of this work, its relationship to thought of the eighteenth century and to our own age, and to the *Classical Presences* of the series, so named, in which it appears.

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THE RECEPTION OF HOMER AND TROY IN THE LATE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

USLU (G.) *Homer, Troy and the Turks. Heritage and Identity in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1870–1915*. Pp. 219, b/w & colour ills, colour maps. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017. Cased, €105. ISBN: 978-94-6298-269-7.

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This book is part of an exciting scholarly trend highlighting diverse voices and perspectives on classical culture, both literary and material (e.g. Z. Bahrani et al. [edd.], *Scramble for the Past. A Story of Archaeology in the Ottoman Empire, 1753–1914* [2014]). U. sets out to demonstrate that the Ottomans were far more interested in classical heritage, including Homer and Troy, than has been recognised hitherto. She argues that European engagement with classical culture was no less of an appropriation than