

nineteenth-century paintings to Nazi propaganda films) direct us to its ultimately reactionary agenda. Peter Rose is also concerned with *Gladiator's* political stance, making (among others) the important point that the influence of commercial concerns on mainstream films should never be overlooked. The most disappointing contribution is Jon Solomon's chapter on the development of the film from its original screenplay to the final screen version. Solomon begins promisingly by noting the abundance of electronic sources (online and on DVD) available to those studying recent films. However, his subsequent discussion demonstrates the potential problems in using such resources when he assumes that a version of the script published online and marked 'First Draft' is the first version (it is the second). There is also a significant omission in his discussion of the film's three consecutive (credited) writers, with the final (and thus perhaps most influential) writer, William Nicholson, completely unmentioned.

For the most part *Gladiator: Film and History* offers a promising model of the multiple approaches that may be taken to a single cinematic text. The stated aims — to appeal to a broad readership and to avoid jargon — are laudatory, and many (though not all) of the contributors display a genuine respect for cinema which does not override their awareness of the often inaccurate historical representations it produces. Its demonstration that even highly commercial products of popular culture can still yield serious insights and analysis can only benefit the study of classics and cinema.

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T. HOLLAND, *RUBICON. THE TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY OF THE ROMAN REPUBLIC*.

London: Abacus, 2003. Pp. xxviii + 430. ISBN 0-349-11563-X. £8.99.

M. PARENTI, *THE ASSASSINATION OF JULIUS CAESAR. A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF ANCIENT ROME*. New York: The New Press, 2003. Pp. x + 267. ISBN 1-56584-942-6. US\$16.95.

F. MEIJER, *EMPERORS DON'T DIE IN BED*. London/New York: Routledge, 2004. Pp. viii + 183. ISBN 0-415-31202-7. £14.99.

History sells, and ancient history seems to sell at least as well as any other kind. Along with film and various formats of television and radio documentary, the trade paperback feeds and responds to a phenomenal current public interest in antiquity. That interest impinges on UK academics in the form of repeated invitations to act as consultants and talking heads. More importantly, it has been accompanied by high levels of applications for places on degrees in ancient history, in the process protecting many departments from the financial pressures on science subjects, modern languages, and vocational degrees less successful in attracting students. While applications to single honours archaeology degrees fall, ancient history and historical archaeology remains buoyant.

It is all the more important then that the quality of popular accounts of ancient history remains high. Those who work on Roman Britain know that the images created by Rudyard Kipling and Rosemary Sutcliffe have proved surprisingly difficult to dislodge from public understandings of the subject despite vast amounts of fieldwork and synthetic research. Fiction has perhaps had less impact on mainstream Roman history, although a flower-girl found her way from *The Last Days of Pompeii* into Jack Goody's *Culture of Flowers* and this reviewer once received an application to write a doctoral thesis on Roman private eyes from one of Lindsey Davis' many fans. The three books under review here, however, are all non-fiction. All are aimed at a large popular readership. Their authors move into this inviting space, where both accuracy and readability are virtues, from different backgrounds: Holland (H) is a novelist and has adapted several classical texts for radio, Meijer (M) is a professor of ancient history at Amsterdam, and Parenti (P) is a political analyst with a commitment to radical and progressive politics in general and democracy in particular.

Perhaps surprisingly, it is the professional academic who is least successful. The style is cheery and the idea a good one: the extent to which the history of the Principate was punctuated by assassinations and unexpected deaths has never emerged so clearly. But the whistle-stop tour through every emperor's death necessitated even more compressed accounts of each reign. As a conscientious historian M. finds himself caught between misleading certainties and the drip, drip, drip of qualifications 'it seems', 'doubtless', 'must have', and 'perhaps'.

P.'s is a very different enterprise, in essence a politically engaged history of the late Republic. The aim is two-fold: first to offer an account in which Caesar's murder is the climax of a series of

repressive responses made by the Republican élite to any politician who took the side of the populace; and second to expose the extent to which modern historians have identified, often tacitly, with the interests and opinions of their élite sources. The first aim is less heterodox than P. claims and he fairly acknowledges those historians who have got there first, de Ste Croix above all but with words of praise for Keith Bradley, Moses Finley, and some others. Some non-Marxists may find the language of class war objectionable, but P. is a careful historian and the provocation is deliberate. I expected to be less convinced by the attack on historians of the twentieth century, but was surprised to find again and again respected figures convicted in their own words, mostly of unconscious bias but bias none the less. The treatment of writers of the 1970s on seemed least satisfactory: the works of Peter Brunt and Andrew Lintott seem to me to have been particularly misunderstood. Perhaps academic historians have taken the liberal consensus so much for granted that we no longer stress what we know about the social injustices of antiquity. Or maybe, our response to partisan history has been to evade passing judgements. Perhaps the most important lesson for academics is how easily we can be misinterpreted — even by an intelligent commentator such as P. — and how the citing of ancient testimony as authorities can seem to condone attitudes that are worse than outdated.

H.'s *Rubicon* comes with a raft of recommendations from academic and popular historians, journalists, and even a few novelists. It does not disappoint. Easily the best written of the three, enormous care has been taken over scholarly precision. At its heart is a gripping narration of the last fatal century, from the Gracchi to the death of Caesar as it were, with glances back to the early Republic and forward to the end of Augustus' reign. H. writes like an action movie, pulling back from the ferocious pace of events for the odd vivid sighting shot 'Set within its icy waters waited the fabulous island of Britain. It was as drenched in mystery as in rain and fog'. By contrast with novelizations of the same period, such as Phyllis Bentley's *Freedom Farewell!*, H. spends relatively little time in the heads of his protagonists, preferring to characterize Homerically, with epithets and snatches of dialogue. Keeping the pace going entails one necessary but drastic economy. H. cannot pause to debate alternative versions, and instead chooses where more than one ancient account exists. But his choices are always reasonable, and extensive research has ensured that his retelling of the fall of the Republic respects nuance as well as factuality. Such an exciting account has not been written of the Republic since Syme's *Roman Revolution*.

One obvious common theme emerges, and it is this: political narrative rules. The contrast with academic publications is striking. To paraphrase Eric Hobsbawm, we are all cultural historians now, so long as we allow that capacious label to include a return to the classics armed with critical theory, a fascination with issues of gender, identity and religion, and the growing fields of reception and material culture studies. Yet on station bookstalls and Amazon listings it is imperial biography and military history that represent our field most prominently. This is not a bad thing in itself, but the distance between research themes and public understanding is striking. No work of Roman cultural history has yet replicated the commercial success of James Davidson's *Courtesans and Fishcakes*. For those who want to take up the challenge of bringing current research to a general public, the three books under review provide abundant tips on how to cross that other Rubicon from academic publishing into trade. For university teachers, they also provide a reminder of what brought our students to the study of Roman antiquity in the first place.

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L. POLVERINI (ED.), *ASPETTI DELLA STORIOGRAFIA DI ETTORE PAIS*. Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2002. Pp. 352. ISBN 88-495-0535-3. €28.50.

This collection of twelve essays, with an introduction and concluding remarks, on the Italian historian of the ancient world Ettore Pais (1856–1939) originated in a conference held in Perugia in 1992. Other such meetings, also promoted by Leandro Polverini, have focused on individuals' work, such as Beloch (1990), Rostovzeff in Italy (1999), and, most recently, Momigliano (in press). What, however, sets the study of Pais apart is that he is a less well-known figure, especially outside of Italy, and that this lesser fame is inescapably bound up with a much-divided judgement on the value of his work, as Polverini acknowledges in the preface.

In the introduction P. outlines Pais's long and multi-faceted career: the advanced study with Mommsen in Berlin and the ensuing life-long collaboration on the *CIL*; the academic career with chairs in Palermo, then Pisa, Naples, and Rome; the publication record of more than two hundred