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SUBJECT REVIEWS

(* denotes that a book is specially recommended for school libraries.)

Greek Literature

Since I've sometimes been disparaging about handbooks, companions, and guides, it is only fair to acknowledge that Kathryn Gutzwiller's 'introduction to the literature of the Hellenistic age for students of classics and for general readers with an interest in the ancient world' (xi) is exceptionally good.[1] Informative chapters on Hellenistic history and culture, and aesthetics and style, precede the longest chapter, which surveys the field by author and genre. The final chapter has a thematic structure: learning and innovation; book culture and performance; social and political background; the critical impulse in literature and art; and Roman reception. Gutzwiller covers a lot of ground in not very much space, without the exposition ever appearing either skimpy or cramped, and gives a good sense of the breadth and diversity of Hellenistic literature (not just poetry), along with a basic understanding of the historical, social, and cultural context. This is a model of the genre. Mark Payne[2] acknowledges that 'formalist' criticism has served Hellenistic poetry well, but aims to transcend it by providing 'a detailed account of the kinds of world-making' found in Theocritus' bucolic poetry (9). Though his detailed observations left me with a deeper appreciation of the variety and subtlety of the poet's fictional techniques, the title's 'invention of fiction' makes a stronger claim for Theocritus than fictional invention. The thesis that his bucolic world was 'the first fully fictional world in Western literature' (1) is not sustained, and depends on a distinction between 'mimetic' and 'fully fictional' fictions that is not clearly articulated, and will not (I suspect) prove sufficiently stable to bear the weight placed on it. There is more solidity in Andrew Morrison's fine study of the 'primary narrator' in archaic and Hellenistic poetry,[3] which demonstrates sustained and sophisticated engagement on the part of Callimachus, Theocritus, and Apollonius with a wide range of archaic poetry (choral lyric, monody, iambus, and elegy, as well as Homer and Hesiod). In their use of a variety of narrative techniques ('quasi-biography, the development of consistent narratorial personas across an author's corpus, the relationship of such a narratorial persona to the historical author's biography, the creation of an impression of extempore composition by the narrator, the depiction of the narrator's relationship with the Muses, and . . . the use of emotional and evaluative language by the primary narrator' [36]), the archaic poets provided a 'pattern book' for the construction of narratives and narrators (14), on which their successors drew. The discussion of Callimachus (focusing on the *Hymns*, *Aetia*, and *Iambi*) is the longest and richest chapter, fully justifying Morrison's insistence that 'Callimachean aesthetics . . . are

[1] *A Guide to Hellenistic Literature*. By Kathryn Gutzwiller. Oxford, Blackwell, 2007. Pp. xvi + 261. 3 maps, 11 figures. Hardback £50, ISBN: 9780631233213; paperback £19.99, ISBN: 9780631233220.

[2] *Theocritus and the Invention of Fiction*. By Mark Payne. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. vii + 183. Hardback £50, ISBN: 9780521865777.

[3] *The Narrator in Archaic Greek and Hellenistic Poetry*. By A. D. Morrison. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. xii + 358. Hardback £55, ISBN: 9780521874502.

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revealed primarily by Callimachean practice, not in a dedicated "programme"' (220). Not everything persuaded me. 'The fact that the Muses claim for themselves the ability to speak falsely as well as truly is clearly not a destabilising of Hesiod's own narratorial authority . . .' (76): how could it not be? On the other hand, the reading of the *Argonautica* as telling a story about 'an evolving "crisis" of the narrator' (272; the narrator is not, of course, Apollonius), in which 'the narrator is progressively losing confidence in his own ability to tell his story' (297), came to seem disconcertingly plausible. David Fearn[4] examines Bacchylides' engagement with the poetic tradition, and with the cities and individuals who commissioned the poems. His discussions of Bacchylides 13 and 15 are lengthy, subtle, luxuriantly footnoted, and undeniably rewarding. His reassessment of the relationship between *kuklioi khoroi* and (not exclusively Dionysiac) dithyramb is also important, if not entirely accessible: here, as elsewhere, many readers will wish that he had provided an orderly introduction to the issues, and been less allusive in his treatment of the secondary literature. Consideration of the performance contexts of *kuklioi khoroi* introduces an attempt to understand the Panathenaea as an ideologically significant civic event. The case, though unavoidably speculative, is also suggestive; the reminder that we should not exaggerate the uniqueness of the City Dionysia is certainly salutary. But there is also much to argue with. Assembling complex patchworks of connections to particular passages in Homer and the tiny proportion of archaic poetry that has fortuitously survived does not strike me as the most fruitful or plausible way of approaching Bacchylides' allusiveness. Claims about what a text makes 'us' do (130, 274, 277) disguise normative recommendations as descriptive reports: 'immediately we are struck' (283) – are we? all of us? (Who *are* 'we'?) The implication that a certain reading is automatic and universal sits uneasily beside Fearn's demonstration of the ways in which different contexts of reception may open up diverse readings. Fearn confuses intentionalist with biographical readings (3 f.); despite his scepticism, he displays a hyperintentionalist readiness to make statements about the contents of Bacchylides' consciousness (122). I do not believe that Greek poetry is so obsessed with 'authority' and 'authorisation' as to warrant twenty-seven occurrences of these words in twelve pages (5–16). What evidence is there that the co-existence of multiple inconsistent variants was felt to be 'problematic' (15)? Didn't it provide poets with rich opportunities for creative re-appropriation? Such opportunities are central to Barbara Kowalzig's dense study of archaic and early classical song-culture.[5] She is concerned both with the malleability of myth, ritual, and religious song and with their 'social efficacy'. In particular, aetiology expressed in ritual choral performance is identified as 'central to an incessant process of forging and re-forging religious communities': aetiology is the 'primary form through which myth plays a function in ritual, and thence in society' (8, cf. 393). An incisive general discussion of myth, aetiology, ritual, and performance introduces a series of detailed and thoroughly documented case studies: Delos, Argos, Aegina, Rhodes, Southern Italy, Boeotia. Kowalzig begins with a relatively cautious claim: 'myth and ritual could work as

[4] *Bacchylides. Politics, Performance, Poetic Tradition*. By David Fearn. Oxford Classical Monographs. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. xii + 428. 2 maps, 4 figures. Hardback £70, ISBN: 9780199215508.

[5] *Singing for the Gods. Performances of Myth and Ritual in Archaic and Classical Greece*. By Barbara Kowalzig. Oxford Classical Monographs. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. xviii + 508. 10 maps, 14 in-text illustrations. Hardback £85, ISBN: 9780199219964.

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strategic modes of human action between the members of the community in which they are performed, and as such are fundamentally related to historical processes' (23). Few would say that myth and ritual *cannot* do this work, or that they are wholly *unrelated* to historical processes. Something far more contentious is on offer when myth is used as a source for speculative reconstructions of Aeginetan economic history (210–13), or the sixth-century history of Delphi (195–201). In the latter case, it is extravagant to say that the texts make it 'overwhelmingly clear' (199) what Neoptolemus' 'real motivations' in going to Delphi were; it is not even clear what 'real' could mean in that context. There is a difficult problem here: even if Kowalzig's reconstructions identify genuine correlations between song and historical process, how would we establish the direction of influence to show that myth and song were socially efficacious, and not (say) retrospective articulations of rather political change? The stronger claims to centrality and primacy are even harder to verify. Moreover, though Kowalzig sometimes treats ritual song's effects as aspirational (38), not necessarily successful (388), they are more often presented as inexorable: 'you cannot argue with a song' is a recurrent claim (50, 117, 188, 357). That is nonsense: myth, ritual, and song can be resisted, subverted, ignored, or simply routinized into insignificance. I was left doubting whether the gap between interpretation of ideological content and demonstration of historical effect had in fact been bridged. But even if it hasn't, this book is an impressive achievement. Ismene Lada-Richards assures us that her treatment of Lucian and pantomime dancing[6] 'has placed the genre and the artist back onto the map of the imperial and later antique world as powerful and central elements of the political, social, intellectual and symbolic orders' (162). Here, too, the claim to centrality goes beyond the evidence: the book's informative and well-documented treatment of detail (which makes it genuinely valuable) is strikingly at odds with its unsubstantiated confidence concerning pantomime's wider significance. A style that abounds in superfluous qualifiers stokes the pervasive hyperbole: infinitely, supremely, inexhaustible, ever-dreaded, etc. Insights are 'invaluable' (20, 29, cf. 31) or 'unparalleled' (21); information comes in 'precious pieces' (24). The loose writing can be deeply puzzling:

> no matter how fervent is our wish to uncover the 'real' pantomime underneath the many layers of appropriation and concomitant distortion, we shall always stumble on a hard and stubborn inner core which cannot be peeled away, because it is part and parcel of pantomime's very essence (77)

– come again? However much we want to find the 'real' pantomime, we shall always find pantomime's very essence? Certain traditions of practice existed in a diverse social-cultural milieu, and elicited diverse responses; essences, intrinsic powers, and an 'inherent doubleness' are not needed to account for this. I wonder, finally, whether an opportunity for illuminating use of comparative evidence has not been missed. Noh and Kathakali receive fleeting references (48, 184, 186). But the Kathak dance tradition seems a more apposite model: it certainly puts a question mark by the 'even' in 'we even hear of the dancer's meaningful use of his eyes' (44). Daniel Ogden's study of Lucian's *Lover of Lies*[7] comprises an introduction, a rather stiff

[6] *Silent Eloquence. Lucian and Pantomime Dancing*. By Ismene Lada-Richards. London, Duckworth, 2007. Pp. 240. Paperback £16.99, ISBN: 9780715634912.

[7] *In Search of the Sorcerer's Apprentice. The Traditional Tales of Lucian's Lover of Lies*. By Daniel Ogden. Swansea, Classical Press of Wales, 2007. Pp. ix + 310. Hardback £45, ISBN: 9781905125166.

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translation, and chapters analysing each of the constituent tales. The framing sections and linking dialogue get limited attention: the book 'does not claim to offer a general or well-rounded account of the text as a whole' (1). Rather, we have an exhaustive survey of analogues to Lucian's tales, addressing two reciprocally related questions:

what does an understanding of the traditional form (or forms) of the tales with which Lucian works tell us of his art and the strategies with which he has manipulated his material? And what does an understanding of Lucian's art, the stock-in-trade of recurring themes and the portfolio of agendas on display in his wider oeuvre, allow us to know (by a sort of subtraction) of the traditional form or forms of the takes with which he works? (1)

Some under-motivated speculations (most notably the suggestion that the statue of Pellichus is priapic [148–52]) weakened my willingness to trust Ogden's expert judgement when the analogues did not look much like the targets – as often happens in studies of 'story types'. Given the fluidity with which informal tales are treated in casual conversation, I wonder whether trying to relate Lucian's work to existing traditions on the basis of scattered, and sometimes not very similar, extant written analogues is entirely realistic. Two books on word order in tragic dialogue take very different approaches. Helma Dik[8] is concerned with questions of pragmatics: the communicative structure of sentences, and the flow of information (2). She is herself a marvellous communicator, explaining technical concepts from Functional Linguistics with great clarity, and allowing the reader to 'bathe' (30) in lucidly analysed examples. Her qualitative approach is, inevitably, more accessible than the quantitative methodology of Nicholas Baechle's study of the metrical constraints of the iambic trimeter on the placement of words:[9] statistical tables rarely fire the imagination. A focus on linguistic resources for communicating meaning is in any case likely to be more rewarding than a focus on constraints. Tragedians dissatisfied with a constrained word order were always free to try a different approach; if they did not, the order must have been acceptable. Since the effect that Baechle finds is quantitatively slight, the poets were either rarely constrained or often sought out alternatives when a constraint appeared. These comments are not meant to be dismissive of Baechle's work (Dik is respectful: 88 f., 121 f.); but it will inevitably appeal to a limited and highly specialist readership. Dik can (and should) be read by anyone who wishes to deepen their appreciation of tragic dialogue. David Carter provides a very successful introduction to politics in Greek tragedy.[10] After briefly outlining some key issues, he surveys a selection of contrasting approaches to the 'political' dimension of tragedy in recent scholarship (Podlecki, Macleod, Goldhill, Griffith, Seaford, Hall), commenting on their respective advantages and disadvantages. After presenting his own 'working definition', he discusses *Ajax*, *Antigone*, Euripides' *Suppliants*, and *Trojan Women*. A final chapter looks at political reception of tragedy (note, *not* the reception of political tragedy), with particular reference to *Antigone* and *Trojan Women*. Carter begins by contrasting weaker and stronger senses of 'political'

[8] *Word Order in Greek Tragic Dialogue*. By Helma Dik. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. xvi + 281. Hardback £55, ISBN: 9780199279296.

[9] *Metrical Constraint and the Interpretation of Style in the Tragic Trimeter.* By Nicholas Baechle. Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield, 2007. Pp. 362. Hardback £69, ISBN: 9780739109502; paperback £23.99, ISBN 9780739121436.

[10] *The Politics of Greek Tragedy*. By D. M. Carter. Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 2007. Pp. xii + 209. Hardback £40, ISBN: 9781904675501; paperback £12.99, ISBN: 9781904675167.

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(4). In fact, the weaker sense is utterly feeble, the stronger pretty weak: 'drama that is meant to have a political function in society' is glossed by 'tragedy could engage with contemporary issues and (occasionally) events' and 'the festival . . . can be considered as a political organ, allowing the audience to reflect'. But a single example (say, *Eumenides*) suffices to establish the *possibility* of 'engagement' (a usefully vague word); and would anyone claim that tragedy *prevents* reflection? Adapting Macleod's formula, Carter defines 'political' as 'a concern with human beings as part of the community of the *polis*' (6). This is capacious enough not to evoke strenuous dissent (although *Ajax* is not a perfect fit [91 f.]), and its capaciousness complements Carter's sustained emphasis on the diverse ways in which different plays are political – which I applaud, along with his focus on the city-state in general, not exclusively on democratic Athens. But though he defines the *political* in 'political function', the concept of political *function* is left unexamined; as I've recently argued elsewhere, that's not straightforward.

Isabelle Torrance's introduction to *Seven Against Thebes*[11] is a more qualified success. It follows the usual format of the Duckworth series: an outline of play and trilogy, and a survey of reception ('legacy'), frame thematic chapters: city and family; divine forces and religious ritual; warriors; women. But reference to secondary literature tends to be superficial: an airy 'it has been suggested . . .', with no indication of the basis of the suggestion or the nature of the argument, does not give the target audience useful tools with which to think. The treatment of problematic issues (such as the relationship between divine and human agency) is often not deep enough to give the beginner an insight into the nature of the problem. By contrast, elementary points (for example, that invoking Ares and Enyo is 'militaristic', and that the Seven are a serious military threat [49]) are unnecessarily laboured. The interpretation sometimes needed a little more thought. Treating *parthenoi* engaged in self-initiated panic with mature women acting on the instigation of the army's senior commander in *Iliad* 6 is surely misleading (97). And if you say 'like Peter, who denied Christ three times, Laius had defied Apollo three times' (56), can you also say 'no blame can be attributed to Laius for returning to the oracle three times' (60)?

In her Further Reading (150), Torrance looks forward to N. J. Sewell-Rutter's then forthcoming discussion of issues of inherited guilt, curses, and divine causation. *Guilt by Descent*[12] has now come forth, and is deeply unsatisfactory. That is partly because of the style: verbose (it takes 205 words to say that it is useful to compare decisions in different Aeschylean plays, whether or not Aeschylus' audiences did so [162 f.]), mannered ('the peculiar quiddity of this inescapably absorbing genre' [xi]), and fond of cliché ('crime begets crime' [30]; 'the mortal of tragedy is no puppet of the gods' [175]). But that could be endured if the substance was better. Sewell-Rutter makes much of the fact that scholars who use 'curse' in a broad (though in English entirely idiomatic) sense risk falling into equivocation, and postulating unnecessary curse-events (66). Yet he does not deny that transgenerational misfortune in tragedy sometimes results from a curse in the narrow sense. Instead, when an ancestral curse has to be acknowledged, the question changes:

[11] *Aeschylus.* Seven Against Thebes. By Isabelle Torrance. Duckworth Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy. London, Duckworth, 2007. Pp. 174. Paperback £12.99, ISBN: 9780715634660.

[12] *Guilt by Descent. Moral Inheritance and Decision Making in Greek Tragedy.* By N. J. Sewell-Rutter. Oxford Classical Monographs. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. xx + 302. Hardback £75, ISBN: 9780199227334.

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it is 'simply one of many intertwining strands of explanation' (75). Obviously, if there are many strands, *every* strand is one of many. The discussion of *Antigone* begins by denying that the play relies on a curse, or taint of inherited guilt, 'in *any significant* sense' (115), and ends by denying that inherited guilt or some curse is 'the *crucial* fact' (119, my emphasis): note the slippage. Note, too, the tendentious treatment of textual evidence: 'a brief allusion, accounting for some dozen lines' (119). Playing an explanatory role in the plot does not entail being the focus of attention in the play; and genuinely brief allusions will suffice to bring background factors to an alert and knowledgeable audience's attention. Here, and in the treatment of the end of *Electra*, Sophocles' subtle allusiveness is underestimated. Correcting that misjudgement will require some adjustment to the characterization of the distinctiveness of Sophocles' treatment of transgenerational misfortune ('in Sophocles . . . the sorrows of the house and its manifold corruptions tend to irrupt into consciousness, becoming *known* or *realized*, rather than working through the medium of Erinyes and curses in the Aeschylean or Euripidean fashion' [173]). 'The long and countless course of Time/Revealing what is hidden, then shrouding what appears' – SPLAT! Encountering a full-stop there was like walking into a glass door (*Ajax* 646–7). Peter Meineck's rendering of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* is occasionally marred by its disdain for syntax and excessive compression. By contrast, Paul Wooodruff's *Women of Trachis* and *Electra* are occasionally verbose.[13] Far more often, this sequel to the same pair's well-received translation of the Theban plays hits an appropriate mean – in spoken dialogue, at least. They are less successful in finding a distinctive voice for lyric, and can be clumsily prosaic ('Unless I have totally lost my mind' [*Electra* 472]). Lyric is signalled only by labels ('strophe', etc.), recitative not at all. But, on balance, this is a text that I could happily adopt for teaching. Its claims are reinforced by a favourable price and generous notes. The opening of Diane Arnson Svarlien's *Medea*[14] reveals a translator who can write with genuine distinction, in proper sentences, with a rare sense of rhythm:

> I wish the *Argo* never had set sail,
> had never flown to Colchis through the dark
> Clashing Rocks; I wish the pines had never
> been felled along the hollows on the slopes
> of Pelion, to fit their hands with oars—
> those heroes who went off to seek the gold
> pelt for Pelias. (*Med.* 1–6)

Yet she, too, fails to find a distinctive lyric voice. Recitative is certainly distinctive, but the rhythmical effect is unhappy: 'You wouldn't go wrong, you'd be right on the mark / if you called them all half-wits, the people of old' (*Med.* 190–1). Even in spoken dialogue, I sometimes tripped over a jarring choice of word: 'I hope old Pittheus is safe from harm— / not done in by some freshly sprung disaster.' That's *Hippolytus* 794 – or 883 f., according to the marginal line numbers. Why do translators persist in

[13] *Sophocles. Four Tragedies*. Translated with introduction and notes by Peter Meineck and Paul Woodruff. Indianapolis, IN, Hackett, 2007. Pp. xlii + 267. Hardback £19.95, ISBN: 9780872205864; paperback £6.95, ISBN: 9780872205857.

[14] *Euripides.* Alcestis, Medea, Hippolytus. Translated by Diane Arnson Svarlien, with introduction and notes by Robin Mitchell-Boyask. Indianapolis, IN, Hackett, 2007. Pp. xxxix + 205. Hardback £27.95, ISBN: 9780872209244; paperback £6.95, ISBN: 9780872209237.

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this madness? 'One thing is certain . . . The translation really matters' (184). Two things, perhaps: 'for an actor, the aim must be to find the right style of self-presentation' (115). Simon Goldhill's *How to Stage Greek Tragedy Today*[15] sometimes lapses into statements of the obvious, sometimes into statements of the far from obvious – can you see the merits of putting Sophocles' *Electra* in a petri dish (37)? Perhaps you needed to have been there. But given the challenging task that Goldhill has set himself, it is the rarity of such lapses that surprises. He tackles six key difficulties facing modern productions of Greek tragedy: theatrical space; the chorus; the actor's role; politics; translation; figures (heroic and divine) from myth. Each chapter prefaces a review of salient features of tragedy in its classical context to accounts of how selected modern productions have tackled the difficulties, successfully or unsuccessfully, and a deliberately open-ended discussion of how it should be done, 'not laying down the law' (2) but exhibiting possibilities and exploring issues. Petri dishes were not alone in making me wonder about the boundary between staging and travesty. If asked to name a tragedy portraying the victims of attack by an overwhelming superpower, one perhaps might think of *Trojan Women* (though Troy wasn't a pushover) – but *Persians* (133)? 'Tragedy is not a good place to be a woman' (148): being a man in tragedy isn't exactly a bundle of fun, either. When it comes to giving people a bad time, tragedy is an Equal Opportunities genre. Goldhill considerately explains obscure allusions, as in 'Bradford, an industrial town in the north' (12). Mnouchkine's *Agamemnon* was exiled to the northern wastes in part because it needed a large, barnlike space. This exposé of southern deprivation is truly appalling. The Government Must Act!

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[15] *How to Stage Greek Tragedy Today*. By Simon Goldhill. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007. Pp. 248. 20 figures. Hardback £23.50, ISBN: 9780226301273; paperback £11.50, ISBN: 9780226301280.

Latin Literature

To begin, two books from the same publisher, very similar in appearance, both in Italian, and both in some way on Roman comedy; and yet it would be hard to find two more different books. All is revealed by their titles: *La Metrica di Plauto et di Terenzio*[1] and *Plauto secondo Pasolini*.[2] The size of the book on metre suggests that little has been left unexplained. Early Latin verb forms in Roman comedy and elsewhere have been the central scholarly preoccupation of Wolfgang de Melo for many years. At last, in *The Early Latin Verb System*,[3] he has brought to fruition a work conceived in an essay and developed through two dissertations. The book takes as its

[1] *La Metrica di Plauto et di Terenzio*. By Cesare Questa. Ludus Philologiae a cura di Cesare Questa e Renato Raffaelli 16. Urbino, QuattroVenti, 2007. Pp. xiii + 550. Paperback E/54, ISBN: 978-88-392-0794-4.

[2] *Plauto secondo Pasolini*. By Leopoldo Gamberale. Ludus Philologiae a cura di Cesare Questa e Renato Raffaelli 15. Urbino, QuattroVenti, 2006. Pp. xii + 209. Paperback E/22, ISBN: 978-88-392-0763-5.

[3] *The Early Latin Verb System. Archaic forms in Plautus, Terence, and Beyond*. By Wolfgang David Cirilo de Melo. Oxford Classical Monographs. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. xviii + 413. Hardback £70, ISBN: 978-0-19-920902-6.

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