

is an exception. This may be because the volume is the output of a collection of papers delivered at the Celtic Conference in Classics held in Bordeaux in 2012, for which there is at times limited control of the topics covered.

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‘CREATIVE’ BIOGRAPHIES

FLETCHER (R.), HANINK (J.) (ed.) *Creative Lives in Classical Antiquity. Poets, Artists and Biography*. Pp. x + 373, ills. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Cased, £75, US\$99.99. ISBN: 978-1-107-15908-2.

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The *Creative Lives* title has a double meaning. In one sense, the volume focuses on Lives (*bioi/vitae*) as creative works in their own right. In another sense, the title refers to the idea that the biographies under consideration depict the lives of ‘creative’ (perhaps a problematic term) figures like poets, philosophers, artists and musicians. The volume is especially concerned with how creativity itself was understood and depicted. It also puts a special focus on reception, in as much as the biographies of creative figures are always to some extent responses to their works. The volume comprises thirteen case studies, by various scholars, divided into five thematic groups.

The first two chapters provide background on the genre of ancient biography and its modern scholarly reception. In the first chapter, ‘Orientation’, F. and H. introduce the concerns of the volume and present a short overview of the chapters, arranged so as to provide something of a history of the *bios* genre. In Chapter 2, ‘“Lives” as Parameter’, C. Güthenke focuses on biography as a practice of the discipline of Classics, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Given that the field of Classics is still organised on largely biographical lines (e.g. So-and-So is a Euripides scholar), this chapter will provide interesting reading to Classicists of all stripes. Güthenke also surveys the era’s scholarly views on ancient biography; here it is particularly refreshing that she provides new insights into Leo’s *Die griechisch-römische Biographie* (1901), a work more often cited than read.

The next three chapters all treat how authors engage with their literary predecessors. All three use literary depictions of poets to elucidate ancient reading practices and ancient conceptions of authorship. B. Graziosi, in ‘Close Encounters’, looks at Anacreon in Theocritus, at Homer in Petrarch, and at Aeschylus in the work of the Italian poet Salvatore Quasimodo. Graziosi highlights the tendency of poets to identify with, and in doing so rewrite the biographies of, their predecessors. A. Laird, in ‘Recognizing Virgil’, examines traditions about Virgil, in particular as they appear in the work of Petrarch and the Mexican poet Bartolomé Rosales, but with a rich analysis of how those traditions had developed in antiquity. Laird’s thesis is that the reception of Virgil (from Horace to the Early Modern age) has placed a major emphasis on the poet’s physical presence. He argues that this tendency goes a long way in explaining ancient interpretations of Virgil, and that it is in some degree due to the poet himself. A. Uhlig, in ‘A Poetic Possession’, analyses how Pindar depicted Archilochus and Homer. Uhlig argues that Pindar used the same techniques employed by ancient biographers in creating depictions of his predecessors and even in how he depicted himself.

The connection between the next group of chapters, which includes Uhlig's contribution, seems to be simply that they treat 'Lives in Unexpected Places' (as the section is titled), although that really describes most of the chapters in the volume. H., in 'What's in a *Life*?', considers two ancient anecdotes about Euripides that did not make it into his surviving biographies. She takes the opportunity to explore some of the problems with how we typically imagine biographical anecdotes to have arisen – in particular emphasising how difficult it can be to determine whether a biographical anecdote was created on the basis of a poet's verses or whether (spurious) verses were created on the basis of a known anecdote. P. Low, in 'Lives from Stone', delves into several intriguing intersections between biography and epigraphy. Low is especially concerned with why Classical Greek inscriptions seem so *uninterested* in conveying biographical detail, even in honorific decrees. She suggests that in these honorific inscriptions (unlike in biography), the moral *exemplum* is not so much to be found in the specific actions of the individual, but rather in the *polis*'s response to them.

The next three chapters are all concerned with philosophy. M. Lefkowitz, in 'On Bees, Poets and Plato', examines biographical portrayals of poetic inspiration, which often involve an encounter with bees or honey; she points out that such anecdotes, while typically found in the Lives of poets, are also found in anecdotes about Plato. She explains the connection between honey and poetic eloquence, which seems rather obvious even if Plato is not a poet, but she also speculates that there may be a connection to pain: in the sting of the bee, in the sadness and negative feelings that can be induced by poetry, and likewise by reading Plato. K. Lampe, in 'The Life of Aristippus', analyses the depiction of the fourth-century BC hedonistic philosopher Aristippus in a series of pseudepigraphic letters from the second or third century AD. Aristippus is known to have not systematically written out his philosophy, but rather to have lived it. Through a sophisticated and compelling reading of the letters, Lampe is able to shed light not only on the letters themselves, but on Aristippean philosophy and its reception, both ancient and modern. F., in 'Imagination Dead Imagine', examines the funeral epigrams of Diogenes Laertius and suggests that they display an Epicurean attitude to death. F. uses the opportunity provided by Diogenes Laertius' (often humorous) epigrams to explore the connections between philosophy, humour and death, adducing as a point of comparison the work of the contemporary philosopher Simon Critchley (as well as various and sundry other contemporary artistic and philosophical figures).

The final three chapters treat the Lives of artists and musicians; all three draw on E. Kris and O. Kurz's *Die Legende vom Künstler* (1934), which argued that certain elements universally recur in biographies of artists. P. LeVen, in "'It is Orpheus when there is Singing'", considers biographical anecdotes about Orpheus, many of which are also to be found reworked and retold in the Lives of other musicians. LeVen argues that these elements recur not because all later biographies use Orpheus as a model, but because they likewise seek to explain the beauty and power of music. As such, these biographical anecdotes provide a window into ancient musical aesthetics. V. Platt, in 'The Artist as Anecdote', explores the role of ancient biography in shaping the practices and concerns of art history. Platt's chapter ambitiously, and cogently, tackles a problem at the heart of the field: that ancient art history, especially concerning Classical Greek art, is heavily indebted to biographical anecdotes, which are likely fictional and which may not have anything to do with surviving pieces (usually Roman). Platt suggests taking biographical anecdotes not so much as factual information about the *artists* (who, after all, are a problematic focus for art history anyway) but rather as information about their works, since these anecdotes 'serve to account for the genesis and salient qualities of works associated with their protagonists' (p. 290). M. Leonard, in 'Freud and the Biography of Antiquity', argues that Freud's interpretation of art, especially as seen in his biography of Leonardo da Vinci, was

heavily influenced by his understanding of ancient history. Leonard points out that the Freudian concept of ‘screen memories’ (childhood memories that are in fact psychological creations of one’s mature years) was heavily informed by contemporary views about Livy’s history of early Rome, which Freud saw as a kind of screen memory for the Roman nation. These screen memories are thus non-factual, and yet of crucial importance for understanding a person’s psychology, which in turn (in the case of artists) may be manifest in their art.

The book ends with a short ‘Envoi’ by J. Henderson, evidently in lieu of a contribution about Nepos. Henderson reflects on the volume, drawing some interesting connections between the chapters, before briefly addressing his own take on Nepos, which is that his biographies might have changed as the cultures that they depicted changed.

The most welcome strength of this volume is that it pushes ancient biography into dialogue with other fields (e.g. philosophy, musicology, art history) and with broader concerns across fields (e.g. reading practices, the nature of authorship, the relationship between artist and art). The study of ancient biography has historically been rather inward-looking: its focus has been on the genre itself, in particular its structure and the history of its development, as well as on its relationship with its immediate generic neighbour, history. More recent studies have started to branch out in other directions, most notably by taking the biographies of poets as a form of reception, an approach pioneered by Graziosi’s *Inventing Homer* (2002). The fact that the present volume builds on this recent work, but also engages with a host of concerns beyond ancient biography, makes it a significant contribution.

Yet the volume goes so far beyond biography that biography itself has a tendency to get left behind. Many of the chapters either do not treat, or treat only peripherally, works that could be considered Lives; they focus rather on material with elements that are (sometimes rather loosely) biographical. There is nothing inherently wrong with this focus, of course, but it raises some pressing questions: first and foremost, what *does* this material have to do with the genre of biography? The entire volume presumes, but never really articulates, this relationship. Some of the cases studied, for instance, actually pre-date the genre of biography (e.g. Uhlig on Pindar), or show interesting changes around the era that biography arose (e.g. Low on Greek epigraphy). The relationship(s) between biography and this biographical material could be pursued much further.

Another point of concern is the term ‘creative’, which feels very modern. It might be appropriate to apply it to antiquity, whether because it was in fact an ancient concept or because it is useful even if not ancient, but it would be good to see the issue explicitly addressed. In a similar vein, the case is never really made why such diverse figures as philosophers and musicians should fall into the same category; or if they do, why generals or emperors (who, like philosophers, also sometimes wrote literary works and lived creatively) do not fall into that category. These concerns, however, do not detract from the individual contributions, which are generally of very high quality.

In the wake of Lefkowitz’s *The Lives of the Ancient Greek Poets* (1st ed. 1981), the fictionality of the anecdotes found in the Lives of ancient poets has been generally accepted. Since that time, the question has been what to do with this fictionality. If ancient biographies do not give us factual information about the actual lives of poets and philosophers, then what is it that they have to offer us? The answer, as *Creative Lives* makes clear, is ‘quite a lot’.

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