

significance. The striking dearth of Latin historians from Hadrian to the late fourth century is suddenly filled by a major lost author that may be understood on his own terms. Alexander Enmann's 1884 theory that there was a lost historical work on which the work of most later historians was based (the *Kaisergeschichte*, 'History of the Emperors') is denounced as a scholarly figment; the influence of the biographer Marius Maximus on later historians is downplayed in a similar vein; the *Historia Augusta* is vindicated as the work of a single author, who depends heavily on the information of Aurelius Victor; Eutropius – whom generations of Latin students have been taught to regard as a paragon of dullness and simple-mindedness – emerges as a keen and intelligent reader of Victor, who shares his interest in institutional history; even Greek historians in late antiquity rely on that lost text and reflect its periodization choices. A close re-reading of Ammianus Marcellinus also shows evidence for his stylistic debt towards Victor.

The landscape of late antique historiography is revolutionized as a result of this tour de force. Stover and Woudhuysen write engagingly and clearly, and the reader is masterfully led through a cumulative argument which has the air of soothing inexorability that the finest empirical demonstrations achieve. There is plenty left to discuss and no doubt much to argue against. The debates on the *Historia Augusta* that have unfolded over the last century or so are unlikely to have been brought to a close, and the *Kaisergeschichte* still has authoritative defenders; Stover and Woudhuysen themselves draw attention to a number of areas that warrant a new lease of research, and identify a new edition of Aurelius Victor as a pressing priority. Two reasonably safe guesses may be made, though: the account they have put forward will be the necessary starting point of any future investigation of late antique historiography, including those that will be heading in very different directions; and their sharp and engrossing discussion will prompt new interest in the topic from a number of quarters, and will encourage scholars who have not so far worked in this area to dip into waters that require fresh, earnest, and energetic exploration.

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### Reception

Following their 2013 monograph, *Helen of Troy. Beauty, Myth, Devastation*, Ruby Blondell delivers a study on screen representations of Helen in the USA, ranging from *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* (1927), via *Star Trek*, Hollywood epics, and *Xena: Warrior Princess*, to *Helen of Troy* (2003).<sup>1</sup> Blondell takes a rounded approach

<sup>1</sup> *Helen of Troy in Hollywood*. By Ruby Blondell. Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2023. pp. x + 322. 15 colour and 50 b+w illustrations, 1 table. Hardback, £35, ISBN: 978-0-691-22962-1.

to their investigation, looking at different strands in the ancient tradition and analysing numerous factors related to the production and reception of the case studies.

It is impossible to discuss Helen of Troy without, of course, discussing beauty. Blondell does an excellent and sensitive job in negotiating the difficulties that arise in casting the role. In Chapter 1, they tease out the often problematic origins of conventional beauty standards at the same time as reflecting on the significance of Helen's *eidolon* (image or phantasm) in myth and its relationship to the illusory qualities of cinema. Most creatively, in Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* (2004), Blondell, contextualizing the film in relation to the contemporaneous invasion of Iraq, compares Petersen's slight Helen to both her mythical *eidolon* and to weapons of mass destruction, and argues that the director 'unwittingly restored Helen to the symbolic heart of the millennia-long conflict between East and West' (170).

Blondell's ongoing interest in gender and feminist studies is also apparent here. They draw on evidence from the direction and cinematography (especially how these are employed in sex scenes), as well as the press surrounding the film, to argue that in some senses Achilles takes the place of Helen. The diminished onscreen presence of the latter allows Brad Pitt's beautiful, dynamic, and memorably naked warrior to become the main focus of eroticism (159). Furthermore, the final chapter, on the lesser-known *Helen of Troy*, examines the trials of the titular character, from her childhood and kidnapping by Theseus to her violent return to Greece following the war, in light of girl studies and the postfeminism of the 1990s and early 2000s. Blondell argues that 'Helen's unconventional characterization lays the foundation for a coming-of-age story in which an innocent girl who rebels against patriarchal gender norms learns the hard way how to be a woman' (235).

*Helen of Troy* also provides the opportunity to undertake some research in audience studies. Blondell analyses reviews from different demographics to explore how the reception of the film's challenging themes, focus on women's experiences, and perceived adaption of classic literature was impacted by viewers' different identities. This is also seen, in conjunction with a discussion of the themes, racial and sexual politics, and costume design of the series as a whole, in Blondell's analysis of *Star Trek* episode 'Elaan of Troyius'. This episode seems to have created strong reactions in some women, including some more resistant readings.

Altogether, this work boasts some well-deployed methodological and theoretical approaches from a number of disciplines. It offers not only some interesting perspectives on the ancient sources, but detailed, careful, and creative readings of its case studies.

If you look closely at the picture of three women on the seashore that graces the cover of *Ovid in French*, you may see that it is a still from Céline Sciamma's 2019 film *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*.<sup>2</sup> This beautiful French-language film, set during the eighteenth century, may not be the first thing one thinks of when discussing the reception of Ovid. However, not only does its littoral scenery, as the editors argue, echo the landscape of the *Heroides*, but the characters' examination of Orpheus and Eurydice in Book 10 of the *Metamorphoses* heightens the tenderness of their doomed relationship (17–19). The authors' discussion identifies in this film several key motifs

<sup>2</sup> *Ovid in French. Reception by Women from the Renaissance to the Present*. Edited by Helena Taylor and Fiona Cox. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023. pp. x + 313. 1 b+w illustration. Hardback, £83, ISBN: 978-0-192-89538-7.

in French women's reception of Ovid. It highlights firstly the intellectual climate in which *Ovidian* reception occurred, especially the 'salon', and secondly the particular place of the *Heroides* in this strand of reception history.

Indeed, a significant portion of the essays presented in this volume analyse responses to the *Heroides*. Jessica DeVos gives a detailed and precise reading of Madeleine de L'Aubespine's translation of Phyllis' letter to Demophoon, in which she rewrites and reframes the lovelorn Phyllis' ability to express her own story. In many of these cases, we are also given a sense of these writers' positioning within culture that both celebrated and chastised women authors. Helena Taylor, through a study of seventeenth-century translations of the thirteenth letter, from Laodamia to Protesilaus, explores the social pressures on women who published translations of texts that feature desire. She claims that "fidelity" in translation was the opposite of "beautiful" because it entailed an improper, or even pedantic, demonstration of knowledge', while some women authors themselves were deemed 'ugly' (85). However, it is clear from these offerings that the *Heroides* was a fruitful, albeit sometimes risky, means by which French women authors could establish themselves as authors.

Several essays also explore gender fluidity. Regarding the chapter on Claude Cahun, the editors admit that it may be 'a presumptive act' to include Cahun, who seemed to have an ambiguous gender identity but used the feminine pronoun, in a book about women (6). Catherine Burke's chapter on the writer and artist argues that Ovid's Tiresias is a template for her interaction with both the classical past and her own identity as expressed in her work. Meanwhile, Florence Klein, in a translation by Eleanor Hodgson, examines Marguerite Yourcenar's response to Sappho and Achilles at Scyros in *Feux*, arguing that, despite the apparently fluid gender roles on display, this freedom of self-expression is portrayed as only available to men. In addition to their reflections on gender, these discussions can be thought of in terms of this volume's broader interest in the *Metamorphoses* and its core themes of transformation and metempsychosis. Among others, this theme can also be seen in Thea S. Thorsen's interpretation of an erotic poem by Constance de Salm and in James Illingworth's discussion of the ludic qualities of George Sand's writing.

The book ends with a personal perspective from translator Marie Cosnay, translated by Fiona Cox. While I have only offered a small window into this volume, it should not be too surprising if I say that Cosnay's meditation on change, the voice, and subjectivity is a provocative but not incongruous epilogue that brings a number of the issues raised in the book into the present. *Ovid in French* will be of particular relevance to readers interested in the relationship of gender to translation, but it also offers plenty for those exploring the themes of Ovid's work more broadly.

We also see the ongoing impact of Ovid in a volume from de Gruyter 'Trends in Classics' series.<sup>3</sup> This is not solely focused on classical reception in the narrow sense, instead discussing a single theme in case studies from antiquity to the present day, and is largely focused on the island's role as cult centre for Aphrodite and, relatedly, on Ovid's Cypriot tales in the *Metamorphoses*.

<sup>3</sup> *The Reception of Ancient Cyprus in Western Culture*. Edited by Spyridon Tzounakas, Stella Alekou, and Stephen Harrison. Berlin and Boston, De Gruyter, 2023. pp. iix + 314. 1 b+w illustration. Hardback, £116, ISBN: 783-1-109-9665-4.

The first half of the volume discusses Latin literature's treatment of Cyprus, in which we frequently see Roman authors' responses to Greek literature. For example, Costas Panayotakis teases out the extent to which the sexual associations of the island remained in Roman adaptations of Greek comedy. Meanwhile, Theodore Antoniadis takes a somewhat different turn from others by discussing Teucer transition from recipient of insults in ancient Greek epic and tragedy, to being 'mostly cherished as a homeless wanderer in Augustan literature' (77). By the time we get to the work of Claudian, however, the Roman predecessors Virgil and Tibullus are deemed by Spyridon Tzounakas to be more relevant. Across this section, we see how the physical sites of Cyprus co-mingle with centuries of the island's literary representation.

The second half discusses ancient Cyprus and its associated classical myths in texts up to the twentieth century. Thea Selliaas Thorsen takes a very long view on the story of Venus and Adonis and the importance of women's perspectives in the early part of this myth's tradition. Before comparing it to Ovid and Shakespeare, Thorsen cites the Sumerian poet, Enheduanna, whose hymn to Inanna and her consort Dumuzi is argued to be a forerunner of the myth (160–1). The late Middle Ages and Renaissance continue to be an important strand here. Laura Aresi picks up on the popular association of Cyprus with love in a discussion of several stories from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, while H el ene Casanova-Robin takes a more cosmic view of Venus' connotations in Italian poetry of the period. The last chapter, Bruce Gibson's study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travel writing, might seem to be exceptional in its subject matter, but this too finds the island's association with Venus to be an important aspect of the way its visitors conceptualize the space.

As throughout, Ovid's contributions to mythic tradition are key, with Pygmalion's statue of *Metamorphoses* Book 10 appearing not only in Boccaccio's tale of Alatiel, as discussed by Aresi, but in Stella Alekou's investigation of Carol Ann Duffy's 'Pygmalion's Bride'. In both cases, the responses and actions of the statue are just as relevant to the analysis as those of the sculptor himself. They also both demonstrate, much like other contributions in this volume, an approach to reception that is in the Martindale mould of reading the ancient source text anew, with Alekou forming connections across different books of Ovid's epic.<sup>4</sup>

The structure of chapters is generally built on short sections of argumentation focused on specific case studies, and there is also an extensive *index locorum*, making this book easy to navigate, despite the vast range of material, and even allowing it to function as a useful catalogue of references to Cyprus. While this review does not do justice to all of the chapters, I would stress that one of the most positive aspects of the book as a whole is the way in which it constructs Cyprus as a lens through which can be apprehended different aspects of the cross-pollination of cultures and practices in the Mediterranean, from antiquity to the present. This work does bill itself as concerned with 'Western Culture'. However the references, not only to Aphrodite's Mesopotamian counterpart, but also, for example, to visits by Martial's friend Flaccus (see Margot Neger's contribution), invite further study into its positioning relative to the long history of human migration and cultural transmission across borders.

<sup>4</sup> The classic text being, of course, Charles Martindale, *Redeeming the Text. Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception* (Cambridge, 1993).

Lastly, Thomas Matthew Vozar's monograph takes Milton and Longinus as the core to an analysis that is simultaneously compact and expansive in its exploration of the sublime in seventeenth-century literature and thought.<sup>5</sup> Longinus' *Peri Hypsous* (usually translated as *On the Sublime*), as Vozar points out, was unknown for several centuries and 'seemed to belong more to posterity than to his own time' (23). However, it is promoted here that the ideas similar to those posited by Longinus can be found in several ancient texts and seem to have been more widely dispersed in the Renaissance than previously thought. This allows Vozar to claim the sublime as a hitherto largely unacknowledged aspect of Milton's craft and conceptual framework.

After exploring the transmission of texts related to the sublime, Vozar delineates two other aspects of the sublime beyond the rhetorical, devoting a subsequent chapter to each of the three; the 'physical species of the sublime' pertains to the scale of objects and space, while the 'theological species' refers to nature of divinity (32, 37). The former of these two species provides the meat for a particularly interesting chapter, named 'Sublime Physics in *Paradise Lost*'. Here, Vozar situates Milton's poetic universe in relation to innovations in astronomy. He highlights how frontispieces for different scientific books, including two editions of Galileo's work, are evidence that the idea of the sublime was associated with new research into the shape and mechanics of the solar system.

As would be expected, we also see the political and theological dimensions of Milton's work both in this chapter and elsewhere. In his chapter on the sublime in rhetoric, Vozar untangles political and moral conceptions of freedom that Milton has gleaned from the ancient Rome, in which not only is 'political liberty' dependent on 'personal liberty', but so is 'the state of letters', since both require 'self-mastery' (81). Relatedly, we also learn that Longinus' dialogue on free speech and mental and physical forms of enslavement, with its allusion to 'pygmies' (100), might have contributed to Milton's description of the fallen angels as a 'Pigmean race' (*Paradise Lost* 1.780), who mistakenly believe they are free but are shrunk to fit a Parliament that is actually their 'prison' (101).

In addition to the close analysis of ancient and Renaissance texts and their paratexts, Vozar also gives us two appendices. One provides information regarding copies of Longinus in English libraries up until 1674, and the other an edited transcription of an English translation of Longinus that Vozar uncovered in the British Library's Lansdowne collection. Altogether, therefore, this book offers stimulating material for readers interested in intellectual and literary history, and the role of publishing and textual transmission in those histories.

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<sup>5</sup> *Milton, Longinus, and the Sublime in the Seventeenth Century*. By Thomas Matthew Vozar. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023. pp. xii + 212. 13 b+w illustrations, 2 tables. Hardback, £76, ISBN: 978-0-198-87594-9.