SUBJECT REVIEWS

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

Greek Literature

As I was saying last time, distinguished scholars are most fittingly honoured by the dedication of things that have an independent rationale. That is not a trivial hurdle: collections with no honorand as pretext often fail to pass the test. Congratulations, then, to Simon Goldhill and Edith Hall: *Sophocles and the Greek Tragic Tradition*[1] is coherent in theme, diverse in content, high in quality – so it is a fitting tribute to Pat Easterling. Not that I agree with everything in it. When Goldhill desiderates a theory of 'the audience' (27), the singular makes me wince: it is no surprise that, soon after, crucial differences between forensic or deliberative audiences and theatrical audiences are hidden away in a parenthesis. Hall, too, conflates theatre and democratic *polis*. Rightly emphasizing the thematic importance of deliberation in *Trachiniae*, she sees in Deianeira a 'mythical surrogate of the civic agent' (90). Why a *civic* agent? Has deliberation no place in personal life? Ismene Lada-Richards offers a meta-theatrical reading of *Philoctetes*: Sophocles explores 'the moment of transition from "Self" to "Other", which constitutes trans-culturally the quintessential act of the theatrical transaction', and thematizes 'the very process of theatrical performance' (49). An obvious objection is that theatrical performers do not, as such, confront the fundamental ethical dilemmas raised by Neoptolemus' role play. Alert to the reductive risk, Lada-Richards speaks of ethical and political issues being 'filtered through the motif…of the unwilling actor, the performer uncongenial for his part' (54); she failed to convince me that they had not been filtered out. Michael Silk inimitably discusses the 'magisterial elusiveness' of Sophocles' style, with the help of Yeats. When he confidently declares 'what one does expect' at the end of *Seven Sages* (136), I wondered, Who is 'one'? Not me! Though I concede that Silk's 'innocence' would have *surprised* me less than Yeats's 'beggary', I did not *expect* it. Is this a sophisticated instance of 'the trivial rhetoric with which so many critics have continued to use the imagined audience as a bastion for their own opinions' that Goldhill denounces (29)? Against scholars trained 'to suspend a reading until the syntactic unit…is complete', Silk advocates an 'open response' (135), which turns out (paradoxically) to mean the premature formation of very determinate expectations, whose sole reason for existence is to perish in a critical show trial. Responding to words 'in their particular order' is of course 'what everyone does…in their own language' (135): but that is consistent with awaiting semantic completion with an open mind. In short, I found a lot in this collection that I wanted to argue with. But that is no bad thing: arguing can be very

[1] *Sophocles and the Greek Tragic Tradition*. Edited by Simon Goldhill and Edith Hall. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xvi + 336. Hardback £55, ISBN: 978-0-521-88785-4.

instructive, and all the contributions were stimulating. It seems unfair to leave anyone out: but I will briefly mention, moving beyond Sophocles to the tragic tradition, Richard Buxton's judicious discussion of the feminization of males in *Bacchae*; Oliver Taplin's brilliant – if speculative – discussion of Astydamas' *Hector*, challenging the assumption that fourth-century tragedy was dull and uninventive; and Chris Pelling's reading of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* alongside Plutarch, *via* North and Amyot, to say nothing of (for example) *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York*. Bodies are important in tragedy; or should that be 'the body'? The difference between Katrina Cawthorn's[2] formulation and mine is important. 'The' body (like 'the' audience) is a construct at a level of abstraction so high that criteria of plausibility become elusive. 'The male body, supposedly impenetrable…' (13). Who supposed that? We are not told. No one in a culture that used edged weapons as an instrument of war could have supposed that male bodies were impenetrable. But whereas 'male bodies are impenetrable' is obviously false, 'the male body is impenetrable' is not obviously meaningful. 'The tragic male body (which should be a closed whole)…' (22): a closed body would have trouble speaking, eating, and excreting. Ejaculation would be tricky, too – which should remind us that bodies are also (give or take some metaphysical details) persons. Cawthorn notes that 'the term "Greek tragedy" has become shorthand…for a histrionic display of warped human relations, where the most intimate bonds are broken or perverted' (21), but quickly relapses into calling Greek tragedy 'the misadventure of the human body'. Yet what is tragic about Oedipus is not the fact that his body is leaky: who it leaks into is the crucial thing. Incest *is* a bodily act, but its significance does not reside in purely corporeal facts. It is a social fact, involving persons and their relationships. If you focus on persons, bodies are supplied as standard. Focus on 'the body' and you lose sight of the persons, and of their bodies, too. 'Attic tragedy emerges as a necropolis of defeated masculinity, a space where femininity resides, victorious' (110): this play of abstractions gives no hint that tragedy deals with men, and women, suffering. The title of Nancy Worman's *Abusive Mouths in Classical Athens*[3] is a neat portmanteau: insulting speech itself but also its preoccupation with improper uses of the mouth, 'especially talking, eating, drinking, and sexual practices' (i). The rest of the book is written with less economy. A weakness for ponderous formulations, frequently decoding into statements of the unsurprising ('the derisive referencing of the female body on stage coincides with and indeed frequently inspires linguistic strategies that result in rude juxtapositions of body parts and in miscued identifications', 74), a strategy of exhaustive exemplification, and the repetition of programmatic themes from chapter to chapter (each with a lengthy, diffuse preamble) combine to make this book less incisive and stimulating than the author's *Cast of Character* (*G&R* 52 [2005], 253–4). The relentless focus on a single (if multiform) theme inevitably precludes a balanced assessment of that theme's place within the full repertoire of abusive discourse. And the argument is not always satisfactory. Worman never, for example, defends her repeated assertion of the chronological priority of comic over oratorical abuse (for instance, 'comedy initiated the introduction of abusive talk into official contexts, thereby rendering it accessible

[2] *Becoming Female. The Male Body in Greek Tragedy*. By Katrina Cawthorn. London, Duckworth, 2008. Pp. x + 188. Hardback £50, ISBN: 978-0-715-63712-8.

[3] *Abusive Mouths in Classical Athens*. By Nancy Worman. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. xi + 385. Hardback £55, ISBN: 978-0-521-85787-1.

to other public political settings, as the orators' techniques of defamation reveal', 69). The implication that, for example, *Knights* did not parody what was *already* part of the currency of political discourse but provided fourth-century politicians with a model of abusive discourse strikes me as implausible. Worman perhaps forgets that the distribution of extant evidence need not reflect the original distribution of phenomena; the same confusion may also underlie the tendency to Athenian exceptionalism (for example, 'a specifically Athenian medium', 11) that she shares with much current scholarship. Even so, this is not a book that one can afford to ignore. Its coverage is extensive, with chapters on epic, lyric, and tragedy; comedy; satyr play; Plato; Aeschines and Demosthenes; and Aristotle and Theophrastus. I have no doubt that I shall return to it repeatedly and mine its abundant material with profit. But it did not excite me. *Talking About Laughter*[4] collects fourteen of Alan Sommerstein's papers, two previously unpublished. The selection emphasizes those less readily accessible; as Sommerstein notes, that entails a bias to more recent items, because of changing publication practices in the discipline. He passes no judgement on these changes: but there is a judgement to be passed. As researchers, we want to read what others write, and want others to read what we write; and technology has made distribution and access potentially much cheaper and easier. Yet we have increasingly chosen to publish in venues that make it unnecessarily difficult and expensive to gain access to our work. What were we thinking? That the elasticity of acquisitions budgets is unlimited? That funding for Arts and Humanities research is immune to political pressures? That universities are so financially secure as to put them beyond the reach of anything less than (to take a wildly improbable scenario) global recession? In which context, *GRBS*'s recent transition to fully online, open-access publication might be seen as a timely and urgent pointer to future sanity. Sommerstein's solution is less radical: you or your librarian will have to pay for more dead tree. But, for those who want access to these papers (as I certainly do), this is still a huge step forward. Hitherto, no UK academic library has held all of the twelve previously published items; among those holding any, the median number of items held in any one library is 6.5, and the median number of libraries holding any one item is 3. In the reprints, Sommerstein has helpfully embedded the original pagination, and pedantically signalled even minor corrections and clarifications in the text by angled brackets (classicists, surely, could be trusted to cope with textual variants). More substantial updates are supplied in addenda, though no addendum qualifies the dismissal of opposition to the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq as 'naïve and misguided' (210). As for Aristophanic politics, Sommerstein sees 'quite clearly, the skeleton of an *anti-democratic* programme' (211), yet refrains from 'positively asserting that Aristophanes was a closet oligarch' (212). He prefers to think of Aristophanes as offering an 'alternative democracy' (that sounds familiar: *οὐ τὸν αὐτον τρόπον δημοκρατεῖσθαι*?), which 'perhaps, but only perhaps…was after all an alternative *to* democracy' (212). An alternative that 'quite clearly' comprises anti-democratic measures only enacted under oligarchic regimes would, surely, be out of the closet already. For Aristophanes, that would have been a dangerous line to take; for his interpreters, it is a precariously unstable one. Unwary readers might infer that

[4] *Talking About Laughter and Other Studies in Greek Comedy*. By Alan H. Sommerstein. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. xiv + 343. Hardback £60, ISBN: 978-0-19-955419-5.

scholars who disagree with Sommerstein's approach are typically motivated by the 'persistent tendency to suppose that an art-form whose primary aim is to arouse laughter cannot also be aiming…to "make men better members of their communities"' (2), held up to scorn in the introduction. I find it hard to think of any scholar whose reading of Aristophanes rests on that premise. So, indeed, does Sommerstein: he names no one more recent than Gomme; and Gomme did not, in fact, say *that*. Stephen Halliwell raises us to a meta-level, talking not about laughter but about the ways in which laughter was conceived, represented, and evaluated in Greek culture. *Greek Laughter*[5] is a work of extraordinary breadth, ranging from Homer to early Christianity by way of the symposium, ritual, comedy (Old and New), philosophical ethics, Democritus, Cynicism, and Lucian (this last triad exploring whether a sense of existential absurdity was known to Greek culture). At every point he offers subtle and enlightening discussions of the texts, always sensitive to their complexity and elusiveness. Perhaps, at times, too sensitive? Elusiveness may be a feature of the text that we find elusive; or it may be an artefact of the limitations of our enquiry. That's a possibility that can only be tested if we venture definite conclusions, and submit them to the test of discussion. They probably won't survive the test unscathed, but that's their great advantage: being more falsifiable than declarations of uncertainty, they afford more scope for progress in understanding. The risk of simple-minded dogmatism is always at hand, however; so simple-minded dogmatists like me need books like this to rein us in. I cannot, in the space available, do justice to its riches (the footnotes alone would be worth the money – though if your copy only has the footnotes, take it back: the text is good, as well). So I must content myself with dogmatically asserting its excellence. Jonathan Burgess' earlier work has transformed our understanding of the relationship between cyclic and Homeric traditions (see *G&R* 50 [2003], 103). In *The Death and Afterlife of Achilles*,[6] he attempts to reconstruct pre-Homeric traditions about Achilles' death, and argues that the myth is implicitly reflected in the *Iliad* through 'motif transference' and not only by direct reference (72). The approach is post-neoanalytic: a composition-oriented analysis of sources is displaced by a reception-oriented concern with the *Iliad*'s allusive reflections of pre-existing mythological traditions (traditions, not specific poems). Though the argument has cumulative force, one might dwell on the uncertainties of the pre-Homeric reconstruction; the difficulty of distinguishing tradition-specific from typical motifs; and the question of what constitutes a similarity sufficiently substantial to be significant. What exactly grounds judgements that distinguish 'not dissimilar' but 'insufficient' (80) from 'not exactly alike' but 'strong enough for an early audience to recognize' (81)? Burgess' reception-oriented approach postulates an 'ideal ancient audience' (80), but ideal audiences are easily constructed to fit an interpretative hypothesis. Burgess sometimes writes as if familiarity with a tradition is the only thing that is needed: but how an audience is disposed to deploy its knowledge is a crucial further variable, and much harder to conjecture. As always, his arguments are exceptionally interesting and deserve careful attention; but readers

[5] *Greek Laughter. A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity*. By Stephen Halliwell. Pp. xiv + 616. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008. Hardback £70, ISBN: 978-0-521-88900-1; paperback £32.50, ISBN: 978-0-521-71774-8.

[6] *The Death and Afterlife of Achilles*. By Jonathan S. Burgess. Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009. Pp. xvi+184. Hardback £24.00, ISBN 978-0-801-89029-1.

may need to supply a greater than usual seasoning of sceptical reserve. The introduction to Lillian Doherty's *Oxford Readings* volume on the *Odyssey*[7] does not attempt to rival Douglas Cairns' *tour de force* in the companion volume on the *Iliad* (*G&R* 49 [2002], 238). However, it does introduce the selected papers effectively, setting them in their scholarly context, clarifying issues, and highlighting points of contact and divergence. The selection itself is varied and judiciously chosen: Skafte Jensen (composition); Burkert (the Song of Ares and Aphrodite); Köhnken (Odysseus' scar); de Jong (unspoken thoughts); Austin (name magic); Cook (active and passive heroics); Walcot (the art of lying); Rutherford (the 'philosophy' of the *Odyssey*); Foley (reverse similes and sex roles); Emlyn-Jones (the reunion); Murnaghan (Penelope's ignorance); Doherty (internal audiences); Redfield (economics); Rose (class ambivalence); Bergren (Helen's 'good drug'); and Boitani (Ulysses in the twentieth century). Several authors have provided updates. This is a useful volume, though it shares with its companion the deplorable absence of an index. Before leaving hexameter verse, we should pay homage to Jane Lightfoot's *Sibylline Oracles*,[8] which presents a new text of the first two books (treated as an integrated composition of the second century AD) with an extensive commentary (and, as an added bonus, a clever translation in blank verse, which the captious might fault for being not nearly so bad as the original). This strange genre, its apocalyptic affiliations, its theology, its audience and purposes, its metre and language, and its sources are discussed in the introduction, which would make a substantial book in its own right. John Muir's *Life and Letters in the Ancient Greek World*[9] does what the title implies (up to a deplorable point: see below). Ancient Greek letters are introduced in their relationship to Greek lives in all their diversity, from 'ordinary' ones, through lives devoted to philosophy or religion, to the lives imagined in literature. It ranges across personal and family letters, business letters (broadly construed: the chapter includes, for example, petitions seeking legal redress), letters of state, letters as philosophical tracts, early Christian letters, and literary letters. The treatment is informative, though there are lapses in detail: the word '*artab*' is explained in an *artab*-free context (63), but there is no help for readers who know nothing about Chian wine, even when a letter's point depends on it (64). The teacher Diogenes would not have been pleased if young Ptolemaios, with whom he had read *Iliad* 6, had spoken, as Muir does, of Hector 'looking out from the Trojan walls with Andromache' (32). More important is a massive lacuna: the author of the largest surviving corpus of Greek letters receives a single fleeting mention ('formidable letter-writer', 21). No one would leave Cicero out of a book on Latin letters: what excuse is there for ignoring Libanius? The Loeb Classical Library has for some time been vigorously refreshing and extending its coverage. Three recent volumes reflect the high standards achieved. Jeffrey Henderson (who as General Editor must take much of the credit for this activity) is responsible for replacing Edmonds' Longus with a superior text (based on the editions of Reeve and

[7] *Homer's Odyssey*. Edited by Lillian E. Doherty. Oxford Readings in Classical Studies. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. xii + 360. Hardback £84, ISBN: 978-0-19-923332-8.

[8] *The Sibylline Oracles. With Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on the First and Second Books*. By J. L. Lightfoot. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. xxiv + 613. Hardback £110, ISBN: 978-0-19-921546-1.

[9] *Life and Letters in the Ancient Greek World*. By John Muir. London, Routledge, 2009. Pp. xiv + 240. Hardback £60, ISBN: 978-0-415-39130-6.

O'Sullivan, with a very selective apparatus) and a good translation.[10] Anyone with a lingering affection for Thornley's version ('When I was hunting in Lesbos, I saw in the grove of the Nymphs a spectacle the most beauteous and pleasing of any that ever yet I cast my eyes upon. It was a painted picture, reporting a history of love. The grove indeed was very pleasant…') will be instantly reconciled by the spare and elegant prose with which Henderson replaces it ('On Lesbos while hunting I saw in a Nymphs' grove a display the fairest I ever saw: an image depicted, a story of love. Fair also was the grove…'). Longus is now paired with Xenophon of Ephesus, making his series debut; Longus' previous companion, Parthenius, will appear in another volume. The phenomenally productive Douglas Olson has been busy with an edition of Athenaeus, hitherto unnoticed in these pages, whose fifth volume takes us to the end of book 11.[11] Since it is hard to produce an accurate and intelligible rendering of technical content that one does not understand, the polymathic Athenaeus presents a formidable challenge to any translator. Gulick often failed; Olson's success is impressively consistent. The notes, too, are more informative than those in the superseded Loeb, and helpful within the limits of the format. Here, then, there is much to be learned about drinking, and about what remains when you remove an airy string from hotplates. In their second, and final, volume of Euripidean fragments,[12] Christopher Collard and Martin Cropp go from *Oedipus* to *Chrysippus* (following Greek alphabetical order), plus unassigned and doubtful fragments and an appendix with the plays attributed by some to Critias. As it happens, a query I needed to answer when the review copy arrived was one that could not be answered without the citation context: a reminder that an edition of this kind has limitations. But it makes a mass of information accessible to readers who could not cope with Kannicht, and will be a convenient and informative reference tool for those of us who do not always have Kannicht conveniently to hand. I close with a quick round-up of recent translations. As a companion to Shapiro and Burian's recent *Oresteia* (*G&R* 53 [2006], 110–14), the series *Greek Tragedy in New Translations* has taken the seemingly logical step of combining the other plays of the Aeschylean corpus into a single volume.[13] The translations, by various hands, were published separately between 1973 and 1981, and were roughly handled in these pages on their first appearance (*G&R* 22 [1975], 87–8; 24 [1977], 82). Anthony Hecht's *Seven* is the most successful. Janet Lembke speaks of her *Suppliants* as 'a sometimes radical reappropriation' of the text (208); and I suppose that, as a solution to the problem of rendering the play's first three words, 'ZEUS MEN APHIKTOR' could in a sense be described as radical. Nowadays, Lembke's habit (here and in *Persians*) of SHOUTING suggests a cranky

[10] *Longus. Daphnis and Chloe. Zenophon of Ephesus. Anthia and Habrocomes*. Edited and translated by Jeffrey Henderson. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2009. Pp. xiv + 370. Hardback £15.95, ISBN: 978-0-674-99633-5.

[11] *Athenaeus. The Learned Banqueters V. Books 10.420e–11*. Edited and translated by S. Douglas Olson. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2009. Pp. xii + 512. Hardback £15.95, ISBN 978-0-674-99632-8.

[12] *Euripides. Fragments. Oedipus–Chrysippus. Other Fragments*. Edited and translated by Christopher Collard and Martin Cropp. Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2008. Pp. xxiii + 710. Hardback £15.95, ISBN: 978-0-674-99631-1.

[13] *The Complete Aeschylus. Volume II. Persians and Other Plays.* Edited by Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. 432. Hardback £41, ISBN: 978-0-19-537337-0; paperback £8.99, ISBN: 978-0-19-537328-8.

e-mail. At least one can see how to perform it: but what are performers to do when well-behaved recitatives are transformed into a typographical phantasmagoria? James Scully's *Prometheus* has some of the same annoying quirks. Anyone planning to teach the three plays about the avenging of Agamemnon's death might consider being more imaginative in their syllabus design; but if they persist, *The Electra Plays*[14] can be recommended as a course text without hesitation. *Libation Bearers* is reprinted from Peter Meineck's *Oresteia*, alongside Paul Woodruff's Sophocles (*G&R* 55 [2008], 279), together with a new translation of Euripides by Cecilia Eaton Luschnig. Justina Gregory contributes a judicious and generally reliable introduction (though a flat assertion that the Theatre of Dionysus was 'designed to accommodate at least fifteen thousand spectators' [viii] is nowadays incautious, at the very least). When a poet as distinguished as Ruth Fainlight tackles Sophocles' Theban plays[15] with the aim of producing 'a version accurate enough to be acceptable for teaching which could also stand as a piece of literature' (ix), one's hopes are high. If they aren't quite fulfilled, perhaps their height was unreasonable. The translation has genuine merit: it is clear and stylish, if occasionally a little thin-voiced. However, an atrocious introduction turns the scales decisively in favour of Woodruff and Meineck (*G&R* 51 [2004], 108–9). The simple dignity of Arthur McDevitt's translation of Bacchylides' epinicians[16] is surprisingly effective: 'To be fate-favoured of god / is best for men; fortune, falling, a heavy burden, crushes even the good, / and when she prospers / raises the bad to prominence. / Each has a different kind of honour' (14.1–7). The translation is accompanied by an introduction, and a generous and genuinely helpful commentary. Adherence to Bundy's encomiastic conception of epinician leads, in my view, to a certain narrowness of perspective. But in general I'm impressed.

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Latin Literature

We begin with three Italian books, all published by Quattro Venti and all devoted to Plautus and his birthplace at Sarsina-Urbino. Two are very full editions of Plautine plays, the *Bacchides*[17] and the *Curculio*.[18] The other is a collection of essays on the

[14] *Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles. The Electra Plays*. Translated by Peter Meineck, Cecelia Eaton Luschnig, and Paul Woodruff. With an introduction by Justina Gregory. Indianapolis, IN, Hackett, 2009. Pp. xxxviii + 180. Hardback £27.95, ISBN: 978-0-872-20965-7; paperback £8.95, ISBN: 978-0-872-20964-0.

[15] *Sophocles. The Theban Plays*. Translated with notes and an introduction by Ruth Fainlight and Robert J. Littman. Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009. Pp. lxiv + 219. Hardback £26, ISBN: 978-0-801-89133-5; paperback £10, ISBN: 978-0-801-89134-2.

[16] *Bacchylides. The Victory Poems*. Translated with introduction and commentary by Arthur McDevitt. London, Bristol Classical Press, 2009. Pp. viii + 232. Paperback £14.99, ISBN: 978-1-853-99721-1.

[17] *Titus Maccius Plautus. Bacchides*. Edited by Caesar Questa. Editio Plautina Sarsinatis 4. Urbino, Quattro Venti, 2008. Pp. 109. Paperback €16, ISBN: 978-88-392-0847-7.

[18] *Titus Maccius Plautus. Curculio*. Edited by Septimius Lanciotti. Editio Plautina Sarsinatis 8. Urbino, Quattro Venti, 2008. Pp. 87. Paperback €16, ISBN: 978-88-392-0851-4.