

BOOK REVIEW

A Companion to Hellenistic Literature. Edited by JAMES J. CLAUSS and MARTINE CUYPERS. Oxford and Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. Hardcover, £136.00/\$218.95. Pp. xxv + 550. ISBN 978-1-405-13679-2.

This addition to Blackwell's "Companions to the Ancient World" sports thirty essays from a wide array of European and North American scholars. Following Droysen's traditional historical dating of the Hellenistic period (323–31 BCE) as coterminous with a literary epoch, the editors have arranged the essays in four sections. A substantial "Poetry" and a smaller "Prose" sections comprise the bulk of the volume while a brief overview of "Contexts" of literary production introduces the work and a rapid and very select multi-cultural survey of non-Hellenic, but Hellenistic literary traditions oddly entitled, "Neighbors," closes it. Clauss then provides a closing coda that outlines Roman literature's debts to Hellenistic Greek literature.

After the editors' "Introduction," which offers an overview of the contents and the rationale for the Companion's organization, the "Contexts" section opens with Erskine's wonderfully succinct overview of the history "From Alexander to Augustus." Strootman ("Literature and the Kings") describes the dominant cultural institutions and practices that promoted and privileged certain forms of literary and artistic expression. Stephens ("Ptolemaic Alexandria") narrows Strootman's focus as she surveys Alexandria as a particularly rich site in which we can observe how a long established indigenous civilization thoroughly infuses the conscious construction of a "Greek" identity within Alexander's *cosmopolis*. Wissmann ("Education") offers a more specialized sociology of education during the period. The first three are essential reading for anyone interested in a broad overview of the period and its cultural institutions, but Wissman's contribution, which relies heavily upon Cribiore's ground-breaking work (e.g. 65–8) seems only tangentially related to the rest of the *Companion's* subject matter.

The "Poetry" section, as the nature of preservation and transmission dictates, comprises nearly half of the entire volume. Acosta-Hughes' opening "The Pre-Figured Muse" provides a synthetic overview of Hellenistic poetics that the advanced undergraduate and/or non-specialist will welcome. The subsequent

contributions are ostensibly organized by genre most broadly conceived (cf. xiv–xv), but the section vacillates irregularly between individual works of specific poets (“Callimachus’ *Aitia*” and “Apollonius’ *Argonautica*”), individual poets (“Aratus,” “Nicander”—in lieu of a single entry on “Didactic Poetry?”), individuals as exemplars of particular genres (“Herodas and the Mime” “Menander’s Comedy” “The Bucolic Fiction of Theocritus,” “*Idyll* 6 and the Development of Bucolic after Theocritus”), individuals as the closest approximation of genre whose remains have been virtually obliterated (“Hellenistic Tragedy and Lycophron’s *Alexandra*”). Three of the contributions provide the more straightforward accounts of particular genres that the editors’ introduction had led us to expect (“Epigram” “Hymns and Encomia” “Iambos and Parody”) though even here we find Fantuzzi’s highly specialized (and for the specialist highly stimulating), “Sung Poetry: The Case of the Inscribed Paean.” Murray’s “Hellenistic Elegy” also surveys a much narrower tranche of poetry while Ambrühl serviceably overviews hexameter poetry that is not the *Argonautica*, didactic, or a hymn (“Narrative Hexameter Poetry,” 151–65), even if it reads as an a nearly arbitrary construct necessitated by the eclectic organization of the volume.

In general, that organizational variety does not lead as much to repetition (for which a proleptic apologetic had been issued (xiv) as a lack of balance. Callimachus’ *Aitia* receives outsized treatment (Acosta Hughes, Harder and Murray each attend to it) while other works are relegated to cursory treatment in the more panoramic accounts of a particular genre (e.g. Callimachus’ *Hecale* receives only scant attention). Theocritus suffers a somewhat similar fate though neither Payne’s highly specialized discussion of Theocritean bucolic mimesis nor Reed’s survey of his bucolic successors give as useful an introduction to Theocritus as found in Harder’s excellent account of the *Aitia* (92–5); however, Bulloch’s section of “Hymns and Encomia” devoted to Theocritus (174–8) admirably illustrates and summarizes the vividly episodic nature of his densely allusive poetry.

The editorial decision to divorce some works from their authors but not others renders this Companion a rather unwieldy instrument, but the very thorough index can readily assist the reader interested in stitching together a comprehensive survey of a particular author or genre. Be that as it may, a number of the “Poetry” contributions offer the best of both worlds: succinct, synthetic overviews of authors, works and themes and close reading of particular passages. Sens’ heroic effort to rehabilitate Lycophron (“Hellenistic Tragedy and Lycophron’s *Alexandra*”) in particular furnishes an excellent example of a well-organized, close reading of a text that exemplifies the difficulties of making large

swathes of Hellenistic literature accessible to undergraduates. “Lycophron’s riddling style, often denigrated as a mark of Hellenistic self-indulgence, requires patience ...” (309). Indeed. As always a multi-authored collection will provide plenty with which a specialist would quibble, but on balance the essays dedicated to a genre or author provide even-handed and up-to-date overviews of their subjects while those dedicated to a specific work or particular facet of an author’s *praxis* will be of interest and use to the more advanced.

The “Prose” section confronts the twin challenges of poor preservation and overlap with existing Blackwell Companions. Cuypers directly confronts those issues in her introductory overview of how indirect transmission constrains the scholar’s ability to construct a literary history for the prose literature of the period (318). The abundant scientific literature of the period receives only the barest of summaries although there is a fine selection of specialized studies in the “Suggestions for Further Readings.” Whitmarsh’s “Prose Fiction” offers a fine overview of select variety of texts, motifs and story forms that are indicative of the cross-cultural exchange that informs literary production both within native/indigenous literary traditions and mesh well with the subsequent contributions in the “Neighbors” section. Gowing (“Historiography from Polybius to Dionysius”) devotes most of his attention to examining the impact of Roman conquest on the Greek historical imagination (385) and so is primarily concerned with the transformation of Hellenistic historiography. Gutzwiller’s “Literary Criticism” provides a measured and focused synopsis of the topic. She cleverly does so by raising two trenchant questions—“What is the Function of Literature?” and “How to Divide the Poetic Art?”—to organize the essay. She then well summarizes Euphonist, Stoic and more eclectic responses to these perennial questions. Her contribution in particular will serve any reader well.

“Neighbors” is an innovative attempt to survey the cross-cultural influences precipitated by Alexander’s conquests and his successors’ varying administrative regimes and cultural programs within a highly distinct cultural contexts, although I am not sure the choice of title is appropriate to the realities experienced. Gruen’s selective study of specific Jewish texts (“Jewish Literature”) is masterful reading of particulars (see especially “The Third Sibyl,” 423–5) but one wonders if a broader discussion of Wisdom and Apocalyptic literature—two genres of Jewish literature that are clearly products of a changed cultural and political landscape—would have been as useful as Dieleman’s and Moyer’s overview of Hellenized Egyptian literature is (“Egyptian Literature”). Knippschild’s similar sur-

vey of literary production within more or less Seleucid domains (“Literature in Western Asia”) seems to strain to find native literature let alone literature with a pronounced Hellenistic influence. Berossos may have written in Greek but, as the author concedes, he hewed very closely to established indigenous literary forms (i.e. list-making (457–8)).

The “Suggestions for Further Reading” at the close of each essay are very helpful, but it might have been more useful if the comprehensive bibliography had been organized into a general bibliography followed by specific ones organized by article under the assumption that no one reads a Companion cover to cover—especially one covering such a variegated collection of literary remains. The index is crucial for this Companion’s functional utility. In this respect it does not disappoint. Undergraduates will particularly appreciate that each individual work discussed is listed under the entry devoted to the relevant ancient author.

In sum, Hellenistic literature resists a synoptic survey. Fragmentary remains of such disparate provenance, form and purpose make it hard to offer a panoramic survey. The nature of the material coupled with a “polyphony” (xiv) of scholarly voices and an eclectic arrangement create a Companion that, like so much of the literature it selectively surveys, furnishes some real gems even as it pushes beyond the limits of the genre.

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