

Classics and the Uses of Reception. Edited by CHARLES MARTINDALE AND RICHARD F. THOMAS. Classical Receptions. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. Pp. xiii + 335. Paper, \$36.95. ISBN 1-4051-3145-4.

Contributors: William Batstone, Katie Fleming, Simon Goldhill, Lorna Hardwick, Kenneth Haynes, John Henderson, Ralph Hexter, Craig Kallendorf, Helen Kaufmann, Duncan Kennedy, Miriam Leonard, Alexandra Lianeri, Genevieve Liveley, Charles Martindale, Siobhán McElduff, Pantelis Michelakis, James Porter, Elizabeth Prettejohn, Timothy Saunders, Mathilde Skoie, Richard Thomas, Tim Whitmarsh, Vanda Zajko

As Charles Martindale points out in his introduction to this collection, Reception Studies has become, in the years since the publication of his *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception* (1993), a mainstream critical modality in Classics. One could add, invoking Classics' reputation as the literary discipline most behind the curve of new critical thought, that *Rezeptionsästetik* and related Reader-Response criticisms have *finally* found their way into our musty, old discipline. The Konstanz School got under way in the 1960s, after all, and the work of its early participants, Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, Juri Striedter, Manfred Fuhrmann and Jürgen Habermas, as well as the Reader-Response criticisms of Stanley Fish, Michael Riffaterre, Norman Holland and many others, were dominant forces in the critical constellation of English and Modern Language studies throughout the 60s, 70s, and 80s. Reception's arrival at the cusp of the 21st century in Classics might thus seem a belated theoretical colonization with—given that the theoretical tide has moved on elsewhere—limited prospects.

But I think that that impression would be incorrect. Classics has a particular stake in critical thought that addresses the problem of our (as classicists and readers) historical alienation from the texts we read. Their recession in time and circumstance from our own, together with their perdurance(?) or continuing relevance(?), is a paradox built right into any fair conception of what Classics is. Classicists set out to address that paradox somehow, either with traditional tools in an attempt to discover precisely what was written and meant *then* in order that we may know this increasingly distant pastness better now, or, with other kinds of tools to discover how these texts have made their way to us, their (changing) shapes and colors of meaning fitted out for the long journey forward. In either case, the very "classic" nature of these texts entails an understanding of them *through* time. As Miriam Leonard puts it in one of these chapters, paraphrasing Gadamer, "we are condemned to look upon [the Graeco-Roman tradition] with the eyes of strangers" (p. 117). The

BOOK REVIEW

final gloss on that may be tragic: our alienation is irremediable, and however we work to repair our ignorance, we cannot reconstitute the world our texts were born into. Or it may be radically optimistic, if we conceive of our classics as in constant dialogue with human sensibility and literature and art through time—and this is the view of most of the contributors to this volume.

It is a heartening view on a number of counts, not least in that it blows apart linear conceptions of “the classics and their legacy”: the (legitimate) classical past, the (marginal) classical tradition, the present (state of “Classics in decline”). In place of this conceptual segmentation, Reception posits a more pliant and interactive relationship among texts and readers. Thus while the Classical Tradition has long represented the set of post-classical texts that can trace parentage or “influences” to classical works, Reception Studies consider a wider range of relational possibilities. Later texts are not only influenced by classical models, but always in some sense exert a countervailing influence. Postclassical authors recast their “Classics,” and they are themselves recast by subsequent writers and readers, so that at any point in time, reading a classical text amounts to reading (considering, knowing, assuming, more or less consciously) what post-classical reception has made of that text, reading through reception as we constitute our own receptions. The very breadth of what “Reception” entails (imitating, interpreting, re-writing, translating, assimilating, revising...) can be a problem, and explains the appeal of Jaussian *Rezeptionsästhetik*, which is of course primarily (simply) a theory of “reading.” At bottom is the truism formulated here by William Batstone, paraphrasing Martindale (1993), “All meaning is constituted or actualized at the point of reception” (p. 14). As with Reader-Response theories in general, emphasis shifts from (authoritative) text to reader under this construction, not (explicitly) in most of these essays to hijack the text’s intended meanings, but in service of the notion that whatever a text’s recoverable intended meanings are, they cannot be read in innocence, that is, apart from a reader’s dispositions, understandings of the world and (limited) knowledge. The reader’s mentality, her epistemological situation, has become known, through Jauss, as her *Erwartungshorizont*, her “horizon of expectations” against which she perceives the foregrounded work. One’s horizon is both personal (an Iserian stress) and shared with others of one’s time and situation, and this latter aspect, reception in history, is largely, though not exclusively, the focus of this book’s essays.

BOOK REVIEW

The chapters here, framed by a bracing introduction by Martindale, a jaunty “provocation” by Will Batstone, and a briefly resuming “afterword” by Duncan Kennedy, are broken into two major sections, “Reception in Theory” and “Studies in Reception.” The “theory” contributions are not meant to be comprehensive; rather, they offer (not equally persuasive) theoretical takes on specific problems: Ralph Hexter unpacks the complexities of the reception-history of even a single author, in this case Ovid; Timothy Saunders points out difficulties with reception criticism’s “practice of exemplarity” (p. 32) and (limited) sense of dialogue between text and reception; Kenneth Haynes wades deep into the hermeneutic debates between Gadamer and Habermas on the factors determining a text’s meaning, then into another, related dispute, between Peter Winch and others, on the evidence for transcultural human rationality; Genevieve Lively examines third wave or “post-”feminism in the context of factors that also influence Reception studies (“a postfeminist hermeneutics ... willing and able to reflect upon the historicity of its position” [p. 66]); Craig Kallendorf comments on allusion as reception in Milton and Vergil; Vanda Zajko considers how the Freudian psychoanalytic conception of “identification” maps out certain kind of reception, both within texts and between text and reader; Mathilde Skoie takes her cue from Iser’s comment that “pastoral poetry unfolds itself as a process of reception which gains its own history from its continual reworking of the pastoral world,” and develops the notion in respect to Boileau and post-classical pastoral; Tim Whitmarsh invokes Bakhtin in calling for a reinvigorated consciousness of history, a “pragmatic historicism” in reception studies; Miriam Leonard rereads Derrida (after Martindale), to show how deeply the Derridean reading of Hegel’s take on *Antigone* is imbedded in real history and politics; finally, Katie Fleming considers our own problematic receptions of 20th-century fascist reception of the classics.

The book’s second section offers a selection of focused “Studies in Reception,” and readers will find a wide range of work, though a few pieces, like Alexandra Lianeri’s intriguing meditation, via Homer, on translation and “the classic’s” historical isolation, might have been better suited to the first section of the volume. Richard Thomas is more topical as he traces the fascinating gender and “morality” negotiations of 19th-century English reception of Horace’s *Odes*. James Porter’s discussion of the (modern) historicity of Foucault’s “technologies of the self” and the very different focus of Siobhán McElduff’s survey of non-elite classical reception in Ireland share an interest in the ways current conditions situate classical works. Helen Kaufmann turns to Derek Walcott’s *Omeros* to illus-

BOOK REVIEW

trate how various “colonizing” (and therefore failed) readings of the character Helen might modulate to a more successful “decolonizing” perception. Colonization gets another look in Lorna Hardwick’s treatment of a number of “disaporic” adaptations of Greek drama. Considering drama again, Pantelis Michelakis looks at performance as a mode of reception. The final chapters treat art: Elizabeth Pettejohn covers a number of later versions of the Venus de Milo; Simon Goldhill reads Victorian readings of Alma-Tadema’s Sappho and Alcaeus and other paintings enfiguring “desire” and sexual tension; while John Henderson in a characteristically zesty account returns to familiar ground, Plato’s *Symposium*, via Anselm Feuerbach’s *Das Gastmahl des Platon*—just the sort of out of the way reception to trigger remarkable insights. The best of this superb collection of essays do just this, showing us how reception re-casts imaginative light, illuminating all around.

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