

Oxford Classics: Teaching and Learning 1800–2000. Edited by CHRISTOPHER STRAY. London: Duckworth Publishing, 2007. Pp. x + 275. Cloth, \$70.00. ISBN 978–0–7156–3645–9.

“This is the first book to be devoted to a study of classics in Oxford” (p. ix). [[1]] Thus begins the Preface to a book devoted to a most interesting task, for few classicists on the planet would not like to know more about the incredible engine of things classical that has touched all our lives, at every stage of our career, from OCT texts and commentaries to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, and beyond.

There is much of merit in this first study, but as is the case with many first studies, more questions are raised than answered, and the general reader is left wishing for a more synoptic view and, decidedly, for more help in understanding Classics in Oxford in particular and England in general.

Those wishing for this broader view will come away from this volume unsatisfied. To a certain degree, this is inherent in the book’s structure—a series of 15 discrete articles arranged chronologically by subject matter. 200 years, divided into 15 chapters over 247 pages of text, is bound to leave some gaps. Moreover, the tone of the articles varies widely, with some reading like formal presentations and others more conversational. In tone and aim they range from those aimed at the specialist to others with the generalist in mind. But over all hangs the specter of jargon—those not privy to the English, and especially the Oxfordian, educational system, will find themselves longing for an acquaintance who went to Oxford—or at least a glossary of terms.

The first essay, for example, is by the editor and claims that its aim is “to look at what is distinctive about Oxford, and about Oxford classics,” especially as opposed to those at Cambridge (p. 2). [[2]] But the purpose is thwarted by the constant use of difficult phrases. *Dos moi pou sto* (p. 2), and “a similarly calcenteric Christ Church man,” (p. 7) imply that only those familiar with Archimedes or the Hellenistic scholar Didymus Calchenterus (“Bronze-Guts”), so named for his ability to “crank out” publications, need read further. “Insider language” abounds. One page contains “The Examination Statute of 1800,” “The Thirty Nine Articles,” “*Literae Humaniores*,” and the statement that “(Cambridge) was much less High Church and more latitudinarian than Oxford” (p. 3). This is followed by more: Classical Tripos, the Previous Examination, Responsions, Honour Moderations (p. 4); sixth form (p. 5); Mods without Greats (p. 8); Senior Classic at Cambridge (p. 9); Eighth Classic (p. 10).

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Occasionally a term is defined, and we find that Wranglers, Senior Optimes and Junior Optimes are “first, second and third class honours men” (p. 4). But the overall effect is one of writing for a very select audience—those who have drunk deeply not just of the Classics but of Oxford itself.

Nor is this confined to a single author. Throughout the remaining essays these terms abound and are joined by a host of others. The average reader—and not just the American one, but any not familiar with the structure of Oxford—will, upon finishing the essays, remain unclear about the nature of the distribution of power and influence between colleges and university, and, if he or she has lasted this long, will utter great thanks to Stephanie West, who helps the reader (p. 205) with a clarification of the duties of professors, tutors and lecturers. She similarly (p. 206) helps with definitions of many (but not all) of the terms used so freely before her essay.

It is true that such information can be found on-line, but, to say the least, one expects better, and at a certain point, I fear, long before Prof. West's assistance appears, many a reader will have abandoned the task and put the book aside, missing out on some of the more interesting essays later in the collection. It is perhaps inevitable that the readership of these essays will be confined to those who know something about the Classics. But clouding them with jargon known to a select (in both senses of the word) readership was quite avoidable, and detracts from what could have been an enlightening overview of Classics at Oxford. The collection would have been enhanced immensely by an introductory essay on the Oxfordian system and a tighter editorial hand.

This is not to say that the essays lack merit. Some are gems unto themselves, others have nuggets worth mining, while some are for the dedicated specialist only. They are assembled chronologically by subject matter, and most focus on an individual scholar or teacher. The earlier period is covered by Heather Ellis on Newman and Arnold [[3]], Stefano Evangelista on Walter Pater [[4]], Christopher Collard on Arthur Sidgwick of Greek prose composition fame [[5]], and Anne Rogerson on Conington's commentary on the *Aeneid*. [[6]] Stephen Harrison focuses on Henry Nettleship as an educational innovator, while August A. Imholtz, Jr. provides delightful insight into the creation of the monumental “Liddell and Scott,” placing it in its historical context and even including a plate of an annotated galley sheet for a graphic reminder of the immense work involved. [[7]] Richard Hingley writes intriguingly of the Roman scholar

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Francis John Haverfield (d. 1919) and the connections he saw between the Roman Empire and Edwardian imperialism. [[8]]

Paul Millett's study of Alfred Zimmern and *The Greek Commonwealth* (pp. 168–202) takes us away from higher profile scholars and shows us the life of a classically trained Oxford man who wrote an engaging portrait of ancient Greece but also used this knowledge to inform his work for the League of Nations. [[9]] Stephanie West's first-hand, well written account of Eduard Fraenkel's Oxford days is engaging, and it is interesting to compare her recollections with those of Robin Nisbet and Donald Russell, whose essays cover 1936–1988. [[10]]

Some essays offer insight into areas too long ignored. Isobel Hurst (pp. 14–27) does an excellent job of painting a picture of the first women who, justifiably chafing at their brothers' ease of access to Oxfordian Classics and, one presumed, subsequent success, struggled their way into this world and proved that women too could excel there. Here we meet Dorothy Sayers, of course, but also the pioneering Girton School and one Agnata Frances Ramsay, whose success even spawned a cartoon in *Punch*. We also hear of the assistance afforded the movement by none other than Henry Nettleship and Arthur Sidgwick, both of whom have their own studies later in the collection. Likewise, the aforementioned essay on Walter Pater touches on the prejudices (and laws) that prevailed against homosexuals in 19th century England, just as Millett touches on anti-Semitism in the case of Zimmern. [[11]]

Oxbridge had many "others." Edmund Richardson offers a fascinating study that begins with Jude Fawley from Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. [[12]] Fawley, a stonemason who longed to enter the halls of academia, met only with rejection. Through this prism, Richardson shows clearly that, in 19th-century England, the study of the Classics was sought not as a refuge from the modern world but as "a way to participate all the more aggressively in it" (p. 29). Case studies treat several individuals who went on to positions of power in Victorian government and the Church, as well as some remarkable failures. No talk of Oxford would be complete without at least a nod to the OUP, and Graham Whitaker charms with a tantalizing study of OCT texts that were never printed. [[13]]

In the final essay in the collection, James Morwood attempts to bring the reader up to date on the current, beleaguered state of Classics in England and of Oxford's attempt to deal with it through curricular reform and an emphasis on modernizing its language teaching. [[14]]

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The piece is notable for its mention (and praise) of the new interaction between the schools and the universities.

The notes for almost all the essays are copious and often discursive, containing a wealth of information to lead a curious reader forward. The text is very clean, although the index is mostly a list of personal names. There are no entries, for example for "Women," "Homosexuality" or "Publication," despite their prominence in several essays. Illustrations are infrequent but aptly chosen.

What, then, is the final evaluation of this volume? Whitaker inadvertently sums up a reviewer's problem nicely as he concludes his own essay: "It is difficult to summarise, or to draw conclusions from, a general survey such as this" (p. 163). There is much of value in this book and much that delights. In the end, and despite its problems, it is more than what James Morwood cleverly calls "Oxford navel-gazing" (p. 246).

It is fascinating to visualize Fraenkel, or "Uncle Ed" as his students called him—undoubtedly behind his back—leading a class in song (pp. 208–9). And it is stunning to read of the linguistic talents of those gone by. When F.C. Geary missed a Fraenkel seminar, he penned an "apology in resonant Aeschylean iambics, such as few if any of us could compose now" (p. 220). And many a modern Classicist struggling to attract majors would welcome Gilbert Murray's promotion in 1889 of the value of studying the Classics in translation (p. 21). Those who clash with administrators will recognize Jowett's motto: "Never retreat. Never explain. Get it done and let them howl" (p. 40). Those seeking tenure will be intrigued by Russell's insistence that there were days when people knew that "to be outstanding as a scholar does not entail having a conspicuous place in *L'Année Philologique*" (p. 230), and by Nisbet's clarion call for authorities to "Assess scholarship by its art, not by the land-surveyor's tape-measure" (p. 225). One such "non-publisher" was F. C. Geary, mentioned above, who, despite having no monographs, published a slim volume of poems on contemporary matters in the more difficult Horatian meters, establishing that "Mussolini" is a double trochee (p. 220)! Other scholars will shake their heads at hearing that Francis John Haverfield had "few major publications" just after learning that the man died at age 59 and had published two books and well over four hundred papers on a variety of topics ranging from Roman Britain to Albrecht Dürer (p. 136).

Such nuggets and much insight are to be found in the book, but getting at it is harder work than it needs to be. Many readers will

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simply dip into the work for information on their particular areas of interest, or will stop reading early, missing the essays toward the end. Others may avoid the book, feeling it does not warrant the price. Much of this could have been avoided with a tighter editorial eye that kept potential readers in mind while trying to knit the essays into a cohesive unit through adjustments to tone and style and, perhaps, short introductory essays setting each piece into a greater whole.

There is much to learn from this first book on Oxford Classics. But perhaps the biggest lesson is how better to approach any book that attempts to sum up the history of a discipline. Such books should lay out a broad, accessible picture for readers who are interested but lack the background information of insiders. When an overview is eventually written of the Classics in America or Germany, one hopes that such amenities are appended and that we can all profit more easily as a result.

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[[1]] I follow the American convention of capitalizing "Classics" throughout except in direct quotes. I have likewise Americanized capitalization conventions in titles.

[[2]] Christopher Stray, "Non-identical Twins: Classics at Nineteenth-century Oxford and Cambridge," pp. 1–13.

[[3]] Heather Ellis, "Newman and Arnold: Classics, Christianity and Manliness in Tractarian Oxford," pp. 46–63.

[[4]] Stefano Evangelista, "Walter Pater's Teaching in Oxford: Classics and Aestheticism," pp. 64–77.

[[5]] Christopher Collard, "Schoolmaster, Don, Educator: Arthur Sidgwick Moves to Corpus in 1879," pp. 78–93.

[[6]] Anne Rogerson, "Conington's 'Roman Homer'," pp. 94–106.

[[7]] Stephen Harrison, "Henry Nettleship and the Beginning of Modern Latin Studies at Oxford," pp. 107–16; August A. Imholtz, Jr., "'Liddell and Scott': Precursors, Nineteenth-century Editions, and the American Contributions," pp. 117–34.

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[[8]] Richard Hingley, "Francis John Haverfield (1860–1919): Oxford, Roman Archaeology and Edwardian Imperialism," pp. 135–53.

[[9]] Paul Millett's "Alfred Zimmern's *The Greek Commonwealth Revisited*," pp. 168–202.

[[10]] Stephanie West's "Eduard Fraenkel Recalled," pp. 203–16; Robin Nisbet and Donald Russell, "The Study of Classical Literature at Oxford, 1936–1988," pp. 217–38. Nisbet's essay is based on a 1988 speech, updated and revised in 1991 and reprinted here unchanged; Russell's is a version of a paper given in 1996.

[[11]] Evangelista (n. 4, above), pp. 67–8; Millett (n. 9, above), pp. 184–5.

[[12]] Edmund Richardson, "Jude the Obscure: Oxford's Classical Outcasts," pp. 28–45.

[[13]] Graham Whitaker, "What you Didn't Read: The Unpublished Oxford Classical Texts," pp. 154–67.

[[14]] James Morwood, "Small Latin and Less Greek: Oxford Adjusts to Changing Circumstances," pp. 239–49.