

BOOK REVIEW

The Door Ajar: False Closure in Greek and Roman Literature and Art. Edited by FAROUK F. GREWING, BENJAMIN ACOSTA-HUGHES, and ALEXANDER KIRICHENKO. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2013. Pp. xviii + 367. Hardcover, € 66. ISBN 978-3-8253-5697-2.

The late Don Fowler began his groundbreaking article, “First Thoughts on Closure: Problems and Prospects,” with a review of recent critical work on closural theory.¹ A check today in the MLA International Bibliography for the past three years shows a continued interest in closure as a critical concern (49 results). Fowler’s recommendation that closural theories be applied more widely in classical scholarship has been taken up in the intervening years and the usefulness of this line of inquiry has been proven.

This new collection, *The Door Ajar: False Closure in Greek and Roman Literature and Art*, cites Fowler’s work on closure as its inspiration, more specifically, his formulation of the “false ending” (Fowler 1989: 97) “where the text seems to pause or end but the external division has not yet been reached.” The volume, deriving from a 2009 conference in Vienna, comprises fifteen chapters (in English), with an introduction and epilogue. The essays treat Greek and Latin prose and (mostly) poetry, along with three chapters on the visual arts. It proposes to investigate the idea of false closure, although the usefulness of this term is itself interrogated (‘premature’ or ‘anticipatory’ might be more useful).

The editors present the volume as “deliberately self-doubting” (11). Christian Kaesser reviews ancient rhetorical training and finds no evidence for a deliberate strategy of ‘deceptive’ endings. While acknowledging the “tension between ‘open’ and ‘closed’ ever-present in the literary work” (Fowler 1989:80), the papers in this volume overwhelmingly endorse continuity over closure: “any closure is of necessity a false closure” (1). As Fowler (1997, 5) recognized, “it is difficult for a twentieth-century person to choose to be closed.” This volume complements and shares many features with the earlier (1997) collection *Classi-*

¹ MD 22 (1989) 75-122. See also idem, “Second Thoughts on Closure,” in *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature*, ed. D. Roberts, F. Dunn, D. Fowler, 3-22. Princeton, 1997.

cal Closure, which limited itself to the endings of literary works. The essays are all stimulating and often thought-provoking.

Ancient poetic and epistolary collections offer particularly rich possibilities for strategies of closure and continuation. Christopher Whitton takes an illuminating look at Pliny's letter collection and analyzes his closural strategies within books and between books, highlighting Pliny's editorial activity in creating juxtapositions and frames. Jonathon Wallis looks at Propertius' staged ending at 3.24, and considers how the *renuntiatio amoris* enacts a traditional pattern of erotic false closure involving rejection and renewal (245). Regina Hörschle's rewarding chapter considers the "inner-textual games" aimed at the reader in the epigram collections of the *Carmina Priapea* and Martial. She shows the authors flirting with gestures of closure and beginning, playing with the reader's expectations, and requiring her to reread and adjust the poems on a macrotextual level.

The endings of ancient works pose particular problems, many textual in nature. Francis Dunn revisits the much-discussed ending of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and reinterrogates the criteria of closure in determining the ending, arguing for social and ethical over aesthetic factors in choosing as the end the transmitted text (line 1530). This cultural grounding is shared with a number of other papers in this volume. In his discussion of the incompleteness of Ovid's *Fasti*, however, Christian Kaesser does not bring to bear textual closural strategies in Book 6 and the political implications of the poem's incompleteness (see Barchiesi in *Classical Closure*). Manuel Baumbach argues that Lucian's *True Histories* is a forerunner of German Romantic 'fragmentary writing' in being intentionally unfinished. One might note that other ancient authors, of course, (e.g. Ovid, Lucan) have already been proposed for this role. Alexander Kirichenko offers an interesting new interpretation of the problematic ending of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, suggesting that the succession of false closures contributes to "Apuleius' systematic destabilization of Plato's anti-mimetic strictures" (308).

Another group of papers consider closural literary strategies. Markus Asper interestingly argues that aetiological closure depends on the reader's reception, namely the audience's understanding of the local context needed to form the bridge from mythical fiction to audience's reality. Michèle Lowrie in her sophisticated study explores how political foundation is treated by Livy and Vergil. Looking at Roman political theory (and Machiavelli and Arendt), Lowrie tries "to recuperate for Livy and Vergil contributions to political thought" (84). In Livy she sees an "overall idea of gradual foundation", where refoundation (continuity) implies movement forward, whereas in Vergil "violence attends founda-

tion without having a pragmatic function, and repetition entails no forward motion" (89). Victoria Rimell's chapter considers the metaphor of the amphitheater or circus in Latin literature as an image for "controlled 'open' ending". Ivana Petrovic argues that the repetitive features of Greek Hymns are meant to create an impression of endlessness (an acknowledgement of Bundy's work on closural strategies would have been useful here).

The editors should be praised for including discussion of art, but the black and white images are disappointing. Gloria Ferrari (on the Nile mosaic at Praeneste), David Petrain (Trojan war visual narratives), Michael Squire (Pompeian paintings) all consider the importance of the "viewing sequence" and "spatial organization" to visual representations. Both Ferrari and Petrain detect a "triumphalist response" in the culmination of a sequence in Roman imagery (140 Ferrari, cf. 148 Petrain). Squire sees in his Pompeian friezes with epigrams a deliberate play with multimediality, in which juxtaposition creates a "conversational centerpiece" and the goal is open-ended and aspirational 'intellectual' discussion (193).

A fine essay by Philip Hardie closes the edition with a study of how *fama*, in its many meanings, appears equally at commencements, middles, and ends. The study looks at closural *fama* from Ennius and Vergil to Petrarch and Byron, providing the sort of intertextual approach Fowler often advocated.

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