

## BOOK REVIEW

*Classics in the Modern World: A 'Democratic Turn'?* Edited by LORNA HARDWICK and STEPHEN HARRISON. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xxxvii + 477. Hardcover, \$160.00. ISBN 978-0-19-967392-6.

**T**His volume is yet another important contribution to the rapidly growing body of scholarship in reception studies. The present collection investigates how role of classics in modern period acquired a 'democratic turn' bringing about the contemporary increase in public interest in Greek and Roman material. In their 2008 *Companion to Classical Receptions* Hardwick and Stray anticipated the appearance of such a volume by identifying the momentum gained in recent studies by the 'democratic turn' in classical reception analysis. Subsequently in their introduction to the volume Hardwick and Harrison carefully and coherently situate the current collection within its theoretical framework. The introduction defines succinctly what the 'democratic turn' in the title signifies. While the term 'democratic' is "common to both the academic and the public spheres", it still carries "contested meaning and contradictory resonances" (xxiii).

Although the 'democratic turn' itself can mean shifting of the focus away from the association between study of antiquity and certain elite groups, it can also signal "lasting epistemic shifts in perception of how texts are constituted and in how meaning might be ascribed and transmitted" (xxii). This volume addresses various types of such epistemic shifts and explores how ancient material impacts the wider world or is shaped by it.

The volume is divided into six sections. The first section "Controversies and Debates" features five essays by Katherine Harloe, Lorna Hardwick, Alexandra Lianeri, John Hilton, and Michael Simpson and sets out to explore the theme of the collection through intellectual history and political analysis.

The second section "Area Study – The United States" also contains five essays by Barbara Lawatsch Melton, Margaret Malamud, Robert Davis, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, and Judith P. Hallett and analyzes the impact of classics on intellectual and socio-political history of the United States, with 1776 as its starting point.

In the third section “Education: Ideologies, Practices and Contexts” three contributions by Joanna Paul, Barbara Goff and Martina Treu focus on different examples of educational processes.

The fourth section “Greek Drama in Modern Performance: Democracy, Culture and Tradition” approaches different facets of productions of Greek drama through five essays by Mary-Kay Gamel, Anastasia Bakogianni, Angeliki Varakis, Nurit Yaari, and Dorinda Hulton.

The fifth section “Creativity – Female Agency in Fiction and Poetry” is the shortest section of the volume consisting of three essays, in which Fiona Cox and Elena Theodorakopoulos discuss issues of gender and link it with several other studies in the volume.

The last, and the largest, sixth section “The Public Imagination” contains seven essays by Sarah Butler, Alexandre G. Mitchell, Amanda Wrigley, Antony Makrinos, George A. Kovacs, Susan Walker, Elton Barker and it concentrates on the use of classics by various media at the crucial intersections of democratic debates and use of classical material.

The afterword written by Sara Monoson offers a summary of how the present volume attempts to emphasize the surge of recent interest in classical sources within popular culture and in public debate.

The editors of the collection acknowledge that such an ambitious project “inevitably raises more questions than it can answer” and that many conceptual issues addressed in it require further refinement (xxxii). While this volume does not offer an exhaustive treatment of any specific subject it questions, its most remarkable contribution is that it prompts an examination of how classical material provoked public engagement beyond that of political discourse and debate.

It is tempting to agree with Monoson’s phrase borrowed from Danielle Allen that, despite the constant misguided assaults on liberal arts as poor “investments”, we are today in a modest “neo neo-classical cultural moment” (428). The ‘democratic turn’ of that cultural moment is certainly one of the most positive developments of the revived interest in Greco-Roman material.

A short review can hardly do justice to the efforts to build bridges between our discipline and the concerns of modern society relevant to the life of the students whom most of us teach. Many of the essays in the volume can be used in the college classrooms. The informative essay by Melton on the role of Cicero and Cato in the making of American civic identity, Threu’s thought provoking discussion of ‘anti-classical’ approach to Classics, Cox’s and Theodorakopoulos’s insightful contributions on female agency in fiction and poetry, Wrigley’s astute analysis

of mass media engagements with antiquity, and Kovacs' interpretation of Frank Miller's *300* are only very few salient examples of the opportunities this volume opens to initiate important and timely discussions with the new generation of scholars and students.

One hopes that this volume is only a start of the larger diversification of the classical tradition and reception and that the future collections of such kind will broaden its geographic scope and include more countries beyond Western Europe and its most notable influences.

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