

## BOOK REVIEW

*Xenophon's Anabasis or The Expedition of Cyrus*. By MICHAEL A. FLOWER. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. xvi + 242. Paper, \$19.95. ISBN 978-0-19-518868-4.

In this excellent contribution to the *Oxford Approaches to Classical Literature* series, Michael Flower notes the resurgence of interest in the study of Xenophon's works over the past 50 years. He cites H.R. Breitenbach's 1967 work as "a foundational text in the modern study of Xenophon" (38), and also rightly notes the importance of J.K. Anderson (1974) and W.E. Higgins (1977) in this regard.<sup>1</sup>

Even with the proliferation of studies of Xenophon through the nineties and first decade of this century<sup>2</sup>, a major lacuna in the scholarship remained: a dearth of engagement with the *Anabasis* from a literary perspective. While this has been increasingly rectified in recent years, the primary contribution of Flower's work is that it is the first book length literary study of the *Anabasis* to be published. Flower sums up the state of play, as it were, in the scholarship on the *Anabasis*, provides a cogent argument for why this text deserves such study, and, finally, presents a rigorous, sustained literary exegesis that will serve as the benchmark and springboard for all subsequent literary studies of the *Anabasis*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Interest in Xenophon picked up steam through the '80s and mid-'90s: e.g. works on *Cyropaedia* by Tatum (1989), Gera (1993), Due (1989); on *Oeconomicus*, Pomeroy (1994); *Hellenica*, Dillery (1995), Tuplin (1993), Gray (1989); *Memorabilia*, Gray (1998). This increased interest culminated with "Xenophon and his World," the first ever international conference devoted exclusively to Xenophon (organized by C. Tuplin in Liverpool in 1999 with subsequent publication in 2004). V. Gray's contribution to the *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies* series in 2010 showed that it was time to take stock of the work of the recent decades.

<sup>2</sup> Only in the mid-90s did the *Anabasis* began to attract comparable attention: commentaries by Stronk & Lendle; Briant conference and publication, 1995. The first decade of this century has seen a veritable boom in work on this text: M.C. Ford's 2001 novelization of the *Anabasis*; J. Dillery's 2001 revised Loeb edition; a seminar led by Robin Lane Fox at Oxford in 2001 and resulting publication 2004; the 2004 publication from the 1999

This book assuredly fulfills the goals of the *Oxford Approached to Classical Literature* series by being accessible to general readers or students of the author who are approaching the work for the first time, while also being an exercise in criticism and interpretation that will engage scholars in the field.

By eschewing footnotes and endnotes, Flower allows for an ease of reading that is not harried or interrupted by the continual shifting of focus to the bottom of the page or the back of the book. This book is an extended essay in literary criticism, and it reads well. For the scholar, however, Flower provides the necessary apparatus to engage more deeply with the different discussions. The body of the book consists of an introduction and eight chapters. At the end of each there is a brief section on “Further Reading” in which Flower comments on the content and merits of the relevant works of scholarship for the chapter. There are a full eight pages of general bibliography along with an index of Prominent Persons, a Bibliography, an Index of Passages Cited, and a general Index.

Flower’s introduction does a good job of tracing the evolution of attitudes to Xenophon and the *Anabasis*, and lays out a clear methodological approach, mapping potential pitfalls as well as the wealth of material. He is quite clear at the outset that this is a literary study, and that his “methodological approach is eclectic, consisting of a historically informed close reading that pays particular attention to rhetorical and narrative strategies.” (5). His “goal is to provide as multifaceted an exploration of the *Anabasis*” (6) as he can, and “to analyze the way Xenophon tells the story and how he constructs his own role and self-image within the narrative.” (7). What he provides, in fact, with this introductory essay is a very clear primer for students thinking about ways to approach texts. At the same he also signals to scholars how and where he will wade into scholarly disputes.

In his first chapter (“The *Anabasis* in Context”), Flower provides a brief synopsis of plot, and a brief biography of Xenophon, including an overview of his literary works. His aim is to situate Xenophon and his

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Liverpool conference; T. Rood’s works on the influence and reception of the *Anabasis* in 2004 and 2010; J. Prevas’ retracing of Xenophon’s steps in 2002; R. Waterfield’s new translation in 2005, and the account his journey in 2006.

“Life in Arms and Books” (19) within the political, military, and literary world of the late 5<sup>th</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. . There follows a brief overview of major interpretive disputes about when and why Xenophon wrote the *Anabasis*. Flower is not persuaded by the traditional, largely apologetic explanations. He intends to argue for “a particularly urgent and overarching motive for [Xenophon’s] committing the story to writing.” (34). He sees the text of the *Anabasis* as a “memory place” which serves as the locus of fixing the identity of the participants in the events and the preservation of their memory for posterity. Of course, since Xenophon himself is the foremost focus of attention in the text, it is his identity and memory that will come alive again each time the work is read. Thus, one of the primary interpretive views that Flower will look to elucidate in this book is the ways in which the *Anabasis* was “a memory place whose entrance was closely guarded by the author himself.” (36). In other words, Flower will be trying to demonstrate how “Xenophon, in his capacity as the author of the text, exercises a tight control both over who and what is remembered and over how they are remembered.” (36).

In chapter 2 (“Xenophon as Author, Narrator, and Agent”), Flower gives a thorough, balanced survey of the well-known questions and difficulties of the text (lack of preface stating theme, purpose, or even subject matter; lack of closure; genre; audience; and narrative voice). He sums up nicely the really maddening difficulty in reading Xenophon: “In both style and content Xenophon is a deceptively simple author, but that simplicity is itself a finely wrought literary strategy” (41). He also addresses the unique, vexed question of the intersection of Xenophon the historical person who wrote the *Anabasis* (the author), Xenophon the character in the narrative, and the narrator. He makes the sensible observations that the veracity of the narrative is reinforced by the presence of first person speeches, while the speeches seem more truthful because of the presence of the “seemingly disinterested narrator.” His main observation, however, is that the distinction between the voices of the narrator and of Xenophon (the character with the most speeches) ultimately collapses, and the narra-

tor's voice is, in a sense, drowned out by the voice of Xenophon the character.<sup>3</sup>

In chapter 3 ("Let It Be Fact *and* Let It Be Fiction?"), Flower lays out clearly his statement of the problem of fact and fiction with regard to the *Anabasis*: "what is the relationship between what actually took place, the context of remembering what took place, the motive for recording what one remembers, and the literary choices that shape that recording?" (62). Is this a work of what we would call historical fiction "or something more akin to modern academic historical writing?" (63). Flower compares Xenophon's account to the account of others, and finds that other extant accounts generally cannot prove Xenophon's narrative false, and that no ancient writer accused Xenophon of falsifying or exaggerating his account of his own role. He notes the similarities in general components of writing fiction and non-fiction, and essentially sees the *Anabasis* as a memoir that is, on the whole, factually reliable, but which gives "a particular type of 'spin' or perspective" in "selecting and interpreting events from the point of view of a single actor." (78). Flower reminds us that memoir, as "a special sort of historical narrative," cannot help but do otherwise. In the end, he would seem to want to remove the question mark from the title of this chapter.

In his longest chapter, and the one most devoted to close reading and literary analysis (Chapter 4: "Style and the Shaping of Narrative"), Flower tries to come to grips with Xenophon's "particular 'style', the sum total of his rhetorical, linguistic, and historiographical strategies." (82). He calls Xenophon a "master of style in that he is adept at choosing precisely the right words, put into the right order, to convey the ideas and images he wishes to communicate." (82). It is "just how successfully Xenophon concealed his art" (82) that Flower tries to explain in this chapter. He treats Xenophon's construction of scenes, his use of focalization, his "narrative economy", his speeches and characterization, and the overall shaping of his narrative, including the vexed issue of closure. Flower provides as "A Case Study in Narrative Technique" (112-115) a scene near the end of the text concerning Xenophon's involvement with Seuthes and the payment

<sup>33</sup> Jonas Grethlein follows this very line of interpretation in an excellent article that appeared after the completion of Flower's book, "Xenophon's *Anabasis* from Character to Narrator," *JHS* 132 (2012) 23-40.

of money and leadership of the troops (7.7.48-54). He offers this episode as representative of the way in which Xenophon, through careful employment of “narrative economy, gaps in the narrative, humor, characterization, and personal apology” (112), ultimately “lets his readers draw their own conclusions.” (116).

In chapter 5 (“Xenophon Takes Command”), Flower describes the scene in which Xenophon takes his place as one of the Greek generals (3.1.4ff) as “one of the most remarkable and carefully wrought passages in all of ancient Greek literature” (120). Flower analyses how Xenophon then, in subtle, incremental ways, constructs a self-portrayal that “moves beyond apology into the realm of scripting a paradigm of the ideal democratic leader” (119). =One of the author’s most common narrative tactics, however, which Flower suggests can lead us to “read against the grain of his narrative; that is, read it subversively” (139), is the way blame is consistently shown to be shared (even by Xenophon), but credit shines most brightly on Xenophon alone.

In chapter 6 (“Xenophon on Trial”), Flower analyses the extended defense speeches Xenophon is compelled to give against serious accusations at three separate times. These set pieces not only contribute to his self-presentation; they also serve to structure and develop the narrative. These episodes (concluding books 5, 6, and 7) are all resolved in a way that tells the reader that “it turned out well”, as the last sentence of book 5 states. The primary complaints concern his alleged desire to start a colony on the coast of the Black Sea rather than lead the army home; his treatment of the soldiers; his alleged tolerance for lawlessness among his troops; and, ultimately, his supposed selfish motivations as leader. Flower sees book 7 as “the last act in a great drama” (151), “from start to finish... a defense of Xenophon against the charges” (152). The structure and pacing of the narrative, and the careful cultivation of his image through six books culminate in book 7, roughly one-third of which consists of speeches by Xenophon. Flower considers these speeches powerful and effective not just because of their content, but because of how they are framed by the narrative. He judges Xenophon largely successful in fulfilling his narrative’s task: transforming his text into the “memory place in which Xenophon’s role in the exploits of the Ten Thousand Greeks... will be pre-

served for all time" (163), and presenting himself as "a truly great man who continually put himself in personal danger on behalf of the army he was determined to save" (141)

Flower begins chapter 7 ("Reading the *Anabasis*"), with some explicit comments about his literary critical method in attempting "to explicate what the *Anabasis* may have meant to Xenophon, to his contemporary Greek readers, and to readers ancient and modern of subsequent generations and, finally, what it may mean to us in the early twenty-first century" (170). He acknowledges the potential for polyvalence in a text, but does not believe that "the subjective element in interpretation is arbitrary" (168). His discussion of "what the *Anabasis* may have meant" focuses on whether it is legitimate to read the *Anabasis* primarily as a call to Greek unity and a panhellenic war against the Persian Empire. In keeping with his approach throughout this book, he explains the rhetorical and literary strategies Xenophon employs to attempt to "shape and direct reader responses" (169) while reminding us that "what Xenophon omits is sometimes as essential to the meaning of his text as what he includes" (193). He concludes that "The *Anabasis* gives little reason to hope that Greeks from many different cities, who are fighting for private gain and are motivated by greed, will ever maintain a consistent obedience and discipline, even if an excellent (and patient) commander can rein them in temporarily" (201). According to Flower, any reading that sees the *Anabasis* as "a panhellenist tract" can only be the result of "the most simple and unreflective of readings" (187).

In chapter 8 ("The Hand of God Artfully Placed"), Flower notes the relative lack of attention given by scholars to the issue of the "religious landscape" in the *Anabasis*. He is thinking here particularly of the system of practice, belief, and knowledge of divination with which "one must come to terms...in order to fully appreciate Xenophon's narrative strategies." (204). Throughout the narrative the gods seem to punish the impious and reward the reverent, but at the "micro-level of individual decision-making" rather than the "macro-level of the rise and fall of hegemonies" (207) as in the *Hellenica*. Flower emphasizes how Xenophon the character has recourse to divination for every major decision he makes for himself. This depicts him as pious and deserving of any good that comes his way. It also, however, tends to relieve him of the responsibility for the

consequences of his choices, and even serves in a “disquieting” way, in Flower’s view, to “whitewash” his mistakes (215). Flower’s analysis of select passages provides a paradigm of close reading that opens up further productive study without pretending to be exhaustive.

This excellent work will need to be read by every graduate student and scholar working on Xenophon, and is suitable for advanced undergraduates reading Xenophon. It also certainly will be of interest to the general reader who has read the *Anabasis* and would like to have a deeper appreciation of the work. I found no errors of typography, editing, or fact to mar what is a well-produced and reasonably priced paperback at \$19.95.

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