

## BOOK REVIEW

*Classical Commentaries: Explorations in a Scholarly Genre*. Edited by CHRISTINA S. KRAUS AND CHRISTOPHER STRAY. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. xxii + 542. Hardcover, \$200.00. ISBN 978-0-19-968898-2.

This edited volume is a delight, one of those books that all classicists will want to read not only for the important information it contains, but also for sheer pleasure. And so, to commence: congratulations are in order to the editors and the contributors for composing and arranging a marvelous addition to the growing bibliography of *Kommentar Studien*.<sup>1</sup>

This beautifully illustrated work opens with a brief and informative essay by the editors that serves not only to introduce the individual contributions, but also to provide a useful primer on what just we mean by “commentary.” From the start, a salient feature of this book is the delightfully detailed way in which it discusses those volumes that classics students and scholars so often take for granted on our shelves: Oxford Reds; Cambridge Oranges; Greens and Yellows. For those who love books for books’ sake—especially those who spent formative years of a classical education in studying the front pages of great (and minor) editions of Greek and Latin works—this volume is a book for pure enjoyment.

The first section of essays is concerned with specific commentaries. Jebb’s Sophocles is the first subject. Here P.J. Finglass offers a balanced tribute to the monument of anglophone Sophoclean scholarship. The failings of Jebb’s editions emerge as part of a complex portrait of the challenges, wisdom, and warnings that this celebrated *fin de siècle* set of commentaries still poses to contemporary students of tragedy.

Anyone who has used—or tried to use—Fraenkel’s *Agamemnon* should appreciate the harrowing story of how those three large-scale volumes came into being. Authors who have wondered if they have too many proof corrections to

<sup>1</sup> The present work can in some ways be seen as the crown to a trilogy that includes John Henderson’s *Oxford Reds: Classic Commentaries on Latin Classics*, London: Duckworth, 2006), and Christopher Stray, ed., *Classical Books: Scholarship and Publishing in Britain Since 1800*, London, 2007.

submit to cost-conscious publishers may take some small comfort in reading of Fraenkel's experiences with his Aeschylus.

Seasoned Virgilians know that there is always profit in consulting the three Macmillan Red editions of T.E. Page. Richard Thomas' essay on Page's Virgil takes us back to Victorian schoolrooms, where concern about the exact function of a given ablative nudges against moral and ethical judgments about Aeneas' behavior with Dido. Thomas offers a snapshot not only of a commentator and his work, but also of the readers past and present of this splendid Virgilian *totum*. For those who have not used Page, Thomas' essay will likely inspire consultation of the editor's unassuming and pithy notes.

Stephen Harrison takes us through the stories of the Kiessling-Heinze, Nisbet and Hubbard, and Nisbet and Rudd Horace commentaries. As throughout, Harrison's contribution to this volume is as much an essay on the history of the literary criticism of the author/work in question as it is a highly detailed record and remembrance of the genesis of volumes that all classicists have consulted at least now and again.

Next is S.P. Oakley's account of perhaps the most famous of the Oxford Reds, the Dodds *Bacchae*. Here there is more of the intriguing biographical detail that characterizes the other essays, in this case on the life of the Irish classicist Eric Robertson Dodds, friend of Huxley and Eliot and successor to Murray as Regius Professor of Greek.

The second part of the volume concerns the commentary tradition on selected authors and works. First is the masterful survey of Salvador Bartera on Tacitus' *Annales*. This is an essay that is reminiscent of Stephen Harrison's inaugural "Oxford Readings" survey of Virgilian scholarship: lucid, densely packed with information, and engagingly written.

All students of Quintus Ennius will want to read Jackie Elliott's piece on the epic *Annales*. This chapter works very well with its successor, Armand D'Angour's paper on the fragmentary Greek lyric commentary tradition. Those interested in learning something about Greek music will be especially rewarded by D'Angour's work.

Matters philosophical come next: first, the ancient philosophical commentary, and then then the Italian commentary tradition on Lucretius. This latter paper immerses the reader in the world of Renaissance humanism in a manner accessible both to specialist and neophyte.

Justin Haynes tackles the difficult problem of the reception of Ovid in the ancient Virgilian commentary tradition. The paper advances successfully the

thesis that exegesis of the Ovidian *Metamorphoses* was associated closely with study of Virgil almost from the start. A final chapter for this section on the phenomenon of the “historical commentary” suffers only from being comparatively brief given its vast subject.

Part Three of the collection immerses us in the world of marketing and publication ventures. Lovers of Renaissance reception of the Classics will want to read Paul Gehl’s study of the treatment of Terence in the nascent age of book publishing. Roy Gibson’s “Fifty Shades of Orange” is a fascinating study of the *Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries* series, from Machon to the series’ two-volume, bilingual Pseudo-Dosithean curiosity.

Commentary Reception is the subject of the fourth section of the volume. Here Joseph Farrell’s essay on Theocritean and Virgilian pastoral exegesis stands out, as does Katherine Harloe’s on Christian Gottlob Heyne. The final installment—internet ventures and electronic commentaries—could easily be the subject of its own profitable volume.

The Kraus and Stray *Classical Commentaries* is an addictive read, and anyone who loves books will find something to appreciate in these pages. Oxford University Press has done a great service in taking on an expensive project (this is one instance where the cost of the volume is more than justified by the production values and illustrative material, including in color). The editors and authors, for their part, have done much to reveal the tantalizing secrets of the very books that seek to unveil the myriad mysteries of classical poetry and prose.

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