

BOOK REVIEW

Reading Late Antiquity. CULLHED, SIGRID SCHOTTENIUS and MALM, MATS, eds. The Library of the Other Antiquity. Heidelberg DE: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2018. Pp. 267. Hardback, €48.00. ISBN 978-3-8253-6787-9.

This book is a welcome addition to the growing body of work on the reception of late antiquity. It follows another volume in “The Library of the Other Antiquity” series, M. Formisano and T. Fuhrer, eds., *Décadence: “Decline and Fall” or “Other Antiquity”?*, Heidelberg 2014, and sits alongside comparable work being done in Byzantine Studies (see especially R. Betancourt and M. Taroutina, eds., *Byzantium/Modernism: The Byzantine as Method in Modernity*, Leiden 2015). The proceedings of a conference held in Stockholm in 2015, it brings together scholars from different disciplines to explore the afterlives of late antiquity in later periods. The chronological range of the contributions goes from the high Middle Ages to the present day, but most of the papers focus on the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. The book is divided into three sections: “Theoretical Outlooks,” “Decadence and Decline,” and “Continuities and Transformation.” Since space prevents me from talking about every contribution in detail, I focus here on four chapters that particularly stood out to me. The other chapters include theoretical approaches to late antique literature, the history of late antique scholarship and focused studies of individual authors or texts.

One of the strongest contributions to the volume is the first, in which James Uden explores the role of the anonymous poem *Pervigilium Veneris* in Walter Pater’s novel *Marius the Epicurean*. Uden uses the uncertainty over the date of the *Pervigilium Veneris* (anywhere from the 2nd to the 5th century) as a starting-point to look at how questions of time and anachronism play into Pater’s (and T.S. Eliot’s, and our) perception of late antiquity. This chapter, along with Uden’s study of 19th- and 20th-century receptions of late antique literature in the new *Companion to Late Antique Literature* (ed. S. McGill and E. Watts, Malden, MA, 2018), should encourage greater attention to the role of late antique literature in Victorian and Modernist Anglophone literature, not only by surveying the territory but also by

showing how critical the frameworks of untimeliness and fragmentation are to both receiving and received texts.

In a chapter on versifications of the Book of Jonah, Ad Putter stresses the continuities between late antiquity and the Middle Ages. Putter's aim is to show the "highly intertextual" nature of the genre of biblical poetry (184). Authors of biblical poetry allude to their predecessors, as well as to classical epic (which is already imitated by their predecessors). This, in addition to the constraints imposed by a desire to adhere relatively closely to the biblical text, produces texts in which almost every line is in some way intertextual. It can be difficult to distinguish between topos, allusion and coincidence, but rather than attempt do to this, Putter instead shows how the poems he selects (ranging from Prudentius' *Cathemerinon* to the *Gawain* poet's *Patience*) are clearly operating in a tradition and adhering to understood (but previously understated or overlooked) generic rules. The chapter is an example of the benefits that accrue from looking at the *longue durée* of a literary tradition: by taking a wider view of biblical poetry, it is possible to see more generic features than might be apparent from a limited examination of (say) the canonical late antique Latin biblical epicists.

The Swedish novel *The Thief* by Göran Tunström will probably be unfamiliar to most readers of *CJ-Online*, not least because no English translation has been published. It tells two interlocking stories: a 20th-century plot to steal the late antique Codex Argenteus, and the life of a 6th-century scribe. One of the challenges of reception studies is that so many pieces end up being on the influence of author X on author Y, something that has limited appeal beyond specialists in either X or Y. Bodin's chapter is a model for how to surmount this difficulty and write on an unfamiliar topic in a way that can engage a non-specialist audience. Tunström and the Codex Argenteus are succinctly introduced, and the key details of the plot are interwoven with analysis that always gestures towards larger critical issues, especially those of memory and bibliography.

In the final chapter of the book, Catherine Conybeare opens by highlighting the similarities between Augustine's *Confessions* and Edward Said's autobiography *Out of Place*. Yet rather than give us a conventional analysis of these two works in dialogue, Conybeare uses the shared idea of exile as a jumping-off point to move backwards in time, first to Erich Auerbach, then to the 12th-century theologian Hugh of St Victor. This Auerbachian chain of literary figures is united not by mimesis but rather by displacement and spiritual autobiography. The chapter is a fitting conclusion to the volume: a reminder of the long continuities inherent in

late antique literature and its reception, and an implicit insistence on the central (yet often overlooked) place late antiquity holds in literary history.

Anglophone edited volumes on classical reception (especially those dedicated to the afterlife of an individual author or work) have a tendency to leap from the 2nd century to the Renaissance: as if nothing of any interest happened between Plutarch and Petrarch, or between Apuleius and Angelo Poliziano. The chapters assembled in *Reading Late Antiquity* stress the critical role the late antique world has had for later readers, and they make clear the amount of work that still needs to be done on the literatures of late antiquity and their reception.

CILLIAN O'HOGAN

University of Toronto, cillian.ohogan@utoronto.ca