

BOOK REVIEW

Classics in Britain. Scholarship, Education, and Publishing 1800-2000. By CHRISTOPHER STRAY. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xxvi + 385. Hardback. \$124.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-956937-3.

These are challenging times. Major figures in the history of our discipline are faulted for lacking 21st-century sensibilities. The discipline itself is faulted for being too elitist or not elitist enough. Change is demanded (and clearly necessary), but what must change and what must on no account be changed is not so clear, nor is it easy to know whether change is itself the issue or simply the pace of change. One thing undoubtedly in short supply is perspective, which makes a book like this one especially timely. Christopher Stray's long and productive career has been dedicated to the history of classical scholarship understood not simply as a record of who wrote what and when but as an inquiry into scholarship's place in the society that produced the scholars, and the eighteen essays collected here, all but two previously published, unfold a record of past practices and the larger debates they engendered that offer much-needed perspective on our current travails.

The essays are organized in three broad categories: "Scholarship and Institutions" (largely the Oxbridge world), "Scholarship and Publishing" (on the rise of scholarly journals and such seminal figures as William Smith and Richard Jebb) and "Schools and Schoolbooks" (on textbooks and teaching). Much of this will produce a shudder or a groan, especially when it comes to the role of education in strengthening class distinctions. There is, for example, Thomas Gaisford (1779-1855), Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford and Dean of Christ Church, famously said to have declared that the study of Greek literature, "not only elevates above the vulgar herd, but leads not infrequently to positions of considerable emolument," the positions in question being country livings and the occasional bishopric. In 1838, Christopher Wordsworth, then headmaster of Harrow and later Bishop of Lincoln (his uncle was a poet), knew that replacing Latin notes with English in school editions would lead to "mental effeminacy." By 1884, critics were bemoaning the loss of "minute acquaintance with the niceties of the dead

languages,” and those worries had only grown by 1920, when Greek was dropped as a requirement for Oxbridge admission, followed in 1960 by Latin.

All this may of course sound like something out of Trollope or perhaps Housman at an uninspired moment. It defines a world that can still send an Old Etonian to Number 10 but is surely not our world or our concern. Or is it? Stray’s ability to reveal truths beneath the stereotypes gets well beyond mundane tales of snobbery and politicking, the fuss over Royal Commissions and reconfiguration of the Classical Tripos. Two things especially stand out. First is how much we owe to men like Gaisford, whose editions of the *Suda* (1834) and *Etymologicum Magnum* (1848) pioneered the style for reference works to come and whose long service as Curator of the Bodleian Library helped make that institution what it is; to Jebb, whose edition of Sophocles remains not just a scholarly landmark but represents the continuing effort to make scholarship accessible to a broad swathe of readers; even to the entrepreneurial, popularizing spirit of Smith, whose dictionaries (thanks to the World Wide Web) have for better and worse come back into their own. It is inspiring and humbling to reflect on how much we still owe such people, even if on a personal level we would not have enjoyed their company—or they ours.

Second is the recognition that our current condition hardly lacks precedent. The scholar who longed to dedicate his life to the dative case received little sympathy from Jowett and Jebb. E. A. Sonnenschein, Professor of Greek and Latin at Birmingham (1883-1918), who helped wrest academic control from the industrialists who had founded the place, sought common ground with teachers of modern languages. Whatever divide existed in the 19th century between the text-based study of antiquity and its material culture attracted eloquent and distinguished bridge-builders. As Charles Newton, the excavator of Halicarnassus and first Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the BM, told the inaugural meeting of the Hellenic Society in 1879, “... by Hellenic Studies we do not mean merely the study of Greek texts, grammars and lexicons. ... new sources of Hellenic Study are opening up every day.” When Gilbert Murray assumed the chair of Greek at Glasgow ten years later, he reminded his audience in no uncertain terms that “Greece, not Greek, is the real subject of our study... There is more in Hellenism than a language.” Indeed.

There are some glitches. Stray’s text can be hard going for the Yankee who never encountered a “Greek play bishop” or cannot imagine what would characterize a work “very much in the eighteenth-century Port Royalist tradition.” It would have been helpful to distinguish Porsonism from your garden variety pedantry, and the observation, when it comes to the dog Latin of the Eton grammar,

that “many of the rules were wrong or self-contradictory” begs for examples. A diligent reader will also notice that the book, though well illustrated and elegantly produced, was poorly edited, with clumsy cross-references, redundancies, words misspelled, omitted or repeated. Not an easy read, then, but an invaluable resource as we look to our past for help in shaping our future.

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