

BOOK REVIEW

Greeks and Romans on the Latin American Stage. Edited By ROSA ANDÚJAR AND KONSTANTINOS P. NIKOLOUSTOS. Bloomsbury Studies in Classical Reception. London, UK and New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. Pp. xii + 296. Hardback, £95.00. ISBN: 978-1-350-12561-2.

G*reeks and Romans on the Latin American Stage* is the product of a 2014 international conference held at University College London and sponsored by the Institute of Classical Studies, the Institute for Latin American Studies, the A. G. Leventis Foundation, the Gilbert Murray Trust and the Hellenic Society and Classical Association. The conference aimed to shift the examination of the reception of classical drama to Latin America, which, although the subject of a handful of scholarly reception studies, continues to be comparatively unknown and a relatively neglected scholarly area. The meeting in London included presentations on works from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Martinique, Mexico and Puerto Rico.

In addition to an introduction to the topic, notes, bibliography and index, Rosa Andújar and Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos supply fourteen essays grouped by geographical area: the Southern Cone of South America, Brazil and the Caribbean and North America. Thirteen of these essays had been delivered at the conference. From the very start, the editors make clear the varied difficulties that scholars face in this area. For example, a vast number of these Latin American texts and their creators are mainly unknown and, indeed, even the term “Latin American” is challenging because it masks “a series of particular problems unique to the region” (1) in which these texts arose and its connection to European colonial and imperial history—the use of this term privileges Europe. Another complicating factor is the paradox that arises from the manifest increase in “Latin American” engagement with European and classical literary models in the 19th century, which is the very time when wars of independence from European powers were being fought.

Moreover, in Latin America, the Greek and Roman classics were not part of the “colonial curriculum or experience” (3), as found, for example, in the former

British colonies in other parts of the world. In other words, it would be wrong to consider Latin America as being in the same postcolonial mode as it would require “a new framework which would need to account for multiple and varied transmitters of the classical, which crucially include religion as well as encounters with foreign ideas”—this results in having “sub-regional and local histories matter enormously” (3). Additionally, the approaches to classical reception taken in this book differ because, in Spanish-speaking Latin America, colonial classics tend to be overwhelmingly Latin and taught and transmitted by such religious orders as the Jesuits and Franciscans. In Brazil, which the Portuguese had colonized, there is no real break in the transmittal of classical culture because the Portuguese royal court had only moved to Brazil in the 19th century, and any university education that took place among Brazilians before that transference involved studying in European universities. Lastly, regarding the Graeco-Roman classics and the Caribbean, the challenge of a unified approach is even more daunting. As the editors note, there “have been recent attempts to conceptualize the Caribbean as a single region, but when it comes to classical reception, we must still rely on a fragmented view of this intensely diverse region: it matters by whom you were colonized, as classical receptions in Cuba have far more in common with other countries formerly colonized by Spain than its immediate neighbor Jamaica” (5).

Due to the space limitations, I cannot review each of the fourteen essays. However, it must be said that the quality of all of the essays is quite good, but as often happens in volumes of collected essays, some essays are better than others. Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos’ “From Epic to Tragedy: The Theatre and Politics in Juan Cruz Varela’s *Dido*” is the first essay in Part I, the Southern Cone. Nikoloutsos explores the historical circumstances and cultural politics that gave rise to the neoclassical retelling of Dido’s tragic story. The author includes a wide range of sources regarding the play’s history and reception to ascertain why Varela wrote a play not generated by the Argentina of his day but by European antiquity. Varela also examines how there was a transformation from the epic of Virgil to tragedy, “and from page to stage” (19). The author, most notably, presents a paradox: why did the poet choose a play with a female protagonist when all of the public actors at that time were male? Rodrigo Tadeu Gonçalves’ “*A God Slept Here* by Guilherme Figueiredo: A Radical Modernist *Amphitruo* from Brazil” introduces the second part of the book, Brazil. Gonçalves analyzes how Figueiredo’s work is different from the Latin model and relates the Brazilian text to “contemporary Brazilian society and theater” (75). This essay is critical because the Brazilian

playwright is largely neglected, even by Brazilian scholars. Much more work needs to be done on Figueiredo, especially on his adaptation of *Satyricon's* Milesian tale of the widow of Ephesus. The third part, The Caribbean and North America, begins with Rosa Andújar's "Distorting the *Lysistrata* Paradigm in Puerto Rico: Francisco Arrivi's *Club de Solteros*." This contribution to the collection is a fascinating study that examines the Puerto Rican play's departure from what is considered or understood to be the modern formula or interpretation of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. In Arrivi's play, men, and not women, are placed at the center of the action. However, this modern rearrangement does not take away from the unique Puerto Rican focus on women. These three essays are wonderful examples of an erudite and worthy collection.

Greeks and Romans on the Latin American Stage offers a glimpse into an area that needs greater attention. The next step to a collection of essays on the subject is, perhaps, a study or anthology that tackles the reception of classical tragedy throughout Latin America and moves away from the areas covered in this book. It cannot be emphasized enough what a remarkable contribution this collection of essays makes to the study of ancient Graeco-Roman tragedy and its place in the Spanish-speaking world of the Americas and Caribbean. All in all, this is an excellent book that will be appreciated by scholars and students of ancient tragedy, those interested in reception studies and individuals that work on Latin American literature.

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