

## BOOK REVIEW

*A de Villiers (Stellenbosch University)*

**Hardwick, Lorna & Stray, Christopher** (eds) 2008. *A Companion to Classical Receptions*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing. ISBN 978-1-4051-5167-2.

This recent addition to the excellent Blackwell Companions series looks at the various forms of classical reception currently being researched as well as those deemed to have future importance. The diversity and volume of the themes and approaches contained in this book are truly impressive. As Hardwick and Stray state in their introduction, this collection “has been constructed on the basis that the activators of reception are many and varied and that we all gain from encountering examples from outside our own immediate areas of knowledge” (p. 4). Throughout the book they stay true to this motto and traditional approaches to classical reception are not given prominence over more recent (sometimes contentious) approaches such as film studies, cultural politics and photography. The same goes for the various cultures involved and there is even a chapter on Greek drama in South Africa.

One of the biggest attractions of this collection is the good balance between theory and practical application, which was the conscious intention of the editors.<sup>1</sup> This makes the book accessible for the newcomer to the field of classical reception as well as insightful for the seasoned scholar. An extensive bibliography and a thorough index round off this vast collection.

The editors have opted to group chapters according to themes rather than taking a chronological approach. This arrangement helps to define the main trends within studies of classical reception more clearly. Part I deals with reception within antiquity as well as the subsequent interpretations of antiquity. In the first chapter Felix Budelmann and Johannes Haubold discuss the relationship between tradition and reception by looking at the traditions of Homeric epic and Anacreontic lyric. Barbara Graziosi looks at the ancient reception of Homer while Chris Emlyn-Jones studies the tension between Plato’s reception of drama and the dialogues themselves. In the next chapter Thomas Harrison turns to ancient and modern representations of Persia and shows how reception is integral to historical interpretation. Ruth Webb explores the Christian reception of Greek tragedy in the work of Basil of Caesarea in the fourth century AD.

Part II looks at various trends of transmission, acculturation and critique. Seth Schein studies the multiple and changing meanings of the concepts of canon, class and ideology in an attempt to elucidate the “classical” as an ideological construct. David Bebbington looks at the use of the classics in and the influence thereof on the politics of the British Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone in the 1800s while Emily Greenwood discusses the use of the classics in political speeches in Trinidad during the 1950s and 1960s. In the last chapter in this section, Stephen

---

<sup>1</sup> In their introduction Hardwick and Stray summarise their aim with this book as follows: “The aim has been to produce a volume that shows reception scholars actively at work. Contributors were asked to contextualize their discussions and to make their working methods transparent ...” (p. 2).

Harrison studies the Virgilian model in the poetry of Tennyson, Frost and the Irish poet Seamus Heaney.

Part III deals with the ever important field of translation of the classics. David Hopkins addresses the concepts of faithfulness, domestication and creativity in the debates surrounding Alexander Pope's translation of the *Iliad*. Ahmed Etman discusses the intersection of traditions in the Arab reception of the classics and the problematic nature of the gods and mythology from an Islamic perspective. Translating the classical play is the topic of Michael Walton's chapter in which he looks at the challenges of translating when the target is a performance. James Robson then addresses the difficulties in translating the comedies of Aristophanes, especially the problem of translating puns.

The extent to which theory affects the interpretation of classical reception is explored in part IV. Cashman Prince discusses André Gide's invention of new versions of the classical past (Narcissus and Prometheus) for projecting his own themes and concerns as well as commenting on our relationship to that past. Vanda Zajko deals with the differences between feminist reception and other kinds of reception, whereas Miriam Leonard argues for the contribution of Freudian psychoanalysis to our understanding of the past in a fascinating chapter. Lastly, Pantelis Michelakis explores how periodization and canonization shape the performance reception of Greco-Roman drama.

Part V moves on to the performing arts. Michael Ewans analyses the reception of Greek tragedy in opera by looking at the relationship between the composers, the libretti and the source text as well as the interpretation of the Greek story for a contemporary audience. Fiona Macintosh explains the performance histories of ancient plays, which is a relatively new field of study, in terms of decisive moments in the reception of *Oedipus Tyrannos* and a fascinating chapter (with illustrations) on the influence of different masks on the receptions of classical plays is presented by Angeliki Varakis. Freddy Decreus explores the "postdramatic" interpretation of classical plays by the nomadic theatre *Societas Raffaello Sanzio*. This theatre, which was founded in 1981, created a new breed of theatre, a "Gesamtkunstwerk" in which all other arts and disciplines were mixed together in performances which shook the foundations of traditional western representation. Finally, Nurit Yaari ends this section with a discussion of a satirical Israeli comedy based on Aristophanes' *The Acharnians*, *Knights* and *Lysistrata*.

In part VI various receptions within film are dealt with as well as the usefulness of film as a teaching tool for the classics. Joanna Paul assesses the contribution of film studies to our wider understanding of both classics and reception while Hanna Roisman looks at the Cyclops episode in two twentieth century film versions of the *Odyssey*. Marianne McDonald discusses film as a teaching tool for the classics by referring to *Star Wars*, *The Crying Game* and *Breakfast on Pluto*.

The next section, part VII, deals with cultural politics. Catharine Edwards explores the effect Rome has on its visitors and the rhetoric of ownership – the way Rome "belongs" to its visitors as much as its inhabitants. Gonda Van Steen looks at the riots following the 1903 Athenian production of the *Oresteia* and how the ancient texts are almost seen as sacred. For the South African reader the next chapter by

Betine van Zyl Smit is of special interest. She addresses the multicultural reception of Greek drama both in pre- and post-apartheid South Africa. The concepts of “class” and “social privilege” within classical reception are explained by Edith Hall at the end of this section.

Changing contexts is the theme of part VIII. Gregson Davis takes a parallel look at the reception of the *Odyssey* in the writing of the Caribbean Derek Walcott and in the visual art of the African-American artist Romare Bearden. Science fiction and the classics is the topic of Sarah Brown’s chapter. She studies the way in which sci-fi’s interest in the collapse of civilizations has its roots in the classics, especially the decline of Rome. Rosalind Hurtshouse explains how the renewed reading of Aristotle’s *Ethics* points to important omissions in the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill. Similarities with ancient Greek art have become a standard theme in the debate surrounding the problematic nature of the male nude in photography – this is the theme of Bryan Burns’ chapter. Finally, Elizabeth Vandiver takes a new look at Homeric references in British World War One poetry and the way in which the poets used the Homeric model to validate their own involvement in the war.

James Porter ends the book on a passionate note in the final chapter titled “Reflection and Critique” where he argues for greater prominence of reception studies within the classics and gives a broad overview of future prospects.

*A Companion to Classical Receptions* contains an incredibly diverse and vast collection of topics. It would be a most valuable book to classicists both within and outside of the field of classical reception – a truly fresh and inspiring read.