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Greeks, Romans, and Pilgrims: Classical Reception in Early New England. By David A. Lupher. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017

Delwiche, Teddy

Published in:
The Classical Outlook

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2019

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):
Delwiche, T. (2019). Greeks, Romans, and Pilgrims: Classical Reception in Early New England. By David A. Lupher. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017. *The Classical Outlook*, *94*(3), 161-162.

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American Classical League

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Greeks, Romans, and Pilgrims: Classical Reception in Early New England by David A. Lupher

Review by: THEODORE R. DELWICHE

Source: *The Classical Outlook*, 2019, Vol. 94, No. 3 (2019), pp. 161-162

Published by: American Classical League

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26865143

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Greeks, Romans, and Pilgrims: Classical Reception in Early New England. By David A. Lupher. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017. Pp. 427. Cloth. $192.

Notwithstanding the pioneering work of Caroline Winterer that has focused on readers and enthusiasts of diverse communities, scholarship on classical reception in early North America has for a long time been predominantly preoccupied with the country's so-called "founding fathers." Nonetheless, within the past five years, investigations into the classical tradition in colonial America have witnessed both renewed interest and new subject matter. From the verse compositions of a Native American student,[1] to the minute Latin learning practices of a young Dutch immigrant,[2] to stately convention orations by German Moravians,[3] classical scholars of late are poring through colonial American archives with noteworthy result. In this present volume, David Lupher likewise examines classical influences on often overlooked historical actors. The emphasis on untangling the influence of Rome and Greece on the Puritan separatist settlements in Plymouth, Massachusetts represents, in Lupher's words, "a contribution to the study of classical receptions on the margins of empire" (4).

On the structural level, Lupher's work contains four discrete and rather lengthy chapters. First, he teases out classical allusions, especially those concerning Greek and Roman colonies, in promotional tracts of the new world. Lupher concludes that classical references provided rhetorical flourishes to celebrate new settlements, and, more importantly, historical justification that colonial expansion was worthy of proper praise. Following this analysis, Lupher directs his attention to the works of Thomas Morton, a controversial colonist who penned many polemical works against Plymouth Puritans. In dissecting Morton's classical allusions, Lupher concludes that the iconoclast writer, despite a somewhat shaky educational upbringing himself, employed numerous esoteric classical references to both belittle and befuddle pilgrim readers he viewed as simpletons. Next, Lupher takes the reader on a tireless – albeit somewhat tiring – tour through the book inventories of various Plymouth residents, showcasing in detail how people of varying social status and means had access to certain classical works in translation. And finally, zooming in on the life of William Bradford, governor of the Plymouth Colony, Lupher chronicles the earnest effort of the aged colonial leader to learn Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

An analytical highlight of this work is its restraint. Rather than simply extol classical knowledge in the new world, Lupher is always careful to question whether a classical quotation signifies that a particular ancient work was actually read in its original language. On Morton, for instance, Lupher bluntly avers that he was "an early modern Englishman who was aggressively and competitively proud of his classical learning without being fully entitled to be so" (126). Further, Lupher wisely understands that classical heritage, like Janus, can turn to praise as often as it can to pillory. After examining how Christian colonists nixed a proposal for shared farmland by appealing, in part, to a similar plot described in Plato's *Republic*, Lupher concludes: "As so often in the New World, the use of the Greek and Roman classics was often a deftly negative one – one based more on proud rejection than emulation" (302). Lupher undoubtedly sheds new light on the complex, sometimes contradictory ways that the classics could *modo hic* validate and *modo illic* vilify a certain political position.

A further accomplishment of this monograph is its corrective function. Lupher evidently takes seriously the task of rectifying "specific errors of Americanists whose training in classical languages, literature, and culture is, understandably enough, rusty at best and sometimes entirely lacking" (83). Though the erudition on display at times seems gratuitous, there are clear instances in which classical knowledge is called for. Most notably, Lupher points out that Thomas Morton's "Ma-re Mount" settlement likely plays on the English "merry" and the Latin *mare* (sea), and not a prurient pun for a female cow (i.e., a mare) and an ablative-e singular of *mas*, *maris* (male), which some American historians have interpreted as "erect phallus" (a usage that Lupher helpfully mentions is neither attested in the Lewis and Short dictionary, nor in the TLL) (105). As much as a scholarly killjoy as Lupher might seem in slapping down truly curious analyses such as these, he does occasionally suggest interpretations bolder than most Americanists. Analyzing William Bradford's account of first landing in Plymouth, Lupher provocatively posits that the Plymouth Puritan's direct reference to Seneca's seasickness (*Epistula Moralis* 53) may have been an implicit allusion to Bradford's first wife, who mysteriously fell overboard and drowned. While Seneca flung himself overboard to counter his queasiness, was Bradford subtly admitting that his wife likewise lunged into the ocean to remedy a sickness of the mind?

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Despite these flashes of insight and provocation, Lupher's work suffers from a few serious shortcomings. Foremost, entirely lacking from this present monograph is any consideration of childhood education. Were there grammar schools in Plymouth? How many students studied Latin and Greek, and in what way? Did parents always feel comfortable contributing the time and money to a classical education for their children? These are questions that have been fruitfully, albeit not yet fully, explored in the Boston context. On the Plymouth front, Lupher leaves these inquiries not just unanswered, but entirely unexplored. More concerning, however, is the failure to consider how separatist pilgrims engaged with classical learning at nearby Harvard College. Lupher appears to have taken it too much to heart that Plymouth pilgrims constituted a "peripheral to a periphery" (22). It seems odd that the possibility is not entertained that Plymouth county residents could have made use of classical works in Harvard College's library. Indeed, there are striking similarities between those classical works that William Bradford alludes to and those that college students routinely toiled over, even on the level of the precise book, chapter, and verse quoted of an individual work.[4] In other words, Plymouth appears a quite connected "periphery."

That being said, Lupher's work still stands out as an original contribution to the field of classical reception studies. Eschewing the habitual subject matter of the "founding fathers," Lupher guides the American historian and classicist alike on a tour through the neglected intellectual recesses of Plymouth County. For the classical educators among us, this is just yet another example for students of how a sound grounding in Latin and Greek can bring insights to topics and time periods beyond just ancient Rome and Greece.

[1]Thomas Keeline and Stuart M. McManus, "Benjamin Larnell, The Last Latin Poet at Harvard Indian College." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 108 (2015): 621-642.

[2]Theodore Delwiche, "An Old Author in the New World: Terence, Samuel Melyen, and The Boston Latin School ca. 1700," *The New England Quarterly* 92.2 (2019): 263-292.

[3]Thomas Keeline and Stuart M. McManus, "*Aenigma Omnibus*. The Transatlantic Late Humanism of Zinzendorf and the Early Moravians," forthcoming in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* (2019).

[4]The Latin compositions of Harvard student Joseph Belcher (A.B. 1690), for instance, contain classical allusions similar to those of Bradford from Terence's *Eunuchus*, Ovid's *Tristia*, and Juvenal's *Saturae* (on this last one, the exact same verses). See Theodore Delwiche, "The Schoolboy's Quill: Joseph Belcher and Latin Learning at Harvard College c. 1700," forthcoming in *History of Universities*, Oxford University Press, 2019.

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William Sanders Scarborough's First Lessons in Greek. A Facsimile of the 1881 First Edition. By William Sanders Scarborough. Foreword by Ward W. Briggs, Jr. Introduction by Michele Valerie Ronnick. Mundelein, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2018. Pp. xiv + 187. $24.00.

It is not every day that a publisher in the 21st century decides to take a chance on reprinting a beginning Greek textbook from the 19th century. So, what makes this little book worthy of once again seeing the light of day?

First, its author is William Sanders Scarborough. He was born into slavery in 1852 and educated in Macon, Georgia and at Atlanta University. An 1875 graduate of Oberlin College, he was hired to teach Latin and Greek by Wilberforce University two years later, a school supported by the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.). At the age of 29, he became the first African American to publish a work of scholarship and pedagogy on a classical subject, *First Lessons in Greek,* a feat that marks "his birth as a scholar" (17).

Second, Ronnick's excellent twenty-five-page introduction provides the historical context for Scarborough's scholarly endeavor. Beginning with a brief outline of his life, the introduction offers an overview of 19th century Greek and Latin textbooks, showing what grammars and textbooks were available, the lively competition among publishers for classical textbooks, the constraints on publishing books with Greek fonts, the costs of printing, and a mention of the textbooks that influenced Scarborough's work. The middle portion of the introduction gives voice to Scarborough's thoughts (from his *Autobiography*) as he prepared the manuscript. "In order to make my class more efficient I began to cast about for devices that might assist in making the ancient tongues living languages . . . . I at once conceived the daring idea: Why not write such a book myself?" (11-12). This middle section also recounts the encouragement he received from others, the publication by a major publisher, A. S. Barnes and Company, the adop-

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