

Reception

In this issue, we have several monographs with wildly differing approaches and interests, from a tight focus on single writers' engagement with antiquity to studies that synthesize varied materials from multiple centuries and countries. While many of them display a deep interest in the relationship between text and image, another shared theme is the nuances and tensions inherent in literary expressions of political ideology.

William Fitzgerald's *The Living Death of Antiquity* is a striking title indeed.¹ It alludes to the somewhat bloodless aura around classicism of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Fitzgerald investigates how the de-coloured statues of antiquity and accompanying ideas around 'Johann Joachim Winckelmann's canonical formula "noble simplicity and tranquil grandeur"' formed a specific type of classicizing aesthetic (8). Starting, perhaps surprisingly, with Ajax bleach, Fitzgerald examines case studies across art, literature, and music, and makes the case for the continued haunting of Western culture by this rather complex 'simplicity'. Indeed, just as Horace's ambiguous phrase *simplex munditiis* (translated here as 'simple in your refinements') makes more than one appearance, Fitzgerald highlights the multi-faceted nature of classical 'simplicity' (48). Classicism is both highly fraught with emotion and seemingly restrained, and is both a 'rebirth' and something deathly.

These complexities are also a product of the sense of temporality that is intrinsic to the structure of the classical tradition, wherein the construction of 'classic' status may be just as much a product of looking into the future as the past. In this respect and others, Fitzgerald makes use of Porter's discussion of classicism, including 'prospective classicism' (44).² In Chapter 2, Fitzgerald discusses eighteenth-century attempts to translate Homer into English, the poet by this time being emblematic of the ancient simplicity. There follows a detailed and interesting account of Alexander Pope's 'Latinated, "classicizing"' translation of the *Iliad* (80). This, however, is matched with an investigation into Flaxman's illustrations, and the 'asceticism' of his minimalist style (116). Intriguingly and convincingly, Fitzgerald links the attention paid by Flaxman to the gesture and positioning of the body to Emma Hamilton's famous 'attitudes', emphasizing the link between form, simplicity, and emotion that Fitzgerald finds in the neoclassical style (86).

In Chapters 4 and 5, we also see a focus on the reduction of content when recalling the classical, but this time with an emphasis on 'voicing' the past. Fitzgerald turns to the Parnassian responses to the *Anacreontea*. This collection of carousing Greek poems from across several centuries, it is claimed, inaugurates something of a tradition itself, advocating a 'timeless lifestyle of drinking, desiring, and singing' (181). However, Fitzgerald sees the neoclassical ethic of reduction and self-conscious temporality in *Études latines* (1852), Leconte de Lisle's response to the Anacreontic model and Horace's similarly bibulous poems, arguing that the collection 'reduces this personal voice – the irony, the humour, the self-awareness—to a pervasive mood of nostalgic lateness' (199). On the other hand, another figure deemed to give 'voice' to antiquity,

¹ *The Living Death of Antiquity. Neoclassical Aesthetics*. By William Fitzgerald. Classical Presences. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. xii + 272. 15 colour and 27 b/w illustrations. Hardback £73, ISBN: 978-0-192-89396-3.

² James I. Porter (ed.), *Classical Pasts. The Classical Traditions of Greece and Rome* (Princeton and Oxford, 2005).

composer Erik Satie, is seen to be rather more restrained and ironic. Satie's *Socrate* (1918) may be a product of the early twentieth century's modernist mode, but Fitzgerald claims that his model of Socrates owes much to the philosopher's portrayal in French neoclassical art, with the gesture once again being paramount (222–4).

Alongside neoclassicism's focus on the 'gesture' or 'attitude' is its whiteness. Early on, Fitzgerald discusses its role and is sensitive to the racializing discourses around the myth of a 'white Greece' (51). For him, whiteness is 'neoclassicism's logo', such is its centrality and its economy as a signifier of antiquity (50). Chapter 3 analyses the differing approaches of sculptors Antonio Canova and Bertel Thorvaldsen. While they both make use of bright white marble, Fitzgerald, as part of his ongoing analysis of the relationship of gesture and form to interiority, concludes that their styles and effects vary enormously. Here, as elsewhere, simplicity and our response to it are key.

Similarly invested in audience response is *Preposterous Virgil* by Juan Christian Pellicer.³ While it may be a 'preposterous' enterprise to attempt such a thing, Pellicer argues that reading Virgil through his four chosen modern writers, Tom Stoppard, W. H. Auden, William Wordsworth, and Seamus Heaney, will make us 'better or at any rate happier readers of Virgil' (18–19). As such, this work is thoroughly absorbed in the process of reading and meaning making. However, there are few easy answers here; rather, this book can be understood as a series of experiments in reading, or as the blurb has it 'a practical demonstration of classical reception and its value as a critical procedure'.

The focus of Pellicer's chapter on Stoppard is his 1993 play, *Arcadia*. As we saw in Fitzgerald's interrogation of neoclassicism, antiquity is a helpful theme for exploring loss. In this case, the pastoral mode can become a meditation on loss and redemption. Pellicer, who assumes a degree of reader familiarity with all his modern authors, navigates the many avenues of intellectual exploration that Stoppard opens up through his writing. Advanced scientific and mathematical theories on chaos, entropy, and time are interwoven with human love and death. Through this proliferation of ideas and images, Pellicer explores the *Eclogues* and Virgil's own generic experimentation, his sense of authorship and relationship to the elegiac tradition. In this way, Pellicer highlights a processual form of writing and reception, wherein elegy's association with loss on the one hand, both as a *topos* (traditional theme) and an effect of its fragmented transmission, and survival in Virgil's pastoral on the other, complements the loss and creation of meaning that later readers experience.

Pellicer highlights some related issues in his chapter on Heaney. The modern critic's ability to draw on such resources as Heaney's lecture notes to aid in analysis is not only practised in this section but demonstrates how different an experience it is to read a poet from antiquity in comparison to one who died but a short time ago, largely because 'in Virgil's case so much contextual detail is irretrievably lost' (146). On the other hand, the loss of certainty explored in the much shorter second chapter is more in relation to the future. The author triangulates Auden's 'The Shield of Achilles' (1952) with the *Aeneid* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Christianity makes several

³ *Preposterous Virgil. Reading Through Stoppard, Auden, Wordsworth, Heaney*. By Juan Christian Pellicer. New Directions in Classics. London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Pp x + 225. 1 b/w illustration. Hardback £56, ISBN: 978-1-8488-5651-6; paperback £17, ISBN: 978-1-8488-5652-3.

appearances in this volume, often as a result of the fourth *Eclogue*'s messianic elements. Here, though, the concern is with the afterlife and what futures there are envisaged for mankind, Aeneas or Achilles. Pellicer argues that Auden presents a 'miscarried prophecy that is not merely equivocal, as in Virgil, but sinister' and rather like 'something Milton would have imagined for his fallen angels' (82). These divergences, according to the scholarship, are not just a product of individual authors and texts, but of their times and contexts. These arguments ultimately feed into Pellicer's concluding advocacy of using imagined audiences as a critical practice. These can be the 'common reader' or 'exemplary practitioners', or ideally both (170). A conscious effort at regaining these absences is a key readerly process.

While the majority of this study is the reading Virgilian texts through later writings, space and place are key themes. Not only is Tintern Abbey a feature of the chapter on Wordsworth, but the introduction has a rather unexpected exploration of poet Ian Hamilton Finlay's garden, known as 'Little Sparta', featuring classicizing statues, inscriptions, and 'many commemorations of the Jacobin leader Louis Antoine de Saint-Just (1767–94)' (1). This foray into horticultural reception not only foreshadows the fragmentary aspect of much classical reading but also the relationship of Virgil's identity (as farmer) to his output. The sculpture identified by Fitzgerald evidenced the contiguity of neoclassicism's mortuary (or not) simplicity across media, while these here suggest a similarity in the act of receiving antiquity from artfully constructed space to considered literary text.

On the other hand, movement through space whether represented in literature or art, is argued by Philip Hardie to figure a range of different spiritual and intellectual activities. *Celestial Aspirations* is specifically engaged with travel on what Hardie terms the 'vertical axis', including as it differs from the 'horizontal axis'.⁴ This monograph, which boasts a splendid front cover of the Painted Hall at the Old Royal Naval College, Greenwich, and many gorgeously Baroque colour plates, is an account of classical and classically influenced heavenly trajectories in art and literature. Hardie identifies several key functions for the metaphor of celestial ascent. Naturally, its association with Heaven aligns it with religious beliefs, including the afterlife and apotheosis. Linked to this is the articulation of royal power through the association of monarchs with divinity. Skyward travel is also associated with at least two forms of mental life: the development of scientific enquiry, especially regarding the physics of earth and the planets, and various cognitive states, including meditation, erotic desire, and imagination. Lastly, this 'vertical axis' is associated with the sublime, from pseudo-Longinus onwards.

Hardie sees in the culture of the ancient Mediterranean, from the era of Homer until the Late Antique period, many predecessors to the celestial aspirants of British art and literature in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. In addition to pseudo-Longinus, He finds key antecedents in both the most canonical of classic texts and Biblical works, including apocrypha. The interplay of Christianity, classicism, and early modern science that comprises a portion of the book is particularly interesting. Hardie discusses the reception of Isaac Newton in sculpture and poetry. He returns to Lucretius'

⁴ *Celestial Aspirations. Classical Impulses in British Poetry and Art*. By Philip Hardie. E. H. Gombrich Lecture Series, 5. Princeton and Woodstock, Princeton University Press, 2022. Pp xiv + 361. 23 colour and 48 b/w illustrations. Hardback £30, ISBN: 978-0-691-19786-9.

depiction of Epicurus experiencing a ‘flight of the mind’ in *De Rerum Natura* (37). In this philosophical epic and the Lucretian tradition of didactic poetry, Hardie finds the ancestry of several poems about Newton. It is argued that here ‘the scientific advances made by Newton were enlisted in the service of the argument from design’ (154). Gone is the iconoclasm of Epicurus and in his place is a more theologically orthodox hero of physics and the heavens. Hardie finds a further point of contact between the portrayal of these two thinkers: in a 1727 response to Newton’s death, James Thomson rendered the scientist as a soldier, waging ‘intellectual conquests’, who ‘subdues Nature’ as his Lucretian ancestor ‘subdues Religion’ (155). However, Lucretius is not the only inspiration for this poem, and Virgil and Ovid also seem to be factors in this poem’s creation, as well as it having been ‘mediated through more recent texts’ such as Milton (161).

Hardie further develops the complexity of this tradition by elucidating the design of and influences on a number of painted ceilings. Although the focus of this study is on British culture, this analysis is supplemented with reference to a number of Italian examples. However, artists of this period would work internationally and Hardie argues that European traditions had a significant impact on British designs. Many of these ceilings cite the ancient belief in the apotheosis of rulers, and so, while there are examples from the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods, ‘[t]he major fashion in Britain for ceiling paintings with images of the heavens, and of ascents to, descents from or journeys through the heavens, begins after the Restoration’ (266). Hardie even finds in the Painted Hall a rendering of William and Mary that utilizes the iconography of the Stuarts and possibly contains ‘an allusion to Virgil’s fourth *Eclogue*’. This programme of imagery is designed to ‘divert the iconography of the absolutist Stuarts’ to the constitutional monarchy of the ‘Glorious Revolution’ (299). This examination of decoration, while largely discrete from the literary criticism that makes up the majority of the monograph, adds an important dimension to our understanding of this work’s imaginative theme, as Hardie successfully makes the case for the prominence of classicizing ‘celestial aspirations’ in his chosen period.

If the above works provide largely open-ended discussion of a confluence of pagan and Christian words and images, *The Dragon in the West* is a more orderly scrutinizing of the development of dragon myths and legends in Europe.⁵ The first part examines ancient understandings of dragons. The Greek terms *drakōn* and *kētos* (sea monster) and Latin *serpens* are examined, alongside numerous examples from ancient literature and art. We learn that the Greeks associated dragons with eyes (33) and that the Romans anthropomorphized their dragons, even giving them a ‘wistful glance’ in one case (53). While male dragons predominate, the feminine term *drakaina* does appear, but frequently refers not to female dragons, but to other creatures, including at one point the Furies, and ‘female anguipedes’, that is woman–*drakōn* hybrids (83). The final chapter of this section, ‘From worm to wyvern’, traces the development of the form of the dragon from serpentine to ambulatory and winged. Familiar myths of Scylla and Medea’s chariot are invoked as Ogden locates the first Christian-era representations of winged dragons in the fourth century, and the first four-legged

⁵ *The Dragon in the West. From Ancient Myth to Modern Legend*. By Daniel Ogden. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. xvii + 459. 30 colour and 29 b/w illustrations. Hardback £30, ISBN: 978-0-198-83018-4.

dragons in the 1400s (126). Ogden clearly demonstrates how images and texts from the pre-Christian era contributed to later European concepts of the dragon.

The other two sections of the book focus on these later creatures. In Part 2, Ogden relates legends of their defeats by saints and reveals a number of narrative structures across hagiographic traditions. The fiery breath with which any modern reader may be familiar has a metaphorical role as the ‘gas of unbelief’, representing the saint’s role in defending Christianity (170). Meanwhile, the role of the ‘final victim boy’, which to this reviewer sounded reminiscent of a modern horror trope, echoes the Resurrection (248). While the approach is systematic and the catalogue of sources exhaustive, Ogden does renew a claim which he admits is ‘bold’ (260). This is that these saintly battles must have been a well-known narrative as early as the second century AD, since Lucian appears to parody them in his *Philopseudes* or *Lover of Lies*. It is an intriguing idea that is persuasively situated.

Ogden continues to follow the evolution (or lack thereof) of the Western dragon when he moves onto medieval Germanic culture. Assessing a range of sagas in a number of languages, Ogden concludes that, although the Germanic dragon was originally vermicular in shape, ‘[t]he exciting new format of the winged dragon of Christian-Latin culture was embraced avidly’ (330–1). Ogden is able to trace these patterns across countries and centuries so clearly because there is an ‘extraordinary and deep-rooted conservatism of the dragon-fight tradition over the millennium and a half of its existence’ (276) – a striking contrast when compared to the slipperiness of other classical traditions mentioned in this review.

This is a truly compendious volume that lays out its argument and evidence clearly, with appendices, tables, and explanatory footnotes. It also usefully provides many sources, which are all translated into English. Included is a Norse story of ‘Unus and the Dragon of England’ from *The Saga of King Flores and his Sons*, which apparently is not available in English (318). There is copious enough information here for a novice draconologist to engage fully with Ogden’s arguments and conclusions.

We turn away now from these expansive titles to two works that concentrate on two very different individuals’ engagement with antiquity: *Co-Workers in the Kingdom of Culture* and *East of the Wardrobe*.⁶ The former, David Withun’s study of the African American intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois, describes this multi-faceted and highly influential man’s navigation of progressive and traditional currents as he traversed the public sphere. Although he was a sociologist and modern historian who wrote his PhD thesis on ‘The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the United States of America, 1638–1870’, Du Bois was greatly impacted by his classical education. Withun aims here to produce the first ‘full treatment of influences by and responses to the classics in Du Bois’s works and thought’ (2). In so doing, this study raises many issues that are of relevance to those interested in the continued relevance of classics amid concerns over exclusivity. Du Bois (1868–1963) lived and worked through a period of enormous changes to his own social status as a Black person, to

⁶ *Co-Workers in the Kingdom of Culture. Classics and Cosmopolitanism in the Thought of W. E. B. Du Bois*. By David Withun. Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. vii + 244. 14 b/w halftones. Hardback £48, ISBN: 978-0-197-57958-9. *East of the Wardrobe. The Unexpected Worlds of C. S. Lewis*. By Warwick Ball. New York, Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. xv + 298. 55 b/w halftones, 5 b/w line illustrations. Hardback £23, ISBN: 978-0-197-62625-2.

the structure and focus of the education system, and to geopolitics. All these aspects are refracted through his engagement with classics.

Within views Du Bois as one of the 'defenders of traditional classical education', just as the ancient languages were becoming increasingly obsolete in the academy (8). It is argued that Du Bois drew from the classics, both in his written language and his worldview. His 1903 essay collection, *The Souls of Black Folk*, is in part a product of his extensive reading, bearing the 'the structure of a Ciceronian oration'. Meanwhile, his 'moral vision', which was a guiding principle of his life and consisted in the elevation of 'the Good', 'the Beautiful', and 'Truth', is clearly inflected by Platonism (10–11). However, the influence of Plato extends beyond this triplicity and into his views on racism and racial segregation in the context of new political movements around the world. Du Bois was not alone as a scholar experiencing segregation: Within states that 'African American intellectuals found themselves in the peculiar position of simultaneously participating in the elitist thinking of their cultural milieu while belonging to a group of people who were seen as naturally inferior...by even sympathetic members of the white elite' (82). It is claimed that this is the context that led to Du Bois developing a politics of 'elitist egalitarianism', in which people would be led by a 'Talented Tenth', much like the philosopher-kings of Plato's *Republic* (126). Nevertheless, Within argues that his views were also generated from a positive regard for communist leaders such as Stalin and Mao.

This was not the only way in which the classics assisted Du Bois in the formation of his political views. Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate that, despite the through-line of Du Bois's 'moral vision', his views on race and society continued to evolve. Within explains how he conceptualized racism as a modern phenomenon, citing ancient historians as evidence that racism had not been a problem in antiquity, allowing him to simultaneously locate Black people as both the 'foundation' and 'future' of civilization. Du Bois is continually portrayed as someone who, while a great individual thinker, has participated in a process of reaching towards and thinking with others. In Chapter 5 we see that his definition of race continued to shift, as did his view of the place of Black people in American society, with him fearing that the end of segregation would lead to 'genocide'-like assimilation with an impact on their specific role in the history of civilization (198). As he continued to revise his philosophical and political stances, he became increasingly attached to Africa and even moved to Ghana at the age of 93 (193). Du Bois' expanded 'cosmopolitanism' shows that even a history of one man's classical reception is a history of numerous intellectual and cultural encounters with moderns and ancients alike.

Ball's account of C. S. Lewis also relates the significant extent to which his reception of antiquity was mediated through a panoply of other sources. Ball, an archaeologist of the Near East, describes how Lewis, who hated to travel, created Eastern worlds in his Narnia chronicles. The author takes care to identify any possible source of numerous details in these fantastical places, whether etymological, archaeological, or fictional. The overriding impression is that Lewis was completely immersed in texts – 'endless books', as it is put throughout. It was from these mountains of pages, and particularly from Rose Macaulay's *Pleasure of Ruins* (1953), that Lewis learned of Persepolis and Palmyra, among others, which must have influenced his depictions of ruins and Eastern lands in *The Magician's Nephew* and *The Horse and His Boy*, published in the two years following Macaulay's work (30). On the other hand, as discussed in

Chapter 7, the maritime adventures found in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952) are said to have been inspired by classical and classicizing epics and fiction, among them the *Argonautica*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Alexander Romance*.

However, Ball emphasizes the importance of Pauline Baynes's illustrations to the meaning and aesthetic of the series. A highly skilled artist with strong knowledge of Eastern art, Baynes may have only met Lewis twice, but her creations are regarded as critical. This lively work relishes the childhood experience of encountering those exciting tales and lands while the mysteriousness of Lewis the man looms large. In this context, Ball explores Lewis' somewhat obscure and uncomfortable history with women. He argues that Lewis, who married very late in life, had largely shunned their companionship, but he suggests that Baynes picks up on some latent eroticism in his portrayal of the Bacchantes – 'Baynes seems to have recognized some elements in Narnia that many others have missed' (88).

Relatedly, Lewis is well known for his Christian beliefs and apologetics. Ball fully acknowledges and argues against a prevailing view that the chronicles are purely a Christian parable by citing a number of religions that he believes shaped the worldview found there. Islam is mentioned repeatedly, but Ball also cites Yazidism, Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism. More broadly, Lewis seems to have engaged with Eastern cultures not purely through modern Western travel writing and art or classical texts; Ball identifies numerous examples of literary forebears, particularly from Persian and Arabic traditions, such as Rumi, *Gilgamesh*, and the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.

As can be seen, Lewis drew from a vast range of influences in constructing his Eastern societies and the entire world of the Narnia chronicles in general. Ball admits that much of this can be viewed easily as an orientalist endeavour, as excoriated by Edward Said (230). Indeed, he does not deny this so much as contextualize Lewis in his specific post-war moment and intellectual milieu, asserting that Lewis, by his own admission, had never intended to construct a 'a real Orient, but a fantasy' (232). While Lewis' orientalism will continue to pose problems for twenty-first century readers, Ball's work highlights the breadth of intellectual and cultural traditions that were available to writers of his generation.

RHIANNON EASTERBROOK

School of Advanced Study, University of London, UK

rhiannon.easterbrook@sas.ac.uk

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General

Since we are globally more or less saved from a disease, if perhaps not quite yet from the threat of a global conflict (the transition from a pandemic to a large-scale war is never easy), I start with two books that deal with deliverance, the first one deliverance from danger, the second book with the deliverance from death.

A charming sympotic poem, a skolion attributed to Simonides, perhaps stemming from the fifth century BC, states the following (Simonides, Sider 109 S):