

would later bring to life in his 1967 biography. Seeck was one of the foremost figures in the field, and Brown read his work with great care, exposing himself to the argument on the *Ausrottung der Besten* and the vision of the decline of early modern Catholic Europe that it sketched. Brown's reaction had the customary moral and intellectual clarity that would go on to inform his work: 'Such odious pronouncements were not for me' (277: one of the few negative statements to be found in over 700 pages). However, Seeck's work opened up questions that awaited proper investigation, and to which Brown would devote so much of his later work: restoring the historical agency of the protagonists of late-imperial history, and recognizing the significance of their contribution to their time without uncritically accepting the categories of decline and fall. For that purpose, the works of Santo Mazzarino and Henri-Irénée Marrou were much more fruitful guides. Brown's book is an invaluable document on the history of the modern historiography on the ancient world, and a remarkable provocation on its future development, and on the ways in which it can be meaningfully opened up. The flow of the narrative is sustained by a whole series of encounters and conversations: from Marrou to Momigliano, from Mary Douglas to Michel Foucault. But the most lingering lesson of this work is arguably the sense of kindness and gratitude which emanates from every page. That, too, is a fundamentally political point.

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Reception

While the reception of Greek tragedy is by now well-trodden terrain for the classical reception scholar, responses to Old Comedy are still harder to come by. Peter Swallow's study of the reception of Aristophanes in Britain in the Long Nineteenth Century examines the playwright's appearance, following a period in which there had been 'few translations, and no commentaries' in English, and his obscure contemporary references proved irksome to Hellenists (23).¹ As a result, while the political – or intentionally apolitical – dimensions of his case studies are a consistent topic throughout the study, we also see Swallow unpick some more subtle or 'subterranean' receptions among their more explicit companions. This is particularly the case in the chapter on W. S. Gilbert (1836–1911), who, although known as the 'English Aristophanes' (4), showed little in the way of direct acknowledgement of his Attic predecessor. However, characterizing Gilbert as a beloved, but moderate humourist, Swallow identifies several modes of Aristophanic reception across a number of his

¹ *Aristophanes in Britain: Old Comedy in the Nineteenth Century*. By Peter Swallow. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. xii + 285. 30 b/w illustrations. Hardback £83, ISBN: 978-0-19-286856-5.

works. For example, his burlesque *Thespis* (1871) not only has similar plot points to those found in *Birds* but also shares with the Aristophanic Jacques Offenbach, whose ‘influence on the British tradition is impossible to overstate’ (98), a cheeky attitude towards the gods. Gilbert’s body of work and attitude to classical sources is contextualized with reference to the work of J. R. Planché (1796–1880), in whom classical reception scholarship has already shown a significant amount of interest and who appears throughout this book, even having his own chapter.² Here, Swallow helps to fill in some notable gaps in the history of Victorian burlesque and related performance forms.

Elsewhere, we see very direct engagement with Aristophanes. Two chapters discuss performances of his plays, mostly in education settings. Chapter 7 gives us a broad sweep of performances in both schools and universities, highlighting several instances of performances of Aristophanes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that can be discerned amid patchy evidence. Swallow then claims that one of the most important arenas for Old Comedy in educational spaces was ‘the annual speech day of boys’ independent schools, to demonstrate to visitors the students’ grasp of ancient languages’ (171), with Dulwich College being particularly dominant in this respect, although the author does find examples of some well-costumed full productions. While this chapter inevitably focuses on Oxbridge and all-boys’ private schools, Swallow does note a 1906 production of *Birds* at Leeds Girls’ Grammar School, and other shows at Leeds University and University College Cardiff. Chapter 8, on the other hand, presents four productions involving women, which ‘show a shared approach to receiving Aristophanes as a vehicle of protest’ (201), while nevertheless differing in other respects. Following the discussion of Greek plays by women at university, we read of a *Lysistrata*, translated by Laurence Housman with care to avoid too much scandal. Swallow also argues that a suffrage play, *How the Vote Was Won* (1909), which swaps ‘sexual disruptions’ for ‘domestic upheaval’ (228), was inspired by *Lysistrata*. Together, he argues that these feminist productions represent a change from the more recent, ‘aesthetic, depoliticized reception of Aristophanes’ (230). In so doing, Swallow clearly furthers the discussions found in previous work on nineteenth-century adaptations of Greek drama, thoughtfully bringing together a considered and fertile combination of obscure and familiar authors.

From comedy, we move on to a rather more sombre theme. The edited volume, *Niobes: Antiquity, Modernity, Critical Theory*, is less a straightforward study of classical reception, and more an ambition collection of responses to *Niobes* from antiquity to the present day, informed by ‘our time of chronic crisis’ (4).³ The myth of the haughty mother, who, revelling in her superior fecundity, offends Leto and ends up losing her family to an attack by the goddess’ own offspring – before turning to stone – is found in

² Edith Hall, ‘Classical Mythology in the Victorian Popular Theatre’, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 5.3 (1999), pp. 336–66; Fiona Macintosh, ‘Medea Transposed: Burlesque and Gender on the Mid-Victorian Stage’, in Edith Hall, Fiona Macintosh, and Oliver Taplin (eds.), *Medea in Performance, 1500–2000*, (Legenda, 2000), pp. 75–99; Rachel Bryant Davies, *Victorian Epic Burlesques: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Theatrical Entertainments after Homer* (Bloomsbury, 2018).

³ *Niobes: Antiquity, Modernity, Critical Theory*. Edited by Mario Teló and Andrew Benjamin. Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 2024. Pp. viii + 276. 9 b/w illustrations. Hardback £89.95, ISBN: 978-0-8142-1563-0.

several ancient texts, including, most famously, the *Iliad* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. However, as is noted throughout, she also makes appearances in Aeschylus' eponymous tragedy, now mostly lost, as well as in Sophocles' *Antigone* and in a fragment of Sappho (142 Voigt). These traces of Niobe's wider presence in ancient literature, along with her subsequent reception in the literature, art, and criticism of later thinkers, gives ample material for this volume. Teló and Benjamin have divided the work into four sections: the first explores the myth's earliest appearances in literature and visual culture; the second is a theoretically complex investigation of Niobe's Ovidian rendering; the third considers Niobe 'from the viewpoint of aesthetics, visual and nonvisual' (20); and the last 'focuses on justice at the intersections of philosophy and poetry' (21).

Walter Benjamin, who discusses Niobe in the 1921 essay 'Towards the Critique of Violence' (*Zur Kritik der Gewalt*), is another important voice in this volume. Not only does Rebecca Comay draw on his work in her sprightly essay '*Nihil est in Imagine Vivum*' (nothing is alive in the image), observing memorably that Niobe 'manages to turn spreadsheet parenting into high drama' (38), but so too do Ben Radcliffe and Mathura Umachandran. In response to Benjamin's exploration of violence as a product of state power, Radcliffe, who, like Comay, has been placed in the volume's first section, discusses how best to understand the transformation of the community around Niobe into stones in the *Iliadic* version of the myth in Book 24, suggesting that 'Niobe is set into a constellation of beings [...] that cut across the boundaries between living and inorganic, human and nonhuman, divine and mortal' (66). Umachandran, whose essay appears in section four, similarly unpicks issues in Benjamin's essay. However, they discuss interpretations of the myth in terms of subjectivity and political agency expressed in resistance to oppression.

As might be expected from a volume concerned with crisis, politics, resistance, and agency echo throughout. In an eclectic and surprising essay by Daniel Villegas Vélez, we are informed of a Baroque opera, *Niobe, Regina di Tebe* (Munich, 1688), by Agostino Steffani and Luigi Orlandi, the production of which is a spatialization of *nomos* or law, theorized here variously as physical and conceptual boundaries and a form of "order" as distribution and command' (183). The author links the repetitive and clearly demarcated nature of formal performance conditions with *nomos* and claims that Niobe's transformation into a kind of boundary stone herself implicates her in the perpetuation of *nomos*. More urgent links are drawn here, with the claim that 'the gruesome slaying of the Niobids has a clear historical parallel in the sacking of Buda and the murder of its Muslim and Jewish populations' (192). Meanwhile Victoria Rimell writes powerfully on the difficulties of trying to understand Niobe's punishment as transmitted so ambiguously across different ancient texts, and, with it, what can be considered her response as a 'traumatized subject' (83). Rimell seems to be speaking to the violence inflicted on women, ending with 'When we can see Niobe's trauma, or even open up the question of whether or not she is to blame, it becomes possible to sit with her, and to endure it' (84).

We are likewise asked ourselves to sit with trauma in drea brown's 'Essay in Verse' on Phillis Wheatley, 'the first African American to publish a book of poetry' (5). Wheatley's 1773 poem 'Niobe in distress for her children slain by Apollo' is movingly set in dialogue with Wheatley's other writings and with broader questions around motherhood and enslaved Africans' experience of the Middle Passage. Here, the themes of maternity, liquefaction, and petrification are brought into a series of

footnoted, polyphonic poems that appears to portray a range of viewpoints, but nonetheless retains a powerful sense of the humanity of enslaved and bereft mothers, despite the ‘foul myth of mothers made stone in grief’ (250).

It should come as no surprise then that this is a challenging book, perhaps emotionally and politically, as well as intellectually, and is the better for that. I have only touched on a few of its chapters, which should as usual not be taken as a slight upon those not included. There is much more that could be said, and undoubtedly more than I am aware of at this point.

John Talbot differs in approach from some of our other publications this issue, but there is also a sombre tenor here. The subject in question is the afterlife of the alcaic metre in English poetry.⁴ Talbot concentrates carefully on the small details of prosody as he traces the development of the form from its Archaic Greek initiator to Horace’s adoption and innovation of it, and beyond. The latter is a critical moment in the transmission of the alcaic form, the reception of which, it is here claimed, has received much less attention, when compared with its Lesbian counterpart, the Sapphic. This is despite the fact that ‘the ruinous condition of the Greek lyric corpus allows only glimpses’ of either poet (33). Horace’s renderings are therefore the key ancient referent for this discussion. As the author himself notes, understanding of versification is nowhere near as widespread as it once was. However, novices need not worry, as all the core elements are explained.

In some senses, then, this study can be read as a recuperative endeavour: while an atmosphere of loss does suffuse the work at certain points, Talbot’s diligent unpicking of caesura and foot appears to be not just an analysis of modern poetry’s debt to its ancient forerunners, but a way of preserving and transmitting knowledge of and appreciation for metre as a subtle and flexible mode of communication. This can be seen early on, in the chapter ‘Coming Late to Latin’, which follows Talbot’s admission in the preface that up until recently, metre had been an ‘unfashionable’ object of study, and ‘academic criticism [...] has tended to slight questions of form and metre in particular, and evaluative artistic judgement in general’ (xxx). In this chapter, following a brief foray into T. S. Eliot, Talbot recounts both the ruminations of Wilfred Owen’s discomfort at seeing someone at the grand age of 24 (!) struggle with a late adoption of Latin and the poet’s own difficulties in overcoming obstacles to a classical education, before reflecting on how much rarer this knowledge is now. Owen’s famous wresting of Horace into ‘Dulce et Decorum est’ is all the more significant, it is argued, for its breaking of the original alcaic, elision and all, into English iambs. However, Talbot is unsure who would have known, late to Latin or not, that this is what Owen has done. As he puts it, unlike the sentiment of Horace’s ‘old lie’, ‘metrical allusions defy the capacity of readers to imagine remembering what they never knew’ (16).

Such discussion of loss continues later on, in several different forms. In Talbot’s chapters on Tennyson, we see how *In Memoriam* addressed his late friend Arthur Hallam while in dialogue with Horace’s sympotic interpellations of Maecenas and Pompeius. Later, Talbot analyzes Robert Bridges’ and W. H. Auden’s experiments

⁴ *The Alcaic Metre in the English Imagination*. By John Talbot. London, New York, and Dublin, Bloomsbury Academic, 2024. Pp. xxxii + 202. Hardback £90.00, ISBN: 978-1-350-23249-5, paperback £28.99, ISBN: 9781350232532.

in combining classical and English prosody in new ways, often at the expense of rhythmic or visual impact of the alcaic strophe. Auden, according to Talbot, displays in two of his alcaic poems a 'sense of a certain kind of cultural disinheritance, the emerging dominance of a narrow technocratic version of science that threatened to sever our connections to the past, in particular the classical past' (138). However, we are also reminded that there is a very significant piece of the puzzle that is missing in most people's understanding. 'Early moderns knew alcaics as a living tradition' due to the widespread popularity of Neo-Latin, with George Buchanan, a 'literary superstar across Europe in the sixteenth century' being a key influence on Mary Sidney, who was the first to compose an alcaic poem in English (47). At the ICS Ancient Literature seminar in October 2024, papers by Roy Gibson and Lucy Nicholas pondered the great body of Late- and Post-Antique literature in Ancient Greek and Latin, much of which troubles conventional understanding of where the bounds of 'classical' literature lie and what were the most widespread and impactful forms of European literature in the early modern period.⁵ As this issue gains in prominence, perhaps greater recuperation here will also occur.

From what I've said, this work might be perceived as melancholy. I wouldn't go as far as that, and yet I would say that the intimate and emotive sensibility of ancient lyric voices permeates much of the book. At the same time, there is a hopeful strand, too, and a challenge to continue exploring this understudied aspect of the classical tradition.

Just as Teló and Benjamin's volume on Niobes responds to the current political and societal moment, so too does one edited by Anastasia Bakogianni and Luis Unceta Gómez.⁶ This might be the first classical reception book I've ever read that starts by talking about GIFs, namely those from the *Greek Quarantology* series by Jonathan Muroya (2020). This is symbolic of the book's insistent embrace of new modes of transmitting or maintaining the classical tradition within the digital landscape. This coincides with an emphasis on the 'convulsive times' we inhabit, exemplified in the book's introduction with Russia's war against Ukraine, state-sanctioned violence against Black people in the United States, and the Covid-19 pandemic, which of course, accelerated the digitization of everyday life and is reflected in these GIFs (1). This book makes a series of interventions, on theoretical, interpretive and pedagogical levels, that respond in different ways to this sense of urgency or 'convulsion'.

The volume is divided into six sections across two parts. Part I could be broadly understood as 'methodological', with sections on theory, archives, and cross-cultural encounters. Part II is explicitly engaged with contemporary issues, and is organized according to sections on identity, 'Greek Tragedy in a Time of Pandemic', and receptions in technology. Again, this is another rich volume, expansive in coverage, and diverse in approach, and so I will mention a few points of interest.

⁵ Lucy Nicholas, 'How a bicycle works: part and whole in a big picture view of Neo-Latin and Neo-Greek'; Roy Gibson, 'Ancient Letter Collections 400 BCE–400 CE: the big picture', ICS Ancient Literature Seminar, Senate House, London, 21 October 2024.

⁶ *Classical Reception: New Challenges in a Changing World*. Volume 9 in the series Trends in Classics – Pathways of Reception. By Anastasia Bakogianni and Luis Unceta Gómez (eds). Berlin and Boston, de Gruyter, 2024. Pp. xiv+419. 21 colour and 10 b/w illustrations. Hardback £144, ISBN: 978-3-11-077372-9.

The first section of this sizeable volume offers re-theorizations of the forever slippery and contentious issue of what classical reception actually is or should be, and how the field relates to its source materials, to Classics more broadly, and to other disciplines. Jesse Weiner's essay on the 'politics of reception' takes two responses to the *Aeneid* – one by the sixteenth-century French poet, Hélienne de Crenne, and another by twenty-first-century hip-hop artists Chamillionaire and Paul Wall – to re-state and confirm the dynamic and transformative aspect of many forms of reception with political resonances. However, in what is a striking commonality with Talbot's emphasis on absences, Weiner also foregrounds the part erasure of ancient texts, arguing that 'the erased text is both present and poignantly revalued in its absence' (37). Later in this section, the book's editors advance two other approaches. Luis Unceta Gómez surveys a number of perspectives on reception theory over the last thirty years in order to challenge those working within the discipline to embrace the potentially infinite complexity of what classical reception, and even Classics in general, might become once we take seriously the multitude of cultural forms and practices across the world we inhabit. Anastasia Bakogianni also offers something new, by advancing a conception of 'masked receptions' in her study of the *femme fatale* across time and genres. Bakogianni's essay, despite a somewhat different approach, shares a certain sentiment with the volume on Niobes, since she also advocates for more nuanced responses to archetypal 'bad' women (80).

Absence once again appears in Zina Giannopoulou's exploration of Anne Carson's Cassandra in *An Oresteia* (2009), which is drawn from Aeschylus's tragedies. Here, Giannopoulou discusses the concept of translation on multiple levels, arguing that 'Cassandra is a double translator, a Trojan who speaks Greek, and a prophet who turns visions into language' (195). As seen elsewhere in this issue, translation seems to lead to conversion that can never be fully lossless; however, those alterations are in themselves meaningful. Giannopoulou investigates the character Carson sees as 'either a negation' or a 'breach of darkness' (196). A detailed analysis of Cassandra's cries and screams that go beyond mere words and challenge traditional, word-based, forms of translation contributes to an argument that Carson's techniques 'manage to replace the past-oriented temporality of trauma with a heightened experience of pain felt in the present, swallowing up past and future' (211).

In Part II, Amanda Kubic responds to the growing adoption of Disability Studies within classical reception and advocates for "cripping" the entire field of Classics', by which she means 'to include disable people not merely as objects of study but as valuable producers of knowledge' (262). Kubic discusses several responses to the Venus de Milo which engage with ideas around disability. She compares and contrasts the representation of two female artists who were born without arms: Mary Duffy, who is the subject of her own photographic series; and Alison Lapper, who while pregnant was sculpted by Marc Quinn for the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square. From one perspective, the problematic and long-standing association of classical statuary with whiteness as a privileged category comes under scrutiny as Kubic interrogates the assumptions underlying these reworkings of the Venus statue. From another, they show different relationships to the quality of wholeness as a desirable aesthetic, with Duffy claiming completeness for herself as something positive, regardless of its association with ableism, and Lapper and Quinn transcending questions of 'wholeness' (258). These issues are further explored when Kubic goes on to explore the

#BodyCan'tWait campaign, highlighting the urgent need for prosthetics around the world. This campaign, which appended prosthetic limbs to classical statues, raises further questions about the way in which disabled bodies are viewed as fundamentally lacking.

A more practice-based discussion, which still addresses pressing issues, is found in the chapter by T. H. M. Gellar-Goad and Caitlin Hines, on their pedagogical work at Wake Forest University. Here, the co-authors discuss the context and practicalities of their social-justice-related classics courses. Against the backdrop of Black Lives Matter, these courses benefited not only from high levels of enrolment, but from some obviously enthusiastic students. Gellar-Goad and Hines not only describe the content of their teaching but also narrate some of the enthusiastic and accomplished work produced for creative assessments. We see another approach to teaching Classics in Sonya Nevin's chapter on *Our Mythical Childhood* and *Locus Ludi*. Nevin charts the interplay of artistic and academic expertise in creating digital educational resources, such as the animation of ancient vases and frescoes by Steve K. Simons, and the inclusion of ancient music interpreted by Armand D'Angour and Aliki Markantonatou. These efforts, treated here – quite rightly – as forms of classical reception in themselves, are the focus of an interesting and thoughtful account of how the ancient world can be made to come alive to non-specialists in an informative and nuanced way. This last essay concludes a volume which offers many accessible and stimulating ways of thinking about classical reception in the twenty-first century.

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General review

Books about Ancient Greeks and Romans for general readership abound, so it was with a certain weariness that I started reading Jennifer Roberts' 'accessible and lively introduction to the Greeks and their ways of living and thinking' (jacket blurb).¹ I like to read the acknowledgments section first to get a sense of the person behind the book. Among the formulaic, the catalogic, and the dutiful, slight personal details or minor idiosyncrasies can be revealing and even endearing, sparking my curiosity about the author's persona and their world view. Roberts pulled me in immediately with an anecdote about her dictation programme's hilarious interpretations of the name Thucydides ('Facilities', 'The city flees', 'Abilities', 'He silly is', and ... 'Frank'). I provide this detail not just because it is amusing, but also because it is

¹ *Out of One, Many. Ancient Greek Ways of Thought and Culture*. By Jennifer T. Roberts. Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2024. Pp. xvii + 439. Hardback £30, ISBN: 978-0-691-18147-9.