

David Hopkins and Charles Martindale, eds., *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature, Volume 3: 1660-1790*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. 700. £147. ISBN 9780199219810.

Over the past twenty years Classical Reception Studies (CRS) has grown into an active and interdisciplinary field of academic study both within and beyond the classical community. *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature (OHCREL 3)* is the third volume (although the first to reach print) of a literary-historical mountain of a project which aims to ‘chart English writers’ engagement and dialogue with ancient Greek and Roman literature from the early middle ages to the present day’ (ix). The *OHCREL* series’ very existence bears testimony to the settlement of the pioneering field of CRS in the mainstream of Literary Studies, and it is fitting that it should be co-edited by Charles Martindale, who did much to establish the field’s reputation with his landmark book, *Redeeming the Text* (1993).

OHCREL 3 covers the period ‘1660-1790’, which corresponds with and complements Stuart Gillespie and David Hopkins’ third volume of *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English* (2005). It is by necessity no slender tome, since what Penelope Wilson calls the act of ‘recreating Greek and Roman texts as vernacular classics’ (31) flourished in the period and allusion to the classics was ubiquitous in its literary culture. The book would have been heavier still had the editors not made the decision to restrict the scope of the project to ‘literary texts of high quality and of the greatest historical importance’ (2). This kind of language is likely, and perhaps designed, to ruffle feathers, especially of those who tend towards a Book or Cultural History approach. But in spite of an initially provocative staking out of their position on ‘Literature’ and ‘reception’, in which Martindale declares his preference for classical reception as ‘two-way understanding... which illuminates antiquity as much as modernity’ (5), he and Hopkins have covered a great deal of ground with carefully edited, lean and readable essays. Their definition of classical reception is not infrequently stretched by the essays that follow, which seldom illuminate antiquity for the classicist as much as the modern. But to restrict CRS to the admittedly gratifying (especially to classicists) dialogical model would rule out many important studies that have enriched the field, which would in turn seriously limit what CRS can offer the academy, as *OHCREL 3* itself shows. A pleasing example of where it does ‘work both ways’ is where Bruce Redford remarks that ‘To investigate the Pliny-Walpole connection is to refresh one’s understanding not only of cultural affinities but also the crucial role played in both *oeuvres* by patrician self-fashioning’ (435).

The ‘literary’ inclination of the History obviously omits the chance to see the interplay between ‘high literary’ and performance, visual, material and ‘lower’ print cultures, but as a result it will surely stimulate a good deal of further research. The genres of literature represented in this book expand the trodden path to include texts currently underrepresented in English Literature teaching, e.g. translations, letters, histories and speeches. It is an invaluable resource for understanding the classicism of eighteenth-century Britain, which of course significantly informs Anglophone literature of both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is perhaps its greatest offering to the readers of this *Bulletin*.

The book is divided up as follows: after the introduction seven of the twenty-one chapters are given to classical genres (Latin Epic, Roman Satire and Epigram, Pastoral, Criticism, Didactic poetry, Lyric and Elegy, and History). The other chapters cover engagements *with* select individual classical authors (Homer, Ovid, and Horace), engagements *by* select individual eighteenth-century authors (Milton, Dryden, Johnson), and then the modern ‘genre chapters’ include: Letters, Fables, Theatre, Novels, Discursive and Philosophical Prose and Travesty and Mock-Heroic. Two miscellaneous chapters by Penelope Wilson do much to ground the collection by calling attention to women, the

working class, and the publishing trade. ‘The Place of the Classics in Education and Publishing’ (29), positioned immediately after the introduction, summarises and expands our knowledge of the era’s all-important classical education and usefully presents trends in contemporary print culture. Her second chapter on ‘Women Writers and the Classics’ (495) informs its reader of alternative ‘indirect’ routes to classical literary culture used by women, much of which by extension can be applied to the engagement of informal learners and children looking to supplement/short-cut their classical education). As well as introducing us to the classicism of Aphra Behn, Anne Finch and Elizabeth Carter, she touches on the ‘labouring-class’ writers Mary Collier, Mary Leapor and Ann Yearsley.

Between many of the chapters of *OHCREL 3* there is a beneficial interlocking of themes and subjects. In spite of this, cross-referencing is minimal. The eighteenth-century expansion of the print medium is ever lurking in the background, which reminds the reader to temper with thoughts of continuity the desire to treat the succeeding era as one purely of reaction. This theme will no doubt be developed by *OHCREL 4* (forthcoming). Any omissions or thin patches in the scope of this ambitious History can be remedied by use of Victoria Moul’s thorough annotated bibliography (647f).

It is impossible to do justice to individual chapters in the space of this short review. I will instead focus on a couple of the book’s myth-busting elements surrounding eighteenth-century classicism. It ought to be noted that Martindale, Hopkins and ‘The Bristol School’ have recently made an important challenge to much received wisdom regarding Romantic classicism in *Romans and Romantics* (Saunders et al. ed., 2012). In Martindale’s own essay on Milton’s classicism he wields the bracket with lucid precision, e.g.: ‘(classicism must not be thought of as something necessarily conservative)’ (61); ‘(despite the reputation of the period for stiff ‘correctness’ and subservience to ‘the [Neoclassical] rules’)...’ (71). *OHCREL 3* throughout problematises the prevalent idea that the ‘narrow rationalism’ of the ‘Neoclassical’, or ‘Augustan’ period was liberated by ‘The Gothic’ (esp. 14-7). Another relatively well-documented concept that the volume challenges is the apparent division of ‘biblically- and patriotically-inspired Whiggery and a classically-influenced Toryism’ (19). The richness of creative classicism across party lines and throughout the long period reminds us to be wary of such political polarisations.

Other times and social and cultural contexts can resonate more easily with certain ancient writers than our own. This is patently true for the eighteenth century, as is revealed by the prevalence in *OHCREL 3* of classical authors rarely read today. The subtle differences and similarities between former relationships with classical writers and our own can often tell us much about both the ancient and modern authors and their work. But even if we learn nothing new about the ancient author, the complex web of attitudes, fashions, tastes and contemporary events that underlie such differences can also powerfully illuminate the social, political and cultural contexts of the modern writer and their readerships. *OHCREL 3* is a valuable collection of essays that displays the rich mix of creative classicism in eighteenth-century Britain.

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