

Richardson, E. 2013. *Classical Victorians: Scholars, Scoundrels and Generals in Pursuit of Antiquity. Classics after Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-1-107-02677-3. £55.00.

This is the first volume in the series 'Classics after Antiquity' edited by Alastair Blanshard, Shane Butler and Emily Greenwood. The editors describe it as 'a series that aims to unsettle, provoke debate and, above all, stimulate a re-evaluation of assumptions about the relationship between Greek and Roman classical pasts and modern histories' (p. xi). This Richardson's contribution certainly does, but, while it gathers a wealth of sensational material pertinent to the analysis of the Victorian obsession with the Classics, it also frustrates and at times annoys the reader because of its loose punctuation, overly indulgent rhetorical style and the use of suggestive allusion that borders on Tacitus's use of innuendo and that is in places entirely unwarranted (more on these points later).

The direct inspiration for this book evidently comes from Simon Goldhill's substantial work in this field.¹ Goldhill, and now his student Richardson (p. xvi), demonstrate that there is a huge amount of information available that is relevant to the study of the reception of the Classics by the Victorians.² Thanks to the increased desire to preserve knowledge during the European enlightenment, the systematic archiving of books in libraries, the growth of print and other media in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the current boom in retrospective scholarship and internet resources, Richardson certainly did not lack data to draw on. A glance at the extensive bibliography (pp. 203-24) reveals the presence of many publications, often anonymous, dating from the Victorian era, and a random inspection of the footnotes shows that Richardson has made good use of government publications (such as Hansard) and newspaper articles from *The Times*, *Gentleman's Magazine*, *Illustrated London News*, *Punch* and other print media of the day, in addition to many recent historical studies of the period. Although Richardson has done a considerable amount of research, however, the book he has produced is relatively short (181 pages), selective, and tendentious. The selectivity is clear from the absence of imperialism from Richardson's discussion. For many historians this is the one thing that defines the Victorians more than anything else, but even when discussing the Crimean War Richardson does not engage fully with this controversial topic. The result is a rather introspective analysis of greater interest to European or even narrowly British concerns than to the wider imperial and colonial world. Tendentiousness is apparent especially in the final chapter (see further below).

Richardson's opening chapter ('Introduction: The Resurrection Men', pp. 1-10), illustrates his sensationalistic and suggestive approach. It begins with an anecdote involving the supply of corpses for the purpose of medical dissection by grave-robbars. Although this has nothing to do with Classics at all, it is taken as a metaphor for the expropriation of Graeco-Roman culture by the Victorians (p. 2: 'no corpses were seized upon so ruthlessly or so completely, in Victorian Britain, as were the ancient Greeks and Romans.') The analogy presents Victorian Classics in a needlessly pejorative and even ghoulish light. The chapter then outlines some of the material to be investigated in the book, such as the short and ultimately unsuccessful career of Theodore Buckley, the satirical writings of Robert Brough, the archaeological work of Duncan McPherson in the Crimea, the forgeries of Constantine Simonides, and the eccentric scholarship of Samuel Butler.

The rest of the book consists of three long chapters containing quite heterogenous matter rather artificially brought together to constitute different themes. Chapter 2, 'Old-fashioned Ambition (a Victorian Seduction)', pp. 11-71, brings together *inter alios* Theodore Buckley, the 'Stockwell Murderer' (the Rev. John Selby Watson), and Thomas Hardy's Jude Fawley, to illustrate Richardson's view of the futility of using Classics as a means of upward social mobility in Victorian England. Richardson places his emphasis on the negative side in this debate. In the case of Buckley he stresses this author's satirical treatment of those who cultivated the society of aristocrats or 'tufts' in his book *The Natural History of Tuft-Hunters and Toadies* (1848) and the author's quasi-romantic death at an early age from alcohol and opiates. However, Richardson does not draw a rounded portrait of his

¹ S. Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity: Art, Opera, Fiction, and the Proclamation of Modernity* (Princeton 2011).

² Richardson rightly acknowledges the work of R. Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford 1980); F. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven 1981); N. Vance, *The Victorians and Ancient Rome* (Oxford 1997); and C. Stray, *Classics Transformed: Schools, Universities and Society in England, 1830-1960* (Oxford 1998).

subject. For example, he does not touch on the fact that Buckley was appointed college chaplain at Christ Church, Oxford, and that he published ecclesiastical works as well as his edition of Apuleius' minor work *De Deo Socratis* (1844), school texts of Greek and Latin authors, and numerous 'hack' translations for the Bohn series, some of which survive today on the internet. Buckley's involvement with the Anglican church is evident also from his later essay 'A History of a Certain Grammar School' published in Charles Dickens' *Household Words* (9 August 1851) – a fictionalized account of corruption in the allocation of pay by the clergy of Rochester Cathedral.

A similarly selective focus is applied to Benjamin Jowett, the Master of Balliol College, Oxford, who is cited for his belief in the power of a classical education to enable upward social mobility (p. 34), against which Richardson adduces the evidence of how little difference educational attainment made to the careers of students at Balliol between the years of 1870 and 1879 (Appendix B, pp. 186-90). Much has been written about Jowett, especially in regard to his controversial engagement with the question of the interpretation of the New Testament and the related question of the excommunication of Bishop Colenso in Natal, South Africa, for heresy – a controversial case that illuminates the close relationship between Classics and the Anglican Church in the Victorian period.³ As in the case of Buckley, it is the role of the established church that emerges as being of at least equal importance to Classics for the success or failure of the upwardly mobile in this period. Even Hardy's Jude Fawley aimed to become a bishop or, more realistically, an archdeacon (p. 40),⁴ rather than a Classics scholar, and the homicidal Rev. John Watson was an ordained minister in the Anglican Church as well as being an enthusiastic Classicist, albeit one prone to murderous rages.

In Chapter 3, 'In Search of an Empire of Memory' (pp. 72-130), Richardson attempts to weave together accounts of the archaeological explorations of Duncan McPherson in the Crimea, the Philhellenic involvement in the Greek War of Independence, the dramatic productions of Robert Brough, and Cervantes' comic narrative of Don Quixote tilting at windmills, which Richardson takes as the governing metaphor of this chapter (p. 126) as he did the 'resurrection men' in the first. Richardson reveals something of McPherson's adventurous life (p. 73, for example) and in doing so presents a glimpse of the extraordinary dynamism of the Victorian era. McPherson served as a medical officer in the British army in China, India, and the Crimea. He was also a Philhellene, like so many of his contemporaries, and an enthusiastic archaeologist on a mission to preserve the material remnants of the ancient Greek presence in the peninsula that he saw being destroyed by looting during the war (p. 100). What he did manage to save was shipped back to the British Museum with the assistance of the War Minister, Lord Panmure (p. 99). While McPherson is the main focus of the chapter, Richardson weaves a number of minor figures into his narrative to broaden his account of the Philhellenic movement at the time. These include well-known figures such as Byron (pp. 77-78, with an unforgettable illustration) and Shelley (p. 102), but also Kinglake, author of *Eothen* (and, more pertinently, *The Invasion of the Crimea* in eight volumes – p. 91), the sculptor Sir Richard Westmacott (p. 98), and others. In this chapter too Richardson emphasises how the Crimean War led to the disillusionment of those who had idealised the Classical past and produced many critics of the campaign culminating, in Richardson's account, in the anti-establishment satires and burlesques of Robert Brough (pp. 112-24, subtitled 'The Revolutionary'), whose *Medea* (1856), for example, gave sympathetic treatment to the 'barbaric' heroine and ridiculed the Greek hero (p. 118).

The final chapter, 'The Children of Babel' (pp. 131-181), commences with an account of 'The London Tower of Babel' – Sir Edward Watkin's failed project to rival the Eiffel Tower in Paris. However, the chief subjects of this chapter are Samuel Butler, especially his book *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, and the artful forgeries of Constantine Simonides. The book here ends abruptly with some general reflections on the Classical Tradition – there is no concluding chapter. Richardson presents a highly associative argument; by weaving together the very different figures of the con-artist, Simonides,

³ See G. Faber, *Jowett* (London 1957) Faber & Faber, 229-88, 314-23, and the references given there to earlier biographies and sources (pp. 435-36). On Jowett and the Church, see P. Hinchcliff, *Benjamin Jowett and the Christian Religion* (Oxford 1987). On Colenso, see now J. Draper, 'The Trial of Bishop John William Colenso', In J. Draper (ed.) *The Eye of the Storm: Bishop John William Colenso and the Crisis of Biblical Inspiration* (Pietermaritzburg 2003) 306-25.

⁴ Much more could have been made of Hardy. See, for example, M. Rimmer, 'A Feast of Language: Hardy's Allusions', in P. Mallett (ed.), *The Achievement of Thomas Hardy* (London 2000), 58-71; M. Ray, 'Jude the Obscure and Benjamin Jowett', *Thomas Hardy Journal* 14:2 (1998) 79-80; A. P. D. Valakis, 'The *Moira* of Aeschylus and the immanent will of Thomas Hardy.' *CJ* 21 (1925-1926) 431-42.

and the author and scholar Butler, he suggests a similarly mischievous purpose in both. At times these loose associations are taken too far, as in the case of the discussion of K. D. White's SABC broadcast, *Our Classical Tradition* (1957). Richardson's entirely anachronistic discussion of this short text arises in the context of his critique of advocates of the Classical Tradition as 'a single straight line, a unified intellectual inheritance' (p. 166), among whom he counts Richard Jebb and T. S. Eliot. Richardson begins his discussion of White's talk with an allusion to a reactionary medieval monk's view that the Greek language and the New Testament are heretical (p. 161, referred to in connection with White on p. 169). This allusion is combined with a harmless remark by White in *Farm Equipment of the Roman World* (London 1975: xii) rejecting 'fashionable' trends in scholarship, in an attempt to suggest that White was a political reactionary. Worse than this, by conflating a partial quotation from p. 4 of White's published text with one on p. 30, Richardson suggests that White aligned himself with White South Africans 'in opposition to the "dark forces" of black South Africa' (p. 169). In fact, White was a liberal scholar, educated in England, who came to South Africa just before War World II and who left the country after Sharpeville in 1960. When he returned to Africa he taught in Black African states.⁵ White's reference to 'dark forces' (p. 30 of his text) actually goes on to say that these were 'unleashed by those cults of the Will that have wrought such havoc in our time', which in the context of the 1950s can only refer to the destruction brought on Europe by the Nazi regime in Germany in the Second World War.

Richardson's text is very loosely punctuated, especially in respect of his use of the en dash. This is used, for example instead of a comma in the following quotation: 'An able scholar might turn into a murderer – but, according to this line of argument . . . ' (p. 53). On page 71 the en dash is used nine times in less than half a page. The book also suffers from an excessive use of lengthy footnotes, reproduced in a minute font, which makes them very difficult to read. Quotations are at times inaccurate. For example, the quote from *Eothen* on p. 91 has the plural 'Olympian dispensations' for Kinglake's singular (ed. Gorvett Smith 1927: 74), and Kinglake's representation of the contemporary Greek pronunciation of names (p. 72) such as Athena as 'Athenie' and Aphrodite as 'Aphrodētie' (*sic*) are corrected without explanation. The date of Kinglake's *Eothen* is given as 1982 (a reprint) in the bibliography instead of 1844. These small errors detract from the series as a whole and both author and series editors need to intervene to greater effect to eliminate them. This is regrettable because this publishing initiative holds great promise for the important work of reassessing what it means to profess the Classics in the early decades of the twenty-first century.

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⁵ For this see Chris Stray's review in *BMCR* 2014.06.05 and the associated blog, with which I am entirely in agreement. Stray took the trouble to communicate with me and other South African scholars about K. D. White prior to publishing his review. Richardson should have done the same.