

Lorna Hardwick and Stephen Harrison (edd.), *Classics in the Modern World. A Democratic Turn?* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. 520. ISBN 978-0-19-967392-6. US\$160/£90.

For a collection of written articles, *Classics in the Modern World* is highly conversational. This is partly due to its origins in a preliminary e-seminar and follow-up conference on the 'democratic turn' in modern engagements with Classical antiquity. Not only are questions that arose within these initial forums re-presented in the Introduction (Hardwick and Harrison, pp. xix-xxxvii), but they are directly and indirectly raised throughout the volume's thirty contributions. Moreover, the very frame is interrogative. The content of the volume is diverse, with case studies drawn from a broad array of periods and settings and Classical receptions that might seem quite detached. Yet the question mark in the title – *A Democratic Turn?* – makes each individual argument a new contribution to a live debate. Whether dipping in or working more methodically through the book, the reader joins the evaluation of how Classics in modern settings might possess a democratic quality.

Core problems attendant upon the idea of a 'democratic turn' are highlighted in the first three chapters of 'Controversies and Debates' (Section 1, pp. 1-140). In political discourse, 'democracy' is ideologically charged – an abstract ideal which hides a myriad of forms and experiences, and whose assumed hegemony might be disputed (Harloe, Chapter 1, pp. 3-13). Anyone searching for the 'democratic' must identify and recognize the subjectivity of the terms of their own engagement. For this reason, the notion of a 'turn' must also be treated with caution. This word arises within cultural studies and indicates a fundamental shift from one set of behaviours or analytical paradigms to another. But if 'democratic' is changing and disputable, then finding movement away or towards carries the risk of mischaracterizing or wrongly prioritizing aspects of modern responses to the Classical world (Hardwick, Chapter 2, pp. 15-32). Indeed, our political vocabulary may have its roots in ancient Greek society, but it already comes to us via Roman conceptions of political interactions, which in turn influence modern understandings of past and present (Lianeri, Chapter 3, pp. 33-46). A refined sense of what is meant and is looked for in any particular investigation emerges as the best way to proceed. Hence what follows is a series of independent studies that each examines one particular instance in which modern persons engage with the written and material culture, history and ideas of ancient Greece and Rome in ways that might (or might not) be considered 'democratic'.

The two case studies that round off 'Controversies and Debates' begin to illustrate the possible dynamics. In a series of law-court trials during the twentieth century, the principles of Roman-Dutch law concerning treason in South Africa were reviewed through explicit reappraisal of Justinian's *Digest* (and later Dutch commentaries on it), altering the legitimacy of protest and rebellion through its application (Hilton, Chapter 4, pp. 47-61). In another time of change, the writer, broadcaster and Labour politician Richard Crossman used Plato's political theory to posit a 'Socratic socialism', an idea widely circulated through the new medium of radio and in an accessible companion book, *Plato Today* (1937). This very work inspired members of the British socialist movement later in the century (Simpson, Chapter 5, pp. 63-76). An idea starts to emerge of what a 'democratic turn' might involve – the movement towards more anti-authoritarian, egalitarian relationships between a state and its citizens. The position of 'Classics' in each example is distinct; in the former, it is a living part of an inherited judicial system, and in the latter it is Plato's philosophy. However, in both, it is under interrogation and reconfiguration that Classics acquires a democratic effect.

The reworking of Classical ideas to democratic effect is visible across the second section, 'Area Study – The United States,' pp. 77-140. For post-independence politicians in the US Cicero and Cato came to represent a style of virtue and governance, building a Republic with foundations that we now regard as democratic, including liberty, public service, and wider access to power (Lawatsch Melton, Chapter 6, pp. 79-88). Then again, access to the literary heritage of Greece and Rome gave nineteenth-century African-Americans the tools to conceptualize their experiences, describe their ambitions and protest against their exclusion from democracy. However, at the same time, while some Anglo-Saxons refused to share 'ownership' of the Classical education that fostered this heritage, some black activists disputed its value for the same reasons as white conservatives – the lack of practical improvement it generated by contrast to domestic, agricultural, and manual training (Malamud, Chapter 7, pp. 89-103). In this environment, Classics was prioritized and contested. At the World's Columbian Exposition, staged at Chicago in 1893, competing perspectives are again visible. Faux-marble architecture in

the White City distils the excellence of the Classical world, as the marker in mankind's evolution from savagery to civilization, an evolution completed in Machinery Hall, which celebrated the contemporary industrial age. Set alongside the Midway Plaisance, where fair-goers encountered 'anthropological' reconstructions of primitive villages, Classics became allied to American cultural superiority. And yet, despite this affirmative ideology, visitors were captivated by exoticism and novelty rather than grand architecture and ideas (Davis, Chapter 8, pp. 105-17). Classics enters the demotic arena, only to be ignored. Conversely, attempts to critique politics on the theatrical stage, especially imperialist warmongering by US democracy, reach a receptive but narrower audience. Aeschylus' *Persians* (New York, 2010) invited the audience to recognize the humanity of the 'enemy' (Iraq /Afghanistan) and the complicity of US citizens in their own ignorance regarding the causes of the 9/11 attacks in 2001 (to draw upon one example). Classics again draws its power to contest dominant ideologies and power structures from its 'Classical' status (Sorkin Rabinowitz, Chapter 9, pp. 119-30). For this reason, it is doubly important that women are actively producing Classical narratives – writing scholarship, working creatively, and talking to one another about it. Female participation represents a democratic advance (Hallet, Chapter 10, pp. 131-40).

The multifaceted and sometimes contradictory role of Classics elucidated through the 'area study' is symptomatic of wider trends. In 'Education: Ideologies, Practices and Contexts' (Section 3, pp. 141-79), the 'democratic turn' is aligned to shifts in educational practices that extend Classical languages and texts to new audiences. With a pedagogical approach that prioritizes active learning, now via open-access on-line materials, the Cambridge Latin Course has increased the attractiveness and availability of Latin in public-funded, non-selective comprehensive schools in Great Britain since the 1960s. The prominent media association between Classics and conservative élites belies a significant expansion (Paul, Chapter 11, pp. 143-56). By contrast to Crossman's earlier efforts (see Chapter 5, pp. 63-76), this development is without obvious political intent or impact; the extension of Classical learning to the masses follows its demotion from a requirement for administrative office. In colonial West Africa, however, learning ancient languages opened access to structures and discourses of power. Originally encouraged by missionaries keen to create independent African ministries, learning Greek and Latin (and Hebrew) soon offered routes to further education (at home and abroad) and government positions, while knowledge of the ancient world (for example, Spartan initiation rituals) allowed Africans to place themselves into the shared Classical heritage by which Europeans and Americans claimed superiority. In the movement towards post-colonial self-determination, a Classical education served a greater utility than that imagined by its supporters and detractors (Goff, Chapter 12, pp. 157-69). Contemporary Greek theatre projects in Italy share the ambitions of the Cambridge Latin Project and the effects of missionary teaching – to widen participation amongst the *dēmos*, with a view to empowering poorer, disenfranchised members. Putting school students on stage, or as the author prefers 'putting into life ancient plays', replicates the participatory character of Athenian drama, and enters performers and audience into debates with contemporary resonance (for example, power and gender, via Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*) (Treu, Chapter 13, pp. 171-79). Community involvement breaks down the kinds of blockages to effective political criticism identified for American theatre (see Chapter 9, pp. 119-30). Such projects not only convey 'messages' but enable the people to speak for themselves.

Participation continues to offer a means of thinking about a 'democratic turn' in 'Greek Drama and Modern Performance' (Section 4, pp. 181-259). A widening circle of contributors goes hand-in-hand with a re-evaluation of the primacy of the ancient text. Amongst the various modes of authenticity modern versions might claim, authenticity arising through the collaborative creative process is the most innovative and productive (Gamel, Chapter 14, pp. 183-95). So, in modern Greece, startling new techniques of staging and costume drawn from other dramatic traditions can distance a new version from its original. So too can the use of *demotiki*, the common tongue that replaced *katharevousa*, an invented language derived from ancient Greek, after the removal of the Greek military junta (Bakogianni, Chapter 15, pp. 197-212). Alternatively, performances of Aristophanic comedy might embrace the audience in a robustly celebratory, sense-driven experience akin to the spirit of Greek folk rituals – and, arguably, to the spirit of Old Comedy itself (Varakis, Chapter 16, pp. 213-25). These are still top-down presentations, but they find authenticity through the language and life of ordinary people, in opposition to supposedly 'faithful' reconstructions. The provocative re-styling of plays is found also in Israeli theatre, where the hurly-burly of Aristophanes' *Peace* (1968) was calibrated towards local politics. *Eddy King* (1975) articulated the anxieties and experiences of

immigrants, and *The Doomed Women of Troy* (1984) demanded sympathy with the 'others' who suffer the brutality of war (the Lebanon War is the context) (Yaari, Chapter 17, pp. 227-44). Expressing and engaging audiences with similar plights was the motivation behind *The Silence of Eurydice*, which combined interviews with relatives of persons from the Greek and Turkish communities on Cyprus who were missing as a result of conflict, 'micro-performances' on the Greek and Turkish sides of Nicosia and in the buffer zone of Eurydice's suicide following news of her son's death, and an exhibition documenting the performance and offering a final sequence in her suicide. The voices of today's bereaved were woven into and heard through the performed experiences of Eurydice (Hulton, Chapter 18, pp. 245-59). The *dēmos* in these case studies is variously constituted, but in each instance Greek drama is (re)claimed by and for the people and communicates distance from, disenchantment with, or protest towards authoritarian ideologies, rhetoric, and power.

By these analyses, Classics becomes a mode of discourse, and capturing Classics – harnessing its communicative power – is a means of self-expression and bid for agency. From a 'democratic' perspective, the increased engagement of women with Classics is therefore a cause for celebration (see already Chapter 10, pp. 131-40), especially when female writers refocus attention on women in antiquity too. 'Creativity – Female Agency in Fiction and Poetry' (Section 5, pp. 261-98) explores some of the ramifications. In the 'Federica Quartet' by A. S. Byatt, her protagonist's sexual experiences are filtered through themes and motifs drawn from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Myths of transformation embody hopes and desires, which are thwarted and instantiated at different moments in Federica's life, effecting a feminist reworking of myth that prioritizes birth and re-birth, rather than (masculine) dying and resurrection (Cox, Chapter 19, pp. 263-73). However, it is not always easy to break away from male narrative control. In contemporary novels about Lesbia, female writers of historical fiction give voice to female characters, but frequently replicate scholarly orthodoxy, focalizing Lesbia through her male lover, Catullus, and applying a misogynistic prism of sexual deviancy and danger (Theodorakopoulos, Chapter 20, pp. 275-86). The potential for women's writing to challenge rather than conform is realized by Ali Smith's polyphonic narratives. Again Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with its fluid and transformative sexualities, articulates and mediates the (homo)sexual experience of its female protagonists in *Girl meets Boy* (2007). 'Democratization' is evident in and effected by Smith (who identifies as intergender and is from a working-class background), the narratives (populated by women, constructed through their voices), and their wide circulation (as best-sellers flying off the shelves at high-street bookshops) (Cox and Theodorakopoulos, Chapter 21, pp. 287-98).

Through such sophisticated reworkings, Classics enters 'The Public Imagination' (Section 6, pp. 299-426). This is an amorphous and ever-changing space in which thoughts and ideas about antiquity gain shape through media and events that engage the (so-called) general public. Newspapers are one such medium. In the nineteenth century, they were instrumental in debates over political reform, and in select reportage Rome's fraternal reformers, the Gracchi, were harnessed by those pressing for and resisting change to characterise reformers positively and negatively as required (Butler, Chapter 22, pp. 301-18). The adaptability of such ancient models is reflected more extensively in political cartoons carried by the print and on-line media. 'Fiddling' Nero, labouring Heracles, and the writhing Laocoon are repeatedly redrawn to satirize current scenarios and figures. Iconography and semantics are both mobilized, so that well-known stories are replayed but also emptied and refilled. The 'Classical' is just one potentially active and recognizable element (Mitchell, Chapter 23, pp. 319-49). In such cartoons, Classics is visible to all, but through this 'democratic' incarnation – available to the masses, striking at power – it might disappear entirely. These conclusions direct attention to the 'audience', who are not simply passive recipients but interact with each reception of antiquity in ways determined by their own experiences or 'horizons of expectation'. Tracing audience responses is demanded by the Jaussian model that inspires Classical reception studies, and is vital for a holistic understanding of Classics today. For BBC radio and television programmes, archive material (for example letters, surveys) permits detailed analyses of audience responses by age, gender, class, and geography. Privileging the voices of individuals within the *dēmos* would be a democratic turn in academic practice (Wrigley, Chapter 24, pp. 351-64).

Until then, democratic turns might be found in the re-authoring of stories about antiquity for non-academic audiences in popular media. Documentaries about Homer demonstrate how new versions conform with wider thought-paradigms (the quest to find history in myth) and reflect movements towards social equality (the incorporation of women into history), within an educational and entertainment frame (Makrinos, Chapter 25, pp. 365-79). In both incarnations, as a graphic novel and

film, 300 is equally demotic in its reach. However, framing the battle of Thermopylae through a comic-book aesthetic, encompassing characterisation and narrative, complicates any possible 'democratic' interpretations. Miller's powerful and morally complex super-heroes have totalitarian tendencies; the film downplays the graphic novel's dismissal of democracy, but in both versions the 'freedom' being fought for by the Spartans is not democratic (Kovacs, Chapter 26, pp. 381-92). A broad reach does not guarantee a pro-democratic agenda. However it can increase access to the remains of Classical antiquity. At the Ashmolean Museum, where funding for refurbishment was predicated upon promises to expand admissions, the structure and content of its galleries and displays were shaped by the needs of anticipated visitors from the general public (albeit not without contestation and attempts to control narratives by academic contributors). The museum continues to solicit visitor feedback and reshapes its exhibitions in response (Walker, Chapter 27, pp. 393-409). The digital environment offers even greater potential for interaction and engagement, with open provision of ancient texts and resources for studying antiquity and the possibility to involve people in their creation, working individually and as teams. Unfortunately, the funding of ventures (and staff) on short-term bases, the continuing control of data by profit-driven organizations, and failure to fund infrastructures and provide longevity to on-line sites limits that potential. The digital environment offers ways of working more 'democratically', but within the restraints imposed by profit-oriented policies (Barker, Chapter 28, pp. 411-26).

Classics in the Modern World showcases a variety of perspectives and approaches, as contributors identify democratic turns (the plural is emphasized by Monoson, 'Afterword', pp. 427-32) in different places, at different times, and through different practices and media. While chapters individually offer valuable insights into their topic or material, it is as a collection that they work best, highlighting the many different ways a 'democratic turn' might be defined: as a shift in political practice and challenge to autocratic authority, a broadening of participation amongst previously excluded groups, and an application of principles like equality, collaboration, and deliberation. In the process, limitations attendant upon proposed turns emerge: the co-option of Classics by antagonistic parties to promote opposed agendas, the adoption of similar processes to differing political effect, disputes over the utility of Classics for extending power and agency to the disenfranchised, and a potential lack of correspondence between widened access and authority and democratic sentiment.

By its own measures, therefore, the book performs a democratic turn. While far from exhaustive, its broad cultural and geographic sweep demonstrates the richness and diversity of Classical engagements across nations, social groups, and gender. Equal priority is given to Classical practitioners and scholars, and the normal dominance of men in the academy is reversed – twenty-one (out of twenty-nine) contributors are female. Continuing assumptions about Classics as the property of white male European élites are undermined, while new voices join the debate. There are explicit incitements to the wider academic community too: to challenge old boundaries by working in interdisciplinary fashions, to incorporate the experiences and opinions of the *dēmos* in their Classical reception studies, and to fight to realize the democratic potential of the digital revolution. When the Humanities are continually undermined through accusations of economic uselessness (which we now understand to be far from new), and governments and educational establishments attempt to silence Classics, the demonstration of its vibrancy and relevance to the modern world is a political act.

Fiona Hobden
University of Liverpool, UK