

BOOK REVIEW

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Hardwick, Lorna & Gillespie, Carol (eds.) 2007. *Classics in post-colonial worlds*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-929610-1.

The volume grew out of a conference on *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds* held at the Open University in the West Midlands Centre in Harborne, Birmingham in May 2004.

The volume is divided into three distinct parts titled: Part 1: Case Studies, Part 2: Encounter and new traditions and Part 3: Challenging theory: Framing further questions. The bibliography is comprehensive and the index very useful.

On balance the material brought together gives an excellent overview of Classics in a post-colonial world, even though the quality of the papers is uneven. Some essays (like those of Gibbs, Djisenu, and Burkitt as well as Kerr Prince and Greenwood) are in dialogue with one another reflecting something of the vibrancy of the current academic debate in this field. Other essays work together to give a mosaic-like impression of the discourse. The collection would be most useful to classicists as an introduction to the various approaches associated with post-colonial studies.

In the introduction to the work Lorna Hardwick gives a brief summary of the problems facing post-colonial studies in general and how the book, its aims and organisation portray or interact with these difficulties. She also gives a very useful overview of individual contributions. Because of limited space this review can only give a very short summary of each.

The section on case studies contained some fascinating analyses (especially Budelmann and Gibbs) of adaptations of classical material in a post-colonial setting. The collection opens with Felix Budelmann's discussion of Euripides' *Trojan Women* in an African context in *Trojan Women in Yorubaland: Femi Osofisan Women of Owu*. This article reflects the versatility of Classics as a discipline and is a good example of what Classics and post-colonial studies can contribute to each other when ideological prejudgement (on either side) is kept in check. In *Antigone's Boat: the Colonial and the Postcolonial in Tegonni: An African Antigone by Femi Osofisan* Barbara Goff takes a completely different position to Budelmann, pointing out that the very fact of adapting Greek and Roman classics within an African culture " ... testifies to the disruption of African history by decades of colonial exploitation" (p. 40). Her analysis of the play itself however focuses on the shared human application of the play in an African context, pointing out the paradox of adaptation – that there must have been a basic human appeal if the original is considered viable for adaptation in a different context at all. On the other hand, James Gibbs, in his essay *Antigone and her African Sisters: West African Versions of a Greek Original* argues that once Greek and Roman material is understood as inherited (and by implication not imposed) a "truly liberated post-colonial writer" can use such material to remarkable effect. John Djisenu's article *Cross-cultural bonds between ancient Greece and Africa: Implications for contemporary staging practice* emphasises stage

practice as vehicle for engaging audiences and thus their participation in the cross-cultural experience of a play adapted from the Greek original. Again the similarities between the adaptation and the original, as well as the accessibility (on a human level) of the original, are emphasised as a prerequisite for adaptation. Michael Simpson takes up an interesting alternative to the previous essays. In *The curse of the canon: Ola Rotimi's "The Gods are not to blame"* he argues that this adaptation does not fit the Greek original (Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*) at all, but rather reflects canonical counter-discourse¹ as well as a theoretical account of its independence from the original canon. Elke Steinmayer in *Post-Apartheid Electra: In the city of paradise* focuses on workshop theatre as a means of reflecting a community in transformation, while Jessie Maritz in her essay *Sculpture at Heroes' Acre, Harare, Zimbabwe: Classical influences ?* suggests that the public sculpture under discussion undermines a simplistic dependence on a "classical" model. Other models (like Korean and Chinese public sculpture) need to be taken into consideration as well.

The middle section of the collection examines the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approaches previously suggested in the case-studies. In a fascinating essay *Perspectives on post-colonialism in South Africa* Richard Evans argues persuasively for a multi-faceted interpretation of two landmark buildings in South Africa's capital city. The next three essays all consider different aspects of genre, referring to texts from writers in and from the Caribbean. All three focus on Derek Walcott. Katharine Burkitt discusses the use Walcott makes of the problematic relationship between history and mythology, Kerr Prince pleads for a more nuanced reading of Walcott's use of his classical models, while Emily Greenwood looks at specifically Caribbean readings of the *Odyssey* and the stratagems employed by writers in this area when facing the dilemmas of their immediate history. Athol Fugard's *The Island* (based on Sophocles' *Antigone*) has become a "classic" in its own right. Rush Rehm's essay discusses Fugard's representation of women (as seemingly representing what is "weakest" in a community) in ongoing colonial contexts. The theme of the continually (and relentlessly) colonial is further explored by Stephen Wilmer's search for a post-colonial voice for Antigone in his fascinating discussion of Seamus Heaney's *Burial at Thebes*.

The third section of the collection with its reflection on and dispute of current ways of conceptualising and linking classical and post-colonial studies is the most interesting and probably the most useful to classicists. What is striking in this whole section is how engagement with post-colonial responses to Greek and Roman texts and values places the post-colonial discussion squarely in a modern critical context. Freddy Decreus, in his article *The same kind of smile ? About the 'use and abuse' of theory in constructing the Classical Tradition*, argues persuasively that a post-colonial response to the classical tradition is just one of a number of responses forming part of a general post-modernist resistance to tradition, while Michiel Leezenberg's *From the Peloponnesian War to the Iraq War: a post-liberal reading of Greek tragedy* challenges appropriating the classical tradition in order to assert western humanist values. Harish Trivedi in *Western Classics, Indian Classics:*

¹ Canonical counter-discourse indicates a discourse where the "terms of the canon are mobilized to challenge the authority and the values that those terms normally articulate", p. 87.

Postcolonial Contestations contributes substantially to the debate by pointing to the illuminating context provided by Indian classics and the Sanskrit heritage to imperialist uses of Greek and Latin texts. Lorna Hardwick's essay *Shades of Multi-Lingualism and Multi-vocalism in Modern Performances of Greek Tragedy in Post-Colonial Contexts* underlines the importance of the practical aspect of cross-cultural communication, especially the language(s) in which Greek drama is presented in modern theatrical contexts, with the result that both the classical texts and the concept of the post-colonial are continually redefined. Ika Willis in *The Empire never ended* portrays the Roman Empire as a metaphor for global sovereignty, illustrating that resistance to the modern idea of globalisation may be just as impossible as resistance to the hegemony of the Roman Empire at that time. In *Another Architecture*, the final essay of the volume, David Richards discusses the openness to new experience, which is one of the most productive results of the contact between the classical and the post-colonial. This openness to new experience embodies the most valuable aspect of the book under review: there is a definite advantage to looking at Classics from a post-colonial perspective.