each other. John Henderson, in the volume's most imaginative response to the call to 'work together', explores the personal and political histories that lie behind one of the monuments of twentieth-century historical scholarship, Frank Walbank's *Polybius*. Walbank himself agreed to work with Henderson, in conversation and through a written response to the draft, a collaboration that appears to have been good humoured, while preserving a certain edge, the difference of productive dialogue.

In the final section, 'Reception/History of Scholarship', Ingrid de Smet reminds us with well-chosen examples that ignorance of the great efforts of Renaissance scholars may condemn moderns to the reinvention of the wheel, and that the history of scholarship is essential for an adequate literary and cultural history. Christopher Stray uses his unrivalled knowledge as an 'ethnographer' of the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century English classics to sketch the politics behind a number of nineteenth-century academic spats; agendas change, but the rhetoric of 'purity' and 'standards' is shared with some of the more recent 'theory wars'. Peter Lebrecht Schmidt directs an unflinching gaze at the varying involvement or disinvolvement of German Latinists with the Nazi regime from 1933 to 1945.

New Hall, Cambridge PHILIP HARDIE

LATIN SANS FRONTIÈRES

D. FOWLER: *Roman Constructions. Readings in Postmodern Latin*. Pp. xii + 350. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Cased, £45. ISBN: 0-19-815309-0.

On 12 May 1939, an article, prompted by a new book, appeared in the *Guardian* newspaper. The article began as follows: 'Mr Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, parts of which have been published as "Work in Progress", does not admit of review. In 20 years' time, with sufficient study and with the aid of the commentary that will doubtless arise, one might be ready for an attempt to appraise it.' As that newspaper article continues, it becomes very clear that its writer's admiration for the work addressed, as much as the unusual nature of Joyce's accomplishment, was what made producing that appraisal so difficult.

The same obstacles face anyone conversant with the contemporary study of Roman literature who would seek to review *Roman Constructions*. Parts of this book too have been published already, but the usefulness and persuasiveness of the twelve papers it contains are considerably amplified by Don Fowler's endeavour 'to recontextualise them into fragments of an argument'. This is rather too modest: the argument—advancing from the realization that the function of the criticizing of texts can never be to establish forms of truth—turns into something little short of a manifesto for how classical studies should be conceived by its practitioners. The rôle of the scholar or reader is in fact to create rather than recover meaning: this position, often labelled 'postmodern' or 'pomo', is more specifically Rortian (p. 92). Although philosophers have now been engaging with such pragmatism in various guises for nearly a century, this outlook goes against the grain for most philologists who are still prone to regard their 'discipline' or 'field' as a form of science which depends on foundationalist assumptions. Even if they accept that F.'s stance is theoretically incontrovertible, conservatives will object that if this stance were to be adopted wholesale it could undermine or even destroy the practice of classical scholarship as we know it. But F.'s conception of critical constructions (p. 33) is nothing if not constructive. 'The stories

© The Classical Association, 2003

https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/53.1.244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that we tell do not lose point: on the contrary, they have to become better ones if we are to get others to share the truths that we are inventing.' Or again, earlier, in the introduction (p. 4): 'We can never stand outside the views with which we have grown up and through which we engage with our contemporaries. To recognize that our views are no more written in the stars than those of others is not somehow to lose those views or commitment to them.'

In my own view there have certainly been drawbacks to the application of post-modern (especially in the sense of 'post-structuralist') approaches to classics. The least of these is that such efforts have failed to enchant traditionalists. A far bigger problem has been the lack of critical imagination: there is no need to name names, but plodding implementations of narratology and, worse still, of fuzzy and half-baked customizations of intertextuality have led either to aporetic muddles or to the same story being told time and time again about one text after another. It is as if the Socrates of Plato's *Republic* had been pedestrian enough to discuss each and every Greek tragedy in depth in order to do nothing other than demonstrate his theory that poetry is a form of mimesis. The victory achieved by *Roman Constructions* on the other hand is that it shows us how, as well as it tells us how, theoretical awareness can generate productive interpretation—by whatever lights. One should not be taken in by the apology in the preface (p. vii) for neglecting the 'middle ground' between theory and the detailed coverage of textual minutiae—that movement from the general to the particular and back again is a major strength of the book. Thus those who only want original and penetrating insights on specific passages and clusters of passages from Greek and Roman authors (notably but no means exclusively from Virgil) will find all sorts of things to delight and impress them—perhaps contrary to their expectation, e.g. the suggestive exploration of Lucretian elements in *Met*. 4.55–166 in a previously unpublished piece entitled 'Pyramus, Thisbe, King Kong: Ovid and the Presence of Poetry' (p. 158). For devotees of *Quellenforschung*, the general index helpfully doubles over as an *index auctorum*.

After the introductory section and essay 'Postmodernism, Romantic Irony, and Classical Closure', the book has four main parts, usually consisting of three chapters, with each part having an introduction of its own. Part I, 'Points of View', treats deviant focalization and ekphrasis. Part II,'Intertextualities', usefully reprints for a wider audience the salutary article on intertextuality and classical studies first published in 1997, in *Materiali e discussioni* 39, and a piece again hitherto unpublished, 'Philosophy and Literature in Lucretian Intertextuality', as well as 'Pyramus, Thisbe . . .'. The chapter on Lucretius begins by conceiving the tension between philosophy and poetry often discerned in the *De rerum natura* in terms of opposition between the reading practices of two interpretative communities— philosophical and literary. Whilst both traditions have tended to look at a text's use of sources as a reflection of authorial choice, consideration both of the resonances 'source-texts' acquired in reception and of the full range of texts discernible in Lucretius can directly bear on how the 'philosophical' message of the *DRN* is interpreted. Part III, 'Realities', contains two chapters on Virgil (one is discussed in my review, elsewhere in this issue, of H. P. Stahl [ed.], *Vergil's Aeneid: Augustan Epic and Political Context*) and an important reflection on monumentality in Rome and how we approach it; this too is published for the first time here. The last part, IV, contains F.'s two celebrated discussions of closure.

The theme of closure runs through the whole volume—and no reader can fail to be moved by the fact that, at the time he was writing it, Don Fowler was aware of his own end. The cheerful acceptance of this, which Don displayed in person when alive, no less

https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/53.1.244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

than it is displayed now in print, commands admiration which is not just intellectual. However, the subtle harmonization of an Epicurean approach to mortality with the theoretical positions advanced in this book should not be regarded by lazy readers as an invitation to regard *Roman Constructions* as any kind of final testament, epitaph, or monument—that would be missing the point. As a powerful parting shot this book does not close things down at all: it is provocative and procreative. It is not about ending, but about beginning classical studies at the start of a new millennium, when scholars should not be cowering behind thinly disguised forms of nineteenth-century positivism, but advancing to embrace the stimulus of the new.

All sorts of ways forward are indicated by this book: the broader applications and implications of intertextual theory; the move to a more self-conscious dialectic between periods and ideologies of reception; the conceptualization of metaphor in our methodologies. It will indeed take 20 years or more to begin appraising what this book offers us. That 1939 newspaper article, offered in lieu of a review of Joyce, ended with a tribute to that author which could be applied to Don Fowler: 'He alone could explain his book and, I suppose, he alone could review it'.

University of Warwick ANDREW LAIRD

https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/53.1.244 Published online by Cambridge University Press