
A frequent complaint of teachers of English in the 1970s, and one that is echoed in schools of art and music (and doubtless elsewhere) is that a lack of a classical background in their students makes a large part of their subject incomprehensible to them. Or, as George Steiner (quoted in Mrs Radice’s introduction) wrote in *Arion* in 1964, ‘From Chaucer to *Sweeney among the Nightingales* much of English poetry has relied on a code of instantaneous recognition. Where the code lapses, where classical literacy becomes, in the strict sense, marginal, a good deal of the poetry may lapse also.’ Mrs Radice’s book ‘is compiled as an attempt to foster classical literacy in its wider sense.’ It is thus in no sense the Penguin answer to the Oxford Classical Dictionary, and will be of very limited use to those of established classical interests and knowledge; but for a student reading Milton, trying to understand Renaissance art, or looking for the ancestry of an opera by Gluck or a German *lied* it could be of great value.

Mrs Radice’s 32-page introduction has a tremendous scope. She briefly indicates the need for the task that she has undertaken, glances synoptically at the Ancient World itself, and then looks at the tradition, from the Middle Ages to the present. The Renaissance, naturally, gets particular attention, including an exposition of Boticelli’s *Primavera* (illustrated) and remarks on Rubens, Claude, Poussin and others. Milton follows, Dryden and others. Mrs Radice is a reliable guide through the complications and inconsistencies of neo-classical and romantic attitudes towards the ancient world; she touches on the impact of anthropology and psychoanalysis and concludes with Picasso and Michael Ayrton. Possibly the introduction is valuable less for the actual information that it contains than for the overall impression of the pervasive effect that the classical heritage has had on European culture – in other words, of the need for such a book.

The main part of the book (pp.47-255) is the dictionary itself, from Achates to Zeuxis. Most of the headings are personal names, with the occasional entry such as the Aldobrandini Wedding or the Portland Vase. On a very brief sampling, names that are of primarily literary or mythological interest (and I should include here Regulus, for example) outnumber strictly historical personages by approximately three to two. The typical entry will comprise a description of the character and his exploits, a reference to his employment in classical literature, and some account of his appearance in subsequent art and literature; all this is concisely and readably expressed. The result is obviously a survey of great breadth and limited detail, but certainly sufficient to tell the reader the significance of the figure that he has come across. There follow a table
of the main dates, two maps and an index. At 74 pages the last named is clearly a most important part of the book, and the user would probably be best advised to make his first enquiries here; it is supported by a full and efficient system of cross references in the dictionary part of the book. Bound in the centre are 56 illustrations, on 32 pages, of great variety and well chosen — from Greek and Roman sculpture to manuscript illuminations and paintings and sculpture from Botticelli to Picasso.

The virtues of this book should by now be obvious, and they originate mainly in Mrs Radice’s enormously wide-ranging knowledge; there are few people who could undertake a work of such breadth. Perhaps the main fault is that the reader in search of further information would not often know how to set about getting it. There is a bibliography of 32 titles (rather strangely chosen — why Robert Graves’ Greek Myths but no reference to Michael Grant, or why Ernle Bradford’s Ulysses Found and not the equally relevant Ulysses Theme of W.B. Stanford?); but short of referring to the OCD whenever he wants further reading, the non-classical enquirer may sometimes feel rather lost.

I noticed a few small printing errors, none likely to cause serious misapprehension.

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