

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

GAZIS (G.A.) and HOOPER (A.) (eds) **Aspects of Death and the Afterlife in Greek Literature**. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. 2021. Pp. vi + 201. £95. 9781789621495. doi:10.1017/S0075426924000363

The editors of this collection aptly introduce the volume's thematic foci by skilfully unpacking a famous passage from Plato's *Phaedo*: Socrates' characterization of the journey to Hades as 'neither simple nor single'. Despite its claims (4–5), this book is not the first to showcase 'influences, intersections, and developments of understandings of death and the afterlife between poetic, religious, and philosophical traditions in ancient Greece in one resource'. However, there are valuable insights into the varieties of speculation on the fate of the soul, distinctive strengths in archaic and philosophical texts, and the contributions are well pitched for a broad scholarly audience.

In pole position, Radcliffe G. Edmonds, discussing the afterlife as 'good to think with' (11–31), categorizes afterlife ideas in the frames of continuation, compensation and cosmology, an idea briefly referenced by several contributions. He clearly illustrates their blending in practice, and the bricolage of traditions, ranging from Polygnotus' painting through sources for lost Orphic poems to Plutarch's thoughts on the punishment and purification of souls in *On the Face of the Moon*.

Vayos Liapis begins with Dracula, to tease out the embodied conception of an afterlife in Greek literature (33–47). He usefully compares the soul in Homer to a liquid taking the shape of its container (a spectral replica of the human body it formerly inhabited) and examines myths of revenants and ideas of the righteous dead, described in physical terms. Next, Ioannis Ziogas examines how Odysseus reports to the Phaeacians the autobiographies in his catalogue of female souls in the Underworld (49–68). The ghosts of the women focus on beauty and childbirth, not death; a refreshing observation sharpened by comparison and contrast with the Hesiodic and Virgilian catalogues.

George Alexander Gazis interprets the blending of traditions in the mysterious three-level afterlife envisaged by Pindar's second Olympian (69–87) as a non-committal acknowledgement of the cultic beliefs of its tyrant commissioner. The stakes of the scholarly puzzles identified are not always made clear, and I wondered how the argument would respond to Pindaric scholarship on secondary audiences. Nicol Benzi argues that Parmenides appropriates and subverts the traditional poetic authority of the *katabasis* ('descent') tradition (89–104). Next, Chiara Blanco (the sole female contributor), argues that Philoctetes in Sophocles' tragedy is presented as a ghost with human feelings (105–21). The interpretation prioritizes the work of Daniel Ogden (*Drakōn* (Oxford 2013)) over (for instance) Sarah Nooter's analysis of Philoctetes' lyric agency in *When Heroes Sing* (Cambridge 2012), and the relevance of Blanco's piece to the volume is not self-evident, but like the preceding chapters, it is a stimulating read.

The next three contributions orientate readers towards Plato. Rick Benitez on 'Socrates' conception of the Underworld' (123–34) persuasively interprets *Apology* 40e4–41c7 as an allegorical view of the jurors' lives. He rapidly pinpoints the passage's ironic hyperbole and melange of traditional and Socratic ingredients. This passage recurs, although interpreted differently, in Alberto Bernabé's survey of infernal judges from Homer to Plato (135–51). Bernabé exposes a fascinating variety in the roles and configurations of Minos, Triptolemus, Aeacus and Rhadamanthys, and the geography of their judgement, as expressed in Homer, Pindar, Apulian and Macedonian iconography (here I missed images),

and Platonic descriptions tailored to different narrative functions. Next, Anthony Hooper outlines another trajectory from Homer to Plato through two Eleusinian cult ‘extensions’ to the Homeric house of Hades (153–70) aimed at accommodating novel eschatological ideas (namely, ideas of differentiated afterlives based on initiation or righteousness) in an authoritative and familiar framework. By contrast, (Platonic) Socratic ‘reconstructions’ invite an active philosophical response. Although the argumentative programme feels somewhat over-glossed, it is engagingly argued with persuasive close readings.

Alex Long strongly concludes the volume by drawing out differing Stoic agnosticisms about how long the soul survives separation from the body and whether it should be identified with the person who has undergone death (171–87). Most of his discussion explicates Seneca’s three different uses of ‘symmetry arguments’ in his letters, both with and without cosmological reflections, before moving on to Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations*; unlike Seneca, Marcus is uncertain whether his soul’s continued existence would provide *him* with a future. Close readings are efficiently contextualized in varieties of Stoic thought and (even more briefly) in longer traditions of comparison between death and pre-natal non-existence, and the writing is outstandingly clear, covering much ground without flattening distinctions.

While the editors’ introduction asserts the hope for a genuine conversation, only Anthony Hooper engages beyond footnotes with the other contributions. The book does enable a sense of key texts in the debates (Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, Pindar’s *Olympian 2* and Plato’s *Apology*, *Phaedo* and *Gorgias*), though it does not acknowledge contributors’ disagreements. Allusions here and there could have done with glossing, and some chapters are disconcertingly divergent in presentation of Greek texts and translations. But I learned from every chapter, and the volume bears out the editors’ emphasis on the usefulness of afterlife discussion in highlighting the artificiality of modern disciplinary divides.

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