

American Classical League

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Terpsichore: The Story of the Dance in Ancient Greece*. ("Dance Perspectives 13," Winter 1962) by Lillian B. Lawler

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pects to the point where the slaughter of her two children comes almost as an anticlimax.

Nor should one forget the great literary genre of the *consolatio*, and the well-known evidence, supplied by Roman sumptuary laws, of the Romans' tendency to excessive displays of grief. Catullus' weeping words on his brother's death are so beautifully expressed that we are apt to forget that they are examples of a type. Cato of Utica broke down the Stoic screen but once, and that was at the funeral of his brother Caepio, very similar in its circumstances to that of Catullus' brother. Normally a frugal man, he spent more money on spices for the pyre than would serve to hire a legion (Plutarch, *Cato Minor* 11.13). His mourning was excessive by any standards, and so too was his final death scene, as Plutarch portrays it (*ibid.*, 68-72), to say nothing of his sister Porcia, who took the amiable path to extinction of swallowing hot coals. In Stoicism itself, the philosophical creed par excellence of this race, is there not an undertone of frantic desperation? Both Cicero and Seneca make their wise man happiest when undergoing torture on the rack.

What is the significance of all these dreadful (though in their way inspiring) tales? Suicide and violence seem to be their keynote. Passions deeply felt and melodramatically expressed are the true signs of Roman *gravitas*. Two points can perhaps be made.

First, we must not confuse *gravitas* with "gravity" and all that that word connotes in English. *Gravitas* is shown in the acts of those individuals whom the Romans themselves thought of as *graves viri*. A Dutch writer, H. Wagenvoort, has recently added much to our understanding of this problem with his book, *Roman Dynamism: Studies in Ancient Roman Thought, Language and Custom* (Oxford, 1947), in which he argues that the underlying virtue-concept here arose in connection with a *mana* idea. The *vir gravis* has weight because he has a more powerful, vital spirit than others, and because spirit is weighty. "Weight" in this sense does not connote dullness, sluggishness, or even necessarily delirium.

The second point has already been mentioned. In a people that praises *gravitas* we must expect to find considerable signs of *levitas* too. Cato is important as well because he is exceptional as because he is typical. In this connection one may refer to Emile Durkheim's *Le suicide* (Paris, 1897). In this great French scholar's

study of suicide—a kind of foundation work for much modern social psychology—we see how this extremest of human acts, depending on the frame of mind of the poor sinner who enters upon it, may reflect a highly organized or an utterly disorganized social content. Lucretia's suicide, as also those of the Decii, would perhaps be classified as altruistic, the act of a person who feels so at one with his social context that he holds his own good inferior to that of the community at large. Such suicide, one may say, is a sign of psychic stability. But other examples, especially those from the last two centuries of the Republic, do not fit this pattern so well. Here we may see "egoistic" and "anomic" suicidal types, which point, says Durkheim, to a basic social change and decay of values: on the one hand the loss of the individual's sense of personality, on the other his coming to feel that society is no longer an intelligible entity.

But of course not all our *exempla gravitatis* tell of suicide. The Romans were grave, severe, harsh, and stern, but, as tends to happen with people who set before themselves unchangeable goals in the midst of a changing world, they very often encountered situations which they could meet only with the calmness of despair. One remembers the wonderful line from the *Aeneid*: "Una salus victis nullam sperare salutem" (2.354).

There is indeed a great deal of this frame of mind in Vergil. We have mentioned his taste for the macabre. The portrait of Aeneas, down on his knees in his ship, succumbing to utter fear and confusion during the storm off the African coast, is not at first sight one of a strong character. Yet it fulfills our idea of the Italian character as popularly conceived today, a picture nicely illustrated by the story of the Italian bark "Monte Tabor." Caught in a severe storm off Cape Cod in September, 1896, she was in grave danger of running aground. Apparently, at the last moment the officers and men decided to abandon her. Only five of the unfortunate crew made land. The next morning, while the ship was breaking up, watchers found the captain and a seaman side by side on the shore, their throats cut, while some distance away lay the steward with a bullet hole in his head. The breezes of suspicion blew madly in all directions till at last a bottle turned up on the same lee shore containing a message from the captain, written in most rhetorical prose and telling how at the end of their fight against the

sea they had all resigned themselves to their Maker. Under stress they had ceased to make rational efforts, taking refuge, it seems, in a suicide pact. Command had broken down. (This story is told in considerable detail by Henry C. Kittredge in *Mooncussers of Cape Cod* [Boston, 1937], pp. 149-151.)

The parallel with Vergil is of course slight. After all, the point of the epic is that Aeneas does *not* abandon ship or men. But the reaction to the storm, the panic fear, the rhetorical prayers—these are there. Fear and trembling are part of the estate of man. It is the reaction to fear which is indicative of type. Can we not clearly recognize in the Roman and in the Italian character a similarity of reaction to the crises of life? And must we not say that this reaction was cultivated by the Romans as part of what they called *gravitas*? Surely they were grave (in our more narrow sense of the word), austere, courageous, but we must also remember their histrionics, their plaintiffs-at-law wearing sackcloth and ashes, their suicides, stabbings, and poisonings, and their displays of frenetic courage and revenge.

BOOK NOTES

Terpsichore: The Story of the Dance in Ancient Greece. By Lillian B. Lawler. ("Dance Perspectives 13," Winter 1962.) New York: Dance Perspectives, 1962. Pp. 57. Paperback, \$1.75.

Faithful and close readers of THE CLASSICAL OUTLOOK associate Lillian B. Lawler not merely with the periodical which as editor she guided for more than two decades but also with an area of classical research which she has made just as peculiarly her own: the Greek dance. She has now collected the fruits of her studies, hitherto distributed among a half dozen scholarly publications, into a coherent account, which appears as the Winter, 1962, issue of a quarterly devoted to the general subject of the dance. It is handsomely printed, generously illustrated from authentic sources, documented with the accuracy only a conscientious scholar can supply, and written with the straightforwardness and the insight to be expected of an outstanding teacher.

The opening section discusses the role of the dance among the ancient Greeks, and describes the methods by which it can be studied—a brilliant example of technical exposition for the layman. The body of the work

is divided into the following chapters: "The Dance in Prehistoric Times," "Animal Dances," "The Dance and the Drama," "Other Origiastic and Mystery Dances," "Dances at Shrines and Festivals: The Dance and the People," and "The Dance as a Profession: Transition to the Middle Ages."

In view of the tremendous importance of the dance to our understanding of Greek culture, one is grateful to Professor Lawler for having made available to the general public as well as to her fellow classicists the facts of what is known about it. And in view of the scarcity, fragmentariness, and scatteration of the first-hand information, one admires not only her industry but even more the skill with which the pieces have been combined to form a meaningful whole.

—K. G.

Ancient Education and Today. By E. B. Castle. ("Pelican Books," A511.) Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961. Pp. 218. 95¢.

"What matters is that we who are products of the western Christian tradition, which is both Hebrew and Graeco-Roman, should accept the fact of our triple inheritance and ensure that its vital relevance to our schools is not outshone by the glitter of the shoddy, the temporary, and the unreal. . . . Someone has to enable our children to know that it is on this earth they live, and that living on it is no easy affair without standards to live by."

The above quotation (p. 209) is a fair summation of the position taken by the author of the volume here being noted, a British educationist with long experience both as a headmaster and as a professor of Education. His purpose is not so much information as persuasion, for his chapters on Homer, Sparta, Athens, Rome, and Judea are merely the background for his final chapter, "Old Wine in New Bottles," in which he distills the lessons of ancient education for modern users under the following eight propositions: 1) "That Education begins in the Home," 2) "That Education is Growth," 3) "That Environment influences Character," 4) "That Education involves Balance and Harmony," 5) "That Teachers should be Educated Men and Women," 6) "That Leisure is Activity for its Own Sake," 7) "That Democracy requires Leaders," and 8) "That We must be Clear What We Educate for."

Professor Castle has read widely

and thought seriously; his points are well taken and ably presented. There are occasional rash statements, such as that "other Hellenic states [i.e., other than Sparta] . . . usually absorbed conquered peoples into their own community" (p. 16) and that in Roman schools "Books were cheap and plentiful owing to the abundance of slave copyists" (p. 127), and the bibliographical information in the footnotes is not always complete. But there is an adequate list of books "For Further Reading" and a serviceable six-page index. Directed, one gathers, at fellow-educationists and at the general public, this useful and thought-provoking book will, it is hoped, convey its cogent message to a large and receptive number of readers.

—K. G.

Freedom in the Ancient World. By Herbert J. Muller. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961. Pp. xvii plus 360. \$7.50.

Years ago a friend called my attention to a contemporary historian whose interpretive grasp, he claimed, was far superior to that of even a Toynbee; he referred me especially to this author's *The Uses of the Past*. I never did get to read either it or the same writer's *The Loom of History*, but if they resemble the present volume, which I have read, they are very good indeed.

Professor Muller (he teaches English and Government at the University of Indiana) goes over essentially familiar ground—from prehistoric man through St. Augustine, plus an epilogue on the Byzantine Empire—but with his eye open for any evidence, and his attention focused on any development, of the concept known as "freedom," a concept which the preface is devoted to defining, and which is never long lost sight of in the pages that follow. There are few dates in this book, and few "historical details," although enough of an outline is given to enable the reasonably educated layman to follow. Instead, the book consists mainly of a thoughtful interpretation and evaluation of the events and developments of Western civilization as they pertain to the central topic. As such, its outstanding feature is fairness: as people after people passes in review, its contributions are acknowledged, its shortcomings freely admitted, and such harm as it did explained in an admirable spirit of charity. Refreshingly, there is a candidly expressed preference for Western over Eastern culture, at least where freedom is concerned; and the Greeks are ob-

viously the heroes of the tale (they rate three of the book's ten chapters), though they too are shown to have had their tragic flaw. Likewise refreshing are the refusal to be dogmatic, as when causes are involved, and the refusal to be drawn into excessive analogy between past and present.

Handsomely illustrated with twenty-four pages of excellent photographs, well written, equipped with good bibliographies and a fairly complete index, this is a decidedly worthwhile book. The classicist in particular will be attracted by its judicious and sympathetic treatment of the Greeks and the Romans.

—K. G.

Life and Thought in the Greek and Roman World. By M. J. Cary and T. J. Haarhoff. ("University Paperbacks," 34.) London: Methuen; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1961. Pp. x plus 355; 12 plates. \$2.25.

This book—a reprint of a work first published in 1940—is "an attempt . . . to present a comprehensive survey of Greek and Roman life in a short space" (p. v). That the authors have indeed been comprehensive is indicated by the topics of the ten chapters: geography, political history, the material background (food, housing, commerce, etc.), social life, the Greek and Latin languages, philosophy and science, art, literature, education, and religion. But they have produced more than a mere compendium; they have assembled and presented their materials on the basis of a specific thesis, that the "conception of 'humanitas,' which constitutes to a large extent our claim to civilization, and which will have to be recovered if we are to avert an age of barbarism," can not be understood unless "we regard Greek and Roman civilization as a whole" (p. vi). This thesis unifies the different elements of the book, and contributes much to its readability, as do the agreeable style (not without its moments of humor), the clarity of the presentation (the reader is not assumed to have previous information), and the conciseness and perspective by which the trivial detail is omitted in favor of the basic and the essential. Also on the credit side are the four maps, the clear illustrations, the many cross references, and the organization into conveniently short units.

On the debit side are (perhaps) the authors' rather amusing addiction to the phrase "nay more"; the positiveness with which assertions are sometimes made on moot points, such