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P. Baker u.a. (Hrsg.): Beyond Reception

Title	Beyond Reception. Renaissance Humanism and the Transformation of Classical Antiquity
Editor(s)	Baker, Patrick; Helmrath, Johannes; Kallendorf, Craig
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Reviewed for H-Soz-Kult by

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The book under review results from a conference held as part of the Sonderforschungsbereich 644 “Transformations of Antiquity”, a collaborate research group of historians, art historians and literary scholars based at the Humboldt University in Berlin. It aims at changing the critical view on and vocabulary of what has been called either ‘classical tradition’^[1] or ‘classical reception(s)’^[2] in previous years (not to mention related disciplines like heritage studies or intertextuality, which show affinities to or overlaps with the field). According to the editors and authors of the volume under review, the new concept should be ‘transformation’. This term is meant to draw the attention not so much to cultural continuity and ideas about heritage, but to an often rather radical otherness of the past when it reappears within later cultural contexts. In order to stress this, the editors coin the new term “allelopoiesis” (p. 4) as the guiding principle of every act of reception.

Also, the main interest is no longer the past itself (in the book’s terminology, the “reference sphere”), but, at least equally important, the receiving culture (the “reception sphere”) and the recipients as intermediary “agents” (cf. for a discussion of these terms p. 4 and 10). As a consequence, judgments about the historical ‘accuracy’ of the reuse of the past are obsolete, as ‘transformation’ is not about academically trustworthy reconstruction (which according to the volume is in itself part of the transformative process, too, pp. 15f.), but about breaks and discontinuities. Let me give one example: when on 20 November 2014 the republican member of the US senate Ted Cruz attacked Barack Obama’s politics by simply quoting the beginning of Cicero’s first *Catilinarian Oration*, one day later

he was criticised for historical inaccuracy by classicist Jessy Weiner in *The Atlantic* (“The problem is that Cruz dangerously misused Cicero”). Obviously, Weiner’s criticism was mostly political, but he also reacted as historian interested in the reference sphere, whereas the speech by Cruz is a fascinating (albeit politically weird) example of the *use* of Cicero in the reception sphere.

The theory in my view stresses what is indeed at the core of reception: assimilation and/or appropriation of the past. But this is admittedly not really new. It is true that still today, many books about classical reception are not very outspoken about their methodology. But in principle, the basic ideas promoted here have been embraced in many studies of the past; suffice to think of important theorists as Charles Martindale, Anthony Grafton, Glenn Most and Craig Kallendorf (whose continuous work on early modern Vergil has rendered us an image of an often uneasily ‘other’ poet than we see him today). The tension between ‘reference sphere’ and ‘reception sphere’ is much older still – my Leiden colleague Luuk Huitink mentioned to me T.S. Eliot’s concept of the “simultaneous order”, which Eliot proposed exactly 100 years before the publication of this edited volume and in which the ground of the editor’s ‘allelopoiesis’ seems to be paved already.[3].

Of course, no one expects new theories to arise from nothing, and development or sharpening of what we already have is welcome. In this sense, the methodological framework proposed in the first chapter of this volume (written collectively by Lutz Bergemann, Martin Dönike, Albert Schirrmeyer, Georg Toepffer, Marco Walter, and Julia Weitbrecht, previously published in German in 2011), is useful in that it makes clear why the new concept leads us a step further. But I was surprised (to say the least) that almost no discussion with the predecessors is found, not even in the form of references in footnotes. The presentation looks as if the authors wanted to suggest that they are presenting something radically new, almost from scratch. I find this disappointing, especially also for a concept called ‘transformation’. Theory development in itself is a field in which transformation of the past takes place, and in an academic publication I expect to see that recognized more explicitly.

One of the really new things the first chapter does is to set out 14 categories (or ‘types’) of interaction between the past and the receiving present. I am sure that they will be challenged and applied in future research, not only as labels as such, but especially as eye-openers for detecting differences in reception that have hitherto gone unnoticed. A wonderful example of how one can fruitfully apply the categories is the chapter by Jill Krayer about the transformation of philosophical thought in early modern Europe. In her compact and very learned overview she not only discovers different strategies of reacting to the past; the new categories also help her to underpin her claim that Renaissance philosophy formed an integral part of the humanist movement and should not be underestimated (a similar plea is to be found in the engaged chapter by Ada Palmer, whose argument also touches the undeserved neglect of early modern philosophers in average modern days teaching and research, a claim corroborated by several intriguing statistics). Krayer’s wish to inscribe philosophy into the very centre of humanism (a position with which she distances herself radically from Paul Oscar Kristeller’s studies) is very convincing. I only missed a reference to another doyen of humanistic studies of 20th century, Eugenio Garin, who had a much finer intuition for the importance of philosophy than Kristeller.

Nevertheless, I advise any reader who wants to familiarize herself with the newly proposed categories, to read the chapter by Bergemann et al. first and then jump to Krayer and then to Craig Kallendorf. His chapter is a wonderful, very erudite and at the same time highly didactic application of all categories to the reception of Vergil in early modern times, while he at the same time orders

the categories in a very sensible way under three main headings: under (1) 'inclusion', he groups (a) 'encapsulation' (often what we would call a quotation), (b) 'appropriation', (c) 'assimilation' (the opposite of a), (d) 'disjunction', (e) 'substitution', (f) 'reconstruction', and (g) 'supplementation'; (2) exclusion comes in the shape of (a) 'focalization and obfuscation' (as focalization is such a powerful concept in narratology, I should better stress that here, it means the concentration on few aspects of the reference sphere while not considering or even distorting many others), (b) 'ignorance', (c) 'creative destruction', and (d) 'negation'; under main category (3) 'recombination', we find (a) 'hybridisation', (b) 'montage', (c) 'translation', and (d) 'reevaluation'. Of course, future research will have to prove the usefulness of so many categories (I myself, for example, find the difference between 'focalisation' and 'reevaluation' very thin). At the same time, as always with categories, there will be the danger of a contest among scholars of inventing new ones – we see that already in this volume: Kraye (p. 153) coins the category "creative self-destruction".

When it comes to the other contributions: all present good, often exciting research by eminent scholars in their field. Johannes Helmrath's chapter combines transformation studies with his own research on early modern 'oratorics' by applying some of the new categories to Enea Silvio Piccolomini's crusade speech (the so-called *Türkenrede*) of 1452. Federica Ciccolella contributes an innovative and convincing chapter on the ways in which cultural contact of Byzantine scholars with the West not only changed Western curricula; the Latin way of teaching and the topics the Italian humanists had advocated also found their repercussion in Byzantine didactics again (Ciccolella shows this with the example of the school of Crete between the 14th and the 17th century). Peter Mack offers a thought-provoking interpretation of Rudolf Agricola's innovative take on rhetoric by closely connecting it to dialectics and thus making it essentially an ethical discipline; his article, however, is not very closely linked to the methodological focus of the volume.

Two other chapters seem a bit less well connected to the volume's main goal. Giancarlo Abbamonte's paper on Lorenzo Valla's attitude towards ancient authors offers very sound philological research, but is methodologically rather old-fashioned; the attempt to connect it at the end to the theme of transformation seem rather forced to me.[4] Roland Béhar's chapter on Petrarch's treatment of the Roman triumph, also based on thorough research, suffers from a lack of focus; Béhar seems to want to do too much (he treats Petrarch's reading of the Jupiter Feretrius-cult and the *spolia opima*; Petrarch's triumphs as an imaginary reviving of ancient *triumphi*; transformations, sometimes even historical corrections of his concepts through early modern commentators; and his influence on painted triumphs of the 16th century), which leads to a certain lack of structure and slightly clumsy argumentative transitions from one aspect to the next.

Finally, a highlight in his own league is James Hankins' chapter on what he calls politics of virtue. He defines this as key concept in humanistic political thought and wants to substitute it with the traditional focus on republicanism advocated by Hans Baron and his concept of "civic humanism". Hankins' theory will surely trigger heated discussions and heavily influence future research on 15th-century historiography and political writing (Hankins has in the meantime published his monograph on the topic).[5] But admittedly, also his article does not really need the new conceptual framework for his arguments to be convincing.

This leads me to a danger of a book as such, which advocates a new theoretical concept and wants to show its usefulness in case studies. There is a tendency to over-stress the new terminology in quite a number of contributions, where the new labels do not automatically added to my understanding of

the material;^[6] this impression is enhanced by the editors' decision to italicize every occurrence of every word that is connected to the theory throughout the volume (i.e., every instance of 'transformation/transformed', 'assimilation/assimilated', 'agent', etc.) – I confess that after a while I felt irritated by this excessive attempt to make the volume's coherence visible. But cases of over-emphasis should not detract from the overall value of the new framework: it will be task of future research to apply it with *Fingerspitzengefühl*, but this caveat is true for every theoretical approach. This one for sure has the tendency to sensitize readers for the many oddities one encounters when studying the reception of the classics, and it will probably help us all to cherish also the historically weird or 'unclassical' moments of the classical tradition in their own right.

Last, but not least, the editors' editorial acumen and care deserves nothing but praise. The copy editing is excellent: all articles are written in fluent English, also those of non-native speakers, and I could spot hardly any typos or editorial flaws (the few I found are p. 3: "I" instead of "We", as the introduction is written by three authors; p. 139: *peroratio* is translated as the "introduction" of a speech instead of its *conclusive end*; p. 150: An "is" is missing in the first sentence of the third paragraph; p. 254: "Enkapselung" must be "Einkapselung").

Notes:

[1] Cf. e.g. Anthony Grafton / Glenn Most / Salvatore Settis (eds.), *The Classical Tradition*, Cambridge 2010.

[2] Cf. e.g. David Hopkins / Charles Martindale (eds.), *The Oxford History of classical reception in English Literature*, Oxford 2012–2015.

[3] Cf. T.S. Eliot, *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (part I), in: *The Egoist* 6,4 (1919).

[4] Cf. his last sentence, p. 44 (emphasis in the original): "This constitutes a real *transformation* of the teaching of Latin in the Renaissance ..." This is of course true, but also a truism that needs no roots in the transformation theory as advocated here. A similar evaluation can be applied to the final sentence of Mack's fine essay, which is vague (emphasis again in the original): "In this way the classical tradition (sic!) of rhetoric was *transformed*, into something that combines elements of the *reference sphere* and *reception sphere* ..."

[5] James Hankins, *Virtue Politics. Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy*, Harvard 2020.

[6] Krayer (p. 149) tackles the danger explicitly: „pouring old historical wine into new terminological bottles“.

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