

Introduction

These two volumes bring together virtually all of the articles and chapters I have written, omitting an early essay and a number of pieces for Companions. There is one noteworthy gap in the record, as I published nothing but some book reviews in the four years from 1987 to 1990. I was frustrated at being unable to make progress on my first book, *The Gods in Epic*, since I kept being distracted by writing articles, especially in response to invitations to lectures and conferences. When I complained about this to my wife, a veterinary surgeon, she said, ‘Well, just say no to everything till you’ve finished your book.’ This was excellent advice, which I followed. Although I was not consciously aware of it at the time, I have come to realise that what mainly drew me into academic life (apart from the usual factors that draw anyone into anything, such as accident and inertia) were the conditions of freedom and autonomy it offered.¹ It would be suicidal nowadays to take my wife’s advice.

In preparing these pieces, I have regularised the citation and reference system throughout, keeping to the conventions of *L’Année philologique* and the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.² I have tried to correct all errors in the original papers, whether my own or those of editors: no doubt errors still remain, but at least they are now all mine. I have updated references where necessary, citing the fragments of Ennius’ *Annales*, for example, from the edition of Skutsch rather than Vahlen. I have made a few additions, marked with square brackets. This is sometimes to correct errors (as in Vol. 1.14 n.22), or else to supplement bibliography. I have given further secondary references in a rather ad hoc way, because systematically updating on every topic, going back often over thirty years, would have added

¹ The best case for pure or ‘basic’ research remains the 1939 essay, ‘The usefulness of useless knowledge’, by the founding Director of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, now reprinted with a companion essay by Robbert Dijkgraaf, the current Director: Flexner (2017).

² I have also translated into English all main quotations from Latin, Greek, German, French and Italian.

greatly to the bulk. Instead, I have mentioned items that I should have been aware of at the time, and also items of special significance that have appeared since initial publication, especially when filling gaps that I called attention to in the original publication (e.g. Vol. 1.6 n.4). This is not a terribly scientific procedure overall, but there it is.

I have not rewritten the papers to make them look as they would if I were writing them now, appealing as that idea sometimes was. The first paper in particular, ‘The Taciturnity of Aeneas’, now looks hair-raisingly bluff in its sidelining of Dido’s perspective and its advocacy on behalf of Aeneas. Ironically, in a paper that denounced one-sided rhetoric when enlisted in a partisan cause, I fell victim to the phenomenon I was exposing, so that I ended up arguing the case for Aeneas as his defense attorney; Philip Hardie’s exposure of these and other blind spots in the article is recommended reading.³ I have refrained even from improving the style, tempted though I was to hack out all the ‘thus’s and ‘thereby’s and other faux-archaisms that I was for some reason given to in the 1980s, and that I have been red-lining in my students’ writing for years. Some of the papers were delivered as invited lectures, and I have let that comparatively informal atmosphere stand (as in Vol. 1.9, originally the basis of a presentation to an NEH summer seminar organised by Christine Perrell, or Vol. 1.14, the Syme Memorial Lecture at Victoria University of Wellington). Many of the papers have a dialogic atmosphere as a result of being initially delivered at conferences. A big change in publication for our generation was the growth in conference proceedings as a venue, and many of the papers were kick-started by having to give a paper at a conference, with most of the rest of them being in response to an editor’s invitation.⁴ As a result, I see that I submitted nothing to a refereed journal between 1986 and 2011 apart from a note in *Classical Quarterly* in 2005, jointly written with Damien Nelis: all the journal articles between those dates were for specially commissioned occasions of one kind or another.

The trajectory of these publications is easier to plot in the earlier stages. My DPhil dissertation (1982) was a commentary on the first book of Silius Italicus’ *Punica*, supervised by Robin Nisbet. He was an ideal supervisor: patient, encouraging, rapid in response to any written work and omniscient on anything to do with Latin scholarship (and much else besides). I was not, however, born to be a commentator, and even though I learnt an enormous amount about Latin literature as a result of working through 694 lines of hexameter with Robin Nisbet over a five-year period, I felt the need

³ P. Hardie (2012), 130–6. ⁴ Remarkd on also by D. Fowler (2000), vii, xi.

to add two excursuses to the commentary. One treated the problem of the epic hero, and was published in *Comparative Literature* as 'Epic Hero and Epic Fable' (Vol. 1.3); the other addressed the problem of the participation of the gods in historical epic, and was the germ of my first book, *The Gods in Epic* (1991). As a result of this background, all of my publications were on epic until 1992, when I published my first paper on another genre—on Ovid's *Fasti* (Vol. 2.1), in direct response to an inspirational lecture on Ovid and the calendar delivered by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill at Edinburgh in 1987 (now Wallace-Hadrill (1987)). I had never read more than random snippets of the *Fasti* before this lecture made me sit down and read the poem properly: the experience led not only to a second paper on that poem (Vol. 1.11), but also more indirectly to the book I eventually wrote on Roman time, *Caesar's Calendar* (2007).

Andrew's lecture stands out in my memory partly because it is an exception, since almost all of these papers had their starting point pretty directly in teaching. It is good to have time off for research from teaching and administration, but I find it hard to imagine thinking about Classics without regular engagement with students' responses to the texts and issues. I have been extremely fortunate in my pupils, undergraduate and graduate, over the last forty years, and the experience of working with them has always prodded me to keep thinking after the class has ended. The first two papers in Volume 1 were the result of teaching Virgil's *Aeneid* for Honour Moderations for four years at Balliol and Merton colleges, and I can now see in retrospect that 'The Taciturnity of Aeneas' was a kind of distillation of everything I felt about the *Aeneid* at that point. The paper on similes in Catullus 68 (Vol. 2.2) came out of reading that poem with a brilliant group at Merton, who kept asking, as we made our way through the text, 'Why are there so many similes in this poem?'—a question it had, embarrassingly, never before occurred to me to ask. The paper on Plautus' *Pseudolus* (Vol. 2.13) ultimately came from lectures on that play at Bristol in 1991; my only venture into post-classical literature (Vol. 2.12) was the result of reading *Antony and Cleopatra* with a small group of Princeton undergraduates in my first semester there, in Fall 2000; two papers on Catullus grew out of close readings of his corpus in a graduate seminar at Princeton in Spring 2009 (Vol. 2.15 and 16). My first paper on Horace (Vol. 2.4) was the product of a graduate seminar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1988, together with a class on Greek lyric that I taught at Bristol in 1991, which led Niall Rudd to ask me to contribute a paper on 'Horace and the Greek Lyric Poets' to his volume *Horace 2000: A Celebration*. The only complaint I could possibly make about my idyllic working conditions at

Princeton would be that, thanks to the strict demarcation lines in American Classics, I have very seldom taught Greek since 2000, and I am sure that this has had an effect on what I have written about.⁵

I have kept circling back to certain topics that will not let go of my interest, such as similes (Vol. 1.15; Vol. 2.2 and 16), or Aeneas' desertion of Dido (Vol. 1.1 and 8), or fictive belief (Vol. 1.13 and 16; Vol. 2.2, 3 and 13), or the importance of Cicero as an intellectual model for the Augustan poets (Vol. 2.6, 7 and 13). In the case of Cicero, this recurrent interest was a result of the fact that I planned for a long time to write a book on this subject. I had to give up the idea, very reluctantly, after repeatedly coming up against the intractable and embarrassing fact that I am unable to think like a philosopher. This was brought home to me very vividly when I was assigned Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as one of my lecture topics in the team-taught Humanities Sequence at Princeton in Fall 2010. I was able to prepare a lecture, partly with the help of my oldest son, Matthew, who was then studying Philosophy at Reading University; I was able to deliver it, since after all I was able to talk for fifty minutes without hesitation, deviation or repetition. But ten minutes into the tutorial discussion with the undergraduates afterwards I was out of my depth, as one eighteen-year-old after another pointed to a page and started probing away at exactly what Aristotle meant when he said this, or that. It was remarkable to see how students who had never before read a word of Aristotle could get on his wave-length in a way I had never been able to do. It was a sobering experience. Clearly, there was no point in writing about Cicero's achievement and the poets' response to it if I could not do justice to this crucial dimension of his work.

A key abiding fascination, one that comes up one way or another in most of these papers, and that was also the main focus of my first book, *The Gods in Epic*, is the bundle of issues to do with fiction and representation. In the face of these problems I was led to my first attempt to come to grips with contemporary theoretical approaches, and I was soon afterwards led into anthropology and comparative religion as I moved on to the interface between Roman religion and Latin literature. This double engagement requires some deeper context—so far as I can recover it, at least: I have always known that I have less access to any conscious motivation in my ways of doing things than a more methodologically self-aware person, such as Don Fowler or Stephen Hinds.

⁵ The exceptions are two highly enjoyable graduate seminars that I co-taught with my friend Andrew Ford, on Hellenistic Literature (Spring, 2001) and Ancient Literary Criticism (Spring, 2012).

Introduction

5

I have been very lucky to be one of a cohort of Latinists born roughly between 1950 and 1960. This cohort has developed a certain sense of shared identity over the years. I do not name them, for fear of causing *invidia* (well, I do not name any more of them: I have just named two). And I do not at all mean to imply that we, or I, have not been inspired by the cohorts ahead of us and behind us.⁶ The reason I mention this particular group in this context is because it seems to me that all of us had a more or less similar experience as we entered the profession: having received a virtually theory-free training we then tried to supplement it as best we could by our own reading and brain-storming, in the period before dedicated conferences and workshops got under way, let alone graduate seminars on theory and method. At Auckland and Oxford, for example, I was trained with essentially the same toolkit that I would have been trained with twenty-five years earlier. It was a very good toolkit, one that demanded knowledge of non-Anglophone (especially German) scholarship, and above all command of the original sources. When I first asked Robin Nisbet about how to approach the problem of ancient allegorical composition and interpretation, he got up and walked to his shelf and handed me his copy of Félix Buffière's Budé edition of pseudo-Heraclitus' *Homerika Problemata*.⁷ This was the right thing to do, and I would do the same with a student now; but neither of us thought to follow up with a modern bibliography.⁸ I remember Nicholas Richardson, my mentor at Merton College, giving me a clipping of a *Times Literary Supplement* review of the English translation of Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse*, but this kind of intervention was rare. It was only when I arrived for a Post-Doctoral Fellowship at Harvard in 1982 that the other Junior Fellows introduced me for the first time to the names of Vidal-Naquet, Vernant, Derrida and Foucault.

My haphazard self-education picked up apace when I moved to Cambridge (1984–5) and started attending the extraordinarily rewarding weekly literature seminars, where John Henderson and Simon Goldhill in particular were test-driving all manner of approaches. It was a polarised atmosphere at the time, not just in Cambridge but across the UK, and this may perhaps explain why I found myself occupying some sort of common ground in the middle with Stephen Hinds, who was then finishing his

⁶ Let me just acknowledge here Tony Woodman, a mentor and frequent collaborator, born ten years before me.

⁷ Buffière (1962).

⁸ Times have certainly changed: when I returned to Oxford in the late 1990s, I had a very enjoyable term co-teaching a graduate seminar on 'Classics and modern literary theory' with Angus Bowie.

PhD, which became *The Metamorphosis of Persephone*.⁹ The Cambridge University Press series that Stephen and I edited together from 1993 to 2016, *Roman Literature and its Contexts*, was specifically designed to provide a venue for a variety of theoretical approaches to Latin texts.¹⁰ Editing the series was, in a sense, a large project of self-education, since we had a ring-side seat while a number of highly gifted scholars displayed the possibilities of a range of theoretical and critical approaches.

At this stage my particular theoretical interests, as I said earlier, were in *mimesis* or representation, and in models—especially anthropological models—of comparative religion. I had always been fascinated, even as an undergraduate, by how conventional black marks on a white background can be so powerful in their impact and so apparently evocative of experience, and many, maybe even most, of the papers in these volumes are involved somehow with this question.¹¹ I responded eagerly to theories of fiction, narratology and discourse, since they seemed to offer some ways of understanding, for example, how the representation of a god in a poem differs from the representation of a god in a temple or in a work of philosophy. This dovetailed with my interests in religion. As a result, I ended up with a bipolar focus, fascinated with textual representation on the micro level and with social structures of religion on the macro—and fascinated with how these two perspectives interacted with each other.

This dual commitment perhaps goes some way to explaining why I have never grasped the force of the common antithesis between formalism and historicism. I remember seizing with delight on a typically svelte aphorism on this topic from Roland Barthes when I first encountered it: ‘a little formalism turns one away from History, but . . . a lot brings one back to it’.¹² A superficial formalism takes you away from history, to be sure, but a deeply felt formalism, one that responds to the particularity of a specific artefact and to the ways that it works in connection with other artefacts and other genres and discourses, can only be part of a historical project. Texts are as concrete as you want. Texts have a history and they are a part of

⁹ Hinds (1987a). I don’t know if Stephen felt this way, but I sometimes felt rather as Frank Kermode did, from his far more exposed position: ‘There is a war on, and he who ventures into no-man’s-land brandishing cigarettes and singing carols must expect to be shot at’ (Kermode (1983), 7).

¹⁰ It is a real pleasure to acknowledge the strong support we always received from Cambridge University Press, and from the Classics editors, first Pauline Hire and then Michael Sharp.

¹¹ As a specific example of how much I learnt from co-editing *Roman Literature and its Contexts*, I may point to the first chapter of D.F. Kennedy (1993), a discussion of ‘Representation and the rhetoric of reality’ that I found particularly stimulating and informative.

¹² Barthes (1972), 111 = Barthes (1957), 184: ‘Parodiant un mot connu, je dirai qu’un peu de formalisme éloigne de l’histoire, mais que beaucoup y ramène.’

Introduction

7

history, and the forms of expression that make them possible have a finely grained cultural specificity that we have to attune ourselves to even if our objective in reading texts happens to be ‘historical’ and not aesthetic.

I always saw my projects as ‘historical’, in some sense, as working to recover the larger networks in which literary texts operated, and that is no doubt partly a result of my experience as an undergraduate and graduate with scholars like Pat Lacey and Robin Nisbet, who combined historical and literary interests. I was, however, eventually more receptive than they would have been to the idea that any category of the ‘non-literary’ was itself radically textual, only apprehensible through specific discourses, so that an opposition between literature and ‘raw facts’ was unreal.¹³ The point was put memorably by Hayden White in *Tropics of Discourse*, which I think I first read around 1985:

Nor is it unusual for literary theorists, when they are speaking about the context of a literary work, to suppose that this context—the ‘historical milieu’—has a concreteness and an accessibility that the work itself can never have, as if it were easier to perceive the reality of a past world put together from a thousand historical documents than it is to probe the depths of a single literary work that is present to the critic studying it.¹⁴

Underlying much historicist work is ‘the assumption that when literature engages with ritual or anything else it is participating in an identifiable larger system of meaning in which the terms are always set in advance by conditions which are more primary or authentic or real’, that texts are ‘parasitic upon something quintessentially more substantial and really there, and recoverable in that substantiality and reality’.¹⁵ This is an assumption I have never been tempted to share.

From this perspective the antithesis between ‘formalism’ and ‘historicism’ also collapses, as Don Fowler so vividly argued, in essays that put the case better than I could and that crystallised the issues for me as I read them. We need, as he said, ‘to broaden the notion of text and in doing so to seek to integrate work on intertextuality with the various forms of cultural criticism, and . . . the first step here is to deconstruct oppositions like “formalism” vs. “historicism”’.¹⁶ As he showed, supposedly hard-edged

¹³ My first systematic thoughts on these issues were, if memory serves, particularly influenced by H. White (1978); Kramer (1989); Conte (1994b), 109–10; D.F. Kennedy (1993), esp. 7–8; A. Barchiesi (1997), esp. ‘Introduction’.

¹⁴ H. White (1978), 89. Note that White’s language almost subliminally allows for the possibility of perceiving that ‘reality of a past world’.

¹⁵ From the paper ‘Interpreting Sacrificial Ritual in Roman Poetry . . .’, Vol. I.II, 225, 226.

¹⁶ D. Fowler (2000), 131.

sociological or political models are themselves textual constructs, so that, for example, “Roman social relations” consist in a set of texts, not in an impossible mystic reality outside textuality.”¹⁷

I was never, then, quite won over by New Historicism. First of all, I could never follow what New Historicists were actually trying to claim about the relationships between texts and contexts. In particular, I responded with instant assent to the scepticism expressed by David Perkins about the explanatory power of the New Historicist models (or the Old Historicist models for that matter).¹⁸ I discussed these problems in the paper on Horace’s *Epistle to Augustus* (Vol. 2.7), following Perkins and other scholars in being unpersuaded that we can ‘explain (in any rigorous sense of the word) the way any given literary text is shaped by its contexts, because it is impossible to know what kind of causal relationship we might be talking about: the nexus of cause and effect is irrecoverable, and the number of contextualisations to be taken into account is insuperably large’.¹⁹ I have always been very impressed by how difficult it is to tease out meaningful connections between intellectual or artistic developments and their nesting societal or technological conditions. To a certain extent, this is just an issue of evidence, which partly explains why New Historicism flourished in studies on the Early Modern period. In this period, there is enough evidence to make the project’s implied causative stories seem plausible, whereas the modern period has far too much evidence, and the ancient world not nearly enough. A second major difficulty I had with New Historicism was the totalising nature of its constructions—a result of the intellectual debt it owes to a certain kind of symbolic anthropology. The models almost inevitably posit a totalising synchronic structure: a culture turns out to be like a massive text, and through some variety of synecdoche, any literary or cultural instantiation will be a fragmentary manifestation of that original overarching text.²⁰

At a certain level, preferences of this kind are as much a matter of temperament as anything else, and for reasons that I cannot recover I have always been antipathetic to holistic and communitarian ways of doing things in any sphere: this is why the pointilliste and contrarian Jonathan Z. Smith has been one of my favourite scholars of religion.²¹ Anything I have ever learnt

¹⁷ D. Fowler (2000), 112; cf. 111: “Intertextuality” is often associated with a formalist approach to literature, and contrasted with forms of cultural criticism that go outside the text. This seems to me to embody a narrow view of text and a naivety about the way the things supposedly “outside” the text are always already textualized.’

¹⁸ Perkins (1992), chapter 6. ¹⁹ Vol. 2.7, 124.

²⁰ Discussed in ‘Interpreting Sacrificial Ritual . . .’, Vol. 1.11; see now the wide-ranging discussion of formalism and historicism in Hinds (2010).

²¹ Witness his splendid banalisation of animal sacrifice in Smith (1987), discussed in Vol. 1.11.

Introduction

9

about the Greeks and Romans has made me feel yet more keenly how various and diverse and contentious their societies were, no matter how strenuously they might have tried at different times for different reasons to project uniformity and adherence to tradition. Literary texts can be put to all kinds of uses, but the idea that what we label as 'literature' could not disturb and refashion its society has never seemed to me to fit well with the self-consciously disruptive nature of the texts I spend my time reading with my students. For this reason, the scholarly construction of the ideal original reader is a model that has real problems: as I discussed in the paper on 'Criticism Ancient and Modern' (Vol. 2.5), most of the original readers must have found a first encounter with revolutionary texts such as Cicero's *philosophica* or Horace's *Odes* extremely disorientating.

Ever since the Romantics, with their fetishising of the primary, communal, organic, and oral, Greek studies have been more given to communitarian models than Latin or Roman studies. I have had a rather complicated relationship with the methodologies of Greek studies, and with their applicability to Roman studies. When Stephen Hinds and I launched *Roman Literature and its Contexts* our manifesto explicitly praised the way that 'students of Greek literature, in the best traditions of Classical scholarship, have been strengthening their contacts with cognate fields such as social history, anthropology, history of thought, linguistics and literary theory'; we went on to say that 'the study of Roman literature has just as much to gain from engaging with these other contexts and intellectual traditions'. I stand by those words, written almost thirty years ago, and I have always done my best to learn from my colleagues in Greek. But I have resisted—at first instinctively, and then more self-consciously—an inertial tendency in Greek studies to privilege the supposedly oral and communal dimensions of literary texts, which regularly get flattened out to the status of a social reflex in the process.

To give some examples to support this very large generalisation, I can refer to the paper on 'Horace and the Greek Lyric Poets' (Vol. 2.4), and to my second book, *Literature and Religion at Rome*, which turned out—rather to my surprise, because this was not at all what I had in mind when I started the book—to be a kind of polemic against Greek models of literature and ritual, and against their transplantation into Latin Studies.²² One salient recent example of such transplantation has been the use by Latinists of models of archaic and classical Greek orality and

²² Feeney (1998). The work of John Scheid was very important to me here, especially his masterpiece, Scheid (1990), as was the major review of that book in Beard (1991).

performance as part of an attempt to retrieve some social power for the texts of Latin literature, which would supposedly otherwise be shut off in an arid reading environment: the same strategy has been used for Hellenistic poetry.²³ Against such a move, I would point out, first of all, that the merits of these models in their own Greek context are open to debate. The focus on the organic social context of the original performance in Greek studies has often led to a disregard for the power that textual circulation must have had from an early stage in the alphabetic revolution: as Robert Fowler points out, ‘By the late sixth century there were something like 200,000 epic and lyric verses, and early works of prose, circulating in writing.’²⁴ Further, it is not proven that textual circulation through schools, booksellers, and public and private libraries is devoid of social power, however one would want to define that: Latinists have been very alive to the importance of such contexts of reception, and to the intimately linked questions of the literary entailments of the technologies of the ancient book roll.²⁵

The experience of reviewing *Matrices of Genre*, edited by Mary Depew and Dirk Obbink, gave me an opportunity to reflect on these general differences between Hellenists and Romanists through the specific case study of the problem of genre. As I put it in that review,

Genre in pre-hellenistic Greece tends to be seen in quasi-sociological terms as a reflex of social practice, to be explained by its performative function in a social setting . . . Such an approach drains the power away from the concept of genre, which might be seen not as indissoluble from real praxis but, in a Contean way, as a mediator which enables cultural perceptions to become part of literary perceptions.²⁶

The approach of the Latinists in this volume strikes me as bearing out once more the force of Barthes’ aphorism about a lot of formalism taking one back to history:

²³ Habinek (2005); T.P. Wiseman (2015); Cameron (1995) on Alexandria.

²⁴ R.L. Fowler (2012); cf. R.L. Fowler (2004), 225. On the kinetic impact of the new alphabetic technology, see B.B. Powell (2002); Yunis (2003).

²⁵ My papers in Vol. 2.8, 14 and 15, together with Feeney (2017), are some contribution to the debates; from a very large bibliography on books, reading practices and libraries in Greece and Rome, I pick out Roman (2001) and (2006); Hutchinson (2008); Lowrie (2009); W.A. Johnson and Parker (2009); König, Oikonomopoulou and Woolf (2013); Houston (2014); Jansen (2014). Spelman (2019) now takes the story of the use of standard texts in Greek education back to at least the fifth century BCE. The account in Langdon (2015) of over 1200 herders’ graffiti from southern Attica, dating to before 500 BCE, will enforce rethinking of literacy rates and education in Archaic Greece.

²⁶ Feeney (2003), 338. The outstanding papers in that volume by Mary Depew and Alessandro Barchiesi on the relation between performance and text in Greek hymns and Horace’s *Odes* respectively together provide a promising line for investigations into poetry’s situation in time.