

Timothy Saunders. *Bucolic Ecology:*
Virgil's Eclogues and the Environmental Literary Tradition.
London: Duckworth, 2008.
ISBN: 9780715636176

Ellen Oliensis. *Freud's Rome: Psychoanalysis and Latin Poetry.*
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One of the most exciting books that I have ever read in classical studies is Charles Martindale's *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception*,¹ the second volume in the consistently interesting series *Roman Literature and Its Contexts*, published by Cambridge University Press. Here Martindale rejects the positivism of empirical philology (orthodox in Latin studies at that time), and creatively engages Latin poetry (Virgil, Ovid, Lucan) with modern critical theory, in particular deconstruction (Derrida) and hermeneutics (Gadamer). Over the ensuing two decades approaches to Latin literature have diversified considerably and the two monographs under consideration continue this trend.

In *Bucolic Ecology*, Timothy Saunders, whose doctoral thesis Martindale supervised, undertakes an ecological reading of Virgil's *Eclogues*, ten pas-

toral poems thought to have been published around 38 BCE. Saunders affirms the *Eclogues* as “bold, innovative, ambitious and playful poems” (1), which relate dynamically to the physical universe through bucolic song (he prefers “bucolic” to “pastoral” because it emphasises Virgil’s classical intertextual relations over his modern ones (8)). Saunders opposes his study to earlier nature-focused readings of Virgil that tend to present bucolic space conservatively as a site for nostalgia or melancholy, that is to say, for reflection upon the loss of (some kind of holistic relationship to) nature. Romantic readings along these lines have already been convincingly critiqued by Paul Alpers, who in *The Singer of the Eclogues*² turns his back on bucolic nature to focus on the figure of the herdsman. Saunders argues, however, that the relationship between poetry and nature is “wide-ranging and pervasive” in the *Eclogues* and so should not be ignored (4).

Saunders also differentiates his work from ecocriticism, which he accuses of being too entrenched in Romantic discourses of nature (4). Accordingly, his understanding of ecology is scientific (rather than political) and precise, focusing on dynamic but systematic relations, as indicated, for example, by his gloss of “ecosystem”: “a decentralised network of relations that incorporates a variety of diverse elements” (4). In his introduction, Saunders presents a creative and exciting theory of literary ecology with particular resonance for classical texts. This is an ecology of literary production and transmission, structured by a recursive temporality of response. Unlike so much classical philology which treats texts as cryogenically preserved remains, an ecological approach of the kind Saunders outlines allows for “new and potentially destabilising elements [such as] later readers, texts and events” (7). The relationship presented by the *Eclogues* (as Saunders reads them) between text and universe is such that in relinquishing the idea of a fixed, stable text outside of history, we also give up on attributing such qualities to nature (7).

Saunders divides his application of such a critical theory into six chapters: catasterisms, cosmology, geography, topography, landscape and physics. In “Catasterisms,” Saunders reads *Eclogues* 3 and 5 and finds in their cosmic allusions and ecphrastic response a metonymy for the self-catasterising aims of Virgilian bucolic. (Catasterism means the changing of an earthly body into a celestial one, i.e., astrological mythology.) The dia logical ecphrasis treating elaborately carved wooden cups in *Eclogue* 3 represents an attempt at catastrophising the artwork, while the description of the apotheosis of Daphnis (the mythical shepherd-poet who invented pastoral poetry) in *Eclogue* 5 represents the artist’s catastrophism. In “Cosmology,” Saunders aligns the reading of the heavens with the reading of poetry, both constituted by *signa* (signs). The cosmos provides the conditions

for bucolic poetry (which is always sung in the shade during the day), but at the same time, bucolic poetry sings the cosmos into existence. The *Eclogues* thus aspire to align bucolic poetry (the intertext is Theocritus's *Idylls*) with cosmological poetry (Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*), and yet ironically acknowledge their inability to do so. In "Geography," Saunders explores some of the copious catalogue of place names that features in the *Eclogues*, focusing in particular on *Eclogue 10*. Over and above providing a setting for the poems, geography establishes a literary index. In "Topography," Saunders explores the recursive relationship between city, farmland and forests, and posits land confiscation (an important historical context for the *Eclogues*) as a bucolic paradigm. On the one hand, the city – the basis of the epic in Virgil's work – emerges as both the origin and the destination of bucolic poetry (all roads lead to Rome). The relationship between field and forest, on the other hand, between the sylvan muse and the rural muse, is more agonistically productive. In Latin, *silua* means forest but commonly signifies literary history as well; the incursion of the pastoral into the sylvan represents the colonisation of land and literature by the bucolic, which nevertheless has its origins in the *siluae*. Landscape-focused studies of the *Eclogues* have been criticised (e.g., by Alpers) as anachronistic; however, in the chapter entitled "Landscape," Saunders refigures landscape as ecphrasis by drawing attention to the word's meaning in ancient rhetoric as literary description of not only artworks, but of any physical phenomenon, including landscapes. Landscape certainly posits a viewer, but not the same objective viewer every time. In Saunders's reading, the ecphrasis of landscape – along with any view of it – becomes an engagement with literary history that recursively reorders time. In *Eclogue 2*, for example, Corydon's landscapes are both artist's representation and critic's reading. Finally, in "Physics," Saunders again draws on the sense of nature elicited by the phrase (and the text) *De Rerum Natura*; once again literary and natural history intersect. In the messianic *Eclogue 4*, the prodigious child who is the subject of the poem gains power over the universe through acts of reading, such that reading itself becomes an ecphrastic historical intervention.

I found Saunders's study on the whole an exceptionally fascinating engagement with Virgil's *Eclogues*, which, having read in Latin, I consider to be radical and unsettling texts. Saunders undertakes the kind of theoretically creative yet careful close readings that hold out this strangeness, rather than flattening it. Nevertheless, I often wished that Saunders would engage more broadly with critical theory. While his knowledge of classical literature is extensive and so his reading in Virgil criticism (a significant canon in itself, spanning two millennia), he engages only peripherally with

philosophical texts. The result, I feel, is that some of his most interesting findings are not as fully explored as they might have been, especially in the case of *silua*. Furthermore, while Saunders's development of bucolic ecology rests on Virgil's prodigious intertextuality (the forest of literary history – past, present and future), a concluding chapter could have helped reinforce his claims to ecology (as unfolded in the introduction) as the differentiating hinge of his work, perhaps embodied in the metaphor of *silua* as ecosystem. In so much Virgil scholarship, the poems (especially the *Eclogues*) become intertextually overdetermined. While Saunders achieves much more than just the identification of allusions, at times his argument seems to get lost in such details; or, to use his metaphor of the *silua*, I often found I had lost sight of the forest for the trees. Despite these points, however, I think *Bucolic Ecology* is an exceptionally erudite and innovative study, and an important addition to Virgil scholarship.

Freud's Rome by Ellen Oliensis is the latest volume in the series *Roman Literature and Its Contexts* (in which Martindale's *Redeeming the Text* was published, among many other interesting titles). Oliensis's is not the first book-length psychoanalytic study of Latin literature, but it is perhaps the most accessible. Oliensis discusses the work of three Roman poets – Catullus, Ovid and Virgil – and, while drawing on a range of psychoanalytic thinkers, including Lacan and Klein, professes a predominantly Freudian bias. In her introduction, Oliensis provides some context for psychoanalysis and classics, including the explosion in the last two or three decades of studies informed by modern critical theory. She also outlines a theory of the textual unconscious as an unlocalisable effect gleaned from the texture of the text (6). "Discourse regularly outruns the designs of the one deploying it," she writes, "and this excess is structured and interpretable" (4). Oliensis uses this theory of the textual unconsciousness to great effect as the guiding principle of the text.

The book consists of three main parts, each discussing a major psychoanalytic theme: mourning, motherhood and the phallus. In the first chapter, "Two Poets Mourning," Oliensis examines the infiltration of mourning in generically non-elegiac texts, namely, book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and poems 65 and 68b by Catullus. In the two poems by Catullus, for example, Oliensis points to the infection of these otherwise non-elegiac texts with the poet's mourning for his dead brother. Poem 65 is structured as a letter prefacing a translation of the Alexandrian poet Callimachus's "Lock of Berenice"; while 68b is about a faithless lover, built around a series of strange and elaborate similes. In 65, the forgetting of the dead brother becomes an act of murder, which nevertheless allows for the interjec-

tion of an ostentatious tribute as token memorial for the forgotten. In 68b, Oliensis argues, the first part of Catullus's famous phrase *odi et amo* ("I hate and I love") is repressed despite his lover's infidelity; Catullus disavows the expected emotions of rage, disgust and jealousy, for to acknowledge the lover's faithlessness would uncover his own with regard to the deceased.

Historical account and Roman self-representation reveal the *pater familias* as a powerful and overbearing figure in contrast to the disengaged and unmotherly *mater*. If this were true, then Roman subjectivity might be expected to develop in markedly different ways to that outlined by Freud. However, in her second chapter, "Murdering Mothers," Oliensis contends that the Romans misrepresented themselves in this respect, and that the myth of the omnipotent *pater familias*, with power over life and death, endured in spite of legal and familial arrangements that speak otherwise. While Roman society was indeed an intensely patriarchal one, Oliensis focuses on powerful mothers in Virgil's *Aeneid* and book 6 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Aeneas's mother – Venus, goddess of love – is the erotic mother: "Behind the matronly image of Venus Genetrix shimmers the naked Aphrodite – and this is just Aeneas' problem" (62-3). Oliensis wonders whether Virgil's poetry might "supply the makings of a maternal supplement to the paternal allegory" of literary production found in theories such as Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" (76). Such a relation would not be agonistic, but one based on a fear of being swallowed and scattered by the mother-text: scatter her or be scattered.

In "Variations on a Phallic Theme," Oliensis fully broaches two of the most troubling and famous themes in psychoanalysis – castration anxiety and penis envy – and again reads Ovid's *Metamorphoses* alongside the love poems of Catullus. In the story of Scylla, for example (not the sea monster of the *Odyssey*, but the daughter of King Nisus of Megara), Oliensis finds a classically Freudian female whose self-destructive desire for the phallus underpins a suppressed narrative of incest. In her discussion of Catullus's poem 63, Oliensis explores how the presence of real life eunuchs in Rome (it was not uncommon for priests and slaves to be castrated) complicates the Freudian theme of castration anxiety in Roman texts. She also makes the point that in Roman sexual ideology boys were seen as little women: "potentially penetrable objects, inviting or fending off desire, but not themselves subjects of desire" (113). In Catullus 63, the beautiful youth Attis castrates himself in order to preserve his femininity, and in Oliensis's reading of the peculiar metonymy *relicta sine uiro* ("left without a man"), Attis, in performing this act, excludes himself from the economy of marriage. Oliensis then makes the un-Freudian move of aligning marital "deflowering"



with castration, which is followed by the restoration of a phallic supplement in the husband.

In her afterword, entitled “Freud’s Rome,” Oliensis looks at the presence of Rome in Freud’s own texts. In both Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents* and Virgil’s *Aeneid* the commonsensical notion of the civilising process as the sublimation of aggressive libidinal instincts is obvious. Nevertheless, Oliensis finds in Roman imperialism (*imperium sine fine*, the archetype of expanding civilisation) an example of the infantile oceanic feeling of eternity, named explicitly by the epithet of the “Eternal City.” Were antiquity the time before repression then it would be uninterpretable. But in Oliensis’s chiasmic Freudian–Virgilian reading of it, civilisation is a terrifying and ambiguous process, as it occurs not only as the repression of aggression, but as the very actualisation of it.

Freud’s Rome is a confidently executed study, full of insightful readings of fascinating texts. Oliensis’s grasp of classical literature and scholarship impressed me, as did her understanding of psychoanalytic theory. Oliensis keeps the co-ordinating thread of the textual unconscious visible throughout, and this is one of the book’s strengths; refreshingly, moreover, her stance toward psychoanalysis remains guarded and she is not afraid to critique Freudian concepts (for example, she points to Freud’s idiosyncratically penis-oriented understanding of castration, which, *sensu stricto*, refers to the removal of the testicles). Having only slight knowledge of psychoanalysis, however, I would have liked more detailed theoretical discussion to complement the readings. Furthermore, at times, Oliensis’s apologetic tendency struck me as strange; I think it says much about classical studies if scholars still feel the need to temper their use of critical theory with reference (however ambivalent) to the philological project of authorial intention. For me, one of the most interesting things about studying classics is the fragility and contingency of the texts, the authors’ long-deadness (in every sense) in contrast to the texts’ miraculous, memetic persistence. Nonetheless, I enjoyed *Freud’s Rome* very much; both it and Saunders’s *Bucolic Ecology* contribute significantly to the diversification of approaches to Roman literature.

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NOTES

- ¹ Charles Martindale, *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- ² Paul Alpers, *The Singer of the Eclogues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).