

BOOK REVIEW

Ancients and Moderns in Europe: comparative perspectives, edited by Paddy Bullard and Alexis Tadié, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 2016, xii + 316 pp., £60.00 (paperback), ISBN 0435-2866

A product of the AGON research project on early-modern quarrels in England and France, this volume, edited by Paddy Bullard and Alexis Tadié, offers a new intellectual history of the “Ancients and Moderns” dispute. Originating in Renaissance Italy, where the rediscovery of classical literature provoked debates about ancient versus modern literature and culture, the Ancients and Moderns dispute became, in seventeenth-century France, a heated public controversy over the relative superiority of ancient and modern intellectual and cultural life, known as the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. The debate subsequently travelled to England where Jonathan Swift christened it the “Battle of the Books”. The various national manifestations of the dispute have been the subject of renewed scholarly interest within the last 30 years. As the editors make clear, however, the scope of this volume extends beyond the central episodes and protagonists of the debate. It focuses instead on the “uses and persistence” of references to the Ancients and Moderns dispute in a variety of intellectual debates in the arts and sciences, particularly its impact on contemporaries’ disciplinary practices, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. It draws together contributions from scholars working in a variety of fields, including literature, philosophy, musicology, intellectual history, and the history of science. The geographical scope of the volume is similarly broad, with chapters discussing case studies from England, France, Germany, Italy and the Low Countries.

The collection comprises of four parts. Part I, “Ancient knowledge and modern mediations”, indicates that, outside the highly polemical and dramatic episodes of the Ancients and Moderns controversy, contemporaries were not interested in adjudicating between the Ancients and the Moderns. The three chapters in this section instead suggest that comparisons between ancient and modern knowledge were often characterised by very different concerns, conditioned by particular contexts, which had more to do with addressing particular problems faced by modern scholars or critics. Vittoria Feola sets the tone in chapter 1 with her discussion of the “positive and utilitarian” approach to ancient knowledge adopted by professors of mathematics, astronomy, and natural history at the University of Oxford in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (35). Underlining the influence of Sir Henry Savile and Francis Bacon, she draws attention to the new editions of classical “scientific” works published by Oxford University in this period. For Feola, the attempt to learn from and improve ancient wisdom was “an antidote” to the polemical tone adopted by literary scholars in their engagement with the classics. In chapter 2, Alexis Tadié suggests that a “less impassioned” approach to the Ancients and Moderns debate was in fact adopted by many literary authors and poets as the key arguments of the *Querelle* and the *Battle of the Books* were diffused in the English periodical press (38). Tadié argues that, in the press, contemporaries drew on the arguments made by both sides of the dispute in order to advocate particular literary or social issues. The absence of any battle between Ancients and Moderns is also evident in the archaeological controversies among Parisian historians of the 1720s, discussed by Stéphane Van Damme in chapter 3.

In Part II, “Logic and criticism across borders”, Martine Pécharman, Marcus Walsh, and Karen Collis address particular debates about “modern” methods in logic or criticism at the turn of the eighteenth century. Pécharman analyses the English reception of John Locke’s *Essay*

concerning human understanding (1690), noting that defenders of Locke's work championed it as providing an entirely new, "modern" system of logic, while defenders of the Aristotelian system attacked it by undermining its novelty and presenting it as a radical form of Cartesianism. In chapter five, Walsh suggests that the use of more detailed and precise forms of scholarly documentation by scholars such as Richard Simon, Pierre Bayle, Jean Le Clerc, and Richard Bentley effected "a transition from an older, narrative history or philological scholarship to a new scholarly humanism" (101). Particularly insightful is Karen Collis's chapter, "Reading the Ancients at the turn of the century: the third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713) and Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736)". Collis demonstrates that Shaftesbury and Le Clerc were deeply interested in how ancient texts should be read, translated, and appreciated in the modern world. In particular, as Collis reveals, they debated how far pagan works could be appreciated by Christian readers. Returning to the theme of Part I, Collis demonstrates that Shaftesbury and Le Clerc were more interested in understanding ancient texts and restoring their original meaning than in entering into any "battle" between the Ancients and Moderns.

Part III, "Conversing with the Ancients: arts and practices", explores aspects of the Ancients and Moderns dispute which have received less scholarly attention than debates over the relative merits of ancient and modern literature and natural philosophy. Contributors pay particular attention to the ways in which the Ancients-Moderns comparison enabled contemporaries to reflect on and transform their disciplinary practices. In chapters 7 and 8, Theodora Psychoyou and Elizabeth Lavezzi reveal the significance of the *Querelle* in debates about music and painting in France. Paddy Bullard subsequently explores John Evelyn's engagement with antiquity in his discussions of architecture and horticulture. Bullard notes that while Evelyn is often categorised as a "Modern", his progressive views on architecture, and particularly horticulture, were inspired by his perception of ancient and archaic styles. Sylvie Kleiman-Lafon concludes Part III by exploring the use of rhetoric in English medical treatises on hypochondria as an instance of the Ancients and Moderns debate. She looks especially at Bernard Mandeville's *Treatise on the hypochondriack and hysterick passions* (1711), in which the use of the ancient dialogic style was a central aspect of an innovative method of healing, which sought to unite the best of ancient and modern practices.

In Part IV, "The persistence of the Quarrel", contributors discuss individuals whose engagement with antiquity the editors describe as having been especially "passionate and profound" (14). In chapter 11, Amedeo Quondam examines Petrarch's contribution to the *phase italienne* of the Ancients and Moderns debate, particularly his desire to bring ancient and modern thinkers into conversation with one another. The remaining chapters address eighteenth-century thinkers, underlining the ongoing significance of the Ancients and Moderns comparative framework for intellectual discourse in the Enlightenment. A central theme of each chapter is the way in which antiquity was used to reflect on, or promote change in, the modern world. Ourida Mostefai discusses Jean-Jacques Rousseau's use of ancient figures as mouth-pieces for the critique of modernity. Karin Kukkonen offers an interesting discussion of Samuel Richardson's revisiting of the Ancients and Moderns debate in his writings, particularly in the preface to Penelope Aubin's *Collection of entertaining histories and novels* (1739) and his final novel, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–1754). Kukkonen draws attention to Richardson's considerable interest in how Christian authors in the modern world might learn from and improve on ancient pagan literary models. In the final chapter, Ritchie Robertson draws attention to the German engagement with the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* in

the late eighteenth century, looking in particular at its influence on Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich Schiller.

The coherence of the volume might have been tightened by clarifying the focus of the collection in the introduction. Although the introduction indicates that the volume will address the long-term impact of references to the various manifestations of the Ancients and Moderns dispute on European intellectual culture, the book also includes chapters which comment on particular debates within the *Querelle* and the ‘Battle of the Books’, as well as more general comparisons between modernity and antiquity which do not seem immediately connected to particular debates within the Ancients and Moderns disputes. Additional explanatory remarks in the introduction or the inclusion of concluding remarks would have helped to clarify the extent to which “the *Querelle* acted as a leading principle for the configuration of knowledge” (v). Overall, however, this volume makes a valuable contribution to scholarship on the Ancients and Moderns debate. In shifting attention away from the more polemical episodes of the dispute and moving beyond national perspectives, it sheds light on the long-term impact of comparisons between antiquity and modernity on European intellectual life, particularly its impact on the development of disciplinary practices in various fields. As demonstrated by many of the contributors, European thinkers who made use of the Ancients and Moderns comparative framework were not interested in fighting over the relative merits of Ancient or Modern culture, but drew instead on the arguments deployed by both sides of the controversy to debate other issues or concerns. The broad disciplinary scope of this collection provides evidence of the ongoing salience of the Ancients-Moderns comparative framework in eighteenth-century Europe, a topic which remains relatively understudied.