

Klooster surveys the Hellenistic monarchs who composed their own writing and explores the motivations behind the wide-ranging textual production of the Hellenistic kings (chapter eight). Timothy Howe argues convincingly that the “Bad Poros” episode found in Arrian – in contrast to the “Good Porus” defeated and then accepted as an ally by Alexander – belonged to a character study of good and bad kingship composed by Ptolemy I as part of his legitimization of rule in Egypt (chapter seven). François de Callataÿ considers the alteration of coins as a means of communicating the infamy of kings losing their crowns (chapter four). He presents the examples of overstrikes by a Seleucid and two Parthian kings, and he provides a theoretical and practical discussion on how coins still in circulation can be used to erase, if not tarnish, the memory of overthrown kings when not recalled and melted down.

Two essays discuss the pursuit of fame by individuals at lower levels of the social hierarchy. Christelle Fischer-Bovet presents a series of “micro-histories,” the first is of individuals who achieved a degree of international fame serving Ptolemaic monarchs inside and outside Egypt (chapter five). In the second set, she examines the statuary and inscriptions of the Egyptian elite who achieved local celebrity at the beginning and end of Ptolemaic rule. Silvia Barbantani surveys the tradition of poetic Hellenistic military epitaphs of both high-ranking royal courtiers and those of common soldiers (chapter two). She analyses how these military epitaphs draw from the Greek tradition of memorializing the glory of warriors in poetry and explores the motivations for the dedication of these funerary epitaphs.

The themes and the discussions in this volume will interest students and scholars of the Hellenistic world. The translations of ancient texts open the discussions for a wide range of audiences. A knowledge of Greek helps to appreciate some of the discussions on poetry – in particular, chapter two where the author includes all the Greek epitaphs along with her translations, which is a great strength of the study. Discussions on numismatics and Egyptian statuary are accompanied by useful illustrations. In other essays, charts provide helpful summaries of the arguments.

The quality, depth, and diversity of the research in these essays make this volume a valuable contribution to the study of the Hellenistic world.

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Johanna Skibsrud. *The Poetic Imperative: A Speculative Aesthetics*. McGill-Queen’s University Press. vii, 160. \$34.95

In *The Poetic Imperative: A Speculative Aesthetics*, Johanna Skibsrud reflects on a constellation of modern and postmodern poets whose work invests in the practice of speculation. Skibsrud opens with dual invocations of the limits of

the human and the dictum “know thyself.” Rather than think about knowing one’s self as the tonnage of neoliberal self-help circulation, Skibsrud argues that knowing one’s self is instead part of an investigative process and project. She suggests that “[l]anguage and knowledge are not considered in their application *to* human being but instead as expressions of the way that human being is constantly being activated within and through language and knowledge.” Poetry, then, becomes a useful tool to investigate the limits of language as it meets the material relations of the body and the world. Poetry can tarry with the places where the categorical cracks, where the untranslatable and the unconscious bubble up, and where story fails us. Skibsrud is interested in the ways in which poetry is a practice that moves us toward the unthinkable – what she calls “a commitment to encountering, and engaging with, what cannot finally be apprehended or articulated through rational thought and language.” Poetry, in other words, is speculative.

Speculative writing has grown into an important genre, spreading from its pulp corners to more, ahem, respectable corners of literary media. This has opened a bubble for poetry that engages with similar thematic concerns as the genre categories of science fiction, fantasy, and horror fiction. While much of this still nascent project focuses on poetry’s content, Skibsrud instead looks to poets who use the formal methods of poetry to speculate on the world. Drawing from the last century of poetry in English, Skibsrud writes about a loose agglomeration: Wallace Stevens, Angela Rawlings, Muriel Rukeyser, Stéphane Mallarmé, Inger Christensen, Craig Santos Perez, M. NourbeSe Philip, Anne Carson, Erin Moure, Lisa Robertson, Douglas Kearney, Katie Paterson, and Christian Bök. Reading back and forth across the century and between geographies, Skibsrud thinks through these poets’ varied investigations into the place where language meets material. She looks for transversal connections between writers. In her opening pairing of Wallace Stevens and Angela Rawlings, for instance, she leverages their differing formal approaches – Stevens’s slippery metaphoricity versus Rawlings’s confrontations with non-human materiality – to find potential connection between them. “Like Stevens,” Skibsrud suggests, “Rawlings provokes a sense of proximity and imaginative contact between representational language and selfhood and the absolutely unrepresentable in order to arrive at a sense of ‘real connection’ between lived experience and its account.” In these two poets, writing close to a century apart, Skibsrud finds common ground that speaks to the uncloseable gap between subjectivity and objectivity, between the virtual and the actual, between the language we use and the spatial relations in which we live.

Skibsrud’s method throughout her book echoes the approaches of the poets she writes about. She discards genealogy, for better and worse, in favour of a looser assemblage. She focuses in, casting an attentive eye on the poetry itself to grapple with the questions it asks on the page. Dipping her toe into the method wars at the end of her discussion of Muriel Rukeyser, Skibsrud insists that we look to the poetic as a rejoinder to Eve Sedgwick’s sense of paranoid reading by resisting the urge to totalize understanding, instead offering “an

expression of the self-reflexivity fundamental to human being" that offers an "ethics of hope." In poetry, Skibsrud spies a kind of hope that emerges from the form's partiality – its instability, contradictoriness, and affectivity. Perhaps what Skibsrud finds in poetry is something like the understanding of critique that Gilles Deleuze draws from Friedrich Nietzsche: a critique that does not operate as a kind of justification but, instead, points to a different sensibility.

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Russell J.A. Kilbourn. *The Cinema of Paolo Sorrentino: Commitment to Style*. Columbia University Press. xxviii, 234. \$30.00

The Cinema of Paolo Sorrentino: Commitment to Style, written by Russell J.A. Kilbourn, at last provides a much-needed English-language monograph on the works of Italian filmmaker Paolo Sorrentino. Since Sorrentino's emergence as a prominent international auteur, the director's films have received nearly equal amounts of acclaim (Sorrentino's *The Great Beauty* [2013] memorably won best foreign language film at the eighty-sixth Academy Awards) as criticism: the negative reception often tied to the depictions of controversial Italian political figures and the harmful stereotyping of female characters. A scholarly foray into this controversial body of work was bound to be met with no shortage of challenges. The subtitle to this book (*Commitment to Style*) seemingly points to the films' formal flourishes, offering an early suggestion that the volume will choose to primarily revolve around the notable stylistic systems of the films, defined by frequent collaborator Luca Bigazzi's cinematography and his chiaroscuro lighting (contributing to what Kilbourn labels as a "spectacular image"). However, upon completion of the book's nine chapters, this assertion can only be said to be partially true. Kilbourn does not attempt to sidestep or circumvent the problematic social and political issues of the films in favour of the "spectacular image" but, instead, uses cinematic style as an important tool to help inform the films' ethical and political interventions. Indeed, Kilbourn, discussing the poles between realism and a spectacular illusionism in film (invoking a similar question by Rosalind Galt about Italian cinema) asks the reader in the introduction: "Why can't we understand Sorrentino's cinema as ethical, and therefore valuable, in and through the image?" *The Cinema of Paolo Sorrentino* ponders the image – the spectacular surface – in order to shine a light on gaps where critics have oversimplified or misinterpreted Sorrentino's political engagement and ambiguous narratives; likewise, Kilbourn shows no reluctance in acknowledging the films' shortcomings in featuring misogynist and sexist viewpoints. This volume adopts a chronological format, tracing the filmmaker's career from his directorial debut in 2001, with the film *One Man Up*, to *Loro* in 2018. The book's nine