

Classics and comparative studies

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‘The fact is, we are mixed in with one another in ways that most national systems of education have not dreamed of. To match knowledge in the arts and sciences with these integrative realities is, I believe, the intellectual and cultural challenge of the moment.’ [Saïd 1993: 331]

‘European tradition, especially the scholarly tradition, used to see the Greeks ... as unique and isolated, classical.’ [Burkert 2004: 1]

‘The days of an exclusively “classical” scholarship are over. To write about Greek literature without knowing something of the West Asiatic has become as impossible as studying Roman literature without knowledge of Greek. [West 1997: xi, quoting Petriconi 1964: 338, n. 18]

‘Greece is part of Asia. Greek literature is a Near Eastern literature.’ [West 1966: 31]

‘The primacy of the Greeks in the canon of Western literature is neither an accident nor the result of a decision imposed by higher authority; it is simply a reflection of the intrinsic worth of the material, its sheer originality and brilliance.’ [Knox 1993: 21]

‘Would it not be more correct to say that the literatures of the ancient Near East, taken as a whole, and the literature of ancient Greece, again taken as a whole, are after all phenomena of a fundamentally different order, incommensurable, not lending themselves to any juxtaposition in terms of “level” or “stage” – that they are not stages on the same path, but rather two different paths which set off from one point but in different directions? Is it indeed possible to apply the same criteria of genre development, authorial originality, and so on, say, to Ezekiel and Sophocles? If we recognize the one and the other as “literature” in the same sense of the word, we will offend both sides at once: first, we will insult the Greeks undeservedly, for we will reduce to nothing, dissolve in universal categories, all the unbelievable, unique initiative that belongs to them and to them alone; second, we will humiliate the non-Greeks, for we will measure their distinctive achievement by a Greek yardstick that is alien to them and describe those achievements in terms of “not yet” – the not yet attained, the not yet understood.’ [Averintsev 1999a: 2-3]

‘The effect of the distance between script and speech in historical logographic writings is that human thought communicated by such systems is simpler than thought common in speech, though with the obvious advantage of outlasting the speaker. Novelty of thought in logosyllabic writing, *tout court*, brings unintelligibility... While enabling highly refined forms of thought through its close alliance with speech, the Greek alphabet would badly disappoint the followers of Thoth, whose beautiful written signs were alive and able to harm or heal.’ [Powell 1997: 6-7 and 12]

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