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**John Taylor, *Classics and the Bible: Hospitality and Recognition*.
Duckworth: Classical Literature and Society Series 2007.
Pp. xi and 204. Price: £18.00. ISBN 978 0 7156 3481 3.**

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As John Taylor notes in his Preface, parallels between classical and biblical literature are little studied at the moment (ix), and so a general introductory volume on the subject is most welcome. The stated aims of the Classical Literature and Society Series are to consider Greek and Roman literature ‘primarily in relation to genre and theme’ and ‘to place writer and original addressee in their social context’ (on the back cover). The series is aimed at a general readership who may or may not have knowledge of Greek and Latin literature, and all texts are translated into English (vii). More specifically to this volume, Taylor offers ‘a series of connected essays’ which are ‘about reading’ and also ‘an invitation to read’ (ix-x). He certainly succeeds in introducing the non-specialist reader to a wide range of classical and biblical literature, and in drawing out and commenting on a particular theme, that of hospitality and recognition, in both traditions; discussion of genre and social context is, perhaps, not quite so successful.

The book is divided into five chapters; the first three explore the issue ‘from the classical side’ (ix), the fourth looks at the New Testament, and the fifth skims at speed over a selection of Roman authors and some aspects of later reception. Throughout the book, Taylor draws parallels between classical and biblical material, usually relating to theme or plot; the main structural difference is that, in Chapter One, he goes through the works of Homer (especially the *Odyssey*) looking for parallels and scenes of hospitality or recognition, while in Chapter Four, he uses the same method to explore the New Testament.

Chapter One, ‘Homer’, focuses mainly on Homer and briefly touches on Hesiod. Taylor describes each scene under discussion in detail and refers to a number of highly influential scholarly works on Homer, providing a useful introduction to the subject for a novice reader. However, some of the drawbacks to his approach are already apparent. He is perhaps over-reliant on the scholars he refers to, and many of the most interesting points he makes are, in fact, indebted to others. The parallels between the two literary traditions that he chooses to explore are often rather basic similarities in plot, and these parallels could be drawn between any number of mythic traditions and are not necessarily specific to the Bible or classical

literature; one section, for example, explores ‘the shadow of death’ (28). The main theme that Taylor sets out to explore is that of hospitality and recognition; rather than treat this theme in an extended section, he refers to it repeatedly throughout the book, with it resurfacing in amongst discussions of other themes. He provides a useful summary of the theme in Homer, with some Old Testament parallels, but fails to provide any in depth analysis beyond observing some similarities in plot. In several places, Taylor explains a point with reference to a much later work, an approach which may help those with no classical knowledge to place certain characters, but comes across as somewhat jarring to the classically trained reader (for example he compares Odysseus among the Phaeacians to a scene from *Figaro*, 10).

Chapter Two, ‘History, Tragedy and Philosophy’ is, as the title suggests, an extremely wide-ranging chapter in terms of the classical literature it looks at. Again, Taylor describes themes and plot similarities between the two literary traditions, but he fails to discuss generic differences; he notes that there are no tragedies in the Bible (36), but, in discussing ancient tragedies, fails to discuss the impact their different generic status has on their treatment of parallel themes (44-50, 54-58, 61-75). Taylor’s references to the Bible have a tendency to switch swiftly from Old Testament to New and back again with barely a pause to register the different times, cultures and literary traditions that produced the different parts of the Bible, at one point referring to Genesis and Revelation within the same sentence (50). His choice of parallels is often unusual; he compares the Witch of Endor scene from 1 Samuel, not to any of the well known classical witches, but to the *Iliad* and Sophocles’ *Electra*.

Chapter Three explores Virgil and Ovid, emphasising the fact, unknown to them, that they were writing at the turn of the era from BC to AD (76). Taylor suggests that ‘Virgil is to Homer broadly as the New Testament is to the Old’ (85) and this grossly over-simplified statement is symptomatic of Taylor’s treatment of the material. Chapter Four looks at the New Testament in particular. Chapter Five speeds through the rest of literary history, starting with Plutarch and ending with an extended description of *An Inspector Calls* (as an example of the theme of recognition). The structure of these chapters is much the same as the earlier two, with the same benefits and drawbacks.

Overall, Taylor’s book will provide a useful introduction to the literature of the Bible and of the classical world to those with no prior knowledge. However, its usefulness to the professional is hampered by its somewhat basic approach and its reliance on the work of other scholars. It is to be hoped that future studies may treat this fascinating subject in more depth.