Latin Literature

I still remember the thrill of reading for the first time, as an undergraduate, Frederick Ahl's seminal articles 'The Art of Safe Criticism' and the 'Horse and the Rider',[1] and the ensuing sense that the doors of perception were opening to reveal for me the (alarming) secrets of Latin poetry. The collection *Wordplay and Powerplay in Latin Poetry* is a tribute to Ahl, and all twenty-two articles take his scholarship as their inspiration.[2] Fittingly, this book is often playful and great fun to read, and contains some beautiful writing from its contributors, but also reflects the darker side of Latin literature's entanglement with violence and oppression. For the latter, see especially Joy Connolly's sobering discussion of 'A Theory of Violence' in Lucan, which draws on Achille Mbembe's theory of the reiterative violence of everyday life that sustains post-colonial rule in Africa (273–97), which resonates bleakly beyond Classical scholarship to the present day. Elsewhere there is much emphasis (ha!) on the practice and effects of veiled speech, ambiguity, and hidden meanings. Pleasingly, Michael Fontaine identifies what he calls 'Freudian Bullseyes' in Virgil: a 'correct word that hits the mark' (141) that also reveals – simply and directly – the unspoken guilty preoccupations of the speaker: Dido's lust for Aeneas, Aeneas' grief-stricken sense of responsibility for Pallas' death. A citation from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* provides the chilling final line of Emily Gowers' delicious article about what ripples out beyond the coincidence of sound of Dido/*bubo*. The volume explores subversive responses to power (for example, the articles of Erica Bexley and David Konstan), as well as the risk of powerful retaliation (Rhiannon Ash considers the political consequences of poetry as represented by Tacitus). There are also broader methodological reflections on interpretation, from musings on the reader's pleasure at decoding the hidden messages of wordplay such as puns, anagrams, and acrostics (as Fitch puts it, 'the pleasure of wit, combined with the pleasure of active involvement' [327]) to exploration of the anxiety of a reader who worries that they may be over-interpreting a text. Contributions variously address the 'paranoia' of literary criticism and the drive to try to ground meaning in the text and prove authorial intention: while John Fitch asks if the wordplay 'really is there' in the etymological names used by Seneca in his plays (314), Alex Dressler's article (37–68) helps frame the various modes of interpretation that we find in subsequent articles, by putting interpretation itself under scrutiny. His intriguing analysis introduces the helpful motif of espionage (interweaving Syme's possible post-war role in intelligence with Augustan conspiracy and conspiracy theories) and concludes that – like double agents – 'secret meanings' need a handler (53) and we readers need to take responsibility for our own partisan readings.

The link between wordplay and powerplay is a strong theme of another excellent collection, *Morphogrammata*, which explores the ludic yet panegyrical picture-poetry of the fourth-century poet Optatian, whose playing around with the visual form of words on the page has seemed to many critics the antithesis of poetry: clever, but lacking in

[1] Frederick Ahl, 'The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome', *AJPh* 105 (1984), 174–208; Frederick Ahl, 'The Rider and the Horse: Politics and Power in Roman Poetry from Horace to Statius', *ANRW* 2.32.1 (1984), 40–110.

[2] *Wordplay and Powerplay in Latin Poetry*. Edited by Phillip Mitsis and Ioannis Ziogas. Trends in Classics – Supplementary Volume 36. Berlin, De Gruyter, 2016. Pp. vi + 451. Hardback £89.99, ISBN: 978-3-11-047252-3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383517000092 Published online by Cambridge University Press

literary merit.[3] This volume mobilizes an interdisciplinary (and international) group of scholars to show that the techniques of riddling, bilingual letter-play, concealing words and phrases within the text in the manner of wordsearch games, and so on are not merely ingenious but are modes of engagement with some central aspects of early fourth-century culture: negotiations between Christian and pagan, past and present, emperor and subject, word and image. By rethinking this poetry, and seeking to understand the cultural dynamics that underlie it, this volume also sheds new light on the intellectual culture of Constantine's Rome. These are multicoloured, painterly poems, designed to be seen. The editors take this feature seriously, and experiment with ways of allowing their readers to experience the poems visually. The volume is bookended by two sets of illustrations, with further black-and-white illustrations reproduced within individual chapters throughout the volume. With the readability of the poems in mind, the book opens with a series of new typeset versions, prepared by Aaron Pelttari, of Optatian's *carmina cancellata* (gridded poems) and *imagines metrorum* – poems arranged in the shape of objects: a water organ, an altar and panpipes (28–51). Meanwhile, at the back of the volume are sixteen beautiful colour plates which include manuscript pages where the hidden words are picked out in colour, and also the editors' own imagined colour reconstruction of *Carmen* 22 that follows Optatian's description in *Carmen* 1 of his earlier poetry, 'all shining in purple, written with letters that glitter in silver and gold, 1.3–4' (60).

What Dressler describes as the 'tactical interplay…between politics and poetry' (*Wordplay and Powerplay*, 48) may also be at the heart of the *Octavia*, a play which, despite the uncertainty surrounding its date and authorship, is evidently about imperial power and its casualties, as we learn from Lauren Donovan Ginsburg's new study.[4] The structure of her book makes it an accessible introduction to the play for those who do not already know it, in addition to her persuasive analysis of its significance. After an outline of the entire play (21–3), the chapters proceed to treat it in sequence, section by section, mirroring the plot, and following it from the heart of the imperial family out into the streets of Rome, where imperial power interacts with the wider population. The author reads the play as a condemnation of the Julio-Claudian dynasty in both private and public spheres, which paints civil strife as part of the Augustan legacy right from the start of the Principate; there is particular focus on the play's engagement with Augustan literature to develop a more critical version of the early Principate than that offered by its contemporary poets. This is another valuable contribution to the growing scholarship on Roman cultural memory, which makes good use of the existing work on intertextuality and historiography to present the *Octavia* as a remembering of the Augustan age for a post-Julio-Claudian audience.

Wordplay and Powerplay offers several different approaches (from Fontaine, Putnam, and Davis, as summarized on pp. 8–9) to the troubling (or perhaps 'troubling' – see below) final scene of the *Aeneid*, which operate with various different assumptions

[3] *Morphogrammata/The Lettered Art of Optatian. Figuring Cultural Transformations in the Age of Constantine*. Edited by Michael Squire and Johannes Wienand. Paderborn, Wilhelm Fink, 2017. Pp. 530. 44 b/w illustrations, 16 colour plates. Paperback €78, ISBN: 978-3-7705-6127-8.

[4] *Staging Memory, Staging Strife. Empire and Civil War in the Octavia*. By Lauren Donovan Ginsberg. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xiv + 229. Hardback £47.99, ISBN: 978-0-19-027595-2.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383517000092 Published online by Cambridge University Press

about the relation between poetry and power: Fontaine finds new significance in the phrase *accensus furiis* (12.946), arguing that its irresolvable ambiguity makes it harder to settle the split between optimistic and pessimistic readings of the poem (147), while Gregson Davis argues that the execution of Turnus is in fact consistent with the demands of *pietas* (as found especially in Epicurean philosophy). Meanwhile, Hans-Peter Stahl slashes through such pessimistic/optimistic debates with a polemical work designed to settle once and for all that the *Aeneid* is a work of pro-Augustan propaganda.[5] Here the relationship between poetry and power is seen as less complicated than it has often been taken to be: poetry is in the service of power. On the pivotal question of Turnus' execution there is no (room for) ambiguity, for (for example) Barchiesi's 'difficult dialectic between compassion and revenge' (64): for Stahl the scene represents the logical climax of a work that casts Turnus as the villain in his impious disregard for the gods, and presents Aeneas' punishment of him as inevitable and righteous. The style of Stahl's argumentation is bracing and urgent, powered by impatience with the Harvard School and with other 'speculative and circuitous readings of the *Aeneid*' (62), as well as the modern yearning for a compassionate and humane Virgil, all of which he feels he must counter. Of course, for most of us the matter will not hereby be settled, and those who favour ambiguity will not be won over, but this is nevertheless both enjoyable (if you like blood sport) and useful, with incisive analysis of the poetry and interventions in debates. Moreover, in its forceful flow against the mainstream of literary criticism, this study offers an important reminder that one should be constantly mindful of one's own interpretative methods, and not allow oneself to be swept along heedlessly by critical fashions.

Le conflit propagandiste entre Octavien et Marc Antoine takes up the interesting topic of *vituperatio* and its role in the propaganda wars between Octavian and Antony in the years following the assassination of Julius Caesar.[6] The study's stated aim is to explore the extent to which *vituperatio* (vicious personal insults wielded as political weapons) was instrumental in Late Republican politics, and also to suggest that the origins of Augustan ideology can be found in the invective deployed by Octavian and his followers. The central idea of looking at invective *as* propaganda (with the problematics of the latter term properly acknowledged in the Introduction) is certainly a valuable one, and it is a worthwhile endeavour to take invective seriously as a political tool with political content and consequences. Yet I finished this study feeling that it had added little to what is already well known, and had in addition flattened some of the insights of previous scholarship into banality (an example which unsurprisingly caught my eye was the summary of Roman sexuality [261], which is wholly misleading in its oversimplification). The book is descriptive rather than analytical, and builds a speculative picture of events from limited sources, taking them more or less at face value. It is disappointing to find, once we turn to the specific themes deployed in the insults meted out on either side, that most of our source material is constituted by the familiar

[5] *Poetry Underpinning Power. Vergil's Aeneid. The Epic for Emperor Augustus. A Recovery Study*. By Hans-Peter Stahl. Roman Culture in an Age of Civil War. Swansea, The Classical Press of Wales, 2016. Pp. xii + 488. Hardback £45, ISBN: 978-1-910589-04-5.

[6] *Le conflit propagandiste entre Octavien et Marc Antoine. De l'usage politique de la uituperatio entre 44 et 30 a. C. n.* By Loïc Borgies. Collection Latomus 357. Brussels, Éditions Latomus, 2016. Pp. 518. Paperback €74, ISBN: 978-90-429-3459-7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383517000092 Published online by Cambridge University Press

passages in Suetonius. These passages are fascinating, but deserve to be discussed in their Suetonian context; a systematic treatment of the key sources *as sources* (Suetonius' *Lives*, Plutarch's *Life of Antony*, Cicero's *Philippics*, and the *Perusinae Glandes*), examining the light they might be able to shed on the practice of *vituperatio*, would have been preferable to the uncritical summary of their content. I also wanted more discussion of the social and rhetorical role of invective which underpinned this Late Republican deployment (rather than the line that Romans were practical people and would not have spent so much effort on it if they had not thought it was useful [39]). Recent global events have brought home that such a toxic marriage of conventional insults, exaggeration, and unsubstantiated rumour can be deployed to lethal political effect; this is a timely and fascinating subject and deserves a more insightful treatment.

Robert Germany's enjoyable and stimulating *Mimetic Contagion* takes a bold approach to its twin subjects, which are a concept and a text.[7] One focus is a very short, if crucial, passage in a single play by Terence: the lines in *The Eunuch* describing the painting of Zeus appearing to Danae in the form of a shower of gold, which catches the young man Chaerea's eye just before he rapes the sleeping Pamphila. In Germany's view, outlined in Chapter 1, the sexual intercourse with the sleeping girl was not premeditated; it is the painting that prompts Chaerea's action, and the scene is thus an encapsulation of the book's central idea that art can exert its influence on the world by inspiring imitation. There flows from this a very wide-ranging discussion of ancient ideas about mimetic contagion, or the power of art to affect real life. The book covers an impressive range of subject matter – including ecphrasis in the ancient novel, Plato and Aristotle on mimesis, ancient erotic art, the agency of objects, and ancient mime – and it displays deft treatment of complex ideas. Its form is somewhat experimental, with the risk that the centrifugal force throws out the discussion so far from the point of origin that coherence of thought cannot be maintained. Certainly, not all the material is immediately relevant to the interpretation of Terence's *Eunuch*, but the volume circles back to the play by Chapter 4, and concludes in an epilogue with a stimulating observation about the central role of the Perseus myth. Moreover, despite the diffusion of argument, each chapter is accessible, illuminating, and interesting in itself, and *in toto* the book spells out the extent to which the study of a work of ancient literature is never isolated, but must always be informed by the wider context of our classical learning, whether we acknowledge it or not. Ultimately, the book achieves the impressive feat of satisfying both as a rich discussion of the theme of mimetic contagion in antiquity and as an informative reading of Terence's *Eunuch*.

A. J. Woodman's commentary on Books 5 and 6 of Tacitus' *Annals* is the continuation of project begun by F. R. D. Goodyear over fifty years ago, and continued, both severally and in collaboration, by Woodman and Ronald Martin;[8] here Woodman's substantial commentary for the Cambridge Orange series now complements Martin's

[7] *Mimetic Contagion. Art and Artifice in Terence's Eunuch*. By Robert Germany. Oxford Studies in Ancient Culture & Representation. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. xi + 198. Hardback £55, ISBN: 978-0-19-873873-2.

[8] *The Annals of Tacitus. Books 5 and 6*. By A. J. Woodman. Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. xxi + 325. Hardback £89.99, ISBN: 978-1-107-15270-0.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383517000092 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Aris and Phillips commentary. Woodman's commentary is characterized by careful explication of text with particular attention to historical and philological detail, to the structure of the work, and to meaningful intratextual connections. His deep enthusiasm for Tacitus' writing is evident in the summaries and extended discussions of particular passages: of Tiberius sailing along the coast at the start of Book 6, for instance; of the significance of islands as liminal space at 6.1.1 (86–7), or of the meaning of the term *spintria* (90–2). In an appendix, Woodman provides a summary of Tacitus' portrait of Tiberius, emphasizing its coherence (302–15). He considers and dismisses Syme's question ('Is the Tacitean Tiberius largely and mainly the creation of Tacitus?', cited on p. 302) and he has some strong words on modern scholarly assumptions about Tacitus' working methods and the knowability of the past; instead this appendix examines the artistry of Tacitus' depiction of the emperor, and its careful composition. Syme is, as ever, the worthy adversary, as is Martin, with whom Woodman continues the interpretative tussles that enlivened their earlier collaborations (for example, 292–3).

To complement his 2013 study *Social Variation and the Latin Language*,[9] J. N. Adams has produced a substantial anthology of relevant source materials: selected passages of Latin that represent (linguistically) juicy instances of writing loosely categorized as 'informal'.[10] The numbered passages are arranged roughly in chronological order from the Early Republic to the tenth century. Each has an introduction, a text with translation, and a linguistic commentary, and is followed by a conclusion which summarizes key themes of linguistic interest in the passage. Adams modestly suggests: 'The volume might serve as a sort of practical or illustrative history of the Latin language over about 1000 years' (3–4). Indeed – though dipping in and out is rewarding as well, with all kinds of interesting titbits to be found, conveying a vivid sense of the range of the Latin language as it diverges from classical and formal: from curse tablets to imperial letters, from reported jokes and sexual innuendo to a late treatise on falcon medicine, from graffiti to translations of the Bible that show the influence of Greek and Hebrew on their modes of expression. Particularly interesting are cases where there is more than one version of the same text, so that comparison between different types of writing can be made – for instance, Text 15 compares two versions of a receipt for a loan from the archive of the Sulpicii which display different levels of literacy, and where the errors indicate a Greek freedman living in Italy whose literacy in Latin leaves something to be desired. In a helpful conclusion, Adams draws together some of the overarching themes of the material: there is a need to complicate the story that primitive Latin moved towards standardization in the first century (643); there is no such thing as a primitive version of Latin, and linguistic nuance and generic variation, for instance, can be seen in early Latin texts; there is no sharp division between the Early Republican and Later Republican periods; Cicero's Latin is an idiolect and should not be taken wholesale as representative of elite language of the day, as it has been conventionally; we must be cautious regarding the possibility of writing a history of Latin on the basis of the available evidence, and of drawing conclusions about periodization.

[9] J. N. Adams, *Social Variation and the Latin Language* (Cambridge, 2013).

[10] *An Anthology of Informal Latin 200 BC–AD 900. Fifty Texts with Translations and Commentaries*. By J. N. Adams. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. xi + 719. Hardback £120, ISBN: 978-1-107-03977-3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383517000092 Published online by Cambridge University Press

When it comes to periodization, Adams concludes that 'continuities, real or imagined, between early Latin and later periods need further investigation' (644); the new volume *Early and Late Latin. Continuity or Change*, which he has edited with Nigel Vincent, now picks up the baton.[11] This collection of eighteen articles (including a broad Introduction by Vincent and an Epilogue by Adams) asks what continuities there are between early and late Latin, and focuses in particular on challenging the notion of 'submerged continuities' that are present in the spoken language for centuries but do not appear in the extant classical texts. Such linguistic studies are well outside my own area of research expertise, and I cannot pretend to have anything to offer in the way of informed criticism of their detail, though I can tender my grateful appreciation for some illuminating studies. Over the seven years that I have been writing this review, the daunting obligation to range far beyond my intellectual comfort zone has brought with it the rewards of numerous eye-opening encounters with unfamiliar fields and methodologies, new texts, new interpretations, new scholars, and a world of enlightening scholarship with which I would not have otherwise engaged. I shall miss both the challenge and the pay-off, since this is my last Latin Literature review for *Greece & Rome*; I hope my successor finds it as rewarding as I have done.

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doi:10.1017/S0017383517000092

Greek History

Three cities dominated the late antique eastern Mediterranean: Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch. Constantinople was the late Roman re-foundation of an archaic Greek *apoikia*, Byzantion; Alexandria and Antioch were cities created by Alexander and his Hellenistic successors. This review includes two important books that examine the long-term history of two of these cities: Byzantion and Antioch. Both books stress the need to situate these cities within the landscapes and territories from which they drew their economic, political, and spiritual sustenance; both also adopt a long-term perspective, covering roughly a millennium each, which makes it possible to trace wider continuities, trends, and changes.

Thomas Russell's book on Byzantion[1] is the first local history of a Greek community that takes seriously into account the agenda of linking ecology, history, and anthropology that was presented by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell in *the Corrupting Sea* almost twenty years ago;[2] in this respect, it is a very important volume for a number of reasons. At the centre of the book's attention is how the peculiar and diverse micro-

[11] *Early and Late Latin. Continuity or Change*? Edited by J. N. Adams and Nigel Vincent. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. xx + 470. Hardback £74.99, ISBN: 978-1-107-13225-2.

[1] *Byzantium and the Bosporus. A Historical Study from the Seventh Century BC until the Foundation of Constantinople*. By Thomas Russell. Oxford Classical Monographs. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xviii + 290. 13 illustrations and maps. Hardback £75, ISBN: 978-0-19-879052-5.

[2] P. Horden and N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History* (London, 2000).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383517000092 Published online by Cambridge University Press