

Reviews

Pierre Laurens. *La dernière muse latine: Douze lectures poétiques, de Claudien à la génération baroque.*

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The essays contained in this collection of twelve chapters range widely across the field of postclassical Latin literature, but with a central focus on Renaissance and baroque poetry. Five chapters are written specifically for the collection, while seven others are revised versions of previously published articles. What they all share in common is an acute sensitivity to the sonorities and the imagery of poetry in Latin — and other languages — and an unerring ear for the French language in the translations that accompany most of the poems discussed. After an opening essay on nine epigrams by Claudian, followed by an essay on two medieval poems on precious stones, one by Marbodius of Rennes, the other from the *Carmina Burana*, there follow two chapters that focus on Petrarch. The first of these is a very fine analysis of the Italian poet's fascination with sound and rhythm, and his original and creative use of the dactylic hexameter in his epic poem *Africa*. The second examines *Familiares* 24.10, Petrarch's epistle to Horace, written in a Horatian style and anticipating, as Laurens suggests, Poliziano's *Sylvae* in its treatment of the role of imitation and intertextuality in Latin composition, and the notion of inspiration, or *oestrus*. Both these essays are characterized by a refreshingly sensitive appreciation of the musicality of postclassical Latin verse and a sharp understanding of the creative process at work in Neo-Latin writing. This is continued in chapter 5, a fascinating analysis of the central role of meter in poetry and the awareness of this in readings of Virgil by Salutati, Pontano, and J. C. Scaliger. In this highly stimulating essay, Laurens analyzes the relationship between sound and sense as perceived, not only by the three Italian humanists mentioned, but also by George of Trebizond and his own source, Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Laurens considers particular examples of the effect of certain sound combinations and, following Genette, points to the mimetic potential of sounds within individual words, even if words themselves may not be mimetic by nature. The good poet will always choose words whose sounds reinforce and enhance meaning.

Chapter 6 explores the theme of exile in one of the *Naeniae* (*Laments*) of the Greek poet Michael Marullus, who was conceived, as he liked to claim, in the city of Constantinople just before its sack by the Turks in 1453, and who expressed himself with great sensitivity to sound and rhythm in a language which he considered to be alien to his cultural heritage. Chapter 7 focuses on poems by one of Marullus's imitators, the hugely popular Johannes Secundus, whose neo-Catullan *Basia* (*Kisses*) helped establish a new genre of Renaissance love poetry. In this essay, Laurens points to various parallels between the young Dutchman's celebration of the lovers' embrace with both classical poets and contemporary authors. The eighth

chapter examines the vogue for Anacreontic poetry in the Renaissance, with examples once again from Secundus, but also the somewhat less well-known Kaspar Barth. Finally, the collection ends with four chapters on baroque poetry, in much of which the Latin language is pushed to extremes of creativity in order to convey sensibilities and themes that would have been far removed from the classical Latin aesthetic. This includes the imitation of bird song, or the beauty of a dewdrop.

These essays, then, are a stimulating invitation to appreciate the creative potential of postclassical Latin in a wide range of genres and forms. They focus on both well-known and more obscure authors but, in all cases, the musicality and allusive powers of the language are explored in a way that demonstrates its richness, while Laurens's French translations convey these qualities in exemplary fashion. This collection is a refreshing appreciation of postclassical Latin poetry, not in a narrowly academic sense, but one that presents it as an aesthetic experience in its own right. In some ways, it brings Neo-Latin writing out of the ghetto, and establishes it as a medium to be savored and appreciated on a par with the other European literary traditions that the author introduces by way of comparison.

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