

previous scholarship improve our understanding of this enigmatic poem and contribute valuable insights into its structure and allusions.

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NEW STUDIES ON LATE LATIN LITERATURE

ELSNER (J.), HERNÁNDEZ LOBATO (J.) (edd.) *The Poetics of Late Latin Literature*. Pp. viii + 534, ills. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. Cased, £55, US\$85. ISBN: 978-0-19-935563-1.

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2019 marks thirty years since the publication of M. Roberts's *The Jeweled Style* – a watershed moment in the study of late Latin poetry. Although the field has still to follow other areas of late-antique studies into the mainstream of Anglophone academic discourse, there are signs that it is starting to make up ground: a wave of monographs and edited volumes has arrived in recent years, with Roberts's book almost always cited prominently as a source of influence. This collection, comprising fifteen essays by scholars from institutions in the UK and Ireland, continental Europe and the US (including Roberts himself), is the most significant attempt since *The Jeweled Style* to highlight the distinctive poetic qualities of this historically undervalued body of literature. Like Roberts, Elsner and Hernández Lobato take a similar approach to the one pioneered by Alois Riegl – the art historian credited with coining the term *Spätantike* in the late nineteenth century – and situate literary texts in relation to the general aesthetic tendencies (*Kunstwollen*) of late Roman culture. Although they are careful to deny problematic notions of a *Zeitgeist*, their introduction invites us to see the Latin poetry of this period as sharing a 'cultural frame' (pp. 17–18) with various other types of artistic production (architecture, sculpture, silver plate, ivories, mosaics etc.). For example, the spoliation of decorative elements from earlier imperial monuments on the arch of Constantine in Rome is analogous to the way in which borrowings from classical sources are put to new purposes in poetic centos (pp. 8–11), which are the subject of Elsner's contribution (Chapter 5; cf. pp. 178–81). Miniaturisation, hybridisation and allegorical interpretation of pagan myth are also identified as trends common to both literature and visual art in Late Antiquity (pp. 11–16).

Roberts's mode of analysis is more formal, focusing on the patterns of symmetrical composition that Riegl himself pinpointed as a key characteristic of late Roman aesthetics. The beginnings of this 'jeweled style' are observed here in a study of *De aue phoenice*, an elegiac poem of the early fourth century attributed to Lactantius (Chapter 12). Anticipating a fashion that would be followed by Latin poets for at least another 250 years, Lactantius exhibits a marked preference for description over narrative: the reborn phoenix, with its gilded feathers, emerald beak and sapphire eyes (vv. 129–42), is portrayed as a kind of *objet d'art*, while Roberts demonstrates that the opening passage depicting the grove of the sun (vv. 1–28) is organised along the same lines as later architectural ekphrasis (pp. 379–81). These features could also be seen as examples of the 'materialist aesthetics' that M. Squire (Chapter 1) examines in the oeuvre of Lactantius' contemporary, Publilius Optatianus Porphyrius – the P.O.P. of what Squire calls 'POP art'. Optatian's *carmina figurata*, with their ingenious arrangements of verses in assorted shapes and symbols, blur the traditional disciplinary boundaries between philology and art history (p. 28). Squire's lavishly illustrated

chapter explores this interface in minute detail, comparing Optatian's pictorial poetry to the juxtaposition of texts and images in late-antique mosaics and illuminated manuscripts, as well as the wider concern of early Christian intellectuals with the relationship between verbal and visual representation (pp. 48–53).

The literature of Late Antiquity does not only appeal to the eyes, however, and several of the essays pertain to poetics in the technical, linguistic sense of an orientation towards the symbolism of sounds. Another aspect of Optatian's work emphasised by Squire is the effect of fragmentation produced by the breakdown of each text into separate units, from individual lines of verse all the way down to specific characters, and I. Gualandri (Chapter 3) explains how late Latin authors zoomed in with microscopic attention on both the sound and sense of single words. Augustine, in particular, displays a rhetorician's sensitivity to the harshness or smoothness of certain combinations of letters and syllables as well as an interest in the exotic foreign accents of Hebrew names (*De doctr. Christ.* 4.7.17) and other rare words (pp. 131–6). The closing chapter, by G. Clark (Chapter 14), also delves into the poetics of a figure who, it was remarked at the 2012 colloquium that preceded this volume, represents a large empty space in late-antique literary studies (pp. 424–5). As is well known, Augustine was ambivalent to classical poetry, whose specialised idiom would have been largely incomprehensible to the average member of his congregation in Hippo, but Clark makes clear that he was open nonetheless to the possibility of poetry helping ordinary Christians to respond to God. Among Augustine's contemporaries in the orbit of Ausonius in Gaul, on the other hand, the expressive potential of classical verse forms was being tested to very different ends, as F.E. Consolino's (Chapter 2) essay on polymetric experimentation in Late Antiquity shows.

The writings of Augustine demonstrate that the poetic function of language is by no means restricted to literature in verse, and other contributors to this collection draw further parallels between late-antique poetry and prose. In a suggestive reading of the preface to Book 2 of *De raptu Proserpinae*, S. Harrison (Chapter 7) connects Claudian's identification with Orpheus to the rhetorical *prolaliai* in which earlier imperial writers like Apuleius and Lucian introduce their recitations by likening themselves to figures from myth. In this way, Claudian appears to reclaim the role of public performer, which rhetors had usurped from poets during the 'second sophistic' (pp. 248–50). Similarly, C. Ware (Chapter 11) calls attention to Claudian's emulation of prose panegyrists, whom he follows in undermining the authority of mythological epic at the opening of his own poem praising Stilicho's victory at the battle of Pollentia, *De bello Getico* (pp. 360–7). Ware's discussion is an excellent complement to the overview of fourth-century Latin panegyrics offered by R. Rees (Chapter 10), who traces a distinct upward curve in the prevalence of 'poetic colour' (i.e. use of epic diction, figures, allusions etc.) in the period between Constantine and Theodosius (pp. 339–44). Arguably, no other individual was more influential in this rise in poeticism than Pacatus Drepanius, who claims that future poets will take their subject matter from his panegyric of Theodosius (*Pan. Lat.* 2(12).47.6) – and S. McGill (Chapter 8) notes in a fine study of revision in the circle of Ausonius that the most eminent poet of the fourth century revered Pacatus for his literary acumen (pp. 269–75).

The challenge to poetry's cultural status presented, not by epideictic rhetoric, but by patristic prose provides the point of departure for M. Mastrangelo's contribution (Chapter 13). After the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy took on new vehemence with the intervention of early Christian thinkers like Jerome and Augustine, Mastrangelo argues, Boethius attempted to bring them to compromise under the *Platonis Musa* (3.M11.15) of his prosimetric *De consolazione Philosophiae*. Together with Prudentius, Mastrangelo credits Boethius with developing

a fully Christianised poetics, reconciled to the limitations of language in the search for divine truth (pp. 420–3). This sort of postmodern unease with the problematics of signification is seen as widespread in Late Antiquity by Hernández Lobato (Chapter 9), who reveals the presence of what he describes as a ‘poetics of silence’ in the writings of a range of Latin authors, above all Sidonius Apollinaris. In a review of *The Jeweled Style* that indicates how much opinions have changed over the last three decades, J.B. Hall complained that ‘Prudentius and Claudian, who are fine writers, have something to say, and know how to say it: Ausonius and Sidonius, who are at best second-rate, have to say something, and polish it excessively in the hope of making it seem to be something important’ (*CR* 41 [1991], 361). On the contrary, claims Hernández Lobato, Sidonius’ poetry is, quite by design, ‘equivalent to a prolonged silence’ (p. 287).

In view of how the intellectual world of late-antique authors was transformed by conversion to Christianity and the collapse of the Roman Empire, how helpful is it to approach the literature they produced along the same lines as that of their canonical predecessors? Two of the essays in this collection, by H. Kaufmann (Chapter 4) and M. Formisano (Chapter 6), seek to open debate about our habits of reading late Latin texts. Kaufmann, adding to a growing bibliography on the intertextual dynamics of late-antique poetry, suggests that writers like Dracontius and Corippus employ a wider array of allusive modes than those that Latinists tend to identify in the work of classics like Ovid (pp. 162–4). Formisano also questions the suitability of intertextuality and allusion as ‘hermeneutic tools’ for understanding the literature of Late Antiquity (p. 208), in presenting his ‘new allegorical’ interpretation of three poems that are all deeply concerned with their own place in the classical tradition: Ausonius’ *Mosella*, Claudian’s *De raptu Proserpinae* and Rutilius Namatianus’ *De reditu*. These methodological proposals are intriguing, but Elsner’s discussion of the Narcissus cento (*Anth. Lat.* 9 Riese), which falls between Kaufmann’s and Formisano’s chapters, shows how much the close reading of poetic allusions still has to contribute to our appreciation of the neglected texts of this period. By pursuing the intertextual connotations of each Virgilian phrase to the fullest possible extent, Elsner turns a poem that was excluded from Shackleton Bailey’s edition of the *Anthologia Latina* on the grounds of artistic bankruptcy into a profound reflection on nostalgia for the past.

Elsner’s image of this ‘late Narcissus’, captivated by an ideal that he can never make his own, is a fitting illustration of the vision of late Latin poetics advanced in this book (p. 204). The editors argue in the introduction that the ‘crisis of identity’ (p. 2) brought on by Christian estrangement from the classical world links late-antique writers with us, their modern readers, who also have to acknowledge that ‘Antiquity . . . is not wholly ours’ (p. 1). I do not disagree with this point, although I must admit to being less comfortable with the way it is framed with appeals to ‘the foundations of modern Western culture’ in the ‘fusion of Greco-Roman culture with . . . Christianity’ (p. 1). Beyond any aesthetic objections, it was the multiculturalism of late Latin literature that required its marginalisation in the nineteenth-century academy, as part of the larger project of inventing what is now referred to as ‘modern Western culture’. More than our notional classical or Christian inheritance, the practice of mixing and matching different, often opposing, cultural traditions – the ‘appropriationism’ (p. 8) highlighted here – is what ensures the continuing relevance of Late Antiquity today. In this respect, Elsner’s Narcissus, probably patched together in Africa under the rule of the Vandals, is a timely symbol for the field to take forward.

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