

I. WILLIS, *NOW AND ROME: LUCAN AND VERGIL AS THEORISTS OF POLITICS AND SPACE*. London: Continuum, 2011. Pp. ix + 186. ISBN 9781441120519. £60.00.

Originating from her Leeds dissertation, Ika Willis has produced a challenging book on the relationship between political order and terrestrial space as witnessed in three (epic) poems, Vergil's *Georgics* and *Aeneid* and Lucan's *De bello civili*. The book follows the structure of five chapters and four short interludes, in addition to an introduction, and the customary bibliography and indices at the end. As W. claims in the Introduction ('Empire after Earth'), 'this is a book about light-speed telecommunications technology in Latin epic' (1). W. links the Latin poets' preoccupation with the definition or disturbance of spatial boundaries and political order to the contemporary theorists' anxiety concerning the relationship between national territory and the technological space of information transmission. Thence the title of this book, *Now and Rome*, invites the reader to contemplate 'the Romanness of now' but also the 'nowness of Rome' (3), that is, the 'contemporary urgency' we shall find in reading the ancient texts through a modernist perspective. In this chapter, W. explains the rationale behind her choice to read Vergil and Lucan against the backdrop of modern theoretical writings concerning earth and technology, by investigating the possibility that, according to Jacques Derrida, in the ancient world dislocation is brought about by simple means of marking or traversing space, such as the plough for instance, as in today's world, technology is often perceived as the principle reason behind the feeling of delocalization.

In the first chapter ('*Aratrum* (Plough): Hannah Arendt and the Agricultural Archive'), W. embarks upon an examination of Vergil's didactic poem, where 'ploughing is figured first of all as originary mark-making' (22). Vergil's description of the primeval cultivation of the earth by means of the plough also marks the beginning of political space (cf. Varro's etymology of *urbs* from *orbis* and *uruum*, 'plough'), inasmuch as the space of the city is inscribed into the earth, the first *polis*. Similarly, in the *Human Condition*, Arendt delineates the boundaries of the *polis*, its walls, as the space of organized remembrance, the space which ultimately provides protection and stability for human affairs. W. does not tackle the question of Vergil's choice to portray the earth here in its post-Saturnian state, post the Golden Age, and what it betokens in the context of Augustan Rome (only a vague reference to the orientation of the poem in n. 30, pp. 139–40). The interlude briefly touches on the transformation of the rôle of the plough in civil war in both Vergil and Lucan.

The second chapter ('*Fulmen* (Lightning): Paul Virilio's Politics at the Speed of Light') addresses the proximity of Virilio's 'shrinking of geophysical space' (38) as a consequence of technological advances (in his *Speed and Politics*) and Lucan's portrayal of Caesar as the lightning speed, the man who manages to win because of his ability 'to keep moving through space without stopping, without slowing' (39). According to Virilio, however, the direct effect of light-speed technology wreaks havoc on political space, as Lucan's Caesar also does by erasing boundaries and unleashing the chaos of civil war on a global level.

The second interlude offers a very short glimpse into the originator of civil strife in Rome, Romulus, and the murder of his brother Remus, as the eradication of familial distinctions and the blurring of categories, such as friend and enemy. This serves as the springboard for the third chapter ('*Hostis* (Enemy): Carl Schmitt and the War of the Words'), where W. looks at the crossing of the Rubicon in the *De bello civili* as a spatial and verbal negotiation on Caesar's part to redefine the space of the political in terms of boundaries (Rubicon) and words (citizens vs. soldiers, enemies vs. friends). Carl Schmitt's *Nomos of the Earth* serves as an illustration of Caesar's actions, since, according to Schmitt, this *nomos* consists of the reorganization of land, that is, the spatial reordering of the earth in accordance with the permutations brought about by international law and war. Some of the examples discussed in this chapter, however, needed further explanation to draw out the parallelisms, and I believe the author could have further elaborated on the complexities of Schmitt's thought.

Ch. 4 ('*Fas* (Speakability): Jacques Derrida's Writing of Space') opens with the observation that Pompey's tomb in Lucan's *De bello civili* 8 looks back to Jupiter's prophecy with regard to the space of the (future) empire in *Aeneid* 1. Then W. explores the details of Aeneas' journey as a trip mobilized by a series of informational events, such as portents, prophecies, and auguries, and sanctioned by *fas* and *fata*. W. brings into the discussion Derrida's thoughts on the nature of the double space of writing, that is, writing as an expression of the here-and-now but also as an articulation of the transcendence of space and time. I must confess that W. does not make her

points clear enough in this section, with the result that some of the valuable insights on *fas* (vs. *nefas* in Lucan) may be lost, as the reader essays to decipher the connections with Derrida.

Finally, the fifth chapter ('Now: the Angel, the Boat and the Storm in Walter Benjamin') expounds on the perversion of *fas* into *nefas* by Lucan's Caesar and the obliteration of resistance, be it the Roman people's against the oncoming tyranny of the (future) emperors after Caesar or Lucan's own resistance, for ever silenced by Nero himself and the poet's suicide. To this reading of Lucan's poem, W. juxtaposes Walter Benjamin's model of successful resistance. For Benjamin history is the site of politics and of revolutionary struggle: 'our actions create new political spaces, causal nexuses, historical trajectories' (127) and thus disrupt the extent of sovereign power.

I believe W.'s ambitious project could have taken into account the political context of the poems examined here. Ultimately, I was left with a lingering question: what does all this mean for Augustan or Neronian Rome and the socio-political context of these very different two periods? Some readers will find several readings of the ancient texts through the modernist theory lens persuasive, while others less so. W. presents here a daring, and often difficult, interpretation of well-known poems, frequently with insightful ideas, which at times, however, fall short of having been exploited for their full potential and beg for further discussion that need not be as cryptic or packed. This is nevertheless a book worth reading, especially by those interested in the very often much-criticized relationship between Classics and theory.

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N. BREITENSTEIN, *PETRONIUS, SATYRICA 1–15. TEXT, ÜBERSETZUNG, KOMMENTAR* (Texte und Kommentare. Eine altertumswissenschaftliche Reihe 32). Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2009. Pp. xviii + 238. ISBN 978311022082-7. £119.95/US\$168.00.

Declamations on the decline of rhetoric, polymetric poetry containing a disquieting number of interpretive cruxes on the one hand, shady business in the forum and the escape from a lupanar on the other, not to mention lacunas, alleged interpolations, or the author's virtuoso play with not only Roman, but also Greek literary traditions — the first fifteen chapters of the preserved text of Petronius (certainly not 'the opening of the *Satyricon*', as the publisher's promotional text refers to it) have much to offer a tiro desiring to obtain a PhD in the Classics in the old-fashioned way of our great ancestors, i.e. by preparing a commented edition of an ancient text. The revised version of Breitenstein's thesis, completed in 2008 at the University of Bern, is yet another weapon, alongside G. Vannini's 2010 commentary on *Sat.* 100–15 and P. Habermehl's on 79–141 (the first volume was published in 2006), used by de Gruyter in a recent campaign to remind us that what survives of Petronius is not limited to the *Cena*. A comparison between B.'s work and those two commentaries is difficult to avoid, but I will put B.'s book on the bookshelf next to A. Aragosti, P. Cosci and A. Cotrozzi, *Petronio: l'episodio di Quartilla* (*Satyricon* 16–26.6) (1988), since with these two volumes we have a complete commentary on the preserved fragments of *Sat.* preceding the *Cena* — a fact overlooked by B., who does not even mention the Italian book.

As is clear from the preface, B.'s book was conceived primarily as a commentary, but its main part is preceded by a brief general introduction to the study of Petronius, also specifically, to the part of *Sat.* treated in B.'s volume, and by the Latin text, which is accompanied by a German translation, intended, as B. tells us, to facilitate study of the text while having no literary pretensions (1). A bibliography and general index are at the end of the book. The introduction is extremely concise, yet well-written and instructive. The list of alleged interpolations is particularly useful (xiv). B. athetizes only five out of the twenty-eight words or phrases that have been suspected, from which we can infer that her methodological preference is to defend the transmitted text. The reader should not be disappointed by the briefness of remarks on the style, language and literary merits of *Sat.* in the introduction, as they receive proper treatment in the excellent introductory discussions of each episode within the commentary. But B. does not do full justice to Petronius' work when she dismisses the problem of the *Prosarhythmus* to a single footnote and declares that the study of rhythmical clausulae as part of editorial practice seems to her 'sehr unbefriedigend' (xii, n. 12). Vannini recently showed in his commentary on *Sat.* 100–15 that the rhythmical