

BOOK REVIEW

Iambic Poetics in the Roman Empire. By TOM HAWKINS. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. xi+334. Hardcover, \$99.00. ISBN 978-1-107-01208-0.

Tom Hawkins finds iambic poetics at work in an impressive range of texts in this stimulating monograph. One of the greatest virtues of this book is that it offers careful analyses of understudied works. Ovid's *Ibis*, Babrius' *Mythiambi*, the poetry of Gregory Nazianzen, Dio Chrysostom's *First Tarsian*, Lucian's *Pseudologista*, and Julian's *Misopogon* all benefit from Hawkins' meticulous readings. This eclectic group of authors "all lived in a world in which the autocratic power structures of the Roman Empire organized a great deal of everyday life" (4). The pressures of empire and autocracy are part of what, for Hawkins, encouraged the deployment of iambic poetics in occasionally unexpected places by unexpected authors. The iambic tradition offered relatively safe modes of expressing personal anger and frustration, and the flexibility of iambic poetics meant that they could be deployed in a variety of social and literary contexts. This flexibility is well illustrated by Hawkins in the six chapters and six 'interludes' that comprise this book.

In his thorough 31-page introduction, Hawkins explains that his study will not only examine the reception of iambic poetry and poetics in the works of imperial authors, but also the appropriation of Archilochus' biographical tradition, which Hawkins suggests "offered a powerful dramatization of a narrative with universal appeal, namely the defense of ethical behavior after the transgression of communal norms" (1). Given the universality of this narrative, readers may not always agree with Hawkins when he specifically identifies Archilochean poetics in the diverse selection of texts featured in this book. Dio, Lucian, and Julian overtly compare themselves with Archilochus in their works, making their conscious association with the iambist more obvious. Hawkins helpfully contextualizes each author's relationship to the iambic tradition with introductory remarks in each chapter. This is especially important in the later chapters which focus on less widely read texts.

Hawkins' willingness to propose and pursue as many paths of inquiry as he does is admirable, and his discussions are characterized by erudition and clarity. The opening chapter on Ovid's venomous *Ibis* is a good example of this: Haw-

kins seems to explore every possible interpretation of the poem's title, even venturing into a discussion of the poetic potential of the eponymous bird's physiological processes (73-77). In this chapter, Hawkins' assessment of the *Ibis* as "a hybrid monster, an elegiac invective that takes its breath from iambic models" is particularly appealing (34). Hawkins proposes that Ovid's overt denial of iambic intent, his "iambic dissimulation", becomes an integral feature of the imperial iambic tradition. The following two chapters on Babrius and Gregory Nazianzen illustrate these authors' unique strategies of iambic dissimulation: Babrius claims that his choliambic fables lack iambic bite, and Gregory injects his iambic invectives with elements of Pindaric epinician, which Hawkins claims is "a genre starkly opposed to archaic *iambos*" (144). Hawkins' analysis of Gregory's vindictory use of the iambic mode to "bolster his new identity as a holy man living outside the traditional power structure" and attack his enemies is particularly compelling (180).

The second half of the book examines iambic poetics in the works of Dio Chrysostom, Lucian, and the emperor Julian. In Chapter 4, Hawkins explores how Dio appropriates the legacy of Archilochus to censure the citizens of Tarsus for their increasing effeminacy in his *First Tarsian*. He suggests that the remaining two authors featured in his study may have intentionally modeled their texts on Dio's (186). Lucian, of course, puts a humorous and playful spin on Dio's moralizing tirade in his *Pseudologista*. In his final chapter, Hawkins shows how an adaptation of iambic poetics helps Julian construct "a response in which his anger conforms to the carnivalesque logic of the festival" in his *Misopogon* (293).

This book offers many new insights about the texts under study. More broadly, it provides a thoughtful meditation on the afterlife of Archilochean poetics in the Roman Empire. Hawkins' clear and engaging style facilitates his reader's progress through some rather dense lines of argumentation. The density is not unwelcome however, as Hawkins has an impressive ability to illuminate several layers within texts. This study will likely find its primary audience among scholars and advanced graduate students who are interested in the works and authors it investigates.

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