

BOOK REVIEW

Motherhood and the Other: Fashioning Female Power in Flavian Epic. By Antony AUGOUSTAKIS. Oxford Studies in Classical Literature and Gender Theory. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. xiv + 314. Hardcover, £63.00/\$110.00. ISBN 978-0-19-958441-3.

The epics of the Flavian Age have become the subjects of an ever-increasing and welcome number of monographs that have brought out the poems' literary, intertextual, cultural and political complexity. Add to this now their engagement of issues of gender with *Motherhood and the Other: Fashioning Female Power in Flavian Epic*, a rich and challenging study by Antony Augoustakis. Though the role of gender has not been absent from scholarship on Flavian epic, Augoustakis' work is the first book-length study and introduces a new theoretical perspective to the debate.

The Introduction ("Other and the Same: Female Presence in Flavian Epic") presents an overview of the book and describes its theoretical underpinnings particularly in the psychoanalytic theories of Julia Kristeva involving concepts such as the symbolic realm (male/paternal, the aspect of language that allows it to refer) and the semiotic realm (female/maternal, pre-/non-verbal), as well as their implications for understanding gender, otherness and foreignness. In adopting a Kristevan framework, Augoustakis explores both the way that female characters in Flavian epic are marginalized and how they are shown to voice opposition to male leaders, who often take action harmful to the state and people: "This portrayal of female figures allows us to examine the change of attitudes toward otherness, especially when the notions of otherness and motherhood are fused in the narrative to suggest a change in the concept of what constitutes sameness, or in other words Romanness, through depictions of otherness, of women from the (either literal or figurative) periphery" (20–1).

Augoustakis analyzes the *Thebaid* in Chapter 1 ("Mourning Endless: Female Otherness in Statius' *Thebaid*"), focusing on the figures of Hypsipyle, Jocasta and Antigone, and on the mourning with which the epic ends. For Augoustakis, motherhood functions as "the locus of expansion of otherness," and he shows well how "the retreat" of mothers and other female characters "into the

semiotic, namely the utterance of Bacchic cries (Ismene in Book 11, the Argive women in Book 12) or complete silence (Hypsipyle's ekphrastic stillness in Book 6) speak volumes for the relegation of the female to the fringes of the epic landscape and the reinforcement of gender and generic boundaries" (90–1).

The remaining three chapters focus on Silius Italicus' *Punica*, in which Augoustakis finds a very different interaction between the semiotic and symbolic realms in their expression of male and female, same and other. Chapter 2 ("Defining the *Other*: From *altera patria* to *tellus mater* in Silius Italicus' *Punica*") examines the relationship of characters to their *patria* and to the Italian *tellus*. To do so, he concentrates on various warriors, Asbyte in Book 2, Anna in Book 8 and the important role of Tellus at the end of Book 15. Augoustakis demonstrates that masculine rapport with the *patria* is often revealed to be flawed and harmful, thereby opening up to question the very meaning of *Romanitas*. By contrast, the maternal figure of Tellus provides a conception of the fatherland and Romanness that does not relegate the female to the margins but merges male and female, same and other, to bring about Rome's ultimate success against Hannibal.

In chapter 3 ("*Comes ultima fati*: Regulus' Encounter with Marcia's Otherness in *Punica* 6"), Augoustakis insightfully explores two competing representations of Regulus in the First Punic War that are voiced to his recently wounded son Serranus: first, the androcentric view of Regulus' former comrade Marus (in which Regulus' wife Marcia is relegated to the periphery), and, second, the view of Marcia herself. Marcia's perspective is subversive, asserting that Regulus is a failed model for their son Serranus, and she thus "signals a departure from established norms and as a result constitutes a centrifugal force from the accustomed norms of previous Roman leadership towards a new model, soon to be embodied by Scipio" (159).

Chapter 4 ("Playing the Same: Roman and Non-Roman Mothers in the *Punica*") discusses Silius' treatment of several foreign female figures (e.g. Imilce, Masinissa's mother, and the Magna Mater), persuasively showing how the *Punica* ultimately offers a solution to how Romanness and otherhood can be integrated in such a way as to entail Roman success. By the epic's end, "Silius' vision of womanhood and motherhood is satisfied and completed with the 'entrance' of the female into the male symbolic, according to Kristeva, into language, politics, time, and ultimately culture" (198). The poet thus gives voice to an "idealised cosmopolitanism, on what is Roman and what has the potential to become Roman" (237).

The book closes with an epilogue (“Epilogue: Virgins and (M)others: Appropriations of Same and Other in Flavian Rome”) in which Augoustakis ties the incorporation of the other/women into the center in Flavian epic with the cosmopolitanism that may be glimpsed in the Flavian visual arts (particularly the Cancelleria Reliefs and the *Domus Augustana*).

Augoustakis has written a stimulating book that provides a new and provocative perspective on female characters in Flavian epic. From this review, it should be clear that not all of Flavian epic is covered: Valerius’ *Argonautica* and Statius’ *Achilleid* are largely omitted (as the author notes), and only one of the four main chapters deals with the *Thebaid*. The focus is thus largely on Silius. Nonetheless, Augoustakis’ study will make us think more complexly about gender, foreignness and Romanness in the *Argonautica* and *Achilleid* as well, and how such reconsideration can affect the potential meaning of “Flavian” in “Flavian epic.” Some will find the Kristevan framework difficult at times, but *Motherhood and the Other* will surely generate productive debate and new interpretations.

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