

## BOOK REVIEW

*Musa Pedestris: Metre and Meaning in Roman Verse.* By Llewelyn MORGAN. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. x + 412. £78.00/\$130.00. ISBN 978-0-19-955418-8.

This ambitious book aims to convince Latinists that meter is not just a category for formal analysis, but an important constituent of meaning in Roman poetry. Each meter, Morgan argues, constitutes a literary tradition with its own distinct character, or “ethos.” As distinct from its formal characteristics, a meter’s ethos accrues from its association with one or more distinctive authors and/or subjects. Often this association is with its eponym or perceived inventor, but further associations accrete over time. So, for Catullus, the Sapphic strophe conveys vulnerability, privacy, and domesticity through its association with Sappho, but for Horace it also carries an association with Catullus, and for Statius with Horace. To recover the ethos of a meter, Morgan looks at ancient metrical practice in light of ancient metrical theory; and although moderns often disdain the metricians as historically inaccurate, Morgan shows their value as evidence of ancient perceptions of a meter’s origin and associations. Morgan applies this methodology through numerous and detailed close readings, in chapters on the hendecasyllable, the non-dramatic iamb, the Sapphic strophe, and the hexameter. The individual readings vary in elegance and success, but they demonstrate the value of this new approach to meter in Roman poetry.

After an introduction that demonstrates his method on Priapeans (which share an ethos with Priapus) and Sotadeans (which connote sexual deviancy because of the *κιναιδολογία* of their namesake Sotades), Morgan attempts in each chapter to reconstruct the ethos of one meter. The chapters are long (65–103 pages), because they combine close reading with a survey of relevant evidence from the metricians. At his best, Morgan uses these to present a general overview of a meter’s history and development. Where the evidence is less congenial to overview, however, his organization can be difficult to follow. The book ranges widely over Latin literary history—this is one of its virtues—but in doing so, it often moves in unexpected directions. Nevertheless, some of its *obiter dicta* are quite interesting, like the claim that *ἡσυχία* as part of the Sapphic ethos may

help explain Catullus's remarks about *otium* in his translation of Sappho fr. 31 (Cat. 51.13–16).

Chapters 1 and 2 are the book's shortest (65, 67 pages), but do the best job combining close reading with overview. Chapter 1 treats the hendecasyllable, the history of which is hazy before Catullus and the Neoterics (its consequent malleability, Morgan suggests, may be one reason the Neoterics favor it). Among other findings, Morgan here shows the usefulness of metrical theory by examining Catullus' use of this meter in light of rival theories about its origins. Although the dominant critical tradition (Varro, Bassus, Quintilian) regards the meter as ionic and therefore effeminate, Catullus apparently knows about another theory (also in Bassus) that regards it as iambic, since he represents his hendecasyllables as *iambi* and therefore as aggressive (*truces vibrare iambos*, 36.5). In Chapter 2, Morgan discusses the Romans' highly artificial use of iambic meters other than the trimeter: the choliamb, known for its metaliterary limp; the so-called pure iambic trimeter, which is delicately Hellenizing in Catullus 4 but elsewhere charged with iambic aggression; and the epodic meters of Horace, which imitate those of Archilochus. This chapter provides an excellent overview of these meters, which variously exploit what ancient critics saw as the iamb's originally aggressive character (lost from the trimeter because of its adoption for tragedy).

Chapters 3 and 4 are longer (103, 94 pages) and less cohesively organized. Chapter 3 treats the Sapphic strophe, which, as noted above, projects an ethos of vulnerability, privacy, and limitation. Chapter 4 addresses the dactylic hexameter, which Morgan rightly claims is the standard of comparison for other meters, just as epic is the standard of comparison for other genres. Because of its association with Homer and the epic tradition, the hexameter projected grandeur and achievement. In Italy, it also represented artistic refinement on the model of Greece, as seen when Ennius contrasts it with the native Italian Saturnian meter (fr. 206–7 Sk.). Morgan's chapter deals mainly with the genres/meters that oppose themselves to the epic hexameter, especially satire (epic's "evil twin"), which turns the tables and uses the same meter to decry Hellenizing and Greek influence as pretension. It also treats Saturnians, which project nationalism and archaism after the introduction of the hexameter, and the elegiac couplet, in which Ovid and others are well known to play on the tension between alternating hexameter and pentameter lines.

This is not an easy book to read, and it sometimes oversimplifies complex phenomena. It pays very limited attention, for example, to the relationship be-

tween meter and genre. But although readers will not agree with Morgan at every point, there is much here that is intuitively right, and Morgan's methodology is clearly valuable. In approaching meter, Morgan makes arguments similar to those that Hinds and others have made about genre: Roman poets tendentiously reinterpret the rules of decorum, finding in a genre or meter some new and original capability, which is nevertheless firmly rooted in literary history and theory. This book, therefore, will be valuable not only for those who work on meter, or on Catullus, Horace, Statius, and Martial, but also for Latinists who work with issues of genre as well.

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