BOOK REVIEW

Roman Literary Culture: From Plautus to Macrobius. By ELAINE FANTHAM. 2nd Edition. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. Pp. xx + 338. $30.00. ISBN: 978-1-4214-0836-1.

Fans of Elaine Fantham's *Roman Literary Culture: From Cicero to Apuleius* (1996) will be cheered by the arrival of a second, expanded edition of the book that, as the title indicates, widens the scope of the original monograph. Now two new chapters, one on pre-Classical poetry and prose and the other on the survival of Classical literary culture in Christian writers, bookend the work and make it even more of a companion volume to Conte's *Latin Literature: A History* - as Fantham herself envisaged in the preface of her first edition (reprinted in this edition; xvii).

Although Fantham has not taken Sander Goldberg's suggestion of substituting a synchronic structure for the diachronic (*BMCR* 97.3.38), she has taken a number of his other suggestions to heart. The most important of these, as she states in her new preface (x-xi), is to liberate our conception of Roman literature and literary culture, as other scholars like Goldberg and Wiseman have begun to do, from Cicero's and Varro's, chiefly by transcending their preoccupation with Greek models and with "public" productions and official records. As a result, her new first chapter is significantly titled "Starting from Scratch." Since the middle chapters remain largely unchanged—although the bibliography and notes have been updated in light of new scholarship—I will restrict my comments to the new chapters.

Fantham begins the new first chapter (16–51) reviewing early dramatists and comic writers, placing them in their original context and highlighting their synthesis of Greek influences from Southern Italy and Alexandria with native Roman concerns. Patriotic *praetextae* and the political memoirs and poetry of the late 2nd and early 1st centuries bc receive her particular attention as marks of nascent Roman independence from Greek models. But she especially notes attempts by early authors to contemplate literary culture and history and their places within it: e.g. the tragedian Accius authored at least 50 plays but also treatises on grammar and spelling reform, as well as nine books of *didascalica* to set up a chronology of his

predecessors (31–2). In this way she provides better groundwork for her treatment of Cicero and Varro in chapter 2, which is largely retained from the first edition. She also describes the slow rise of social Latin verse in elite circles during this period with Lucilius and his imitators 40–43), beginning a tradition that leads through Catullus to the "quasi-erotic nonsense" of Pliny the Younger's friend Sentius (209) and beyond.

Fantham's last chapter "Classical Literary Culture and the Impact of Christianity" (247–87) traces through the analysis of select authors and works the changes introduced to and the continuity maintained in literary culture in the later, Christian centuries of the empire. Classicists sometimes fear that they may lose their bearings once they tread onto Christian soil: when Fantham notes early on how in his *Apologeticus* Tertullian says that God gave mankind *instrumentum litteraturae* "so that they may seek Him out" (250), the reader may fear that he or she has lost sight of the land of Cicero and Ovid. But when she outlines the Ciceronian character of Minucius Felix's *Octavius* and Lactantius' deep engagement with Cicero, Vergil, and the Roman jurist Gaius, the reader realizes that though the landscape has changed, his or her feet are still on the ground.

Fantham is judicious in her selections in this last chapter, picking authors and events that well illustrate the Classical literary life in a time of change. For instance, a discussion of Ausonius' *Mosella*, illustrating the poet's absorption and elaboration of Vergil and Statius, leads to a brief description of the estrangement between him and his increasingly pious friend Paulinus of Nola. The premier event in the culture war of the 4th century, the controversy over the Altar of Victory in the Senate House, is told through literary analysis of Symmachus' prose *Relatio* 3 and Prudentius' reply in verse.

Short sections of the final chapter are also devoted to Jerome's *Letters* and Augustine's works, especially his *City of God*, as well as Claudian's secular poetry. The *Saturnalia* of Macrobius, the intellectual heir of Gellius and Plutarch and a student of all things Vergilian, serves as a proper capstone of the book, as he was "the last writer of antiquity to treat the secular classics on their own terms, recognizing and revering both their artistry and their moral purposes" (286). One may also note that Macrobius marks the end of the Roman conception of education that Fantham traces from the Republic to the Hellenophile days of the High Empire and into Christian times; thereafter Classical education and literary culture largely withdraw into the cloister.

Only a couple and very minor typographical errors caught my eye: "simper" for "semper" (50) and "495" instead of "395" as the date of Claudian's first poetry

in Rome (272). In the table of contents one of the sections of chapter seven is entitled "Choices of Literary Career: Fame or Survival?" (vii), but the same title lacks the question mark in the body of the text (190). Fantham also wrongly assigns Polemo's *Physiognomy* to his rival Favorinus (220)—something no doubt the shade of the latter would smile at. But these in no way detract from her expanded and improved book. In short, scholars who possess the first edition will find more than enough reason to justify buying this one, and those who have not read the first have an even better reason to read the second.

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