

BOOK REVIEW

The Space that Remains: Reading Latin Poetry in Late Antiquity. By AARON PELTTARI. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014. Pp. xi + 190. Hardcover, \$49.95. ISBN 978-0-8014-5276-5.

Aaron Pelttari's *The Space That Remains* intends to show how readers of Latin poetry in the fourth century acquired new importance, as poets and commentators invited their readers to help make sense of their subjects. The book describes techniques used to enable readers to contribute to the meaning of compositions that were considered as texts "needing" interpretation. Pelttari acknowledges that every technique he treats in the book has parallels in classical literature, but he emphasizes that the fourth-century Latin West saw the rise of "an entire constellation of tropes that draw out the reader's involvement" (4).

In Chapter 1, on the theory and practice of interpretation, Pelttari notes that "Augustine celebrated the fact that Scripture could have different meanings for different individuals" (24). Augustine accepted divergent individual interpretations, however, that were aligned with *caritas*, and it might be important to add that, for Augustine, Scripture was univocal in its "meaning." Pelttari enlists Jerome as a constructive reader as well by noting that instead of publishing new and independent compositions, Jerome made interpretation of existing texts "the source of his significant literary authority" (17). Pelttari's most convincing example is Macrobius and the widening range of interpretations of Vergil. He is right to emphasize that in Macrobius, "the creativity of late antiquity is concealed under the guise of simple exposition" (33).

Chapter 2 considers the effect of prefaces that began to be added to commentaries on older poetry and to collections of new poems. These introductory pieces allowed late-antique authors "to enact for their readers one possible approach to the text" (10). One ought to ask, however, whether the tendency of late antique writers to offer a preferred reading was meant to invite readers to construct individual meanings or rather to focus readers' interpretation. Whichever the motivation, Pelttari rightly concludes that the addition of interpretive prefaces suggests that readers were thought capable of interpreting works vari-

ously, whether their authors wanted them to interpret freely or wanted instead to hem them in.

Chapter 3 applies Umberto Eco's concept of "open texts," writings deliberately constructed to operate on "multiple distinct syntactic levels" (73). Pelttari illustrates techniques intended to promote openness, including both physical and the rhetorical devices. Thus, pattern poems, Proteus poems, and *versus intexti* are open from the use of physical devices; allegory, typology, and personification use metaphors and tropes to produce open narratives by operating on more than one level. Also, centos constantly present earlier texts to the reader. Pelttari claims that a cento must be read through its source (98) but then acknowledges that the reader may always enjoy a cento apart from its intertextual foundations (101). One may wonder whether the anonymous commentator who claimed that Proba's cento was Vergil "mutatum in melius" was suggesting that "the success of that transformation depended on the reader's reception" as Pelttari claims (112), or that the transformation was thought of as already effected by the centolist's rearrangement.

Chapter 4, on intertextuality, focuses on literary allusion. At what points in a text, Pelttari asks, does a poet who alludes to an earlier poem expect readers to relate the contexts of both works. Pelttari catalogs various kinds of references, following R. Thomas Conte and other critics. Some references are made to compel the reader to recognize the author's skill in manipulating his source. Sometimes, as in cases of *Kontrastimitation*, a late antique poet used allusion to repudiate the content of an earlier classical source. At other times poets who wrote on Christian themes repeated classical sources without attempting to reform them. The difficulty of agreeing upon whether a source is being praised or repudiated is perhaps this book's strongest appeal to the need for a reader's participation.

Many studies of literature fall under the heading of reader-response theory, the branch of literary criticism that examines the reader's role in determining what a text may mean. Here is a thoughtful, occasionally frustrating contribution to those complex efforts. The study offers valuable considerations of what is particular about the reader's role in late antiquity, but at times it belabors aspects of poetic expression and reception that are always in force.

Within the admittedly limited scope treating only one century, the work contributes to the appreciation of a literary culture in transition, about which there is still much to learn to appreciate. While Pelttari largely overlooks biblical epic poetry for being faithful paraphrases, I have attempted to demonstrate

(1993) that to consider them as mere verse translations is to overlook the same features Pelttari is advocating here. Further, inviting readers to engage creatively in discovering and producing meaning in texts became stronger in the two centuries that follow, with allegorical interpreters of Vergil like Fulgentius.

Pelttari's writing is well organized, although readers will find some literary-critical jargon and much repetition of the thesis. There are helpful indices and a bibliography. Citations of the Latin poetry are accompanied by accurate translations. The translation of *Ep.* 53.4 Jerome, however, reads *revelata facie* as "[God] in his unveiled appearance" (14). This should rather be understood as "with [the beholder's] face unveiled." *Lectio* (70) in the context may mean "recitation," "reading aloud," instead of "interpretation." Francis (87, 180) should be Frances.

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