

BOOK REVIEW

The Art of Veiled Speech: Self-Censorship from Aristophanes to Hobbes. Edited by HAN BALTUSSEN and PETER J. DAVIS. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2015. Pp. vi + 328. Hardcover, \$79.95. ISBN 978-0-812-24735-0.

The Art of Veiled Speech is a wonderful collection of essays examining free speech, censorship, and self-censorship. The collection is useful alone for teasing out the distinctions between the latter two terms. Though there is no essay tying together the threads from the various essays (more on that below), most readers will come away with an understanding of the nuances of self-censorship and veiled speech; for example, self-censorship can be an act of fear or an act of resistance depending on the time and place. The editors and individual authors do a convincing job of showing the persistence and near-universality of self-censorship across two millennia of western history and literature.

There is too little space here to devote time to all the chapters in *The Art of Veiled Speech*, so I will make a few general comments about the chapters and then highlight a few of them. All of the essays in this collection are well written and thought provoking in their own ways. Unlike some collections, which exhibit an unevenness in quality from essay to essay, there is a genuine consistency to quality and scope across the chapters. Each chapter consists of about fifteen pages of text, followed by a couple of pages of notes, and then a bibliography. The length of the essays immediately followed by notes and bibliography allows each essay to stand on its own and provides a certain ease of reading. The only drawback to this format is that there is no comprehensive bibliography, so if a reader is searching to see if a particular work has been consulted, especially if it is a work that speaks to free speech and censorship generally, then one has to rifle through the individual chapter bibliographies.¹ There is, however, a comprehensive index.

Roughly two-thirds of the essays address antiquity; this ensures a certain relevance and interest for classicists, and the editors correctly identify antiquity as

¹Two examples that came to my mind as I was reading were Shadi Bartsch's *Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), which is referenced once by John Penwill, and James C. Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), which I did not see referenced at all.

fundamental to understanding the topic (3). The essays addressing later topics (chapters ten through fourteen), however, are some of the strongest and are written in such a way to be accessible to most readers. Moreover, these later chapters add a greater dimension to understanding not only the general topic but also the earlier chapters. For example, chapter ten by Pauline Allen, ostensibly on the practices of Christian letter-writers, provides many details that would also pertain to classical epistolographers.

A willingness to put political questions to texts and circumstances that have typically been interpreted as apolitical is an achievement of this book, particularly the chapters addressing antiquity, and is perhaps best demonstrated by Marcus Wilson's chapter on Seneca's *Epistles*. As Wilson states, "The epistles are so ostentatiously apolitical, they are political (140)." Wilson demonstrates this point by examining Seneca's conspicuous citations of Epicurus early in the *Epistles*, which has puzzled many readers of this Roman Stoic. Epicurus famously called for a withdrawal from politics. The Stoics too allowed for a withdrawal from politics, but only when the political environment had become too tyrannical. Thus to quote a Stoic would clearly mean that Seneca was openly suggesting that Nero had become a tyrant. By quoting Epicurus, Seneca's would be philosophical opponent, he makes the same claim but only for those with the eyes to see it. Many of the chapters deliver such insights.

The only significant critique I have of *The Art of Veiled Speech* as a whole is that it misses the opportunity to draw together some of the over-arching aims stated in the first chapter. The editors do provide an epilogue, but this is a scant three pages and is only very general. I think there could have been a substantive chapter reflecting on the connections and synergies between the individual essays, as well as a recognition of any changes over time in self-censorship. The astute reader, thanks to the quality of the essays, will likely notice some of these on their own, but that will be by accident rather than by design. Just one example from my own knowledge: in chapter 12, Megan Cassidy-Welch records the testimony of William Fournier before the Inquisition, to which he testified that an acquaintance had called the inquisitors "false prophets' who 'prosecuted good men (259)." William effectively distanced himself from these words, but the double meaning could still be read as an act of resistance, some might even describe it as an act of truth-telling. A similar story is recalled by Tacitus (*Annales* 1.74.3) when Caepio Crispinus accused Granius Marcellus of speaking maliciously about the emperor Tiberius. Whether Marcellus was guilty or not is beside the point; the accusation

was believed because Crispinus had selected Tiberius' worst, yet all too well-known, characteristics to put into the mouth of Marcellus. Crispinus, just as William of Fournier, spoke truth in the face of power and survived by crediting the words to another. Whether the editors would have thought of this particular example is uncertain, but in the absence of an attempt to get at such connections the reader is left to their own store of knowledge.

This last critique aside, the editors and authors are to be commended for producing a well-written, well-edited volume that will illuminate our understanding of free speech and censorship. Given its breadth of topics, this book will be of interest to many readers, including those with an interest in antiquity and the middle ages as well as those with an interest in the modern world.

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