

BOOK REVIEW

*Canidia, Rome's First Witch*. By MAXWELL TEITEL PAULE. London: Bloomsbury Classical Studies Monographs, 2017. Pp. 218. Hardcover, \$85.99. ISBN 978-1-350-0038-0.

The subject of this short book is Horace's three early poems on the witch Canidia. An introduction inquires "What is a Witch?" and discovers that she represents a highly variable figure just in Greco-Roman literature, let alone cross-culturally. Three subsequent chapters discuss each of the poems in which Canidia has a starring role (*Epodes* 5 and 17, *Satire* 1.8). As the only female figure who recurs in the *Epodes*, she serves as a programmatic figure for the genre.

Paule views Canidia as a malleable fiction whom Horace adapts to the local needs of each poem. Like Catullus' Lesbia, she cannot be fit into a coherent narrative. Otherwise it would be difficult to make a consistent character from the figure who can torture a young boy in *Epode* 5, yet run terrified from a farting Priapus in *Satire* 1.8. The Greco-Roman witch figure covers a diverse category, from Theocritus' Simaetha to Lucan's Erichtho to Apuleius' Meroe. The names for witches do not always map to their activities, especially the catch-all terms anus and saga, and Canidia also resembles demonic figures such as the lamia and empusa. In this regard, Roman witches are as old as Rome itself, as the prohibition against their activities in the Twelve Tables would suggest. Thus it is difficult to see in what sense Canidia was Rome's "first" witch, and the book does not advance much in the way of this *illa prima* claim beyond its title. Johnston's description of the witch as the "clay with which people mold images of their fears and anxieties" (*Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, Leiden 1995, 371) is the most pertinent for this book.

In Chapter 2, Paule reads *Satire* 1.8 as a metanarrative, as self-conscious as *Satires* 1.1, 1.4, and 1.10, of Horace's struggle to compose the *Satires*. Canidia's threat to Maecenas' efforts to convert an old pauper cemetery to a pleasure garden models Horace's anxiety over intrusion of elements from foreign genres. These include bucolic (e.g. Virgil *Eclogue* 8), epic (Homer *Odyssey* 10), and iambic (Horace's own *Epode* 5). Priapus' use of farting as a weapon rather than penetration is a sign that this is a gentler version of iambic than Callimachus' *Iambi*, an important background for Horace's *Epodes*.

Chapter 3's interpretation of *Epode 5* as a companion to *Epode 16* and negative response to Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* is more problematic. Paule reads this odd poem as Horace's expression of fear of returning civil war rather than trusting in the promise of peace. It is inconsistent to be (correctly) told to reject the colorful imaginations of the scholiasts who made Canidia the pseudonym of a perfume seller named Gratidia, but then be told that through a "happy coincidence" (87), she can be the analogue of P. Canidius Crassus, who replaced Pollio as suffect consul in 40 BC. Paule also sees civil war in the threatened boy's "Thyestean" oaths that conclude the poem, which leads to a train of association that ends with comparing Octavian to Orestes. The presence of a name that recalls Canidius Crassus's and the fact that the boy of *Epode 5*, like the boy of *Eclogue 4*, are the only unnamed boys in their respective collections, are not enough to make civil war a significant theme in this poem.

The more pertinent literary problem comes in judging the tone of the poem: where does it fall on the spectrum between farce and terror? (Or is the better image Stephen King's description of humor and horror as "Siamese twins"?) Canidia and her fellow witches torture a young boy and plan to extract his liver to craft a love potion. These activities would indeed be terrifying if we were to take them literally. But an audience raised on mime might recognize them as preparatory to a sudden escape or reversal as in *Satire 1.8*. Watson (*A Commentary on Horace's Epodes*, Oxford 2003, 182–191) draws on this background to argue, among other points, that the boy's curses might have put the witches to flight. In its effort to emphasize Canidia's terror, the present book dismisses the mime genre far too summarily as a pertinent background and the interpretive possibilities of humor mixed with horror.

Chapter 4 reads *Epode 17*, Horace's farewell to iambic, in the contexts of ritualized insults that chase away demons. The chapter offers a lengthy comparison between Canidia and other sexually voracious female monsters, including the empusa driven away by Philostratus' Apollonius of Tyana, and the witch Meroe who destroys Socrates in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. A complementary reading examines *Epode 17*'s recapitulation of earlier epodes and Canidia's programmatic role as the antithesis of Maecenas, closing the collection by threatening Horace where the patron opened it. Ovid's Dipsas is analogous to Canidia in her role as a blocking figure whose voice opposes the narrator's, but she receives no discussion in this book.

The brief concluding chapter focuses on Horace's three minor mentions (*Epode 3*, *Satire 2.1* and *2.8*) of Canidia, which present her as a generic figure

of misfortune. It draws the modest conclusion that Horace adapts her to multiple contexts and does not make her consistent. This book could have used substantial editing: the quotations are unnecessarily lengthy, there are too many numbered lists, and conclusions are restated multiple times. Ferriss-Hill's *Roman Satire and the Old Comic Tradition* (Cambridge 2015) was presumably too recent for inclusion.

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