

## BOOK REVIEW

*Roman Literature under Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian: Literary Interactions, AD 96–138.* By ALICE KÖNIG and CHRISTOPHER WHITTON, eds. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. 473. Hardback, \$135.00. ISBN 978-1-108-42059-4.

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Was there a particular *Zeitgeist* in the literary culture after Domitian? How did literary figures think of themselves, their predecessors and their contemporaries under the first three of the “five good emperors”? What sort of literary and cultural interactions are apparent in the authors active from the 90s to 130s CE? The eighteen contributions of this volume address these questions and more through a variety of interpretative and methodological lenses, with intertextual and New Historicist readings driving a majority of the essays (although the contributors often want to stress how they have moved past “the snake pit of intertextuality”).<sup>1</sup> The editors give a “manifesto” for the volume: “*Literary Interactions* is a call to work harder at reading high-imperial texts in their mutual context, and to attend to their dialogues (and lacks thereof) in as many ways as may be profitable” (28). As a whole, the volume succeeds in spades; while contributors stress the interactions between Pliny and Martial prominently and expectedly, there are also strong claims for Juvenal, Quintilian, Tacitus and Frontinus as especially important representatives of the illustrative “interactions” under consideration.

The first group of essays focuses on literary connections. Whitton’s “Quintilian, Pliny, Tacitus” opens with a reflection on his title “Quite a pretentious title, to be sure” (37) that sets the reader up for the self-conscious style of his compelling essay. By exploring the intertextual nooks and crannies of Tacitus’s *Dialogus* and

<sup>1</sup> A quotation that Henderson employs (425), which references the title of Soerink, J. 2013. “Staius, Silius Italicus and the snake pit of intertextuality,” in G. Manuwald and A. Voigt, eds. *Flavian epic interactions* (Berlin), 361–78.

Pliny's *Epistles*, first in relation to Quintilian, then in dialogue with one another, Whitton is able to detail Tacitus's antagonistic response to Quintilian and Pliny's use of Quintilian to delineate facets of his literary self-fashioning. Rimell brings together the odd couple of Martial and Tacitus to explore Domitian's death, *libertas*, and the drama of *fama* in Book 10 of the epigrams and *Agricola*. Tacitus's *Agricola* and *Historiae* are read through the lens of Valerius Flaccus in Buckley's piece, which points out "the shared intellectual preoccupations, ideological manoeuvring and even parallel allusive strategies shared between Valerius and Tacitus" (107). It is a helpful reminder in a volume that downplays Flavian epic in general (Stattius's *Thebaid* is only mentioned once and poor Silius is absent altogether from the *index locorum*). Fitzgerald ruminates on duplicity and dupes by juxtaposing Pliny and Martial, which evokes the dissimulation and dissidence common in studies of the Age of Nero. *Mirabilia* from Martial to Juvenal is the topic of Ash's diachronic study and she shows how topics such as floating islands and the *spectacula* of the arena "demand contextualization and comparison with previous marvels... and lend themselves to dialogic readings which transcend textual and temporal boundaries" (145). Roche teases out how Suetonius may have utilized Pliny's *Panegyricus*, while Kelly makes the case that the Juvenalis of Martial 12.18 is the satirist Juvenal; thus the *imitatio* of Juvenalian satire found in that poem points to an earlier date of publication of Juvenal's first book of *Satires* (c.100–101 CE).

The second section of essays deals with "Interactions on and off the page" and stresses how such connections occur through recitation, personal acquaintance and less textual forms of interconnection. Recitation's blend of competition and cooperation is the topic of Roller's stimulating essay, which applies Mauss's theory of exchange and reciprocity to the world of recitation (especially as seen in Pliny and Juvenal). Mratschek investigates the way Martial and Pliny reference the prominent senator L. Domitius Apollinaris and shows that each author invokes Apollinaris to further define themselves vis-à-vis patronage, politics and *otium*. As with the literary interactions above, this essay stresses the learned intertextual play found in Martial, redeployed in Pliny, and appreciated by the ideal reader and addressee, Apollinaris. Frontinus is named twice in Martial *Epigrams* 10, and König explores in a sophisticated manner how Frontinus can evoke the political transition from the Flavian period to Nerva and Trajan as well as his literary work *De aquis*. In becoming a "cultural object" (Marchesi's term, 352), Frontinus takes on a variety of social, political, and literary resonances for Martial to exploit in his epigrams. Two pieces discuss Pliny's letters to Trajan; Harries

stresses the juristic background of such a collection and Lavan places them in the larger context of imperial correspondence, which alleviates some of their idiosyncrasies. Morello is interested in the way Republican *exempla* are modified by Martial and Pliny during the short reign of Nerva. The counterfactual mode of these *exempla* “becomes an important marker of modernity, as new manipulations of the cultural expectations on which Rome’s sometimes rather leaden exemplary traditions rested imply a disconnection from the past” (328). Keeping *exempla* center stage, Langlands examines how an oral account of a soldier falling on his own sword was employed by Tacitus and Suetonius at diverse moments of the civil wars of 69 CE. This “floating anecdote,” almost like an urban legend (Langlands compares it to the “Christmas Truce” of 1914), provides a type of exemplary truth but from an oral, extratextual, tradition.

The third section highlights silence, gaps, erasures and the limits of such interactions, literary or otherwise. Marchesi’s provocative chapter asks why Lucan is not found in Pliny’s *Epistles* and discovers an answer in the way Martial had positioned both Lucan and Regulus in his *Epigrams*. Her findings stress how “any production of meaning in canonical texts takes place in the immediacy of social and political tensions of the present and contributes to determining its cultural geography of power” (365). Uden’s consideration of educational texts and the common ways in which they discuss children shows the broad pedagogical interconnections between texts that might at first glance seem far apart – Juvenal, Quintilian and pseudo-Plutarch (*De liberis educandis*). Gibson tries out his creative writing chops by penning a dialogue between Plutarch, Pliny the Younger and Sosius Senecio (*Dialogus de moribus*). Although Pliny and Plutarch do not speak about one another in their extant works, Gibson utilizes his fictional dialogue as an alternative methodology “for engaging the imagination and the intellect in otherwise conceptually difficult or aesthetically challenging subject areas” (418), and pointing out some of the major issues of this collection as a whole. Combined with Henderson’s “Envoi/Venio” piece that concludes the volume, it certainly makes a fitting final duet to this challenging and rich collection.

This volume offers a strong argument for considering this to be a unique period with its own literary concerns, political standpoint(s) and cultural contexts. The essays are uniformly strong. As much as they inform our understanding of the Nerva-Trajan-Hadrian era, these essays are very much the product of our own time; these scholars at times personify the “ideal readers” posited by

Geue who seem to be “enhanced cyborg versions of ourselves” (369) in their ability to sniff out the lightest traces of connection, critique and even absence.

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