

BOOK REVIEW

Complex Inferiorities: The Poetics of the Weaker Voice in Latin Literature. Edited by SEBASTIAN MATZNER & STEPHEN HARRISON. Oxford, UK and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. xiv + 320. Hardback, \$94.00. ISBN 978-0-19-881406-1.

C*omplex Inferiorities: The Poetics of the Weaker Voice in Latin Literature* is the result of a conference held September 2014 at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. The book consists of an introduction and thirteen essays, supplemented by collective References, General Index and Index Locorum. The basic focus of the volume is to consider “the deliberate assumption of a weaker voice by speakers who, in fact, hold sufficient status not to be forced into this position” (2) and to explore “the literary and cultural-political possibilities opened up by assuming and speaking in voices of weakness and inferiority” (3). The various examinations of a variety of text focus almost exclusively on inferiority presented according to gender and social status.

The essays are written in diverse styles and cover a range of texts, both poetic and prose. The introduction by Sebastian Matzner explains the reasoning behind the overall focus and presents a brief review of the individual essays. The first essay by William Fitzgerald, “Claiming Inferiority: Weakness and Strength,” addresses the poet’s speaking voice in a variety of Latin lyrics, concentrating on claims of taking up lesser genres and of suffering. The second essay is “How Do You Solve a Problem Like Horace? On Roman Philhellenism and Post-Colonial Critique” by Sebastian Matzner who examines perceptions and presentations of the cultural relationship between Greece and Rome, and how that relationship informs Horace *Ep.* 2.1. Third, Amy Richelin analyzes skin color in *palliata* to suggest status hierarchies among the characters in “Blackface and Drag in the *Palliata*”; fourth is “Social Inferiority and Poetic Inferiority- Martial’s Revenge in his *Epigrams*: A Commentary on Martial 5.13,” Jean-Claude Julhe’s examination of Martial 5.13 in terms of three inferiorities: economic, geographic, and literary. Essay five is Tom Geue’s “Drawing Blanks: The Pale Shades of ‘Phaedrus’ and ‘Juvenal,’” addressing inferiority within authorial self-representation and personal anonymity. Essay six, “The Creative Superiority of Self-Reproach: Horace’s *Ars*

Poetica” by Victoria Rimell, addresses self-fashioning and presentation alongside the values and practices behind forms of censorship. Essay seven is Ellen O’Gorman’s “‘The Noise, and the People’: Popular *clamor* and Political Discourse in Latin Historiography,” in which the author considers the collective voice of the citizenry as presented by Tacitus and Livy, among others. Eighth, in “Loud and Proud: The Voice of the *praeco* in Roman Love Elegy,” Dunstan Lowe explores the perception of the *praeco* in Roman society and uses of associated vocabulary and techniques in Ovidian love elegies and Horatian satire. Ninth, Stephen Harrison, in “Hidden Voices: Homoerotic Colour in Horace’s *Odes*,” addresses questions of homoeroticism and ambiguity. Essay ten, G. O. Hutchinson’s “On Not Being Beautiful”, discusses how standards of beauty in Latin love poetry express hierarchies of value and perception. Eleventh, Vassiliki Panoussi’s “From Adultery to Incest: Messalina and Agrippina as Sexual Aggressors in Tacitus’ *Annals*,” argues that the trope of the older sexually aggressive woman from Livy and Cicero through Tacitus emphasizes attributes that eventually attribute greater power to the women. Twelfth is Shadi Bartsch with “The Aeneid as ‘Weaker Text’ and Fulgentius’ Radical Hermeneutics,” looking at how the Vergilian work was presented as proper or improper for later audiences, especially Christians. The final essay, “Cowherds and Saints: Paulinus of Nola Carmen 18,” by Phillip Hardie, discusses a Christian poet’s use of some of the Classical poetic techniques of presenting the superiority and inferiority of characters.

The styles of the essays range from the highly technical to the conversational. Some essays use footnotes to suggest sub-arguments, while others do not. Approaches vary from close reading to feminist theory to formal logic. This variety could prove attractive to mid to upper level undergraduates because there is likely something in this volume that is accessible to a variety of levels of experience with academic prose and Classical subject matter. For the more advanced scholar, the variety is a reminder that academic writing of this kind can be done in different ways and still be effective. More advanced scholars might also appreciate some of the more novel approaches presented. The ideas and readings are generally interesting to anyone with some degree of knowledge and interest in Latin poetry, history and historiography and general culture.

The diversity of this collection also presents potential problems for some readers concerning the levels of detail in terminology and translation of some of the texts and concepts. For example, in O’Gorman’s essay, some of the Latin and Greek quoted is paraphrased as opposed to translated, and terms like “lalangue”

and “glossolalia” are used but not immediately defined, which might prove challenging for someone not familiar with the citations or terminology. Similarly, Hutchinson’s essay requires a reader to be familiar with the notations of formal logic, knowledge without which the essay would be difficult to follow. This is not a complaint, but rather a notice that the styles and analytical approaches do vary to an extent which might make some of the essays difficult for those with less experience or expertise.

Overall, this volume presents a series of essays that are closely connected by the theme, but also widely diverse. It has a lot to offer in terms of ideas and approaches that might be applied beyond the texts directly considered within. *Complex Inferiorities* would be a good addition to any general library collection, as well as a resource for those interested in uses of voice and characterization in a range of Latin literatures.

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