
This is a remarkable book, containing as it does essays on the political engagement of almost every major Latin author of the early imperial period, as well as Cicero and Lucretius from the late republic and Flavius Josephus. Silius Italicus is a notable absentee. Given the centrality of epic poetry to the scholarly work of Dominik and Roche, his absence is clearly due to forces beyond their control. They suggest as much in their first chapter. The high quality of each of the individual essays is also remarkable and results in an excellent collection. For scholars familiar with the debates over the political stances of Augustan writers, this book has another remarkable feature. Discussion of Ovid and his contemporaries has been bedevilled since 1992 by Kennedy’s argument that the opposition between the terms ‘pro-Augustan’ and ‘anti-Augustan’ is essentially meaningless.¹ I refuted that position in

² Manning notes that the use of demotic was in decline by the second half of the second century BC (p. 193) and was giving way to Greek (p. 204).

³ Perhaps xenophobic reaction to immigrants and Ptolemaic policies of making Egyptians feel secure in their traditional systems helped the Egyptians to retain a common identity as Egyptians.

What is remarkable is that it is clear from this volume (as well as from the scholarship on Neronian and Flavian literature more generally) that Kennedy’s argument has had no impact on the study of post-Augustan literature.

The editors perform in chapter 1, ‘Writing Imperial Politics: the Context’ (pp. 1-22), the tasks that we expect of such chapters. First, they lay out the book’s thesis ‘that political debate is a continuous, multi-dimensional, and fundamentally important aspect of the literature produced in virtually every genre and period at Rome and within the boundaries of the Roman empire’ (p. 1). Secondly, they introduce the following chapters and explain how they support the collection’s argument. Steven H. Rutledge, an ancient historian best known for *Imperial Inquisitions: Prosecutors and Informants from Tiberius to Domitian*, focusses on the all-important topic of the limits of free speech under the early empire in chapter 2, ‘Writing Imperial Politics: the Social and Political Background’ (pp. 23-62). Rutledge’s argument, which is subtle and complex, attends to the importance of the various social contexts in which libertas was exercised. This chapter offers far more than its title ‘Social and Political Background’ seems to promise.

John Penwill gives a challenging political analysis of Lucretius in chapter 3, ‘Lucretius and the First Triumvirate’ (pp. 63-88). Penwill argues that the poem offers a critique not just of the practice of politics in the usual Epicurean way but of the moral behaviour of Caesar, Pompey and Crassus. Jon Hall’s chapter 4, ‘Serving the Times: Cicero and Caesar the Dictator’ (pp. 89-110), examines Cicero’s response to Caesar’s dictatorship. The interest here lies in the fact that we see a politician accustomed to the rough and tumble of late republican politics having to adapt to a new quasi-monarchical situation. Hall argues that, though he practises self-censorship, ‘Cicero was not in the habit of thinking in terms of doublespeak or of composing subtly subversive literature’ (pp. 108f.) because these were skills that republican politicians had not needed.

In chapter 5, ‘Vergil’s Geopolitics’ (pp. 111-32), William Dominik considers Vergil by examining *Eclogues*, *Georgics* and *Aeneid* as constituting a single text. As Dominik observes, such treatments are rare. He focusses upon human violence against the land and the urban invasion of the rural world. Robin Bond considers Horace chronologically in chapter 6, ‘Horace’s Political Journey’ (pp. 133-52). Bond investigates the poet’s shifting allegiances from republican sympathiser to author of ‘the poetical expression of the Augustan propaganda of the *Res Gestae*’ (p. 136). He explores in just a few pages the complexities of the *Epodes*. Accepting Kennedy’s argument that the *Satires* are ‘an integrational text’ (that is, quietly pro-Augustan), Bond argues that the *Satires* are ‘far more subtle and politically loaded than it has been the conventional wisdom to believe’ (p. 144). The account of *Odes* 1-3 avoids

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some of the more obvious choices (1.2, 3.1-6) in order to explore poems in which the survival strategies adopted by Horace and some of his republican friends are uppermost. In the final section (‘Augustan Eulogist’), Bond examines the *Carmen Saeculare*—noting Putnam’s positive revaluation—*Epodes* 16, *Odes* 3.6 and 1.37. He concludes by contrasting the relative anonymity of Vergil’s chosen form with the more personal forms selected by Horace.

Matthew B. Roller avoids making ‘for or against’ judgments on the question of Livy’s view of Augustus in chapter 7, ‘The Politics of Aristocratic Competition: Innovation in Livy and Augustan Rome’ (pp. 153-72). Roller considers textual politics in a broader sense through an examination of Livy’s representation of Appius Claudius Caecus. He focusses on Appius as one who transgresses ‘the boundaries of established competitive arenas’ (p. 156) and argues persuasively that ‘reconstructing the rules and venues of aristocratic competition’ was an important Augustan project. In chapter 8, ‘The Politics of Elegy: Propertius and Tibullus’ (pp. 173-202), Marcus Wilson considers Propertius and Tibullus. Wilson notes a discrepancy in the dominant modes of interpretation of love elegy: scholars tend to treat the lover’s relationship with his mistress as fictionalised and his relationship with his patron or the emperor as reflecting social or political reality. Furthermore, elegy, as a genre whose ‘first function [is] the passionate articulation of discontent’, is hardly a ‘suitable vehicle for Augustan or any other “propaganda”’ (p. 176). Particularly important is Wilson’s discussion of programmatic poems, the failure of poets to meet their programme’s requirements, and the implications of those (deliberate) failures. For Wilson the poems addressed to political figures are functionally no different from those addresses to mistresses: all are ‘epitaphs for lost opportunities, in love, in poetry, in career, and ideological assimilation’ (p. 201).

Gareth Williams confronts the Ovid controversy in chapter 9, ‘Politics in Ovid’ (pp. 203-24). Williams argues that ‘Ovid writes not for or against but *about* Augustus and Augustan Romanness’ (p. 204). The distinction is a subtle one. If we accept that this is a genuine distinction, it is still reasonable to ask whether what Ovid writes about Augustus is on balance favourable or unfavourable, supportive or not. Williams’ chapter is ambitious in scope and complex in argument. It merits close scrutiny. Victoria Jennings’ chapter 10, ‘Borrowed Plumes: Phaedrus’ Fables, Phaedrus’ Failures’ (pp. 225-48), analyses Phaedrus. Although Phaedrus is perhaps the least read author in this volume, Jennings’ essay is one of the most lively and most interesting. Her principal concern is the way in which Phaedrus contrives to speak freely at a time when free speech was dangerous.

James Ker examines Seneca in chapter 11, ‘Outside and Inside: Senecan Strategies’ (pp. 249-72). Given the volume of Seneca’s writing and his direct involvement in politics, this is a difficult task. It is the prose works that get most attention here. Little is said about the tragedies. It seems odd, however, to claim that parallels between Senecan tragic tyrants and Nero did not become apparent until the Flavian period (p. 255). From Naevius onward Roman tragedy had been a profoundly political genre. It is hard to believe that Neronian spectators and readers were any less
alert to political allusions than their republican forebears. Martha Malamud’s chapter 12, ‘Primitive Politics: Lucan and Petronius’ (pp. 273-306), accepts the tricky task of discussing two very different authors. She does this by focussing on their treatment of the motifs of primitive hospitality and primitive architecture both in texts and in the context of Nero’s extravagant building programme.

In chapter 13, ‘Visions of Gold: Hopes for the New Age in Calpurnius Siculus’ Eclogues’ (pp. 307-22), John Garthwaite and Beatrice Martin discuss Calpurnius Siculus. Garthwaite and Martin dispose of the problem of dating quickly and argue for a poetically sophisticated Calpurnius, whose work is carefully structured so as to offer a pessimistic critique of contemporary (Neronian) politics. Steve Mason offers the only chapter that deals with a Greek author, Flavius Josephus, in chapter 14, ‘Of Despots, Diadems and Diadochoi: Josephus and Flavian Politics’ (pp. 323-50). Mason focusses on Herod’s succession crisis of 4 BCE and argues that Josephus advocates senatorial aristocracy and his critique of hereditary monarchy is as applicable to Vespasian’s Rome as it is to Judaea. Mason gives us not a Flavian flatterer but ‘a dab hand at barbed or figured speech’ (p. 348).

Andrew Zissos offers in chapter 15, ‘Navigating Power: Valerius Flaccus’ Argonautica’ (pp. 351-66), a sophisticated analysis of the poem’s ‘sociology’. Zissos argues for parallels between the sociopolitical organisation of the poem’s major cities, Iolcus and Colchis, and Rome, and examines the poem’s exploration of the difficulties that the existence of the principate posed for competitive aristocrats. Zissos has contributed much to our understanding of this important poet, and this chapter does not disappoint. In chapter 16, ‘The Ivy and the Conquering Bay: Quintilian on Domitian and Domitianic Policy’ (pp. 367-86), Paul Roche examines the nature of Quintilian’s praise of Domitian. Roche argues that Quintilian offers ‘an ironic or satirical response to Domitian’s public imagery’ (p. 368). Given that Quintilian is a literary theorist, Roche is able to measure his author’s prescriptions against his practice. Roche concludes that Quintilian ignores his own instructions for writing encomia and employs tropes that he himself associates with subversion.

Carole Newlands focusses in chapter 17, ‘Statius’ Self-conscious Poetics: Hexameter on Hexameter’ (pp. 387-404), upon three of Statius’ Silvae (1.5, 3.2, 3.5) as interpretive guides to his Thebaid, and closes with remarks on his Achilleid. Newlands argues that the Silvae, through dialogue with the Thebaid, confront the vexed question of whether imperial poetry can have a meaningful social and political role in Domitian’s Rome’ (p. 389). John Garthwaite returns to Martial in chapter 18, ‘Ludimus Innocui: Interpreting Martial’s Imperial Epigrams’ (pp. 405-28). This chapter is, in part, a response to conservative reactions to Garthwaite’s own work. Garthwaite rejects attempts to limit ‘the interpretive possibilities of the text’ (p. 426) on the basis of ‘common sense’ (that is, uninformed prejudice). Rather than rehearse old arguments, however, Garthwaite focusses on Martial’s self-representation and his treatment of Domitian’s building programme.

In chapter 19, ‘Reading the Prince: Textual Politics in Tacitus and Pliny’ (pp. 429-46), Steven H. Rutledge looks at both Tacitus and the younger Pliny.
Rutledge examines the ways in which Tacitus’ writings about the past reflect upon his own times. Thus he draws a contrast between Tacitus’ representation of the behaviour of his father-in-law Agricola and that of the emperor Nerva. Rutledge next scrutinises Pliny’s letters for dissent and notes that Pliny ignores Trajan’s conquests and seems to question the sincerity of Trajan’s *ciuilitas*. David Konstan’s chapter 20, ‘Reading Politics in Suetonius’ (pp. 447-62), confines itself to Suetonius’ *Life of Titus*. Konstan offers us a close reading of its chapter 9 by exploring the connections between conspiracy against the emperor and the popularity of astrology. A discussion of Juvenal’s *Satire* 4 and its representation of Domitian and his circle is the centrepiece of Martin Winkler’s chapter 21, ‘Juvenal: Zealous Vindicator of Roman Liberty’ (pp. 463-82). For Winkler, as for Dryden, Juvenal is a ‘zealous vindicator of Roman liberty’.

As can be seen from the above summaries, the different authors have taken varied approaches to their brief. Some discuss one or two voluminous authors in a single chapter. Others concentrate on a single poem, passage or aspect of an author’s work. Taken together, these chapters do indeed prove the book’s thesis: political engagement is an aspect of all imperial Roman literature that cannot safely be ignored.

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