Jaś Elsner - Jesús Hernández Lobato (edd.), *The Poetics of Late Latin Literature*. Oxford studies in late antiquity, New York: Oxford University Press, viii+534 pp. $85.00, ISBN 978-0-19-935563-1.

The foundations of modern study of the writings of late antique Latin authors were laid between the early 1960s and late 1970s by continental European scholars, with only incidental contributions from their colleagues in the UK and USA, where the conservatism of most Classics departments and the relative weakness of Roman Catholicism in wider society ensured that Statius and the Younger Pliny remained the *ne plus ultra* of ancient Latin literature for all but a few dare-devils. The first and still solitary volume in what should have been a four-volume summa of this main European scholarly tradition appeared in 1989 as *Restauration und Erneuerung: Die lateinische Literatur von 284 bis 374 n. Chr* (= Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike [HLL], Bd 5), edited by Reinhart Herzog with an expansive, critically nuanced, richly documented introduction (not referenced anywhere in the work under review). Despite the handbook format, collaborators on the HLL addressed a full range of critical issues, including questions of genre, style, poetics, transmission history, etc. In the same year, Michael Roberts' *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity* appeared like a bolt of lightning from the clear blue sky of Anglophone classical studies. Roberts explained that he followed Henri-Irénée Marrou, Jacques Fontaine and others in positing a 'common ground between Christian and pagan authors' in respect of 'aesthetic, and particularly stylistic, preferences'. He went on: 'More questionable is the supposition that there is a single aesthetic that is characteristic of late antiquity… but at least in poetry, it seems to me, it makes sense to talk of stylistic features that are typical of the period' (6). His modest claim—citing Arnold Hauser, *Mannerism*—for what art historians used to call 'period style' was supported by the literary- and art-historical evidence lucidly set out in his book, which is still the best introduction in English to late antique Latin poetry and, for the methodological framing of its subject, had no serious company in that language until the appearance of Aaron Pelttari's *The Space that Remains: Reading Latin Poetry in Late Antiquity* (2014).

Since 1989, and especially over the last two decades, new fashions in classical literary studies—reception, intertextuality—have combined with the curricularization of Late Antiquity to encourage Latinists throughout an ever-widening Anglosphere to reinvest in the more classically inviting of Greek and Latin writers from later periods of the Roman Empire. The

volume in hand, announced as the first of its kind 'in English-language scholarship' (20), based on a colloquium held at the University of Oxford, and with the majority of its essayists coming from British and North American universities, catches some of the excitement and uncertainty of what may prove to be a transitional phase for the field. Were it (as it is *not*) an institutional expression of 'Oxford classics', it might rank as that school's most tangible corporate contribution to late antique studies since a long-gone generation triggered the allergic reaction of Peter Brown's early work, including the epochal *World of Late Antiquity* (1971). If we take to heart the editors' remarks in their introductory 'Notes towards a Poetics of Late Antique Literature', the present volume is meant to boost the flagging fortunes of 'the literary study of late Roman poetry' in the face of 'a larger narrative of continuity and change that has intertwined material-cultural with historical research'—understand: global 'late antique studies'—and thereby concealed 'the open, vibrant, complex… poetics that underlay and made possible [!] the cultural revolution of the later Roman world' (2–3). There may be elements of truth in this subdisciplinary damage claim, however rhetorically inflated. Whether a 'poetics of late Latin literature' like the one now offered—hard to tell apart, in most respects, from that expounded thirty years ago by Roberts—is equipped to deliver a remedy, is one of the critical questions ultimately posed by this book.

Poetics, here, is or are done *in verse*. Outside a few pages in the Introduction and a remarkable lead-off essay by Michael Squire, reference to the visual and plastic arts is merely implicit (*ekphrasis*). The focus of the collection is exclusively textual and non-epigraphic, and the only *prose* texts discussed at any length are panegyrics, analyzed in a section by themselves for their authors' uses of 'poetic colour' (Roger Rees) or attitudes to the *fabulae poetarum* (Catherine Ware). According to the Introduction, 'the late Roman world was a time when literature itself became one of literature's main concerns' (6). Whatever that could possibly mean (there is a clue in one of the subheadings of Jesús Hernández Lobato's own essay, viz. 'Making Literature after the End of Literature' [187]), the 'literature' with which *The Poetics of Late Latin Literature* concerns itself is primarily that of Latin verse in classical metres. The same could of course be said of the late antique coverage of E. R. Curtius' monumentally tendentious *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1948), saluted here without any attempt at critical distance (2). Indeed, the last hundred pages of H. W. Garrod's selection for the *Oxford Book of Latin Verse* (1912) already provide a comparable 'late' canon. Although it has become standard practice in the built-up field of later classical / late antique 'literary' studies to deprecate the myopia of earlier cohorts of classical scholars, the truth is that later-going classical Latinists—whether condescending, as often before, or rehabilitating, as now—have almost always gone straight for the same later Roman writers, and to 'pagan'

or not-too-Christian poets in the first instance (Ausonius, Claudian, Rutilius Namatianus, Sidonius Apollinaris). The longstanding preference for later classicizing poetry over later classicizing prose is slowly being undone, with Gavin Kelly's *Ammianus Marcellinus: The Allusive Historian* (2008) opening a new front on the overwhelmingly larger body of prose writing available from the period—not only historiography but also epistolography and a multifarious *Fachliteratur*. Dennis Feeney's *Beyond Greek: The Beginnings of Latin Literature* (2016), which pointed to the simultaneous genesis of a 'new [Latin] literature' and 'the emergence of a large-scale prose literature in the Latin language' (172–73), may also be expected gradually to exert a methodological influence on study of later periods. And what, then, shall we make of the vast expanses of more or less theological or devotional (Christian) prose that is extant in Latin from the second century onwards? How, for example, would that wildly experimental prosateur, Tertullian of Carthage, fit into a future 'poetics' of Latin *literature*? How would the production and reception of the Old Latin version(s) of the Bible? Or the theorizings of Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*? Such questions have been current in scholarship for at least fifty years and the contributors to the Oxford volume are clearly familiar with the debates that they have generated. It is left to the last (Gillian Clark), in an essay focussing on the only snippet of 'classical' verse to survive from the prolific hand of Augustine, discreetly to underline their power to unsettle the comfortably classical-formalist positions laid out 400 pages earlier by the editors.

The contents of the volume are arranged under headings that, with the partial exception of the last, also supply keywords applicable across the board: 'The Explosion of Form: Late Antique Experimentalism', 'Late Antique Intertextuality', 'Programmatic Reflections: A Metaliterary Twist', 'Literature and Power' (the two essays on prose panegyric) , 'A New Literary Space: The Challenges of Christian Poetry'. If we could add a subtitle to the collection, it might be the phrase 'metatextual and intertextual perspectives' offered by one essayist (Stephen Harrison, at the end of his study of 'Metapoetics in the Prefaces of Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae*' [251]). Given the attention here paid to prefaces and other framing elements as sites of metapoetic reflection and bravura allusivity, we should probably add *paratextual* too. 'Late antiquity was an age of the preface', writes another contributor, citing Pelttari's work and noting that 'poets and prose authors alike used [prefaces] especially to sketch their literary programs' (Scott McGill, concluding a study of Ausonius' prefaces as evidence of his 'rewriting' practices [276]). Interestingly, in a field once associated with the pioneering of aesthetics of reception, the slant of most of the papers in this volume is towards the poetics or aesthetics of literary production. Both the papers just cited fall in the section on 'Programmatic Reflections'. The emphasis on *authorial program* belongs with assumptions about 'immanent literary history'

underpinning recent work on classical intertextuality and metapoetics. As any writer may put forth his—or, in the case of the fourth-century centonist and verse-panegryist Proba, her—own 'program' against a background of shared generic and stylistic expectations, so every one may be said to have an individual poetics, if not several such. A work entitled *The Poetics of Late Latin Literature* will live up to its promise if it can present an array of those individual, collectively plural poetics, each instanced by a text or choice of texts from a given author—as this one does, not only for Claudian and Ausonius (see above) but also for Lactantius (Michael Roberts on *De aue phoenice*) and for Boethius and Prudentius (Marc Mastrangelo, opening a prospect on the theological poetics of the Middle Ages and Renaissance). These 'Oxford' proceedings thus add their store to the aggregate of studies made over the past several decades of the prefatory and other programmatic statements of late antique Latin writers across genres. (The proceedings of a Paris colloquium, *Manifestes littéraires dans la latinité tardive*, ed. Perrine Galand-Hallyn and Vincent Zarini [2009], could be added to the Bibliography.) At the same time, the editors' introductory 'Notes towards a Poetics of Late Antique Literature' urge us to join them in trying to make out something more than that—to glimpse a *singular* late antique poetics, recognizable beyond as well as for latinity.

What are the prospects for a program of that order?

Nearly twice the length of most of the other pieces, the opening essay by Michael Squire ('POP Art: The Optical Poetics of Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius') is a *tour de force* that almost unbalances the volume. It would be a pity to lose even a line of it. Squire's central claim is that '[a]t the heart of Optatian's poetry… is an idea of the work as simultaneously material and literary entity—as something designed to be read with the eyes' and designed from the start for codex rather than roll (35). The argument is convincing and it has the potential to re-materialize many if not all the paratextual and visibly 'textural' features commented upon at length by other contributors. ('Texture', a term of art of mid-twentieth-century American New Criticism, continues to serve the purpose of an idealizing, formalist textualism in early twentieth-first-century classical studies.) That possibility is spelled out in the final paragraphs of a typically precise and persuasive piece by Isabella Gualandri, who connects Optatian's *versus intexti* with other special initiatives of graphic literalization on the part of late antique (Christian) authors. Citing a famous passage of Augustine on the importance of *not* being detained by graphic signs on the way to apprehending the truths that they may signify, she observes that 'in Optatian there is always the danger that *res* may be forgotten' (146). Taken with Clark's essay in the same volume, Gualandri's should prompt us to ask how deeply Augustine's semiotic dualism could have been implicated in the frequently pictorial and paratextually elaborate codex-borne book-arts of his day, Manichean and/

or Roman. Meanwhile, in a substantial chapter on 'Intertextuality in Late Latin Poetry', Helen Kaufmann reminds us that the first requirement for recognizing an intertextual relation is that a correspondence be *visible*, or in Don Fowler's words (quoted by her) that it 'stand out' (150). The focus of her analysis is on the second requirement for what she suggests may be held to count as 'classical' intertextuality, namely that the correspondence also be *meaningful* ('make sense'). What she discovers by tracking Latin poets from Ovid to Venantius Fortunatus is a continuum between, at one pole (e.g., Ovid), 'allusions as [an] essential part of the content' and, at the other (e.g., Dracontius), 'allusions as formal features' (163). On this analysis, the overall drift of later Latin intertextuality is away from the 'classical' norm of high meaningfulness towards an extreme of pure formality, texturality or visibility, as graphically realized in our own time by the bold-facing of type to mark perceived allusions in texts (as in several chapters here). Seeing her take Macrobius' *Saturnalia* as evidence for late antique tastes in intertextuality, we may next want to know more about graphic styles for lemmatization and quotation in the period itself. Among other obvious high-visibility features of the 'artefactual aesthetic' (Squire) posited for late antiquity would be the *mise en page* for prosimetrum (Martianus Capella, Boethius) and for those other cases of polymetry—some of it in prose contexts—that Franca Ela Consolino finds so thick on the ground in Gaul ('Polymetry in Late Latin Poems: Some Observations on Its Meaning and Functions'), or for anthologies such as that or those transmitted by the Codex Salmasianus, which preserves the Virgilian cento on Narcissus turned here by Jaś Elsner into a master-class for students of self-reflexive intertextuality wishing to fix the point at which modern exegesis finally supplants its ancient target-text ('Late Narcissus: Classicism and Culture in a Late Roman Cento').

Most readers of *The Poetics of Late Latin Literature* will probably come away from the book with a strong enough conviction of the family resemblances between the texts on display to be willing to allow that it makes sense descriptively to attribute *a* poetics-in-common to (at least some of) the written discourse that we might agree to call 'late Latin literature' when speaking of the cultures of late Graeco-Roman antiquity in their wider geographical orbit. We would thus recognize elements of a period style, including a certain 'set' (in the sense of Roman Jakobson's *Einstellung*) towards the text itself as *visible medium* of contact between writer and reader. How such a poetics might itself be historically explained, what other historical phenomena might henceforth be better explained in the light of it, how precisely it would be mirrored in *Greek* texts of the same period, and how—in particular—it may be seen to have 'made possible the cultural revolution of the later Roman world' (2, quoted above) are questions towards which the present volume furnishes little in the way of answers. For one if not both of its editors, we infer, the 'cultural frame' that such a poetics would at

once partly constitute and be partly if not entirely enframed by, is a version of that durable *deux ex machina* of modern late Roman historiography, the conflict of Christianity and classicism: 'Th[e] changed cultural frame is the demand of the late empire to be both traditionally classical and to be Christian… The cultural frame—simultaneously Roman… and Christian—meant that there was an inevitable and fundamental conflict of identities and a profound challenge to individuals to find a comfortable place in determining their own identity within this context' (18). A footnote there refers us to Jerome's famous vision. That is all. (As Chateaubriand said, 'Everyone has seen paintings of St Jerome'.) Subdisciplinary squabbles between later-going literary Romanists and other kinds of later Romanist aside, what one misses at this point and elsewhere in *The Poetics of Late Latin Literature* is an awareness of how much the wider scholarly ecosystem of late antiquity has evolved since Michael Roberts, in 1989, left open the question of whether the aesthetics of later Latin poetry might not in fact somehow be the aesthetics of the later Roman Empire. Long before Alan Cameron's *Last Pagans of Rome* (2011) aimed its delayed coup de grâce at the 'crisis-and-conflict' school of later Roman studies, other influential work in English such as Averil Cameron's *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (1989) and Peter Brown's *Power and Persuasion: Towards a Christian Empire* (1992) had spurred or reinforced the variously 'textual' turns of students of ancient Christianity and the later Roman Empire who had taken their lessons from first-wave later Latinism (Fontaine *et al.*) and from social-scientific researchers (Foucault, Bourdieu *et al.*) offering more powerful models for understanding the relations between discursive and social change than any posited by the Standard Intertextualism of *fin-de-siècle* Anglophone classicism. There is a clear risk, thirty years later, that the best continuing work of that kind in the broad field of *Spätaltertumswissenschaft* and the new work by later-beginning 'literary' classicists will proceed on divergent paths.

In the event, the essays in *The Poetics of Late Latin Literature* provide far less evidence for late antique crises of culture, identity and representation than the volume's lightly postmodernizing introductory program might lead one to expect. One of them, moreover, pushes politely back against Standard Intertextualism (Marco Formisano, 'Displacing Tradition: A New-Allegorical Reading of Ausonius, Claudian, and Rutilius Namatianus'), although at the price of a hermeneutics that harps upon the 'absence and loss' of a classical past and so deepens the sense of 'post-antique nostalgic classicism' already borne in on us by Elsner's 'Late Narcissus'. Having discerned that spirit in his chosen cento and related it to 'the nexus of desire, distance, nostalgia, and mourning for the classics' that Freud diagnosed as the modern 'narcissicm of culture', Elsner draws what might be taken for the moral of the collection: 'The wonder of late antique poetics', he suggests, 'is that it is already fully

modern in its relations to the classics. That is perhaps why this poetics has so frequently been unfairly condemned' (204). Perhaps it is. Then again, perhaps fortunately, classicists are now no longer the only ones with a stake in late antique poetics.

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