*Ut Roma Poiesis*: (Re-)Writing the City

As poets and other writers always operate within the tradition from which they emerge, often under considerable “anxiety of influence,” so walking around the public and private spaces of Rome brings the spectator into confrontation with the past at almost every turn, and face to face with the contradictions and paradoxes which underlie Roman identity. As we move from Republic to Empire, and beyond, the experience of the cityscape becomes ever more characterized by multiple perspectives and dramatic collisions. This panel explores the ways in which the topography of Rome and the physical landscape of the city is written and re-written by the Latin authors Varro, Catullus, Juvenal, and Seneca, all of whom display intense interest in what it means to be “Roman” in a city, and a world, of violently shifting subjectivities. The final paper extends the topic to the “classical crisis” of the Early Modern era, when the reality of a ruined Rome, a Rome to be recovered but ultimately replaced, served as a primary locus of anxiety. The presentations consider the various means of connecting identity and expression with the geographical features and the monuments of Rome devised by writers in different periods, as they each attempt to grapple with the fundamental questions of how we define ourselves through the boundaries and limits—cultural, ideological, literary and linguistic—upon which meaning and a coherent identity are constructed. What emerges is a cityscape marked much more by fragmentation, slippage, and gaps than it is by the outwardly solidifying manifestations of Roman imperial power, embodied in its grandest and most enduring constructions. The panel is designed so that the papers proceed in a chronological fashion while at the same time engaging in dialogue with each other, in order to draw out the unique *poiesis* of place that defines textual approaches to the *Urbs*.

ABSTRACT 1

Urban Language and the Urban Self: Varro’s *de Lingua Latina*

Although much of Varro’s account of the Latin language is now lost, the surviving books show a man struggling to make a direct linguistic connexion between who and how (Roman) ‘we’ are, and the physical landscapes of Rome. In the process, Varro highlights the performative and display-focused culture of ancient Rome, and the close relationship between speech acts, citizen behaviour, and their contextual ‘scenery’. Urban movement (how citizens move, transform their movement into citizen acts through discourse, and operate within a city of stories) is vital in Varro’s densely mapped festal, quotidian and political routes and nodes within the city. Significantly, he also characterises Latin as a semiotic system driven by movement. Thus, as speakers negotiate their world through Latin ‘signs’, they also confront a ‘described’ world which semantically is always contingent and ‘in progress’. This paper explores a series of sample elements in the narrative sequence, demonstrating how Varronian attention serves to highlight terms and semiotic clusters which have deep meaning for the experience of elite life in the city.

Book 5 makes the relationship between time and semiotics central to Varro’s program; Roman interest in the discourse of time and the calendar in this era was intense, and recent study of Caesar’s calendar reforms (e.g. Feeney 2007) shows that exercising epistemological control over ‘time’ was part of a developing ‘Roman’ discourse of power. All movement—whether syntactical or physical—takes place within time and space, and frequently has a situational or determinative chronological imperative as part of its meta-narrative. This paper showcases how Varro’s grammatical ‘handbook’, read as an intervention in the deepest semiotics of citizen-politics, makes the duration, the moment, and the frame all contribute to the ideological quality of even the smallest Roman ‘movement’ (cf. Bachelard; also e.g. explored in Ingold 1993). And this in turn helps Varro the public intellectual to develop his audience's understanding of the physical power of speech to actualise the *res publica* itself.

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ABSTRACT 2

The Geography of Desire: Place, Power, and Catullan Self-Presentation

Throughout the Catullan corpus the speaker often represents Roman imperial culture as dehumanizing and dehumanized, and he positions himself, for the most part, at the margins of that culture. Yet in Poem 11 we see the Catullan persona insert himself into the very center of Rome’s ideological space, as he imagines himself journeying to Roman sites of imperial domination with his putative companions, Furius and Aurelius. In language evoking epic grandeur, the speaker imagines the three men in a wide sweep of geographical locales that correspond with the military conquests of Caesar. The images of the men “penetrating” the places they visit and of the shore being “pounded” have overtones of sexual activity that evoke male sexual aggression. Moreover, the images of venturing into the farthest Indi and crossing over the lofty Alps imply a transgressive crossing of boundaries. In the context of “penetration” of a landscape that has been conquered by Caesar, this crossing of boundaries suggests a link between sexual violation and unbounded imperialistic conquest.

On the one hand, the speaker identifies himself with the geography of empire and, on the other hand, he infuses that geography with a discourse of eroticism that serves to undermine such an identification (Konstan 2002). I shall argue in this paper that Poem 11 displays Catullus’ characteristically ambiguous self-presentation (Adler 1981, Greene 1995). The speaker’s conflicted identifications with masculine and feminine identities is configured in this poem through his relationship to place (Skinner 1993, Greene 1995, Wray 2001). The speaker associates the physical symbols of imperial conquest with the world of masculine adventure and action and, at the same time, permeates the geographical catalogue of the journey with erotic imagery (Putnam 1982, Fredricksmeyer 1983, 1993). Finally, I will argue that by focusing on the erotic character of Caesar’s world of conquest and emphasizing an association of that world with the effeminate East, Catullus challenges the notion that the erotic and political can be conceived as opposites and, more specifically, that the world of Rome and its enemy, the decadent East, cannot be so clearly distinguished from one another (Janan 1994).

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ABSTRACT 3

I am Large, I Contain Multitudes: Space and Satire in Juvenal 3

Although scholars have long recognized Juvenal’s first satire as programmatic (Braund 1996 36), his third satire also presents the Juvenalian program for satire in both its spatial comprehension of the city of Rome and in its disjointed portrait of the city’s geography. *Pace* Anderson, who declared the city in Juvenal 3 as “un-Roman” (Anderson 1982, 223), satire 3 in fact encompasses the entire city of Rome (either explicitly or by association) within its bounds. Both the poem’s initial speaker and the character of Umbricius mention many specific locations within Rome (the Porta Capena at 11 and Valley of Egeria at 13-20, Subura street at 4, the Tiber river at 62, the Esquiline and Viminal hills at 71, the Aventine hill at 85), and Umbricius alludes to the Quirinal hill (via *Quirites* at 60). Umbricius also mentions generic locations (the theater at 154, circuses at 65, 223) that are associated with specific areas in and around the city (theaters and circuses were located on the Campus Martius just below the Capitoline hill, e.g., while the Circus Maximus lay between the Palatine and Aventine hills). Such references encompass every part of Rome, including her seven hills, river, streets, and walls. Furthermore, Juvenal’s description of Rome even comprises the entire city along a vertical axis, from the underworld (265-6) and the Tiber (62) to the dilapidated tile rooftops of the cheapest apartment buildings (201, 269). Similarly, the physical spaces that the two speakers describe range from the beggar-filled grove of Egeria (13-20) to the rickety apartment buildings (196) of the poor, to the nice neighborhoods on the Esquiline and Viminal (71), to the mansion of Asturicius (212) and thus comprise the entire social spectrum as well. As comprehensive as this portrait is, however, Juvenal does not proceed through the city in a systematic way. Instead, by leaping from one part of the city to another he presents Rome as a series of disconnected (and often unpleasant) locations.

By stuffing the entire city into the central (and longest) poem of his first book of satires, Juvenal alludes to the genre’s claims of completeness or “fullness and mixture” (Gowers 1993 113; cf. *farrago* at Juvenal 1.86). He also repeats his own initial claim that Rome serves as the inspiration and material of satire (*nam quis iniquae / tam patiens Urbis, tam ferreus, ut teneat se…*, 1.30-1), thereby correcting Horace’s depiction of satire as a rural activity in *Sermones* I.5, II.3, and II.6. Indeed, Rome creates satire both at the macro level (it gave birth to the genre, hence Quintilian’s claim that *satura quidem tota nostra est* at *I.O.* X.1.93) and at the micro level (it is the very building material of Juvenal’s poem). With such a comprehensive portrait of the city Juvenal stakes a claim to a place in the satiric pantheon, and also asserts satire’s superiority over other genres, which cannot hope to incorporate and encompass all that satire can. However, his disjointed presentation of Rome’s physical geography depicts a city—and a genre—that has lost, and may never regain, the “potency” it once enjoyed (Keane 2007 50).

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ABSTRACT 4

Transcending Boundaries in Seneca’s *Oedipus*: *locum quis tantum explicet*?

For the majority of Seneca’s *Oedipus*, the titular character occupies an ambiguous, liminal territory: a realm of the monstrous both defined and dissolved by a tension between the aporetic forces of truth and knowledge, confidence and anxiety, and oppressive rule and subjection. In the play’s denouement, however, there is a transcendence of sorts: one to which Seneca alludes throughout the work, and in which Oedipus exceeds what one could consider the “categorically marked” – a locus both geographical and notional which, while at times difficult to comprehend fully, can at least be conceptualized within defined bounds. As I shall argue in this paper, Oedipus departs from this defined, albeit paradoxical, sphere, in both literal (e.g. *eripite terras*, 658) and metaphorical (*quidquid excessit modum* / *pendet instabili loci*, 909-10) senses, only to usher in and happen upon a space with which no topological nomenclature adequately corresponds.

After the death of Jocasta, Oedipus exclaims that he has surpassed the sinful fates (*fata superavi impia*, 1045), and in so doing defies the work’s established theoretical framework of man following a divinely ordained path (*omnia secto tramite vadunt*, *primusque dies dedit extremum*, 987-8). Upon his departure from Thebes, Oedipus draws with himself all the deadly ills of the earth (*mortifera mecum vitia terrarum extraho*, 1058), and thereby brings the tragedy to an appropriate conclusion, as Busch (2007) notes: there is the implication that “there can be no dramatic universe without them.” Indeed, the exit of Oedipus and his companions is a complete overturning of the tragic universe’s law and order, as well as of an emotional locus occupied by the Romans in the late Republic and early Empire; Barton points out that “[one] of the signals of this emotional state is the proliferation of monsters,” and that it “[spills] over into every aspect of Roman life.” Previously, Oedipus’ actions only *reversed*, or *inverted*, nature’s laws; his exodus brings about nothing short of their collapse, leaving in its wake a locus, a no-man’s land, that not only eludes adequate description or categorical identification, but in addition transfers the dramatic narrative to a decidedly new emotional locale for the Romans in which the categories of the monstrous and the grotesque fall short as comprehensive explanatory terms.

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ABSTRACT 5

Exorcising Rome’s Rome: Satiric Space and Imitative Crisis in the Early Modern Period

There has been much critical discussion in recent years concerning lyric subjectivity and lyric self-projection, both in the classical and early modern periods. However, there has been much less discussion of the use of satire as a mode of self-projection. The speaker of satire is undeniably different from that of the lyric subject. In many ways, the subjectivity of the satiric voice is even more difficult to define and possesses certain crises of literary appropriation when later writers attempt to imitate and to subvert classical sources. The Renaissance appropriates specific structural elements of classical satire; however, for humanists to feel secure in their poetic originality and cultural ideologies, their classical models must be both acknowledged and rejected within the generic framework. Looking particularly at the appropriation of Horace by Luigi Alamanni and Sir Thomas Wyatt and of Persius by John Donne, I contend that what emerges is a pattern of literary imitation that uses the notion of space, specifically the ideal of Rome, as a way to undermine the authority of the imitated Roman satirist. Even in imitating the classical writer, the Renaissance writer supplants the classical Roman space and replaces it with a valorized contemporary European locus, which transfers authority and autonomy to the humanist identity and to the new humanist satiric speaker while at the same time exposing the ruptures in the original classical texts.

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