

Into the Ancient Woods: Metaliterary References in Republican Literature

Scholars have long noted that metapoetry, the coded and self-conscious use of metaphor to convey the processes and products of writing, stands at the heart of Augustan literary culture. The elegists present their books as *doctae puellae* (Wyke), Vergil uses agricultural metaphor for *poesis* (Henkel), Horace plays with satiric metapoetics in his *Epodes* (Johnson), Ovid represents artists in his *Metamorphoses* self-reflectively (Pavlock), etc. But except for Catullus, whose metapoetic interests have been well studied (e.g., Harrison, Young, Roman), uses of metaliterary metaphor by Republican poets have received far less attention.

This panel aims to redirect the metapoetic spotlight from Augustan literature onto earlier generations of Latin authors. Acting as intermediaries between the well-documented Hellenistic interest in metapoetry and its Augustan *floruit*, these authors experimented boldly in elaborating a new Latin metaphorical vocabulary for exploring and communicating the literary processes in which they were introspectively engaged. This panel reveals a greater continuity in the trajectory of Roman metaliterature than has been appreciated and suggests new directions for the study of Latin metapoetics.

Paper 1, “The well-worn road: Metapoetics from Ennius to Ovid,” introduces the panel by offering an overview of ancient approaches to metaliterary reference between the Hellenistic and Augustan periods. It traces the development of several metaphors for different aspects of poetic production (e.g., feet, plowing, and herd animals) that become fundamental to Roman writers’ representation of their selves and their work.

Paper 2, “Metatheater, *meretrices*, and life behind the scenes in Plautus and Terence,” argues that Roman comedy uses the onstage presence of the houses of *meretrices* to explore the social conditions of sex-laborers and to represent metatheatrically the gaps between façade and

reality. In Plautus' *Truculentus*, *meretrices* and clients dispute whether wealth flows into or out of sex-laborers' houses (40-111) and distinguish between playing roles and doing deeds (450-496). In Terence's *Eunuchus*, the house of the *meretrix* is the site of the play's central crisis, the premeditated rape of a citizen girl, an act that is presented metatheatrically and that violates the theatrical conventions of comedy. Men demonstrate confusion at the backstage work behind the sex-laborer's presentation, metaphorically replicating the deceptive, desirable performance of comedy itself.

Paper 3, "Lucilius and the satisfaction of *satura*," shows that satiric etymologizing on *satura* and *satis* familiar from Horace, Persius, and Juvenal is present already in Lucilius. The term *satis* is found in connection with other terms and concepts—*stultus*, *ludus*, *asper*, *acer*, dining and food—which are, in the satirical context, often freighted with metapoetic meaning (see, e.g., fr. 1130-1137, 1191-1192). Despite the fragmentary state of Lucilius' poetry, there is compelling evidence that self-aware play with the etymological possibilities of *satura* constituted part of Roman verse satire's fabric since its inception, rather than being a later innovation, as has commonly been supposed.

Paper 4, "ποιητῆς ὀλιγοποιός: Animal song and metapoetry in Cicero's *Prognostica*," shows that Cicero represents animals as naturally gifted observers and singers, using them self-reflectively as metapoetic symbols of didactic poets like himself. In the process, Cicero updates Aratus' outmoded Old Stoic doctrine in light of the work of Panaetius of Rhodes and Posidonius of Apamea, both of whom he praises for modifying Stoic thought on divination, and of his own philosophical dialogues. Cicero's translation thus represents part of his larger discourse on the role of human observation and its relationship to literary production.

Paper #5, "The light of Lucretius: A metapoetic acrostic (L-U-C-E) in *De Rerum Natura* 5.712-15," argues that Lucretius constructs an intentional and metapoetically significant acrostic in L-U-C-E ("shine"). Appearing during a discussion of how the moon shines, the acrostic looks back to Aratus' *LEPTĒ* ("slender") acrostic, which similarly appears during a discussion of the moon (*Phaen.* 783-87), and through Aratus to Homer's infamous *LEUKĒ* acrostic ("white") in *Iliad* 24.1-5. Lucretius' acrostic also plays on his own name—and perhaps inspired Vergil's own acrostic allusion to his name (*MA-VE-PU*) in his version of Aratus' *LEPTĒ* passage (*G.* 1.429-33). This allusion, combined with an earlier comparison of Epicurus to the sun (3.1042-1044), acknowledges the dependence of *De Rerum Natura* on Epicurus' writings and also (because the text emphasizes theories according to which the moon shines with its own light) subtly nods to Lucretius' own poetic brilliance.

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