

TOM GEUE and ELENA GIUSTI (EDS), *UNSPOKEN ROME: ABSENCE IN LATIN LITERATURE AND ITS RECEPTION*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. x + 379. ISBN 9781108843041. £90.00.

In this enjoyable volume, the reader will find a stimulating demonstration of Latin literary texts and their readers, both ancient and modern, being energised by significant dynamics of ‘absence’ — whether this absence results from what a text does not say or from temporal distance and other factors that limit readers’ access to the archive.

The chapters are arranged in three parts that are expanding circles. The first part, ‘Absence in the Text’, comprises six readings that stay mostly within the bounds of individual works. These explore, first, a profound poetic lacuna that may or may not have been original (Ábel Tamás on Catullus translating Sappho, ch. 1), a poet’s use of aposiopesis for metaliterary messaging (Stefano Briguglio on Statius in *Thebaid*, ch. 2), allegory that involves readers in the presencing of absent meaning (Philip Hardie on Virgil, Ovid, Prudentius and Claudian, ch. 3), characters who are proxies for absent characters, along with the ‘proxiness’ of the text itself standing in for an author (Giuseppe Pezzini on Plautine comedy, ch. 4), a new way of understanding the relationship between presence and absence in elegiac poetry (Victoria Rimell on reading Ovid’s *Remedia Amoris*, ch. 5), and a poet’s conspicuous silence on whether an epic hero actually ‘saw’ his beloved (Viola Starnone on Dido’s first appearance in *Aeneid* 1, ch. 6). By this point already, we see absence mediated through a wide variety of devices and producing a whole range of consequences for literary communication — with receptions, both literary and philological, very much part of the story.

The added element of the second part, ‘Absence in Context’, is that each of its chapters attends somewhat more to Roman political and historical conditions. Thus, we read about contrasting forms of ‘silence’ to be found in two texts of successive eras that both address the history of public speaking (Kathrin Winter on Cicero’s *Brutus* and Tacitus’ *Dialogus de oratoribus*, ch. 7), changing perceptions of anonymous poems that satirise Roman autocrats in successive eras (Barbara Del Giovane on verses quoted by Suetonius in his lives of Julius Caesar, Augustus and Tiberius, ch. 8), a text’s conspicuous silences on — and oblique acknowledgement of — an elephant in the room (Catharine Edwards on Nero in Seneca’s *Epistulae morales*, ch. 9), an emperor’s own self-writing in a discourse from which political autobiography is seemingly absent (John Henderson on the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, ch. 10), an ethnography that tells no history, whether as an act of violence toward the Other or as an admission of the limits on imperial epistemology (James McNamara on Tacitus’ *Germania*, ch. 11) and an instance of radical periodisation between republic and principate marked by physical, visual and linguistic discontinuity (Ellen O’Gorman on Tacitus’ *Annales*, ch. 12).

While the chapters of the second part move outward into context, those in the third and final part, ‘Going Beyond’, give more explicit consideration to ways in which perceived absences have prompted creative response. We learn about the supposed solitude of specific elite Roman characters that is in fact a product of modern readers’ assumptions (William Fitzgerald on unmentioned slaves in Horace and other authors, ch. 13), a buried city’s oscillation between suppression and symbolism (Joanna Paul on the ‘enduring absence of Pompeii’, ch. 14), a novelist’s reworking of the relationship between feminine sacrifice and epic inspiration (Francesca Bellei on the Dido theme in Elena Ferrante’s Neapolitan Quartet, ch. 15), a mourning poet-philologist’s therapeutic tending of a Roman grief poem (Erik Fredericksen on Anne Carson’s *Nox* and Catullus 101, ch. 16) and a metaphysical analysis of the relationship between the parties at either end of classical reception (Duncan Kennedy on Joseph Brodsky, Horace’s *Epistles* and the philosophy of communication, ch. 17).

While each of these chapters is a productive contribution to its own subject area, together the case studies add up to a highly effective collaborative project with a satisfying degree of conceptual overlap. Building upon a 2017 conference at St Andrew’s entitled ‘Unspeaking Volumes: Absence in Latin Texts’, editors Tom Geue and Elena Giusti have orchestrated a multifaceted analysis of absence as ‘a fundamental “generative” force both for the hermeneutics and the ongoing literary aftermath of Latin literature’ (3). The chapters speak to one another in ways that reflect the editors’ role in fostering leitmotifs and points of intersection, including through thoughtful arrangement. The reader gains much, for example, from the pairing of Ovidian elegy with Virgil’s Dido (chs 5 and 6), Seneca with Marcus Aurelius (chs 9 and 10) and Elena Ferrante with Ann Carson (chs 15 and 16), while multiple topics (e.g. silence; empire; slavery; visibility) and multiple

authors (e.g. Ovid; Virgil; Tacitus; Catullus) are revisited from several angles in the course of the book so as to produce a three-dimensional view. The chapters are bookended by the editors' Introduction and a synthesis with further insights by Emily Gowers ('Afterword: Lights Out'). These pieces enhance the conversation between the chapters and also theorise absence as a revealing case-study for the entire practice of Roman literary studies.

I found it helpful to be invited, in the Introduction, to rethink the 'New Latin' of recent decades, such as the reign of intertextual studies, by considering an alternative approach to textual 'gaps' that is more about 'lacunae as active producers of meaning rather than empty vessels waiting to be filled by speculation' (3) — an approach nicely illustrated throughout the chapters. (It helps that the contributors are a mix of generations, including some New Latinists of earlier decades renewing their thinking in light of present conditions.) The Introduction addresses broader questions concerning institutional hierarchies in academia (e.g. 'who gets to handle the rules of the game of filling these gaps', 3) and notes the omission, in this volume itself, of approaches such as 'queer theory and critical race theory' (15) — an absence that they admit is in need of remediation. It would have been more satisfying, of course, to see these approaches applied in chapters here.

The volume's scope does not go far beyond Latin literary studies, and this focus is what allows it to examine certain absence effects in fine-grained detail and to assemble a comprehensive account. I imagine that some readers will find that the book embraces too closely the fragmentariness of the Roman literary archive as both the inescapable constraint and foundational inspiration for Latin literary hermeneutics. When Gowers asks, in her afterword, 'On second thoughts, would we really want Latin literature complete?' (332), she is perhaps being ironic. But the volume itself occasionally doubles down upon textual finitude and the hermeneutics of subtlety when ready conversation partners await in the archives of historical and archaeological studies and pressing considerations of social context are put on hold. But for what it does explore, the book is team scholarship at its absolute best. It showcases some of the most productive and progressive work in present-day Latin literary studies, while humbly admitting that this picture remains incomplete.

University of Pennsylvania
jker@sas.upenn.edu

JAMES KER

doi:10.1017/S0075435823000072

© The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.

BETTINA REITZ-JOOSSE, *BUILDING IN WORDS: THE PROCESS OF CONSTRUCTION IN LATIN LITERATURE* (Classical culture and society). New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. xii + 271, illus. ISBN 978019761068. US\$99.00.

Bettina Reitz-Joose's gripping and innovative study of Roman literary representations of construction processes probes how texts work to commemorate building(s) and themselves. This fascinating book bridges more culturally and/or intermedially attuned approaches to literature and those teasing out the intricacies of Latin metapoetics, valuably enriching both. R.-J.'s main focus is on literary reflections (and distortions) of dominant perspectives on how building takes place, but this work should stimulate further attention to the representational dynamics of occlusion in both physical construction and literary production.

An engaging Introduction frames the topic, surveying past approaches and laying out the book's blueprints — an appealingly diversified row of case studies progressing, roughly, from more tangible to most poetological. Preliminary visits to real and literary *re*-construction sites (in Lower Manhattan, on the Capitoline) suggest powerful links between ancient and modern memorialising tendencies that will resurface.

Ch. 1 shows how 'madness' is built into physical monuments, and their literary portraits, and how both shape reception. First, inscriptions spell it out: Trajan's Column moved a mountain, say its words; complex operations get summed up with a curt, authorising *fecit* (etc.), patronage/ownership trumping others' labour. Even in the Novara baths inscription and Nonius Datus' *cippus* the detail redounds to the credit of those in charge. Second, reliefs draw the gaze: inscriptions trumpet the victorious raising of 'Theodosius' obelisk, but its reliefs direct viewers