

is presented as a scholar of post-humanism and Jack Halberstam as a queer theorist (trans being a term that the editors and contributors tend to shy away from). In this respect, I would like to single out R.E. Ash's chapter on Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, which takes great care to situate its analysis within a wider pool of trans knowledge (Susan Stryker, Anne Fausto-Sterling and Julia Serano amongst others). Explicitly trans voices and perspectives are also absent, though Leslie Feinberg is mentioned briefly in passing. That said, the editors have paid great attention to presenting trans matters to an audience that may be hesitant to accept their presence in antiquity or who may be closed off to that particular term *tout court*.

Surtees and Dyer (and their contributors) therefore do a good amount of heavy lifting for the rest of us: laying down a framework for gender diversity in classical antiquity that asks not so much whether transgender experience existed in ancient Greece and Rome but rather how such experience manifests and what it signifies in the literary and visual remains of these cultures. As with the use of queer approaches to pre-modernity (with which this volume allies itself on several occasions), much ink seemingly needs to be spilled to justify viewing ancient sources through scholarship based upon modern understandings of self. Again, as with queer scholarship and Classics, with enough momentum the analysis can move beyond such methodological and existential trench-laying to get on with the more revealing work of seeing what contemporary ways of thinking and viewing can tell us about old sources. With this solid and broadly focused volume, I hope that we are now at that tipping point. Moreover, if we add to this collection the sterling work already published by I. Ruffell and C. Mowat, the emerging postgraduate scholars, such as those involved in *Trans in Classics* (who are admirably steering field-wide and interdisciplinary discussions concerning trans historicity), as well as the increasing number of trans and gender-nonconforming students coming to and enlivening our classrooms, I am confident that such endeavours will lead to an even richer body of scholarship on gender in the classical world.

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## WOMEN AND POWER IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

CRERAR (B.) *Feminine Power. The Divine to the Demonic*. Pp. 272, colour ill. London: The British Museum, 2022. Paper, £25. ISBN: 978-0-7141-5130-4.

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The British Museum's exhibition 'Feminine Power: The Divine to the Demonic', promised much: that it is 'the first exhibition of its kind' and that it will leave the viewer transformed. Curated by Lucy Dahlsen and Belinda Crerar, the accompanying catalogue includes a preface by Mary Beard, who also featured in the exhibition alongside other commentators such as Deborah Frances-White, Elizabeth Day, Rabia Siddique and Bonnie Greer. Their responses projected on screens and signs framed the exhibition for viewers, nudging them towards empowerment and a celebration of femininity with a type of sassy energy and learned intellectualism that was designed to appeal to the widest possible audience.

The exhibition intended to look back over 5,000 years, interrogating how female authority has been perceived and how different traditions view femininity, displaying more than 80 prehistoric, ancient and medieval objects alongside contemporary artefacts taken from global cultural contexts. As such it would draw the attention of anyone interested in culture, religion, faith and women, now and across historical periods, including the classical past. 'Feminine Power' suggests that the exhibition would focus on the power women have held in history, either through conforming and mobilising traditional aspects of female power or by resisting expectations of what women can and should do. This would complement existing historiographical trends that seek to rebalance the overlooked and uncelebrated achievements of women, exemplified in the renewed attention to the suffrage movement.

But this was not quite what the exhibition did. Instead, it brought together a sparkling array of objects that foregrounded female spiritual beings and goddesses from a variety of religious contexts, such as Mami Wata, a spirit of water and wealth venerated across Africa, the Caribbean and South America, displayed on a headpiece from Nigeria (early 1900s), and Sedna, the Inuit mistress of the sea, personified in a soapstone sculpture (1987). But the remarkable objects were removed from their contexts of faith, belief and religion, making their intrinsic meanings difficult to discern and obscuring how femininity and power interact with their creation and continued use.

The artefacts made sense in their groupings according to theme or culture; so the 'Capitoline Venus', a life-size statue of the Roman goddess, appeared with the painted terracotta relief of Sappho from fifth-century Greece. But collectively the objects appeared a little diffuse and fragmented, with insufficient threads drawing them together, making it difficult for viewers to advance beyond an aesthetic appreciation. Perhaps it is the absence of the biting point, or as Sara Ahmed terms it, the feminist snap, that caused the viewer's alienation (S. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* [2017]). Viewers could stand shoulder-to-shoulder at the glass display cases and appreciate the skill invested in making these beautiful objects, but the sense of being taken by the hand and guided through the space was missing, leaving viewers slightly unmoored even in a sea of appreciation.

The exhibition blended objects of veneration together with artefacts that reflect or challenge the construct of femininity, such as Judy Chicago's print, *The Creation* (1985), that reimagines the creation of the world 'from an overtly Western feminist perspective' (as described in the exhibition), and *Lilith*, a sculpture by Kiki Smith showing a naked Lilith defying gravity and crouching above the viewer. This amalgamation of the functional and semiotic, with artefacts displaying veneration and tradition in the past alongside more contemporary critical reinterpretations, at times obfuscated the meaningful presentation of artefacts. Female divine beings such as Kaushik Ghosh's track-stopping icon of Kali (2021) functioned partly as objects of worship, but how viewers were supposed to approach other artefacts such as the painted terracotta of Medusa from Italy (first century BCE) or the mask of the Andean deity of death, China Supay (pre-1985), was less clear.

The exhibition built on the premise that the worship of femininity or the foregrounding of women within faith and belief gives women power. Yet the often uncomfortable and deeply ambivalent place of women within organised religion could have been interrogated more, and the tension between the worship of women and the exploitative consumption of femininity was not explored. Rather than picking apart the representation of femininity and authority, the exhibition more often blurred the two together, which was perhaps inevitable in conceptions of women that were light on feminism and did not illuminate patriarchal power structures. The viewer was at times uncertain, unsure if women were being centred as powerful, and that they should in turn feel empowered, or if the exhibition critiqued the

consumption of an imaginary, idealised femininity, heightening their more cynical critical responses.

The exhibition was organised around five paired themes: creation and nature; passion and desire; magic and malice; justice and defence; and compassion and salvation. The focus on emotions did not necessarily have to descend into stereotyped conceptions of women and femininity, but the exhibition could have pulled harder against it. When talking about women and power, a lack of engagement with the pressing concerns of women now, even when looking back to the past, risks perpetuating the structures and systems that promote and tolerate misogyny, sexism and discrimination. Even if we accept the presupposition of matriarchal spiritual worship and belief that the exhibition traded on, it took little account of the permanence of patriarchy. The exhibition did not speak to the importance of resistance in the historic struggle for liberation, the violence of the state and the value of solidarity in the face of intersectional oppression based on class, disability, race and ecocide. The absence of discussion around how conceptions and expressions of gender and sex relate to femininity, theories of the body and women felt like a missed opportunity, and there was little emphasis on queerness or gender beyond the binary.

Instead, at the close of the exhibition a board pointed to 'new social movements for gender equality' that are 'driving important conversations about inclusivity and ways of understanding sex, gender and identity'. The exhibition did not expect viewers to speak in dialogue with these conversations; instead at the close they were asked the question 'what does feminine power mean to you?' with a large screen projecting anecdotal responses from participants. Here we finally find the radical in the slogan 'fuck the patriarchy', but only alongside 'redemption, grace, and an inability to load a dishwasher'. The giftshop offered a naked armless, headless and legless female torso in milk chocolate and edible gold or a pineapple and mango face mask that invited the purchaser to repeat 'I am strong' (presumably when wearing it). While the packaging of the exhibition was playful, marketing products that commodify the consumption of femininity and women alongside works by Nikita Gill and Bernardine Evaristo do not make it radical.

The universalising perspective of the exhibition with its ambitious temporal and spatial scope works much better in the beautifully produced catalogue, which admits more detail and nuance. Colour images adorn nearly every page, and it really is a feast for the eyes. Clearly the short films that were part of the exhibition cannot be translated into text, and some of the significance of the objects, such as the stately grandeur of the Maori cloak, were better represented physically rather than textually. The painted terracotta relief of (possibly) Sappho is more effective on the page, with the distancing screen of the exhibition case removed and the detail and paint remaining clearly visible.

Some remarkable classical artefacts that did not appear in the exhibition feature in the catalogue, such as the late-fourth century CE Projecta casket and the euphemistically labelled 'nude woman' on a red-figure kylix from the sixth century BCE, who is crouching and masturbating with two phalloi. The exhibition and catalogue blend artefacts from Graeco-Roman antiquity with objects from other cultures; so Hecate and Circe sit apart from Ishtar and Aphrodite and are discussed alongside the *kijo*, a demonically jealous woman from Japanese mythology, and Rangda, the childless woman and demon leader from Indonesia. With careful detail, the cross-cultural thematic ties that Crerar crafts make more sense in the catalogue, where readers are free to linger, reflect and follow-up without the pressure of eager visitors hustling for a spot.

Wangechi Mutu's unique artistic approaches characterised by reuse and reformation that complicate and diversify are represented in conversation at the close of the catalogue. The section 'Grow the tea, break the cups' is a welcome conclusion, moving away from

more abstract, safer critical territories to discuss justice, blackness, slavery, colonisation and industrialisation. M. Beard's excellent preface is typical in how she opens up the ancient world to new audiences with her gentle learnedness that manages to be authoritative, accessible and engaging. The exhibition ran from 19 May until 25 September 2022.

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## EDITING AND LATE COMMENTARIES

BOODTS (S.), †DE LEEMANS (P.), SCHORN (S.) (edd.) *Sicut dicit. Editing Ancient and Medieval Commentaries on Authoritative Texts.* (Lectio 8.) Pp. 373, b/w & colour ill. Turnhout: Brepols, 2019. Cased, €95. ISBN: 978-2-503-58649-6.

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*Sicut dicit* are the first two words in any number of medieval scholarly works. The third is invariably the name of some authoritative writer – *Aristoteles*, *Tullius*, *Boethius* etc. Then follows, optionally, *in Topicis* or the like and, finally, what the *auctor* said. The ubiquity of this incipit testifies to the fundamental role of authoritative writings in medieval culture, and many of the works that start *Sicut dicit* are commentaries on an authoritative book, though usually not the one referred to in the incipit.

Commentaries come in many guises. Some are *expositiones* that divide the text under consideration into parts, the content of each of which is then analysed and explained, the explanation often involving paraphrase and sometimes discussions of problematic issues (*dubia*). Others, so-called question commentaries, consist entirely of discussions of selected problems. And then there are the scholia, the unstructured or loosely structured heaps of notes that accompany authoritative texts in manuscripts.

Each of these genres of exegetic works presents its own problems for editors, and this volume's four essays about Greek texts and eight about Latin ones vividly illustrate just how many challenges such works pose to their editors.

A fundamental problem is that commentators rarely start from scratch. Usually they build on predecessors and include excerpts from them in their work, often verbatim and mostly without indicating the source. Once completed, a commentary may be revised by the author, and others may not only use it as a quarry but also revise it, the result being texts with a fluid identity. *Sicut dicit* primarily deals with texts suffering from an identity crisis and the question how an editor is to treat such patients.

A classical example is Servius' commentary on Virgil, which, so I learned as a youth, comes in two main variants, a shorter original one and an expanded one ('Servius Danielis'), most of whose extra material had been quarried in Donatus' now lost commentary. J.H. Brusuelas has now taught me that, while what I learned was not quite wrong, the situation is much more complicated, *inter alia* because there have not been watertight bulkheads separating the two versions in the course of transmission, and so it is less than obvious how to present the text(s) in an edition.

Medieval Latin question commentaries might seem to be relatively unproblematic: they generally have exactly one author, even when the name is *Anonymus*, and most of them