State of the Scholarship in Classics on Ancient Roman Rhetoric

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ABSTRACT
Limiting ourselves to scholarly books published in English from 2009–2016, we survey classics scholarship about rhetoric in ancient Rome from the late republic through the early empire. We seek traditional threads and growing trends across those works that advance our understanding of rhetoric’s practical, theoretical, and material manifestations during that time of tumult and transition. We begin broadly, using companion books to delineate three structural pillars in the scholarship: rhetoric as a formal cultural system, the republic as subject to ruptures and reinventions, and Cicero as a foremost statesman of the late republic. Then we move into scholarship that draws upon nontraditional rhetorical objects, such as art, and that moves into increasingly vibrant areas of interest in rhetoric, such as the senses. Overall, we find that classicists writing about ancient Roman rhetorical culture share with their counterparts in rhetoric an urge to test old verities and to add historical depth to larger scholarly turns within the humanities.

When it comes to their approach to rhetoric in ancient Rome, scholars of rhetoric and of classics resemble Cicero and Cato: they share plenty of interests but have slightly different principles and vastly different pedigrees. In De Finibus, Cicero happens upon Cato in the library of the country villa they are independently visiting. The two have a lively conversation among the book-rolls, their common zeal for learning overcoming potential interpersonal obstacles (3.7). While we do not mean to suggest rhetoricians in rhetoric and rhetoricians in classics are at odds, we do think it oversimplifies matters considerably to pretend each group pursues critical objects and questions in the same ways and without being conditioned and enabled by different disciplinary histories and identities. Such differences seem sufficient reason to inspect periodically the state of classics scholarship on ancient Roman rhetoric. An additional motivation is that, though there are many classicists who do not study rhetoric, few scholars in rhetoric do not learn or draw from ancient (or “classical”) rhetoric. Though we believe our survey will appeal to the sensibilities of all the aforementioned groups, we imagine it
will be most useful for those in rhetoric who do not claim expertise in ancient Roman rhetorical culture but who encounter its echoes in later historical periods, its cast of characters when teaching courses in the rhetorical tradition, or its terminology in contemporary rhetorical and political theory.

Limiting ourselves to scholarly books published in English from 2009–2016, we survey classics scholarship about rhetoric in ancient Rome from the late republic through the early empire.\(^1\) We seek traditional threads and growing trends across those works that advance our understanding of rhetoric’s practical, theoretical, and material manifestations during that time of tumult and transition.\(^2\) We begin broadly, using companion books to delineate three structural pillars in the scholarship: rhetoric as a formal cultural system, the republic as subject to ruptures and reinventions, and Cicero as a foremost statesman of the late republic. Then we move into scholarship that draws upon nontraditional rhetorical objects, such as art, and that moves into increasingly vibrant areas of interest in rhetoric, such as the senses. Overall, we find that classicists writing about ancient Roman rhetorical culture share with their counterparts in rhetoric an urge to test old verities and to add historical depth to larger scholarly turns within the humanities.

**Companions**

The multi-author “Companion to” series, published by Blackwell and Cambridge presses respectively, feature several titles pertaining to ancient Roman rhetoric. These volumes court non-specialists, from advanced undergraduates to graduate students and scholars who want to know more about a given feature of ancient Roman rhetoric but do not stand to benefit much from overly technical details. Blackwell’s *Companion to Roman Rhetoric*, edited by William Dominik and Jon Hall, exceeds 500 pages and includes among its contributors many marquee and much-cited names among classicists who study rhetoric (e.g., Joy Connolly, John Dugan, and Catherine Steel).\(^3\) Dominik and Hall organize thirty-two original contributions into five parts. “Approaching Rhetoric” familiarizes readers with current critical idioms in secondary scholarship and introduces the complex tension within Roman rhetoric between its Greek heritage and its native derivation that ancient speakers and writers creatively managed and exploited. “Rhetoric and Its Social Context” groups essays about education, acculturation, politics, and demonstrative oratory, a genre in which boundaries of social propriety—especially as regards masculinity—were vigorously negotiated. “Systematizing Rhetoric” covers the traditional five *partes* of rhetoric and rhetorical handbooks. “Rhetoricians and Orators” includes attempts to enlarge beyond Cicero and Quintilian, assessing the fragmentary orations of Cicero’s contemporaries and considering the views of Tacitus and Pliny on oratory.
“Rhetoric and Literature” ranges across poetry (epic, satire, elegy) and historiography, all variegated by colors and patterns of rhetorical culture.

Anyone interested in how ancient writers and modern scholars distinguish among prose genres will benefit enormously from G. O. Hutchinson’s *Greek to Latin: Frameworks and Contexts for Intertextuality*. Chapter 10, titled “The Landscapes of Prose,” aims to supply a few new organizing terms. Hutchinson recommends we think of “three major super-genres of prose: philosophy, oratory, and history [emphasis added]” (223). Poetic super-genres have identity-signaling meters that distinguish one from another (e.g., tragedy in iambic, epic in hexameter—though hexameter is tricky), but prose does not. How and when ancient writers maintain or blur distinctions among and between prose super-genres, and how subordinate genres complicate those distinctions—e.g., are Caesar’s and Cato’s speeches in Sallust’s *Bellum Catilinae* oratory or history?—are questions of pertinence to how we decide what texts “count” as rhetorical as ancient Romans may have viewed the term (see also Berry and Erskine 4–6). Hutchinson asserts that “the differing actions, outlook, and lifestyle of the creators are fundamental to separating oratory, philosophy, and history” (224). He permits, however, that super-genres can and do “multi-task” and “interplay” (226), and trains attention on when a practitioner of one prose super-genre regards a practitioner of another as overreaching (e.g., Quintilian 10.1-31-3 on historians as bad models for orators).

Most of the chapters in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rhetoric*, edited and introduced by Erik Gunderson, span Greece and Rome. This volume is remarkable for departing from the usual classicist stance that “rhetoric” refers exclusively to the art of the speaker, of which spoken oratory is the purest manifestation (3); however, the framework and contents of the collection ultimately do not press hard on that convention. The volume’s first division (“An Archeology of Rhetoric”) lingers in Greece, but its second division (“The Field of Language”) pursues elements and issues of rhetorical theory in ways pertinent to its Roman conception. Two rich chapters are James Porter’s on the voice as an aesthetic phenomenon and Gunderson’s own on the rhetoric of rhetorical theory, in which he shows how Quintilian “archives [earlier] theories of rhetoric as part of [his] own performance of rhetorical-cum-theoretical mastery” in his *Institutio Oratoria* (111). Within the third division (“The Practice of Rhetoric”), two top-notch contributions focus exclusively on Rome, but the chapter on “Rhetorical Practice and Performance in Early Christianity,” by premiere New Testament scholars Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, particularly recommends itself. Penner and Vander Stichele emphasize “the profoundly hybrid nature” (258) of early Christian rhetoric, which pulled from Judaic and Greco-Roman rhetorical traditions and availed of oral and textual genres.
The contents of *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic*, edited and introduced by Harriet Flower, range across the republic’s 500-year history, culminating in an epilogue about the influence of the Roman republic on the French and American revolutions. Curiously, the only direct attention to rhetoric and oratory in the entire collection appears in Elaine Fantham’s chapter on “literature,” where Cicero and the historian Sallust are briefly paired (see also Fantham *Roman Literary Culture*). Flower’s most recent solo-authored book, *Roman Republics*, tackles matters of periodization, championing the titular multiple republics as a new paradigm. Her revision makes Rome much more dynamic and the republican idea much more resilient through its recurrence, though she concedes the difficulty of locating attention to breaks and bursts in the textual evidence, writing:

The characteristic Roman focus on *mos maiorum* [the custom of those who came before] and continuity with the past need not mean that we have to accept their rhetoric at face value. By contrast, it seems evident that the dramatic changes Roman society was undergoing produced a discourse of tradition and an insistent claim to a timeless heritage, which should itself be regarded as a cultural artifact created for a political purpose. (21; brackets ours)

Not surprisingly, Cicero ducks in and out of the narrative, and his rhetorical efforts to warn Romans of an imminent dissolution of *res publica*, as though it were unprecedented and the republic unrecoverable once lost, looks much more constructed from the view of Flower’s paradigm. Flower’s index contains no entries for “oratory,” or “rhetoric,” which is strange, given their sprinkling throughout the book: “oratory” appears three times, “rhetoric” eleven.

The discontinuity of “the” republic is a point of emphasis, too, in Mary Beard’s magisterial *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome*. One remarkable authorial choice is that Beard begins her book with Cicero’s consulship in 63 BCE, instead of starting with the archeology of archaic Rome or the myth of Remus and Romulus, which are delayed until chapters 2–4. This choice merits the attention of rhetoricians because it signifies (a preeminent and popular classicist’s view of) the importance of oratory in constituting and contesting Roman identity. Because Beard’s book is likely to be more culturally consequential than any other work referenced in this review, we rhetoricians should note her choice.

What role did the people play in Republican periods? T. P. Wiseman, in *Remembering the Roman People: Essays on Late-Republican Politics and Literature*, shines the spotlight directly on the *populus*, arguing that in the second century BCE “*res publica*” was “*res poplica,*” the people’s matters, and that “[i]t is therefore paradoxical that modern historians of Rome regularly assume that the republic was always and necessarily an oligarchy” (1). Also marshaling against that assumption is *Community and
Communication: Oratory and Politics in Ancient Rome, edited by Catherine Steel and Henriette van der Blom. Its contributors work together to show when and where political elites and the populous were engaged in communication as a process characterized by mutuality (at times, to the point of symmetry), vulnerability, and uncertainty. Dialogism mattered.

Thanks to surviving speech-texts, we know, however, more about one side of the dialogue than the other. But what did Cicero, for example, say and sound like when addressing the people, and how similar were speeches orally delivered at contiones (public meetings) to the polished, published versions that have come down to us? In her contribution to the edited volume, Colloquial and Literary Latin, co-editor Anna Chahoud investigates “Idiom(s) and Literariness in Classical Literary Criticism” (ch. 4). She observes that “the notion of ‘colloquial’ (feature, register or language) has emerged from the opposition with such qualities as ‘intellectual’, ‘stylised’, ‘poetic’, ‘vulgar’ or ‘archaic’ (feature, register or language)” and wonders how serviceable those oppositions are, given reception questions of subjectivity and relativity (45, parentheses sic). Chahoud’s chapter jumpstarts inquiry about how orators appealed to popular audiences likely to be suspicious of hoity-toity language yet probably appreciative of the odd functional flourish.

How did the populus distinguish between what sounded natural and artificial? How conversational and vernacular were Roman orators (who were, of course, élite) when it suited them, and could they err in presenting themselves as such when they had a reputation for learnedness? Those recent works on the Roman people remind us to read textual sources—and survey rhetorical spaces (see Lamp City of Marble)—with the populus in mind.

The Life of Roman Republicanism, the latest opus of Joy Connolly, extends her effort to align ancient thinkers with political theory ostensibly inspired by them. She identifies a distortion of ancient talk about politics in what she calls the “neo-Roman republican revival in political theory” and a reduction of its complexity among classicists who treat it merely as talk about virtues (xv). She aims to restore to the history of political theory three giants of the late republic—Cicero, Sallust, and Horace—and to provide political theorists and classicists with a better heuristic and hermeneutic for finding and deriving meaning from ancient political texts. As forecast by its leading position in the title of the book, “life” is her overall fixation, since its sustenance played a primary part in the political reflections of prominent ancient republican orators, historians, and poets. Specifically, she contends that “[d]esire, hope, passion, time, contest, and fantasy drive and guide political life” (6). Connolly’s arguments in chapter 1, which focus on concordia and consensus in Cicero’s Republic, and in chapter 4, which highlight methods for the creative management of pluralism and agonism in a democratic republic, cover territory plenty familiar to rhetoricians. A bit less familiar, perhaps, but sure to be welcome, is chapter 5, where Connolly
works closely with Cicero’s understudied Pro Marcello to make a case for the political potency of “imagination, finitude, responsibility, and irony” (173). Connolly finds in ancient Roman thinkers a lot more than dear prudentia.

As has already become clear, classics scholarship about Roman rhetorical culture skews toward Cicero, due to his dominance of the textual record, and the dominance of the textual record in classics, though it seems less dominant than it used to be. Contributors to The Cambridge Companion to Cicero, edited and introduced by Catherine Steel, circumscribe his life and afterlife by limiting themselves to his textual traces instead of seeking him out in the complicated locus of late-Republican Rome, or any other time and place in which he has appeared. In other words, no chapter gets bogged down in the kind of thick contextual descriptions that readers can find in other books. His seeming accessibility—the humor in his speeches, the vulnerability in his letters—has long been at the core of his appeal: to read him is to feel like you know him (for better or worse). This Companion fans out around three facets of the multifaceted man: the Greco-Roman intellectual, the Roman politician, and the phantom of Republican Rome who roams about in later centuries. The volume vibrantly succeeds in making its point that Cicero has “multiple characters: a heroic defender of freedom; a political failure, blinded by vanity and oblivious to change; the epitome of oratorical brilliance; the supreme model of Latin; and a human, to whose weaknesses and foibles we have unmediated access” (Steel 1). Of those who either love or hate Cicero, this book demands a dampening of affect: so many Cicerones have come down to us that we ought to be nuanced in our appraisal.

Other books on Cicero attempt to narrow in on slimmer portions of his corpus. John Hall in Politeness and Politics in Cicero’s Letters and Peter White in Cicero in Letters: Epistolary Relations of the Late Republic dwell on Cicero’s surviving correspondence, which amounts to 950 letters. For rhetoricians intrigued by epistolary rhetoric (and the medieval ars dictaminis), those books offer additional ways of viewing the genre and its social functions. Given the lead role the rediscovery of Cicero’s letters played in the rise of humanism, their importance is hard to overstate. Catullus, Cicero, and a Society of Patrons, by Sarah Culpepper Stroup, also focuses on writing, pairing a poet and an orator who did not much like one another. Stroup departs from the use of “literary culture” to describe that to which various Roman writers contributed and instead uses “textual culture.” This terminological change opens up a new set of questions about the aesthetic affordances of textual materiality, the politics of dedication, and the management of one’s cultural legacy. The most riveting chapter, “Brutus: The Dialogic Personification of the Republican Voice,” argues that Cicero personifies eloquence (Eloquentia) in his Brutus to dramatizes the—really his—political situation: it is too dangerous for Eloquentia to speak in public, so she writes indoors. In Cicero’s Role
Models, Henriette van der Blom shows how Cicero addressed “criticism and witticisms” about his non-aristocratic background by associating and connecting with the words and cultural legacies of exemplary, élite Romans of earlier times (325). This technique is not at all unique to Cicero. In 2008, Catherine Steel compared Cicero’s role-model strategy with that of Barack Obama, noting their shared skill at “setting up a genealogy of forebears—not biological forebears but intellectual forebears. For Cicero it was Licinius Crassus, Scipio Aemilianus, and Cato the Elder. For Obama it is Lincoln, Roosevelt, and King” (qtd. in Higgins). Clearly, Ciceronian legacy-craft lives on.

Cicero also appears aplenty in books in whose titles he does not appear. Another recent book by Beard, Laughter in Ancient Rome: On Joking, Tickling, and Cracking Up, intersects with recent interest in vituperation (see Conley, who makes passing reference to Cicero, Quintilian, and Martial). Beard’s nimble work, a collection and extension of her 2008 Sather Lectures at Berkeley, focuses on textual sources spanning several genres and covers the history and theory of laughter from Aristotle through Bakhtin. Beard rounds up the usual suspects—Cicero, Pliny, Quintilian, Plutarch—but her treatment of them moves well beyond the idea of humor as derision. In the second part of the book, Beard moves to a thematic treatment of Roman humor, including a section on the gesturing orator. On the whole, she organizes her inquiry around three questions concerning Roman humor: what was funny and why? What was the role of humor in Roman society? And can we get the joke? Her answers to the last have important implications for all scholars trying to contextualize ancient sources.

Senses, Symbols, Materials

Here we move from some well-traveled areas of classics scholarship about the rhetorical culture of late-Republican Rome and onto a few newer paths. In the remainder of this survey, we consider recent books about intersections between ancient Roman visual and rhetorical culture before transitioning to scholarship on senses other than sight. There is plentiful evidence that humanists have been taking the visual seriously for a while. To speak of a visual culture of ancient Rome is to consider the vocabulary and public function of images and visions, from the material (paintings, reliefs, statues, architecture) to the phantastical (dreams, memories, imagination, visualization). Many of the following works turn to rhetorical theory to contextualize visual or material culture.

Jás Elsner and Michael Meyer’s edited volume, Art and Rhetoric in Roman Culture, offers contributions from largely classical archaeologists and art historians, a preface and coda by Meyer, and an introduction by Elsner, in
which he shares the hope that the book will “establish the significance of the frame of rhetorical practice and theory within antiquity for ways in which Roman art was conceived and made in its time” (31). Elsner’s introduction begins by expanding the Aristotelian proofs to accommodate the production and viewing of visual arts. He argues Aristotelian logos should include “any medium by which an audience is addressed,” not just texts, pathos should encompass viewers and audiences, and êthos should extend to artists and patrons (4–6). These proofs are offered alongside concepts from the progynasmata as appropriate tools for contextualizing and analyzing Roman culture. The nearly five-hundred-page volume is divided into four major thematic parts: “Architecture and Public Space,” “The Domestic Realm,” “The Funerary,” and “Rhetoric and the Visual.” A long chapter by Edmund Thomas begins the volume, arguing that both rhetoric and architecture are “arts of communication” and that Longinus’ On Sublimity contains an appropriate critical approach to architecture. Thomas gives a fair amount of space to a discussion of the features of the sublime. Other chapters in the volume give more attention to material culture than rhetorical treatises and theory as such, including an essay by Eve D’Ambra on female portraiture, which delivers an analysis of “rhetorical systems of female beauty,” examining differences in female portraiture (including dolls) in private and public settings (156).

Elsner’s “hope is that the volume will open up models of future collaboration between historians of ancient rhetoric and classical archaeologists and offer inspiration to others who wish to examine many more aspects of the comparison of rhetoric and art than has been possible here” (31). Making a nod towards this collaboration, Thomas cites several recent works on Roman architecture by rhetoricians, including Diana Eidson’s work on the Celsus library and Kathleen Lamp’s work on Augustan Rome (Eidson; Lamp “City of Brick”; Lamp City of Marble). The latter’s A City of Marble argues the Augustan cultural campaigns—including coins, altars, and monuments—were influenced by rhetorical theory and practice. The result was the Augustan “political myth” depicted in all variety of media, which claimed Augustus’ rule was destined by the gods from the time of the fall of Troy and only his descendants would continue the material prosperity brought by his rule. Later chapters explore how the Roman people took up this myth. Ultimately, Lamp argues for the expansion of rhetorical artifacts in the Roman period to include visual and material culture.

Also using rhetorical theory to contextualize visual culture, Ellen Perry uses the rhetorical concepts of decorum (as related to emulation of a model) and phantasia to challenge the long-standing idea that Roman art offered nothing but slavish copies of Greek masterpieces (Kopienkritik) in her book The Aesthetics of Emulation in the Visual Arts of Ancient Rome. Perry is not interested in rhetorical theory specifically, but instead uses rhetorical theory
(Cicero and Quintilian) to explain Roman attitudes on imitation, appropriateness, and the production of ideals in the visual arts. Also focused on the relationship between language and visual culture, Emma Scioli, in her book *Dream, Fantasy, and Visual Art in Roman Elegy*, explores dreams as described in Roman elegiac poetry, primarily that of Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid, and other “manifestations of visual images,” such as analogy and *ekphrasis* and often in relation to (mythological) painting (13). Scioli frequently contends there are similarities between dreaming and seeing and that in instances where the poet recounts dreams, the reader is positioned as a viewer (3, 5). Scioli concludes “these [dream] episodes give us special insight into the fundamental dualism of the elegiac narrator, witnessed in the moment of transition between introspection and exhibition that characterizes the elegiac subject” (219). Moving away from visual culture, Ruth Webb begins *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Thought and Practice* (2009) by making clear that it will not focus on the modern definition of *ekphrasis*—descriptions of art—but instead on vivid language. This is significant, since she argues classical definitions did not give priority to the thing described, but rather the act of perception (38). In taking this approach, Webb gives priority to the “power of language” and in many respects places the rhetorical tradition as a “rival” to the visual arts (3, 27). The chapters develop roughly as the educational curriculum did—beginning with *ekphrasis* and its subjects in the progymnasmata (Hermogenes, Theon, Aphthonios, Nikoloas) before moving from the grammarian to the rhetorician (Quintilian, Menander Rhetor, “Longinus”) to focus on the uses of the psychological effect on the audience in the form of *enargeia* and *phantasia*, and finally *ekphrasis* in declamation and epideictic rhetoric.

The success of visual scholarship has given troping power to what anthropologist David Howes called a “sensorial turn” ten years ago in the book, *Empire of the Senses* (xii). Since it ostensibly focuses on the visual, Mark Bradley’s *Colour and Meaning in Ancient Rome* is a fitting transition text between vision and the other modes of perception. His chapter on rhetorical *color* (chapter 4) explores “color in the sense of the ‘gloss’ or complexion put on an argument, [and] sometimes extended to refer to a speaker’s personal ‘character’, behaviour or demeanour” (111, brackets ours). Moving from tinted passages in Cicero to those in Seneca the Elder and Quintilian, Bradley shows how *color* became a distinctly Roman contribution to rhetorical theory, practice, and pedagogy. *Color* infused and diffused throughout a speech instead of sitting on its surface like cosmetics (*fucus, pigmenta*). Routledge is publishing an in-progress series on The Senses in Antiquity that straddles some of the chronological and cultural divides those who study “ancient Roman rhetoric” are likely to encounter. *Synaesthesia and the Ancient Senses*, edited by Butler and Alex Purves, inaugurates the series. Though several chapters would snag a rhetorician’s interest, we are drawn
to Curtis Dozier’s “Blinded by the Light: Oratorical Clarity and Poetic Obscurity in Quintilian,” wherein Dozier illuminates the visuality inhering in many of Quintilian’s preferred terms for ways in which orators make their words clear and vivid for listeners (e.g., *illustratio* means something like “example” but literally means “a lighting up”).

*Smell and the Ancient Senses*, edited by Bradley, comes next in the series. In his introduction, Bradley claims that “certain genres such as comedy, satire and biography direct the reader’s attention to smell more cogently than rhetoric or historiography” (16), at which rhetoricians may flair our nostrils. For instance, what about the dangers of an orator’s speech “smelling of the lamp”? What of Marcus Antonius’s intriguing disclosure that he “sniffs out” how audiences “seem liable to be led most easily by speech” (Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.44.186)? And smell plays no little part in invective; consider Cicero’s description of Marcus Antonius, retching in front of a tribunal, the vomit “reeking of wine” (*Philippic* 2.63). The two chapters that bear on rhetoric in *Sight and the Ancient Senses*, edited by Michael Squire, do not much advance upon what rhetoricians already know about ancient visual rhetorics but are useful compressions of it (Elsner and Squire; Webb, “Sight and Insight”).

Forthcoming volumes in The Senses in Antiquity series will round out the rest of the senses, with *Touch and the Ancient Senses*, edited by Alex Purves, due to emerge in early 2017. We wonder how contributors will engage the Latin verb *tango* (tangere, tetigi, tactum; touch), which ranges in meaning, in Cicero, for example, from “touching upon” a topic to crafting an argument that is “touching” in an affective sense, similar to our idioms “touching a nerve” or finding something “touching.” Terms of ancient rhetorical style, too, have tactile qualities, from smooth (*levis*) to hairy (*hirsutus*). *Integritas* (*in* + *tango*), literally “having not been touched” but meaning something more like “soundness” or “wholeness,” is a concept not unimportant to ancient rhetoric and philosophy, and clearly it is the origin of our concept of “integrity.” The English word “tact” also derives from *tango* and played no small role in eighteenth-century British rhetorics (see Agnew, *Outward, Visible Propriety*). We suspect the volume on taste, edited by Kelli Rudolph and expected in March 2017, may well feature a chapter on sapience (*sapien-tia*, from the Latin *sapio*, to have the sense of taste, to be sensible, to be wise), which Cicero and Quintilian believe an orator must join with eloquence if s/he is to serve the public good. The volume on hearing already has a companion piece, since Butler’s most recent solo-authored book, *The Ancient Phonograph*, tunes into how ancient writers—the ones most relevant to this review’s parameters are Cicero, the Senecas, and Quintilian—“write” (*graph-*) the “voice/speech” (*phōnē*). We anticipate the Senses series will delight rhetoricians warm to rhetoric’s affective and sensuous dimensions.
and potentially inspire rhetoricians unsure of how to ground such growing
enthusiasms in the tradition.

Because we are doctae puellae (learned ladies), though not in the ques-
tionable elegiac sense (we think), we close with A Roman Women Reader:
Selections from the Second Century BCE through Second Century CE, co-
edited by Sheila K. Dickison and Judith P. Hallett. This collection brings
together 21 brief Latin excerpts about or by women, organized chronologi-
cally, from Plautus to Aulus Gellius, and ranging over centuries, genres, and
media. (The only excerpts by women are from two poets, both named
Sulpicia, who wrote erotic verse). Even Latinless readers will learn a lot
about the cultural conditions of ancient Roman women from this reader;
on what occasions and in what locations women could acceptably be seen
and heard from are details most relevant to rhetoricians. The bibliography
immediately following the introduction inventories over forty years of scho-
larship about ancient Roman women. Before each excerpt in the first part of
the book, Dickison and Hallett supply a note on the source text. In
the second part of the book, they provide historical context and line-by-
line commentary on the Latin. These aids even identify rhetorical tropes and
figures; for instance, the editors present prosopopeia (83) to name Cicero’s
devastating ventriloquizing of Clodia in Pro Caelio (56 BCE).

Notes

1. At the risk of inviting mistrust, which one ought never to do in one’s partitio, we offer
that old Latin warning: caveat lector. The abundance of publication outlets and options
for classics scholarship has required us to be selective, though not unrepresentative.
Lois Peters Agnew covers recent scholarship prior to 2009 (see Agnew 2010).
2. Though Rome was an empire before it had emperors, we use the typical nomenclature.
3. Though the original publication date of 2007 places this book outside of our date-
range, we believe its 2010 publication in paperback demonstrates its ongoing popular-
ity, makes it an affordable choice for classical rhetoric courses, and thus justifies its
inclusion.
4. Some readers may remember the series of scratch-and-sniff children’s books from the late
nineties by Mary Dobson called Smelly Old History. Roman Aromas came out in 1997.

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