



BRILL

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Martial's Catullus. The Reception of an Epigrammatic Rival by Bruce W. Swann

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BRUCE W. SWANN, *Martial's Catullus. The Reception of an Epigrammatic Rival* (Spudasmata 54). Hildesheim, Olms, 1994. 180 p.

The reputations of ancient poets tend to shift from generation to generation. The case of Catullus is an extreme one: the poet has been, among other things, hailed as a passionate romantic, criticized for writing obscene verse and honoured as a *doctus poeta*.

Complex as his reputation may seem, the Romans themselves saw Catullus above all as an epigrammatist, as Bruce Swann argues in the present monograph, a revised dissertation. Martial invariably speaks about Catullus in this way, regarding him as a great successor in the genre of which he himself became the main exponent. Swann even extends his claim to later generations. He defends the theory that in the Renaissance and later ages Catullus was still seen mainly as a writer of epigrams, along with Martial. Opinions tended, however, to vary on the question which of the two was to be preferred. Only in the Romantic period, Swann argues, did Catullus come to be seen as a great poet of love and erotic poetry.

Swann's theory is supported by ample evidence from various sources, especially sources from the Renaissance and later periods. There are, for example, several chapters on Catullus and Martial in Italy, France, England and Germany, whereas Martial's view of Catullus is dealt with in one chapter only.

One can only admire the scope of Swann's familiarity of sources, the careful way in which he handles them and the clarity of his theory. Meanwhile, for students of Roman literature the book is rather disappointing. The title seems to promise a study on Roman intertextuality, but this is only partly fulfilled by this book. The way in which, say, 15th century Italians regarded Catullus, whether as an epigrammatist or not, is of little relevance for our assessment of the poet, or even of Martial's. Besides, even Martial's judgment may well be coloured by his own specific literary interests and does not necessarily represent 'the' Roman view of Catullus.

As far as Roman studies are concerned, the theory that Martial considered Catullus to be an epigrammatist, convincing as it is, could conveniently have been dealt with in an article. In its present form, this monograph is mainly relevant for those interested in the later reception of Catullus and Martial.

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