

Maxwell Teitel Paule, *Canidia, Rome's First Witch*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Classical Studies Monographs, 2017. Pp. 218, 3 b&w ill. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-350-0038-0. US\$85.99.

In this book derived from his dissertation, Maxwell Teitel Paule zeroes in on Canidia, a witchy figure Horace deploys in several of his *Satires* and *Epodes*. For Paule, Canidia demands examination not to prove her status as a “typical” literary witch, but rather to demonstrate that no “typical” literary witch existed. Canidia – who is sometimes ridiculous, sometimes terrifying, sometimes powerful, sometimes powerless – defies consistency. Paule’s approach is to embrace variation as the interpretive key. Impulses to identify generic traits of witches are “unnecessary entanglements” (p. 2) that distract from witches’ true function, which is to serve the needs of the contexts in which they appear. Approached from this perspective, Canidia can be seen to be a flexible literary device that Horace used to stretch generic boundaries and fashion poetic space.

Paule divides his study into five chapters. The internal three deal with individual poems starring Canidia; the final addresses other poems in which Canidia appears as a very minor character. The first chapter (“What is a Witch?”) outlines and justifies Paule’s decision to focus on Canidia’s inconsistency of character across the Horatian corpus. He rejects the historical reading of Canidia as a pseudonym for a certain Gratidia, purported to be a Neapolitan perfumer, to argue that Canidia is instead best taken as a literary fiction. He notes that Latin terms for “witch” tend to be quite specific about the kinds of powers or characteristics supposedly inherent in a person so labelled. For example, one word for “witch,” *venefica*, suggests “poisoner.” However, the actual use of this terminology does not reflect the particular powers or characteristics a given “witch” might be presented as possessing – a woman called a *venefica* might not, in fact, wield physical poison. Since terminology is often an inaccurate reflection of behaviour and expertise, Paule argues the witch must be considered an unfixed character, a screen upon which to project current anxieties, and so must be understood to have performed a function similar to that which Sarah Iles Johnston has ascribed to demons (pp. 19–20).¹ Canidia will therefore be the kind of “witch” that Horace’s poetic needs demanded in each individual work in which she appears. The remaining chapters discuss which witch she was where, and the poetic purposes she served.

Chapter 2 (“Satire 1.8: Canidia in the Gardens of Maecenas”) discusses Canidia as ridiculous and repulsive claimant of magical expertise, an uncivilized intruder into the former-graveyard-turned-garden, the Gardens of Maecenas on the Esquiline. Though freshly ordered, the gardens remained a liminal space; it is necessary for Priapus, the narrator and apotropaic statue charged with defending the area against disordering presences, to rid the space of Canidia. Paule argues that the Gardens of

¹ See also Paule’s “*Quae saga, quis magus*: On the vocabulary of the Roman witch,” *CQ* 64 (2014) 745–57.

Maecenas ought to be understood as a metaphor for Horace's own brand of satire, into which he imports a multiplicity of other – perhaps, too many – poetic genres. Canidia carries with her epic, bucolic, and iambic elements, and so must be expelled from Horace's poetic garden lest its borders dissolve entirely.

Canidia is no longer an object of pure derision in the poem dealt with in the next chapter ("Hag and Snatcher: Canidia as Child-killing Demon in *Epoche 5*"); rather, she is a frightening presence who plans to torture a young boy to death in order to make a potion with which to force home a wayward lover. Paule details the comparisons to be made between Canidia in this context and the persistent menace of child-killing demons (Lilith, Lamia, the *strix*) in ancient traditions. The grimness of these associations invites a startling contrast with the hopefulness of Vergil's fourth *Eclogue*, which famously celebrated the imminent birth of a saviour child; Vergil's utopic focus on the birth of an unnamed *puer* is answered by Horace's dystopic presentation of the imminent demise of a (different) unnamed *puer*, whose poetic context and words call to mind further the travesties of civil war.

Next, in "Routing the Empusa: The Iambic Canidia of *Epoche 17*," Canidia takes on the appearance of a sort of vampire, an *empusa*. These were demonic figures who fed on the bodies of men, but who could be repelled by insults and abusive language. In *Epoche 17*, both characteristics well suit Canidia, who has drained Horace of breath and colour and who is the object of back-handed compliments. But here, the abusive-and-abused Canidia also embodies the *Epodes* as a whole, an iambic force which with which Horace must wrestle. Although she is given the last word in the last poem, Horace effectively routs his parasite by ending the book: Canidia, his creation, is silenced.

In a brief final chapter ("Venefica Minor: Canidia in *Epoche 3, Satire 2.1 and 2.8*"), Paule pushes further his thesis that literary witches in general share only superficial similarities with each other, and that Canidia in particular is an inconsistent character in the Horatian corpus. In the three remaining poems by Horace in which Canidia appears only briefly, she is cast respectively as a cook, a poisoner, and the possessor of poisonous breath. While these three identifications could be seen to share some internal consistency, they contrast with the Canidia of the three poems treated in the previous chapters. From the example of Canidia, Paule concludes that literary witches have "polyvalent status"; they are "generic entities, ready to be outfitted with highly specific attributes to operate in distinct contexts for precise purposes." (p. 150)

Students of Horatian poetry are likely to be Paule's primary audience, but those interested in the poetic potential of characters that might deceptively strike as flat or "stock" will find much of value here, as will those occupied with witch figures in literature more generally. The strengths of Paule's discussion lie in his ability to identify insightful poetic allusions and connections internal and external to Horace's poetry. If an infelicity is to be identified, it is the book's title. This may seem an excessively pedantic quibble, but "first" is perhaps too bold a claim in a discipline that

can debate even the identity of the first emperor, and there is surely a difference between what might have been a more accurate title, *Canidia, Horace's Witch*, and the actual title, *Canidia, Rome's First Witch*. The former would have reflected the literary focus, whereas the latter implies instead a social or historical thrust. Social-historical and literary investigations generally adopt interpretive binaries that are not strictly parallel; the former prefer continuity-change, the latter, similarity-difference. Paule's presentation of literary witches within the frame of difference is effective, but his arguments could not be convincingly transposed to argue that women identified by, e.g., Cicero *sagae* or Varro as *praecantrices* (pp. 9–13) were merely screens upon which to project ever-changing needs and anxieties, even if their labels are perceived to be misleading. Women summoned in to perform a professional service are real, but the same cannot be said of demons, and so the analogy in a social-historical context is limited. It must be stressed that Paule does not claim to describe “real” witches (it is the “author’s needs” that occupy him, p. 14) and that his view that Canidia existed only in Horace’s works is persuasive. But Paule’s title elides life and literature, whose relationship is of course complex and whose spheres do not overlap absolutely. If differentiation is not made clear, it is necessary to ask, for example, if the stereotypical attributes assigned to literary witches, which Paule takes simply as a flat way of saying that a woman was a witch, were truly devoid of significance.

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