

10-25-2024

Review of Amy A. Koenig. 2024. The Fractured Voice: Silence and Power in Imperial Roman Literature. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin Studies in Classics. Pp. vii, 228. Hardcover. (ISBN 9780299345303) \$99.95.

Sigrid Schottenius Cullhed
Uppsala University, sigrid.cullhed@littvet.uu.se

Follow this and additional works at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/necj>



Part of the [Classics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cullhed, Sigrid Schottenius (2024) "Review of Amy A. Koenig. 2024. The Fractured Voice: Silence and Power in Imperial Roman Literature. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin Studies in Classics. Pp. vii, 228. Hardcover. (ISBN 9780299345303) \$99.95.," *New England Classical Journal*: Vol. 51 : Iss. 2 , 101-103.

<https://doi.org/10.52284/NECJ.51.2.review.cullhed>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by CrossWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in New England Classical Journal by an authorized editor of CrossWorks.

accepted their place as subordinate to the father-emperor, as clients, or as inferior *amici*. Yet, as the book points out, for many male members of the Roman elite, it was still important to claim their masculinity by preserving some degree of freedom and independence. This appears to explain the anxieties of some later imperial authors (such as Publius Cornelius Tacitus) for whom, under the regime of “unmasculine” and despotic emperors, it was difficult or to retain their manly independence.

Melanie Racette-Campbell’s *The Crisis of Masculinity in the Age of Augustus* is a fresh contribution to the study of Roman masculinities. It is a well-written study that inspires the reader to learn more about Roman masculinity and to consider the various sources that can shed new light on the topic. The book raises important points regarding both change and continuity in the ways of performing Roman manliness during Augustus’ reign. It is an interesting question whether some of the examined reactions, responses, and resistance should be viewed as directed against the Augustan regime or rather against the hegemonic version of masculinity that existed before (and also after) Augustus’ reign. All in all, I highly recommend this elegantly written book to everyone interested in Augustan literature as well as those interested in the study of premodern masculinities more generally.

Jaakkojuhani Peltonen

Tampere University

jaakkojuhani.peltonen@tuni.fi

<https://doi.org/10.52284/NECJ.51.2.review.peltonen>

AMY A. KOENIG. 2024. *THE FRACTURED VOICE: SILENCE AND POWER IN IMPERIAL ROMAN LITERATURE*. MADISON, WISCONSIN: THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN PRESS, WISCONSIN STUDIES IN CLASSICS. PP. VII, 228. HARDCOVER. (ISBN 9780299345303) \$99.95.

In *The Fractured Voice: Silence and Power in Imperial Roman Literature*, Amy A. Koenig examines a recurrent motif in Roman imperial literature: characters losing and regaining the ability to speak. The book covers a wide range of texts, including the writings of Galen, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, Achilles Tatius’ *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Longus’ *Daphnis and Chloe*, Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass*, and pseudo-Lucian’s *Onos*, culminating in an epilogue that examines Prudentius’ *Peristephanon*. A primary aim of the book is to demonstrate that the loss of voice in these texts carries a deeper and more significant meaning beyond mere powerlessness – that muteness in these contexts enables new forms of communication.

In the first chapter, Koenig discusses the second-century physician Galen and his experiments on the nerves that control the voice and the vocal apparatus in his surviving anatomical writings. In the second chapter, she examines Roman religion and its relationship to the voice through an analysis of Ovid’s *Fasti*. Koenig argues that the nymph Lara, who is raped by Jupiter and subsequently silenced when he forcibly removes her tongue, gains power as she ultimately transforms into a goddess. Koenig holds that Lara’s presence manifests a particular anxiety about the attempt to revive forgotten deities and practices from Rome’s past and integrate them into the imperial religious calendar. The mysterious identity of the *dea muta* in these texts underscores the special role of speech restriction in the religious sphere.

In the third and fourth chapters, Koenig interprets narratives involving the loss of voice in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Achilles Tatius’ *Leucippe and Clitophon*, and Longus’ *Daphnis and Chloe* through the lens of the pantomime. She describes it as a form of danced mythological storytelling that emphasizes the silent yet communicative body. Koenig argues that this perspective alters the significance and power dynamics of silencing in these stories, suggesting that the authors use this form to explore new dimensions of the mythical traditions.

In the fifth chapter, Koenig examines Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and the pseudo-Lucianic *Onos*, where the protagonists are transformed into donkeys and later regain their human form. She argues that the loss of voice in these texts is not simply synonymous with powerlessness, and that regaining one's voice cannot always be equated with gaining true agency: "For better or for worse, Lucius' voice is not free, and it is no longer his own" (p. 145). In the epilogue, Koenig examines how Prudentius' *Peristephanon* 10 builds on classical motifs of voice loss. In the Christian context, the suffering and silence of the martyr are depicted as forms of divine empowerment, representing a positive transformation of voice loss.

A strength in Koenig's study lies in her detailed literary analyses and thoughtful selection of texts. Koenig moves between different literary genres and historical contexts, bringing these sometimes quite diverse texts into a thematic conversation with one another. While Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* are often discussed in relation to the topic of silence and power, Koenig's inclusion of Galen's medical writings adds a new dimension. A more problematic aspect of Koenig's work is rooted in somewhat ambivalent motivations that permeate the study. On one hand, Koenig seems to be motivated by power-critical concerns, as the central argument of the book is that the traditional association between voice/muteness and power/powerlessness is overly simplistic and does not apply to imperial literature. On the other hand, the study centers on works of elite male authors with capacity and freedom to write and speak in public. Koenig seeks to avoid texts "steeped in a fundamentally masculine aristocratic and political perspective in which the voice is the chief and sometimes only appropriate mode of exercising power" (p. 9). This refers mainly to rhetoric and historiography. She recognizes that the texts on which she does focus are "no less the product of such an elite masculine perspective", but they use portrayals of marginalized characters – women, slaves, performers, and animals – to explore how muteness can unleash "unimagined avenues of power in its possessor" (p. 4). However, this claim is not critically assessed in the subsequent chapters, but rather treated as a fundamental assumption, confirmed and never questioned.

Accordingly, despite Koenig's intention to distance her work from an elite male Roman political perspective, her analysis occasionally reinforces the very cultural biases she seeks to critique. For example, in her interpretation of the myth of Philomela, whose voicelessness is presented as a source of power, Koenig overlooks darker elements in the narrative. The tragic fate of Philomela and her sister Procne – culminating in the murder of Procne's son and their transformation – can be read as a grim cautionary tale about the extreme consequences faced by marginalized women who attempt to make their voices heard. We need good reasons to read it as a portrayal of empowerment rather than a warning to women to keep their mouths shut, but this kind of argumentation is lacking.

Previous research is not always fully integrated. In her discussion of Philomela, Koenig does not position her analysis of the myth's transformation from the Greek version in relation to the numerous recent studies on this process, which would have strengthened her analysis and discussion.⁴ Another drawback is the lack of a more synthesizing conclusion that systematically addresses the questions raised in the introduction in light of

⁴ Sabrina Mancuso, 2018, "Anfione-Niobe e Zeto-Aedon: la fondazione di Tebe nel dramma attico," *Gaia* 21 <<http://journals.openedition.org/gaia/357>>; Sabrina Mancuso, 2022, *Der Prokne-Mythos als exemplum in der attischen Tragödie*, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag; Sabrina Mancuso, 2022, "Traces of Sophocles' *Tereus* in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 6.424–674," in *Fragmented Memory: Omission, Selection, and Loss in Ancient and Medieval Literature and History*, edited by Nicoletta Bruno, Martina Filosa, and Giulia Marinelli, 281-302, Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter; Stamatia Dova, 2020, "Procne, Philomela, and the Voice of the Peplos," *Arethusa* 53.2: 69-88; Daniel Libatique, 2018, *Tereus, Procne, and Philomela: Speech, Silence, and the Voice of Gender*, Boston University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, PhD Dissertation. Even older texts on the subject, like Nicolas Zaganiaris' "Le mythe de Térée dans la littérature grecque et latine" (*Platon* 25, 1973) are notably absent. Chiara Blanco's "The Frenzied Swallow: Philomela's Voice in Sophocles' *Tereus*" (*Classical Quarterly* 73.2, 2023) may be too recent for inclusion in this publication, but it remains highly relevant.

the presented analyses. Despite these issues, Koenig's book remains a useful resource for students in Classics in exploring the intersections of literature, power, and voicelessness in ancient Rome.

Sigrid Schottenius Cullhed

Uppsala University

sigrid.cullhed@littvet.uu.se

<https://doi.org/10.52284/NECJ.51.2.review.cullhed>

RONNIE ANCONA AND GEORGIA TSOVALA (EDS.). 2021. *NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF WOMEN IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD*. NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS. PP. XVI, 278. HARDCOVER. (ISBN 9780190937638) \$110.

This volume was received for review electronically, and as a result of a continuous formatting, pagination within this review may be imprecise compared to the print version.

Ancona and Tsouvala's collection of new essays about women in Greco-Roman antiquity promises "new directions" in the study of women but rarely manages to avoid being old-fashioned. This volume arose from a 2015 panel at the Society for Classical Studies, co-organized by Tsouvala, and featuring contributors Frier, Hanson, and Milnor. The panel celebrated the 40th anniversary of Sarah Pomeroy's *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* (1975) and the present volume serves a similar function. With nearly half of Ancona's 10 page introduction dedicated to Pomeroy and every contributor (with the exception of Levick) either citing or prominently thanking Pomeroy, this volume feels strongly as though it is missing the subtitle "Essays in Honor of Sarah Pomeroy." While the published title of this collection is certainly broad enough to encompass the dozen chapters, readers should not expect a publication like one of the many handbooks and companions published in recent years. Ancona states that this volume will feature a variety of essays which reflect the "most up-to-date" work in the field of women in the ancient world, comparing this volume to Budin and Turfa's *Women in Antiquity: Real Women across the Ancient World* (2016), a volume which Ancona considers unwieldy "due to size and cost" (p. 2).⁵ Describing this collection as "eclectic and inclusive" (p. 2), Ancona highlights the diversity of expertise among the volume's contributors, saying that the volume, taken as a whole, will demonstrate to the reader the variety of approaches within the field of Classics. This variety is well-reflected in the split between Greek and Roman subjects, with four chapters dedicated to Greek subjects, six to Roman subjects, and two treating both.

While the approaches and subjects within this volume are certainly diverse (within the boundaries of Classics), there is a startling homogeneity among contributors to this volume which seems to contrast with the goal of offering "new directions." Among the twelve scholars who contributed chapters to this volume, six are faculty emeriti, and an additional four the rank of professor. This means that only two chapters in this volume are written by scholars who have neither retired nor reached the terminal rank within this field. I do not mean to suggest that seniority of contributors is necessarily a fault for a volume of this type, nor do I believe that novelty is the sole providence of the young; however, this demographic oddity is particularly notable in this case because the chapters within this volume which most exemplify "new directions" are those by Penrose and Tsouvala, the

⁵ In contrast to this volume's 278 pages and 12 chapters, Budin and Turfa's volume is 1110 pages and 74 chapters. It is also worth noting that in 2021, the year that the present volume was published, Budin and Turfa's volume received a paperback edition that is a little more than half of the cost of Ancona's volume.