



The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets (Cornell Studies in Classical Philology)

Gian Biagio Conte

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This collection of essays offer a unified and coherent argument and point toward an important new approach in classical philology that challenges the dominant trends in Anglo-American criticism of Latin literature, which emphasize the autonomy of isolated texts or make extensive use of historical or sociological analysis.

Gian Biagio Conte here seeks to establish a theoretical basis for explaining the ways in which Latin poets borrow from one another and echo one another. He stresses the systematic nature of literary discourse and its tendency to create systems of interrelated texts wherein each author's mode of assimilating and changing the tradition becomes a part of the tradition. Imitation, Conte asserts, should not be regarded merely as the inert confluence of historical circumstances but rather as a rhetorical figure in itself?and indeed as one of the major rhetorical devices of classical Latin poetry.

The first half of the book establishes Conte's theoretical position; that position is then applied in detail to Virgil in the second half. Conte shows how Virgil, by contrasting bucolic and elegiac genres in Eclogue 10, effects a confrontation between different models of life. He discusses the Aeneid at length, demonstrating how Virgil modifies and transforms both Greek and Roman epic conventions. Virgil's ability to simultaneously maintain a plurality of points of view, Conte believes, made it possible for him to transcend the limits set by his predecessors and thereby to enrich the communicative and expressive range of the epic genre.

These suggestive essays address important issues in the field of classical literature and interpretive method. They will find an appreciative audience among classicists and their students, comparativists, literary theorists, and anyone else concerned with the application of contemporary critical and semiotic theory to literary texts.

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