

James Noel Adams (ed.): *An Anthology of Informal Latin, 200 BC – AD 900. Fifty Texts with Translations and Linguistic Commentary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2016. XI, 719 pp. £ 126.00. ISBN: 978-1-107-03977-3.

The British linguist J. N. Adams is well known for his numerous, valuable studies on Latin, such as *The Latin sexual vocabulary* (1982), *Bilingualism and the Latin language* (2003), *The regional diversification of Latin 200 BC – AD 600* (2007), and *Social variation and the Latin language* (2013). He has also published widely on archaic Roman comedy, vulgar Latin, and the Vindolanda tablets. His latest book, published in 2016, forms the sequel to his 2013 study, of which it was originally planned to be an appendix. What was apparently first scheduled as a selection of model texts has now been developed into a full scale text book of fifty passages in Latin, with translation and ample linguistic commentary.

The variety of texts included, both in terms of spreading in time and place, is almost breathtaking, ranging from sample sections of the archaic Roman authors Ennius, Plautus, and Cato, to a Visigothic text from the 7th century, *The Annales regni Francorum* and a 10th century treatise on falcon medicine from northern Italy. In between, the reader is presented with all kinds of surprises: a freedman's speech from Petronius' *Satyrica*, a letter by Claudius Terentianus, curse tablets, inscriptions and letters from Algeria and Egypt, the gospel of John according to the *Vetus Latina*, passages from the *Confessio* by Saint Patrick, and much more. What unites these texts is the circumstance that they all in some way or other diverge from formal, classical Latin as it has come to be codified. The general term 'informal Latin' has been chosen by Adams to cover this broad scope, although he admits within just a few lines of his short introduction that it is 'appropriate only up to a point, and has been used for want of a better term' (1). Many of the authors and texts could be expected to be included, given the different research interests of J. N. Adams ever since 1973. In the end, it is the personal interest of the researcher which forms the truly unifying element. It would not seem to be entirely unjustified to call the volume 'an anthology of J. N. Adams' Latin texts'.

That is, other scholars would very probably make other choices. To mention one thing, I was surprised to find merely one short item with texts from

Pompeii, poetry at that. Text 16 gives three sexual iambic lines (*amat qui scribet, pedicatur qui leget, | qui opscultat prurit, paticus est qui praeterit. | 'ursi me comedant, et ego uerpa qui lego.'* CIL IV, 2360 a. o.) with detailed and useful commentary notes on *scribet*, *leget*, *opscultat*, *paticus* and *uerpa*, as well as some general remarks on the graffiti. That is very good, but one wonders why not more (prose) material from Pompeii has been included, since the many thousands of published graffiti from Pompeii and Herculaneum would seem to represent 'informal Latin' *par excellence*. As to another obvious lacuna, one can understand Adams' decision to leave out Cicero altogether, but parts of his correspondence would in fact have been a useful or even indispensable source for colloquial language, as would have been the interesting and often neglected correspondence of Fronto and the young Marcus Aurelius. Their letters, particularly the shorter ones, present much formal language, but also contain many phrases of daily and personal language as used between close friends. Finally, I dearly miss any mention of Apuleius, in whose artificial and highly stylised Latin many colloquial elements may be detected as an integral part of his fine artistry.

Many more critical remarks about the selection of texts in this volume would of course be easy to add: indeed, any choice of just fifty passages from the entire corpus of Latin comprising as much as 1000 years and the whole of Europe is bound to be subjective and open to discussion and disagreement. However, it is perhaps best and fairest to accept J. N. Adams' choice simply as it is, and to regard the book as a treasury of all kinds of known and unknown Latin jewels.

But for whom has the book been composed and published? To quote from Adams' introduction again: 'The book might be used by students, but is not intended as an elementary reader' (4). Indeed, the book cannot easily serve as a text book in university for students of classics, if only because of the provided translations of all included passages. One might envisage its use in courses of Latin linguistics, but a volume of more than £ 100,- is due to remain well beyond the financial range of the average student. The volume seems to be affordable only for university libraries and professional linguists. The lack of clarity about the targeted readership is, in my view, somewhat unsatisfactory. It would seem that the book has been published as a tribute to the scholar, rather than to serve the needs of any particular audience.

Having said this, there is much of interest to be found for anyone willing to look beyond the borders of classical Latin as it is usually taught and learned.

There are even some sample texts from the period commonly associated with classical Latin, the first centuries BC and AD. For instance, there are two brief sections from the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* on the ‘simple style’, a letter of Marcus Caelius Rufus to Cicero, some jokes from the republican period, and passages from letters of Augustus and Seneca.

Given my own research interests I was much interested in Adams’ notes on chapter 10 of the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, which describes the famous vision of Perpetua about her upcoming fight in the arena. In line with his general approach, Adams zooms in on such issues as word order (e. g. object placement), anaphoric structure, parataxis, Greek words such as *horoma*, constructions of verbs with prepositions, accusative with infinitive constructions as against *quod*-clauses, the future participle, *coepi* with infinitive, and many more linguistic details. By contrast, even the most debatable and hotly debated general phrases in Perpetua’s account, such as her truly fascinating words *et expoliata sum et facta sum masculus* (‘and I was stripped and became male’, 10.7) do not receive a single word of comment. In a fairly long appendix on chapters 3–13 (341–353, which seems the equivalent of a separate paper), Adams discusses the authorship of three allegedly different narratives (by the compiler, Perpetua, and Saturus) on the basis of the linguistic phenomena mentioned above. Interestingly, he observes that the Perpetua account is somewhat different in style, but cautiously suggests that this might very well be the result of conscious choices by ‘a single author of the whole text’ (351), much as Petronius adopts different styles in his *Cena Trimalchionis*. A concluding, one page analysis of Perpetua’s Latin (‘informal but correct’, 352) rounds off the chapter.

It is difficult to judge the general value of this book as a whole. There is little doubt that J. N. Adams is a very great linguist, whose authority is unchallenged and whose word may therefore be said to count. But as the book is in some ways rather idiosyncratic, its potential use to individual readers or groups of readers rather much depends on any shared interests they may have with J. N. Adams. While the included sections from archaic and classical literature from Rome may still be called fairly representative of their periods, this effect diminishes as the book progresses to later ages and other lands, from which many more texts have been transmitted. The final text on ‘falcon medicine’ may illustrate this point: it is a quite unknown technical text, from which Adams prints almost two full pages of Latin (one of the

longest selections in the entire volume) expanded to a chapter of no fewer than 32 pages).

Fortunately, J. N. Adams has also added a chapter called ‘final conclusions’, in which he presents something like a synthesis of the entire book, focusing on periodisation, Latin and Greek, regional Latin, and ‘some distributional patterns’ (such as accusative and infinitive, word order, and relative clauses), with some final comments on genre. Finally, he takes up the key word ‘informal’ once more, labelling it a ‘vague term’ (655). I am not sure whether these final comments are enough to satisfy readers in search of one, clearly defined approach or a clear cut methodological discussion. They certainly round off a valuable volume, that offers interesting pieces of Latin from a wide range of periods and regions, presented with great care and enthusiasm by one of the greatest Latin linguists of our times.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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