

Cambridge University Press

052185461X - Constructing Literature in the Roman Republic: Poetry and its Reception

Sander M. Goldberg

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## CONSTRUCTING LITERATURE IN THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

How the Romans came to have a literature, how that literature reflected native and foreign impulses, and how it formed a legacy for subsequent generations have become central questions in the cultural history of the Republic. *Constructing Literature in the Roman Republic* examines the problem of Rome's literary development by shifting attention from Rome's writers to its readers. The literature we traditionally call "early" is seen to be a product less of the mid-Republic, when poetic texts began to circulate, than of the late Republic, when they were systematically collected, canonized, and put to new social and artistic uses. Imposing on texts the name and function of literature was thus often a retrospective activity. This book explores the development of this literary sensibility from the Romans' early interest in epic and drama, through the invention of satire and the eventual enshrining of books in the public collections that became so important to Horace and Ovid.

Sander M. Goldberg is Professor of Classics at the University of California, Los Angeles. The author of *The Making of Menander's Comedy*, *Understanding Terence*, and *Epic in Republican Rome*, he has held fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Fulbright-Hays Commission. He is a past editor of the *Transactions of the American Philological Association*.

Cambridge University Press

052185461X - Constructing Literature in the Roman Republic: Poetry and its Reception

Sander M. Goldberg

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# CONSTRUCTING LITERATURE IN THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

POETRY AND ITS RECEPTION

**SANDER M. GOLDBERG**

University of California, Los Angeles



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
 052185461X - Constructing Literature in the Roman Republic: Poetry and its Reception  
 Sander M. Goldberg  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press  
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521854610](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521854610)

© Cambridge University Press 2005

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
 no reproduction of any part may take place without  
 the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2005

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Goldberg, Sander M.  
 Constructing literature in the Roman Republic : poetry and its reception / Sander M. Goldberg.  
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-521-85461-X (hardcover)

1. Latin poetry – History and criticism.
2. Rome – History – Republic, 510–265 B.C.
3. Nationalism and literature – Rome.
4. Poetry – Appreciation – Rome.
5. Authors and readers – Rome.
6. Books and reading – Rome.
7. Rome – In literature. I. Title.

PA6047.G65 2005

871'.0109358 – dc22 2005013006

ISBN-13 978-0-521-85461-0 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-85461-X hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for  
 the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or  
 third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication  
 and does not guarantee that any content on such  
 Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

052185461X - Constructing Literature in the Roman Republic: Poetry and its Reception

Sander M. Goldberg

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

Erich Gruen

*amico collegae magistroque semper*

Cambridge University Press

052185461X - Constructing Literature in the Roman Republic: Poetry and its Reception

Sander M. Goldberg

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page ix</i>
<b>Introduction</b> . . . . .	<b>I</b>
<b>1. The Muse Arrives</b> . . . . .	<b>20</b>
<b>2. Constructing Literature</b> . . . . .	<b>52</b>
<b>3. Comedy at Work</b> . . . . .	<b>87</b>
<b>4. Dido's Furies</b> . . . . .	<b>115</b>
<b>5. Enter Satire</b> . . . . .	<b>144</b>
<b>6. Roman Helicon</b> . . . . .	<b>178</b>
<b>Retrospective</b> . . . . .	<b>204</b>
<i>Bibliography</i>	213
<i>Index of Passages Discussed</i>	241
<i>General Index</i>	244

Cambridge University Press

052185461X - Constructing Literature in the Roman Republic: Poetry and its Reception

Sander M. Goldberg

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## PREFACE

THIS STUDY DEVELOPED FROM THE NAGGING SENSE, INCREASINGLY common among students of the Roman world, that the traditional story told of Roman literature's origin and early development is deeply unsatisfactory. Challenges to the old verities have become too numerous, too insistent, and too convincing to keep the old story in place, but many of the alternatives now being proposed seem to me to be grounded too deeply in modern ideology and not deeply enough in ancient evidence. Like most New Historicists, I want to speak with the dead, but I am more eager to hear what they have to say than to tell them what I think it means. The following pages therefore set the primary evidence above the debates being waged over it. Scholarly opinions come and go (and sometimes come again), but the evidence endures. My presentation reflects that priority, quoting and discussing Roman sources in the text and being as clear as possible about why I read them as I do, but relegating the majority of my scholarly debts, disagreements, and suggestions to the notes. Yet this is not a strictly empirical study. It owes much to theorists, in particular to Stanley Fish for its definition of literature and to Pierre Bourdieu for its understanding of literature's role in society, and its way of reading Latin poetry is inevitably influenced by the work of Giorgio Pasquali and his successors. Though I am obviously not one to unpack and interrogate when I can analyze and ask, this inquiry remains in all significant respects, by choice and not just by necessity, a product of its time.

Its approach to literary history is nevertheless a little unconventional, and its findings occasionally run counter to one or another commonly held view. A new perspective may compel even familiar landmarks to reveal unfamiliar aspects. I shall be arguing here that Romans of the late Republic had both the concept of and a word for "literature," but that

Cambridge University Press

052185461X - Constructing Literature in the Roman Republic: Poetry and its Reception

Sander M. Goldberg

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## PREFACE

imposing this name and function on certain works was often a retrospective activity. The Republican literature we traditionally call “early” could be as much a product of the late Republic, when texts were first systematically collected and put to new social and artistic uses, as of the mid-Republic, when works were first composed with writing in mind. The literary history that follows therefore pays rather more attention to readers than is often the case. Cicero, the most fully documented of Roman readers, will loom especially large. Horace will acquire his greatest significance as a reader of earlier poetry, and what remains in purpose and in essence a study of Republican literature will nevertheless draw its final argument from the most notorious of Augustan exiles, who found all too much time to reflect from a distance on the literary life of Rome.

One other oddity deserves mention. The process of reading and reception in antiquity was of course continuous, but the evidence left of those activities is only intermittent. The following chapters focus on what survives, centering on those points in the process that prove most congenial to investigation. One consequence of this decision is a privileging of poetry over prose. Cicero’s sense of *litterae* no doubt embraced prose as well as verse, and even Cato’s *Origines*, a pioneering prose work of the 150s, was keenly aware of its own cultural significance. Yet the debts of later Romans to early poetry are, with a few notable exceptions, much easier to trace than their debts to early prose, and the reception of poetry thus claims priority here. The nature of the evidence also explains why, though I have stressed continuities from one chapter to the next, there are obvious disjunctions as well. I can only build with the material at hand.

A continuous argument, vaguely chronological despite its avowed distrust of chronology, runs through these chapters, but the need for back-reference and recollection allows them to be read separately. Since the argument can be complex, a little repetition and an occasional appeal to the familiar seem a small price to pay for clarity. Ancient authors are generally cited from their Oxford editions, the significant exceptions being Horace and Ovid, who are quoted from the most recent Teubner texts of Shackleton Bailey (1985) and Hall (1995) respectively, and Cicero’s correspondence, cited from the Loeb editions of D. R. Shackleton Bailey, though I have maintained the traditional numbering. The sources for fragmentary texts are indicated in the notes. Translations are my own.

As inevitable with a project of this scale, my debts to individuals and institutions are considerable, and they are a pleasure to recall. The investigation began in 1998 during a term of relative calm as a visitor to the

Cambridge University Press

052185461X - Constructing Literature in the Roman Republic: Poetry and its Reception

Sander M. Goldberg

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## PREFACE

School of Classics at the University of Leeds, which provided a congenial base for what became an extensive operation. Aspects of its argument have over the years excited – the verb is deliberately ambiguous – audiences from St. Andrews and Exeter to Dunedin and Hobart, Freiburg and Pisa to Charlottesville and Seattle, and I have learned a great deal, though perhaps not always enough, from the resulting exchanges. It is equally pleasant to acknowledge the fellowship support of the University of California's Office of the President, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the National Endowment for the Humanities for providing leave for writing, and UCLA's own Council on Research for a timely series of research grants. Finally, there are the many debts to individuals whose advice and encouragement, suggestions and objections, have not just made this study possible, but even made it fun. The two readers for Cambridge University Press will recognize my debt to them, as will Beatrice Rehl, as demanding and yet supportive an editor as any author could wish. I also owe much to John Barsby, Elaine Fantham, Rolando Ferri, Bob Kaster, Jörg Rüpke, and especially Erich Gruen, whose support over the years has meant far more than a mere dedication can adequately express.

Sander M. Goldberg  
Los Angeles  
January 2005