



Work in Progress: Literary Revision as Social Performance in Ancient Rome (American Philological Association American Classical Studies Series)

Sean Alexander Gurd

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Work in Progress offers an in-depth study of the role of literary revision in the compositional practices and representational strategies of Roman authors at the end of the republic and the beginning of the principate. It focuses on Cicero, Horace, Quintilian, Martial, and Pliny the Younger, but also offers discussions of Isocrates, Plato, and Hellenistic poetry. The book's central argument is that revision made textuality into a medium of social exchange. Revisions were not always made by authors working alone: often, they were the result of conversations between an author and friends or literary contacts, and these conversations exemplified a commitment to collective debate and active collaboration. Revision was thus much more than an unavoidable element in literary genesis: it was one way in which authorship became a form of social agency. Consequently, when we think about revision for authors of the late republic and early empire we should not think solely of painstaking attendance to craft aimed exclusively at the perfection of a literary work. Nor should we think of the resulting texts as closed and invariant statements sent from an author to his reader. So long as an author was still willing to revise, his text served as a temporary platform around and in which a community came into being.

The theories of revision that guide the author's study come from the new genetic criticism that has been successfully applied, especially in Europe, to modern authors. While many of the tools of analysis applicable to modern authors (author-written manuscripts, corrected proofs, etc.) are not available for ancient authors, Sean Gurd has amassed a surprising number of passages in ancient texts about revision, its importance to the author, and the circle of critics involved in the process of rewriting.

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