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The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor

By Amy Richlin



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Statues of the god Priapus stood in Roman gardens to warn potential thieves that the god would rape them if they attempted to steal from him. In this book, Richlin argues that the attitude of sexual aggressiveness in defense of a bounded area serves as a model for Roman satire from Lucilius to Juvenal. Using literary, anthropological, psychological, and feminist methodologies, she suggests that aggressive sexual humor reinforces aggressive behavior on both the individual and societal levels, and that Roman satire provides an insight into Roman culture. Including a substantial and provocative new introduction, this revised edition is important not only as an in-depth study of Roman sexual satire, but also as a commentary on the effects of all humor on society and its victims.



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Editorial Review

Review

"*The Garden of Priapus* was the first, and still is the best full-scale study of sexual language and humor in Roman poetry. Fully alert both to the linguistic and literary nuance of the poetry and to the social and psychological attitudes of its audience, Richlin gives us a penetrating and provocative view of an important but neglected aspect of Roman antiquity. This new edition is a most welcome event for anyone interested in Latin literature and the modes of its engagement with the Roman world."--Jeffrey Henderson, *Boston University*

"A comprehensive, frank, and bold analysis....Abundant insights from today's social sciences, together with references to numerous modern sex 'types' and studies on sexuality and verbal obscenity, support Richlin's observation and...underlie her concern...that in our own society and in antiquity sexual humor may 'serve not only to reinforce, but possibly to exacerbate aggressive tendencies.'"--*Choice*

"The author's command of the primary texts and relevant scholarly literature is evident throughout....The book is well crafted and reveals aspects of Roman literature that had until recently been considered inappropriate for wide dissemination and discussion. For many it can add a new dimension to their understanding and teaching of Roman literature and civilization."--Gerald Erickson, *University of Minnesota*

"By insisting on the prescriptive function of obscene and aggressive humor in Latin literature, by observing its close connection to basic social structures and its links with other modes of discourse, both subliterate and elevated, Richlin has achieved a major methodological breakthrough."--Marilyn Skinner, *University of Arizona*

"Important study...The book remains a major treatment of Roman sexuality and of Roman society more broadly. Richlin presents admirably a vital aspect of an imperial, cosmopolitan, and highly influential culture...Beautifully typeset Greek and Latin quotations. Richlin's writing is virtuosic and vigorous: worthy of her often mind-boggling material."--*Journal of the History of Sexuality*

From the Back Cover

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About the Author

Amy Richlin is at University of Southern California.

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