INTRODUCTION: FROM ROME TO BUFFALO

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All the articles in this special issue were originally presented in oral form at the Pacific Rim Latin Literature conference "Center and Periphery in the Roman World," held at the State University of New York at Buffalo in the summer of 2001.[1] This startling relocation of the Pacific Rim to New York State provided the perfect forum for an examination of geographical and cultural disjunction.

Most of us engaged in the study of the classical world are used to a more or less profound geographical remove from the ancient Mediterranean. Indeed, many of us have spent years immersed in the study of classical culture from locations that no Greek or Roman could ever have known or conceived of. In this sense, geographic alienation is for many of us an inevitable result of our work in classical studies (only relieved by infrequent forays into the *in situ* remains of classical culture). Added to this geographical separation is a vast temporal disparity; when it comes to the classical world, time and geography have conspired to make us all peripheral.

Issues of centrality and marginality are preoccupations of modern critical thought and embraced by a variety of approaches such as feminism, postmodernism, new historicism, post-colonialism, and cultural and popular culture studies. Similarly, questions of identity and affiliation are very much contemporary and continuing concerns. Postmodernism ushered in a theorization of homogeneity and heterogeneity and of the related processes of

1 The editors would like to thank the faculty, staff, and student body of the Classics Department at the University at Buffalo for hosting this enjoyable occasion. Regrettably, it is only possible to include in this issue a handful of the papers from the conference.

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inclusion and exclusion. The confident humanism of self-sufficient autonomy has disintegrated and been decentered by the influence of competing discursive interests; texts and cultures are scrutinized at their edges and their full significance elaborated from their margins; difference and diversity have become central concerns of critical and cultural inquiry. Whether or not one sympathizes with such approaches, there is no denying their widespread influence in modern critical thought.

We also live at a time when identity is at issue not just in theoretical circles but in the shaping of the modern world. Globalization, economic union and market integration, the internet, and air travel have condensed the world as perhaps never before and inevitably thrust issues of cultural identity and affiliation into the mix of contemporary life. American-based corporations such as McDonald's, Starbucks, and Microsoft advance inexorably across the planet; Europe contemplates federal union; NATO begins to incorporate the eastern bloc; terrorism and the "war on terror" polarize the world into various rhetorically enhanced dichotomies: "good" and "evil," believers and infidels, etc. Who and what we are, and what we stand for and against, are of pressing importance.

As we look back to the past from the present there are fundamental issues of continuing significance to be pondered. The Roman empire provides an invaluable model of cultural interaction and the evolution and consolidation over time of a sense of subjectivity and cultural integration. The empire covered a vast tract of land around the Mediterranean basin and stretched into northern Europe and across into Asia. Its advance, consolidation, and interaction with other cultures provide rich material for studies on imperialism, alterity, and subjectivity. The papers in this volume provide examples of some of the ways in which the issues of inclusion and exclusion, subjectivity and alterity, centrality and marginality can be examined in the Roman world.

Cindy Benton considers how Seneca's *Medea* investigates the dynamic interaction between Roman subjectivity and Roman imperialism. The mythic cycle surrounding Medea and the voyage of the Argo point to Roman anxieties about the effects of interactions between Rome and the margins of its empire. The Roman narrative tradition views the voyage of the Argo as an event that precipitates the end of the Golden Age, when preexisting harmony is shattered by Jason's lust for power and wealth. The interaction between a Greek center and a "barbarian" margin causes devastation in both locations, and thus provides a salutary meditation on the consequences of imperialism and cultural interaction.

Rhiannon Evans's article explores Roman ideas on, and uses of, utopia. Utopian narratives in this reading should not be viewed merely as an exploration over time of a universal trope but as rhetorical expositions that are historically contingent and perform specific cultural work in their immediate contexts. Utopian and Golden Age landscapes are encoded with moral meanings and provide mixed messages. This capacity for ambiguity can be exploited in various literary, geographical, artistic, and horticultural media both to explore cultural anxieties and to manipulate opinion. Roman utopian symbols and discourses are discussed with a view to examining their immediate political, social, and cultural uses.

Cultural attitudes to food and dining form the basis for a more visceral take on notions of boundaries and identity in the Roman world in Dave Fredrick's study. The *triclinium* provides the setting for a "consumption package" that elucidates exemplary forms of Roman cultural behavior. This study combines a stylistic analysis of Roman wall painting with theoretical approaches to dining taken from anthropology and body history. Parallels are drawn between the treatment of the surface of the body in Roman dining and the treatment of the surface of the wall in the painting schemes that framed this culinary experience. Roman dining is found to provide an experience that formed a potential basis for contesting the cultural norms of ideal elite behavior and body integrity and thus functioned as a virtual metaphor for the "self in a dynamic social structure."

Judith Hallett's article considers a text written from the periphery of the Roman world for the eyes of those at the center. Ovid's *Tristia* 4.10 is an attempt to center a banished physical body through an act of literary reintegration. *Tristia* 4.10 works towards this end, Hallett argues, by setting up a complex web of intertextual allusion with Nepos's biography of Atticus. By alluding to Atticus as a validated model of behavior approved by Augustus, and by casting himself in the same mold, Ovid's text hopes to create an image of its author as indispensable to the cultural machinery of the center. Hence a text from the margins strives to lay the foundations for both the intellectual and physical renaissance of the poet.

Tacitus's *Histories* forms the basis of Art Pomeroy's study; in particular, the historian's use of geography and geographical detail in his narrative of the events of 69–70 C.E. Geography is not simply a matter of physical facts and measurements but also an attitude of mind; distance and topography can be matters of ethical interpretation, boundaries are not only physical but conceptual. Our own culture of virtual global simultaneity is a quite different mindset from the temporal disjunctions of the ancient world,

where news travels by foot, rather than electronically, along real, rather than virtual, highways. The delay and uncertainty of the ancient information highway is mapped onto Tacitus's narrative of the turbulent events of Roman civil war and the connectivity but disjunction of Rome and its periphery.

Saundra Schwartz's article explores the issue of cultural interaction and contestation in the Roman empire through a consideration of Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe.* The fictional landscapes of the Greek novel are not simply the backdrop for escapist and entertaining fiction but equally a forum for asserting Hellenic cultural hegemony in the melting pot of multiculturalism created by the Roman empire. Although Rome does not feature expressly in the geography of the Greek novels, it functions very much as an "absent presence." The reality of Roman power in the authors' consciousness inevitably imparts a particular significance to images of empire and cultural interaction in their fiction. The interactions between Greeks and Persians set in the fictional past of the novels map out both contemporary anxieties concerning Hellenic and Roman interaction in the present and an attempt to negotiate a continuing place for Greek autonomy and cultural significance in the wider context of the Roman empire.

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