This book is based on five of the six Sather lectures that I delivered in spring of 2016, with the addition of three further chapters (4, 5, and 7). Materials from the fourth lecture, “Cowherds and Saints: Realism and Humour in Paulinus of Nola,” have been published elsewhere.

My experience on first receiving the invitation in February 2012 to give the lectures as the 102nd Sather Professor—an experience perhaps shared by others—was one of a warm glow at the great honor of being invited to join the roll call of previous Sather Professors, quickly followed by trepidation at the thought of the distinction of my predecessors, and anxiety over the choice of a topic for my own series of lectures. At that time a couple of other projects were in their final stages, and I decided to venture into the, for me, relatively untried field of late antiquity. What emerged is in substantial part a study of reception, the reception in late antiquity of the poetic “classics” of the late Roman Republic and early empire. Within my own academic trajectory, this can be seen as a stepping back in time from my work in recent years on the reception of ancient Latin poetry in the early modern period.

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