

Genus a generando: Grammatical Gender and Biological Sex in Varro

This paper seeks to understand the significance of grammatical gender in 1st century BCE Latin literature. Latin scholarship has neglected the importance of grammatical gender as a poetic device, assuming that gender existed only as a grammatical contrivance rather than a meaningful division. This assumption has become standardized in Latin education, but it is limiting and inaccurate. The more recent works by Anthony Corbeill conclude that grammatical gender was not arbitrary and possessed a distinct space in Roman thought (Corbeill 2015). Based on his research and alongside other linguistic research showing the effect that grammatical gender has on cognition and conceptualization, this paper closely examines Marcus Terentius Varro's *De Lingua Latina* to understand how he constructs grammatical gender as it relates to the physical world, specifically the mechanisms of sexual reproduction. It shows how Varro uses gender to construct a binary, essentialist world, where words are inherently gendered but subject to change by common usage. Finally, it examines two case studies to determine whether Varro's construction is idiosyncratic or representative of larger trends in the understanding of gender in Roman authors: first, Book 4 of Vergil's *Aeneid*, where Dido describes Aeneas as being born from a masculine mountain; and second, Catullus 1, where Catullus (possibly) describes his own poetry as polished by a feminine pumice-stone.

Works Cited

Corbeill, Anthony. "‘Genus Quid Est?’ Roman Scholars on Grammatical Gender and Biological Sex." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-) 138, no. 1 (2008): 75–105. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40212075>.