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978-1-107-02465-6 - Doubt and Skepticism in Antiquity and the Renaissance

Michelle Zerba

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Doubt and Skepticism in Antiquity and the Renaissance

This book is an interdisciplinary study of the forms and uses of doubt in works by Homer, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Cicero, Machiavelli, Shakespeare, and Montaigne. Based on close analysis of literary and philosophical texts by these important authors, Michelle Zerba argues that doubt wears many faces and is a defining experience in antiquity and the Renaissance, one that constantly challenges the limits of representation. The wide-ranging discussion considers issues that run the gamut from tragic loss to comic bombast, from psychological collapse to skeptical dexterity, and from solitary reflection to political improvisation in civic contexts. It puts Greek and Roman treatments of doubt into dialogue with not only sixteenth-century texts, but with contemporary works as well. Using the past to engage questions of vital concern to our time, Zerba demonstrates that although doubt sometimes has destructive consequences, it can also be conducive to tolerance, discovery, and conversation across sociopolitical boundaries.

Michelle Zerba is Associate Professor of English, Classics, and Comparative Literature at Louisiana State University. She is the author of *Tragedy and Theory: The Problem of Conflict Since Aristotle* (1988) and numerous articles on literature, rhetoric, and philosophy in antiquity and the Renaissance.

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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.orgInformation on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107024656

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First published 2012

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.**Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data*

Zerba, Michelle, 1953–

Doubt and skepticism in antiquity and the Renaissance/Michelle Zerba.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-02465-6 (hardback)

1. Belief and doubt – History. 2. Skepticism – History. I. Title.

BD215.Z47 2012

121'.509-dc23 2012009157

ISBN 978-1-107-02465-6 Hardback

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*For my daughters, Claire and Rachel,
and my mother, Patricia*

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Acknowledgments

Two sources of funding gave me the time I needed to complete the manuscript of this book, one a Regents' Research grant from Louisiana State University and the other an Award to Louisiana Artists and Scholars. My deep gratitude goes to two people who read the manuscript in its entirety and offered excellent suggestions for revision: Gordon Braden, whose rare combination of talents shed light on many nooks and crannies of the manuscript, and Patrick Coby, whose sharp and perceptive mind guided me through some of the intricacies of my argument, particularly in political theory. I am fortunate to have had numerous colleagues and friends who offered expert comments on particular authors and texts or who shared conversations that meant a great deal to me: Robert McMahan, Kim Orr, Eduardo Velasquez, Tom Martin, Mark Yellin, John McCormick, Judith Mossman, Anthony Long, Rex Stemm, James Stoner, Elisabeth Oliver, Mary Sirridge, and Lillian Bridwell-Bowles. They saved me from bloopers, pressed me toward greater clarity, and steered me away from cliffs. So did my excellent editor, Beatrice Rehl, and my copy editor, Karen Verde, to whom I am grateful for seeing the manuscript through production. My student assistant, Johanna Collier, helped me in the final stages with indexing. I take responsibility for whatever errors remain.

While writing the manuscript, I was sustained by two very dear friends, Anne Coldiron and Sonny Cranch. They were there to nurture, listen, and laugh. In addition, I owe an immeasurable debt to Tom Rosenmeyer. His spirit as a classicist and comparatist are at the heart of this book. In different ways, so is that of my late and greatly missed father. His intense moral commitments and my own skepticism somehow ended up hand in hand. He provided, as did my large, beautiful family, the devotion without which I could never have seen this project to completion.

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Finally, I thank my mother and my two daughters, to whom this book is dedicated. They taught me about doubt in ways one does not learn from books. Their courage and endurance testify to the capacity of the human soul to survive adversity with grace.

A version of Part One appeared as “Modalities of Tragic Doubt in Homer’s *Iliad*, Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, and Shakespeare’s *Othello*,” *Comparative Literature* 61 (2009): 1–25. © University of Oregon.

Part Two contains a substantially revised version of “What Penelope Knew: Doubt and Skepticism in Homer’s *Odyssey*,” *Classical Quarterly* 59 (2009): 295–316. © 2009 Cambridge University Press. Reprinted with permission.

Some of the ideas in Part Three appeared in “The Frauds of Humanism: Cicero, Machiavelli, and the Rhetoric of Imposture,” *Rhetorica* 22 (2004): 215–40. © 2004 The International Society for the History of Rhetoric.

Portions of the chapter on Cicero appeared in “Love, Envy, and Pantomimic Morality in Cicero’s *De Oratore*,” *Classical Philology* 98 (2003): 299–321. © 2002 University of Chicago.