PART I

PROGRAMMING APPROPRIATION
CHAPTER TWO

ROMAN DREAM WORKS

Christine Walde

1. Roma aeterna

Romanitas, the first novel by Sophia McDougall (2005) received world-wide attention on its appearance.¹ In a sort of experimental history the author depicts a world without a fall or even a decline of the Roman Empire, which has maintained its political structures and culture up to our times. This fictional parallel cosmos parts from real history with the reign of Didius Pertinax, successor of Commodus (945–957 a.u.c. = 192–204 C.E.): not assassinated after sixty-eight days, he is able to realize his reform projects, and the task is taken over by his no less innovative and reform-conscious son, the heir to the throne. In the following centuries religious minorities, especially Jews and Christians, are persecuted and marginalized. Finally only Sina and Nionia (China and Japan) are left as political rivals of Rome. On a world-wide level the national languages are relegated to local dialects, with Latin the dominating written and spoken language. Foreign languages are important only for commerce or for the fugitives of the Roman Empire. McDougall’s novel is focussed on a human-interest story set in the year 2757 ab urbe condita (or 2004 C.E.). After the violent deaths of his parents, the heirs apparent, the young prince Marcus Novius Faustus Leo flees from the intrigues of the court and even mingles with slaves. In the end he succeeds in winning back his position, but we are referred to a second (and third) volume in which further conflicts and challenges will arise. . . .

Any expectation, however, that McDougall depicts en détail a modern Imperium perenne will be disappointed. To focus on the protagonists’ psychology could have been a convincing strategy, had she evaded banality in this respect. Obviously, the self-imposed task of depicting