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Spentzou (E.) *The Roman Poetry of Love. Elegy and Politics in a Time of Revolution*. Pp. xiv + 107. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic 2013. Paper, £12.99. ISBN:978-1-78093-204-0.

There is much to admire in this *libellus*, not least its succinct compression of profitable contemporary approaches to Latin love elegy at large and the specific poets on whom S. focuses. Aimed at ‘those for whom love elegy is a new discovery’ (p. xiv), it highlights the personal nature of the poet’s voice, elegy’s pervasive intensity of emotions, the rapidly-changing faces of Rome and *Romanitas* at the end of the Republic and under Augustus, and the alienation imposed by those changes that in turn inspires elegy. S.’s primary focus is the personal and confessional aspect of elegy, whether inspired by authentic emotion (of a private or political nature) or poetic pretense; the narrative thread she constructs is one in which politics both engender and kill elegy. The book consists of five chapters, arranged chronologically by poet, and a preface, which situates the poetry in its historico-political context. S.’s broad readings are up-to-date and insightful, presenting the neophyte reader with a homogenized synthesis of current scholarly thinking; she intermingles these sweeps across genre and author with close readings of individual passages and their engagement with the book’s (and elegy’s) persistent themes.

S. dwells in her first chapter on the sick corruption of the political system that Catullus abhors yet desires to be a part of, highlighting his conflicted identities as Roman male, aristocrat, lover, poet, and intellectual elite. The period’s tumultuous politics inspire his angry attacks on foe and friend, his obsession with sexual aggression and passivity, the emotional intensity of his

poetry, and its gendered inversion. S.'s discussion largely revolves around the polymetrics (which she considers 'proto-elegies' [p. 17]); actual elegiacs are confined to the chapter's final three pages, where S. focuses on Catullus' appropriation of Roman *amicitia* into 'the realm of illicit, unconventional love' (p. 22). Mid-chapter, raggedly separating Memmius and Mamurra from Lesbia and Licinius, a digression intrudes, covering meter, elegy's Greek origins, Callimachus and Alexandrianism, the Neoterics, the lover-as-soldier *topos*, the 'unorthodox' (p. 17) character of the elegists, and Ovid's eventual exile; located here, such a wide-ranging discussion may be confusing for the non-classicist and could more profitably be consigned to the Preface.

The next chapter tackles Tibullus, whose poetry features 'melancholic introspection' and 'an earnest attempt at withdrawal from the socio-political sphere' (p. 26). Nonetheless, the apolitical nature of Tibullus' poetry *is* an engagement with politics, the studied contradiction just one of many 'unresolved tensions' (p. 27) within the Tibullan corpus. He is torn between his desire for a peaceful, rustic life and his divided loyalties to Messalla and Delia, who 'loom in his poetry' (p. 28) as well as in this chapter; Nemesis is confined to a single page. Tibullus' poetry features the *topoi* of *servitium amoris*, the *dura puella*, and the *exclusus amator*; *militia amoris* is still, in Tibullus, a true competition waged between his military and political duties, his love for his mistress, and the unattainable pastoral world that haunts his dreams. Concluding the chapter with a brief coda on Sulpicia, S. highlights the rarity of the authentic female voice in elegy while marking Sulpicia's unsettling fusion of 'the elegist, the heroine, the elegists' *puella* ... in one voice' (p. 43).

Chapter 3 'traces the Propertian persona' (p. 46) as it develops throughout his corpus. In the *Monobiblos*, where love and friendship are the persistent, if fragile, themes, the attractive yet

dangerous Cynthia takes center stage; nevertheless, ‘fashioned by the poet-lover as he desires her’ (p. 53), Cynthia becomes more written and less real throughout, turning from flesh-and-blood Cynthia into pastoral, inscribed *Cynthia*. Books Two and Three, while not entirely abandoning Cynthia, fashion Propertius as the Roman Callimachus who champions slender elegy against constant pressures to write epic. He hones the *recusatio*, repeatedly suggesting that his ‘Augustan’ epic would become a civil war narrative; this, as well as his gradual fusion of the Cynthia narrative with Augustan Rome, is his response to and struggle against the increasing prominence of the ‘Augustan narrative’ (p. 63). S. omits discussion of Book Four (where Propertius truly sets *Roma* and *amor* face-to-face) because in it ‘we lose the poet’s voice and identity in a masqued ball’ (p. 46); while her express intention is to pursue the elegists’ first-person voices, 4.5–4.8 (at the very least) would be welcome additions to the discussion.

The book concludes with two chapters on Ovid; the first covers poetic and political aspects of the *Amores*, reading them as the final culmination of elegy’s trajectory. The Ovidian is the extreme: poetry fully eclipses *puella*, and where earlier elegy was a marginal alternative to politics, Ovidian elegy *is* politics, a metaphor for ‘the Roman desire for domination’ (p. 75). Ultimately, ‘love and politics cannot be, and are not, kept separate’ (p. 81), but as a result, elegy can no longer fulfil its mission; ‘the putatively alternative world of elegy has become corrupt’ (p. 81).

The final chapter is a fully original contribution by S. She ‘look[s] backwards, offering a reading from the exile to the lover’ (p. 83); her focus is not the exile poetry, but themes of exile and *nostos* already present in the *Amores*. The *Amores*, especially Books Two and Three, are deracinated and peripheral. Home is where the heart is, and Ovid’s heart is with his *puella*, not in Sulmo or Rome; but the *puella* is always kept just over the horizon, just off the page. Ovid’s

love story becomes ‘timeless and spaceless’ (p. 92), as even poems set in the heart of Rome fail to engage with their surroundings. S. frames her discussion with Malouf and Ransmayr, who ‘treated Ovid as the iconic poet of exile’ (p. 84), but coming at the end of a short book on Roman love elegy, this contextualization seems forced and irrelevant. S. could have easily—and more fruitfully, in constructing a self-reflectively Ovidian narrative—approached the same topic through Ovid’s own exile poetry (which, oddly, receives no mention). This is, to my mind, the least successful chapter of the book, but not because the material itself is flawed—indeed, it is a fascinating approach. Rather, S. tries to do both too little and too much; the chapter would have fared better on its own.

While the majority of S.’s readings are successful and her juxtapositions productive, some problems arise throughout. Both structure and writing could be tighter in places; in particular, the internal organization of chapters often feels poorly-thought-out. S. also sometimes omits information relevant for the non-classicist, as when she refers to ‘an elegiac mourning’ (p. 21) without anywhere discussing elegy’s putative origins in lament. Potential synergies are generally ignored; for instance, the brief discussion of the ‘wife-beating farmer’ (p. 40) at the end of Tibullus 1.1 could find closure and development in the later discussion of Ovid’s reaction to striking Corinna. Mistranslations, inaccuracies, and inattention to detail can also occasionally mar the discussion. Blame for these problems should be shared with the editor, and unquestionably the book could have used a stronger editorial presence: a profusion of typos, misspellings, and incorrect names abounds (I count twenty-one in the main text, thirteen in the Further Reading, and one in the Index), while the index is haphazard (Hortensia, mentioned once, features; Gallus, mentioned sixteen times, does not).

Even with these flaws, the book is, overall, a largely-successful introduction to the themes of Latin love elegy, showcasing ‘why ... we should read poetry two millennia old and why it continues to speak, powerfully, to a world not so different as people might imagine’ (p. xiv). Students in a class on Roman elegy will benefit from the book, although the series’ reference-less format stymies further research; an interested member of the general public, an audience S. has in mind, will certainly find much to fascinate. (Swapping title with subtitle might help to attract such an audience.)

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