



Review of *Gendered Dynamics in Latin Love Poetry*, eds. Ronnie Ancona and Ellen Greene. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005. ISBN: 0801881986. 384pp.

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What might be described as a rhetoric of indeterminacy has come to dominate a great deal of scholarship on Latin love elegy. A polarity within scholarship that once pitted elegy's potential for subversion in its representations of female empowerment against elegy's confirmation of masculine norms has yielded to a discourse of more "complicated negotiations concerning gender, sexuality, and power politics (2)". This is in part due to the important revelations made in Lacanian readings of the genre (Janan [2001] and Miller [2004]), readings that have stressed the instability of the *amator*'s subject position, as he tries to self-identify within the context of rapidly changing norms of the Augustan Symbolic, particularly those norms that defined Roman masculinity. The collection of essays under review, *Gendered Dynamics in Latin Love Poetry*, expanding the boundaries of erotic discourse beyond those of the elegiac couplet, is a testament to the influence of such readings, and of a new tendency to see above all fluctuation, destabilization, and reversal in the power struggle between the *amator* and his beloved. At their best, the essays illustrate just how nuanced are the inconsistencies of gender representation in Latin erotic discourse, and what that signifies within the context of Roman cultural and historical norms. At the same time, a constant foregrounding of how erotic poetry's *amatores* (elegiac or otherwise) contradict themselves or undermine their own allocations of

power occasionally leads to frustrating (in-)conclusions that appear above all to confirm contemporary post-modern aporia.

The essays are divided into three sections that balance an initial interest in “male desire and sexuality” with a focus on how women are written into erotic discourse as desiring subjects (“female subjectivity and silence”). Couched between these emphases is the bulk of the volume, on “the gaze,” concerned largely with how the look of love empowers or emasculates the male *amator*. In the first section, Trevor Fear convincingly explains a socially sanctioned liminal phase in the life cycle of the Roman elite male (a *tirocinium adulescentiae*) as an essential ingredient in elegy, one that motivates the narrative progression of the Propertian *amator* in his transformation from madness (1.1) to good sense (*Mens Bona*) at the end of book three (3.24-5). Ronnie Ancona, extending Fear’s interest in masculine liminality, considers how Horace’s Barine Ode (2.8) echoes the language of Catullus 61, a marriage hymn, and constitutes an anxious, ironic response to his predecessor’s portrayal of the ideals of male fidelity. While her argument rightly underlines common cultural norms that harness male desire within the context of marriage, there is surprisingly no discussion of the Augustan marriage legislation which, though not passed by the time the Odes were published in 23 B.C.E., was likely a matter of public discourse (cf. Prop. 2.7). Ellen Greene views the epic resonances of Propertius 2.1 as confirming the speaker’s masculinity and undermining the characteristically effeminate posture of the elegiac *amator*: as the speaker assumes a heroic persona by identification with, e.g., Achilles and Prometheus, he insinuates himself in the epic realm of *fama* and *gloria* represented by the poem’s addressee, Maecenas. In one of the highlights of the collection, Kirk Ormand addresses Ovid’s tale of Iphis and Ianthe (*Met.* 9.666-91) within the context of a larger debate over the Roman conception of sexual relations as necessarily hierarchical. Thus Iphis’ plight, which foregrounds the lack of a dominant figure in her relationship with Ianthis, is not about lesbianism as female deviance, but about the lack of an active, masculine partner in the relationship, which confirms the Roman tendency to perceive sex as “essentially predicated on asymmetry of power (85).” Ormand offers a cogent argument, buttressed by a useful review of the (post-Dover, Foucault, et al.) scholarship on Roman sexuality, though his essentializing of the Roman attitude, in light of a story that at least suggests the potential for alternate (i.e. non-hierarchical) conceptions of sexual relations, is occasionally overstated.

Contributions to the next section of the volume, on “the gaze,” often explain the shifts of power implicit in the dynamics of viewing with reference to Laura Mulvey’s gendering of the gaze as masculine and to the various critical responses that thesis has provoked. Within this framework, Elizabeth Sutherland assesses the audience’s relationship to the objects of desire presented in Horace *Carm.* 2.5, and argues that Gyges, as an effeminate male who also evokes the famous killer of Candaules in Herodotus, destabilizes the assumed power relations between viewer and viewed. Patricia Salzman-Mitchell questions Mulvey’s monolithic theory of the male gaze as she explores the relationship between gaze and movement in the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid’s story of Perseus and Andromeda as well as of Atalanta and Hippomenes present female beloveds who temporarily disturb (but ultimately confirm) their lovers’ role as active and empowered spectators: Perseus experiences moments of stupefaction in the process of looking upon Andromeda, and Atalanta, though eventually fixed in marriage, is assigned powers of flight and mobility characteristic of the masculine spectator. Victoria Rimell, drawing more on Irigaray than Mulvey, though still occupied with the gaze, takes on Ovid’s most specular moment of didaxis, the *Medicamina*, and reveals how his prescriptions allow a reader to voyeuristically imagine the processes of “artification” (cf. Downing [1990]) characteristic of the elegiac *puella*. And yet instead of cementing the *puella*’s status as *materia*, the poet interprets the *puella* at her boudoir as a kind of rival artist, whose self-cultivation is not so different from the *amatores* strutting vainly about in Augustan Rome. Hérica Valladares adds a great deal to our understanding of what Boucher (1965) described as Propertius’ *sensibilité visual* by considering poem 1.3 in light of ancient models of viewing and notions of realism. Through allusion to contemporary pictorial representations that position one subject (the viewer/lover) enthralled and halting before another (viewed/beloved), Propertius presents a model of viewing that is not so much about possession as enthrallment.

Amidst so much attention to the male gaze, it is refreshing to find Kerill O’Neill’s contribution dealing with the opening line of Propertius’ Monobiblos (*Cynthia prima suis me miserum cepit ocellis*, 1.1.1), which figures Cynthia’s gaze as an active and aggressive force. I am not certain that all his evidence points to “the struggle for dominance in the elegiac relationship as a more evenly contested battle” (cf. O’Neill’s concession about Cynthia’s twofold status as a “looker” [viewer] and a “looker” [attractive woman]), or even that the gaze should play such a critical role

in our evaluation of that battle, but I was glad to find a wealth of evidence pointing to the subversion of gender roles that made the genre appear so revolutionary when Judith Hallett (1973) first made the case for elegy's "counter-cultural feminism." Brunelle's analysis of Ovid's *Remedia Amoris* (esp. 399-440) also stands out in this section because it is less obviously concerned with the dynamics of the gaze and instead focuses on readerly response to the *praeceptor's* quasi-satiric and disturbing reminders to focus on female flaws, instruction intended to help rid the *amator* of his desire. Brunelle's interest in the response that the *praeceptor* provokes in his reader aligns this contribution with recent scholarship that queries Ovid's identity as a social critic rather than a misogynistic advocate of the behavior he describes: "we want to know whether Ovid is a social critic, but Ovid is asking a similar question of us" 155.

In the final section of the volume, on "female subjectivity and silence," Phoebe Lowell-Bowditch offers another reading of Ovidian didaxis that implicitly asks us to question the ideological distance between Ovid the poet and the *praeceptor amoris*. She focuses on Procris' role as a reader and interpreter of signs in *Ars* 3, and argues against studies of the Procris/Cephalus story that have assumed a master version of the myth that would allow Ovid's reader to condemn Procris' misinterpretation of her lover's infidelity with the goddess Aura/Aurora. Instead, Ovid's *praeceptor* hints at suppressed elements of mythical variants that would confirm rather than condemn Procris' hermeneutic uncertainty. Tara Welch, who furthers this exploration of female perspectives within Latin love poetry, suggests that the topography surrounding the Capitoline hill, Rome's "religious and ideological head," adds to our understanding of Tarpeia's conflict in Propertius 4.4. This conflict, arising largely from expected gender norms that impose ritual chastity on vestal virgins, and mirrored physically in the heroine's marginal location between the Capitoline and Forum (i.e., the site of Tatius' camp), may be read as emblematic of the elegiac *amator's* ideological contestations in the larger Propertian corpus. Efrossini Spentzou appropriately concludes the collection by drawing out a tempting parallel between Ovid's exilic voice and the voice he allows his (more or less exiled) heroines in the *Heroides*. Her analysis uncovers crucial differences in the way that Ovid and his heroines relate to the written word: for Ovid, writing is a poor substitute for vocalized presence in his native Rome, and yet passages in the *Tristia* patently suppressing details about the official reality of his exile imply that he has

learned something of the subversive potential of silence from his abandoned heroines.

To my mind, the strongest pieces in the collection lay some emphasis on the ideological challenge inherent in the erotic discourse of the Augustan period. For the most part the volume does an admirable job contextualizing erotic poetry of the period, especially its relevance to the *mores* of male adolescence (Fear), visual arts (Valladares), and city topography (Welch). And, as intended, the range of authors under discussion expands the traditional notions of erotic discourse, pointing to new connections between elegiac and epic (Salzman-Mitchell, Ormand), or between epithalamium and lyric (Ancona), or even satire and eroto-didaxis (Brunelle). The most significant disappointment in the volume is undoubtedly the absence of Sulpicia, and, especially, of Tibullus, who is mentioned only in passing, and on one occasion improperly contextualized (180). Errors of omission are of course inevitable in a project of such scope, and it is perhaps a virtue of the collection that its wide range of theoretical applications and varied conclusions about gender and power in erotic discourse will surely, in future efforts, enhance our reading of the Tibullan corpus.

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