

HUNTER H. GARDNER, *The Latin Love Elegists*, Brill Research Perspectives in Classical Poetry, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2023, vii+98 pp., €70.00, ISBN 978-90-04-68814-8.

“Lo bueno, si breve, dos veces bueno” is a famous dictum by Baltasar Gracián, a prominent writer of the Spanish Siglo de Oro. This maxim aptly applies to Hunter Gardner’s book, *The Latin Love Elegists*, which provides an excellent overview of the unique genre of Latin love elegy in just over 80 pages. Still, one might ask: was another book on Latin love elegy really necessary, given the abundance of high-quality contributions in recent decades? Scholars such as Paul Veyne, with his semiotic approach in *L’Élégie Érotique Romaine. L’Amour, la Poésie et L’Occident*, Paris 1983 and Duncan F. Kennedy (*The arts of love: five studies in the discourse of Roman love elegy*, Cambridge 1993), with his eclectic-sociological analysis, have significantly enriched the field, along with contributions from Maria Wyke, Sharon James, Paul Allen Miller, and more recently, Sara H. Lindheim¹. Additionally, several recent companions or collective volumes, such as those edited by Genevieve Liveley and Patricia Salzman-Mitchell², Karen Weisman³, Barbara Gold⁴ or Thea Thorsen⁵ provide comprehensive coverage. Gardner herself has already made a significant contribution with her book *Gendering Time in Augustan Love Elegy*, Oxford 2013, which informs some of the theoretical considerations in this new work, particularly regarding temporality in elegy.

Given this wealth of scholarship, one might argue that another book on Latin love elegy was perhaps unnecessary. However, after reading Gardner’s concise volume, it becomes evident that its value lies not so much in filling a gap but in offering a fresh and insightful perspective on the genre. The book offers a well-balanced overview that is accessible to a broad audience while maintaining the scholarly rigor expected by specialists. Gardner’s erudition is evident, yet it does not overwhelm the reader. Instead, the thoughtfully restrained footnotes allow more interested readers to delve deeper into specific discussions and explore further bibliographical references.

Gardner’s book is a nuanced and innovative contribution to the study of Latin love poetry. It stands out for its careful analysis of the Latin love elegists—Tibullus, Propertius, Ovid, and Sulpicia—through a relatively brief selection of passages and for its focus on the gendered dynamics that shape the relationship between

¹ M. Wyke, *The Roman Mistress, Ancient and Modern Representations*, Oxford 2002; S.L. James, *Learned Girls and Male Persuasion, Gender and reading in Roman love elegy*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 2003; P.A. Miller, *Subjecting Verses: Latin Love Elegy and the Emergence of the Real*, Princeton 2004; S. Lindheim, *Latin Elegy and the Space of Empire*, Oxford 2021.

² G. Liveley, P. Salzman-Mitchell, eds., *Latin Elegy and Narratology: Fragments of Story*, Columbus 2008.

³ K. Weisman, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, Oxford-New York 2010.

⁴ B. Gold, ed., *A Companion to Roman Love Elegy*, Malden-Oxford 2012.

⁵ T. Thorsen, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Latin Love Elegy*, Cambridge 2013.

the *amator* and the *puella*. This approach not only enhances our understanding of the elegists' work but also recontextualizes their contributions within the broader literary and cultural traditions of ancient Rome and the Greek precursors of the genre. At the same time, it offers a fresh perspective on the complex fact that any reading of elegy is inevitably influenced by the historical contingencies of its readership.

The volume is divided into five sections, preceded by an "Introduction" and followed by a "Bibliography". The bibliography includes some of the most relevant contributions (mainly written in English) to the study of Latin love elegy. One issue to note is that some authors are listed with their full names, while others are cited with only their first names abbreviated. A useful "Index" concludes the book.

In the short introduction, Gardner situates the emergence of the genre in its historical context, specifically within the framework of the "cultural shift (...) that accompanied the end of Republican governance" (p. 2), and anticipates the contents of the five sections that follow.

The first section ("Antecedents, Origins, Innovations") analyzes the backgrounds of the genre, specifically Greek elegy of the Hellenistic period on the one hand, and Catullus, on the other. Gardner subscribes to the thesis that Hellenism introduced a new kind of authorial self-consciousness, which, in its turn, was developed by Catullus, whose merit consists in "bridg[ing] the gap between the artistic principles of Hellenistic poetry and the Augustan elegists" (p. 2). As Gardner argues, Greek epigrammatic tradition crucially paved the way for the particular power dynamics of Latin love elegy, whereas the New Comedies of Plautus and Terentius foreshadowed some of the *dramatis personae* and themes that are typical of erotic elegy. Yet, as Gardner cogently notes, there are some critical points of divergence between Roman New Comedy and Latin elegy, specifically in regard to one of the defining features of elegy, which, in contrast with comedy, is "the lover's repeated capitulation to erotic indecision" (p. 12).

Pages 12 to 28 provide an insightful explanation of the role of Catullan poetry as a pivotal influence on the subsequent development of elegiac discourse. This influence is particularly evident in the way Catullus merges "erotic experience with a political and moral lexicon that effectively championed extra-marital relationships as an alternative (...) to traditional politics and morals in Rome" (pp. 19-20). Although the compact format of Gardner's book limits the depth of textual analysis she can provide, it still offers some excellent readings, such as her analysis of Catullus 68 on pages 21-2. As Gardner notes (p. 22), "C. 68 thus establishes not only a constantly shifting position of the speaking subject, but also an inversion of and reversion to the norms defining gendered identity in Rome as significant contributions to the Augustan elegists." At this juncture, Gardner could have strengthened her argument by engaging with interpretations of Carmen 68(b) that highlight the poem's foreshadowing of elegiac power dynamics. Specifically, the analogies between myth and personal experience, as well as the blurring of

boundaries between center and margin, anticipate the treatment of the *puella* as subject-matter, that is, as literary *materia* in Latin love elegy⁶.

Gardner's exploration of Catullus's slippery subjectivity underscores her extraordinary ability—rare among scholars—to make complex ideas accessible. This skill makes the book especially valuable for readers who may not be familiar with some of the more specific (and at times rather hermetic) scholarship, such as the work of Paul Allen Miller on the emergence of 'lyric consciousness' in Catullus⁷. For instance, on pages 22-3, Gardner concisely yet clearly explains the intricate split experienced by the speaking subjects of elegy during the transition from Republic to Empire through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Sub-section 1.2 (pp. 28-32) is devoted to Gallus and, within the constraints of the scant fragments of his poetry, examines the significant role he played in the development of elegy. Gardner infers from the remnants "certain constitutive ingredients of Augustan elegy: in particular, the reference to a beloved's transgressive behavior (*nequitia*) from the perspective of a first-person *amator* and the combination of political panegyric (...) with self-conscious poetic posturing and reference to less lofty affairs" (p. 30).

In the second section ("Playing the Gender Card: Augustan Love Elegy"), Gardner examines how the Augustan elegists build upon themes of political unorthodoxy and gender role-playing, first anticipated by Catullus, and skillfully integrate them into their exploration of power dynamics. Focusing on Propertius's *Monobiblos*, Gardner concludes that although the *puella* is granted power over the *amator* and is thereby cast in a role that challenges normative gender dynamics in Rome, "power is of advantage only to those who wish to use it, and we are given very little to evaluate the *puella*'s attitude toward her own dominant status" (p. 35).

Particularly intriguing is Gardner's argument on pages 41-2, where she questions the view of the *puella* as a completely subdued poetic subject. Drawing on Erika Zimmermann Damer's application of Irigaray's concept of *mimétisme*, Gardner suggests that while the Propertian *puella* is indeed shaped by the *amator*'s discourse, she also actively challenges it. So, Gardner concludes that "the elegists occasionally cede control of their sign systems in ways that challenge the *amator*'s discursive mastery over his *puella*" (p. 43).

In subsection 2.1, titled "*He Said, She Said: A Puella's Perspective*", Gardner primarily examines the *Heroides* and the poetry of Sulpicia, both of which she considers "natural extensions of the elegiac corpus" (p. 46). Particularly noteworthy is the comparatively extensive attention given to Sulpicia, whose elegies are often overlooked in scholarly discussions of elegy. Gardner contrasts

⁶ This issue is discussed, among others, in J.M. Blanco Mayor, *Power Play in Latin Love Elegy and its Multiple Forms of Continuity in Ovid's Metamorphoses*, Berlin-Boston 2017 (esp. in pp. 75-91).

⁷ See P.A. Miller, *Lyric Texts and Lyric Consciousness: The Birth of a Genre from Archaic Greece to Augustan Rome*, London 1994.

the typical male perspective in elegy with Sulpicia's unique approach. Whereas in male-authored elegy the poet often uses illness as a metaphor to showcase his own creative power, emphasizing how he, the *amator*, can “overcome” or transcend physical and emotional challenges through his art (overshadowing, thus, the *puella*'s actual experience and reducing her to a mere object within the poet's narrative), Sulpicia shifts the focus to the *puella*'s perspective, highlighting that her experience of illness is not just a backdrop for the poet's self-expression. Instead, Sulpicia emphasizes the *puella*'s own physical and emotional suffering, suggesting that recovery is not just the poet's triumph but a shared process that involves the *puella* as an active participant. This approach brings a more nuanced and empathetic view of the *puella*'s experience, acknowledging her agency and the reality of her suffering.

Gardner's conclusions on the relationship between gender—i.e., who plays the role of man or woman within love elegy—and sexual identity (biological male vs. biological female) are also noteworthy. As she states at the end of subsection 2.1, “in permitting only biological males (*amator* and *puer*) to develop into adult men whose narratives, life courses, and identities can be envisioned as exceeding the boundaries of the genre, gaining rather than losing powers and prerogatives, the genre allows only them to ‘play the man’” (p. 51).

Section three (“(De)construction the *puella*”) examines what Gardner calls “the vulnerabilities of elegy's key players” (p. 3), particularly the *puella*. Gardner explains how Propertian and Tibullan elegy subtly reveal the *puella* as a sexual construct, while Ovidian poetry further develops this idea, challenging the artist's control over his subject-matter. In this context, Gardner discusses Ovid's evolution beyond the *Amores* and convincingly argues that it “does not entail a clean break from the viscous trap that ensnares elegy's *amatores*” (p. 55). Drawing on Sharrock's insights into the elegiac nature of desire in the *Metamorphoses*—particularly illustrated by Pygmalion's “womanufacture”—Gardner supports the idea that the *Metamorphoses* evoke the gendered power dynamics central to elegy. However, Gardner could have expanded on this topic, as the erotic world of the *Metamorphoses* is more complex. It not only reflects elegy but also explores its transformation, making possible the elegiac *adynaton* of *mutuus amor*—thereby signaling the definitive end of erotic elegy. In this regard, Blanco Mayor's study⁸, which is not listed in the bibliography, could have provided valuable insight.

The most noteworthy aspect of subsection 3.1 (“*Time's Up? Elegiac Violence and Twent-First Century Readers*”) is Gardner's ethical approach to the genre—another strong reason, in my opinion, to recommend this book. Shifting from a strictly meta-poetic interpretation of the genre, Gardner aligns with the increasingly common approaches to elegy that focus on “uncomfortable questions about the flesh and blood of those women who have, however tenuously, inspired the *puella*'s creation” (p. 57). Within this framework, she advocates for

⁸ See footnote 6 above.

recognizing the “pedagogical value of teaching elegy in the post-#MeToo era in classrooms where the students are more sensitive to the (perhaps) predatory intent that defines, e.g., the Propertian lover’s near advances upon sleeping Cynthia” (p. 3). Although there are some valuable contributions that explore the darker, abject, or violent aspects of the genre, Gardner rightly argues that these ethical considerations warrant further investigation, as they have been largely overlooked in the study of Latin elegy.

Section four (“Elegiac Vulnerabilities: Scripting Desire in Augustan Rome”) explores the challenges faced by both the *puella* and the poet in relation to the civic and moral duties imposed upon them by the Augustan context. Gardner contends that “[w]hatever the status of the *puella*, whether didactic addressee of *Ars* 3 or the beloved in the elegiac poetry of Ovid and his predecessors, there is an unavoidably political aspect of reading, frequently a public, shared activity in the ancient world, and especially of reading poems about sexual behavior in Augustan Rome” (p. 69).

In section five (“Receptions and New Directions”), Gardner concludes her overview of Latin love elegy by exploring the genre’s afterlife in Imperial Rome and its presence in contemporary culture, particularly in cinema. This perspective adds considerable appeal to the book, not only by engaging with popular culture but also by demonstrating that the ‘limping pace’ of Latin love elegy—despite its brief period of prominence between the late Roman Republic and the Augustan era—persists.

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GREGSON DAVIS, SERGIO YONA, eds., *Afterlives of the Garden. Receptions of Epicurean Thought in the Early Empire and Late Antiquity*, Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2024, viii+182 pp., € 79,95, ISBN 978-3-11-102192-8.

This collection of essays complements the editors’ 2022 *Epicurus in Rome*. Gregson Davis and Sergio Yona are clear on the different aims of the present volume. It is specifically addressed to Epicurean themes in the literature of the late Roman republic and the Empire. Although the modes of reception range, as the editors comment, from “wholesale rejection” to “total acceptance” (4), the particular interest of the volume lies in the examples of positive uptake of, or at least strong engagement with some of the most appealing features of Epicureanism’s original and later Lucretian presentations. Approximately equal attention is given to poetry and to philosophy. The three topics treated most comprehensively are