

BOOK REVIEW

A Commentary on Propertius Book 3. By S. J. HEYWORTH and J. H. W. MORWOOD. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. xi + 377. Paperback, £31.00/ \$49.95. ISBN 978-0-19-957149-9.

Meant primarily as an edition for undergraduate students and especially for those who have not been studying the Latin language and literature for long, this book is more than a commentary on Propertius' third book of elegies; it is a formative guide for the reading and interpretation of Roman love elegy and, moreover, of Latin poetry in general. Heyworth and Morwood have matched the text's truly rich educational potential with a didactic approach that both enables and encourages the student of Latin on any level to explore and understand Propertian poetry beyond the literal level.

The commentary is based on the recently published OCT text and offers plenty of additional information, including the text's critical apparatus. The 59-page introduction provides the reader with brief, yet comprehensive and comprehensible information on a number of related topics, such as the poetics of Propertius' relationship with Cynthia in Book 1, the historical context, the nature of 'Book 2' both as text and as artistic program, the peculiarities of Book 3 in terms of structure, imagery, themes as well as words, and the Propertian text and its transmission. Valuable tools of reference are provided by a glossary and five maps. The material is explained with great clarity throughout the introduction, and the section on meter, scansion, and versification is particularly commendable.

The 'Appendix of Significant Intertexts' may be regarded as the most innovative addition to this extraordinary commentary. The segment comprises the 23 passages from Greek and Latin literature (in the original language as well as in English translation) that are most relevant for the interpretation of the Propertian text. Worth mentioning is also that, in contrast to many commentaries designed for students, no vocabulary is given in the back. Instead the reader finds a brief section on Book 4, a short bibliography, and two indices—one of the passages cited and scanned, and one of the Latin words discussed in the commentary.

Philological diligence, emphasis on contextualization (historical, mythological, literary), and what may be called a “deliberate uncertainty” toward both textual problems and interpretation are the strengths of the actual commentary. They form a pedagogical approach that aims at raising a student’s interest in not just translating, but exploring a given text. A look at the entries on Elegy 3.1 tells the reader about the information that s/he can expect throughout the commentary. Detailed, and at times multiple, references to the *OLD* are provided for a word’s possible meaning (e.g., *detraxerit*, p. 103). A literal as well as an idiomatic translation is offered for a better understanding of certain phrases (e.g., *exiguo sermone*, p. 105). Variants in the text’s transmission are discussed (e.g., *Pulydamas*, pp. 104–5). Moreover, attention is given to the literary model(s) on which a poem draws (e.g., pp. 97–8). Yet, despite the amount of very specific information, Heyworth and Morwood manage to open up, rather than to limit the reader’s perspective.

The goal of encouraging the student to read Propertius with an open mind is also reflected in the type of information given at the beginning of the individual poems’ commentary. Each elegy is paraphrased, not summarized. Moreover, each paraphrase is followed by introductory remarks that do not convey to the reader a fixed perspective on the poem, but point to possibilities of (further) exploration. A brief comparison of Richardson (1976) with Heyworth and Morwood in regard to the introductory information to Elegy 3.9 in may illustrate the difference. Richardson rules out the possibility that the elegy is either a programmatic poem or a dedication based on the observation that neither of the two generic types would ordinarily be found in the middle of a poetry book. Heyworth and Morwood, in turn, suggest a more topic-oriented approach, according to which 3.9 may be interpreted either as a “jaundiced” reflection “on patronage in the Augustan age” (183) or as “a kind of *recusatio* [that] revisits themes of 3.1–3” (*ibid.*).

There is little doubt that Heyworth and Morwood have set a new standard for student-orientated commentaries—not only for Propertius’ third book of elegies but also for classical texts in general. By choosing to provide a commentary on the third book, the authors give impressive evidence of what is possible and what is needed for the study of classical literature these days.

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