

BOOK REVIEW

Dream, Fantasy, and Visual Art in Roman Elegy. By EMMA SCIOLI. Wisconsin Studies in Classics. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015. Pp. ii + 276. Paperback, \$55.00. ISBN 978-0-691-12537-4.

The scope of Scioli's book extends well beyond that of Roman elegiac poetry in its discussion of the important role of dreaming as an act of artistic creation and initiation in Roman literature. Scioli also provides nuanced discussions of key works of art, especially the wall paintings and mosaics of Roman domestic decoration that illuminate the highly visual culture that shaped the imagination and craft of Augustan poets. As its title suggests, the book emphasizes the visual nature of Roman dreams; the inclusion of the term 'fantasy' acknowledges a subset of the dream, the 'daydream' as in Tibullus 1.5. While the visual sensibility of the Roman elegists has been long recognized, Scioli's book is unique in exploring parallels between dreaming and viewing, between the textual dream and the visual image in elegiac poetry.

The introduction surveys previous criticism on dreams in Greek and Roman literature and sets out the parameter of the present study. As Scioli emphasizes, her book is not a psychoanalytic study of the symbolism of dreams. Rather, by calling attention to the recurrent use of words of 'seeing' in Roman literary dreams, especially the past participle *visus*, she characterizes literary dreams as visual experiences that mediate between vivid realism and fantasy. This point is reinforced in the first chapter, which establishes a taxonomy of the language of dreams from a variety of prose and poetic sources. Excluded from Scioli's study are so-called 'epiphany dreams' of the kind that occur commonly in epic. Her focus is "episode dreams" (a term of W.V. Harris), which are more varied than those dreams that bear an urgent message.¹ The first-person dream narration forms an important, enigmatic subset in elegy's defining mode of narration, the monologue.

The heart of the book is Scioli's detailed discussion in separate chapters of Tibullus 1.5 (Ch. 2), Propertius 2.26 (Ch. 3), Propertius 3.3 (chapter 4), and Ovid's dream of Rhea Silvia in *Fasti* 3 (Ch. 5). Each of these chapters concludes with a

¹ Harris, W.V., *Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity*. Cambridge, MA, 2009.

detailed discussion of works of art that shed light on the elegist's art. Scioli is careful to avoid positing the direct influence of any painting or mosaic upon the poems she discusses. However, she emphasizes that visual art and the elegists' art invite similar modes of viewing. In particular, the 'Second Style' of Roman painting, where the boundaries between artifice and naturalism are blurred, finds a parallel in the world of illusion inhabited by the poet-dreamer, one that invites subsequent commentary on the experience of that altered state. The book concludes with a fascinating discussion of visual representations of Mars and Rhea in Roman frescoes and mosaics. These share with Ovid's narrative in *Fasti* 3 an emphasis on the dynamic crossing of boundaries between divine and human, female and male, virginity and pregnancy, innocence and violation.

Scioli argues that the dream is an essential feature of the elegiac genre. Readers, therefore, might have appreciated more detailed discussion of the distinctive nature of elegiac dreams as opposed to dreams in other genres. How, for instance, is the 'lightness' of elegy that the poets programmatically play upon reflected in elegiac dreams? For example, Scioli argues that the pseudo-Ovidian *Am.* 3.5, her test case for the characteristic features of the elegiac dream, invites the reader through its visual intensity—in particular, the employment of colour words and striking similes—to identify closely with the dreamer's experience (53). And yet, does the text not possibly invite the reader's ironic detachment from the dream? The first couplet announces the poet's terror during his dream; but soon the poem plunges into bathos with the apparition of a cow whiter than snow or milk and then, languidly chewing its cud, a bull, which an internal interpreter claims is a figure of the elegiac poet. Scioli argues for the variety of elegiac, episodic dreams but does not consider the possibility that elegy can admit wit, self-deprecation, and an ironic approach to the portentous dream conventions of other genres.

A frustration of this rewarding book lies in its presentation. With the exception of *Propertius* 3.3, Scioli does not give us the full text of the dreams she discusses; one often needs to have a text at hand to follow the argument. Often, too, Scioli gives us only one line of the elegiac couplet where the full distich would be helpful for comprehension of both sense and artistry.

The book is meticulously researched and proofread. Since Scioli's book emphasizes the importance of color in Roman art and elegiac poetry, it is a pity that the press could not provide some color plates in addition to those in black and white.

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