

BOOK REVIEW

A Commentary on Ovid's Fasti, Book 2. By Matthew ROBINSON. Oxford Classical Monographs. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. xiv + 572. Hardcover, £100.00/\$165.00. ISBN 978-0-19-958939-5.

Within the past twelve years, three books of the *Fasti* have been equipped with substantial commentaries in English: E. Fantham, *Ovid: Fasti, Book 4* (Cambridge, 1998); S. J. Green, *Ovid. Fasti 1: A Commentary* (Leiden 2004); and R. J. Littlewood, *A Commentary on Ovid: Fasti Book VI* (Oxford 2006). With the appearance of this volume, only Books 3 and 5 are now available to any would-be commentator who minds the gap. Robinson's volume is a useful addition to the resources available to the student investigating the context for Ovid's calendar poem, with a great deal of information on the historical, religious, and astronomical background. It is less informative, however, on the literary context. It is also notably lacking on questions both metrical and lexical, and thus will be less helpful to readers interested in the poetry of the *Fasti*, but that should not detract from the overall utility of Robinson's contribution. After all, no one cannot be expected to whack every mole, especially in a revised dissertation.

The general introduction is brief at only twenty pages in three sections, referring us to the introductions of its recently published brethren rather than repeating information to be found there. Robinson limits himself in the first section to a few comments about generic play in *Fasti* and the Augustan milieu. Here he explains his use of the terms "suspicious reader" in referring to interpretations with negative inferences about the political context, and "supportive reader" to characterize interpretations in harmony with Augustan propaganda. It is not immediately clear that these represent an improvement on other terminology—even Robinson concedes that it is unclear what is being "supported"—but they are no worse. The second section on the astronomical content is certainly helpful, while the third section of less than a page on the text is not. A concordance listing the places where Robinson differs from the text of Alton, Wormell and Courtney (1977) would have been of more use. The text itself follows, without the calendrical divisions interpolated by modern editors, an improvement which one may hope will be adopted in future editions. The second appendix, which correlates the contents of Book 2 with events from the Roman calendar, is a more helpful way of relating Ovid's *Fasti* to the *fasti*.

The commentary is hefty—474 pages for Ovid’s 864 lines. Much of the bulk is devoted to assembling material on the historical, mythological and astronomical contexts of the poem, all of it helpful and intelligently digested. There is also ample discussion of literary controversies, with considerable space devoted to doxographies. These are typically presented in a reportorial mode that tends to mask Robinson’s own views, e.g. “McKeown saw this ... Herbert-Brown argues ... Littlewood similarly sees ... Hinds stresses ...” (139). One might wish for a more straightforward exposition of the commentator’s own view that refers to others’, rather than stitching them together. Textual criticism is not a focus of the commentary and the notes devoted to it can be somewhat diffuse: for example, on 722 the discussion of *lentas* versus *longas* (465) is a rather long-winded alternative to stating that he prefers the *lectio difficilior*. Notes on diction are not the volume’s strong point. What does it mean, for example, to say (65) that “the phrase *equus bellator* is not found before Vergil, and is quite at home in epic” without explaining the resonance of the form in *-tor* and its use as an adjective? Or to say (97) that *delubris* and *templa* are both poetic plurals, when the former is normally plural in prose as well as poetry? The notes on points of metrical style are perfunctory and do little to contextualize Ovid’s practice in the *Fasti*: for instance, the remarks on a Greek proper noun spondaic line end in 275 only lists “other spondaic verse endings of this kind” without reference and adds, “this all helps to emphasize the Greek feel of the passage” (213). One cannot help but feel that there is scope for another work with a focus on the poetic texture and literary context of the book. In the treatment of the Arion episode, for example, Robinson diligently assembles the extant sources in his introductory note, but it might be said that he elides a number of questions that arise about literary antecedents and intertextual connections that the text poses. It is not always necessary to genuflect to recent scholarship on intertextuality when a poet signals an allusion, but one may wonder if more is signaled by *memorant* in 114 (134) than an awareness of Herodotus.

That dispenses with the quibbles, which are an inescapable concomitant of any review of a very good commentary. There is a great deal of useful information in Robinson’s volume, assembled with judgment and presented intelligently. It will be an essential starting point for scholarship on the *Fasti* and is a worthy complement to the commentaries already on the shelf.

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