Propertius: Poet of Love and Leisure. By ALISON KEITH. London: Duckworth, 2008. Pp. 214. Paper, $33.00. ISBN 978–0–7156–3453–0.

Propertius: Poet of Love and Leisure is Alison Keith's (K.) contribution to Duckworth's series "Classical Literature and Society," which proposes to discuss authors primarily in relation to genre, theme and social context. For Propertius, that entails chapters on his biography, his relation to literary tradition and Roman rhetoric, and the interaction of his poetry with issues of empire. The book's intended audience is a little harder to peg. The series preface speaks of Greekless and Latinless readers, even readers with little knowledge of ancient civilization—but this book is pitched above the heads of those readers, who would need more context to understand Propertius' place in early imperial Rome and would not benefit much from, for example, the extended comparison of Propertius' Latin to Meleager's Greek (p. 46), even if everything *is* glossed.[1] It is better pitched at Classics undergraduates or even graduate students first embarking on study of Propertius. For such students, K. offers a thorough, up-to-date and thoughtful introduction to Propertian elegy. There is no recent work to recommend in this vein. Of the trio from the 1970s, Steele Commager's *Prolegomenon to Propertius* is narrowly focused and out-of-print; Margaret Hubbard's *Propertius* and J.P. Sullivan's *Propertius* remain valuable, but recent scholarship has rendered them a bit out-of-date. The 2006 *Brill's Companion* is in no one's price-range. K.'s book fills the gap.

The opening chapter offers a solid biography of Propertius. K. is a cautious biographer, and thereby teaches her reader to be so too. A sentence at the end of the chapter is worth noting: "the relations outlined here press the available evidence as far as it can reasonably be pursued" (p. 18). Each term—press, available, evidence, reasonably, pursue—is important when it comes to Propertian biography. Little information is available, and controversy lurks under every piece of evidence. On top of that, the danger of the biographical fallacy has largely frightened scholars off from biography in Propertius; because elegy places the first-person front-and-center, though, the willingness to pursue it matters. K. begins with the ostensibly biographical portions of 1.22 and 4.1, connecting the poet to the civil war, Assisi and an elite aristocratic family. Next she maps Propertius' interconnections with the Aelii Galli and with Maecenas' poetic circle, and discusses his place in the "canon" of elegists and ancient criticism. Finally, K. tentatively links Propertius to physical remains in Assisi,

[1] The book clearly attempts some hand-holding; e.g. p. 74, where K. spends a paragraph summarizing Callimachus' *Aetia* prologue. But cf. p. 53, where she mentions without explanation "imperfect" verbs, "anaphora," "vocalic glide -i-," "fourth conjugation," "syncopated perfects" and "epanalepsis."

namely the *domus Musae*. Throughout, K. shows the reader the evidence from which she builds her narrative, whether textual, inscriptional or archaeological, and is careful to hedge her claims, when they are tenuous, with "maybe" or "perhaps." This is exactly what those beginning to think about the lives of ancient authors need to see.

Chapter 2 discusses Roman rhetorical education and its lasting influence on Propertius. Devoting an entire chapter to rhetoric, usually considered Ovid's playground, is unexpected. But the role rhetoric plays throughout Latin poetry is generally understated, and the emphasis here is appreciated. (K.'s own interest in rhetoric's connection with poetry no doubt played a part in the inclusion of this topic.)[2] The discussion is not without problems, though. Since Propertius says relatively little about his rhetorical education, K. has to swap in Ovid, whose rhetorical training is better attested. This unfortunately contributes to the scholarly assimilation of Propertius to Ovid, which occurs too frequently. Once K. has argued for the fundamental nature of rhetoric in ancient education, she proceeds with a catalogue of rhetorical tropes, all illustrated from the Propertian corpus: maxims, mythological and historical narration, refutation and confirmation, praise and blame, comparison, *ethopoeia* / *prosopopoeia*, thesis and, finally, *suasoria* and *controuersia*. A brief section on Propertius' use of legal language and his use of rhetorical *topoi* follows. The illustrations are helpful and sometimes very clever; for example, reading 2.7 as a rhetorical exercise denouncing a law, or reading Horus' interruption in 4.1 as a *suasoria*. But sometimes the evidence is pressed too far: a mere *apostrophe*, for example, is not necessarily a rhetorical flourish, and the chart which reveals that Propertius uses *arbiter*, *arbitrium* and *reus* (among other terms) once apiece is not a great argument for his employment of legal language. In the end, K. seems to be arguing that Propertius was immersed in the rhetorical culture—but no one, I think, would argue against her.

The longest chapter is entitled "*Callimachus Romanus*." The potential of forty-plus pages of Propertius' worn out and tired Callimacheanism is not an enticing prospect, but K. avoids the trap and broadens out to cover the several literary influences on Propertius. Catullus, Gallus, Horace, Tibullus, Callimachus, Philitas and an assortment of Hellenistic Greek poets and neoterics all figure here. Importantly, K. gives Philitas as much emphasis as Callimachus—rare to find, but altogether appropriate considering the equal weight Propertius gives the pair. K. gives credit where credit is due, which

[2] Cf. K.'s "Slender Verse: Roman Elegy and Ancient Rhetorical Theory," *Mnemosyne* 52 (1999) 41–62.

means that some of what others lazily call Callimacheanism is properly attributed to Catullus. K. shows how Propertius reclaims Horace's public lyric for his own elegiac ends, and how, in response to the impact of Tibullus 1, he begins to flirt with pastoral-themed elegies. Overall, K.'s Propertius becomes more and more playful generically, engaging first with his elegiac predecessors Catullus and Gallus, then with his contemporaries Tibullus and Horace, and most extensively with Callimachus and Philitas.

Next comes a pair of chapters dealing with Cynthia. Chapter 4 begins with the question of identification. K. advocates a combination of philological, historical and literary-critical methods. First she offers a pellucid exhibition of the process by which Cynthia has come to be seen as a pseudonym for Hostia (p. 88), then Cynthia/Hostia's connections with Tivoli and possible literary pedigree. Sliding into the territory of the literary critic, K. highlights the way Propertius begins to blur the line between Cynthia the woman and Cynthia the poetic product. As an exploration of this blurring, K. spends the remainder of the chapter mapping out Propertius' problem with Cynthia's infidelity, reading this as a progressive working-out of the "tension between his mistress' erotic and literary circulation" (p. 108). The more popular the poetry, after all, the more popular the girl, and Cynthia has found her way into many men's hands. The next chapter picks up this thread, discussing Propertius' place (and Cynthia's) in the "homosocial" world of Rome. Catullus 50 serves as the paradigm. Cynthia—both woman and book—is the token by which Propertius negotiates his status among the social elite and in terms of male-centered authority. In particular, K. outlines a contest in Book 1 between Propertius and his poetic predecessor Gallus that works out literary rivalry through the metaphor of erotic rivalry. Poems addressed to Tullus, Lynceus (here identified with the fellow-poet Varius) and Maecenas document Propertius' rise in this social network and his increasing engagement with the public/political world, leading up to Book 4. It is unfortunate that K. closes this provocative diptych of chapters with the sentence "The elegist has finally come of age" (p. 137). This treats Propertius' move from the pursuit of love and elegy to the socially-elevated homosocial public network as a teleological fulfillment of purpose. Although this sort of teleological or developmental reading of Propertius' elegies is alluring (and common), I am not convinced that an engagement with public or political topics is in itself the mark of a "mature" poet—especially when that poet writes love elegy.

The specter of Augustus and Propertian politics proper is postponed until the final chapter; but even here K. forestalls tangled pro- or anti-Augustan arguments by offering her own *tertium quid*. The elegist's *otium*, she argues, is a benefit bestowed by the workings of

empire. She tracks the luxury products used by Propertius, whether physical products such as wine, paintings and gemstones, or literary products such as mythological learning and Greek literary tradition. Propertius, indulging in the leisure and wealth of empire, broadcasts this virtue, as it were, through his poetry to the furthest reaches of the empire. Poems perform imperial duties: 3.11 subjugates Egypt linguistically by appropriating the exotic into Roman poetic language; 3.22 recalls Tullus to renewed favor at Rome; 2.31 aestheticizes Roman conquest. Rather than seeing Propertius and his elegy as counter-cultural, K. emphasizes that "Propertian elegy is itself both the product of Roman imperialism and productive of it" (p. 141).

The greatest virtue of this book, perhaps, is that no reader will escape without a great deal of exposure to Propertius himself. Nearly every page features some bit of quotation. Almost every poem of Propertius receives discussion. The endnotes and bibliography reveal the breadth and interconnectedness of modern Propertian scholarship. K. covers the biggest issues in Propertian studies, and opens up just enough new paths to encourage readers to branch out. In the end, K.'s book has the potential to seduce new readers to undertake serious study of a poet with a reputation for being erratic and difficult.

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