

BOOK REVIEW

Gendering Time in Augustan Love Elegy. By HUNTER H. GARDNER. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. viii + 285. Hardcover, \$110.00. ISBN 978-0-19-965239-6.

Hunter Gardner's book, which began its life as a doctoral dissertation, is a welcome addition to scholarship on Augustan love elegy. Situated simultaneously within the debate about the dynamics of gender and power in elegiac poetry and interpretations that seek to explore the contradictions at the heart of the elegiac *amator's* subjectivity, *Gendering Time in Augustan Love Elegy* argues that the genre, obsessed as it is with time, offers a different experience of temporality to (male) lover and (female) beloved.

Drawing on the theories of the French psycholinguist and feminist Julia Kristeva, Gardner suggests that, on the one hand, the elegiac *amator*, faced with the newly emerging prescriptions governing the lives of young, elite, Roman males in the early Principate (in particular the pressures to marry and rise to political responsibility at an increasingly young age), attempts to eschew the demands of male time—historical, teleological, linear. Instead, he seeks to embed himself firmly within the repetitive, cyclical, a-teleological “women's time” that marks the *puella*. Embarking on a circuitous relationship of ever-deferred pleasure with an unattainable *puella*, the elegiac *amator* sidesteps the pressures of the Roman political, social, and cultural expectations for a man's life course. Emphasizing the generic connection between *amor* and *mora* (Prop. 1.3, Tib. 1.3, Ovid's *Remedia Amoris*), the *amator* finds the antidote to linear time in his pursuit of his beloved.

On the other hand, however, Gardner shows that the *amator* constantly raises the specter of hideous old age for his beloved, both through threats of what the future holds for her, and the recurring presence of the physically decrepit *lena*. Female subjectivity, posits Gardner, is linked in its cyclicity to the cycles of nature, and in this way circularity becomes “a sign of mortality and decay rather than eternity” (28). Cynthia (Prop. 2.15, 2.18, 3.24/25), Delia (Tib. 1.6), Phloe (Tib. 1.8) are all subject to the ravages of time, on the verge of becoming wrinkled, sagging, and erotically unappealing.

But woman's decay does not imply man's; on the contrary, the *amator* aligns himself with culture, rather than with nature. Through *ars*, through his poetry, he provides himself with the means to escape the grasping hands of time. The *puella*, trapped within the elegiac genre, may reach her expiry date, but the poet can grow up, can write about other subjects, can evolve poetically from erotic elegy to "celebrating Messalinus' priesthood [Tibullus] ... memorializing the matron Cornelia's virtues as a *Callimachus Romanus* [Propertius], and spinning out a *carmen perpetuum* in hexameters from the world's origins to the Augustan era [Ovid]," (223). In the end, however, freedom to join the teleological march toward responsible, male adulthood and citizenship is not all it is cracked up to be, and Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid all regress, through "various tropes of recantation" (255), to "a posture of eternally arrested development" (250), firmly ensconced within the demands of the elegiac genre.

Gardner's reading of elegy is intelligent and persuasive. Rather than obfuscating or explaining away contradictions that emerge so clearly from the genre of erotic elegy, she invites us to focus our interpretive attention squarely on the inconsistencies. The *puella* provides the *amator* with a means to deny temporal imperatives, either when he discovers a refuge from linear time in her arms, or, antithetically, when he underscores her limited shelf-life along with that of erotic elegy by promising to grow up and choose other poetic forms. When he highlights the process of aging that awaits her, Gardner argues, the *amator* aligns the *puella* with the natural world and thus with decay. At this point, somewhat surprisingly, Gardner supplements her arguments based on Kristeva's theories of "women's time" with concepts drawn from the work of feminist anthropologist Sherry Ortner, who famously points out the alignment of the feminine with (perishable) nature and the masculine with (immortal) culture ("Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?," orig. published 1972, revised version in *Making Gender: The Erotics and Politics of Culture* (1996: 21–42). This seems to me an unnecessary and confusing blending of theoretical models.

Much closer to hand are Lacanian theories of desire that would serve more seamlessly to illuminate the contradictory representations of the ageless and aging *puella*; indeed one could argue that the works of Kristeva, influenced by, and in constant conversation with Lacan's, must always already be read in intimate connection with his. The workings of desire as Lacan sets them forth make clear that the *puella*, as a representation of all the lover aspires to be and also, conversely, all he denies in himself, tells us little about the feminine and remains for the *amator* no more than a strategy and a signifier that he manipulates for his own purposes.

Despite my quibbles about mixing theoretical frameworks and my preference for a more bleak reading of the feminine in the poems, this book will sit on my shelf right beside my current favorite pieces of scholarship on elegy, Paul Allen Miller's *Subjecting Verses: Latin Love Elegy and the Emergence of the Real* and Micaela Janan's *The Politics of Desire: Propertius IV*. It is a must-read for both students and scholars of Augustan love elegy.

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