

BOOK REVIEW

The Cambridge Companion to Latin Love Elegy. By THEA S. THORSEN, ED. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xiv + 435. Paper, \$37.99. ISBN 978-0-521-1237-4.

Few writings have been as influential for the reevaluation and renewed exploration of a genre as G. B. Conte's 1989-publication "Love without Elegy". Since then a number of approaches, gleaned primarily from either literary or critical theory, have offered us insights about the depth and richness of the genre of Latin Love Elegy and its significance in literary history. Thorsen's *Companion to Latin Love Elegy* now offers a selection of approaches that combine textual criticism with close analysis. Her compendium not only recognizes the recent shift away from theory but also provides a new set of perspectives that is informative, stimulating, and refreshing.

There are many things to praise about this volume. One is the book's balance. As laid out in the introduction, the editor aimed at (and indeed achieved) a good balance of topics covered (elegiac love, genre, the beginnings as well as the end of Latin Love Elegy, canon, politics, gender, and reception). Her book also strikes a good balance between surveys (e.g. Tibullus, Propertius, *militia amoris*, *seruitium amoris*) and explorations of specific questions (e.g. Roy Gibson on the elusive concept of "poet + [one] mistress," P. Allen Miller on erotic elements as defined characteristics in Propertius' fourth book and Ovid's *Fasti*). Lastly, this volume also features a balanced mix of well-known scholars and newer voices.

Yet what makes this book truly exceptional is the generous room (not only in spatial terms) that the editor allotted to the study of the reception of Latin Love Elegy. Comprising no less than seven contributions that cover roughly the time from Late Antiquity (Maximianus) to twentieth-century Hollywood, this section is the largest part and perhaps also the most outstanding aspect of this volume. Victoria Moul's analysis of how the genre is recast in English Latin elegies of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, Andrew Kahn's chapter on the formative influence on Latin Love Elegy on the Russian poetry between 1760 and 1830, and Theodore Ziolkowski's survey of classical German elegy from its inception, inspired by the genre's meter, to its dissolution—just to mention a

few—contribute indeed to the successful meeting of one of the goals pronounced in the book's introduction, namely, “[to contextualize] the Latin love elegists within the literary history of the West” (17). Aside from that, however, it emphasizes the (occasionally still underestimated) significance that this short-lived genre had on posterity.

Thorsen has done an impressive job assembling a great team of critics for providing a comprehensive introduction to *Latin Love Elegy*. The various contributions are tied together by extensive cross-referencing and thus impart a sense of unity to each section as well as to the book as a whole. The volume's layout is exemplary in its user-friendliness. An introduction by the editor expounds the purpose and goal of the companion and provides a brief overview of the scholarship on *Latin Love Elegy* since the sixties of the twentieth century. After that, the volume is divided in six parts: (1) History and Context; (2) The Latin Love Elegists; (3) The Elegiac World; (4) The Ends of Latin Love Elegy; (5) Receptions; (6) Meter. Across these divisions, the book contains twenty-three chapters with the largest number of contributions appearing—as already mentioned above—in Part 5. At the end of each contribution, the audience finds suggestions for further reading. A dateline, a comprehensive list of the works cited, and an index are provided at the end of the book. Part 6, which consists of a one-chapter long exploration of the poetic significance of the genre's metrical form offers helpful guidance.

This book is a worthy and highly recommendable addition to the Cambridge Companion series. It is a valuable resource for anyone working on *Latin Love Elegy*, and it is a great reference for teaching graduate seminars and advanced undergraduate courses.

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