

BOOK REVIEW

Ovid: Epistulae Ex Ponto Book I. By GARTH TISSOL, ED. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. ix + 191. Paper, \$99.00. ISBN 978-0-521-52562-6.

Despite Ovid's continued popularity as a Latin author at the university level, his later poetry is not often read by undergraduates, due partially to a comparative lack of interest in the exilic works and partially to a dearth of appropriate commentaries for the student. Tissol's commentary in the Cambridge Greek & Latin Classics series is therefore a welcome addition to higher-level commentaries aimed at scholars, such as those of Martin Helzle or Jan Felix Gaertner.¹

While Tissol gives a very brief account of what we know of Ovid's exile, he assumes general knowledge about Ovid's life and other works: the focus remains on the *Epistulae ex Ponto* and *Tristia* as the "exile poetry." (More mention of the *Ibis* would, I think, have been helpful for the intended audience of undergraduate and graduate students, particularly when discussing Ovid's use or avoidance of names, but this is likely a result of the field as a whole dividing the *Ibis* from the other two works that were written 'in exile'). His brief introduction (28 pages) is divided into, first, a short discussion of the collection's arrangement by addressee; second, the use of earlier epistolary works as generic source material for the *ex Ponto*; third, Ovid's use of hyperbole and the "higher genre" of epic; fourth, the work's use of names; fifth, some general stylistic observations; sixth, the early reception of the *ex Ponto*; and seventh, a note on the text, which is for the most part taken from Richmond's 1990 Teubner edition.

There is a certain amount of overlap among sections, with the same theme approached from a slightly different point of view; thus generic sources for the *ex Ponto* are discussed in section 2 (Horace's *Epistles* & earlier Roman elegy) as well as section 3 (mythological epic), for example. At twelve pages, the third section is by far the longest and includes, as part of his discussion of Ovidian hyperbole, a

¹ M. Helzle (ed.), *Ovids Epistulae ex Ponto, Buch I-II, Kommentar.* (Heidelberg 2003); J. F. Gaertner (ed.), *Ovid, Epistulae ex Ponto, Book I.* (Oxford 2005)

brief review of scholarship on the exile poetry. I was surprised at the amount of space given to Fitton Brown's article on the unreality of Ovid's exile, given its lack of influence. Tissol uses it largely to stress his own readings of the poetry's historicity, following Helzle and in contrast to G. D. Williams' comparative skepticism, though I would note that most references to Williams in the commentary proper (as opposed to the introduction) do not substantially disagree with his readings.² The methodological quibbles I have here, however, do not detract from the usefulness of the work as a whole.

The commentary itself has a good balance of grammatical/stylistic, metrical, textual, and historical information, though the level of expected knowledge seems to vary: thus Tissol will cite one construction as "enallage (or hypallage) adiectivi" (64) without much explanation (why not refer to it as a transferred epithet?), while conscientiously defining polyptoton as "inflectional variation of the same noun or adjective" a few pages later (69). Literary connections and reception by later authors, ancient and modern, in the notes are generally quite engaging, though occasionally somewhat oddly chosen, as with a quotation of Pope given in the notes to 1.1 as an example of anticipating a question from the reader.

Much of the philological and stylistic commentary is presented without interpretation (e.g. commenting on the hyperbaton at 1.3.48 without venturing an explanation as to why). This is in some ways a positive, as it forces the student to think about such matters for herself, but I believe that more guidance is sometimes called for at this level—as for example with the note on 1.4.29-30, which does an admirable job of both commenting on the word order and noting how it "reinforce[s] the sense of space and distance" (108). Tissol warns us in the introduction that the apparatus will contain only variants discussed in the commentary, but occasionally discusses textual choices in the commentary that are passed over in the app. crit. entirely (as with, e.g. 1.5.79-82)—I would have preferred to see those discussions reflected in the apparatus as well.

Tissol's methodological approach to the historicity of the *ex Ponto* is evident throughout the commentary: whenever an individual or event is mentioned in the poetry or commentary, s/he is fully identified in the notes. On the whole, I see this as a positive, as it provides the student, and instructor, with copious historical information culled from a number of different scholarly sources. At times, however, this can lead to overstatement, as for example when *Tr.* 3.7 is explained

² *Ibid.* (Helzle); G. D. Williams, *Banished Voices: readings in Ovid's exile poetry*. (Cambridge 1994)

as having been written “to O.’s stepdaughter Perilla” (90). Even if one accepts a biographical reading of the poems, as Tissol does, the identification of ‘Perilla’ as Ovid’s stepdaughter is far from certain and ignores contrasting views such as Ingleheart (or, for that matter, Luck).³ The bibliography is otherwise fairly comprehensive, though I was surprised at the omission of Claassen’s 2008 *Ovid Revisited* and Luck’s magisterial commentary on the *Tristia*.⁴

In general, any complaints I have are minor; this is a well-written and highly usable addition to the series, and one that was sorely needed.

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³ J. Ingleheart, “Ovid’s *scripta puella*: Perilla as poetic and political fiction in *Tristia* 3.7.” *CQ* 62.1 (2012) 227-241; G. Luck, *P Ovidius Naso: Tristia, Band II: Kommentar*. (Heidelberg 1977)

⁴ *Ibid.* (Luck); J.-M. Claassen, *Ovid Revisited: The Poet in Exile* (London 2008)