

BOOK REVIEW

Silenced Voices: The Poetics of Speech in Ovid. By BARTOLO A. NATOLI. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2017. Pp. 227. Hardback, \$69.95. ISBN: 978-0-299-31210-7.

Ovid might have been unceremoniously packed off in disgrace from Rome to Romania in AD 8, but the poems he wrote there have come in from the cold in recent years. Where once critics took Ovid at his word (a dangerous pastime) when he claimed that these were the shoddy products of a flagging talent, they now recognize the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* as sophisticated creations of a poetic skill as fiercely alive in Tomis as by the Tiber. Most recently, Bartolo Natoli has added to the discussion by focusing on the exile poems' interrelationship with the *Metamorphoses* and that epic's long-recognized motif of speech and silence.

Natoli's monograph falls into four distinct segments. Chapter 1 lays the groundwork by analyzing the 1st-century BC Roman conception of speechlessness as expressed in selected texts; Natoli seeks to establish what he calls "a schema of speech loss" with, in particular, the term *mutus*. Being unable to speak becomes inextricably bound up with ideas of the non-human, social isolation and intense emotions. Chapter 2 examines speechlessness as a pattern in the *Metamorphoses*, both in terms of characters suffering social isolation because of it (as in the myths of Lycaon, Callisto, Actaeon, Dryope and Echo) and those overcoming that isolation by writing (Io and Philomela, writing to her father and sister, respectively). The latter sets up Chapter 3's core argument: a reading of *Tristia* 1.1 that presents Ovid's exilic persona suffering speech loss but overcoming it by writing just as Io and Philomela do. Finally, Chapter 4 sets out to consider Ovid's depiction of exile in terms of being forgotten or remembered via writing to his Roman poetic community as a substitute for speaking.

All useful monographs should expand the larger scholarly conversation, and Natoli does present Ovidian studies with several helpful avenues of discussion. Ovid was one of the most complex, sophisticated, and allusive poets that Rome ever produced, and Natoli's admonition to read the exile poetry alongside the

Metamorphoses is an evergreen reminder of Ovid's self-referential habit. This is particularly useful given that the exile poetry repeatedly mentions the love poetry (namely the *Ars Amatoria* of *carmen et error* infamy), and it is all too easy to overlook the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*'s relationship with the *Metamorphoses*. While the theme of losing one's voice is long a recognized aspect of Ovid's "poetics of exile" (to use Williams' term) and his "pose of decline" (to use Kenney's), Natoli complicates that theme by looking at it explicitly in tandem with its role in the *Metamorphoses*: Ovid interweaves his exile poetry with his own previous epic as much he does with the epic and tragedy and elegy of others, and reading it with an eye trained on those resonances enriches our scholarly appreciation of the *Tristia* and *Epistulae* and of Ovid's own artistry.

Nevertheless, the book is not without its flaws, some small, some more substantial. Some Latin passages have English translations while others do not. Occasionally the writing contains bobbles that could have benefitted from an editor's gimlet eye; for instance, the repetitive "Ovid creates an artistic creation" (16) or rather dogged recaps of previously covered material. The fourth chapter purports to be partly an attempt to explore "why Ovid attempts to portray himself in such a manner" and to "reach beyond the exilic persona of Ovid to the historical Ovid" (14), a claim which seems to me to flirt with intentionality and speculation. Also, the monograph lacks a conclusion *per se* as a separate section. In at least two discussions, the evidence offered does not fully convince because of its brevity. For example, Natoli presents *Epistulae ex Ponto* 1.7.1-4 and 2.6.1-4 and then confidently asserts, "What these two excerpts ... highlight is the emphasis placed on writing throughout the exile literature" (123). Two passages from one work cannot substantiate a claim of "throughout" five books of *Tristia* and four books of *Epistulae ex Ponto*; one recalls the old adage, "once is chance, twice is coincidence, three times is a pattern."

Later on, Natoli offers two passages, one from Cicero and one from Seneca, and declares, "Both of these examples are indicative of the way in which the physical letter was conceived of in antiquity (127)." The timeframe of "antiquity" implies a vast claim that requires more than only late Roman Republican Cicero and Neronian Seneca. In terms of the overall content, I am puzzled why an examination of voicelessness in Ovid's exile poetry does not mention even in passing the *Fasti*, a work that, edited in exile, also has an extensive interest in speech and silence, as Feeney's essential 1992 article clarified. Granted, speechlessness there is often focused on themes other than Natoli's strict attention to social alienation and the use of writing to bridge that gap, but *Fasti* Book 3's myth of Lara perhaps would

have enriched the examination of the *Metamorphoses*' Philomela, as both women are similarly mutilated into silence, and *Fasti* Book 2's tale of Lucretia could have provided additional evidence for speech hindered by emotional distress. In terms of considering the Ovidian epistle, Natoli does nod to the *Heroides* in 14's mention of Io in the imprisoned Hypermestra's appeal to Lynceus (ll. 85-92). All the same, a longer engagement with the *Heroides* might have enhanced the context and discussion of Ovid's use (and then exilic reuse) of the elegiac letter form as an attempt to bridge both geographical and emotional distance through writing.

In conclusion, despite its occasional flaws, Natoli's monograph reminds us to read Ovid's exile poetry with fresh appreciation for its literary complexity and learned allusiveness, and in that Ovid enthusiasts may be pleased.

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