

GARTH TISSOL, *Ovid, Epistulae ex Ponto, Book I*, ed. by G. T., Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, ix + 191 pp. ISBN 978-0-521-52562-6.

After the rich and learned commentaries by Helzle and Gaertner¹ there could be no doubt that Tissol's green-and-yellow edition was intended primarily for classroom use; it will be warmly welcome there for it is a highly successful piece of work.

The introduction is not yet the best part of it; it is somewhat unorthodox in scope and not always convincing in argument. Instead of staying in closer proximity to the seasoned structure "Poet – Work (background, structure, language, metre, reception) – Text and Transmission", Tissol has no fuller section on Ovid's biography, keeps information on transmission to a minimum, and dedicates most of the space to rather specialist topics, some of which I am inclined to think would have better been mooted in contributions to journals.

A section on "The literary background" (2–6) sets Ovid's work mainly against Horace's epistles; certainly a comparison worth studying, but some of the conclusions seem to me a bit of a stretch: "By choosing to write verse epistles in the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, Ovid invites the reader to consider his career together with Horace's" (5) – given Ovid's situation and reputation I find it difficult to see any significant signal in his "choosing to write verse epistles"; some sort of dialogue with Horace was just a priori inevitable, hardly to be perceived as *raison d'être* for the new work. Tissol's discussion, on the other hand, reads at times as if the exiled poet had nothing more urgent on his mind than to ring some witty new changes on a predecessor's literary model.

Discussion of style and presentation is divided into two sections, "The higher genres and Ovidian hyperbole" (6–18) and "Observations on style" (23–25), the latter rather cursory and with a focus on hyperbaton. Again there is much of interest to learn, but in order to gain fresh insight into the idea of hyperbole in Ovid's exile poetry I would tend to check periodical articles, not introductory chapters. Somewhat surprising is Tissol's insisting that Ovid's verse in the *Epistulae ex Ponto* is exactly on the same stylistic level as in his earlier work (*passim*; e.g., 23), making his constant complaints about failing abilities nothing more than just a symbolic pose. This would be at odds with those many observations that have led to (what I would have

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

thought to be) consensus that, e.g., “the diction of the *Epistulae ex Ponto* is, generally speaking, more prosaic and colloquial than that of Ovid’s earlier works” (Gaertner 25). Tissol repeatedly seems to share in again (e.g., 25: “In his later style he is less punctilious in regard to repetition of vocabulary in close proximity”) and at least once contradicts himself more or less plainly in this respect². No doubt Tissol had some sort of common denominator to all this in his mind, but it did not become clear to me throughout the book.

More fundamentally, though, I would contend that we are not, and will never be, in a position to evaluate truly Ovid’s claim of failing skill. No matter how much information on style and language we gather, our judgement can never reach the accuracy of native speakers of Ovid’s time; and as far as our knowledge goes, our ability to assign aesthetic values, quantitatively and qualitatively, to stylistic differences will at best be limited. More precisely: Differences are there, and even where they seem minute to us they may not have seemed so to contemporaries, let alone to the author; nor do we really know much about what was felt to be ‘better’ or ‘worse’ in style³. And at any rate, if there was just something to be desired then the poet himself should only be expected to be the first to complain.

This does by no means diminish the probability that there is an element of hyperbole in Ovid’s claim, i.e., that readers are meant to estimate his verse higher than the poet’s own statements do when taken at face value. But reducing these to a pure pose⁴ can in my eyes never be more than an unprovable speculation – and an implausible one at that.

When in the above I restricted myself mostly to critical remarks it was only because I trust that any scholar interested in the field will read the whole of the introduction anyway. Anyone failing to do so would miss valuable information and a substantial number of fresh and insightful thoughts, in the sections mentioned already as well as in “Names in the *Epistulae ex Ponto*” (18–23) and a section on early reception (25–7) covering Cornelius Severus, Seneca, Pliny, *Anthologia Latina*, and (especially intriguing) epigraphy.

The text of the poems is equipped with a “highly selective” (28) apparatus, relying on Richmond’s 1990 Teubner edition for manuscript report⁵ but

² Headnote to 1.5 (p. 113): “[to his readers,] O’s powers seem as great as ever, his verse as skilful and eloquent”, to be followed only a little later by: “[Ovid] illustrates its [i.e., the verse’s] harshness with an intentionally awkward series of three monosyllables”. Leaving aside for a moment the question of how we can be sure about the aesthetic value attributed by the Roman reader to such a series – can verse be skilful/eloquent and awkward at the same time?

³ Cf. above, last note. Even where we have explicit statements from ancient authorities they are notoriously unreliable; see, e.g., Tissol himself on 1.4.17–18 for a stylistic remark of doubtful merit in Servius (where, by the way, Tissol follows others in misunderstanding Servius’ *cacemphaton*: the term refers to the ‘dirty’ meaning potentially to be heard in *Dorica castra*, not to the duplication of the syllables censured before as *mala compositio*).

⁴ It must be said that Gaertner, more than Tissol, had taken this stance to an extreme.

⁵ Tissol probably could not take notice anymore of Richmond’s corrections published

independent in choice of variants⁶. The commentary proper is followed by a bibliography⁷ and two short indexes (“Latin words” and “General”).

Now for the heart of the book. The first and foremost requirement to be met by any commentary – and a regular source of disappointment even in a series as renowned as the Cambridge Greek and Latin classics – is to explain what needs to be explained. For a quick check, let us have a look at the beginning of the first *Epistula* (Tissol’s text, orthography, and punctuation):

Naso Tomitanae iam non nouus incola terrae
 hoc tibi de Getico litore mittit opus.
 si uacat, hospitio peregrinos, Brute, libellos
 excipe, dumque aliquo, quolibet abde loco.
 publica non audent intra monimenta uenire, 5
 ne suus hoc illis clauserit auctor iter.
 a quotiens dixi ‘certe nil turpe docetis;
 ite: patet castis uersibus ille locus.’
 non tamen accedunt, sed, ut aspicias ipse, latere
 sub lare priuato tutius esse putant. 10
 quaeris ubi hos possis nullo componere laeso?
 qua steterant Artes, pars uacat illa tibi.
 quid ueniat, nouitate roges fortasse sub ipsa:
 accipe quodcumque est, dummodo non sit amor.

In these lines I noted five points on which I would expect students to need help: a) 4 *dumque aliquo*: elliptical expression; b) 5 *publica monimenta*: meaning; c) 9f *latere / ... putant*: construction (two infinitives, one of which serves as subject accusative); d) 12 *Artes*: meaning; e) 13 *ueniat*: text (v.l. *ueniant*). Tissol addresses all these clearly, and in each case at the earliest possible occasion. Helzle does the same only with b), while d) is solved not explicitly, but indirectly towards the end of the note, e) treated only briefly and in a way not easy to understand for beginners, and nothing is said about a) and c). Gaertner leaves out c) and explains b) only later into the note but is fully informative on a), d), and e). The sample turns out to be representative; Tissol never lets his readers down on points of basic-but-non-obvious understanding, many of which remain below the radar of Helzle and/or Gaertner (what “needs to be explained” obviously depends on target audience).

just one year prior to his commentary: *Corrigenda et Addenda in Ex Ponto Elegias 1990*, ExClass 17, 2013, 207–219. None of those would have been relevant to his discussions anyway.

⁶ While otherwise the book is excellently edited, there is an unfortunate misprint in the text of 1.2.67 (p. 35) where *suscipe* must be read instead of *suspice*.

⁷ One minor quibble: A. E. Housman’s works are referenced only through page numbers from the *Classical Papers* edition (e.g., on 1.5.17–18) although nowadays, thanks to online archiving services, the original publications are often much easier to access.

This alone would have been enough to earn full marks for a teaching commentary, but Tissol has even more in stock; there are surprisingly many notes which go significantly beyond the understanding already established by the predecessors. My favourites included a thorough discussion of postponement of *cum* (on 1.1.39–40); a new and well-reasoned suggestion for the imagery of *nova cera* in 1.2.56; a nice hint at a prescript from *Ad Herennium* concerning the structure of 1.3.61–84; an informative treatment of the pattern *Caesaribus cum coniuge* replacing ... *et coniugi* (on 1.4.55–6; strangely, there is no cross reference to this on 1.8.32 *cum cara coniuge nata*); a comparison with Tibullus 2.6 in the headnote to 1.6 (p. 126f.), attentive in particular to what Ovid chooses *not* to incorporate from his model; a lucid remark about “almost paradoxical” *scripta canenda* in 1.7.30; an illuminating discussion of the *hysteron proteron* in 1.8.15–16; a sagacious assessment of the implications of Ovid’s alluding to *Am.* 2.10 in 1.10 (headnote, p. 173f); and many more.

No progress at all, on the other hand, is made on the thorny issue of interpolation. Questions of authenticity are obviously not a core interest of Tissol’s, and it is all the more honourable that he at least mentions almost all of the numerous deletions adopted or made by Gaertner⁸. His discussions, however, are hardly ever satisfying. Sometimes he will just oppose without argument (“wrongly deleted by Merkel and Gaertner”, on 1.2.35–6), sometimes he will answer only with commonplaces not apt to balance detailed *ad locum* argumentation⁹. Quite fundamentally, “unimpeachably Ovidian style and expression” (on 1.8.7–8; similarly *passim*) is not a valid argument against deletion¹⁰, and on 1.5.65–6 he becomes downright contradictory: “The rep-

⁸ Only 1.4.15–18 *del.* Gaertner is left out. Tissol is not very precise, though, in ascribing expunctions to scholars; 1.1.67–8 were deleted first by Bentley, not Gaertner (who records Bentley’s precedent correctly), 1.6.45–6 were doubted already by Luck, and 1.7.21–2 again deleted by Bentley (this had escaped also Gaertner’s attention, as did 1.7.65–6 *del.* Bentley, where 61–6 *del.* Gaertner following Weise; see E. Hedicke, *Studia Bentleiana. V. Ovidius Bentleianus*, Freienwalde 1905, 40); moreover, 1.7.19–22 *iam del.* Merkel, just as at 1.6.23–4 and 1.8.39–40 the lines cut out by Gaertner belong to passages already deleted (1.6) or doubted (1.8) by Zwierlein.

⁹ No one will deny that “one ought not [...] to expect invariably smooth transitions in Roman elegy” (on 1.7.49–52), but this does not account for any of Gaertner’s weighty objections, particularly not for the fact that 53 links the new paragraph seamlessly to the train of thought developed until 48 while 49–52 on closer inspection follow quite a different, and in one important aspect, Augustus’ attitude, even opposite, line (this, incidentally, being the typical outcome whenever an interpolator tries to insert his loosely related embellishment between two original paragraphs without paying attention to the linking function given to the second paragraph’s opening line(s) by the original author). Tissol goes on to remark that the poem “reflects Tibullan style” but I doubt he will have good parallels ready to prove that incongruous interruptions of this kind were characteristic of Tibullus.

¹⁰ See, e.g., E. J. Kenney, *Ovid, Heroides XVI–XXI*, Cambridge 1996, 20f: “in discussions of authorship and authenticity only negative proofs are as a rule cogent”, the reason being that the possibility of an interpolator catching the original author’s style up to perfection can

etition of *satis est* [...] is unusual (*satietatem movet* according to Richmond [...]) [...] Gaertner's case for deleting the couplet is unpersuasive. The language and expression are unexceptionable [...]” (my emphases).

I confess to feeling a bit uneasy about the fact that, concerning the issue of potential interpolation, undergraduates might go away from Tissol's book with the impression that i) they had seen an appropriate account of the matter (which they have not), and that ii) there exists a whole book of Ovidian poetry without one single interpolated line (which, according to all we know at the moment¹¹, is quite unlikely). Extent and exact location of spurious material will without any doubt continue to be a matter of debate for a while; but suggesting that there is not even a real issue does not lead the path towards solution but rather away from it.

Finally some minor points (I am not commenting on places where help can easily be obtained from Helzle or Gaertner):

– 1.2.38: When a “golden line” (Tissol) or *versus aureus* (e.g., Helzle on 1.1.6) is discussed, it sometimes occurs to me as worth mentioning that this is in fact a modern term, defined for the first time no earlier than 1652¹². In the absence of any explanation, undergraduates will, I think, most naturally tend to assume ancient terminology¹³.

– 1.2.109: Tissol detects an oxymoron in *male compositos*, “since *compositos* connotes care, *male* the lack of it”, but the latter is certainly to be taken in the (quite different, but not unusual) sense “to one's disadvantage” or similar (OLD *male* 7; Tissol seems to have overlooked the same meaning in 1.2.64, too).

– 1.2.145: Tissol's sole authority for assuming a prodelision *me (u)t* is Kenney (as above n. 10) on *Her.* 19.29, where it is even more difficult to see how an original pronunciation *te (e)t* instead of *t(e) et* could be proven. New metrical phenomena should not be conjured up unless suggested by solid evidence.

– 1.4, headnote: Little is said about the curious fact that the addressee of

nowhere be excluded (cf. W. Lingenberg, “Kleine Schule der Echtheitskritik: Ars Amatoria 1,231–236”, *RhM* 158, 2015, 16–29: 27 n. 19). Incorporating the original's trademark formulae would have been an especially convenient way to achieve this, so Tissol's verdict on 1.8.39–40 is equally misguided: “*at puto*: a favourite Ovidian expression (and one hardly likely to have been introduced by an interpolator)”.

¹¹ A good starting point for bibliographical research on this topic would be M. Mülke, “*Adulteratio* und *Aemulatio* – *Verfälscher als Co-Autoren?*”, *RhM* 153, 2010, 61–91.

¹² See, e.g., K. Mayer, “The golden line: ancient and medieval lists of special hexameters and modern scholarship”, in C. D. Lanham, ed., *Latin Grammar and Rhetoric: From Classical Theory to Medieval Practice*, London 2003, 139–179: 139.

¹³ Conversely, on 1.8.11–12 Tissol notes that the opening type *stat vetus urbs* is “called ‘ekphrasis of place’ by modern commentators” although this term does in fact go back to antiquity: see H. LAUSBERG, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik*, Stuttgart 2008⁴ (= 1973²), §§ 810, 819, 1133.

1.4, Ovid's wife, is not named explicitly until line 45. Tissol speculates about a heading *uxori*, which would have given the clue right at the outset, but the poet himself quite certainly did not use superscriptions for single letters.¹⁴ How soon then did his first readers discover to whom the letter was directed? What would they make of the beginning before they did?

– 1.5.21–2: Tissol deserves praise for at least trying to explain the difficult couplet, offering no less than three attempts at paraphrasing – none of which, though, really convinces me.

– 1.5.29: “*miraris? miror et ipse*: the juxtaposition of different forms of the same verb is akin to polyptoton of nouns and adjectives” – Ch. Zgoll sensibly suggested using the term *Polyklise* for this (*Römische Prosodie und Metrik*, Darmstadt 2012, 119 n. 316).

– 1.7, headnote: “[Tibullus’] abrupt style, so well suited to the [...] elegiac lover, serves O.’s purpose here [...]” (136); I found Helzle’s thoughts about Ovid’s constant reuse of motives from love elegy in the context of exile rather illuminating (see Helzle 23–25 on “Enterotisieren” of elegiac material as a “Grundthema der Verbannungsliteratur”) and would have liked to see reference to them here or at other suitable places.

– 1.7.66: The whole pentameter is enclosed in cruces; given the intended audience, one would rather have expected Tissol to rewrite less scrupulously to a sensible reading text (as do Helzle and Gaertner).

– 1.8, headnote: For the fragments of Cornelius Severus, the letter’s likely addressee, Tissol 148 refers the reader only to the first edition of Courtney’s *Fragmentary Latin Poets* (Oxford 1993); a revised edition with addenda appeared in 2003, and Hollis’s fuller account in *Fragments of Roman Poetry* (Oxford 2007) should have been mentioned, too.

– 1.8.41–4: Even with a more precise and, for the international student or scholar, more easily accessible reference than “*The Times*, 21 September 2000”, archeological findings labelled by Tissol as an “implausible ‘Ovid’s villa’” would not have seemed of genuine interest to me.

– 1.9.3 *quodque nefas dictu, fieri nec posse putavi*: *quod* cannot be nominative and accusative at the same time, as Tissol thinks; the subject accusative for *posse fieri* is to be understood from, not identical with, *quod*. (The other possibility, taking *quod* and *nefas* as accusatives dependent on *putavi*, with *esse* supplied, is unattractive in sense.)

The diminutiveness of the items in the above list makes it even more obvious that Tissol’s *Epistulae ex Ponto I* is an achievement for which we can be grateful indeed. While I might have preferred a different design for the intro-

¹⁴ See B.-J. Schröder, *Titel und Text. Zur Entwicklung lateinischer Gedichtüberschriften. Mit Untersuchungen zu lateinischen Buchtiteln, Inhaltsverzeichnissen und anderen Gliederungsmitteln*, Berlin–New York 1999, 277–80. The issue of poem titles is not touched upon at all by Tissol, nor is it by Helzle or Gaertner, despite its relevance for interpretation in those cases where disclosure of the addressee is delayed (in book I also in the ninth letter).

duction, and leaving aside the unsatisfactory handling of authenticity issues, the commentary is exemplary and exactly what was needed complementing Helzle's and Gaertner's existing works. According to his website, Tissol has agreed to complete Anderson's commentary on the *Metamorphoses* with a final volume on book 11–15; we have every reason to be looking forward to that.

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