Latin Elegy and Narratology

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I n recent decades literary studies have shown great interest in issues concerning the elements of narrative: What are the central pieces of a plot? How do stories begin and end? What is the role of the “point of view” or focalization in a story? What are the functions of description? How does the reader participate in the construction of a story? The study of narrative, or narratology, particularly as theorized in the writings of Mieke Bal, Gérard Genette, and Paul Ricoeur, has inspired many productive readings of classical texts. However, for the most part these studies have centered on genres that are deemed as “essentially” or “straightforwardly” narrative, such as epic, history, and the novel.  

1. Massimo Fusillo’s 1985 study of Il tempo delle Argonautiche, informed by the narratological theories and methodologies of Genette, has been identified as “the first published narratological study of a Classical text” (Nikolopoulos 2004, 17). However, John Winkler’s 1985 Auctor and Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius’ The Golden Ass might have an equal claim to this pioneering label.  

These key works were shortly followed by Irene De Jong’s 1987 groundbreaking Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad. For more recent narratological studies of Greek texts, see Richardson (1990), Rood (1998), Morales (2004), and Doherty (1995). In Latin literature, interest in narratological approaches to textual criticism similarly emerged in the late 1980s. In fact, Alessandro Barchiesi locates “one of the first Genettian moments of Ovidian criticism” with Stephen Hinds’s 1987 study of Ovid’s epic Metamorphoses in The Metamorphosis of Persephone: Ovid and the Self-Conscious Muse (Barchiesi 2002, 188 n.19). Yet, as with narratological approaches to Greek literature, such studies in Latin literature have tended to focus primarily upon the straightforwardly narrative genre of epic. For recent narratological studies of Latin texts see Hinds (1987b), Laird (1999), Sharrock and Morales, eds. (2000), Barchiesi (2001), and Nikolopoulos (2004).
This volume explores how theories of narrative can promote further understanding and innovative readings of a series of texts that are not traditionally seen as narrative: the corpus of Latin elegy. Although this body of literature does not tell a continuous story in the sense of Callimachus’ ’aisma dienekes, yet many stories surface in the web of the poems at different narrative levels. We have, for example, quasi-narratives like the overarching “story” of Tibullus’ relationship with Delia, of Propertius’ affair with Cynthia, or of Ovid’s life in exile—which are, however, often interrupted and infiltrated by other tangential plots. Throughout elegy there are many embedded tales—narratives in their own right—located within and interacting with the primarily nonnarrative structure of the external frame-text. The essays in this volume discuss several aspects of how such stories are formed, presented, and read in Latin elegy.

The thirteen essays collected here address a series of interrelated questions: Can the inset narratives of elegy, with their distinctive narrative strategies, provide the key to a poetics of elegiac storytelling? How, as readers of erotic elegy, should we respond when we find ourselves positioned as eavesdroppers or voyeurs? Can narratology and its concepts of framing and focalization provide a critical vocabulary with which to explore these effects? In what ways does elegy renegotiate the linearity and teleology of narrative? Does the idea of death in elegy work to fix or destabilize its narratives and supply or deny closure? How do the concepts of time and space shape the way we read Roman elegy? In what ways does elegy use the dynamics of narrative to manipulate the relationship between reader, poet, character, and text? Why are women in elegy characterized by narrative circularity and repetition rather than by forward momentum in story, time, and space? Can formal theories of narratology help to make sense of the temporal contradictions and narrative incongruities that so often characterize elegiac stories? What can the reception of Roman elegy tell us about narratives of unity, identity, and authority?

But first, we might ask: Does elegy actually narrate? Does the elegiac genre provide an appropriate vehicle for telling stories? Or does the “closed” form of the elegiac couplet impose structural limitations upon the development of narrative, marking a metrical barrier to an effective narrative continuum, as Brooks Otis once maintained? Is the elegiac meter with

2. The focus of this volume will be primarily the poetry written in elegiac couplets that flourished between 30 BCE and 30 CE at Rome. While love was the central theme of most authors, other topics such as exile, politics, and even the Roman calendar were treated as suitable elegiac materia by the poet Ovid and his successors.

its characteristic rise and fall “anti-narrative”? The answers to these questions are intimately linked to the history of literary criticism on this genre. Scholars of elegy from antiquity to our own century have endeavored to link the characters, incidents, and plots described in the elegiac collections to people and events in the “real” lives of the poets Tibullus, Propertius, Ovid, Sulpicia, and others. From such a perspective, the Tibullan corpus is seen to trace the story of the poet’s life and loves and, on the basis of discrete details provided in individual elegies, a coherent story—a quasi-autobiographical narrative—can be read. In this view, it matters not that Tibullus’ poetry is characterized by its lack of narrative unity and continuity, described by W. R. Johnson as “a sheer discontinuum, fragmentations of self and work and love”4—the overarching story of the poet and his mistress(es) is seen to tie these fragments together, creating a narrative continuum out of elegiac shards.5

Critical hostility to such a viewpoint has been widespread for at least the last sixty years, however. In his highly influential 1945 study Ovid: A Poet between Two Worlds, Eduard Fränkel denied that there was any sense of narrative continuity and chronology in the collections of the elegiac love poets, maintaining that: “there is little continuity in the volumes of Roman erotic poetry, and scholars who have tried to piece together the history of one individual affair have wasted their labor.”6 In 1965, Jean-Paul Boucher roundly denied that Propertius’ monobiblos narrated a story of love, claiming that the first book of the Propertian corpus “has no beginning, no ending analogous to that of a novel” and that the second “is completely independent of any novel-like chronology.”7 And in 1988 Paul Veyne made the scathing declaration in his seminal Roman Erotic Elegy: Love, Poetry, and the West that: “[t]o believe that our elegists tell the story of their affairs, one must not have read them. The ‘Story of Tibullus and Delia!’ It comes down to five poems. . . . The poems do not present the episodes of a love affair—beginnings, declaration, seduction, a falling out. Time does not pass at all.”8

Veyne is highly censorious of readers and critics who try to find a narrative continuation in any of the elegiac collections. Indeed, he insists that, without exception, elegy is: “a poetry without action, with no plot leading to a denouement or maintaining any tension, and this is why time has no

5. For a recent illustration of this approach see Lee (1990), xiv–xv. See also Griffin (1985), 118 on Propertius 2.20.
reality in it. . . . An event . . . is not really an event. Before and after do not exist, any more than does duration.”

But Veyne overstates the case. Certainly, the elegiac genre seems to invite and authorize the conventional view of its “anti-narrative” status, and to an even greater degree than its generic “neighbors,” lyric and epigram, elegy seems particularly antithetical to narrativity. So, where readers of elegy look for consistency of viewpoint or voice, for unity of time, place or action, for plot and progress, for time passing and movement toward a final telos, we find instead inconsistency and disunity, inconsistency and incongruity, fragments of self and work and love and story. But this does not tell us the “whole” story about elegy’s narrativity.

It has become a critical commonplace to acknowledge that “sincerity” and “reality” are elegiac tropes effected and exploited by the elegiac ego and his (or her) first-person poetry, and to appreciate that behind the pseudonyms Delia, Cynthia, Corinna, Cerinus et al. lie not “real” women of flesh and blood, or even invented characters, but rather poetic figures, representations, embodiments of elegiac poetry and its programs. Similarly, contemporary critics offer increasingly convincing affirmation that plot, character, action, and chronology are themselves also effects produced in and by elegiac poetry—that “story” is a fundamental part of elegiac textual discourse, no less than “reality” or the elegiac ego.

W. R. Johnson has reminded us that, although there may be no overriding narrative sequence or thread that ties together the individual poems that make up the Propertian corpus, individual elegies and individual books lose something of their “resonance and bite” if read outside of the wider narrative context offered by their position within the collection as a whole. Emphasizing the role of the reader and the process of reading in the configuration of elegiac stories, James Butrica goes further, to argue that:

Propertius’ elegies are not discrete entities but are meant to be read together in a linear progression for cumulative meaning; each elegy, each book in fact, is only one element of the tribiblos and achieves its full significance only when read in sequence together with all the other elements. Of course, such a linear reading is virtually demanded by the format of the ancient bookroll, which offered little scope for browsing back and forth.

9. Ibid., 51.
There is no narrative thread as such, and no “message” or “meaning” is spelled out explicitly; rather the reader is left to extract the cumulative meaning from the multiple resonances created by sequence, juxtaposition, echoing, or cross-reference within the whole.

Most recently, Niklas Holzberg has claimed that “Ovid tells vividly realistic stories about people in love” and expounds the thesis that Ovid’s elegiac works can be read like novels. Indeed, he repeatedly describes the *Amores* as an “erotic novel,” a “romance,” and a “novel in poems,” arranged in order to tell an “ongoing story.”13 What is more, in his discussion of *Amores* 3.7, he explains that what we have here is: “. . . not only a poem, but also an exciting first-person verse narrative. Indeed, because *Amores* 3.7 takes its place in a sequence of elegies in which the speaker reconstitutes his erotic experiences in chronological order, what we have, in fact, is one episode of a first-person novel.”14

This “fictive chronology” is, he affirms, “typical of Roman verse collections” and he even goes so far as to suggest that15 “the borderline between elegy and epic is crossed in certain passages” and that some narrative features of these elegies might even be compared to those of the Greek novel.16 As Johnson and Butrica claimed for the Propertian corpus, so Holzberg emphasizes that stories are told *across* poems in the *Amores*, and that while an individual elegy may lay claim to its own status as narrative, it is primarily through its relation to other poems and other parts of a wider narrative scheme that it is able to tell a story.17

However, what Holzberg underplays somewhat here is the important consideration that some of the extant “sequence of elegies” that we read are, or appear to be, the products of their author’s devising (such as Ovid’s *Amores*), while others (such as Propertius Book 4 or the fragments of Sulpica)
are evidently the products of later editors and their efforts to arrange a collection of poems into a coherent sequence. This raises an important question concerning elegy’s narrative potential: What differences are entailed in reading the narrative of a single poem and in reading that poem as part of a narrative sequence or continuum across poems—which may or may not have been arranged by the author? The role of the reader in configuring elegy’s narratives is brought to the fore in such considerations, reminding us that, in elegy’s complex relation to narrative, the roles of reader and elegiac poet-lover are intimately intertwined.

What “story”—if any—are we trying to tell, then, about the relationship between narrative and Latin elegy in and across the forthcoming chapters? Can narratology simply aid us in understanding the “grammar” of how stories are composed in the corpus of Latin elegy? Can it help to forward new interpretations of elegiac texts? The various theories of narrative employed in the following chapters—ranging from Plato to Prince—each present narratology as an essential critical tool for the study of literary texts. Indeed, Bal’s account of what the use of this tool might entail illustrates well the aims of this volume:

Readers are offered an instrument with which they can describe narrative texts. This does not imply that the theory is some kind of machine into which one inserts a text at one end and expects an adequate description to roll out at the other. The concepts that are presented here must be regarded as intellectual tools. These tools are useful in that they enable their users to formulate a textual description in such a way that it is accessible to others. Furthermore, discovering the characteristics of a text can also be facilitated by insight into the abstract narrative system. But above all, the concepts help to increase understanding by encouraging readers to articulate what they understand, or think they understand, when reading or otherwise ‘processing’ a narrative artifact.

The essays that make up this collection use the tool(s) of narratology in different ways and to varying degrees. Some of the papers aim to explore

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18. Skoie, in this volume, explores this question in relation to the *corpus Tibullianum*.
19. Bal (1997), 3f. A detailed survey of narratology and its theories is beyond the scope of this volume, but Bal’s *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* is an excellent starting point for the neophyte narratologist. For a good overview of narratology and narratological analysis, see Herman et al. (2005), Herman and Vervaeck (2005), Phelan and Rabinowitz (2005), Onega and Landa (1996), and Toolan (1988). For an interesting study applying the tools of narratology to lyric poetry, see Hühn and Kiefer (2005).
and explain the dynamics and mechanisms of elegiac narratives using the instrument(s) and theories of narratology in a systematic way. Others offer new readings and interpretations of elegiac stories prompted by the insights that narratology offers into (amongst other motifs): narrators and levels of narration, actors and characters, focalization and temporality, readers and reception. The essays are organized broadly according to narratological theme rather than by text or author—although, inevitably, there is productive interplay not only between these themes but also between individual essays.20

Part I, *Unveiling the Body of Elegiac Narrative: Two Narratological Approaches to Ovid’s Amores 1.5*, offers an extended introduction to the subject of elegy and narratology. Intended as a critical orientation for both the practiced and the neophyte narratologist, two essays focusing upon Ovid’s programmatic *Amores* 1.5 demonstrate the rich potential in bringing the tools of narratology to bear upon elegiac poetry. Aptly enough for a collection primarily concerned with the genre of erotic elegy, this section begins with a new reading of *Amores* 1.5 inspired by the work of American critic and theorist Peter Brooks. Brooks draws both upon the insights of narratology and Freudian psychonalysis in his exploration of the “erotics of narrative,” arguing that what moves us as readers forward through any narrative is our desire for the end, for closure, and telos—a desire that Brooks sees as analogous to a desire for sexual consummation and orgasm. Integrating Brooks’s ideas on the intimate interrelations between narrative and erotics into his own innovative reading of Ovid, Duncan Kennedy in “Elegy and the Erotics of Narratology” traces desire as a dynamic of narrative signification to show how the poet, his narrated self, and the reader move together, through a series of delays and descriptions that mutually excite and frustrate, toward a desired end-point.

Coming at Ovid’s programmatic *Amores* 1.5 from a different narratological perspective, Patricia Salzman-Mitchell in “Snapshots of a Love Affair: *Amores* 1.5 and the Program of Elegiac Narrative” offers an alternative—and complementary—reading of this poem. Again emphasizing the eroticized participation of the reader in the “story” of *Amores* 1.5, Salzman-Mitchell

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20. Ovid’s dominant position in the collection is worthy of note here. An attempt to cover all of the principal works encompassed in the sphere traditionally labeled as “Latin elegy” necessarily entailed that we include essays devoted not only to Tibullus and Propertius, but to Ovid’s *Amores, Heroides, Ars* and *Remedia Amoris, Fasti*, and *Tristia*—hence his expansive profile in this collection. However, as Barchiesi has observed (2002, 180): “The poet who minted Latin words like narratus ‘narrative’ and narrabilis ‘narratable’ is no passive participant in the modern debate about story-telling and its techniques . . . the study of narrative and Ovidian poetics continue to be mutually illuminating.”
takes the concept of “event”—a term central to definitions of narrative from Aristotle through to Genette and Bal—to propose that elegy presents its narratives in a succession of fragmented “states” or “snapshots,” leaving the linking events to the imagination of the reader. Corinna’s body, as presented in *Amores* 1.5, is thus seen to inscribe the program of elegiac narrative, and elegy itself is seen to tell fragmented narratives with missing “holes” and “gaps” that require the active engagement of the reader to be satisfactorily completed and filled.

Part II, *Telling Times: Elegy and Temporality*, considers the important relationship between elegy, narrativity and time, with three essays exploring different aspects of time and narrative in Ovid’s elegiac writing. Indeed, an understanding of time and temporality is shown here to represent a *sine qua non* in the appreciation of elegiac narrativity. In his study of the interrelations between plot, story, and narrative, narratological pioneer Gérard Genette focused upon the ways in which narrative discourse works to subvert and replay the passage of time in order to explore the links and differences between “what is told” and “its telling.” And, like Genette, French narratologist Paul Ricoeur maintained in his seminal work *Time and Narrative* that “Everything that is recounted occurs in time, takes time, unfolds temporally.” For, as Ricoeur argued, “the common feature of human experience, that which is marked, organized and clarified by the fact of storytelling in all its forms, is its *temporal character*.”

In this light, Eleonora Tola considers “Chronological Segmentation in Ovid’s *Tristia*: The Implicit Narrative of Elegy,” looking at the temporal play evident in Ovid’s exile poetry. Ovid’s *Tristia* is traditionally seen to tell the “story” of its narrator’s exile. Nevertheless, the insertion of this story within the elegiac genre confers on it a narrative modality that differs from that of more traditional storytelling. In particular, Tola shows how temporally confused and contradictory poems about Ovid’s journey into exile are interspersed throughout the *Tristia*, fragmenting the Ovidian narrator and his narratives. Employing the narratological insights of Genette to focus upon the text’s temporal configuration, this chapter proposes that the implicit and a-chronological narrative of the *Tristia* can be read as a *mise en abyme* of the poetics of a genre—that elegy is founded, as is Ovid’s exilic experience, on (textual) fragmentation and dislocation.

Next, Hunter Gardner looks at the subject of “Women’s Time in the *Remedia Amoris*,” using Julia Kristeva’s concept of women’s time and Paul Ricoeur’s description of the teleology that gives narrative meaning to forward
a fresh interpretation of Ovid’s poem—focusing in particular upon the *exemplum* of Phyllis. Gardner argues that Kristeva’s understanding of “women’s time,” which posits female subjectivity as marginal to the linear movement of syntax and symbolic language, offers a persuasive explanation for the properties often attributed to women in elegy, such as delay, repetition, and enclosure—properties that retard the elegiac narrative and become especially problematic in Ovid’s antidote to elegiac love, the *Remedia Amoris*.

Genevieve Liveley in “Paraquel Lines: Time and Narrative in Ovid’s *Heroides*” similarly explores the delays, the “frozen moments” and “stopped clocks” in Ovid’s elegiac narratives. Liveley considers the *Heroides* as narrative “paraquels” or “side-narratives,” occupying space upon parallel chronologies and narrative lines to their original narrative models, short stories that telescope out from a moment in another tale to project alternative pasts and futures. Focusing upon the alternative futures, counterfactual histories, and virtual lives imagined and written by Ovid’s heroines, she identifies the *Heroides* as “What if?” narratives—plausible but speculative side-shoots from the established time-lines and the established versions of familiar master-narratives and canonical source texts.

Part III, *Plots across Poems: Elegy and Story*, focuses upon different strategies of elegiac storytelling, drawing broadly upon a range of insights into “action” and “plot” offered by narratological theory. In his *Poetics* (considered by some critics to be “the first narratological treatise” in Western literature\(^\text{22}\)), Aristotle indicated that genres such as epic and drama are structured upon the arrangement of events—and that such stories need a beginning, middle, and end. Thus, he coined key “narratological” terms such as *mythos* (“plot”), and *praxis* (“action”), defining *mythos* as “the combination of incidents or things done in the story,”\(^\text{23}\) and observing that “plot” is the essential element of tragedy—in Aristotle’s view, the highest form of narrative. Further, Aristotle introduced the well-known ideas of unity of time and space, maintaining that the action of tragedy must be complete in itself, having a beginning, middle, and end.

Subsequent classical literary critics and theorists were all influenced profoundly by Aristotle’s thinking on narrative. Thus, Horace’s *Ars Poetica* considered some of the narrative techniques appropriate to different literary genres and styles—perhaps most famously, advising that the proper way to begin an epic narrative is *in medias res* (as in Homer’s *Odyssey*) so as to allow for the development of plot through the heightening of narrative inten-

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\(^{22}\) Onega and Landa (1996), 1.

\(^{23}\) Aristotle, *Poetics* 5.
INTRODUCTION

sity. However, over the next two thousand years much of the narratological theory outlined in Aristotle's *Poetics* remained neglected and undeveloped by literary theorists (its evolution restricted perhaps by Aristotle's privileging of drama—and above all tragedy—in his analysis) until the formalist and structuralist schools of the twentieth century took up his ideas as the basis for their new science of narrative and story—narratology.

In her chapter, “Self-Reflections on Elegy-Writing in Two Parts: The Metapoetics of Diptych Elegies in Ovid, *Amores* 1.11 + 12,” Sophia Papaioannou argues that this Ovidian diptych comprises a unified story, and that its narrative continuity is principally determined by the poetics behind the identification of Nape, the maid/messenger with the tablets/love-messages that she is entrusted to carry. Drawing particularly upon Bal and Barthes, Papaioannou’s reading of *Amores* 1.11 and 1.12 as a narrative unit examines the mechanics of elegiac storytelling alongside the performance of elegiac mimesis and role-play.

Christine Walde’s “Narration in a Standstill: Propertius 1.16–18” proposes that this thematically organized group of poems provides a key not only to the Propertian concept of love, but also to a poetics of elegiac storytelling. She argues that Propertius’ use of the literary device of soliloquy profits from the narrative unity of time, place and action. Yet, at the same time, the temporal, spatial, and geographical liminality of the spaces from which these soliloquies are delivered (such as doorway and seashore) seem to preclude narrativity in that they proliferate possibilities both past and present, slowing the first person narrator’s story to a standstill.

Next, Vered Lev Kenaan’s “Platonic Strategies in Ovid’s Tales of Love” engages Barthes’s notion of a “nonnarrative” erotic discourse and Kristeva’s ideas of love and storytelling to illuminate some of the critically neglected narratological conventions at work in and across Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*. She focuses upon Ovid’s rejection of a linear form of storytelling and upon his choice of an alternative cyclical narrative to show that Ovid adopts two of his major narratological strategies from Plato’s erotic dialogues, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, in configuring his own erotodidactic “tales of love.”

Part IV, *Seeing and Speaking the Self: Elegy and Subjectivity*, deals with a subject that both underpins contemporary studies in narratology and is fundamental to contemporary studies in Roman elegy: subjectivity. The question of who sees, who speaks, and who tells in elegiac narratives has been at the forefront of classical scholarship in the field since the 1980s—to such a degree that any meaningful analysis of Latin elegy is now unthinkable without due consideration of issues (primarily) of gender, but also (more gener-
ally) of historical, cultural, and local contexts. Feminist critics of the 1970s and 80s complained that early narratology, in its desire to be objective and descriptive, and in its primary focus upon the “mechanisms” of story-telling, was too little concerned with the subjective and personal implications of narrative to provide an effective critical tool. However, in no small part due to the writings of Mieke Bal, Teresa de Lauretis, and Laura Mulvey, feminist criticism and gender scholarship have asserted a considerable influence upon the contemporary shape of narratology. In particular, feminist analyses of the construction of gender have encouraged critics to rethink notions of textual authority and authorship, focalization and characterization, reading and reception. And, as several of the essays in this collection demonstrate, cognizance of gendered subjectivities can direct readers of Latin elegy and its narratives to rethink (and reread) not only gendered points of view, but also gendered expectations and desires.

This section opens with Michèle Lowrie, “Cornelia’s Exemplum: Form and Ideology in Propertius 4.11,” a rereading of Propertius 4.11 in the light of formal analyses of the narratological unities of time, place, and character. Lowrie’s reading of 4.11 reveals that Propertius grants Cornelia consistency in none of these. She speaks on different occasions and in different places. These inconsistencies alert us to Cornelia’s greater role as an exemplum rather than as an individual, but the exemplum is both a narrative category that mediates between singularity and the general, and a moral category that sets up a model to be imitated. Cornelia emerges in this reading not merely as an exemplum of Augustan morality, but as a paradigm for the dynamic principles of representation informing the Augustan age and Augustan elegy.

Next, Steven Green in “The Expert, The Novice, and the Exile: A Narrative Tale of Three Ovids in Fasti” focuses on the opening sections of Ovid’s Fasti (1.1–288) in an attempt to tease out the multilayered character of its homodiegetic, and at times autodiegetic, speaker (“Ovid”). As a mature work from a self-consciously experienced poet, the Fasti can be seen to pull “Ovid” in different directions: “Ovid” can be viewed simultaneously as a poet-expert steeped in personal and literary experience; a complete novice in matters of religious inquiry; and a Black Sea exile struggling to keep his emotions in check and his mind on the Roman literary project to hand, presenting (at least) three different—and competing—levels of narration and focalization in this text.

24. Bal was among the first theorists to forward a specifically feminist approach to narrative and narratology with her 1987 study of Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories. For a good overview of feminism and narratology see Nikolopoulos (2004), 135–41.

25. See in particular, Kennedy, Papaioannou, Gardner, and Skoie in this volume.
Then, in Benjamin Lee's chapter “Potentials of Narrative: The Rhetoric of the Subjective in Tibullus,” we investigate the narrative function of subjective withdrawal and private thought in the elegies of Tibullus. Lee argues that there are two forms of narrative in the elegies of Tibullus: a narrative of real events, public events that unfold in public time, and a narrative of subjectivity, a depiction of the imagination that happens in private time. He concludes that, from the perspective of narratology, the principal function and effect of Tibullan elegy is to generate a rhetoric of subjectivity, which makes the narrative of public or “real” events coordinate with, and perhaps even subordinate to, the narrative of the imagination.

Part V, Narrative at the Receiving End: Elegy and Reception, turns finally to examine the role of narrative and narratology in the reception of Roman elegy, following its demise in the early first century CE. Ricoeur identified three key temporal components of narrative: prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration. Prefiguration is our practical pre-understanding of how characters are likely to behave in a narrative, our beliefs and expectations regarding the motivations, values and behaviors that, for example, lovers and ex-lovers may exhibit in Roman elegy. The next mode, configuration, describes the relation of “agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances, unexpected results,” however diverse and contradictory, through the processes of emplotment. As with prefiguration, there is a key temporal dimension to the mode of configuration, concerning (to borrow Frank Kermode’s phrase) “the sense of an ending” in which meaning is made by and as a story progresses toward an end point, and is only understood retrospectively from that end point when the story can be seen as a whole. Following on from the configuration of a narrative, refiguration is seen to involve “the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader,” that is, the impact of the text upon its audience to bring about new or increased understanding—an important narratological consideration for the “reception” of Roman elegy.

This section offers innovative analyses of two poets whose work is often neglected in studies of Latin elegy: Latin literature’s only extant female poet, Sulpicia, and the early Christian elegist Prudentius. Christian Kaesser in “Narrating Disiecta Corpora: The Rhetoric of Bodily Dismemberment in Prudentius Peristephanon 11” sets out to examine Prudentius Pe. 11, one of only two elegiac poems in Prudentius’ book of martyrdom poetry, to show how a late antique and Christian example of the elegiac tradition

both reworks narrative strategies of previous elegiac poetry (particularly Ovid) and reflects these strategies through its imagery. Here, Kaesser draws innovatively from ancient narratological and rhetorical theory, particularly the tradition that figured literary works and their parts as corporeal entities, to highlight the suitability of the “disfigured” elegiac meter (famously characterized by Ovid as being deprived of one foot) as a vehicle to carry narratives of dismemberment and fragmentation. Engaging with the ancient narratological theories of Plato and Quintilian rather than Bal and Genette, Kaesser traces a convincing concordance between the form and content of Prudentius’ elegiac writing.

Finally, Mathilde Skoie in “Telling Sulpicia’s Joys: Narrativity at the Receiving End” offers an analysis of the reception and narrative reconfiguration of Sulpicia’s elegiac fragments in three translations of the corpus Tibullianum—viewing these translations themselves as “narratives” in their own right. These translations variously rearrange the poems and fragments attributed to Sulpicia so as to emplot a (morally) satisfying narrative sequence of events—with beginning, crisis-ridden middle, and happy ending for Sulpicia and her beloved. Skoie’s close analysis of these translations shows how the translator’s—like any reader’s—desire for a coherent narrative (with the concomitant sense of a unified narrative voice and stable point of view that this entails) inevitably directs and structures his or her readings. She returns, thus, the readers of this collection of diverse narratives to its beginning, and to Duncan Kennedy’s “tale” of elegy and the erotics of narratology, where a desire for knowledge and satisfaction drives the reader to read on.