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review of: Philip Hardie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*,
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Ovid seems to have become fashionable once again. Not only his most famous works, such as the *Metamorphoses*, the *Amores*, and *Heroides*, but also some of his works that until recently were the exclusive domain of specialists, such as the *Fasti* or the *Ibis*, are now eagerly read and studied. Perhaps the present age, with its lack of clear-cut and widely shared ideologies (at least in the West) and its inclinations towards play and allusion, is better equipped to understand and appreciate Ovid than some earlier periods.

Secondary literature about Ovid has become too extensive for any individual to command, and synthetic studies have therefore become indispensable. Two new, separate 'companions' to Ovid have been published, which each in its own way may serve to help students to find their way in Ovidian literature and to guide scholars in the various areas of research on Ovid. The first of these (not reviewed here) is *Brill's Companion to Ovid*, edited by Barbara Weiden Boyd (Leiden 2002), the other is the *Cambridge Companion to Ovid* edited by Philip Hardie. Both volumes show some renowned names of contributing scholars and both present a rich and varied range of approaches of Ovid and his works.

The volumes may properly be seen as complementary. In his review of the Brill volume, Roy Gibson (*BMCR* 2003.01.34) argues that the book only rarely breaks new ground, and rather offers a useful survey and synthesis of scholarly approaches. Therefore, the Brill volume seems truly a 'companion', granting easy access to basic information about the poet. On the other hand, Gibson calls its layout 'conventional', and the volume as a whole 'rather conservative perhaps'.

'Conventional', and 'conservative' are qualifications that certainly do not apply to the *Cambridge Companion of Ovid*, which already on the cover promises to show 'exciting new critical approaches.' Readers who are already familiar with the *Cambridge Companion to Virgil* (edited by Charles Martindale, Cambridge 1997), in the same series, know what to expect: new, refreshing ideas, but with the acute danger of adventures started primarily for the sake of academical adventure itself, rather than to broaden or deepen our knowledge of the ancient author.

The volume contains a general introduction and twenty essays, divided into three categories. The first of these, 'Contexts and history', opens with a helpful, readable paper by Richard Tarrant on Ovid and Greek and Roman literary history. Perhaps the best part of this is the section on Ovid's complex fascination for Virgil. Next, Philip Hardie narrows the topic to Ovid and early imperial literature, showing that there is rather more continuity between the Augustan and so called 'silver Latin' periods in Latin poetry than is often thought. Hardie also tries to understand Ovid's less generally appealing features, such as his tendency towards rhetoric and his focus on dismemberment and violence. In a third, provocative paper, Thomas Habinek argues that Ovid's poetry forms part of the mechanism of Roman imperialism, with the poet being 'profoundly in tune with the Augustan imperialist agenda', as the editor sums it up (p.10). To a majority of readers of Ovid, this is the very opposite of how they will read the poet. Habinek's unlikely position is effectively contrasted by a paper of Alessandro Schiesaro, which highlights the contested nature of knowledge and authority in Ovid. If for Ovid knowledge is no more than rhetorical, and if his fascination for all that is fleeting and transient is serious, as Schiesaro shows, this would strongly undermine any Ovidian position as a possible supporter of definite, imperialist values.

Part two is called 'Themes and works', a title that seems broad enough to include any general or specialised account. It comprises ten essays, ranging from text-centered and practical to highly theoretical and academic. From the first kind, I mention Stephen Harrison's essay on Ovid and genre, which shows how the poet is deeply concerned with questions of genre in all his writings. Harrison focuses on such topics as relations between genres, genre changes, and genre play. In another contribution, Fritz Graf discusses Ovid and myth, mainly in the *Met.*, with the interesting conclusion that in the end even myth and metamorphosis itself are called into question, since the narrator repeatedly proves to be unreliable. Still on the *Met.* is a paper on the central motif of *Metamorphosis* by Andrew Feldherr, who, if I understand him well, argues along similar lines, highlighting the fundamental ambiguity of metamorphosis. Other works of Ovid are dealt with in various papers. The exile poetry is discussed by Gareth Williams, the amatory poems by Allison Sharrock, the *Heroides* by Duncan F. Kennedy, and the *Fasti* by Caroline Newlands. Still in part 2 there are essays on 'Gender and sexuality' by Allison Sharrock, on 'landscapes' by Stephen Hinds, and on 'narrative techniques and narratology' by Alessandro Barchiesi (with a striking instance of Ovidian embedded narration at no less than *five* levels: *Met.* 5,597-600, discussed on p. 188-9).

'Exciting' as most of the approaches in the second part may be, they regularly fail to convince at the simple level of presenting readable texts. In some papers, the abundant use of academic jargon forms an obstacle, essentially barring the entry to novice readers or even scholars not steeped in theory. In other papers, the obvious desire to suggest new approaches of Ovid seems to have had a bad effect on the argumentation. For instance, in Sharrock's piece on 'Ovid and gender and

sexuality' I fail to see a clearly formulated, central question: perhaps the theme is simply too large to deal with in the compass of a mere thirteen pages.

Part three of the Companion, rather predictably, ends on 'Reception', with six papers on various aspects of the rich Ovidian afterlife. Raphael Lyne discusses English translations of Ovid, both historical and contemporary, while Jeremy Dimmick in a long contribution deals with Ovid in the Middle Ages. Not only Ovid's works influenced later literature, but as Raphael Lyne in his second contribution shows, the poet's life did so as well: Ovid as the typical lover or exile became an inspiring figure as well. Colin Burrow concentrates on Ovid in the Renaissance, while Duncan F. Kennedy zooms in on some recent receptions of Ovid (Ransmayr, Rushdie, Brodsky). Finally, Christopher Allen deals with the vast subject of Ovid and art, limiting himself to painting from Renaissance until the French revolution.

Naturally, papers in the third section tend to be less theoretical and include more fragments of texts, and even, in the last paper, a number of black and white illustrations. Every paper in the book ends on a useful note on 'Further Reading', and of course a good general bibliography and index are not missing.

The volume presents a rich and complex picture of Ovid, whose works prove, again, to be inexhaustible and sufficiently 'open' to allow a great variety of approaches. In this volume, the focus is on Ovid as a poet who questions and undermines authority, who resists fixed meanings, who is concerned with questions of genre, gender, and Roman identity, and whose works open up endless possibilities of interpretation and further development. That is, the *Cambridge Companion* presents readers a postmodern Ovid.

It would probably be unwise for undergraduate students to start reading these papers before getting acquainted with Ovid's works, be it in the Latin original or in translation. As a general introduction, the rivalling Brill volume will most likely serve better. But to those with an interest in theory and a taste for the adventurous, the *Cambridge Companion* will provide good quality, and food for further thought.

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