

# Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences On Literature And Art From The Middle Ages To The Twentieth Century

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*Ann.* 1.335: it alone is nearly reason enough for acquiring this book, but I confess that I do not in the end clearly understand what serious need or justification there may be for its existence.

Rome

NICHOLAS HORSFALL

CHARLES MARTINDALE (ed.): *Ovid Renewed. Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*. Pp. xiv + 298; 16 halftone plates. Cambridge University Press, 1988. £29.50.

A remarkable battalion of epithets is mustered by the contributors to this volume to characterise a poet who has often seemed to typify the stylistic accomplishment of classical verse and the glassy charm of the Greek mythological landscape. 'Callous', 'distant', 'gloating', 'perverse', 'degenerate', 'trivialising', 'obscene', and 'amoral' are among the terms employed – a curious burden for a writer who in the Middle Ages was regarded as a moralist, who for the editor of this volume is the poet of love and even fidelity, whose poetry is the source of some of the most luscious painting and captivating music ever made. Clearly Ovid is more difficult than he seems. Ovid in fact is full of paradoxes. Charles Martindale in his introduction remarks on the tension between Ovid the romantic and Ovid the poet of marriage, and many of the other essays are similarly attuned to paradox: for C. Burrow there is a tension of the generative and the perverse or improper sexuality; S. Medcalf points to the conflict of antiquarianism and scepticism (which is part of Ovid's Hellenistic legacy); and R. Trickett to that of passion and convention.

It is the paradoxes of Ovid that made him fertile material for later poets. In turn, analysis of the way that later poets transformed his vision deepens our appreciation of his own layers of significance. One of the subtlest essays in the book, by C. Burrow, shows how Spenser in the *Faerie Queene* uses Ovid to link human sexuality to the processes of the natural world, and to create fecundity where in Ovid all was sterility.

It is easy to disapprove of Ovid – of his godlike disdain for his characters' sufferings, of his own personality – too fond of women, and a coward in exile – as Thackeray called him. Perhaps it is harder than we realise to value him truly. The merit of this excellent book is to suggest that Ovid's meaning is inextricable from his influence. The editor's beautiful opening essay traces some of Ovid's real virtues – his narrative skill, his psychological penetration, his imagination, even the archly self-aware quality of his literariness – and his discussions of Ovid in painting and music add a new dimension to our reading of that most metamorphic of texts, the *Metamorphoses*.

Institute of Classical Studies, London

RICHARD STONEMAN

LOUISE FOTHERGILL-PAYNE: *Seneca and Celestina*. (Cambridge Iberian and Latin American Studies.) Pp. xvi + 172; 6 illustrations. Cambridge University Press, 1988. £25.

*Celestina* has generated its own scholarly industry; it even has a periodical dedicated solely to it. Such was its popularity that it was translated into the other languages of Europe (J. Mabbe's English version of 1631 has just been reissued with the Spanish text, edited by D. S. Severin, under the Aris and Phillips imprint); in 1624 Kaspar Barth produced a Latin translation, *Pornoboscoididascaelus* ('cries the stall-reader, "bless us! what a word on a title-page is this!"). Now L. Fothergill-Payne adds to the scholarly interest a fresh issue, the use by the authors of *Celestina* of Seneca. Her thesis is that Seneca is a pervasive contemporary work, that his works are cited so as to mock the superficial knowledge of so-called new readers (pp. xiv and 141). A classicist may offer some criticisms of this thesis.

It depends above all on what you mean by Seneca. For, as F.-P. ably demonstrates in her opening chapters, by the sixteenth century Seneca was less the author of certain moral works in Latin than a moralist whose name gave authority to many suppositious works, to extracts of sentences and proverb collections, to the increasingly popular vernacular translations and compilations. This dilution and diffusion and reabsorption of Seneca's prose in fact works

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