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Review of Philip Hardie (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*

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Philip Hardie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. xvi, 408. ISBN 0-521-77281-8. \$65.00 (hb). ISBN 0-521-77528-0. \$23.00 (pb).

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[Note: The reviewer wishes to apologize to the editor and readers of BMCR and to all those involved with the *Cambridge Companion to Ovid* for the unconscionable lateness of this review.]

[Authors and titles are listed at the end of the review.]

If anyone needed proof that Ovid's stock had risen sharply in these last years, this book would serve: for, with its publication, Ovid becomes just the second classical author to be included in the series of Cambridge Companions to Literature, behind only Vergil and edging out even Homer.¹ This is a development that only a few years ago not many would have predicted .

The editor of this volume, Philip Hardie, is one of those responsible for the rise in Ovid's fortunes, and many of the contributors that he has recruited for this volume have done their parts as well. But the essays on the whole do not merely reprise earlier themes; and Hardie has also recruited some less obvious but highly suitable collaborators, with the result that the collection makes a striking impression and succeeds on two separate fronts. As a summary of where Ovidian scholarship has been, it is, with perhaps one or two caveats, very successful indeed; and as an effort to indicate fruitful directions for future work, the volume should have a stimulating effect.

To begin with some general considerations, the collection consists of three parts: "Contexts and History" (78 pp.), "Themes and Works" (167 pp.), and "Reception" (119 pp.). This distribution of topics illustrates a characteristic feature of Latin studies in recent years. Like the aforementioned Vergil companion, the Ovid stresses contextualization and, especially, reception. The four essays of Part 1 situate Ovid within the relevant social, historical, literary historical, and intellectual contexts that obtained in antiquity. Thus this volume does not actually begin with reception (a somewhat controversial feature of the Vergil companion). It does, however, conclude with six chapters on this subject, and these occupy half again the space allotted to the ancient contexts of Ovid's work. This decision is justified not only by the importance of reception in contemporary Latin studies but by the sheer magnitude and variety of Ovid's *Nachleben*, both in literature and in the visual arts, and by tradition as well. Studies by scholars of the Renaissance that combine literary and art historical approaches have been among the most inspirational contributions to Ovidian studies in recent years.² And it was L. P. Wilkinson, devoted student and sympathetic interpreter of Ovid even during those long decades when few latinists took the poet of Sulmo at all seriously, who championed the study of the poet's influence during the Middle Ages and Renaissance.³ So the design of this volume is more than justified by these considerations.

Even with this much space at their disposal, though, the contributors are challenged to cover Ovid's *Nachleben* in all its aspects, even in a representative way. In part this has to do with a decision, understandable in a volume addressed to an anglophone audience, to emphasize the reception of Ovid in English literature. Raphael Lyne devotes a fine chapter to English translations of Ovid, and Colin Burrow's equally fine chapter on "Renaissance afterlives" is mainly concerned with Golding, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton. Jeremy Dimmick's chapter on the Middle Ages and Lyne's on "Love and exile" both redress the balance somewhat, particularly in the direction of French; but the presence of such crucial Ovidian epigoni as Dante, Petrarch, and especially Boccaccio (who appears just once in the index) seems rather attenuated. Christopher Allen's chapter on artistic reception heroically surveys the main contours of an enormous field and should prove helpful to the mainly literary audience to which the companion is addressed, as they approach this rich discursive tradition. All of these chapters may be characterized as surveys rather than as analyses: the more ambitious sense of reception as an inescapable condition of reading ancient literature is less evident here than is a desire to call attention to Ovid's enormous presence in post-antique literature and culture. If a choice has to be made, this is probably the right one for a collection of this kind. The final part of the volume is rounded out by Duncan Kennedy's excellent chapter on the most recent period of Ovid's *Nachleben*. Kennedy tackles this subject on two fronts. The first part of the chapter is a succinct account of Ovidian criticism over the last half-century or so. The second part deals with literary and artistic responses to Ovid in recent decades. This section is necessarily a progress report: Kennedy succeeds in calling attention to and assessing recent developments, but even as the volume was appearing the contemporary Ovid phenomenon has gathered momentum. To stay abreast of it, one would need to leave printed companions behind and relocate to the blogosphere.⁴

A second general point has to do with the way in which the companion represents the history of Ovid studies in a larger sense; and a third, related point concerns the roster of contributors. The current Ovidian vogue dates from about the mid-eighties, by my reckoning. For about twenty years before that time, when many latinists paid little real attention to Ovid, one group that did think seriously about Ovid consisted mainly of first-wave American feminists, prominent among them several students of W. S. Anderson at Berkeley. The volume under review reflects the scholarship of more recent times, as is appropriate; but I find it a bit curious that the enormous area of interest represented by feminism and/or gender studies -- and here at least I beg the question of the relationship between the two -- is pretty well confined to a single chapter in this collection. The chapter itself, by Alison Sharrock, is excellent, and in her suggestions for further reading Sharrock implicitly makes the same point I am making now by giving a very good account of where one might go to find out about the contributions of American feminists to Ovid studies. The other surprising thing is that besides Sharrock, who contributes two chapters to this collection, Carole Newlands (another unimpeachable choice) is the only other woman involved in the project. That makes two women out of seventeen contributors. Probably this is an accident; possibly more women were invited to contribute, but they declined. But it has to be said that the ratio of 17 : 2 doesn't accurately reflect the interest or the previous contributions of female Ovidians.

In any case, the "Contexts and history" essays (part 1) do an effective job of situating Ovid's oeuvre in its contemporary setting. Tarrant's essay is a superb introduction to many of the essential issues of literary history as they appear in Ovid's own poetry and to Ovid's career as a whole as it appears from this point of view. It is followed by an equally fine essay by Hardie on Ovid and early imperial literature. Somewhat in the vein of Hardie's book on *The Epic Successors of Virgil* (Cambridge 1993), this chapter identifies in more summary fashion those aspects of Ovid's poetry that were suggestive and in some cases determinative of the character of later literature. Thomas Habinek then takes on the difficult question of Ovid's relationship to empire. The provocative and, in my view, overstated position that Habinek took in *The Politics of Latin Literature* (Princeton 1998), where he regards Ovid's exile poetry as having little to do

with a traumatic peripeteia in the poet's own life and opinions and more to do with the largely impersonal project of "do[ing] the work of Empire," is reprised here. (Peter Davis' trenchant criticisms of this idea unfortunately appeared too late for Habinek to take account of them.⁵) But on the whole I would say that Habinek comes closer in this chapter than he did in his book to capturing the nature of Ovid's position, and he has some very well-judged sentences that usefully complicate the reductive pro- or anti-Augustan dichotomy that (I would say) most leading Ovidians have now outgrown, but that remains to some, by virtue of its sheer simplicity, a tempting conceptual model. A similar approach to Ovid's poetry as a symptom of more fundamental intellectual shifts informs Alessandro Schiesaro's chapter on Ovid's place in the Augustan cultural revolution, one of the best in the book. It builds on Andrew Wallace-Hadrill's justly renowned contribution to a collection of essays that Schiesaro and Habinek edited, makes the relevance of Wallace-Hadrill's essay to Ovidian studies as clear and explicit as it could be, and opens up this topic in a way that well serves several of the essays (notably those of Hinds, Sharrock on the amatory works, and Newlands) that follow.⁶

Part 2 is devoted to "Themes and works" and, like part 1, it begins with a superb overview of Ovid's career, focusing this time on the elegiac genre, by Stephen Harrison. In it Harrison explores the ways in which Ovid used the apparent constraint of metrical form and poetic tradition to fuel his imagination and remake (more than once) his chosen genre as well as its close cousin, epic (or is it "epic"?). The next two essays present genre problems of their own, but of a different kind: are "gender" and "myth" better handled as themes in Ovid's poetry, or do these words name larger contexts within which Ovid's oeuvre took shape? Tarrant shows that "literary history" is both a context for and a pervasive theme within Ovid's poetry, so that (arguably, anyway) it could have been transferred to this section. By the same token, Sharrock on "Gender and sexuality" and Fritz Graf on "Myth in Ovid" might have appeared in part 1. It is true that both Sharrock and Graf handle their subjects as themes rather than contexts, and in Sharrock's case in particular I think this is probably the right approach for this collection. Ovid is extremely canny about gender issues throughout his career, as Sharrock well illustrates, and her discussions of passages that document this characteristic are pointed and instructive. As for myth, to recruit Graf for this chapter was an inspired editorial decision, even something of a coup. Graf is one of our most distinguished experts in ancient myth; but, while myth is a pervasive element in Ovid's poetry, Graf has had little previous occasion to write about Ovid *per se*. The resulting essay should be required reading for all Ovidians. It is worth adding that something more could be said about myth from a contextual point of view: for instance, if Graf and Schiesaro had collaborated on considering myth as a "professional discourse of scholarship," we might have had more on what Ovid owed to ancient mythographic research. In any case, important work that has appeared since the volume under review may open up new possibilities in this vein.⁷

Stephen Hinds' chapter on landscape is a major contribution by a scholar who has done as much as anyone to chart the course of Ovid studies since the eighties. His essay builds on antecedents that go back at least to Charles Segal's seminal monograph of 1969.⁸ Hinds' chief contribution is to draw on Greco-Roman traditions of gardening and landscape architecture both *per se* and as they interact with painting, sculpture, and the other arts. He begins with literary ephrasis, especially that of the *locus amoenus*, a familiar territory to which he nevertheless brings fresh insight. A staple of previous treatments of the pictorial element in Ovid and in Latin poetry generally is the assumption that the poets were influenced by the visual arts. In the second half of this chapter, Hinds develops the appealing idea that the relationship was circular by asking "what influence the *Metamorphoses* itself may have exerted upon Roman painting in the later first century AD" (141). This is a clear instance of how increased attention to reception has refreshed Latin studies: Hinds states clearly that it is Ovid's impact on the visual arts of later periods (the very subject of Christopher Allen's chapter in this volume) that raises the question of whether ancient artists were also open to this form of inspiration. And he shows that there is evidence to suggest that they were. Of course, interpretation of this evidence is far from a

straightforward matter. For instance, Hinds cites a painting from the time of Vespasian that juxtaposes Narcissus with Pyramus and Thisbe, commenting that "such a pairing would be inconceivable without the *Metamorphoses*" (141). That is probably correct. But we are beginning to see that Ovid relied on non-poetic collections of myths to a greater extent than was previously imagined, and that in some cases what had seemed like characteristically Ovidian combinations of myths were in fact borrowed by Ovid from a mythographic source.⁹ This fact complicates, but is not incompatible with, Hinds' ideas about Ovidian influence; in short, it underlines his point that this is an area that calls out for further research.

The balance of part 2 is rather slanted towards the *Metamorphoses*. In addition to Graf and Hinds, who deal mainly with the magnum opus, Andrew Feldherr contributes a capable survey of metamorphosis in the *Metamorphoses*, while Alessandro Barchiesi takes on narrative technique and narratology in the poem. The *Metamorphoses* naturally looms large as well in Harrison's chapter on elegy and in Sharrock's on gender. By contrast, "the amatory works" as a group (i.e. the *Amores*, the *Ars*, the *Remedia*, and the *Medicamina*), the *Fasti*, the *Heroides*, and the exile poetry each receive one chapter apiece. Harrison's success in tracing Ovid's development as a elegist does a lot to redress the balance by making clear the generic connections among all of Ovid's works, while Gareth Williams' fine survey of the *exilia* makes clear those signature aspects that inform Ovid's work both before and after his relegation to Tomis.¹⁰ Carole Newlands' chapter on the *Fasti* starts with the observation that the poem begins where the *Met* leaves off, "in present time" (200); but in general, the status of the *Fasti* as the epic *Metamorphoses'* elegiac twin, together with its status as a part of the exilic corpus -- both well-worn themes that are at least alluded to elsewhere in the volume -- give way in this chapter to considerations of authority and narrativity: connections with the chapters of Schiesaro, Graf, both Sharrocks, and Barchiesi, whether implicit or explicit, are evident throughout. Disproportion of coverage perhaps reaches its maximum point in the contrast between Alison Sharrock's survey of the amatory works and Duncan Kennedy's chapter on the *Heroides*. There is advantage in addressing the *Amores* and the erotodidactica in a single essay, but to cover this waterfront in eleven pages is a tall order. Sharrock knows her way around this material as well as anyone, so that the chapter bristles with important points. But if there is any area to which I would have liked to see more space allocated, it would be this. Kennedy gets fourteen pages for the *Heroides*, and he uses this comparatively generous allotment well. No surprise there: Kennedy's seminal 1984 paper on *Heroides* 1 did much to inspire subsequent work, not least by focusing on the specifically epistolary mode of the poems.¹¹ Epistolarity as such is the main focus of this chapter as well, but Kennedy's own thinking about these poems has continued to develop, and he does an admirable job of synthesizing the major advances of the last twenty years. In addition, Kennedy's Penelope paper dealt explicitly with only one poem and by implication with *Heroides* 2-15 as well; this chapter not only canvasses the entire collection of "single *Heroides*," but adds Kennedy's thoughts on the *Heroides* 16-21. (Interestingly, though he acknowledges the existence of two separate collections, he draws no categorical distinction between them.) Those who know Kennedy's work will not be surprised that the chapter situates its perceptive explication of the text within a clear critical framework that is, like Hardie's and Hinds' chapters, informed by reception studies. The particular relationship between Kennedy and Hinds on this score is worth stating. Hinds reasons that our understanding of the enormous impact that the *Metamorphoses* had on the artists of the Renaissance might be capable of being paralleled in antiquity, and his position is justified at least as a hypothesis because the analogous hypotheses have led to brilliant results in related areas. Kennedy's topic is a case in point: attention to the literary and theoretical *Nachleben* of the *Heroides* has already played a decisive role in rescuing the poems from neglect and low esteem. On a larger scale, a similar drama has been played out in the area of allusive artistry, with the work of Thomas Greene and other students of Renaissance classicism having informed the work of several influential latinists on the dynamics of literary *imitatio* and *aemulatio*.¹² This is another, and perhaps the best reason why an emphasis on reception studies makes sense in a volume like this.

A few things that go missing perhaps sharpen one's sense of what the volume is and what is not. No mention here of the *Narrationes*, that late antique summary of myths that appear in the *Metamorphoses* and by implication of Ovid's fortunes in the ancient scholarly tradition, which could have formed a provocative counterpoint to Hardie's and Hinds' essays.¹³ There is passing reference only to Maximus Planudes' Greek translation of the *Heroides*, but not to his *Metamorphoses*. Admittedly, neither work is the most influential or representative of the many translations and imitations of Ovid's poetry, but any notice of Latin literature in the Greek east in any period is sufficiently unusual to invite some attention. More broadly we find lots here on authority, but little on authenticity, mostly again with reference to the *Heroides*; plenty of intertextuality, nothing about interpolation; summaries of Ovid's career from different points of view, but little explicit discussion of persistent problems of dating. Perhaps these missing topics spell out the difference between a "companion" and a "handbook." What is excluded from this volume is not unimportant, but it can be had from other sources. At any rate, this volume is not, and was clearly not intended, as a prolegomenon to Ovid studies in all their essential aspects, but more as an introduction and a stimulus to further literary critical discussion.

In this respect, the new companion succeeds admirably by surveying the entire range of Ovid criticism at the level of theme, genre, narratology, key aspects of cultural studies, and reception. The individual chapters are very well done, most of them summarizing the principal approaches of recent decades, and several marking real advances over what had previously been achieved. As a whole, the volume succeeds because it brings together the contributions of experts in what is, in view of the magnitude and importance of the subject and the rapid growth of the subject literature, a very compendious volume indeed. It is all too easy to point out, as I have done, what was left out or what might have been done differently, but my purpose in doing so has been to develop a context for assessing what this book accomplishes, and in my opinion the assessment must be positive. *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* succeeds from the point of view both of editorial design and of the quality of the individual contributions. The result is a collection that both beginners and old hands will find informative and stimulating, and I can recommend it with enthusiasm to readers of both kinds.

Contents:

"Introduction," Philip Hardie (1-10);

Part 1, Contexts and history:

"Ovid and ancient literary history," Richard Tarrant (13-33);

"Ovid and early imperial literature," Philip Hardie (34-45);

"Ovid and empire," Thomas Habinek (46-61);

"Ovid and the professional discourses of scholarship, religion, rhetoric," Alessandro Schiesaro (62-78).

Part 2, Themes and works:

"Ovid and genre: evolutions of an elegist," Stephen Harrison (79-94);

"Gender and sexuality," Alison Sharrock (95-107);

"Myth in Ovid," Fritz Graf (108-121);

"Landscape and figures: aesthetics of place in the *Metamorphoses* and its tradition," Stephen Hinds (122-149);

"Ovid and the discourses of love: the amatory works," Allison Sharrock (150-162);
"Metamorphosis in the Metamorphoses," Andrew Feldherr (163-179);
"Narrative technique and narratology in the Metamorphoses," Alessandro Barchiesi (180-199);
"Mandati memores: political and poetic authority in the Fasti," Carole Newlands (200-216);
"Epistolarity: the Heroides," Duncan Kennedy (217-232);
"Ovid's exile poetry: Tristia, Epistulae ex Ponto and Ibis," Gareth Williams (233-245).

Part 3, Reception:

"Ovid in English translation," Raphael Lyne (249-63);
"Ovid in the Middle Ages: authority and poetry," Jeremy Dimmick (264-287);
"Love and Exile after Ovid," Raphael Lyne (288-300);
"Re-embodiment Ovid: Renaissance afterlives," Colin Burrow (301-319);
"Recent receptions of Ovid," Duncan Kennedy (320-335);
"Ovid and Art," Christopher Allen (336-367).

Notes:

- [1.](#) A Homer (ed. Robert Fowler (Cambridge 2004)) has just appeared as I finish writing this review. The first classical companion in the literature series was that to Greek tragedy (ed. P. Easterling, 1997; rev. V. Bers, *BMCR* [1999.06.02](#)). There have been other classical entries in the culture and (especially) the philosophy series.
- [2.](#) Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven 1986).
- [3.](#) L. P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled* (Cambridge 1955).
- [4.](#) To the works that Kennedy mentions one can add Vintila Horia, *Dieu est né en exil* (Paris 1960; English translation, *God was Born in Exile*, New York 1961); David Malouf, *An Imaginary Life* (London 1978); Jane Alison, *The Love Artist* (New York 2001); Mary Zimmerman, *Metamorphoses: A Play* (Chicago 2002; cf. *AJP* 123 (2002) 623-27); Genichiro Takahashi, *Sayonara, Gangsters* (New York 2004); the list goes on.
- [5.](#) P. J. Davis, "The Colonial Subject in Ovid's Exile Poetry," *AJP* 123 (2002) 257-273.
- [6.](#) Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "Mutatio morum: The Idea of a Cultural Revolution," in *The Roman Cultural Revolution*, ed. Thomas Habinek and Alessandro Schiesaro (Cambridge 1997) 3-22.
- [7.](#) See below n. 9.
- [8.](#) Charles Segal, *Landscape in Ovid's Metamorphoses: The Transformation of a Literary Symbol*, *Hermes Einzelschriften*, 23 (Wiesbaden 1969).
- [9.](#) At the level of microcosm, see Dirk Obbink, "Vergil's *De Pietate*: From Ehoiae to Allegory in Vergil, Philodemus, and Ovid," in D. Armstrong (ed.), *Vergil, Philodemus, and the Augustans* (Oxford 2004) 194-96 on Poseidon's lovers; for macrocosmic structures, see Alan Cameron, "A Greek Source of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*?" in *Des Géants à Dionysos: Mélanges offerts à F. Vian*, ed. D. Accorinti and P. Chuvin (Alessandria 2003) 41-59 and *Greek Mythography in the Roman World*, *American Classical Studies* 48 (Oxford and New York 2004).
- [10.](#) This chapter is very similar to the one that Williams contributed to Brill's Companion to

Ovid, ed. Barbara Weiden Boyd (Leiden 2002), rev. BMCR [2003.01.34](#).

[11.](#) D. F. Kennedy, "The Epistolary Mode and the First of Ovid's Heroides," CQ 34 (1984) 413-22.

[12.](#) Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven 1982); *Creative imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, ed. David Quint et. al., *Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies* 95 (Binghamton 1992).

[13.](#) Cameron, *Greek Mythography* (above n. 9) discusses the Narrationes both per se and as a guide to Ovid's mythographic sources.

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