

A. BARCHIESI, *Ovidio, Metamorphosi*, Volume I, Libri I-II.
A cura di Alessandro Barchiesi; traduzione di Ludovica Koch,
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This excellent volume was first published one year ago in November, planned as the first of a major series of studies and commentaries on the magnificent fifteen books of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Since I acquired this volume in May, I have been reading and thinking about the achievement of Alessandro Barchiesi, its creative editor and the model commentator on Ovid's first two books. It is obvious from my reading that Barchiesi has done masterful service to Ovid and the scholarly world in this volume, but even more obvious that, if the five additional volumes that he has planned and assigned to other important scholars eventually also are published, he and they, will have erected a marvelous monument to Ovid, by which, as the poet hopefully predicted, he would live through all time.

Barchiesi in a brief Foreward explains some of the initial problems that faced him as the projected commentary to Ovid started to assume shape. The most painful one was the sickness and death of Charles Segal, who was to be editor of a later volume. But there was another death, too, that of the translator of our Books One and Two and also of Three and Four, Ludovica Koch. She actually died in 1993, leaving her planned translation of the entire epic un-finished, but losing her proved a difficult loss, especially to Barchiesi who worked so closely with her version as he developed his commentary on One and Two. The plan had to be revised with a new editor for Volume 3 (I believe) and a new translator for Volumes 3 through 6. On the other hand, fortune smiled on Barchiesi when it came to choosing the Latin text which he would follow. In 2004, Richard Tarrant brought out his long-awaited Oxford Text, and Barchiesi, who no doubt was given an opportunity to make preliminary use of that text, quickly recognized its merits and secured the use of it for his opus.

This first volume starts with a dedication to Segal and Koch and then presents as a kind of special Introduction an essay written by Segal in English and translated into the dominant Italian: “Il corpo e l’io nelle *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio”. I shall not review its wise words, but keep my attention on Barchiesi’s accomplishment in his slightly briefer but more substantial Introduction and then in his Commentary on the Latin text. In the former, he covers a wide register of expectable topics that are associated with the Ovidian genius, but then he continues to explore the background in exciting and original ways, to produce in about 60 pages a rich preparation for an even richer commentary.

Using subheadings, Barchiesi breaks his Introduction into thirteen sections, which are models of subtlety and admiration for the ambiguity about Ovid that the poem requires. He tackles, for example, metamorphosis, the elusive theme of the poem, in two different sections, first in relation with the Greek treatment of change, for which Ovid finds the need for major innovations; and second, the poetic and human topic of change, by which Ovid appeals to all times by his blend of fantastic and realistic emphasis. He treats the Roman poet as a master of learned composition, for whom no apologies are due, for Ovid did the homework of his contemporaries on the Greek myths and their sources, but he did not enslave himself to myopic fidelity. A particular example of Ovid’s creative independence may be found in the area of genealogy and chronology, an area which only in the last decade has become for many scholars an exciting focus of research. Barchiesi has thoroughly digested the scholarly material, and he regards the questions as not completely settled as to whether and how dutifully Ovid followed the doctrines of Castor of Rhodes and his Roman admirer, presumably Varro. However, he sensibly warns against the excesses of the so-called positivists who try too hard to limit Ovid’s freedom and the (to me) tempting irony by which he evades the strait-jacket that others try to fit on him. Moving on to qualities of his poem, Barchiesi raises the question of whether and how Ovid uses morality and justice in his tales and whether a postmodern reading of the poem without insistence on morality is a valid way to appeal to today’s audiences. From here, Barchiesi reviews the problems of the poem’s style and genre. The style is far less

problematic than the genre, for the *Metamorphoses* have been called by Kenney an “anthology of genres”, a marvelous phrase which B. still is able to enrich. Besides the genres of heroic epic and elegy, which are regularly emphasized in Ovid, B. adds Greek tragedy and the hymn. Next, he takes up Ovid’s poetic rhetoric, which too many readers have predictably reacted against. But it is time now to give up the prejudices and tired anecdotes of men like Seneca and Quintilian and recognize as readers how skillfully we are guided by Ovid’s rhetoric in the poem. After an important discussion of how the interests of contemporary Roman pictorial art can and should be carefully analyzed along with Ovid’s verse, B. ends with an investigation of power and ideology, which covers deftly and reasonably Ovid’s attitude not only toward Augustus but also towards the complicated achievements of the era of Augustus. Thus, we may not be confident about how Ovid regarded Augustus (any more that we can be sure of Vergil’s view of the princeps), but we can be pretty certain that Ovid and many members of his audience both reveled in Roman mastery of the Mediterranean world and regretted the methods used upon the victims of its conquests. A final lengthy note suggests that B. could easily have gone on with a discussion of Ovid’s attitude towards sexual relations, especially the victimization of women, which is the topic of so many stories in the poem. This brilliant Introduction, precisely because it is wide-ranging and encouraging of our appreciation of Ovidian ambiguities, serves as an excellent companion to the commentary, which is more stern and conventional in its presentation.

The introductory matter concludes with an up-to-date Bibliography that even has one reference from 2005 (Ziolkowski) and a note on the way B. exercises some freedom in dealing with the text he adopted from Tarrant. (I shall come to that later.) We are on page CXC, ready to plunge into Text, Translation, and Commentary in the next 310 pages.

Tarrant’s text of the *Metamorphoses* is very spare, and therefore so is B.’s. Beside eliminating otiose alternate readings, Tarrant also dropped some lines, made intelligent choices of competing readings, and accepted the conjectures of his predecessors and adopted some of his own. B. chose to differ from Tarrant only five times in Book I: three readings on which

I agree with B. (92, 190, 235) and two line deletions (344, 638), where I also agree with B in retaining the lines. By trimming the Apparatus criticus, both Tarrant and Barchiesi make the text feel more open and readable.

A few words about the translation of Koch. An experienced translator of other languages, she did a fine job on the first four books before her untimely death. The translation is in clear prose and planned to match the Latin line numbers. Koch kept the Latinate way Ovid used to refer to characters indirectly by an adjective based on a distant relative or place of origin, an imitation of epic. But because many readers lack the erudition that Ovid is playing with, Barchiesi regularly marks such a passage and invites his audience to check the commentary for clarification. It is hardly surprising that Koch at times simplified the many possibilities of Ovid's allusive wit. For example, the key adjective *perpetuum* 4, changed to a prepositional phrase "di seguito", has lost most of its allusive meanings. Or the unique *innabilis* 16 has wrongly been limited to "innavigabile", when Ovid starts us with the fancy that water cannot be used for swimming, just as the earth we find so solid could not be stood on (*instabilis*). I found one early misprint: 20 "greve" for "grave". But we must not ask too much from a translation: this serves B.'s purposes well.

Finally, the superlative Commentary. Barchiesi uses his opportunity to follow the text carefully, selecting the words, situations, and sources that deserve elaboration. There is nothing like this commentary in existence, and it will be centuries, I daresay, before anyone challenges B.'s achievement. B. divides the text intelligently into narrative sections, each of which he thoroughly introduces. Then, as he comments more specifically on specific lines and words of the sections, he can afford at times to be brief. Book One contains 779 verses; B.'s commentary fills almost 180 pages. Book Two contains 875 verses; but B. confines his commentary to 76 pages. That suggests to me not that he grew tired, but rather that the beginning of the poem required more thorough presentation of points that later he could take for granted with his audience. What strikes this member of his readership is the density of his analysis of individual sections. Thus, the four lines of the Proem (1-4) claim twelve pages of commentary; and few people will conclude that much space has

been wasted. In my opinion, it is in fact the most thorough and sensitive analysis of the complex series of sources and allusions that qualify the seemingly simple four lines. B. insists that we be aware of the Hellenistic and Neoteric background of this Proem, but he regularly cautions us to avoid simple connections from Callimachus to Ovid. Though the verb *deducere* 4 had artistic resonances with Roman elegy, it possessed many other relevant overtones which should not be ignored. For those who want a list of misprints, I can only offer *Festschrift* on p. 145.

Most readers will no doubt sample B.'s erudition and poetic sensitivity in particular sections of the Latin. I gave myself the pleasure of reading at leisure the entire commentary, and I emerge from that experience a wiser man and an even greater admirer of Ovid than I was at the start. I look forward to further volumes in this series, though Barchiesi will take a major role only in Volume II, which he will share with Rosati.

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