

RALPH HEXTER, LAURA PFUNTNER, JUSTIN HAYNES, *Appendix Ovidiana. Latin Poems Ascribed to Ovid in the Middle Ages*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 62, Cambridge, MA-London: Harvard University Press, 2020, 544 pp., 31.50€, ISBN 978-0-674-23838-1.

This attractive volume in the well-known Dumbarton Oaks series does something that has never been done before: it collects all poems (a total of thirty-four) that we know were ascribed to Ovid at some point over the course of the Middle Ages (roughly 500-1500 CE). The editors—Ralph Hexter, renowned specialist in Ovid in the Middle Ages, and two younger scholars, Laura Pfuntner and Justin Haynes—are referring to their corpus as the *Appendix Ovidiana*, though unlike with the better-known Vergilian *Appendix*, only some of their texts were ever grouped together in manuscripts, and it is the achievement of the editors themselves to have gathered them between two covers.

The volume's Latin text is drawn from modern editions of the individual poems, with occasional divergences as a result of the inspection of manuscripts not known to previous editors. The Latin is faced by an accurate and readable English translation (though see below), and the bilingual text of the entire *Appendix* is followed by three sets of short poem-by-poem notes: a statement of the edition(s) and, where applicable, manuscripts used; a very selective apparatus criticus that highlights textual problems and/or differences from the underlying edition; and a brief commentary cued to the translation, mostly about realia. It would have been more user-friendly to combine these three categories and provide all information on each poem in one place.

The poems are ordered chronologically—not by date of composition (which is often impossible to determine), but by the first attested identification in a manuscript of Ovid as the text's author. As a result, works that were written in antiquity and have occasionally been considered authentically Ovidian—the *Halieutica* (here headed by its manuscript title, *Versus de piscibus et feris*), the *Nux*, and the *Consolatio ad Liviam*—are interspersed through the genuinely medieval compositions that make up the bulk of the collection.¹ In arranging their corpus this way, the editors have followed a “reception-oriented principle” (xii): they are interested not in who wrote these poems, when, and why, but in the fact that (some) medieval readers considered them

¹ There has been renewed scholarly interest in Latin pseudepigrapha, and the 2020 volume *Constructing Authors and Readers in the Appendices Vergiliana, Tibulliana, and Ovidiana*, ed. by T.E. Franklins and L. Fulkerson (Oxford), contains chapters on the three ancient pseudo-Ovidian poems.

Ovidian. This is a wisely pragmatic choice, which, however, leaves many questions unanswered.

For what is it that made these thirty-four poems appear to be the products of Ovid's pen? Very few engage in open impersonation by claiming to have been written by the poet from Sulmo; the most obvious exception is *De vetula*, which at three books is by far the longest text in the book and comes with a delightful set of prefaces that explain how this alleged piece of autobiography was discovered in Ovid's tomb by the King of Colchis and subsequently published by a Byzantine protonotary. A number of other poems have themes or topics that can be considered Ovidian in the widest sense, treating either amatory or scientific subjects; also, like the works of the real Ovid, a good number of the texts in the *Appendix* are fairly humorous. Even so, the poems collected are on the whole so disparate in outlook and content that, in many cases, they may have been fathered on Ovid for the sole reason that, especially from the *Aetas Ovidiana* of the 12th/13th century onward, he was an admired and popular ancient poet and thus an obvious candidate for authorship of any Latin poetic text.

Providing in the first place a bilingual edition of texts and not a work of literary criticism, the authors largely present their material without engaging in speculation as to their texts' authorship and purpose, contextualizing them in ancient and/or medieval literary history, or providing farther-reaching interpretation. The Introduction is brief and refers to a previous publication by Hexter for further discussion,² while the notes to the translation are mostly explanatory. In light of this general hands-off interpretive approach, it is surprising, then, to find in the Introduction what can only be described as a denunciation of the treatment of topics of gender and sexuality in a number of the collection's poems. Misogyny, sexism, and ageism are deplored, and Ovid himself is excoriated as the alleged *fons et origo* of a "diachronic fraternity" (xviii), toxic masculinity, as it were, of the *longue durée*.

It is not clear why the editors have chosen to engage in detail with this single aspect of the corpus at the expense of others. Are they personally outraged and/or wish it to be known that they do not condone the views and mentalities implicit in their texts? Or do they believe that twenty-first-century readers will not be able to cope with medieval depictions of sexuality without receiving a trigger warning? As it happens, the modern #metoo mentality seems light years away from the collection's carnevalesque reveling in the joys and mortifications of the flesh (at a far remove, incidentally, also from Ovid's own urbane *decorum*): the poems' graphic descriptions of sexual encounters and mishaps, rapturous or scathing catalogues of body parts (often with loving attention to fragrance or stench), nightmarish scenarios of overflowing genital

2 "Shades of Ovid: *Pseudo-* (and *para-*) *Ovidiana* in the Middle Ages" in J.G. Clark, F.T. Coulson, K.L. McKinley, eds., *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge 2011, 284-309.

effluvia, and an extensive scholastic discussion of the physical, metaphysical, and grammatical status of eunuchs make the editors' earnest deprecation seem rather beside the point.

More problematically, their outrage leads them to a positive misreading in the case of what is their prime exhibit, the poem they dub "one of the most disturbing ... in the collection" (xvi): the 11th-century *De nuntio sagaci*. This text revolves around the sexual encounter of a *puer* and a *puella*, the title's "crafty messenger" being the male go-between who takes the girl to the rendezvous. The editors are convinced that this is a rape, an interpretation they push with their unaccountably tendentious translation of *amare* as "rape" (*puer hic me quaerit amare*, 191). Things are not so clear-cut, however: the girl's reaction to receiving gifts from an unknown suitor is a knowing smile (56), though in her extended hilarious conversation with the *nuntius*, she pretends that she has absolutely no idea what the "deed" is to which she is being invited. It is true that she protests while the *factum* is being done and accuses the *nuntius* immediately afterwards; however, just a few lines later she eloquently avows her love for the *puer* and declares herself satisfied with what has transpired. While this could just about be read as some post-traumatic adoption of the perpetrator's perspective, the fact that she also states "I am happy to have experienced what I have so often desired" (*saepe quod optavi feliciter ipsa probavi*, 266) seems to confirm the impression that she wanted the encounter to take place all along.

At the very least, the poem is ambiguous on the question of consent, though I believe a good case can be made for seeing the *puella* as a woman who knows and gets what she wants (*viz. sex*) while outwardly adhering to societal expectations by disclaiming any unfeminine agency; in this she may just be the most *sagax* of the *dramatis personae*. That this particular *puella* is not a helpless female is apparent also from the farcical further development of the plot: when she and the messenger on their way back are stopped by her concerned parents, she has no compunction about throwing the *nuntius* under the bus (rather, to the torturer: 377), and the last line before the poem breaks off shows her literally in a fist fight with the man.

It is to be hoped that this welcome edition will inspire more research into this and other pseudo-Ovidian poems, as well as into the wider phenomenon of the reception and transformation of Ovid in both antiquity and the Middle Ages. Meanwhile, Hexter, Pfuntner, and Haynes deserve our thanks for having put this intriguing chapter of literary history at our fingertips.

KATHARINA VOLK
Columbia University
kv2018@columbia.edu

