

2000

Review of *Latin Commentaries on Ovid from the Renaissance*, by A. Moss

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Gaisser, Julia H. Review of *Latin Commentaries on Ovid from the Renaissance*, by A. Moss. *Classical Review* 50 (2000): 445-446.

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RENAISSANCE OVID

A. Moss: *Latin Commentaries on Ovid from the Renaissance*. Pp. xv + 260, 7 ills. Signal Mountain, TN: Summertown, for the Library of Renaissance Humanism, 1998. Cased, \$45. ISBN: 1-893009-02-S.

Ovid has been one of the principal beneficiaries in the recent boom in reception studies, as a spate of books in the last fifteen years or so attests. One thinks of L. Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh* (New Haven, 1986) and J. Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford, 1993), as well as the essays collected in C. Martindale, *Ovid Renewed* (Cambridge, 1988), H. Lamarque and A. Baïche, *Ovide en France dans la Renaissance* (Toulouse, 1981), and—most recently—P. Hardie, A. Barchiesi, and S. Hinds, *Ovidian Transformations* (Cambridge, 1999). Moss herself has made important contributions both to Ovid and to reception studies generally with *Ovid in Renaissance France* (London, 1982), *Poetry and Fable* (Cambridge, 1984), and especially her recent ground-breaking work on Renaissance reading, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford, 1996).

In the present work M. follows three famous episodes from the *Metamorphoses* through the commentaries of eight Renaissance humanists from Raphael Regius (1493) to Thomas Farnaby (1636). The episodes are Apollo and Daphne, Actaeon, and Echo and Narcissus. M. begins with the Latin text of the three stories and George Sandys's 1632 translation on facing pages. For each commentator she presents a brief introduction, a translation of his preface (sometimes abridged) and commentary, and some endnotes. She concludes with a short bibliography.

The format is modest and the treatment spare, but for the most part M.'s brevity pays off. With only a few (but very sure) brush strokes she has painted a complex picture, situating Ovidian interpretation in the context of Renaissance intellectual and religious history and relating it to such interesting phenomena as book illustration, emblems, and commonplace books. Her broad and deep knowledge of mediaeval and Renaissance hermeneutics, evident on every page of the introductions and endnotes, makes her a sure-footed guide through the thickets of material; her eye for the pertinent detail and her clarity of thought and presentation keep the reader with her all the way. The illustrations are well chosen and neatly integrated into the discussion.

Most of M.'s commentaries were designed primarily as school texts—which means that they provided both a way of reading Ovid and a way of reading in general to boys and young men in the formative stages of their intellectual development. The texts, like schoolbooks of any age, not only provided information, but were derived from and intended to convey ideological and societal expectations and assumptions. Given their period, many of these assumptions are moral and religious. (Some are merely gender stereotypes. Thus, Raphael Regius on Apollo's plea to Daphne in *Met.* 1: 'Very ingeniously Apollo lists his powers, his family connections, and his famous discoveries in order to entice Daphne to love him, for women are particularly susceptible to any of these things' [p. 42].)

The ideological assumptions remained more or less constant, but the hermeneutical approach varied with the time and circumstances of the commentator. We should note, however, that none of the commentators employed anything like the critical and purely aesthetic styles of reading practiced by modern readers. (For Renaissance reading practices, see J. Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance* [Leiden, 1991], i.18–26.) Very few saw the epic as more than a repository of separate fables in need of interpretation.

Raphael Regius (1493) wrote a humanist commentary, treating the epic 'as a document about the ancient world' (p. 30). He 'underlines elements of pagan morality . . . consonant with Christian principles but does not rewrite pagan fables in Christian language' (p. 30). Petrus Berchorius (Petrarch's friend, Pierre Bersuire), whose fourteenth-century work was first published in 1509, practiced mediaeval allegoresis, finding in Ovid's fables the same moral and spiritual meanings he saw in scripture. His allegorical reading was 'a process of decoding, a process in which the original text is displaced by a reformulation of truths already known' (p. 62). (The discussion of Bersuire's method and sources [pp. 61–8] is one of the most interesting sections in the book.) Georgius Sabinus (Georg Schuler, 1554), a Protestant, believing that Ovid intentionally conveyed universal moral lessons but without knowing the truths of Christianity, provided moral, but not spiritual, interpretations and treated the fables as exempla. The Jesuit Jacobus Pontanus (Jakob Spanmüller, 1618) expurgated Ovid and also treated the stories as exempla, his commentary fully in tune with the threefold aim of Jesuit education: 'good morals, good Latin, and solid erudition' (p. 159). But not too much erudition, apparently: 'the Jesuit commentaries are a small contributory factor in the evolution of the typical seventeenth-century gentleman amateur, who wears his learning with grace and elegance, and for whom pedantry is a social solecism' (p. 162).

M.'s brevity, so generally admirable and no doubt mandated by the format of the Library of Renaissance Humanism, still left me wanting more biographical information and historical context as well as answers to some questions. Are her eight commentaries the only ones published between 1493 and 1636? If not, what are her principles of selection? Why cite the 1518 and not the 1493 edition of Regius, especially since the later edition includes the Lactantius summaries Regius disdained and the somewhat extraneous observations of Jacobus Bononiensis?

But these are quibbles. M. has assembled a group of texts probably not available together in more than one or two libraries (if that). Her clear and readable translations will be a boon to Latinless readers, and her introductions and notes provide a mini-history of Renaissance hermeneutics useful to anyone interested in reception studies.

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LE TOMBEAU DE STACE

F. DELARUE, S. GEORGACOPOULOU, P. LAURENS, A.-M. TAISNE (edd.): *Epicedion: Hommage à P. Papinius Statius, 96–1996*. Pp. 344. Poitiers: La Icorne: UFR: Langues Littératures Poitiers, 1997. Paper, frs. 150. ISBN: 2-911044-08-8.

A commemorative volume to mark the 1900 years that have elapsed since the assumed date of Statius' death (A.D. 96) is welcome. The editors have succeeded in drawing together a number of prominent Statian scholars, whose contributions deal with the epics, the *Silvae*, and also aspects of the *Nachleben* of Statius.

David Vessey's introductory piece, 'Honouring Statius', begins with Nisard's negative evaluation of the decadence of later Latin literature, before examining attitudes to Statius, both in England and in France, in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, when there was far more dispute on the poet's worth. The