THE DEFINITIVE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE COMMENTARY ON OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES*

BARCHIESI (A.), ROSATI (G.) *A Commentary on Ovid's* Metamorphoses. *Volume 1: General Introduction and Books 1–6*. Translated by Erin Brady and Theresa Davis. Pp. xxvi + 758. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024. Cased, £120, US$160. ISBN: 978-0-521-89579-8.

BARCHIESI (A.), †KENNEY (E.J.), REED (J.D.) *A Commentary on Ovid's* Metamorphoses. *Volume 2: Books 7–12*. Pp. xx + 669. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024. Cased, £120, US$160. ISBN: 978-0-521-89580-4.

BARCHIESI (A.), HARDIE (P.) *A Commentary on Ovid's* Metamorphoses. *Volume 3: Books 13–15 and Indices*. Pp. xviii + 455. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024. Cased, £120, US$160. ISBN: 978-0-521-89581-1.

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The Fondazione Lorenzo Valla commentary on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, published in Italian in six volumes from 2005 to 2015 under the guidance of general editor Barchiesi, was rightly hailed as a watershed in Ovidian scholarship. J. Solodow in a review of the third volume (*CR* 61 [2011], 133–6) claimed in no uncertain terms that 'This is the finest interpretative commentary on the *Metamorphoses* ever created. . . . it . . . establishes, along with its sister-volumes, a platform for understanding the poem that will stand well into the future, until such time as radically new paradigms of interpretation arise' (pp. 133–4). The three-volume set under consideration here is an English-language update, published by Cambridge University Press, of that watershed Italian commentary, an update already in progress while the original Valla series was being published. A. Zissos (*CR* 59 [2009], 145–8) commented on the potential global reach and appeal of the Italian commentaries beyond '[i]l pubblico italiano' and said that 'one would hope that an English-language version is already in the works' (p. 147); Solodow's 2011 review (p. 136) makes it clear that it already was, almost fifteen years ago. The Cambridge update is not (nor should it be) an enormous departure from its Italian source material in ways other than the shift into English from Italian, but a number of necessary bibliographic and interpretative updates, along with smart editorial and marketing changes, bring the commentary firmly into the 2020s and ensure its longevity as the definitive comprehensive English-language commentary on the *Metamorphoses* for decades to come.

At its core, this *Fünfmännerkommentar* offers wide-ranging analyses of the language, characters, episodes, structure, models, intertexts and allusions in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with specific analytical lenses dependent upon the strengths and interests of each of the five

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editors in the series, ranging from, for example, Kenney's pedagogical explanations of Latin grammar to Barchiesi's theory-informed analyses. Comparisons between each editor's approach are legion throughout the various reviews of the original Italian series.[1]

As in the Italian version, the commentaries rely on R. Tarrant's seminal Oxford Classical Text (2004). While the Italian edition reproduces Tarrant's Latin text with *apparatus critici* and Italian translations by L. Koch and G. Chiarini, the Cambridge version eschews reproduction of the text, a detail that requires readers to keep an external copy of Tarrant's OCT to hand as they consult the commentary. Variant readings are catalogued at the beginning of each triad of books, and this triadic structure also marks the shifts between editors, which remain the same as the divisions for the Italian commentary: Barchiesi (Books 1–3), Rosati (4–6), Kenney (7–9), Reed (10–12) and Hardie (13–15). The Cambridge update collates Books 1–6 into Vol. 1, 7–12 into Vol. 2 and 13–15 into Vol. 3, rather than giving each triad and editor their own volume.[2]

On the commentaries of Kenney, who passed away in 2019, Barchiesi notes that he 'did not dare to alter Kenney's work after his death, but [Kenney's] notes and introduction on books 7–9 incorporate a number of revisions he made subsequent to the publication of the Italian volume (2011)' (Vol. 1, p. vii). Volume 2 begins with a touching foreword by Barchiesi (pp. vii–x) that verges on a eulogy for Kenney, whom Barchiesi praises as 'the author of masterful critical editions . . . , an influential critic of (to name but a few examples) Lucretius, Ovid and Apuleius . . . , [and] a leading authority in both textual criticism and literary studies' (pp. vii–viii). Kenney's notes on Book 7 were revised by J. Ziesel; those on Books 8 and 9 were revised by Barchiesi.

The front matter of the introductory volume largely updates the items in the Italian version with one notable omission: the seminal essay 'Il corpo e l'io nelle *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio', which occupied 86 pages in the first volume of the Valla series, by the late C. Segal, who was originally intended to be one of the editors of the series, was not included. The update as a whole, however, is dedicated to Segal and to Kenney (p. vii). After a preface that includes a brief positioning of the history of the commentary and its path towards its current English incarnation (p. vii; this preface is reproduced in each of the three volumes), a bibliographic note (pp. viii–xix) updates the original version in its Italian predecessor by collating and organising hundreds of scholarly and artistic references relating to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* according to topic, from an updated history of commentaries and learned editions (pp. viii–xi) to new topics such as Ovidian reception in the visual and performing arts (pp. xviii–xix). The latest publication date of a work in the note is 2020, perhaps an unfortunate feature of the long gestation period of the update's publication, as important recent works such as S. McCarter's monumental translation (*Ovid:* Metamorphoses [2022]) deserve inclusion in such a comprehensive annotated bibliography on Ovid.[3]

[1]Reviews of the Valla series can be found in most major expected fora, including *Classical Review* (the two reviews cited above), *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (S. Casali on Vol. I; G. Liberman on Vol. II; K.S. Myers on Vol. III; J. Solodow on Vol. IV; B. Natoli on Vol. VI), *Classical Journal* (K.S. Myers on Vol. I in 104.2 [2008–2009], 182–4; K.S. Myers on Vol. II in 104.3 [2009], 284–6; M.L. von Glinski on Vol. IV [*CJ-Online*, 2012.05.02]), and *Phoenix* (P. Knox on Vol. II in 63.3–4 [2009], 412–4).

[2]The Italian version splits its volumes in the opposite direction, into six volumes rather than five: Books 1–2 (Vol. I, 2005); 3–4 (Vol. II, 2011); 5–6 (Vol. III, 2013); 7–9 (Vol. IV, 2011); 10–12 (Vol. V, 2013); 13–15 (Vol. VI, 2015).

[3]Works later than 2020 appear in the various volume-end bibliographies, including K. Volk and G.D. Williams' edited volume *Philosophy in Ovid, Ovid as Philosopher* (2022 [given as 2021 in Vol. 1's bibliography]).

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Next, Barchiesi's introduction to the poem as a whole (pp. 1–47) gives readers an expansive grounding in the interpretation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and its structures, themes and receptions, with sections that explore Ovid's models, the theme of metamorphosis, narrative structure, cultural debts to Rome and Greece, scholarly erudition, genealogy and chronology, justice and morality, style and genre, art and spectacle, and power and ideology. While the introduction is clearly updated with new, recent items of bibliography and certain turns of phrase, the translation into English from the 2005 Italian original also serves to validate Barchiesi's prescience as to the enduring nature of Ovid's poem and its themes. His argument for the relevance of Ovid's stories of transformation to an ultra-modern world characterised by 'aesthetic surgery, drugs and psycho-drugs, cyborgs, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, genetic engineering, cloning, manipulation of images and biotechnology' (p. 31)[4] is as applicable in 2025 as it was in 2005, if not more so, and his observation that 'it does not appear that the questions raised by the new interaction of human and artificial will result in a total eclipse of moral problems' (p. 31) seems clairvoyant in the age of artificial intelligence and its myriad abuses, in terms of both its uses and its deleterious effects on the environment and education.

With regard to the commentary, several aesthetic choices improve the reader's experience from the Italian original. The formatting of the updated commentary helpfully bolds line numbers and lemmata to guide readers, and the larger font and print size and more spacious leading than in the Valla editions make reading the updated commentary easier on the eyes. I found no noticeable typographical or formatting errors, an impressive accomplishment for such an expansive work across multiple editors. Another improvement over the Valla editions is that each Cambridge volume concludes with a comprehensive bibliography, while also including a list of abbreviations of the most frequently cited works in the front matter. In the Valla editions, the list of bibliographic and journal abbreviations in a volume's front matter did not include all referenced items within the volume, and occasional full in-line citations of secondary scholarship are easy to miss unless an interested reader happens to be consulting the passage in which they appear. The series ends with an index *nominum* (Vol. 3, pp. 403–20) and a general index (Vol. 3, pp. 421–55) that span all three volumes, comparable to the Valla editions' *indice dei nomi* and *indice delle cose notevoli*.

Kenney and Hardie present an overview of the three books under each of their purviews (respectively Books 7–9 in Vol. 2, pp. 1–23, and Books 13–15 in Vol. 3, pp. viii–xiii) before beginning their line-by-line commentaries; Barchiesi and Rosati do not offer synopses of their triads in either the Valla or the Cambridge commentaries; Reed's overview of Books 10–12 in the Italian commentary (Vol. V, pp. xv–xxi) was not reproduced in the Cambridge update, but in its place there is a note of acknowledgements and methods (Vol. 2, pp. 303–4). Introductions to individual books, if they exist,[5] can range from a single sentence (e.g. Kenney on Book 9, Vol. 2, p. 213) to multiple pages (e.g. Barchiesi on Book 3, Vol. 1, pp. 232–5).

[4]This list is translated nearly word-for-word from the Italian original, with a few additions in the English: 'chirurgia estetica, droghe e psicofamaci, intelligenze artificiali, realtà virtuale, ingegneria genetica, clonazione, manipolazione dell'immagine, biotecnologie' (Vol. I, p. cxlii).

[5]Books 7, 11, 13, 14 and 15 begin immediately with line-by-line commentary (Book 14 after a brief bibliographic note). The commentary on Book 10 begins with a general note bridging Book 10 with the beginning of Book 11 with a discussion of Orpheus and his various appearances throughout ancient art and literature (Vol. 2, pp. 309–10).

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Updates to the commentaries include not only recent bibliography but also new observations ranging from minor linguistic ones to larger issues of interpretation. While a comprehensive list of updates does not fall within the scope of this review, a few illustrative examples will suffice. Reed *ad* 12.175 (*monstri novitate*) directs the reader's attention to I. Ziogas's monograph *Ovid and Hesiod: The Metamorphosis of the* Catalogue of Women (2013) on the topic of Caeneus' name and its potential derivation from the Greek adjective καινός, 'new' – the Italian original directed the reader to Ziogas's 2010 dissertation. Reed adds helpfully in the update, though, that 'Caeneus' might actually derive from καίνω, 'to kill', an appropriate etymology for a warrior, which can coexist with the intertextual implications of a derivation from καινός. Rosati *ad* 6.477 bibliographically directs readers towards a 2016 article by A. Ramírez de Verger regarding a variant reading (*usque* for *ipsa* in most editions), and a resulting glance at the volume-end bibliography could guide interested readers to Ramírez de Verger's 2021 textual commentary on *Metamorphoses* 6, which explores in-depth the manuscript tradition and textual transmission of that book. Hardie augments his analysis of the *sphragis* (15.871–9) with the new comparandum of the Song of Silenus in Virgil's sixth *Eclogue* (Virg. *Ecl.* 6.64–6), with Gallus' elevation to the top of Mount Helicon eclipsed by Ovid's elevation *super alta … astra* (Ov. *Met.* 15.875–6); the comparison helps contextualise Ovid's accomplishment within his literary predecessors. Small additions and changes like these deepen the understanding of the *Metamorphoses* and its place in the literary tradition and introduce more recent scholarship into the conversation.

The most readily obvious benefit to this updated edition of the commentary is its availability and accessibility to Anglophone audiences and to the academic world more generally. While English-language commentaries on the *Metamorphoses* are ubiquitous, most focus either on one book at a time or on a selection of books (e.g. the first or second pentad), often with more narrow pedagogical or philological aims.[6] The expansive scope of the Cambridge update across the entire poem, with five different editors' approaches to the text mutually informing and complementing one another, makes it the obvious place to start (and in many cases to end) for scholars interested in detailed exegesis of and comprehensive bibliography relating to the *Metamorphoses*, especially those scholars whose primary language is English. But even scholars with Italian proficiency inclined to use the Valla editions may face obstacles in accessing the Italian commentaries if they or their institutions do not already hold copies. Conveniently, the Cambridge update is available not only in print

[6]The following is a list of English-language commentaries on the *Metamorphoses*, with their scopes indicated in their titles. Single-book commentaries: A.G. Lee (ed.), *Ovid:* Metamorphoses *I* (1991); J.J. Moore-Blunt (ed.), *A Commentary on Ovid:* Metamorphoses *II* (1977); A.A.R. Henderson (ed.), *Ovid:* Metamorphoses *III* (1991); A.S. Hollis (ed.), *Ovid:* Metamorphoses: *Book VIII* (1970); N. Hopkinson (ed.), *Ovid:* Metamorphoses *Book XIII* (2001); K.S. Myers (ed.), *Ovid:* Metamorphoses *Book XIV* (2010). Multi-book commentaries: W.S. Anderson (ed.), *Ovid's* Metamorphoses*: Books 1–5* (1998); W.S. Anderson (ed.), *Ovid's* Metamorphoses*: Books 6–10* (1978); D.E. Hill (ed., trans.), *Ovid:* Metamorphoses *Books I–IV* (Aris & Phillips Classical Texts) (1985); D.E. Hill (ed., trans.), *Ovid:* Metamorphoses *Books V–VIII* (Aris & Phillips Classical Texts) (1992); D.E. Hill (ed., trans.), *Ovid:* Metamorphoses *Books IX–XII* (Aris & Phillips Classical Texts) (1999); D.E. Hill (ed., trans.), *Ovid:* Metamorphoses *Books XIII–XV* (Aris & Phillips Classical Texts) (2000). We might add to this list J.D. Reed's scholarly annotation of R. Humphries' translation (*Ovid:* Metamorphoses*, The New, Annotated Edition* [2018]), which occupies a similar position as Hill's Aris & Phillips series as a translation accessible to general readers that includes detailed commentary for the interested.

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but also electronically through Cambridge Core, which ensures broader and longer-lasting access to this treasure trove of Ovidian scholarship than solely the print medium would allow.

This Cambridge update rightfully assumes its place as the definitive comprehensive English-language commentary on the *Metamorphoses* for the advanced undergraduate level and upward. Like its Italian predecessor, it complements rather than replaces other commentaries of differing purview or focus. For example, F. Bömer's monumental German commentary (7 vols, 1969–1986) remains the gold standard of philological and mythological analysis of the *Metamorphoses*, as Barchiesi notes: 'Bömer's work is not superseded by any competitor for its wealth of mythological and linguistic comments' (Vol. 1, p. x). W. Anderson's commentaries on Books 1–5 and 6–10 skew towards pedagogical use and exhibit a 'genuine interest in the poem as a work of literature, particularly with regard to issues of character, psychology and morality' (Vol. 1, p. xi). D.E. Hill's Aris & Phillips translation with commentary on the whole poem avoids deep philological or linguistic discussion and is geared towards non-specialists in translation classes.[7]

The Cambridge commentary, by dint of its comprehensive scope and combination of scholarly approaches to the text, exhibits both breadth and depth in its treatment of the *Metamorphoses* and catches many elements of a learned commentary for students and researchers: grammatical explanation, cultural or historical context, bibliographic direction, intertextual references, thematic connections, structural analyses and so on. While future research will undoubtedly explore new angles of analysis of the *Metamorphoses*, a fact to which Barchiesi nods,[8] this Cambridge commentary captures at this moment in time the pinnacle of scholarly analysis on Ovid's best-known poem. The five editors have created a work that is requisite reading and reference material for scholars of the *Metamorphoses*, a work that will remain consequential for decades to come, if not longer: *iamque opus exeg*[*erunt*], *quod nec Iovis ira nec ignis / nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere vetustas* (Ov. *Met.* 15.871–2, *mutato mutando*).

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[7]The existence of Hill's work, which translates and comments on the whole *Metamorphoses* in four volumes, would slightly undercut Cambridge University Press' claim that this is 'the first complete commentary in English' (https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/commentary-on-ovids-metamorphoses/7A4431406B9F5420163A4F2BA5B6F9F5#fndtn-information), unless we read 'complete' as engaging in deeper analysis or approaching the text from more expansive interpretative angles (e.g. 'from textual interpretation to poetics, imagination, and ideology') than Hill's translation-*cum*-commentary does.

[8]'. . . not every new commentary can control and contain the proliferation of meanings generated by the text, especially when generational change is also intense cultural change, as happens to people whose life straddles the second millennium and the third' (Vol. 2, p. ix).

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