

Review

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JOSEPH B. SOLODOW. *The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1988. Pp. ix + 278. \$32.50.

New books on Ovid are always welcome. The *Metamorphoses* in particular still offers much opportunity for both detailed interpretation and overall analysis. Solodow's book is a valuable addition although it does not break much new ground. The very title is suggestive of that, being virtually the same as that of Wilkinson's fine article in Herescu's *Ovidiana* (1958). Solodow's claim to remedy the lack of "a comprehensive and general literary interpretation of the poem which finds something positive in it" (p. 7) is, alas, the sort of assertion one frequently finds in a scholar's first book. The main virtue of his is the expansion on some well-established aspects of the *Metamorphoses*. It seems best to discuss them in the orderly sequence—no Ovidian technique here!—in which they are presented.

Chapter I deals with "Structures" or, as Franz Bömer put it so aptly some years ago, "the German *Aufbau*" (if Bömer can use a light touch at times, so could Solodow; books on the *Metamorphoses* should not be unremittingly austere). Solodow pursues a sensible *via media* by showing how the same literary devices are used for both unifying and non-unifying purposes; one particularly good observation is that thematic links can prove to be red herrings (p. 28). To put it differently, we might say that much of the poem's unity is deliberately impressionistic and that quite a bit of it is in the eye of the beholder. Just as Ovid, despite giving certain hints, leaves much latitude to the reader in responding to a given story so he gives us the same associative freedom in connecting various episodes to a greater or lesser degree. The *Met.* thus is an ideal text for applying the principles of reader response criticism and *Rezeptionsästhetik*—far more so than the *Aeneid*, for instance—but Solodow does not explore such perspectives. His method is largely positivistic.

Another illustration of this is his summary, under the heading "Comprehensiveness," of the much debated aspect of the genre of the *Metamorphoses*. Especially because he uses good examples Solodow's enumeration of the various genres is useful, but the broader perspective opened up by Heinze and, more recently, P. E. Knox and S. Hinds, is left undiscussed. There is no reference to Wilhelm Kroll's important chapter on *Die Kreuzung der Gattungen* nor to the thorough discussion of that phenomenon by L. E. Rossi in *BICS* 18 (1971). Similarly, Solodow again goes only half the distance when emphasizing, in his discussion of Ovid's story telling, "the visual picture" as Ovid's main achievement: "The poem, we may say, moves from narrative towards imagery, from story towards icon" (p. 36). That does not mean, however, that linear progression and variety combined with unity and thematic repetition are peculiar to literature, and not the arts, as Solodow claims; cf. Philip Hardie's recent discussion of the Great Frieze at Pergamum in relation to the

Aeneid.¹ And where do we find, at Ovid's time, a marked tendency towards an individual image or panel instead of a larger narrative? In the programmatic art of the Augustan age, as Paul Zanker has so well demonstrated.² Once that connection is made (cf. my article in *ICS* 14.2, 1989), another larger perspective suggests itself for discussion, i.e., the mix of the relation of the *Met.* to Roman life (à la Jasper Griffin) and to the literary tradition; despite R. Thomas' strictures on Griffin's argument,³ it is simply silly to posit an either/or dichotomy.

Useful as Solodow's book is, therefore, more could have been attempted—especially in the light of the discussion of Augustan art and literature in the past ten years—than going over much of the same ground, however more systematically at times, as my own book (1975) or Due's (1974). The chapters on "The Narrator," "Mythology," and "The *Aeneid*" continue in this vein. Solodow reiterates that Ovid both draws much attention to himself—this, in fact, is one of the strongest unifying aspects of the *Met.*—and, at the same time, maintains a certain distance from the stories he tells. As for mythology, Solodow uses the starchy term "intra-mythological references" for the kind of incongruities which Bernbeck described so delightfully and while wit and humor generally do not get any funnier when a scholar analyzes them, the discussion the subject receives—a scant eight pages—does little justice to its pervasiveness in the real world of the *Metamorphoses*.

The chapter on the *Aeneid* adds little that is new. More than a short page should have been devoted to style and meter, especially in view of the work of Bömer and Kenney, but we American scholars are averse to such matters and prefer "ideas." While wisely staying away from the red herring of anti-Augustanism, Solodow's conclusion that "Ovid's poem is the representation of an alternative view which by the very fact of its difference calls the other into question" (p. 54) needs to be given more depth and perspective. *Imitatio* and *aemulatio* surely are relevant here, although they are not mentioned at all, and a glance at modern studies on the anxiety of influence might have been useful. Equally relevant is Ovid's fundamental role in the history of the shaping of myth. Ovid's procedure was not so much to call Vergil's treatment of myth into question as to provide a constructive alternative. The reception, therefore, of both Vergil and Ovid by the Silver Latin poets is instructive and would have been another valuable perspective which has not been much explored in previous books on the *Metamorphoses*.

In the remaining chapters on "Metamorphosis" and "Art," Solodow is finding more of a voice of his own. He returns to the view that metamorphosis

¹ *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford 1986) 125–46.

² *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder* (Munich 1987) 209–13.

³ *CP* 83 (1988) 54–69.

is indeed the central subject of the poem. The fascination with metamorphosis in European art and literature has recently been illustrated by Leonard Bar-kan,⁴ a study that appeared too late to be considered by Solodow with whose views on the literal centrality of metamorphosis in Ovid's poem it largely concurs. I am still unpersuaded that the true import of metamorphosis lies here rather than in its function as an operative principle affecting the style and narration of many stories; in most stories, metamorphosis is not the central event. Solodow seems to obviate this objection by emphasizing the character of metamorphosis as "clarification": "It is a process by which characteristics of a person, essential or incidental, are given physical embodiments and are rendered visible and manifest. Metamorphosis makes plain a person's qualities . . . It is—and this constitutes a central paradox of the poem—a change which preserves, an alteration which maintains identity, a change of form by which content becomes represented in form" (p. 174).

Catch-all definitions, of course, are always problematic, especially for the *Metamorphoses*. It is part of the mutability of Ovid's literary technique that what is true of some stories doesn't apply at all to others. For every Lycaon, Ceyx, and Philomela there is more than one Phaethon, Perseus, Daedalus, and Erychthon where the metamorphosis, far from clarifying anything, is tangential, if not irrelevant. It is precisely part of Ovid's genius that this variety, including the variety of handling the metamorphosis theme, transcends a simple formula. Solodow's virtue is to take his argument as far as it can be taken, including the attempt—contradicted already in the poem by the phrase *mutatas formas*—to distinguish rigidly between change and metamorphosis. Hence, to open another can of worms, he dismisses the speech of Pythagoras as an "extended joke": "The subject of the speech is not really metamorphosis at all, but rather mere change" (p. 167). *Metamorphosis*, according to this view, is the antithesis of mutability because it creates permanence. Once metamorphosed you cannot change anymore. At least all this makes for a stimulating argument.

Solodow's emphasis on the relation of the *Metamorphoses* to art is most welcome. This important aspect of the poem has often been noted—especially by scholars like Kraus, Bernbeck, Viarre, and P. Gros⁵—and a more comprehensive overview is definitely valuable. Since the publication of Solodow's book, Zanker's book on Augustan art and E. W. Leach's on landscape have enriched the picture yet more. Solodow rightly stresses Ovid's intensely visual imagination and, as a consequence, the character of his narrative as a series of

⁴ *The Gods Made Flesh. Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven 1986).

⁵ "Les *Métamorphoses* d'Ovide et le décor intérieur des temples romains (un essai de définition du dernier art "baroque" hellénistique)," *Collection de l'Ecole Franc. de Rome* 55 (1981) 353–66 (not cited by Solodow).

static (self-contained might be a better word) pictures. As noted before, the perspective can be enlarged. Contemporary Augustan and, in fact, programmatic art provides the best analogue for the emphasis on individual scenes rather than narrative composition on a large, interconnected scale. Ovid draws inspiration from this cultural milieu and then uses the procedure for his private purposes; Solodow does well in stressing, throughout his book, the personal and private character of the *Metamorphoses* and its protagonists (a particularly apt formulation is found on p. 156). Furthermore, the phenomenon can be usefully connected with the "cult of the individual episode" in the Silver Latin epics. Its genesis tends to be ascribed, far too narrowly, to the influence of rhetoric.

This is a serious book about a sprightly poem, perhaps too earnest at times to capture the poem's effervescence. It does not open up more new and needed perspectives, but it is useful for its careful discussion and documentation of major aspects of the *Metamorphoses*. On balance, it is a welcome and sensible contribution to elucidating the poem and its maker.

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J. DELZ., Ed., *Sili Italici Punica*. Stuttgart, Teubner, 1987. Pp. lxxviii + 528. DM 168.00.

Examination of the MS. tradition of the *Punica* quickly reveals that recension of the text depends crucially on the evidence of two 9th/10th-century manuscripts which are now lost, namely the *Coloniensis* (*C*) which belonged to the Cathedral Library of Cologne, and the so-called *Sangallensis*, a manuscript discovered by Poggio Bracciolini during his attendance at the Council of Constance (1415–1417).

Manuscript *C* has survived only in the form of a few hundred words reported in L. Carrion's *Emendationum et Observationum libri II* (Antwerp 1576, Paris 1583) and in Franciscus Modius' *Novantiquae Lectiones* (Frankfurt am Main 1584). A very large store of alleged readings from *C* is provided by Nicolaus Heinsius. He drew his material from a copy of the *editio Gryphiana* (1547?) which contained a collation of the *Coloniensis*. The readings annotated in his *ed. Gryph.* were transferred to his own exemplar, a copy of *ed. Colinaei* (Paris 1531) and from this latter transferred by A. Drakenborch into his edition of the *Punica* published at Utrecht in 1717. Heinsius' copies of *ed. Gryph* and *ed. Colinaei* are now lost; our knowledge of the collation used by Heinsius must therefore be drawn from his notes preserved in Drakenborch's edition.

After his discovery of the Silius manuscript (*S*) in Switzerland Poggio had it copied by a very ignorant scribe, "ignorantissimus omnium viventium."