

BOOK REVIEW

Ovidio: Metamorfosi, Volume IV (Libri VII–IX). Edited by E. J. KENNEY. Translation by Gioachino CHIARINI. Milan: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla/Arnaldo Mondadori, 2011. Pp. lxxii + 484. Hardcover, €30.00. ISBN 978-88-04-60424-2.

With the fourth volume of this ongoing commentary project, the torch passes from Italy to England, and to E. J. Kenney. Kenney's style is more soberly traditional than that of his predecessors, and represents a different outlook on what a commentary is designed to do. While Kenney is sensitive to issues of narratology that feature so heavily in these books, especially in Book 8, he generally refrains from talking about larger themes, pointing readers to the relevant, up-to-date literature instead. A general introduction ranges over the whole of the *Metamorphoses*, which Kenney calls an epic of the human spirit, embodied in particular in its heroines who outshine their male counterparts. The section on Ovid's style whets the appetite for the commentary proper, displaying Kenney's considerable finesse.

The text is based on Tarrant's 2004 OCT edition, with forty deviations. Kenney restores lines expunged by Tarrant (7.522; 9.111, 147–8, 179, 777) and transposes others (inverting 9.111–2, 524–5). All instances are discussed in detail in the commentary, spelling out the various options, sometimes even with translations. Kenney cautions against overconfidence in restoring a perfect text, borne out by the existence of "double versions," especially in Book 8. The only place where I find myself in real disagreement with Kenney's choices comes at 8.266 where he relies uncharacteristically on mere common sense (and Bömer) to argue for *acervis* over Tarrant's *acerris*. Would the Athenians unceremoniously pile up incense precious enough to be dealt out by the grain elsewhere (*Fast.* 2.753)? Props of garlands and caskets are also mentioned in one breath as prohibited at funerals by the sumptuary legislation of the Twelve Tables (*Cic. Leg.* 2.60; cf. *coronantur, Met.* 8.264), an anachronistic restriction lifted from the Athenians now that they are freed from the Minotaur.

Kenney's clarity and helpfulness are exemplary, and he is not above providing grammatical help or translations of individual phrases or explaining such epic

conventions as “frozen time” (masterfully done at 9.120–6). All Greek and many of the Latin parallels are translated as well.

Medea looms large over Book 7 even as Apollonius Rhodius’ epic is drastically condensed. Even so, her persona threatens to overwhelm Ovid’s Callimachean poetics, a danger narrowly avoided by making her travel through the air for a telescoped view on myths not told (but supplied by Kenney)¹ while the murder of her children takes only four lines. Ovid’s sovereign skimming over literary history contrasts with the anxious circumnavigation of Circe’s island in *Aeneid* 7.10–24. As Medea traverses Rhodes (*Phoebamque Rhodon*, 7.365) and the Telchines in her flight, a pun on Apollonius as much as on Helios as Medea’s *auctores* seems to be suggested by the Italian translation (*Rodi apollinea*) but receives no comment.

Just as important for Kenney is the intertext with the self-aware *Heroides* (he regards *Heroides* 12 as authentic, *pace* Knox) so that questions of divine motivation become nothing but literary rationalization (Kenney’s dry riposte to Medea’s *nescioquis deus* 7.12: “ovviamente Amore, come poi amette implicitamente”). Medea is the first in a line of exceedingly literary heroines which culminates in the bookish Byblis whom Kenney makes out to be a Madame Bovary *avant la lettre* (her selective reading, ignoring Euripides, leads to her downfall, 9.507–8) and whose own letter-writing contributes yet another piece to the genre puzzle of the *Metamorphoses*.

Crises of authority pervade these books from Theseus’ challenge to Achelous as storyteller, to Daedalus’ defiance of natural limits, and on to the gods questioning Jupiter’s legitimate right of rejuvenating Iolaus (9.418–38). Kenney explains the strategies of divine *Realpolitik* but keeps to the sidelines on its contemporary relevance to the aged Augustus.² This skeptical stance about the merits of divine favor works well in reading Ovid’s ingenious capping of Hercules’ apotheosis with an account of his birth just as he has been purged from his mother’s mortal associations. Galanthis’ metamorphosis produces an animal that is actually useful in contrast with Hercules’ grandiose pose of defeating mythical but perhaps imaginary monsters (Kenney refers to *Lucr.* 5.22–42). At other times, the insistence on the purely literary is frustrating. So, for instance, Kenney’s

¹ See also R. Tarrant, “Roads Not Taken: Untold Stories in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*,” *MD* 54 (2005) 65–89.

² L. Galasso, “Giove e il fato nel IX libro delle *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio,” *MD* 49 (2002) 117–33.

assertion that sacrificial similes are a “cliché epico” (8.761–4) seems overstated. Unsurprisingly, none of the invoked parallels involve a female victim in the ambiguous guise of a tree. Thus Erysichthon’s impious act, compounded by the drastic gender reversal in the simile, aims straight at the heart of the *Metamorphoses*. The presence of non-human sentient beings calls into question the institution of sacrifice itself (which emphatically forbids slaughtering a bull to Ceres, in any case (*Fast.* 4.413–16)).³

The densely learned commentary provides a backdrop of sources at the beginning of each episode and ample discussion of Ovidian and other parallels throughout. Kenney has an incomparable ear for Ovid’s style (literally at 8.524–5) and is especially strong on etymology, allusion, and usage compared with Virgil. Ilaria Marchesi’s fine translation of Kenney’s commentary deserves special mention (Mycenae is “giusto quel tantino collinosa” for Ovid to make a molehill out of Virgil’s mountain (*Met.* 7.463 ~ *A.* 3.76)); only once did I find myself disagreeing with the faithful retention of English quirkiness. Would Philemon and Baucis really offer “formaggio del Cheshire” (8.666) to the gods instead of the famous regional specialty Phrygian cheese, made from donkey’s and mare’s milk? Or perhaps, in keeping with the *nouveau pauvre* style of their feast, rustic “ricotta”?⁴

This commentary joins the others in this series as indispensable tools for anyone working on Ovid, and retaining the unique flavor of each contribution enriches the whole. Kenney’s commentary provides sure footing for future interpretations.

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³ Cf. the note on another sacrifice simile at *Met.* 2.623–5 in A. Barchiesi, *Ovidio Metamorfosi: Volume I (Libri I–II)* (Milan, 2005). For the problem of the sacrificial simile see now M. L. von Glinski, *Simile and Identity in Ovid’s Metamorphoses* (Cambridge, 2012).

⁴ A. Dalby, *Food in the Ancient World from A–Z* (London, 2003), s.v. “Cheese.”