

countless authors have turned to Horace's major panegyric odes when faced with the dilemma of making resonant art out of the duty of public praise. For all the strengths of his rich and discerning commentary, T. could perhaps have offered the first-time reader of *Odes* IV a fuller sense of why the most difficult of these poems have not always seemed so hard to admire.

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A. FELDHERR, *PLAYING GODS: OVID'S METAMORPHOSES AND THE POLITICS OF FICTION*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010. Pp. x + 337. ISBN 9780691138145. £34.95.

Playing Gods explores the nuanced strategy of reading that the *Metamorphoses*, according to Feldherr, stages for the contemporary Roman reader. It does so from the much less examined perspective of cultural discourses, particularly those of civic and religious spectacle and of the visual arts. F. argues that the poem operates on a 'politics of fiction' that works toward constructing a double vision, or a double reading response, as readers encounter and negotiate images of status, hierarchy, and power. For F., the proem (1.1–4) lays down the framework for this kind of response: while the promise to unfold an unbroken (*perpetuum*) history of time that links a Greek mythological past to Ovid's contemporary Rome draws the reader's attention to the narrative of metamorphosis *per se*, the poem's claim to be the result of 'fine spinning' (*deducite*), conversely, encourages the same reader to contemplate the poem as a literary and artistic artifact. The principles, or the 'politics' of fiction, that promote a simultaneous view of the *Metamorphoses* as content and form, furthermore, emerge as analogous to the principles that govern the universe in which the reader and Ovid's work exist, since, as the proem announces, all things in our world are changed into new forms by an external force (i.e. the gods). From the perspective of readers, then, the poem is a *mise-en-abîme* of our world, its workings, and hierarchies (here (p. 2) F.'s reference to the politics of fiction in Julio Cortázar's *La continuidad de los parques* (1956) is very apt).

Discussion is organized into three parts (Part One: 'Fiction and the Empire'; Part Two: 'Spectacle'; and Part Three: 'Ovid and the Visual Arts'). All the close readings, some of which are excellent (e.g. the episode of Io as a parallel between the first representation of reading in the *Metamorphoses* and the audience's task of interpreting the book as text (ch. 1); Pythagoras' view of sacrifice as a model for modes of viewing which are generated by metamorphosis (ch. 3); the clever appeal to the amphitheatre as a paradigm for grasping Ovid's narrative as imperial display (ch. 4); or the analysis of Pygmalion as a viewer, rather than a maker, of art (ch. 6)), are examined through the lens of the double vision which, F. argues, prompts readers to negotiate the complex relationship between fiction and reality in the poem. That the word 'politics' figures prominently in the subtitle of this book, is not to say, however, that its central thesis seeks to emphasize an Ovidian view of Augustus. Nor does discussion take sides on the pro- and anti-Augustan debate (and here one can argue that F. stands with Kennedy, who argues that the term 'Augustus' has become 'the point of intersection of contesting ideologies [in criticism's] control over the discourse of the past' (1992, 27)). 'The politics of *Metamorphoses* that [*Playing Gods*] addresses', F. explains, '[aims to] expand our understanding of the modes by which the work facilitates the audience's reflection on and redefinition of the hierarchies operative within Roman society' (7). Thus, for instance, when it comes to the power relations between the artist and the *princeps*, F. contends that 'the grand fictions that the poem discloses seem to be the artist's way of controlling and containing empire as well as emperor; at others', he adds, 'the comparative triviality of the artist's product is balanced by the recognition of the real status of the artist' (61). Fiction, therefore, has certain limitations in articulating hierarchy and identity for the reader, since it is both able and unable to gain the authority and presence of other discursive forms.

Methodologically speaking, F. partially complements new historicist approaches to the *Metamorphoses* (especially those of Feeney (1991) and Barchiesi (1997)) in his attempt to examine the poem, not simply from a formalistic perspective, but for its capacity to become a constituent element of the discourses of power and culture current in Augustan Rome. A departure from previous criticism, and particularly from Hardie's study of illusion *vis-à-vis* audiences (2002), can

be found in F.'s examination of the trajectory of reception from the 'outside inwards', i.e. from the reader of the *Metamorphoses*' real world into the text of the *Metamorphoses*: 'my emphasis', F. states, 'will be to imagine [the text's illusionistic capacity] to appear from the outside in, that is, from the horizons defined by the material and social circumstances of its first readers' (9). Some readers might take issue with this approach, and F. is aware of a potential crack in the formative stages of his methodology (9–10): the 'realities' that Ovid's first readers may have brought to their response/s to his poem remain subject to speculation, as well as being too varied to be gathered into one neat representative form of reception; so, too, are both the set of outside references which might have been brought by audiences into the interpretation of Ovid's work, and the way in which each reader would have applied them. Also problematic is F.'s identification of Augustus as an artist, rather than as a promoter of the arts, especially in the light of the discussion of Perseus in ch. 7, where one of the similarities between the hero and emperor is that they are, emphatically, not artists. Presumably, by artist, F. means something close to creator or maker of the Rome in which writers such as Ovid operate?

While its target audience may, arguably, exclude the non-expert, *Playing Gods* will be equally interesting and relevant to literary theorists and critics and cultural historians. F. offers an attractive new model for reading politics in a work of fiction, and pushes, considerably further than recent studies of the *Metamorphoses*, the boundaries of our understanding of the interplay between narrative and exegesis, fiction and reality, and content and form in the reception of Ovid's poem.

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M. JANAN, *REFLECTIONS IN A SERPENT'S EYE: THEBES IN OVID'S METAMORPHOSES*.
Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. viii + 276. ISBN 9780199556922.
£64.00.

Reflections in a Serpent's Eye is a title that nicely encapsulates the multi-layered aspects of Michaela Janan's latest work, a Lacanian exploration of Ovid's Theban narratives in *Metamorphoses* 3 and 4. From the reflections of Narcissus in his pool to those of Rome in Thebes, J.'s own reflections on the 'psychoanalytic patterns of Thebes' doom' (225) reveal many aspects of the *Metamorphoses* in an engaging and stimulating new light, a light by which justice can seem a lot like cruelty, and Theban serpents a lot like Roman she-wolves. Broadly speaking, Ovid's Theban cycle is for J. a response to the *Aeneid* as a 'meditation on the ideal city, and the relations between citizens and the sexes therein' (225). J., as often, uses the psychoanalytical framework of Lacan (here with some help from Freud, Hegel and Kant) to interpret and articulate Ovid's own meditation on the city.

Ch. 1 serves as a literary, methodological and theoretical introduction to the rest of the book. There we find J. signalling her support for full Kristevan intertextuality as opposed to what she sees as the weakened form commonly employed by classical scholarship; this leads into a discussion of Lacanian theory and its relationship to Freud and Hegel; we are introduced to key Lacanian concepts which inform the rest of the work, such as the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary; the Father and the Woman; and the divided subject. With these concepts in place, the investigation proper commences in ch. 2. There J. focuses on the paradoxical (but entirely Ovidian) combination of *pietas* and *scelus* that leads to the foundation of Thebes, as Agenor exiles his son for failing to find his daughter. J. articulates this chapter around the Lacanian ideas of the (aloof, neutral) Symbolic Father and the (sadistic, tyrannical) Father of Enjoyment: key moments in the history of Thebes (Cadmus' exile, Diana's punishment of Actaeon) reveal this dark side to the Lacanian father figure, reminding us that at the heart of 'the rule of law, lies chaos, cruelty, and malign enjoyment' (86).

Ch. 3 turns from the dark side of law to the dark side of love, and the figure of Juno. J. notes how Juno's anger against those she perceives as her rivals crescendos through the first books of the *Metamorphoses*, reaching its peak in the Theban narrative as she destroys not just her rivals but also their extended family; Juno's rage then disappears from the main narrative. For J., Juno's pathological need for revenge stems from her pathological jealousy: it 'enacts on an Olympian scale the dilemmas attendant upon human desire' (95). Although she eliminates her rivals for Jupiter's affection, she is still unable to attain the inherently unattainable perfect sexual unity, and