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BY THE SAME AUTHOR  
HORACE AND HIS LYRIC POETRY  
LETTERS OF CICERO (Bles)

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## OVID RECALLED

*...le plus gentil et le plus ingénieux  
de tous les poètes grecs et latins.*

GASPAR BACHET, SIEUR DE MÉZIRIAC (1626)

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IVID  
RECALLED

BY  
L. P. WILKINSON

*Fellow of King's College  
and Lecturer in Classics in the  
University of Cambridge*

CAMBRIDGE  
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
1955

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TO  
*Dennis Proctor*

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## PRE FACE

COMPARATIVELY little has been written about Ovid lately, considering the volume of his work and its historic as well as intrinsic interest. In Büchner and Hofmann's survey, published in 1951, of work done on Latin language and literature since 1937 he claims only two pages out of two hundred and forty. It so happened also that Sellar, composing his classic *Roman Poets of the Augustan Age* (1892), died with the section on Ovid alone incomplete, and this gap has never really been made good. There is Ripert's charming *Ovide, Poète de l'Amour, des Dieux et de l'Exil* (1921), and Rand's all too brief *Ovid and his Influence* (1925) in the series 'Our Debt to Greece and Rome'; and more substantial, there is Hermann Fränkel's *Ovid, A Poet between Two Worlds* (1945). This last work suffers from what most critics seem to agree to be fanciful interpretation, and also from the convention that in the Sather Lectures quotation should be in English, which cannot do justice to Ovid of all poets; but it is based on wide reading and up-to-date knowledge, and I gladly acknowledge my debt to its informative notes in particular. Anyone approaching the study of Ovid must also be grateful to E. Martini's *Einleitung zu Ovid* (1933), with its reliable information on each work as well as on various aspects of him, and its select bibliographies.

The present book is not intended as a contribution to scholarship. It is addressed primarily to the Latinate reading public; but I hope it may also be of interest to students of the classics who are not experts on Ovid, for whom the references at the end of the volume (indicated by catch-figures in the text) are supplied, and still more, on the other hand, to readers who have forgotten their Latin or never had any, for whom I have provided the translations. These last are nearly all in heroic couplets, not because I have any illusions about the possibility of reproducing in English verse the streamlined neatness of Ovid's Latin, even when the full sense can

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## PREFACE

be fitted into the shorter medium in the more verbose language and fortune proffers appropriate rhymes, but simply from a hope that rhyme and metre of any kind may prove more palatable to the non-classical reader than plain prose would be. I have stuck to this traditional medium because it is the closest counterpart we have to the Ovidian elegiac (indeed, a direct descendant, as I shall indicate), compact, subject to clear restrictions, and familiar to all educated readers. Anything modern, such as *vers libre* or sprung rhythm, would be wholly foreign to the spirit of the original. And I have not scrupled to use various poetic licences and words that belong to the convention of heroic couplets.

It is true that our Augustan Age made translations into this medium of almost all Ovid's works; but these are sometimes so free or diffuse as to be more like paraphrases, and thus not very helpful to those who want a crib; and, moreover, their vocabulary tends to be artificial, whereas Ovid's was usually plain and direct, or to be outmoded now, whereas Ovid's was in the main contemporary. I do not mean that his diction was not poetic; but it was not quaint or *recherché* or archaic. As regards the *Ars Amatoria* I have less excuse, for two notable versions in couplets have appeared in our time. Mr Phillips Barker's (1931) is brilliant, not to say flashy, but he helps himself out with feminine rhymes, which lend variety but are not quite true to the Ovidian discipline; Mr B. P. Moore's (1935), more chaste artistically, maintains a high standard of excellence. I am therefore driven to confess that I have made my own versions partly because the attempt has been so enjoyable in itself, though partly also, as already stated, with the object of keeping as closely as I could to the Latin, couplet by couplet, for the benefit of those who need a crib. So they represent a compromise for which I must ask indulgence.\*

Ovid's writings are voluminous and too repetitive. As in the case of Wordsworth or Tennyson, only a selection can do him

\* Mr A. Watts' elegant translation of the *Metamorphoses* into heroic couplets, with reproductions of the etchings of Picasso, appeared while this book was in the Press; also Mr R. Humphries', and Miss Mary Innes', neither of which I have seen.

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justice. There is much in him that we can enjoy today, but the casual reader might well be discouraged in the search. References could be given to the selected passages, but it would be tedious for the reader to keep looking things up in separate volumes, even if he possessed the complete works. For these reasons I have quoted at length most of the passages that seem to me to deserve it, so that the book is somewhat in the nature of an anthology with running commentary.

I have added two chapters and an epilogue on the posthumous fortunes of the poet. The study of these from original sources could be the work of more than a lifetime, and I have pieced together my account from a limited number of secondary authorities who have dealt with various aspects. It seemed better to do even this than to leave the reader with a wholly false impression of Ovid's status by ending at his death. No ancient author, not even Cicero, has had so great a posthumous importance in proportion to his intrinsic merits. Ovid has been part of the cultural history of Western Europe; and the study of the classics is shorn of a great deal of its interest and justification if we overlook what it has meant to others down the ages, and how they have turned it to peculiar uses of their own, as Dante did in the case of Virgil, to the enrichment of the heritage passed on to us. For these chapters I must acknowledge a particular debt to F. J. E. Raby's *Secular Latin Poetry* (1934), R. R. Bolgar's *The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries* (1954) and Douglas Bush's *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry* (1932). The part of Rand's book that deals with *Nachleben* is tantalizingly short. To my great disappointment I have found W. Brewer's *Ovid's Metamorphoses in European Culture* (1933) unusable. It contains a mass of information, but this is wholly undocumented apart from a bibliography, and in many cases it is patent that the author is interpreting any similarity as influence.

I wish to thank friends who have read all or most of this book in typescript and made valuable suggestions, Mr George Rylands, Dr R. R. Bolgar, Mr W. A. Camps, Mr A. G. Lee and Mr D. W.

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## PREFACE

Lucas. They are in no way responsible for the faults that remain. Others have kindly given me help in various ways, notably Professor W. B. Stanford, Professor M. L. Clarke, Mr E. J. Kenney, Mr A. M. Jaffé, Mrs R. Bromwich, the staffs of the Warburg Institute and Stanford University Libraries. The Society of Authors as A. E. Housman's literary executor has given permission to quote the extract from an article of his in the *Journal of Philology*; and the frontispiece appears by permission of the Trustees of the National Gallery. To my College I am grateful for generous help with typing expenses, and to the staffs of the University Typewriting Office and University Press at Cambridge for their patient skill.

L. P. W.

CAMBRIDGE

May 1955

## INTRODUCTION

IF you ask anyone whether he likes Ovid, the chances are that he will reply that he did not care for what he read of him at school and has read nothing since. Further inquiry may elicit the fact that he was introduced to him by way of selections from the *Heroides* or *Fasti* or *Tristia*, works which have this in common, that they are not 'unsuitable' for schoolboys. But what are the preferences of a mature reader? Macaulay may serve as a witness, since he read Ovid all through at least once during his residence at Calcutta, and his biographer has obligingly assembled his opinions for us.\* Well, 'He was evidently surfeited by the *Heroides*, but pleased by the *Amores*. Of the *Ars* he said, "Ovid's best". 'The *Fasti* were almost too much for him', the *Tristia* he found 'a very melancholy set of poems'. With the *Metamorphoses*, though they contained 'some very fine things', he was disappointed at first reading, though he liked them better on re-reading. So the works that are commonly set before schoolboys are precisely those which a literary man of the world found least palatable. I should myself be inclined to begin my order of preference *Metamorphoses*, *Amores*, *Ars*, but the point remains: there is a case for offering the individual reader a reintroduction to Ovid.

And in a wider sense also there is, I venture to think, a case for offering our generation a reintroduction. For nearly two centuries Ovid has been out of fashion.† Suggested reasons for this, which are cumulative, I will postpone to where they belong chrono-

\* Sir G. O. Trevelyan, *Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* (1908 edn.), p. 725.

† A crude test is provided by references in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, where comparative figures are approximately as follows:

	Before Dr Johnson	Since Dr Johnson
Virgil	127	41
Horace	92	34
Ovid	66	5

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logically—in the Epilogue; here we are only concerned with the fact, and with posing the question whether the attitude of recent generations has not been, in a temporal sense, rather provincial. For six centuries, roughly from 1075 to 1675, Ovid's position as one of the greatest poets, comparable with that of Virgil, was scarcely challenged.\* Thus in the fourteenth century at one end of Europe Maximus Planudes was rendering the *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides* into Greek prose for Byzantine readers, a unique distinction in an age when all the cultural traffic was going the other way, while at the other his name was one to conjure with in the poetry of Dafydd ab Gwilym, who, though he may only have known him at second hand, invokes as his source of inspiration a fictitious 'Book of Ovid'.†

It is perhaps significant that Ovid has always appealed most to the young. The *Metamorphoses*, read at the age of seven or eight, before he knew French, was the first work of literature to delight Montaigne.‡ Petrarch, Boccaccio, Shakespeare and Milton are among those who seem to have enjoyed him especially in their youth. More surprising is the testimony of Wordsworth: 'Before I read Virgil I was so strongly attached to Ovid, whose *Metamorphoses* I read at school, that I was quite in a passion when I found him in books of criticism placed below Virgil.'§ At Eton Swinburne, about 1850, wrote Ovidian poems on Byblis, Clytië, and Apollo and Daphne; and there, a few years later, Robert Bridges' eyes were first opened to poetry by reading some elegies of Ovid.|| The most striking evidence, however, of his power to affect the young is Goethe's recollection in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*

\* In Miss H. R. Palmer's *List of English Editions and Translations of Greek and Latin Classics Printed before 1641* (1911), Latin poets figure in the following order: Ovid 74, Virgil 63, Horace 36, Terence 33, Seneca 30, Juvenal 15, Lucan 13, Persius 10, Martial 5, Plautus 2. Of course the figures are affected by the number of works each poet wrote.

† Cf. Chaucer's 'Lollius'. Dafydd uses 'ofyddiaeth' to mean love-poetry. For his relationship to Ovid see T. M. Chotzen, *Recherches sur la Poésie de Dafydd ab Gwilym* (1927), p. 143.

‡ Essays, I, 25.

§ Note on *Ode to Lycoris*.

|| G. Gordon, *Robert Bridges* (1946), p. 14.



## INTRODUCTION

of how he had struggled to vindicate him against Herder's strictures:\*

'Try as I might to take my favourite under my protection, saying that for a youthful imagination there could be nothing more delightful than to linger with gods and demigods in those gay and glorious surroundings and be a witness of their actions and their passions, . . . all that was not allowed to count: there was no genuine, first-hand truth to be found in these poems: here was neither Greece nor Italy, neither a primitive nor a civilised world, but mere imitation throughout of what already existed, such as one could expect only of an over-cultivated man. And when I finally tried to establish that whatever an outstanding individual produces is also 'Nature', and that among all peoples, old and new, it is always only the poet who has succeeded in being a poet, these facts were allowed to count for absolutely nothing in my favour, and I had to endure much, indeed I was nearly put off my Ovid by it.'

Again and again it is clear that the qualities in Ovid which appealed to these young poets were his fertility in invention, his power of conjuring up vivid pictures, his unphilosophic gusto, his preoccupation with love, and his knowledge of the human heart. They were also enchanted by the wild, free, romantic world he had imagined as background for his *Metamorphoses*, careless whether it was *Natur* or not. I would not suggest for a moment that we should put him back on his pedestal beside Virgil; indeed, I have tried to remain conscious throughout of the danger of overpraising through eagerness to redress the balance. It was absurd of Landor, reacting against his contemporaries, to say that Ovid's contest of Ajax and Ulysses is 'the most wonderful thing in the whole range of Latin poetry', and that it 'has more continued and unabated excellence than anything in Dante'.† But

\* I, p. 50; cf. p. 167 (Sophien Ausgabe, Bd. 26).

† Works VII, p. 240; IX, p. 271.

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has not the time come for the exile to have his case impartially reviewed, to plead at any rate to be brought nearer home—

non ut in Ausoniam redeam, nisi forsitan olim,  
but at least

ut par delicto sit mihi poena suo?

Is it not possible that a poet who could say so much to Shakespeare, Milton and Goethe may still be able to say more than we have realized even to us?

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>A.A.</i>	Ovid's <i>Ars Amatoria</i> .
<i>Abh.</i>	Abhandlungen.
<i>A.J.P.</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i> .
<i>Am.</i>	Ovid's <i>Amores</i> .
<i>A.P.</i>	<i>Anthologia Palatina</i> .
<i>Ber.</i>	Bericht.
<i>C.H.E.L.</i>	<i>Cambridge History of English Literature</i> .
<i>C.I.L.</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> .
<i>C.Q.</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i> .
<i>C.R.</i>	<i>Classical Review</i> .
<i>Cl. Phil.</i>	<i>Classical Philology</i> .
<i>F.</i>	Ovid's <i>Fasti</i> .
<i>G.L.</i>	<i>Grammatici Latini</i> .
<i>Her.</i>	Ovid's <i>Heroides</i> .
<i>Hum. Gym.</i>	<i>Humanistisches Gymnasium</i> .
<i>J.P.</i>	<i>Journal of Philology</i> .
<i>J.R.S.</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i> .
<i>M.</i>	Ovid's <i>Metamorphoses</i> .
<i>P.</i>	Ovid's <i>Epistulae Ex Ponto</i> .
<i>Ph. Qu.</i>	<i>Philological Quarterly</i> .
<i>P.L.</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , ed. Migne.
<i>P.M.L.A.</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i> .
<i>R.A.</i>	Ovid's <i>Remedia Amoris</i> .
<i>R.-E.</i>	Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, <i>Real-Encyclopädie</i> .
<i>Rev. ét. lat.</i>	<i>Revue des études latines</i> .
<i>Rev. hist. rel.</i>	<i>Revue de l'histoire des religions</i> .
<i>Rh. Mus.</i>	<i>Rheinisches Museum</i> .
<i>S.P.</i>	<i>Studies in Philology</i> .
<i>St. It. Fil.</i>	<i>Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica</i> .
<i>T.A.P.A.</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i> .
<i>Tr.</i>	Ovid's <i>Tristia</i> .
<i>Wien. Stud.</i>	<i>Wiener Studien</i> .

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Superior figures in the text refer the reader to the Appendix of References beginning on p. 445. An index of the passages quoted will be found on p. 471 and a list of modern works cited will be found on p. 463.