
This collection brings together eight papers published between 1986 and 1997, six of them translated from the original Italian by Matt Fox and Simone Marchesi. Individually, they contain perceptive readings of Ovid, Vergil and other Latin poets; together they provide a journey through what has been an exciting decade or so in the study of these authors and an illustration of how narratological and intertextual approaches have enriched our critical perspectives—a decade in which Alessandro Barchiesi’s has been a prominent and persuasive voice.

In ‘Continuities’ (pp. 9-28), recognition of intertextual allusion is crucial to how Barchiesi resolves textual problems in three passages of Ovid (Her. 3.44, Rem. Am. 281-86, Her. 10.81-98). Ovid’s Briseis recalls the Iliad, his Circe the Odyssey and Aeneid, his Ariadne Catullus and the Fasti. But acknowledging that intertextuality is fundamental to Ovid’s poetics risks a subjective critical over-emphasis on predictable allusiveness. This Barchiesi, building on Hinds’ reading of Tristia 1, forestalls by arguing that Ovid’s explicit instructions to his book in Tr. 1.1 and 1.7 take his poetics a stage further, to explore connections between his own works. ‘Now begins for him the most depressing of intertextual journeys, the backward path of retracing his own writing in light of his present misery, and seeing the sadness of the outcome as the last metamorphosis to be narrated’ (p. 28).

‘Narrativity and Convention in the Heroides’ (pp. 29-47) explores the potential for irony and distancing in the interplay of genres. Heroines like Penelope and Briseis (Her. 1, 3) are exempla in elegy, and the letters reflect elegy’s single-minded focus on love, a subjectivity reinforced by the choice of first person narrator. At the same time, these women belong in epic, and Ovid’s subtle intertextual play revisits their stories in an original way—not, as some earlier scholars argued, as parody or subversion. What Barchiesi calls ‘the hesitation between, coexistence of, and the shifting back and forth of codes and values’ (p. 34) is even more complex in Dido’s letter (Her. 7), for she is not a conventional epic heroine, but had already been drawn from elegy into epic by Vergil.

In ‘Voices and Narrative “Instances” in the Metamorphoses’ (pp. 48-78), the application of narratological theory to sections of the poem which have been thought to convey the poet’s ‘voice’ reveals unexpected ironies as Barchiesi shows how the identity of the narrator and the circumstances of narration (occasion, setting, audience) impact on the theme of the narrative. How, for instance, do we react to the ‘wisdom’

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1 References have been updated and some changes have been made, without altering the argument, and the translated articles have been edited by Fox and Marchesi. Details of first publication are listed with brief summaries in the preface (pp. 7f).


Numa learned from Pythagoras and brought to Rome, when we consider that the Augustans were well aware that the pupil lived some two centuries before the teacher and that Pythagoras’ injunctions to spare innocent animals and abstain from meat are delivered to the king famous for having instituted almost all the blood sacrifices at Rome?

‘Teaching Augustus through Allusion’ (pp. 79-103) examines the relationship between poetics and politics through readings of Horace’s and Ovid’s letters to Augustus (Ep. 2.1 and Tr. 2) which focus on the construction of Augustus as ‘didactic addressee’ (p. 79). Horace’s Augustus has many characteristics, often contradictory, and the delicate question of how to praise him is bound up with questions of classical moderation and taste. Ovid’s is a reader needing instruction who is given an intertextual lesson in how to read elegiac poetry that turns generic expectations of the relationship of real life and poetry inside out. ‘Tristia 2, if Augustus knows how to listen, is above all a lesson on one important aspect of poetry, its instability of meaning’ (p. 102).

Intertextual allusion takes the reader backwards in time, to an earlier text, although the writer works forwards from that text to the new one. In ‘Future Reflexive: Two Modes of Allusion and Ovid’s Heroides’ (pp. 105-27), Barchiesi asks what happens if the allusion is to the future (as in a prophecy) and argues that it then creates space for irony and literary self-consciousness. In this light he regards the Heroides as exploiting the contrast between ‘traditional’ epic and tragedy and ‘new’ and ‘private’ love elegy (p. 114). The letters’ reflexive concern with writing and texts reaches a climax with Heroides 20 and 21 (Acontius and Cydippe), which use Callimachean allusion to rehearse ideas about elegy. Barchiesi suggests that Augustan poets sometimes use allusion ‘to recreate a kind of myth of origins’ of their genre.

The study of allusion necessitates detailed, text-based analysis (and Barchiesi’s readings communicate an intense pleasure in this engagement with texts), but two chapters aim at more generalised theoretical overview and synthesis. ‘Tropes of Intertextuality in Roman Epic’ (pp. 129-40) concisely covers a wide field, identifying figures whose connection with ideas of transmission and interpretation makes them ideal vehicles for the creation of a nexus of generic awareness through indirect allusion: fate, fame, dreams, prophecies, ecphrasis. A post-conference summing up of common ground and divergences (‘Some Points on A Map of Shipwrecks’, pp. 141-54) provides a welcome survey of scholarly positions in this field of intertextuality. Barchiesi stresses that interpretations are not immutably fixed, either in the model or the imitating text, and that interpretation works both ways (Vergil may influence the way we read Homer) and that the study of intertextuality need not preclude other critical perspectives (like feminism or the ‘new historicism’). He has some interesting observations on how our recognition of allusion can engender a respect not previously accorded to some less-appreciated authors, balanced by a caveat against ‘the notion that what is complex is also beautiful’ (p. 115).

Finally ‘Ovid the Censor’ (pp. 155-61) situates books 2 and 3 of the Amores in the discourse of Augustan marriage legislation (an appendix argues that the five-book
‘first edition’ of the Amores is a literary fiction, thereby countering problems of too early a date). Starting from an allusion in Am. 3.11.39 to a speech of the censor Q. Caecilius Metellus Macedonicus in 131 BC Barchiesi argues that numerous Catullan allusions and ‘censorial’ terminology point Ovid’s exploration of tensions between nequitia (‘vice’) and traditional morality. This chapter is a more obvious example of what is an article of faith throughout Barchiesi’s work: the separation of formalist and historicist readings is not justified. Throughout this book we are constantly confronted with interpretations that merge poetics with politics, and an earlier generation would have looked in them for a definitive answer to questions like ‘Ovid’s attitude to Augustus’. Barchiesi shows here, as in his other work, that such a simplistic approach is inadequate: texts and contexts and their interpretation are too mobile, too dependent on readers. ‘Experience teaches that tracing intertextual relationships enriches and complicates reading, setting up dialectical tensions, more than it closes and simplifies interpretation’ (p. 146). This is certainly true of Speaking Volumes. Barchiesi has a gift for making theory work for philology and vice versa, and for presenting complex arguments lucidly. The collection makes his work more accessible to English-speaking readers and could serve as a concise and thought-provoking introduction to a significant area of classical criticism in recent years.\(^4\)

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\(^4\) See especially The Poet and the Prince: Ovid and Augustan Discourse (Berkeley 1997).