

# Bryn Mawr Classical Review

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**Luciano Nicastrì, *Classici nel tempo. Sondaggi sulla ricezione di Propertio, Orazio, Ovidio*. Salerno: Edisud, 2003. Pp. 258. ISBN 88-907-41-2. €20.00 (pb).**

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Luciano Nicastrì (N.), professor of Latin Literature at the University of Salerno, presents in this book a compilation of four of his essays on the survival of Propertius, Horace and Ovid, first published between 1992 and 1998. The essays are preceded by a short *Introduzione* (9-15) by Vittorio Amoretti and also a short *Premessa* by the author himself (17-19); they conclude with two indexes featuring a selection of passages (249-53) and the scholars (255-8) referred to in the work. The book belongs to the Collection *Lo scriba sapiente: studi e testi della tradizione classica, ebraica, cristiana*, directed by Nicastrì himself.

The book is clearly influenced by the author's Christian belief, "a man of faith in full practice of philology" (Amoretti, 15). The linking thread of the four essays (*Premessa*, 17-19) aims to analyze the vitality of the classics in subsequent generations of readers through a historical, critical, and religious approach. N. declares that he has made some minor changes in the wording of the essays; he has also updated the bibliography and has included translations of the texts (19).

(1) "*Propertio coturnato: l'itinerario poetico di Pomponio Gaurico elegiaco*" (21-113) is the longest essay and, with the fourth one, the most essentially philological.<sup>1</sup> It examines the revival of the elegiac genre (especially in Propertius' own fashion) as generally seen in humanistic poetry and particularly with Pomponio Gaurico (ca. 1481-2/1528-30). After a few pages describing Propertius' reception amongst Italian humanists (23-29), N. focuses on Pomponio Gaurico's 29 elegies, assessing their originality as compared with Propertius' and Pomponio's own secondary models from Theognis to Maximian, from Petrarch to his contemporaries. The following ideas are highlighted: the humanist applying a more negative, pathetic and even tragic dimension to his model; for example Propertius' usual leniency towards the lover's infidelity is turned into despair, jealousy and revenge in Pomponio; the absence in the latter of Propertius' erotic joy, which will even culminate in a desire to die; Pomponio's rebellion against the *servitium amoris* of his Latin models; the humanist's peculiar preface, paradoxically containing a *discidium*; the metamorphosis of the ego ("non son chi fui") under the burden of grief; the poet's tragic identification with Ajax (Elegy 12), and the increasingly intense dramatic quality within the second half of the *liber*. These subjects, among others, are dealt with in detail. In this first essay written in 1992, the study of the interaction between classicism and Christianity is left to the final paragraphs.

(2) In the second, more recent, essay,<sup>2</sup> "*Per una lettura cristiana di Orazio*" (115-153), far

from trying to "Christianize" Horace, N. aims to explore the way different Christian intellectuals read and used Horace's ideas. This essay is definitely based on the assumption of Christian faith shared by N. and his subject (120), thus the article's scope often becomes more religious than philological, philosophical, or literary. N. tries to find out if Horace and his Classics' admirers (from Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine or Prudentius to Paulinus of Nola) and especially the later ones (Luther, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Manzoni, among others) changed their approach in reading, interpreting, using and quoting the Classics, especially Horace, after having adopted a Christian point of view. N. finds Biblical elements in different Horatian subjects (*autarkeia*; *de contemnenda morte*; *ede, bibe, lude*), but above all he detects a sound Christian transvaluation of Horatian stoicism in the aforementioned authors; both stoics and Christians, renounce man's self-sufficiency.

(3) "Metamorfosi e conversione. Paolino di Nola lettore di Ovidio" (155-223).<sup>3</sup> In this third essay, as well as in the fourth and last one, N. deals with Ovid's gigantic figure and his Christian readers. This essay focuses on the classical and Christian intertextuality between Ovid (also Horace, among others) and Paulinus of Nola. Having compared both with Biblical texts (since, in N.'s opinion, reviving metamorphosis is already a Biblical issue) and after thoroughly studying the metamorphosis of the ego (*non sum qui fui*) and divine intervention (*Deus mutat speciem et tempora vitae*), N. concludes that Paulinus is "the poet of Christian metamorphosis", of the transformation of werewolf into a new and tame creature. In N.'s opinion, Paulinus did not adopt the issue of transformation from Ovid. Instead, he assumed it is a structural part of his own conversion experience, making it a principle of the mutual relationship between God and man.

(4) "Ovidio e i posterì" (225-48).<sup>4</sup> This essay, like the first, is essentially philological. N. studies the almost dialogical relationship Ovid creates between the writer and his audience as an intrinsic element within his work, his wish to perpetuate himself *ore populi*, and also his approach to a discussion with a vast audience so that the sudden break of this relationship with his audience (exile) really meant death in life for him. N. also studies the possibility of an allegorical interpretation (usually taken by Medieval readers when reading classical authors), which he defends for any period: "Oggi siamo noi i posterì di Ovidio, così come erano, poniamo nel XII secolo, altri uomini e altre donne -- tra questi Abelardo ed Eloisa che, prendendo sul serio Ovidio, trovarono l'*Ars* e le *Metamorfosi* molto utili per comprendere se stessi". For someone so deeply influenced by his vital religious code as N., resorting to an allegorical interpretation certainly makes a good end, a channel that helps to get wisdom from the universal sage and then reinterpret it according to its own spirituality. Finally, N. shows himself aware of Ovid's "Antiaugustanism" (he sees Julius Caesar's divinization as a political act to help seizure of power by Octavian, 244-5), thus revealing himself no naive reader of a silenced (by Augustus' dictatorship) and ill-treated author.

The book is clearly marked by the author's religious beliefs, but shows his knowledge and philological competence.

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#### Notes:

<sup>1.</sup> First published as "*Properzio coturnato*", in: *I Gaurico e il Rinascimento meridionale: atti del convegno di studi (Montecorvino Rovella, 10-12 aprile 1988)*, Alberto Granese et al. (edd.), Salerno 1992, pp. 173-246.

<sup>2.</sup> First published in: *Synodia. Studia humanitatis Antonio Garzya septuagenario ab amicis atque discipulis dicata*, U. Criscuolo et al. (edd.), Napoli 1997, pp. 751-777.

<sup>3.</sup> First published as "Paolino di Nola lettore di Ovidio", in *Ovid: Werk und Wirkung*.

*Festgabe für Michael von Albrecht*, Heidelberg 1998, pp. 680-730.

4. First published as "Aetates Ovidianae" in: *Lettori di Ovidio dall'Antichità al Rinascimento*, I. Gallo e L. Nicastrì (edd.), Napoli 1995, pp. 7-25.

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