
The present vogue for studying literary patronage has provided classicists with a respectable pretext for returning to the old biographical approach to Roman poetic texts, for rationalizing poetry into history. Historical information is squeezed from poems and built into hypothetical structures which then become the tools for interpreting the works from which they are derived. Thus the literary critic might well shudder simply at the title of Syme’s *History in Ovid*. A glance at chapters 5-9, especially pages 72-113, seems to confirm one’s worst fears: ‘The Friends of Ovid’ and ‘Patronage and Letters’.

‘More history than Ovid, some will say’, Syme himself observes in the first sentence of his preface. And that is likely to be the reader’s reaction to much of the first nine chapters. Even as history, it is heavy going. For few books make fewer concessions to the reader than does this. Tacitean terseness is carried to such an extreme that a strong act of will is needed to pursue the work from cover to cover. It is like reading footnotes without an accompanying text. Only a scholar of Syme’s stature could have published such a work. And that is why the book is as important as it is exasperating. There is a wealth of information, ideas, and conjectures here which is left for subsequent scholars to winnow, refine, and develop. Even the literary critic who throws hands up in despair over the first three quarters of the book should read the last three chapters which contain good examinations of poetry and government, of legislation and morals in Augustan times, and what is probably the most sensible treatment of Ovid’s *carmen* and *error* in print (pp.169-229).

Syme has a better sense than most literary critics that poems are not ‘documents’ to be read as if they were perversely written history. He is alive to the dangers of assuming (as, he notes, Nisbet and Hubbard assume of Horace) ‘that a poet must be eager to document an event as soon as it occurs’ (p.48). He supplies food for thought about the relationship to Augustus not only of Ovid, but of Horace and the elegists. Despite the ode to Lollius, he points out offhandedly, ‘no military action conducted by a general of Augustus receives commemoration from Horace.’ (p.49). Similarly his observation of Ovid’s persistent use of the appellation *dux* for Augustus: ‘nor is it clear that the prince of peace would derive pleasure from being so often styled “dux”’ (p.190). What is ‘clear’ or ‘obvious’, that is, assumed without question, by literary commentators is subjected to terse but telling scrutiny. Syme’s judgment of the motives of poets when they write on political subjects is a far remove from the still dominant school of Latin literary criticism which assumes widespread admiration,
gratitude and affection for Augustus among the poets of his age. Syme finds in Ovid a 'malicious frivolity or even muted defiance' towards the emperor, and 'a lack of tact that looks wilful' (p.190). This is a useful counterbalance to the sort of observation we find in L.P. Wilkinson who exclaims of the conclusion of the *Metamorphoses*: 'Flattery could hardly go further . . . we cannot help being alienated' (*Ovid Recalled*, Cambridge, 1955, p.255).

Syme has a sympathy for and an understanding of Ovid's relationship to Augustus which avoids the kind of condescension we find in Wilkinson. And his reaction to the foibles of conventional literary criticism ranges from amused bewilderment to barely disguised disgust. On p.189, note 6, he cites Otis' reference to the elegists as 'a concentrated opposition to Augustus' with the laconic addendum: 'Later defined as non-political anti-Augustanism'. Herrmann argued that Ovid's *error* was that he witnessed Livia 'presiding unclothed at the mysteries of the Bona Dea' while he was doing 'field work' for the *Fasti*; he is dismissed by Syme as 'another ingenious scholar', author of several 'verbose papers' (p.218). And Syme expresses ironic surprise that Thibault and Kenney should regard Herrmann's theory as 'a serious contribution' (Thibault), one that 'satisfies the evidence better than most' (Kenney) (p.218 and note 2).

'Ingenuity' here as elsewhere in Syme is a term of disapproval. (See for example his note on Gordon Williams, p.170, note 2). It would probably have made things easier for the reader had he avoided this kind of sarcasm in favour of a more direct criticism, since there will be those who interpret his remarks as praise. The book has difficulties enough without this. It challenges accepted views at almost every turn; it draws distinctions which literary critics rarely make between 'literary' and 'historical' events, distinctions which make little sense until parallels are adduced from Latin authors to illustrate them (p.5 and note 5, for instance); it offers suggestions about the history of Ovid's shaping of his works which send one reeling back to the original in surprise (p.3, note 1, for example). One senses the 'appeal of the poet becoming ever more seductive' to the author as one reads on, and that the 'scope and direction' of the work change, as he tells us they will in the preface.

In some ways *Ovid in History* is Syme at his best intellectually. What emerges is a sense of Ovid's duel with a not altogether lovely despot, a duel which the poet finally won, rather than lost in his exile. Perhaps it took the keen eye of a historian to move Ovid firmly away from the tawdry imperial flatterer we see in many literary studies. Unfortunately the book will never really touch the wider audience of Ovid's readers because the sheer wealth of its learning has made it an almost impenetrable jungle of information.
The field will be left, I suspect, to the more simplistic but more readable books whose judgment Syme attacks.

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Two papers delivered to the Macquarie Ancient History Association during 1978 have been published by that Association. Both are deserving of the wider publicity thus given to them.

The modern social tensions referred to by Professor Judge are those created by the opposing views enshrined in the Classical tradition on the one hand and Christian doctrine on the other—'the conflict between Athens and Jerusalem' as he describes it in his introductory paragraph. He demonstrates, by reference to papyri and a wide range of authors both Christian and Pagan from the first four centuries just how tangled these traditions have become, and how difficult it is to separate them in modern thought.

'I hear Catholic Nuns strenuously advocating humanistic ideas of self development, and humanists taking their stand on such distinctively Christian slogans as integrity and commitment. And so it was in late antiquity. It is not easy to say in individual cases how much is owed to Athens and how much to Jerusalem. But historically it is this conflict built into our cultural tradition that has brought us to the argumentative, progressive, open societies of the West.' (p.19).

Judge begins his argument by quoting four secular papyri from the villages of Egypt and dated between c250 and 350 AD. In each, Christianity is shown to have permeated rural peasant life, and by the mid-fourth century to have become an accepted institution not only in the cities but also in the more remote areas.

Not that Christianity is thus shown to have sprung up and taken society captive from below. The New Testament shows that the cities were the centre of early Christian influence and activity. The Pauline Churches were characterised by intellectual debate, and the style that had been the preserve of the philosophers was taken over and widely diffused in the early Christian context.