



Selections from Ovid, Read in Classical Latin, Robert P. Sonkowsky. Stephen G. Daitz, Series Editor. Jeffrey Norton Publishers, 1999. ISBN 1-579770-047-0. Pp. xi + 64.

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On this two-cassette set, Robert P. Sonkowsky reads aloud a variety of episodes from Ovid's hexameter *Metamorphoses* (on one and a half tapes), as well as a more circumscribed assortment (on the final side of the second tape) of Ovid's elegiac poetry including brief selections from the *Amores*, *Ars*, *Remedia*, *Fasti*, *Heroides*, *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*. The cassettes come in a package that includes a booklet containing a Preface, Other Acknowledgments, Table of Contents, and the Latin texts (from the Loeb editions) of the Selections read on tape accompanied by English translations in the public domain (by Dryden, Pope, Congreve, Addison, etc.). Sonkowsky concurs with the Series Editor, Stephen G. Daitz, that the performance should reflect "our best understanding of the restored phonetics of Classical Latin and intense regard for correct quantitative rhythm" (v), but his respect for metrical quantity does not vitiate his sensitivity to Latin word-accent. The whole package constitutes an impressive contribution to the oral performance history of Ovidian verse and will be invaluable in the classroom at both the secondary and tertiary levels.

As the *Metamorphoses* is currently the most studied of Ovid's poems in both schools and universities, it garners the most attention from Sonkowsky. He reads the opening cosmogony (*Met.* 1.1-88), Daphne and Apollo (1.452-567), Phaethon (2.1-343, with the omission of 2.241-259), Echo and Narcissus (3.339-510), Niobe (from the conclusion of

Arachne, 6.129-312), Procne and Tereus (6. 424-674), Daedalus and Icarus (8.183-235), Baucis and Philemon (8.611-724), Orpheus and Eurydice (10.1-85), the death of Orpheus (11.1-66), Pythagoras' philosophical exegesis (15.176-236), and the poet's sphragis (15.871-9). I was curious to hear how Sonkowsky's performance of Ovid's hexameters conveyed the narrative drive and descriptive speed of his epic poem, and very pleased indeed actually to be able to perceive the frequent enjambments by which the poet moves his narrative relentlessly forward.

The oral performances are histrionic (in the original sense of the word), in Sonkowsky's studiously dramatic recitation of the narrative. The listener can easily distinguish between the poet's tale and his characters' words in this carefully crafted performance. In 'Echo and Narcissus,' for example, Sonkowsky reads the poet's scene-setting in restrained tones and uses change of tone and pace to mark embedded discourse (Juno's punishment of Echo, 3.366-367; the dialogue of Narcissus and Echo, 3.380-391; the prayer of Narcissus' spurned lover, 3.405; and the amatory speech of Narcissus himself, 3.442-473, 477-479) and Ovid's emotional direct address to his character Narcissus (3.432-436). Students will particularly enjoy hearing Sonkowsky's articulate rendering of Ovid's punning verbal byplay in Echo's courtship of Narcissus (3.380-391).

Sonkowsky's recitation of Ovidian elegy is equally successful in capturing the characteristic couplet-by-couplet movement of elegiac verse. His performances, in fact, well capture Ovid's own early description of the elegiac couplet as rising through six feet and falling back in five (*sex mihi surgat opus numeris, in quinque residat, Am.* 1.1.27), for his tone of voice tends to rise in the hexameter and sink in the pentameter. When the sense demands otherwise, however, as for example when an elegy includes an internal monologue that rises to a crisis (as in *Am.* 1.6, 1.13, *Her.* 1) or when the poem is narrative (as in the *Fasti*, *Tristia*, and *Epistulae ex Ponto*), Sonkowsky adjusts his pace to respect the narrative or dramatic requirements of the performance without compromising the distinctive rhythm of the elegiac couplet. The only infelicity in the recording occurs in the selection from the *Fasti*, where there is an odd and, I am sure, unintended repetition of the initial syllable of *omnibus* (*F.* 1.416). Overall, however, the recording is extremely clear and it is otherwise free of technical glitches.

Although the publisher provides both Latin texts and (dated) English verse translations, the performances are best absorbed without

visual aids. Our students' (and often our own) experience of classical Latin is so closely focused on textual exegesis that the opportunity for aural pleasure and oral performance is rare in the classroom while sustained practice in pronunciation and recitation is almost impossible. At every level of undergraduate study I require students to read aloud the passages we translate and discuss in class, but I almost always encounter resistance to treating a dead language as though it were living and I have given up altogether on incorporating oral performance into graduate study. In particular, I have found it difficult to develop successful strategies for improving student pronunciation of Latin even before we tackle the oral performance of Latin verse. But with Sonkowsky's elegant recitations of Ovidian hexameter and elegiac poetry now available, along with tapes of selections from Catullus and Horace, Cicero, and Vergil, I will be able to exploit this relatively large performance archive in the classroom.