WINKLER, Martin. *Ovid on Screen.* A Montage of Attractions. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 444 p.[1]

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Reception has become a productive subfield within classical studies, and among the most productive scholars of classical reception has been Martin Winkler, professor of Classics at George Mason University, whose focus has been on cinema.[2] Aware of the importance of the 'seventh art' as one of the main narrative forms in the recent 'age of image' and interested in expanding the reach of classics, Winkler has developed in his work the idea of cinematic philology. His most recent book, *Ovid on Screen – A Montage of Attractions*, has its roots in a 15-hour course titled 'Cinemetamorphosis: Ovid and Cinema – A Montage of Attractions' that he taught at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG-Brazil) in 2013 as part of the 11th Archai International Conference (cf. SEMINÁRIO INTERNACIONAL ARCHAI, 2013   ). Starting from the visual quality of ancient poetry and the bonds between verbal and visual narratives across the centuries, the book explores the relationship between Ovid and the cinema. For Winkler, an affinity between the two is evident in, on the one hand, the canonical form that Ovid gave to many myths and mythological characters in his *Metamorphoses* and on the other,

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[1] I owe special thanks to Jim Marks for carefully proofreading the English version of this text.

[2] E.g., *Cinema and Classical Texts*: *Apollo's New Light* (2009) and *Classical Literature on Screen*: *Affinities of Imagination* (2017).

the inherently visual nature of Ovidian narratives, which can easily be described as 'cinematic'. Accordingly, his investigation proceeds in two main directions, considering both 'foreground Ovidianism', defined as the translation of Ovid's texts to the screen in films based on his poetry, and 'background Ovidianism', which involves identifying classical features in films that are not necessarily based on specific ancient works but that present elements, themes, or characters identifiable as Ovidian. In the process, Winkler discusses in detail films by Alfred Hitchcock, Alain Resnais, Stanley Kubrick, Jean Cocteau, Sergei Eisenstein, Fritz Lang, Ingmar Bergman, Max Ophüls, Helmut Dietl, Walerian Borowczyk, and others.

The book's front matter includes a dedication in Latin to Frederick Ahl, described as Winkler's mentor in Latin studies, and acknowledgments, also in Latin, to Ovid, Sergei Eisenstein, and Jean Cocteau, the figures who are most prominent in the book and the main models for its construction. A series of programmatic adages about cinema and the nature of images serve as epigraphs, focussing on the creative and poetic aspects of cinematic art and introducing the main issues discussed in the book and the connections between image and reality, life and art, and the poetic and metamorphic nature of cinema.

The book has eleven chapters distributed among five parts bracketed by a 'Proemium' and 'Sphragis'. The first part, 'Theory and Practice', introduces the fundamental concepts of 'cinemetamorphosis' and 'montage of attractions'. For Winkler, 'Cinemetamorphosis is a conceptual approach whose purpose is to apply a filmic perspective to Greek and Roman literature' (WINKLER, 2020, p. 3). In other words, 'it is *a retrospective interpretation and appreciation of the complexity of classical texts and images made possible by the invention of the motion-picture camera and projector and their digital heirs*' (WINKLER, 2020, p. 4-5, emphasis in original). Next are theoretical reflections on the plasticity of Ovidian style, the visual power of the *Metamorphoses*, and the possibility of transforming its narratives into screenplays.

In the second part, 'Key Moments in Ovidian Film History', Winkler investigates Ovid's influence on cinema in its formative years, with particular attention to the contributions of the Italian poet Gabriele

D'Annunzio,who is described as a key figure because he re-evaluated his opinions about cinema after considering it in association with Ovid and the idea of metamorphosis. Winkler goes on to compare the labyrinthine structure of some films with Ovid's narratives and style, showing that the maze in films can serve as both a theme and a narrative form.

The third part, 'Into New Bodies', presents in detail Winkler's argument about the role of transformation in the cinema in relation to Ovidian patterns of metamorphosis. He begins by asserting that the character of the 'seventh art' is in essence metamorphic, in that it involves giving movement to an assemblage of static images. Traversing the history of cinema, he makes note of key examples of on-screen metamorphosis, such as Méliès's magical cinema, Harryhausen's animation, and the effects made possible by computer-generated images. Indeed, Winkler observes, the cinema has not only put metamorphoses on the screen but also has undergone technical metamorphoses over time. Referencing specifically the *Metamorphoses*, Winkler suggests patterns to describe the sorts of transformations depicted in films, such as Pygmalion, Daedalus, and Medusa effects. This part of the book concludes with an analysis of horror and thriller movies, which are suggestive of the *Metamorphoses* in their presentation of the transformation of human bodies into those of wild beasts.

The fourth part, 'Love, Seduction, Death', focusses on the cinematic reception of love episodes from the *Metamorphoses* as well as Ovid's erotic elegy, especially the *Heroides* and *Ars Amatoria*. Winkler concentrates here on films that allude to the myths of Orpheus and Eurydice (Ov. *Met.* 10.1-85; 11.1-66) and Philemon and Baucis (Ov. *Met.* 8.611-724) and those with epistolary features in connection with the love letters that make up the *Heroides*. His aim is also to show how the cinema has represented amorous didacticism.

The last part, 'Eternal Returns', highlights the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis in *Metamorphoses* XV and its reception in cinema, especially in films dealing with change and permanence. According to Winkler, metempsychosis is a kind of metamorphosis closely related to the essence of cinema itself and to the nature of animation.

The end of the book deepens the reflections on the immortality conferred by art through a detailed analysis of Cocteau's Orphic trilogy and on the technical innovations provided by cinema, which Winkler associates with the myth of Icarus's boldness and fall.

The connection between Ovid and cinema is not completely new. In 1979, Italo Calvino ascribed to the *Metamorphoses* 'the same principle as cinematography' (CALVINO, 1999, p. 31). In a Brazilian context, Augusto de Campos stated that 'few literary works are so cinematographic' and that 'in the *Metamorphoses* all is *kinema*, pure movement, action becoming poetry', so the work might well be called 'the great cinemascopic thriller (with 15 books) in Latin literature' (CAMPOS, 1988, p. 191, my translation). Winkler's substantial merit is to provide a systematic and extensive study of Ovid's reception in cinema. Thus, in like manner as the *Metamorphoses* is an encyclopaedia of myth, assembling various narratives from the mythological tradition, Winkler's book is an encyclopaedia of Ovid's presence in cinematic works, mentioning more than two hundred films, containing numerous footnotes, and offering a wide bibliography.

By putting Ovid on the screen, Winkler creates a work doubly Ovidian and doubly cinematic. His book takes Ovid and cinema as its main subjects at the thematic level but also explores Ovidian and cinematic practice formally in its structure. In this respect, Winkler constructs a new version of film history based on an Ovidian point of view in a manner similar to the literary histories that, according to Hinds (HINDS, 1998, p. 52-98), Latin poets constructed for themselves in their works. Also, the excerpts in Latin by Winkler have Ovidian inspiration[3]. Concerning the cinematic structure of the book, it is noteworthy that several of the titles of chapters and sections evoke procedures from the seventh art - 'Fade-In', 'Fade-Out', 'End Credits' - while others allude to Eisenstein - 'Ovid's Film Sense', 'Not Ovid's, but How Ovidian!' The chapters, then, constitute a sort of Eisensteinian montage,

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[3] The initial dedication to Frederick Ahl quotes a verse from *Tristia* 1.5.8. The 'Sphragis' at the end is a montage of verses from the *Metamorphoses* (15.872; 876; 879) and *Tristia* (4.10.131-132), which are Ovidian sphragis.

making the whole work a highly cinematic written version of a long film documenting this new Ovidian history of cinema.

Also noteworthy is the choice for the book's front cover, which reproduces an illustration of Orpheus with his lyre by Cocteau. Orpheus symbolizes ancient and classical poetry; he is the archetypical poet who inspires other artists, who immortalizes in song his lover and poetry itself. Ovid, Eisenstein, Cocteau's Orpheus… Winkler constructs his book with an eye to these great masters of verse, cinema, and song. It is not by chance that precisely these three artists are mentioned in the book's initial acknowledgements.

The English text is clear, and the book makes for a pleasant read, though infrequent digressions amid the discussions interfere with the linearity and development of the argument. For example, on p. 127-128, a long comment on Honoré's film *Métamorphoses* interrupts reflections on the labyrinth in Ovid's Daedalus episode in *Metamorphoses* VIII. The reader may wonder whether this arrangement is an effort to make the form reflect the content. Whatever the intent, the digression breaks the continuity of Winkler's narrative. Also, the index at the end would have been more user-friendly if the titles of the films were listed separately.

On its content and propositions, it is fair to say that the book displays a theoretical-methodological antinomy concerning the notion of classical reception. Often, the author manifests a conservative approach, even expressly ascribing to a 'mainly positivist or evidentiary procedure' (WINKLER, 2020, p. 8). Thus, 'While much recent scholarship applies modern theories to Ovid, I proceed largely but not exclusively in the opposite direction: by applying, as it were, Ovid's texts to a modern medium and, to some extent, *its* theories' (WINKLER, 2020, p. 8, emphasis in original). This methodology is positivist in that '*its* theories' are understood as something fixed and stable and immanent in the text that is just waiting for a reader to identify them - rather as than variable and changeable constructions made by readers during the act of reading and necessarily pervaded by modern theories and the previous tradition. In this context, evoking the idea of *philologia perennis et universalis* suggests, again, a positivist point of view, ascribing to the classics

features that will become pervasive in later works. There are also some references to modern approaches and theories with ironical hints, such as 'post-modern nuggets', 'disciples of deconstruction' (WINKLER, 2020, p. 126), and 'deconstructionists' (WINKLER, 2020, p. 128).

Despite this explicitly conservative perspective, however, the analyses and discussions throughout the work suggest, in practice, something different and highly modern (or even post-modern). Thus, behind the 'Ovidian theories', there is a reader, Martin Winkler, who constructs them according to the texts that he has read. Behind the transformation of Ovidian texts into cinema, the book indirectly expresses recent and highly relevant theoretical notions, in particular the possibility of re-reading ancient works from a contemporary and cinematic perspective. Winkler has, then, enacted the possibility of an author creating his own precursors in Borges's sense, that is, without the limits of linear time. In Winkler's book, the cinema becomes a precursor of Ovid's visual poetry in like manner as Ovid can, at the same time, be regarded as one of the precursors of cinema.

My critiques here are not meant to diminish the great value of this book. Indeed, the antinomies just referred to could be easily explained with reference to the tension between the modern approach to ancient poetry through the cinema and the desire to reaffirm the value of classical studies, which has historically been associated with philology and similarly conservative theoretical approaches. *Ovid on Screen* is, without a doubt, a very rich contribution to literary and cinematic studies and will be of interest to students, researchers, and professors in the areas of classical and film studies and also to lovers of the arts outside the academy. Winkler's re-readings from an Ovidian perspective result in innovative interpretations of several films and of the history of film. At the same time, his cinematic perspective provides the basis for an innovative exegesis of Ovid's poetry. Freeing himself from the fetters of linear time, Winkler's cinematic text indeed succeeds in putting Ovid on screen.

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