Marguerite Johnson, *Ovid on cosmetics: Medicamina faciei femineae and related texts*. London-New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, xiii+171 pp., ISBN 978-1-4725-0657-3.

Marguerite Johnson (who has books on Sappho, Boudicca, a source collection with Terry Ryan on gender and sexuality, and *Alcibiades and the Socratic Lover/Educator* with Harold Tarrant) offers us this new volume, *Ovid on Cosmetics*, in a Bloomsbury series on Ovid (alongside other books by Rebecca Armstrong, Sarah Annes Brown, Yasmin Hadskell, Paula James, and Genevieve Liveley). Professor Johnson aims to provide a comprehensive overview of Ovid's technical writing on cosmetics, a subject that will come as a surprise to the many readers who are familiar with Ovid mainly through his epic poem the *Metamorphoses*. Johnson's unusual subject, cosmetics (and Ovid's poems relating to this), is something that until recently would have been downplayed as a topic worthy of serious scholarly interest. The fascination that we all now seem to feel for the intimacies of daily life in antiquity (Kelly Olson's *Dress and the Roman Woman: Self-Presentation and Society* [2008] offers a good parallel to this book) makes Marguerite Johnson's welcome subject a timely one.

In *Ovid on Cosmetics* Marguerite Johnson provides a Latin text and translation plus commentary (geared to the English translation and explaining the logical or narrative sections of each poem, rather than a traditional line-by-line account) on the *Medicamina Faciei Feminae* (chapter 1: Ovid's 100-line didactic poem on women's cosmetics), *Amores* 1.14 (chapter 2: "Corinna" has a "bad hair day" and loses her locks to a *calamistrum*, a "curling iron"), *Ars Amatoria* 3.101-250 (chapter 3: advice to women on, amongst other matters, hair, clothes, hygiene, cosmetics, and hairdressing), *Remedia Amoris* 343-356 (chapter 4: how the sight of the cosmetics that woman will use on her face can cure a suitor of his infatuation), and *Ars Amatoria* 1.505-524 (chapter 5: advice to men on the best way to cultivate their bodies). There is a long Introduction offering background information and interpretations to the five chapters that covers the following topics: Greek and Roman attitudes to bodily beautification; "the Roman body" (bathing, cosmetics, mirrors); Ovid on *cultus*, *munditia*, and *ars*; Ovid and Augustus' moral legislation; and a brief discussion of the literary and generic characteristics of the *Medicamina*, the *Amores*, the *Ars Amatoria*, and the *Rededia Amortis*. There are four appendices (1: Notes on the Latin text; 2: Glossary of cosmeceutical terminology [the adjective "cosmeceutical" usually indicates cosmetic products with biologically active ingredients

claiming to enhance skincare efficacy]; 3: Ingredients in the *Medicamina* recipes; 4: Roman weights and measures and equivalents [the basis for her own "recipes"].)

The *Medicamina Faciei Feminae*, perhaps because it is the one "free-standing" poem in her collection, is at the heart of Marguerite Johnson's edition - just as her book title suggests. Part of the aim of her volume – as well as elucidating cosmetic lore - is to make the *Medicamina* more accessible and more a part of what students and scholars understand as Ovid's corpus. Concerning the *Medicamina* Johnson elucidates her mode of interpretation as follows: "Most of the few publications on the work focus on its didactic nature, yet its sensual qualities are also important. Dispensing with the hexametric tradition of instructional poetry and adopting with the hexametric tradition of instructional poetry and adopting the elegiac meter of the *Amores*, Ovid speaks to his female audience on an intimate topic in an intimate manner" (p.23). Johnson also believes that Ovid's stance in this strange poem is essentially a feminist one: he "cultivates female skin, instructs and assists in beautification and holds an elegiac mirror for woman to gaze at the finished product. The demarcation point of privacy and secrecy that traditionally marginalizes the woman at her toilette is thereby breached by Ovid in a poetic exercise that traverses gendered separation" (p.23). This later position is one that Johnson repeats in her versions of the other poems within *Ovid on Cosmetics*. In all of the pharmaceutical detail of *Ovid on Cosmetics* it is easy to forget these two lines of interpretation – and that Johnson is as interested in literary criticism as she in *Realien*.

Ovid on Cosmetics foregrounds Marguerite Johnson's fascination with Ovid's surprising technical knowledge relating to women's and men's attempts at self-beautification. Her book title is quasi scientific. This becomes clearer in the commentary section of the book, especially that devoted to the *Medicamina Faciei Feminae*. Approximately two thirds of Marguerite Johnson's commentary on the *Medicamina* is devoted to Ovid's five cosmetic "recipes" (these are: a mixture to increase the brightness of the complexion; a recipe to produce a smooth complexion; a combination designed to improve the skin of the whole body; a mixture that will presumably remove bodily swellings; and a fifth prescription designed to remove blemishes from the face; the five concoctions comprise about 50% of the extant poem). She begins her discussion of each of these with a proper and almost modern "cookbook recipe", indicating ingredients, portions, weights, and methods. Johnson attaches notes detailing how these "treatments" (*medicamina*) worked according not just to Ovid but also to ancient writers such as Aristotle, Theophrastus, Celsus, Pliny, Scibonius Largus, Pliny, Dioscorides, and others. Ovid and and the other writers from antiquity who touch on comparable prescriptions and ingredients seemed to think these things really did work. From what Marguerite Johnson has to say in her commentary, so

do we. That is just what many readers will hope to learn from a book like this one. Johnson is especially interested in how Ovid's poems offer parallels for modern culture.

Johnson technical enthusiasm may be best displayed in the commentary on the *Medicamina*, but it is also to the fore in her notes on the other supporting poems and portions of poems in *Ovid on Cosmetics*. These technical sections are perhaps the most novel parts of her fascinating book. In the notes on *Amores* 1.14 there is information concerning hairdressing, the *calamistrum*, and wigs. In the notes on the *Ars Amatoria* 3.101-250, there is a discussion on hygiene and on how to disguise the use of cosmetics, and on hairdressing. The chapter notes on the *Remedia Amoris* 343-356, and *Ars Amatoria* 1.505-524 are brief (as are the Latin passages) and offer less detail. They concern more generally Ovid's themes of personal cultivation (*cultus*) and cleanliness (*munditia*).

Who were the women and the men to whom and of whom Ovid writes in these poems? Johnson suggests : "Rather than the simplicities of the idealized *matronae* of epic and historical texts, or the *mertrices* (prostitutes) and *puellae* ('girls', `girlfriends') of the elegiac poets, or even the ghastly hybrids of the wife-whore of satire, Ovid's women are sophisticated, classy, and well-groomed urbanites" (p.17). But who are these "classy and well-groomed urbanites"? Citing *AA* 33-34 (p.20) Johnson suggests that these urbanites were not free born married women, *matronae*, but *meretrices* and freedwomen or *libertinae*. The dividing line, however, between *matronae* and *libertinae* cannot always have been easy to draw, she believes (citing Jasper Griffin, Katarina Volk, and Lindsay Watson – p.20-21). Such may have been the women of the *Medicamina* and the *Ars* and *Remedia Amoris*. The women of the *Amores*, if not their audience, were *meretrices* or prostitutes (p.28). The men addressed in *Ars Amatoria* 1.505-524 were "sexually excitable (perhaps predatory) men" (citing Peter Greene, p.28), presumably well born, air-headed and as yet unmarried. They were not like us, in other words, and their interest in cosmetics and cosmeceuticals cannot necessarily be confused with the modern one. It feels at times in *Ovid on Cosmetics* as if we are meant to see Ovid's men and women as fellow humans with most of the same cosmetic enthusiasms as we do, and that such interests are perhaps to be found in all large urban societies. But Marguerite Johnson does not belabor this controversial point, nor does she need to in such an technical book.

For whom is *Ovid on Cosmetics* aimed? The intended readers are social historians of Rome above all (compare, for example, Mark Bradley's collection *Smell and the Ancient Senses*); readers and students with a concern for gender and sexuality (for whom the audiences of these poems would be particularly of interest); historians of medicine, and of course literary historians, critics, and students of Ovid. There is not enough Latin in the

book (there is about 350 lines) for it to become the basis for an upper level Latin course, but it could be used profitably in conjunction with a selection from, for example, the *Amores*. *Ovid on Cosmetics*, linking literary criticism with the study of material culture and gender and sexuality, is an absorbing addition what is becoming to a bourgeoning scholarly genre.

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