

Ovidian Bibliofictions and the Tudor Book: Metamorphosing Classical Heroines in Late Medieval and Renaissance England. Lindsay Ann Reid.

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Ovidian Bibliofictions and the Tudor Book coins an intriguing concept at the crossroads of the history of the book, sixteenth-century Ovidianism, and gender studies. Reid questions the material identity of books and the historical conditions of the book trade as represented within literature, noting a fruitful negotiation between the physicality of books and the “supraliminal realm of imagination” (2) of the receptor, through an in-depth study of (pseudo-)Ovidian heroines’ fictionalizing the transmission of their own texts. The *praeceptor amoris* retells stories, offering a bibliogenesis (through a network of analogues and shifting viewpoints) and evincing his preoccupation with the fragile physical status and malleable nature of literature. Reid introduces these metatextual hermeneutics using Ovid’s model — as he experiments in “literary revisions and focalisations” (2) with an eye to posterity — to question how it fashioned the making of an Ovidian Tudor poetic identity.

Vernacular adaptations of the Ovidian canon supplemented by an appendix on Tudor Latin editions of Ovid are put in perspective as Reid looks back to Chaucer’s time

and forward to Shakespeare's, to finely investigate "the emergent modes of printed book production in conjunction with the metaphors of literary transmission" (3), in what she clearly posits as gendered intertextual Ovidianism.

A welcome addition to reflections on periodization in the study of Ovidianism, this study emphasizes "unexplored continuities rather than a widely acknowledged break in hermeneutic practice" to show "how the treatment of Ovidian characters in medieval vernacular tradition remained influential" (30). Thus Reid broadens the definition of Ovidianism as "the indirect evocation of the recognizable narrative substance and/or sentiments of Ovid's poetry" (33) rather than a direct engagement with Ovid's Latin. She posits Chaucer's fruitful influence on Tudor writing by her astute reading of the "Wife of Bath's Prologue" in the wider context of the *querelle des femmes*, showing both Alisoun and Jankyn could claim "Naso magister erat" (40–46). The compositional influence of Chaucer's subsequent editors then shaped Tudor reception: her analysis of Stow's 1561 *Workes of Geffrey Chaucer*, which added apocryphal poetry with a profeminist stance, demonstrates that readers saw Chaucer as a source and an "active participant" in the transmission of Ovidian material (63–68). In chapter 4, "Ovidian Heroines, Epistolary Elegy, and Fictionalized Materiality," she shows that Richard Pynson's 1526 edition of *The House of Fame* similarly supplements Dido's portrait with a 200-line rewriting of *Heroides* 7, enhancing Dido's fictional materiality in Chaucer.

Chapter 2, "Ovidian Heroines in the *Querelle des femmes*," explores the crossovers between Ovid and neglected vernacular pamphlets about women's defamation to show a "textual aesthetic of permeability" (39); this material instability of texts is illustrated by the practice that printers had of binding this material together, thus exacerbating a Tudor *querelle*. In this literature, mythological heroines are polysemous exempla, within texts or within the paratextual bibliofictions framing their creation and marketing, thereby engaging with Ovid as "an ideological and aesthetic precedent" (57). Reid convincingly explores the conversation between these scarcely read pamphlets in historical contexts, arguing that Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* dramatizes the continuities in the opposed readings of Ovid by means of Katharina's and Bianca's successive emblemizations (63).

Yet all female paragons (or their counterparts) are not necessarily Ovidian. Reid contends that they are made Ovidian in a compound manner throughout a wide survey of material, from Skelton's *Boke of Phyllyp Sparowe* (1505) to 1590s love epistles. Chapter 3, "'Hir Name, Allas! Is Published so Wyde': *Fama*, Gossip and the Dissemination of a Pseudo Ovidian Heroine," thus explains how Chaucer's Criseyde becomes "an honorary Ovidian heroine" (70), showing the "conceptual grafting of a postclassical Trojan heroine onto a classical Ovidian canon" (93). The chapter follows the metaphors of textual transmission, reflected by Shakespeare's open treatment of Cressida that turns her into "an interpretative amalgam," "compounding all prior readings of her text" (105) in *Troilus and Cressida*. Chapter 5, "The Anglo-Ovidian Heroines," provides numerous examples from the 1590s of fictional female authors, taken from English chronicle history, molded on Ovidian epistolary precedent, and

thereby conferring on them Ovidian status. Ovidianism thus redefined unveils a dazzling intertextuality while the layers of embedding of the *Heroides* are explored in a felicitous choice of examples — a thought-provoking and theoretically engaging reading.

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