

The Ovidian Vogue: Literary Fashion and Imitative Practice in Late Elizabethan England. Daniel D. Moss.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014. xii + 256 pp. \$65.

The Ovidian Vogue explores an impressive range of mostly late Elizabethan narrative poetry and thereby contributes an interesting and valuable argument to the current body of work on Ovidianism in the period. The originality of Moss's study is in the argument

that poets are not just imitating but actively appropriating the Ovidian corpus to both compete with each other and to identify their poetic position within late Elizabethan culture. This includes bids for patronage, establishing poetic maturation and development, and the concurrent repudiation of Ovidian reference, especially in the early years of the seventeenth century. Ovidianism is described as “an immediate allusive language through which poets competed with one another in the literary marketplace, addressing readers, patrons, and audiences increasingly familiar with Ovidian materials and styles” (6).

Indeed, the starting points of several of Moss’s discussions are not particularly original (on the Ovidian elements, for example, of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* and *Venus and Adonis*), but it is this concern with poetic self-representation that instigates some illuminating readings and impressively broad intertextual connections. Particularly interesting are the implicit comparisons made between what the author is doing in adaptation or representation of Ovidian material and their own self-fashioning. For example, *Titus* is read as an allegory of the Ovidian vogue itself; it is argued that Thomas Nashe’s *Choice of Valentines* constitutes a metaphoric commentary on the creation and reception of imitative poetry in the symbolic (and actual) dildo, “an outrageous bid for attention, appealing to certain types of readers and perfect for rereading and transcription, but sterile and puerile” (37); and that Shakespeare’s *Venus*, in picking the metamorphosed flower, “signals the ephemerality and indeed sterility of poetic imitation” (48).

Moss differentiates here between authors who aim to work within the Ovidian vogue, such as Beaumont, Lodge, Marlowe, and Shakespeare, and those who attempt to set themselves apart from it, such as Chapman, Donne, and Jonson. The ironic caveat regarding the latter group is that “their repeated efforts to signal their independence from the tyranny of fashion could likewise fall short, proving them more obsessed with the imitation of Ovid even than their peers” (18–19). Some of these writers evidently considered Ovidianism a youthful posture, “appropriate only for a poetic apprenticeship or first publication,” while others “revisited Ovid time and again” (38); yet a thematic concern with Ovidianism as a passing fad is common in both groups. *The Ovidian Vogue* offers engaging and fascinating readings of the “intertextual promiscuity” (36) of, among other texts, the aforementioned *Choice of Valentines*, Spenser’s fifth book of *The Faerie Queene*, and Michael Drayton’s *Englands Heroicall Epistles*, coming to some intricate and possibly contentious (in the case of Spenser) conclusions. The work’s final chapter reads John Donne as essentially post-Ovidian, “accomplishing with vastly more sprezzatura than Chapman the repudiation of the mythographic style and vitiated eroticism then in fashion” (153), yet with the poetic self-consciousness that this is as much a posture as those who would claim affinity with the Roman poet.

Moss does overlook recent minor scholarship on some areas discussed here (for example, regarding the figure of Procne and *Venus and Adonis*’s thematic preoccupation with death). In addition, a full consideration of George Chapman’s humorless continuation of Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* would have been interesting in the

chapter on Chapman, but it is only mentioned briefly in the conclusion. Also, very occasionally there are some odd word choices (“rubes,” for example [56]), but this is overall a lively, witty, articulate, and detailed work. *The Ovidian Vogue* thoroughly explores the appropriately protean aspects of Ovidian reference and imitation and of “an Ovid for virtually any poetic occasion” (10), examining the subsequent range of poetic responses to both the literary fashion and individual Ovidian texts in an ambitious and extremely well-informed body of research. Moss constructs a convincing argument that Ovidianism was “the premiere means of locating oneself among peers and rivals . . . at this transitional moment — as private patronage was giving way to market-driven professionalism . . . [and] a nimble, readily adjustable allusive posture proved indispensable to ambitious young poets” (181). His book thereby makes a valuable contribution to the critical body of work on the texts, intertexts, and contexts of Elizabethan Ovidianism.

SARAH CARTER, *Nottingham Trent University*