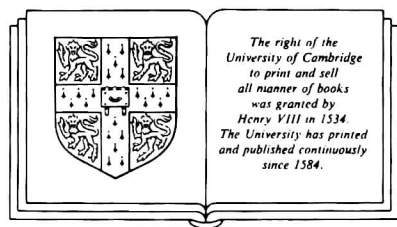


# OVID RENEWED

Ovidian influences on literature and art  
from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century

edited by  
CHARLES MARTINDALE  
University of Sussex



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In memoriam  
L. P. WILKINSON (1907–1985)  
scholar, man of letters,  
*anima naturaliter Ovidiana*

en ego, cum caream patria vobisque domoque,  
raptaque sint, adimi quae potuere mihi,  
ingenio tamen ipse meo comitorque fruorque:  
Caesar in hoc potuit iuris habere nihil.  
quilibet hanc saevo vitam mihi finiat ense,  
me tamen extincto fama superstes erit,  
dumque suis victrix omnem de montibus orbem  
prospiciet domitum Martia Roma, legar.

Although I am without fatherland and you and home,  
and although everything which could be taken from me  
has been snatched away, yet I find company and pleasure  
in my own *ingenium* – Caesar could have no jurisdiction  
over that. Let anyone who wants end this life of mine  
with a cruel sword; yet though I shall be dead, my fame  
will live, and as long as warlike Rome looks out victorious  
from its hills at the whole world which it has conquered,  
I shall be read.

*Tristia* 3.7.45–52

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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COLIN BURROW is writing a D. Phil. thesis on *The English Humanist Epic, 1580-1614* at New College Oxford, and has been elected to a Research Fellowship at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge.

HELEN COOPER is a fellow of University College, Oxford, and the author of *Pastoral: Mediaeval into Renaissance* (Ipswich and Totowa NJ 1977) and *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales* (London 1983).

CHRISTOPHER GROCOCK wrote his thesis on Gilo of Paris' *Historia Vie Hierosolimitane* at Bedford College, London, and is editing the work for the Oxford Medieval Latin Texts series. He has also edited the *Ruodlieb* (Warminster and Chicago 1985).

BRUCE HARBERT, formerly lecturer at Merton College, Oxford, is Roman Catholic chaplain at the University of Sussex; he is the author of articles on medieval literature and theology, and editor of *A Thirteenth-Century Anthology of Rhetorical Poems* (Toronto 1975).

DAVID HOPKINS, lecturer in English at Bristol University, is the author of *John Dryden* (Cambridge 1986), and has a special interest in Dryden's translations from the Latin.

LAURENCE LERNER, poet and critic, Professor of English, formerly at Sussex University, now at Vanderbilt, is the author of numerous books including *Love and Marriage* (London 1979) and *The Literary Imagination* (Brighton 1982).

NIGEL LLEWELLYN is lecturer in the History and Theory of Art at Sussex University; he contributed to *Virgil and his Influence*, has a special interest in eighteenth-century art and historiography, and is writing a book on English Renaissance funeral monuments.

CHARLES MARTINDALE, lecturer in Classical and Medieval Studies at Sussex University, shortly to move to Bristol University, is the editor of *Virgil and his Influence* (Bristol 1984) and author of *John Milton and the Transformation of Ancient Epic* (London and Sydney 1986).

#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

STEPHEN MEDCALF, Reader in English at Sussex University, has published on Virgil, Golding and *The Later Middle Ages* (London 1981), and is writing a study of the poetry of T. S. Eliot.

JANE MILLER wrote her thesis (under the name Jane Keen) at the University of Southampton entitled *The Perseus and Pygmalion Legends in later Nineteenth-Century Literature and Art, with special reference to the Influence of Ovid's Metamorphoses* (1983).

A. D. NUTTALL, formerly Professor of English at Sussex University, is now a fellow of New College, Oxford; his writings on Shakespeare include *The Winter's Tale* (London 1966), *Two Concepts of Allegory* (London 1967) and *A New Mimesis* (London and New York 1983).

NIALL RUDD is Professor of Latin and Dean of Arts at Bristol University; his writings on Latin literature include *Lines of Enquiry* (Cambridge 1976) and *Themes in Roman Satire* (London 1986).

RACHEL TRICKETT is Principal of St Hugh's College, Oxford; her publications include *The Honest Muse: A Study in Augustan Verse* (Oxford 1967), and she has contributed to *Augustan Studies: Essays in honour of Irvin Ehrenpreis* (Newark, University of Delaware 1986).

NORMAN VANCE is lecturer in English at Sussex University; he has written widely on nineteenth-century literature, and is author of *The Sinews of the Spirit* (Cambridge 1985).



## PREFACE

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Ovid would have thought Britain little better than Tomis, to which Augustus maliciously confined him for the last years of his life. But he would perhaps be pleased that the *ultimi Britanni* have come to share in that *cultus* to which he had so unswervingly committed himself and to which he made no small contribution. His culture, handed down by tradition, may now be drawing to its close. The disappearance of classics from most of our schools and its shrinkage in universities is a ruination, and it is still too soon to say what will eventually survive the wreck. But if nothing else, the crisis has brought classicists to speak more openly of the importance of their subject for understanding the world in which we live, so many aspects of which – its languages, its political structures and discourses, its thought, its art, its law – are grounded in the civilisations of Greece and Rome. So as classics has declined, the study of the classical tradition has actually burgeoned.

This book was designed as a successor to the present editor's *Virgil and his Influence: Bimillennial Studies*. It had its immediate origin in the Faculty Latin Reading Group of the University of Sussex and the enthusiastic discussions of its members: Bruce Harbert, Larry Lerner, Michelle Martindale, Keith McCulloch, Stephen Medcalf, Tony Nuttall, Norman Vance. It is still too soon to write a complete account of Ovid's influence (at times almost coterminous with the history of education), but these essays provide material for such an account. Contributors were asked to provide something critical and comparative, not merely descriptive, but otherwise no attempt was made to enforce uniformity; differences of opinion and approach will be evident. The focus is primarily on English literature, but within the wider European cultural context.

The book was not initially planned as a memorial volume for L. P. Wilkinson, but as it took shape so many of the contributions appeared to continue and elaborate his interests that it seemed appropriate to dedicate the collection to his memory, which his widow has kindly given us permission to do. L. P. Wilkinson wrote what is still the best general introduction to Ovid in English; he made a substantial contribution to the study of *Nachleben*; he always saw classics as part of the European cultural tradition. His humane approach, together with the very ease and grace of his writing, perhaps led him to be underestimated within the austere and often limited world of classical scholar-

## PREFACE

ship. Like Ovid he wore his learning lightly, but there can be no doubt about the enduring value of his books on Latin poetry (all published by CUP): *Horace and his Lyric Poetry* (1945), *Ovid Recalled* (1955, later abridged as *Ovid Surveyed*), *Golden Latin Artistry* (1963), arguably his masterpiece, and *The Georgics of Virgil* (1969). And, like Ovid's, his books are read.

I am grateful to Professor E. J. Kenney, another distinguished Cambridge Ovidian, who gave help and advice in the early stages of the project (he is in no way to be held responsible for the results), and to the staff of Cambridge University Press for their assistance throughout.

Unless otherwise stated the texts of Ovid cited are as follows: OCT for the amatory poems and *Tristia*, Palmer for *Heroides*, Teubner for *Metamorphoses* (Anderson) and *Fasti*.

C.A.M.

*Shoreham-by-Sea*  
*December 1986*

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# I

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## INTRODUCTION

*Charles Martindale*

### I

SI MONUMENTUM REQUIRIS, CIRCUMSPICE. Ovid is everywhere. His importance for European literature is immense. Medievalists call a whole epoch the *aetas Ovidiana* (what this means in practice is shown in Christopher Grocock's essay on Gilo of Paris). A list of the major English poets alone on whom he has been a key influence is impressive: Chaucer, Gower (in some ways the leading Ovidian of the Middle Ages, as Bruce Harbert shows), Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, Pope. On the arts, both fine and decorative, his influence has been at least as great. Ovidian stories have provided the material for innumerable musical compositions – the first opera, Peri's *Dafne* (c. 1597), had an Ovidian subject. He has influenced the history of gardening from the Renaissance onwards: the interplay of nature and art, the exotic world of the antique gods conjured up in grotto, grove and statue, the shifts and transformations which bedazzle the visitor's eyes, including automata worked by hydraulic systems to create metamorphic effects – all these and more are the gift of Ovid to the garden.<sup>1</sup> He can turn up in the most unexpected places: one may find a story from the *Metamorphoses* decorating a medieval cathedral;<sup>2</sup> a bizarre pottery group of Cephalus and Procris was issued in the 1790s in grimy Burslem by the Staffordshire firm of Lakin and Poole.<sup>3</sup> In short, from the twelfth century onwards Ovid has had a more wide-ranging impact on the art and culture of the West than any other classical poet. Only the critics have stood aloof.

This is a book about Ovid's influence, but it is also a book about Ovid himself. 'The greatest commentator on Virgil is Dante, the greatest commentator on Ovid – Shakespeare'; so writes J. K. Newman.<sup>4</sup> That artists are the best interpreters of other artists is a slogan containing truth and falsity in about equal measure. Critics have their own job to do, and artists, for all their intuitive insights, are often both idiosyncratic and egocentric when responding to the work of others. Yet in the case of Ovid the claim has a larger measure of truth than usual. There is a striking contrast between the rich and varied response of artists, and the comparative poverty of the critical tradition, which has often done little more than reiterate the complaints made in antiquity by the school-

masterly Quintilian and the Senecas, father and son. David Hopkins shows how this dichotomy existed within the same man in the case of Dryden, who criticised Ovid along familiar lines in his prose, while responding to him with instinctive sensitivity in his translations.

There are many reasons for studying the afterlife of a great writer;<sup>5</sup> here it is enough to say that tradition is a two-way process and closely bound up with hermeneutics, as T. S. Eliot observed in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent':

what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are re-adjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.<sup>6</sup>

Since the notion that the present affects the past may seem unduly mystical and anti-historical, it is worth trying to show briefly what Eliot's formulation might mean. For example a development of a distinct genre of science fiction has allowed the critic to identify what we might call the science fiction impulse in the literature of the past, as in Lucian, *Gulliver's Travels* and the *Divine Comedy*. Again it was Sainte-Beuve in the nineteenth century who first popularised the notion of Virgil as the poet of the tears of things, because the Romantic movement in poetry had made it easier to identify such qualities in Virgil. Texts – all texts to an extent and great texts in particular – are complex and multi-faceted; no reading, even a true reading, can be more than partial. No reader or age can notice all that is potentially present, and any reader will be more inclined to notice what chimes with present preoccupations, whether his own or those of his society. When an important new work is produced, it may thus alter not perhaps an earlier work, strictly speaking, but the elements in that work we are able to see. Furthermore sometimes later artistic responses to a work of art are quite straightforwardly the best way of approaching it. The study of the tradition can help us to relativise ourselves, see the works of the past with fresh eyes, escape our own parochialism; it is important to avoid the teleological assumption that only the responses of one's own age have any validity. Certainly the tradition can often teach us to understand Ovid better. Pythagoras' speech in *Metamorphoses* 15, which provides a philosophical *ratio* for a poem about flux, is generally not taken seriously today; it is regarded either as parody (by the more sympathetic) or as sheer opportunism to give some semblance of unity to the poem.<sup>7</sup> Of course the speech is not philosophy of a technical kind like Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, but it is philosophical poetry, as earlier ages had no difficulty in understanding. Dryden, who excelled in such writing, thought it 'the masterpiece of the whole *Metamorphoses*'.<sup>8</sup>

## Introduction

Shakespeare, obsessed throughout his work by time and change, echoes lines from it in several sonnets, for example at the beginning of 60 (cf. *Met.* 15.181-3, with Golding's translation):

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,  
So do our minutes hasten to their end.

Spenser pays tribute to the philosophical poet in Ovid in the *Mutabilitie Cantos* and elsewhere in the *Faerie Queene*, as Colin Burrow shows.

Those who think that Ovidian wit is inconsistent with seriousness might reflect on the kaleidoscopic tones in the Elizabethan epyllia inspired by Ovid, discussed by Laurence Lerner. Those who believe that metamorphosis is no more than a structural device in the *Metamorphoses* might contemplate Bernini's *Apollo and Daphne* in which the youthful sculptor, with impressive virtuosity, shows the flesh of Daphne at the very moment of transformation (Pl. 10b).<sup>9</sup> A moralising epigram was added at the suggestion of the future Pope Urban VIII while the work was in progress:

quisquis amans sequitur fugitivae gaudia formae  
fronde manus implet baccas seu carpit amaras.

(Whatever lover pursues the joys of fleeting beauty  
fills his hands with leaves or plucks bitter fruit.)

Bernini conveys the brio of Ovid's story with its numerous witty touches (for example as Ovid's Apollo pursues Daphne he offers to run slower if she will do the same, and also incongruously delivers a kind of hymn to his own powers, *Met.* 1.510ff); in particular Bernini cleverly takes the Apollo Belvedere – that most revered of ancient statues – and metamorphoses him into a sprinter. But Ovid's story is not only ebullient, there are disturbing undercurrents in the nymph's fear of rape and above all in the strangeness of her transformation to which Bernini also does justice. The contrasted textures of the sculpture convey the paradoxes of Ovid's description of the metamorphosis – heavy torpor seizing the running limbs, soft flesh ringed with bark, hair growing into leaves, swift feet sticking in clinging roots (548ff):

vix prece finita torpor gravis occupat artus:  
mollia cinguntur tenui praecordia libro,  
in frondem crines, in ramos brachia crescunt;  
pes modo tam velox pigris radicibus haeret,  
ora cacumen habet: remanet nitor unus in illa.

Scarce had she finished, when her feet she found  
Benumbed with cold and fastened to the ground;  
A filmy rind about her body grows,  
Her hair to leaves, her arms extend to boughs.  
The nymph is all into a laurel gone,  
The smoothness of her skin remains alone.

(Dryden)

There is an intense, tactile, almost surreal concentration on the details of metamorphosis, particularly marked in the treatment of fingers and toes, the latter becoming, horribly, claw-like at the tips as they put down roots. Daphne's face seems to express fear and horror, which could be as much in response to her metamorphosis as to the imminent approach of the lustful god (for a different view see p. 160). In general the sculpture embodies a characteristic baroque paradox, on the one hand sweeping theatrical movement creating an impression of careless ease, on the other a technical perfection in the surfaces and a mastery of precise detail, not in the least impressionistic. The paradox is perfect for the combination of movement and stasis as the fleeing Daphne becomes 'root-bound', as Milton puts it in *Comus* (661). The witty, the erotic and the grotesque are miraculously fused as in the original, in an image at once polished and fluid, sprightly and troubling.

It seems likely that metamorphosis also has a profound if obscure psychological significance.<sup>10</sup> A particularly striking instance in literature which concerns the story of Apollo and Daphne occurs in a lyric by Petrarch (*Canzoniere* 23), in which the poet imagines himself transformed into a laurel, image at once of his beloved Laura and of poetry. The story of Daphne seems to have caught the imagination of artists of all kinds, perhaps because it could readily be taken as a 'metaphor for the pursuit of perfection'.<sup>11</sup> The best-known reference in English poetry occurs in Marvell's 'The Garden' (27-32):

The gods that mortal beauty chase  
Still in a tree did end their race.  
Apollo hunted Daphne so,  
Only that she might laurel grow.  
And Pan did after Syrinx speed  
Not as a nymph, but for a reed.

There is a typical Ovidian ambivalence at work here, depending on whether we are dealing with intention or result. If Apollo is chasing Daphne for the purpose of stimulating new plant life, we have a clever paradox, mischievous in tone; however, if the god's lust for female flesh finds as its object only vegetation, there is a more melancholy undertow to the wit – and 'mortal beauty' certainly obliquely suggests the sort of moralisation inscribed on the Bernini statue.

Those to whom the violence in the *Metamorphoses* is merely a trivial gratification of a Roman taste for cruelty might have their view modified by contemplation of Titian's disturbing late masterpiece *The Flaying of Marsyas*.<sup>12</sup> Part of what is troubling in some Ovidian episodes is the combination of cruelty with a certain wit and detachment and the unruffled stylishness with which acts of violence are described; in consequence the reader is left uncertain of how to react. For example in Ovid's version itself of the story of Marsyas, the satyr, while being flayed by Apollo for his presumption in challenging him to a musical contest, is made to say, with pointed ingenuity, *quid me mihi detrahis?* (*Met.* 6.385 why do you tear me from myself?), while Ovid cleverly



## Introduction

observes of his flayed body *nec quicquam nisi vulnus erat* (388 he was nothing but wound). The cleverness coexists with authentic pathos, horror and the mysterious sense of release in the transformation of the tears of the onlookers into the Marsyas, the clearest river in Phrygia (*Phrygiae liquidissimus amnis* 400), perhaps also reflecting the earlier exposure to vision of the victim's uncovered inwards (*perlucetes* 391). Titian's painting presents problems which if not identical are in some respects analogous. The sense of detachment emanating from all the characters (there is no pain in Marsyas' face and no writhing or contortion), the strange serenity of the painting with its muted but sensuous colour and its creamy surface so at odds with the violence of the subject, the thoughtful industry with which, like artists and without seeming brutality, the flayers perform their terrible work, all intensify the troubling horror of the image; while we see no raw nerves, the bucket gleams upon our attention with a sickening significance, and a small dog laps up blood. There is a telling combination of the impressionistic with precise detail like the sharp outline of the skin peeled away from Marsyas' body. As in Ovid, the artist's virtuosity seems to have outrun his human sympathy; some have thought the result so disgusting that they have questioned Titian's authorship. Yet, though it may have a kind of decadence, the image is not easily dismissed as merely trivial or callous, and it has the capacity to haunt the imagination. Titian's mythological paintings after Ovid (whose *Metamorphoses* he read in translation) are not in general exactly based on Ovid's words like Bernini's statue, rather, as Nigel Llewellyn shows, they are poetic evocations of the spirit of the original, towards which Titian seems to have had a special responsiveness (see Pls. 4, 8, 13).

### 2

The variousness of the response to Ovid (illustrated for particular stories in the essays by Niall Rudd and Jane Miller) mirrors the variety of Ovid's own writings. Ovid is sometimes thought of as monotonous, and partly because he wrote more voluminously than other Latin poets he occasionally repeated himself, particularly in the *Heroides* and the exile poems. But at the same time he is a protean artist, whereas images of him are frequently only two-dimensional. Recent criticism regularly emphasises the wit and humour (valued anew and no longer seen as proof of essential triviality) at the expense of other equally important qualities. For example the exuberance and rhetorical facility of his style is rightly stressed, but it is less often remarked that he can write with a simplicity which few Latin poets dare to venture. An instance is the bitter directness of his address to his friends in *Ex Ponto* 3.7, or these moving lines from *Tristia* 3.8 (8-10):<sup>13</sup>

[ut] aspicerem patriae dulce repente solum,  
desertaeque domus vultus, memoresque sodales,  
caraque praecipue coniugis ora meae.