

***Ovid and Adaptation in Early Modern English Theatre***  
**Edited by Lisa S. Starks**

**Lisa S. Starks, “Introduction: Representing ‘Ovids’ on the Early Modern English Stage”:**

I’ve always been drawn to the idea of transformation and myth, which led me to Ovid back in the 1990s. Over the years, I’ve found that Ovid’s philosophy of constant change and flux permeates early modern plays, underlying notions of theatricality and textuality. This interest has informed the two main areas of my research on Shakespeare and early modern literature: sexuality, trauma, and psychoanalysis, which I focused on in my monograph *Violence, Trauma, and Virtus in Shakespeare’s Roman Poems and Plays: Transforming Ovid* (Palgrave, 2014) and other essays; and Shakespearean, film, and adaptations/appropriation studies, which I’ve published on in two co-edited book collections and other essays. After leading a seminar at the Shakespeare Association of America on “Representing Ovid on the Early Modern Stage” in 2016 and speaking with participants afterwards, I considered editing a book collection on this topic. Along the way, following talks over lunch at the Folger with Goran Stanivukovic and John Garrison, I decided to give it a go. When writing the book proposal, I realized that this collection could do something quite different from other volumes: use contemporary Shakespeare and adaptation studies to analyze the multifarious, complex appropriations of Ovid in early modern English theatre. In my previous writing on Ovid, I’ve felt limited, that there was only so far I could go in examining the ways in which Shakespeare transformed Ovid to explore the traumatic effects of violence. Since then, I’ve pondered how it might be possible to open up Shakespeare and Ovid criticism and to articulate interconnections between adaptation studies and other contemporary theoretical perspectives, which this collection does. I’m extremely thankful that my brilliant contributors were all keen to take on this challenge, resulting in truly remarkable chapters on

Ovid, adaptation, and early modern drama. The contributors have all shared a bit about that experience in the blog entries below:

### **1. Simone Chess, “Queer Gender Informants in Ovid and Shakespeare”:**

I don't usually work with Ovid, or in adaptation studies, and yet here I am! When Lisa invited me to make a proposal for this edition, at first I was at a loss. But what I *did* know, and frequently teach and cite, about Ovid was about the queerer parts of the *Metamorphoses*, particularly the story of Iphis, which has been a core source text in the emerging canon of early modern trans studies. My research therefore developed in two directions: what were the other queer moments in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that might contextualize Iphis, and, given the influence of the Iphis narrative in queer early modern studies, how might a broader range of queer moments in Ovid be in conversation with early modern text like Shakespeare's. My essay therefore pairs three queer Ovidian characters (Tiresias, Caenis/Caenus, and Iphis) with three Shakespearean characters (Mardian the eunuch from *Antony and Cleopatra*, Portia/Balthazar from *Merchant of Venice*, and Viola/Cesario from *Twelfth Night*). Though these pairings do not represent direct adaptation, they do show that Shakespeare uses Ovidian strategies when he positions his eunuch and crossdressing characters as code switchers who are especially poised to make crucial judgements and give critical insights. Thus, I find that Shakespeare — the tradition of, and seemingly in conversation with, Ovid — sometimes staged his nonbinary characters as queer gender informants whose insights and experiences add value to the plays.

### **2. Shannon Kelley, “Women in Trees: Adapting Ovid for John Lyly's *Love's Metamorphosis* (1589)”**

In 2019, few trees remain in my Connecticut hometown that are big enough for a person to crawl inside, but they must have existed in early modern England. In *King Lear*, Edgar hides inside the hollow of an oak; Ariel becomes a cloven pine in *The Tempest*; and in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Falstaff and the wives gather near the legendary Herne's Oak, where children emerge from a "sawpit." Theater historians speculate that John Lyly owned a stage tree with a hollow compartment for actors to inhabit since his Elizabethan plays often feature significant roles for the plant kingdom. It was hard for me to visualize these trees until I saw old growth coastal redwoods in the Muir Woods last summer. Here, I could see why tree heroines appear so frequently in Renaissance stage adaptations of Ovid, for it was easy to imagine dwelling inside these giant, vertical trees that nonetheless depend on decentered, rhizomatic undergrowth throughout the subterranean forest and its canopy. In this volume, I experiment with ecofeminist approaches to adaptation theory, crossing from critical plant studies to the history of the book, to show how tree and human lives intersect in knowledge production and literacy differently in early modern England. While the sacred, old growth tree heroine at the center of *Love's Metamorphosis* is destroyed by an enraged forester, my reading reminds us that the rest of the forest is placed under protective conservatorship by Ceres — a female deity — at the play's conclusion. I'd like to think that we've only just begun to recover the ecofeminist possibilities of *Love's Metamorphosis*.

### **3. Daniel G. Lauby, "Queer Fidelity: Marlowe's Ovid and the Staging of Desire in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*":**

My childhood is filled with cinematic returns: *Return of the Jedi* (1983), *Back to the Future* (1985), and *Return to Oz* (1985), just to name a few. (I had to leave the theater after seeing

Princess Mombi's closet full of heads.) There is something uncanny about such returns, at once threatening and familiar. Returns are never simple since they carry the baggage of a journey. In many ways, returns are at the heart of Christopher Marlowe's work, especially as it relates to Ovid's queer politics of desire. I came to this project through Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* as I examined overlapping layers of erotic performance and traced the myth through contemporary adaptations and translations to Ovid's *Heroides*, *Amores*, and *Metamorphoses*. Marlowe's use of Ovidian rebellion and erotics made the *epyllion* feel like a unique kind of queer return.

Consequently, I became increasingly interested in the ways an adaptation manages the relationship between intermediary precedents and a source text. I eventually chose to focus on *Dido, Queen of Carthage* in order to trace Marlowe's return to an already queer source, while also contending with a contagion of intermediary precedents. *Dido* was particularly unique in terms of staging because of its use of a boys' company to convey complex webs of desire aimed at early modern anxieties. The staging of *Dido* says much about how adaptations are multi-layered and about how an artist like Marlowe can rely on a history of adaptation in conjunction with the politics of a source text to unearth a constellation of meaning. Such complex staging of politics and desire seems to say as much about queerness as it does about adaptation itself.

#### **4. Deborah Uman, "Let Rome in Tiber melt': Hermaphroditic Transformation in *Antonius and Antony and Cleopatra*":**

At the high school open house this fall, I spoke to my senior's Latin Teacher and told him how glad I was that the students were getting to translate Ovid. I didn't get to translate *The Metamorphoses* until I needed to refresh my Latin skills in graduate school. My interest in Ovid is longstanding, but this essay emerged from my many years of studying early modern women

translators, a field in which the question of Latin literacy can be a touchy subject. Perhaps ironically, in juxtaposing Mary Sidney Herbert and William Shakespeare, I am examining a woman well-versed in Latin and a man likely much less so. Then again, I am also approaching the topic of translation in a rather metaphorical sense, as a form of composition or adaptation that combines old and new. Similarly, I focus on the narrative of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, who is not literally present in either *Antonius* or *Antony and Cleopatra*, but rather who appears through veiled allusions and the plays' interest in gender reversals and overflowing boundaries. Writing this essay allowed me to play with some of my favorite writers and to suggest that, to a degree, they all reject notions of literary rigidity in favor of more flexible views of artistic creativity.

## **II. Ovidian Specters and Remnants**

### **5. Lisa S. Starks, "Ovid's Ghosts: Lovesickness, Theatricality, and Ovidian Spectrality on the Early Modern English Stage":**

This chapter has undergone so many transformations over the years that it epitomizes Ovidian transformation itself. It evolved from three strands of my research: early modern lovesickness; Ovid and theatrical discourses; and adaptation studies, especially spectrality. Years ago, I served as a local scholar for the Folger Intensive workshop. In this 45-minute talk, I examined lovesickness and Ovid in *Romeo and Juliet*. The research on lovesickness made its way into my monograph, but not in reference to *R&J*. Later, when tossing out notes from my book after its publication, I noticed many instances of Ovid popping up in discourses about theatre, which I wrote about elsewhere. Researching this chapter, I took this research a step further, linking Ovidian theatricality and lovesickness, thereby tying two of the strands noted above together in

writing about Jonson's *Poetaster* as well as Shakespeare's plays. Then, while researching at the Folger Shakespeare Library, I ran across the remarkable closet drama *Ovid's Ghost* – just when I was concentrating on spectrality to examine appropriations of Ovid on the early modern stage. This odd little play brought all three strands together. Writing the chapter for this volume, I was able to tie up loose ends of this research, giving me closure on my work with Ovid — a ghost that has been haunting me for many years.

#### **6. John S. Garrison, “Medea’s Afterlife: Encountering Ovid in *The Tempest*”:**

My essay for this collection began with a simple line of inquiry. Could Prospero's use in *The Tempest* of Medea's words from the *Metamorphoses* be considered a form of adaptation or was it just just an appropriation of earlier text? As I wrote the piece, I began to see the complexities of the question. What did it mean to move the text from classical antiquity to the early modern period? From poetry to drama? From a female character to a male character? These lines of inquiry connected the piece nicely to another study I was writing at the time, [\*Shakespeare and the Afterlife\*](#). In that book, I had thought about the use of Medea's words as a form of resurrection of a much earlier figure. This essay allowed me to ask new questions and consider new implications. Applying the lens of Derrida's notion of “hauntology” and his thinking about the nature of the archive allowed me to add a new dimension to my essay in its later stages. I'm now quite happy with where it ended up, though I know there are still many more questions to ask about this curious use of Ovid in Shakespeare's play.

#### **7. Catherine Winiarski, “Remnants of Virgil, Ovid, and Paul in *Titus Andronicus*”:**

As I was working to adapt an essay of mine to include in this collection that is focused precisely on adaptation (and Ovid), I was reminded of how valuable it is to have to adapt: for me, the task

of adapting my work to fit into an edited collection opened up unforeseen possibilities to improve that work, rather than limit or divert it. I began my essay several years ago, choosing Virgil, Ovid, and St. Paul as contexts for my examination of *Titus Andronicus* because they were all interested in the role of survivors of war or other catastrophe in forming new communities. After being invited to contribute to this collection, I dove into all the theories of adaptation I could find and discovered Linda Hutcheon's analogy between biological and literary adaptation, including her argument about the survivability of literary narratives in new contexts. This discovery allowed me to add another layer to my discussion of survivors and remnants in the play — hope this gives my essay more vitality in the lively environment of this collection.

### **III. Affect, Rhetoric, and Ovidian Appropriation**

#### **8. Jennifer Feather, “Power, Emotion, and Appropriation in Ovid’s *Tristia* and Shakespeare’s *Henry V*”:**

What began for me as a philological project – how do we read cruelty? – became a consideration of how emotional language infuses our relationship to authority even when emotions are specifically forbidden. Ovid doesn't use the word *crudelem*, the Latin root for the English “cruel,” very often. The words that are often translated as “cruel” are dripping with emotion, an emotion they figure in particularly sensual terms. The gods are *duros* or “hard” and cannot be touched by feelings. In his poetry of exile, Ovid's pleas to the Emperor use the word “*sentiat*,” the root of the English words “sensation,” “sensitive,” and “sensual.” As I was preparing the essay for publication, Americans had finished a particularly emotional presidential election, and I was struck by just how much feelings play into our relationships to elections and elected

officials. Shakespeare's *Henry V* has so many emotional registers, and his references to Ovid, however oblique, offer a substantial consideration of how authority functions through feelings.

### **9. John D. Staines, "Appropriating Ovid's Tyrannical Raptures in *Macbeth*":**

In a New England classroom of Gothic limestone and Tudor oak, I first studied Ovid and his appropriators with Lynn Enterline, who was writing her book on Ovid's bodies. Reading for this chapter, I reached a new understanding of her account of *prosopopoeia* as I recognized how my thoughts ventriloquized her voice, and the voices of other teachers and critics who have helped me look through unfamiliar eyes. So often in Ovid those are the eyes of rapists and their victims. Seizing a rapist's words to make art is ethically risky. Procne is horrifically transformed by the story her sister weaves for her, yet those polluting words bring Philomela back to life, free to take the wings and voice of a bird. *Hauntology*: We speak in voices made from ghosts, traces and echoes of others. The deepest violations may leave the deepest marks, but those who teach us to read so as to see and speak even the most difficult truths, leave marks as well.

### **10. Goran Stanivukovic, "Ovid and the Styles of Adaptation in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*":**

I've often maintained that in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* Shakespeare plays with appropriating more works by Ovid than in any other of his early writings. This volume is a perfect opportunity to explore some of my ideas on Shakespeare's "earliest" Ovidianism. Since archival work with early modern collections is most often full of lucky revelations each time we touch and feel an old document, I had such small luck. One late spring a few, while working in the Folger, I came across several commonplace books filled with the neatly copied lines from

several works by Ovid, which an anonymous reader or student, an Ovid enthusiast, legibly committed to as many leaves of paper. This anonymous reader commented and briefly annotated his choice of memorable lines from Ovid. Remarkably, for my purpose, I started to see that some of the copied lines resonated in Shakespeare's own dramatic use of Ovid in the epistles and elsewhere in *The Two Gentlemen*. Soon, an idea started to form in my head connecting the play's Ovidianism with Shakespeare's own likely classroom practice of using Ovid in one's own artistic recreation, of which this probably his earliest comedy is an example. That idea was helped by conversation with the volume's editor and other scholars working alongside me in the library. Subsequently, some of those fellow-readers appeared as the names with whom I was privileged to share space in this volume.

#### **IV. Ovid Remixed: Transmedial, Rhizomatic, and Hyperreal Adaptations**

##### **11. Louise Geddes, “Truly, and very notably discharg'd’: The Metamorphosis of Pyramus and Thisbe and the Place of Appropriation on the Early Modern Stage”:**

This essay grew out of my work on Shakespeare appropriations and the history of Shakespeare in performance. Pyramus and Thisbe has a long history of being adapted independently of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. During my time at the Folger in 2010, I discovered the 1964 performance of Pyramus and Thisbe by The Beatles, and my first book mapped the history that began with Shakespeare and ended in 2012 with Dmitry Krymov's *A Midsummer Night's Dream (As You Like It)*. I've always been interested in how we might extend the parameters of appropriation to accommodate and reframe Shakespeare as part of a complex network of artists who appropriated Ovid, using him as their own culture and purposes demand, rather than

imagining Shakespeare as a singular genius who took straw and spun it into gold. Moreover, this project allowed me to spend a little more time with the delightful Andreas Gryphius, the German poet and playwright who adapted *Pyramus and Thisbe* into the *Absurda Comica*.

**12. Liz Oakley-Brown, “The Golden Age Rescored?: Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Thomas Heywood’s *The Ages*”:**

When I started writing my essay on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Thomas Heywood’s *The Ages*, the BBC began screening an eight-week television series *Troy: The Fall of a City* (2018) as part of its leading channel’s Saturday evening schedule. The TV series’ episodic structure and David Farr’s adaptation of Homer and Greek myths for a contemporary audience really helped me think about Heywood’s approach to staging classical set pieces (from the birth of Jupiter to the fall of Troy) at the Red Bull playhouse in Clerkenwell, London (a seventeenth-century theatre with a colourful reputation - oh, and pyrotechnics!). How did Heywood’s *The Brazen Age*, for instance, show how a river-god takes his promised ‘shape of a Dragon’ (s.d 175), a Bull (176) and even fire (175)? I don’t answer that question, but these plays encouraged me to consider early modern Ovidianism in wholly unexpected ways.

**13. Ed Gieskes, “*Materia conveniente modis*’: Early Modern Dramatic Adaptations of Ovid**

My contribution to the collection emerged from my interest in rethinking the idea of a “source” in early modern drama. Ovid is everywhere in our period, and I think he’s even more pervasive than an iteration model of source allows. My essay takes up ways that Ovid — figure and the work — gets deployed in early modern drama. The poet and his poems operate not only as sources for later works but also as models for the structure of both poetic careers and works. My

essay looks at the way that Jonson's play about writing — *Poetaster* — uses Ovid as a character (he's the first character we see after the induction) while also considering his poetic legacy by using a slight revision of Marlowe's translation of *Amores* 1.15 to stand in for the Ovidian poetic corpus. Ovid works as both a source and a problem in the play. In Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, Ovid is an important presence but more as a source of structure than of content. I argue that the way the play defers narrative has much to do with Ovidian techniques of narrative deferral that produce a desire to hear the deferred tale. In both cases, Ovid gets adapted in ways that go beyond retelling stories from the *Metamorphoses*.

#### **14. Jim Casey, “Worse than Philomel, Worse than Actaeon: Hyperreal Ovid in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*”**

Although I am happy with it now, my contribution to this collection may be the most difficult critical piece I have ever written. The essay began as part of Lisa Starks' “Representing Ovid on the Early Modern Stage” seminar at the Shakespeare Association of America meeting in 2016. I was interested in exploring how the extreme violence against gendered bodies in *Titus Andronicus* might intersect with the omnipresent body-trauma of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The work was fine for the seminar, but when I sat down to revise the piece for inclusion in this collection, I found that I was dissatisfied with the majority of the essay. In the end, I deleted everything except the first paragraph and started over. Lisa Starks showed the patience of a saint as I struggled to decide what the new essay was really about (taking dozens of trips down a variety of critical and creative side tracks). Ultimately, I combined the initial essay's concern with violated bodies and my recent interest in Shakespearean adaptation theory, looking at the way Shakespeare appropriated Ovid's work rather than the way Shakespeare's plays have been

adapted by later authors. By taking this approach, I discovered what I found to be a number of interesting revelations regarding the performance of the “unspeakable,” the “obscene,” and the “irreligious” in both *Titus Andronicus* and the *Metamorphoses*.