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A HANDBOOK TO THE RECEPTION OF OVID

EDITED BY JOHN F. MILLER AND CAROLE E. NEWLANDS

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Introduction

Carole E. Newlands and John F. Miller

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Ovid has proved the most influential and indeed the most versatile by far of all the poets of Latin antiquity. His works have exerted a fundamental influence on the literature and art of the West, beginning in ancient times and continuing with astonishing vitality to the present day, inspiring in recent times not only poetry and painting but novels, plays, and films. The present volume explores how Ovid's poetry, and indeed Ovid's life itself, has been interpreted, rewritten, critiqued, adapted, translated, and metamorphosed in later periods of time and different cultures.

One of the requirements of such a handbook is to offer a broadly based survey of significant research. Thus this volume provides an extensive temporal sweep in the West from Ovid's times to our own. It encompasses all of Ovid's major works and it explores key players in their reception, many of them familiar figures in the Western literary canon but viewed afresh through an Ovidian lens, others less well known and here brought significantly to our attention. The contributors represent a variety of geographical and cultural backgrounds. But so rich and diverse is the afterlife of Ovid and his works that this volume cannot, and does not, aim to be comprehensive. The history of the reception of Ovid's poetry covers many periods of human history and involves many geographical regions and disciplines, in particular literature, dance, drama, film, and the visual arts. While chronologically ambitious, our volume nonetheless is necessarily selective. Its focus is literary, but also pays attention to the influence of Ovid's poetry on the visual arts (Barolsky, Casid, Knox, Winkler) and music (Solomon). While its surveys of recent research on Ovid's impact also offer fresh ways of thinking about Ovid's poetry, the volume's emphasis falls squarely upon reception, that is, upon documenting and exploring from multiple perspectives how Ovid's poetry has been interpreted and transformed over time in response to the individual circumstances of a writer or artist, to be sure,

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but also to the major intellectual, social, and political changes that have shaped that response.

As a whole, this volume identifies culturally specific moments in the reception of Ovid's poetry while also tracing historical continuities and discontinuities. An interesting case is how women writers through the ages engage with Ovid's poetry. Although his works explore the intricacies of the female voice and psychology, in some eras women seemed to play little part in the acquisition of Ovidian cultural capital. The resulting gendered imbalance in reception reveals the historical pressures upon the reception of Ovid, pressures which begin with the *Art of Love* itself when Ovid tells Roman matrons that this poem is definitely not written for them—surely a tongue-in-cheek remark, for they would have been among his most literate readers (*Ars* 1.31–34). Nonetheless, during the Middle Ages Christine de Pizan and Heloise responded in important ways to that very *Art of Love* as well as to the *Heroides*, Ovid's fictional letters by heroines (Desmond). Much later, a handful of women writers shared in an early modern craze for the *Heroides*—writers like Aphra Behn, Mary Wortley Montagu, and Jane Barker (Horowitz). More recently, we find a large number of women writers reacting to Ovid's poetry: the enormously successful play *Metamorphoses* by Mary Zimmerman, granted the Tony award in 2002, and two recent novels, Jane Alison's *The Love Artist* (2001) and Benita Jaro's *Betray the Night* (2009), both of which adopt a provocative feminist perspective on the poet. Charlotte Higgins recently updated the *Ars Amatoria* in her delightful mock-didactic *Latin Love Lessons: Put a Little Ovid in Your Life* (2007). In the visual arts of the modern era, women have responded to Ovid's poetry in ways that are both playfully deferential (for instance, Mme Yyonde) or alienating (Casid); New York artist Kiki Smith's sculpture *Daphne* shows a bare, mutilated, headless stump, a tree stripped of its leaves, a woman devoid of face, hands, and feet. A large group of modern and contemporary women poets likewise meditate on Ovid's Daphne from female points of view; Anne Sexton, Silvia Plath, A.E. Stallings, Alice Fulton, Eavan Boland, Jorie Graham, and others give a voice to the beautiful nymph unsuccessfully chased by Apollo, and then transformed, in the first love story of the *Metamorphoses* (Martindale 2005: 200–17).

We start neither from the idea that poetry "hands down" a tradition in a linear progression nor from a simple perspective of afterlife or *Nachleben*; rather, we begin from the understanding, outlined by Andrew Laird (2010: 356), that reception is a dynamic two-way process in that texts do not retain a continuous identity but are constituted by their interpretation over time—all the more insistently the case with the poetry of the master of change. Ovid was an acutely self-reflexive and self-conscious poet about his relationship to his predecessors and to posterity. Our study of the reappropriations and reworkings of Ovid's texts thus starts with Ovid himself (Feldherr; Myers), and, to paraphrase Lorna Hardwick, thereafter crosses boundaries of place, language, and genre as well as time (Hardwick 2003: 4). Central questions of this volume include what new meanings the author and his works acquire through migration to often quite alien registers; and to what

ideological ends—aesthetic, intellectual, cultural, and political—Ovid's poetry has been adapted. The definition of reception studies is constantly changing. But by stimulating debate, the rewritings, translations, and revisions of Ovid's poetry over time encourage a greater critical and historical awareness in its readers and indeed further creativity.

The study of the reception of Ovid is particularly complex because he produced such a large and diverse body of work. As we see from this volume, his epic *Metamorphoses* consistently stands out over time. No epic poet subsequent to Ovid could ignore his innovative reshaping of the Roman epic code, his challenge to Virgil's epic; the *Metamorphoses* is crucial for understanding imperial epic (Keith). For Dante, Ovid is the poet of the *Metamorphoses* (Clay), and the *Metamorphoses* reaches the peak of its influence in the Renaissance (Casali; Hardie; Keilen) as well as, perhaps, our own times (Godel; Brown; Winkler; Casid); translation involving radically different approaches by prominent English poets allowed Ovid's epic to reach a wide audience from the sixteenth century to our own time (Hooley).

However, Ovid's elegiac poetry was extremely influential, too, in charting new generic territory; the *Heroides*, the *Amores*, the *Ars Amatoria*, the *Fasti*, the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* all represent different, experimental approaches to the elegiac genre, a monumental achievement for a traditionally slender genre. Several of the essays show how later writers, beginning with the Flavians Statius and Martial (Rosati), capitalized on the creative range of Ovid's experimentation with elegy and his language of luxury and desire. Despite its title and central trope, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* drew on the erotic tropes of Ovid's *Amores* as well as on his epic (Harrison). Moreover, the reception of Ovid's poetry in late antiquity and the Middle Ages was far from being dominated by allegorical interpretation, even with regard to the *Metamorphoses* (Hays; Fumo). The sixth-century poet Maximianus revived erotic elegy with the ironic persona of an elderly lover (Fielding). At the height of the Middle Ages Ovid's amatory elegy was instrumental in the development of the courtly discourse of a language of desire (Desmond). The structuring of the *Amores* as a sequence charting the rise and decline of the poet's engagement with *eros* provided an influential template for love poetry, from Petrarch's development of the sonnet sequence to Goethe's elegiac love poems (Braden). Even the puritan Milton in the seventeenth century found in Ovid's elegiac poetry a potent source for his creative imagination, beginning early in his career with his Latin elegies (Green). The elegiac, etiological *Fasti*, in its negotiation with imperial ideas of time, introduced the concept of the calendar poem that became an important political genre in the Renaissance (Kilgour). Well before the twentieth century made urban alienation a major theme, responses to the exile poetry in the Middle Ages explored this concept (Keen). Moreover, the return of elegy in the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* to its origins in lament and its adaptation to the politics of Ovid's imperial exile laid the basis for subsequent social and cultural interventions in situations not necessarily of geographical displacement but of censorship and cultural alienation (Keen; James;

Kahn). But despite its thematic and generic complexity, Ovid's poetry also consistently confronts common major issues of erotic and political power, and crises of identity involving personal loss, betrayal, and cultural alienation—in short, the fundamental themes of love and death. The return of his poetry to these major issues again and again in different ways, and different genres, constitutes part of Ovid's enduring fascination.

The study of the reception of the poetry of Ovid is particularly rewarding as well as complex, for Ovid himself was a poet obsessed with his future reception and in all his works he attempted to control how they would be read by posterity (Feldherr; Myers). Essentially there are two strands to the reception of "Ovid": there is the poet himself, a fascinating case study of tragic downfall and poetic transcendence, and there is the poetry itself; the proximity of the "life" to the poetry means that these two strands often become interwoven, for it is almost entirely through Ovid's poetry that we know of his "life," or at least as he chose to represent it both for his critics and supporters in Rome and for posterity. The scripting of his own life in exile as a case study in metamorphosis became an open invitation for later writers to write speculative biographies that focus on the mystery of his exile, harnessing it to a variety of ideological agendas. For instance, in the thirteenth century a three-book elegiac poem, *De Vetula*, presented itself as "the last will and testament of Ovid" found on his tomb. In this popular pseudonymous work Ovid has renounced the erotic life for Christianity; his particular life thus models that of the "everyman" in religious thought who necessarily suffers on the path to spiritual redemption. On the other hand, a popular story included in many of the medieval *accessus* ("introductions") to Ovid's works reflects historical and aesthetic concerns in a comic vein. According to this narrative our poet, climbing up a ladder to enter Livia's turreted bedroom, was compelled by a call of nature to descend; Virgil, however, had removed a rung from the ladder and Ovid fell and broke his leg. The story plays off Ovid's enigmatic statement at *Tr.* 4.10.51, *Vergilium tantum vidi*, "I only saw Virgil," and thus makes a crude attempt in the vein of the *fabliau* to explain both the historical reason for Ovid's exile (adultery with the emperor Augustus' wife) and his perceived rivalry with Virgil. In recent times novelists have imaginatively explored Ovid's exile through the lens of contemporary culture and politics. For instance, Austrian novelist Christoph Ransmyer in *The Last World* (1988) ambitiously merged Ovid's world with that of the East German totalitarian state (Godel). At the end of his life English Poet Laureate Ted Hughes (1930–98) essentially assumed the mantle of Ovid when he interwove Ovidian biography and epic poetry in the award-winning poems *Tales from Ovid* (1997) and *Birthday Letters* (1998), a powerful diptych crafted from the *Metamorphoses* and Ovid's *Heroides* and the exile letters.

Underlying the remit for this volume is the pertinent question, "Why Ovid now? What is our enduring fascination with Ovid in the twenty-first century?" In her essay in this volume, Casid explores what might be the relevance of "Old Masters" to today's fractured, self-questioning culture. Ovid's poetry has often been

read for the pleasure of his verse and his gift of storytelling; Knox in this volume has shown how Ovid's storytelling permeated popular culture in Italy from early on, appearing as decorative themes and conversation pieces on the walls of houses in Pompeii. But, as Feldherr suggests, it is not sufficient to say that Ovid's poetry, particularly the *Metamorphoses*, endures because of the power of his fictions when freed from their specific cultural moorings. Even as he seduces with words, Ovid draws attention to the irony and instability of language. A central trope of Ovid's reception is change, inviting exploration of ontological questions of identity, image, and reality that appeal to postmodern sensibilities. For instance, the major modern theme of bodily and cultural alienation was given Ovidian form in Kafka's novella *Metamorphosis* in 1915, written in the middle of World War I. The dynamic nature of Ovid's art, constantly shifting in perspective and emotional register, invites change in response at the epistemological and aesthetic levels. But in our contemporary world, where scientists can engineer hybrid creatures well beyond Ovid's imaginings, Ovid's poetry can nonetheless still powerfully appeal to a sense of wonder as well as our fears. His paradoxical, oracular formulation of metamorphosis, *Met*. 10.566 *nec tamen effugies teque ipsa viva carebis* ("you will not escape, yet you will be separated from yourself while alive"), can suggest the horror of imprisonment, or the glory of liberty—or perhaps both. In reception, Ovid is a poet very much of our times, and of all time (Brown).

This volume follows a basic chronology, beginning with Ovid himself as a key figure in his reception. Such a temporal format invites comparative study according to which Ovid's various works can be seen to shift in importance, depending on the historical period and the social and cultural circumstances in which the poems were produced and read. The frequent shifts in the popularity of Ovid's works demonstrated here should invite us to consider our own forms of literary inclusion and exclusion. For instance, from the essays in this volume (de Armas, Galloway, Hardie, Kilgour) we learn that Ovid's Roman calendar poem the *Fasti* was widely read and used as a school text and literary source in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and beyond; it also inspired one of the most famous of premodern paintings, Botticelli's *Primavera*. Despite a renaissance of interest in the *Fasti* in the 1990s, study of this elegiac poem has not kept pace with other new work on elegy which generally confines its generic range to love poetry (e.g. Lively and Salzman-Mitchell 2008; Gardner 2013). In contrast, the prominence given the *Heroides* by three critical studies in the past decade (Lindheim 2003; Spentzou 2003; Fulkerson 2005) is not yet matched by comparable interest in their reception (see however Horowitz; Solomon). The heyday of the *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris* seems to have been the Middle Ages, when these erotodidactic texts invited critical rereadings and innovative play on gendered conflict and desire (Desmond); but the afterlife of this text in the early modern and modern periods requires further investigation. The vagaries of Ovid's reception and the practical constraints on a volume of this kind inevitably result in lacunae; these are partly redressed by recent collaborative volumes such as Keith and Rupp (2007) and Clark, Coulson, and McKinley

(2011) on the Middle Ages; by Ziolkowski (2005) on the modern reception of Ovid; and by Ingleheart (2011) on responses to the exile poetry over a 2000-year span. In general, however, the gaps in our own more comprehensive survey highlight areas where there is urgent need for more critical exploration.

This volume reveals that, as in his own day, so over the intervening years there have been many Ovids, often in coexistence, and his poetry has served many purposes. Major recurrent themes of his reception include of course erotic passion—for, which other Roman writer has so fully explored the complexities of the human heart and made the emotions the driving force of human action? Exile and alienation, major themes of modern literature, also preoccupy writers from the Middle Ages. Pleasure, delight, and beauty are important aesthetic categories in Ovid's poetry that can both seduce but also discomfort the reader in their very allure. If there is one overall theme that emerges from this volume, however, it is that writers and artists over time have consistently responded to the subversive nature of Ovid's poetry. We do not mean necessarily politically subversive, though obviously that is often an important feature of his reception too. While Virgil's *Aeneid* has been used in support of nationalist agendas (Thomas 2001), the reception of Ovid's poetry has usually involved critique of such agendas, testing whether the power of art can challenge state power and effect social and political change (Godel; Ziolkowski). In general, however, we mean "subversive" in the sense that his poetry constantly challenges conventions and norms, whether they are political, literary, artistic, or social.

In exile Ovid constantly wrote against the fear of poetic oblivion, aware of the implacability of the political system that finally held him in its grip. A short story by Antonio Tabucchi tells how Ovid dreamt that, restored to the emperor's favor, he was transformed into a beautiful butterfly, but was torn to death by an overenthusiastic crowd of his fans (Miller 2001). This disturbing parable of Ovid's reception nonetheless makes its central symbol, the butterfly, a figure of immortality. And precisely because of the revisions, rewritings, even depredations of his poetry by successive generations, Ovid has claimed for himself an enduring major place among European writers, thinkers, and artists. While the attention given individual works varied over different periods of time, as we see from this volume, Ovid himself has remained a figure of unbroken authority who gave future generations artistic license to innovate, challenge, critique, and delight. The overall aim of this volume therefore is to reveal the rich diversity of the reception of Ovid over time, its continuities and discontinuities, its surprises. An understanding of the historically based, multicultural processes of reception may well increase our sense of the transformative power of Ovid's poetry even in the present day. This volume thus is open-ended; it is an invitation to further exploration, scholarly or creative, of the reception of this most protean poet.

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1

Ovid's Self-Reception in His Exile Poetry

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The study of Ovid's reception begins with Ovid and importantly is shaped by his statements about his poetry and career in his exile poems. Ovid in exile is the "first extant reader to interpret and reprocess" his earlier works (Hinds 1999a: 48). In the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* Ovid does more than reflect on his earlier poetry; he attempts to control its reception and to construct an image of "Ovidianism," which is meant to convince the emperor to recall the poet. But, of course, there are more "re-s" involved in the exile poetry than reception: Ovid reflects on his career, recalls, rewrites, and revises his earlier works, refutes the misinterpretation and condemnation of the *Ars Amatoria*, and rebukes the emperor for his excessively harsh punishment of the poet and his flawed understanding of his poetry. Ovid is concerned with the reception both of his earlier poetry, especially the *Ars*, and that of his current project, the exile poetry. He seeks in exile to shape an image of his poetic career that will guarantee his lasting fame. This chapter will look at some of the general strategies and themes of the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* that reflect "Ovid's self-consciousness about how his texts will survive and how they will be reread in the light of new circumstances" (Burrow 2002: 302).

I want to look specifically at three aspects of Ovid's self-reception in his exile poetry. First, I am interested in the way in which Ovid in exile encourages a rereading of his earlier poems, in an attempt to shape their reception and interpretation in ways that will reflect his current situation and plead his case with the emperor. This involves defending his past (erotic) poetry by crafting an ideal reader and by conditioning his audience's reception of his texts. Second, and closely related to the first strategy, through allusions to his earlier poetry, Ovid encourages the reader to read his personal history into his poetic corpus, to reconsider his earlier work in the light of his current exilic state. This reuse of past erotic, mythical, and metamorphic motifs to shape his current experiences creates interesting and piquant

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conflicts between poetic fictions and the poet's new reality. The poet offers himself as the subject of poetry: *Tr.* 1.5b.57–58 *pro duce Neritio, docti, mala nostra, poetae, / scribite*, "instead of the Neritian hero, learned poets, write of my sufferings". Finally, in exile Ovid reflects on his poetic career, defends his literary choices, and compares his downfall with other career models, as he advocates for the future transmission and survival of his poetic texts.

Rereading and Revising

The emperor Augustus relegated Ovid to Tomis on the Black Sea (modern Constanta in Romania) in 8 CE, when the poet was 51 years old (*Tr.* 4.10.95–96), for two crimes: the *Ars Amatoria* and an unknowable "mistake" (*Tr.* 2.207 *duo crimina, carmen et error*). Ovid's exilic *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* represent a radically new departure in the Roman elegiac tradition, but Ovid is less interested in proclaiming their originality than in stressing their inevitability. His exilic condition poses a generic opposition to the possibility of writing in any genre other than elegiac lament.[1] These are poems born from his sad new circumstances (e.g. *Pont.* 3.9.35 *cano tristia tristis*, "being sad, I sing sad songs"), and must function to rescue the poet by representing him at Rome, pleading his case with the emperor, and defending his career. While Ovid continually stresses the discontinuity and decline of his exilic poetic production in comparison to his pre-exilic poetry (e.g. *Tr.* 3.14.33 *ingenium fregere meum mala*, "my misfortunes have crushed my talent"), modern critics highlight instead the close relation of his exilic and pre-exilic phases, pointing out his undiminished poetic abilities, his unchanged style, wit, and irreverence. Decline instead may be seen as a trope, a strategic pose designed to evoke sympathy and reproach the emperor (Nagle 1980: 171), or it may function as an ironic, self-mocking pose (Williams 1994: 50–99).

Ovid emphasizes his former position as Rome's foremost poet by reminding his readers of his past literary achievements. One of the ways he does this is through pervasive allusions to his earlier writings. Although Ovid frequently defines the exile poetry in terms of a rupture with his literary past, especially with his didactic love poem, the *Ars Amatoria* (*Tr.* 1.1.67 *non sum praeceptor Amoris*, "I am not the teacher of Love"; cf. *AA* 1.17 *ego sum praeceptor Amoris*), it is well known that there is a strong line of continuity between the elegy of exile and Ovid's earlier amatory elegy (Kenney 1965; Evans 1983). Although he expresses regret for the composition of the *Ars Amatoria* (e.g. *Tr.* 5.1.8), Ovid continually positions his new poetry in relation to his previous love poetry, constantly evoking the repudiated model and reminding the reader of it (Labate 1987). Ovid persistently identifies himself as a love poet throughout the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* (*Tr.* 4.10.1–2; *Pont.* 2.11.2). In *Tr.* 5.1.17–20 Ovid's wish that he did not follow the love poets Gallus, Propertius, and Tibullus still functions to reinscribe him in this genealogy. In his imagined epitaph, Ovid remains *tenerorum lusor amorum,* "he who played with

tender love" (*Tr.* 3.3.73). Widely demonstrated is Ovid's redeployment in Tomis of the techniques, vocabulary, and themes of the amatory mode when framing his suit to Augustus and expressing his longing for inaccessible Rome (for the similarity of Ovid as "exclusus exul" and *exclusus amator*, see for example Nagle 1980, Helzle 2003, Rosati 2003 on *Pont.* 2.2.40). His wife is offered the fame and immortality earlier offered to Corinna in the *Amores* (*Tr.* 4.3.81–82, 5.14.1–6). In *Pont.* 3.3 a now bedraggled Cupid himself returns (replaying his numerous earlier programmatic scenes in Ovid's poetry); his changed appearance announces the sadly altered condition of the exile elegies, yet marks a defiant continuity with the poet's earlier amatory works.

It is, of course, Augustus' reception of the *Ars Amatoria*, the *causa exilii* (*Pont.* 3.3.23), that concerns Ovid above all. Ovid's repeated defenses of the offending poem serve as persistent rebukes to the emperor, who by including the poem in his condemnation of the poet provided Ovid with his best weapon for his self-defense. It suited Ovid to claim that his poetry was the major cause of his exile (*Tr.* 5.12.45–46), as his offense was apparently unmentionable (e.g. *Pont.* 3.3.73–74 *quicquid id est (neque enim debet dolor ipse referri, / nec potes a culpa dicere abesse tua)*, "whatever it is (for the pain itself ought not be recalled nor can you say that you are free from guilt)"). *Tristia* 2 constitutes Ovid's most prominent attempt to rewrite the reception of the *Ars Amatoria*, to defend it as morally neutral and harmless. In this poem Ovid does not so much apologize for the *Ars Amatoria* as instruct Augustus (and his readers) how to read poetry, while expressing his views on readership and reception (Barchiesi 2001). Among his many claims, Ovid suggests that Augustus has not had the time to read the *Ars Amatoria*, busy as he is with affairs of state (213–40) and that he has been "critically naive" about the nature of poetic reception (Williams 1994: 193). Ovid argues that "the burden of interpretation falls on the reader of the poetry" (Gibson 1999: 23). The morals and mind of the reader determine whether a text is harmful (301 *omnia perversas possunt corrumpere mentes*, "all things can corrupt perverse minds"); there is no *crimen* in his *Ars* (240), if it is read *recta mente* (275). A sound and balanced judgment is required (80). Ovid suggests that "every work of art is open to deviant interpretations" (Barchiesi 1997: 33). The *Ars* has been unjustly singled out against the author's intention and Ovid's tendentious review of Greek and Latin literature (361–538) is meant to show that all texts are potentially immoral if misread, even Virgil's *Aeneid* (533–36), and yet all of Ovid's erotic predecessors eluded punishment (469–70). The teleological thrust of this catalogue of authors firmly asserts Ovid's position in the literary tradition (Ingleheart 2010: 22–24). Later, Ovid will turn to Germanicus in the hopes of finding in a fellow poet a proper understanding of the nature of poetry (*Pont.* 4.8.67–68).

Ovid also attempts to shape Augustus' understanding of his *maius opus*, the *Metamorphoses*, encouraging especially a recognition of its panegyrical intent.[2] At *Tristia* 2.63–66 Ovid proposes that Augustus will find in the epic praise of himself. This "retrospective authorization of an 'Augustan' reading of the poem" (Hinds 1999a: 50) may, however, be undermined by its advertised fictionality (64 *in non credendos*