

Ovid on the Margins: From Douglas to Walcott
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Carole E. Newlands

Reception studies of Ovid often focus on the great metropolitan centres, such as the humanists' Rome, or Shakespeare's London. My paper explores visions of Ovid by two later poets: Gavin Douglas, the first translator of the *Aeneid* in the British Isles, and Derek Walcott, the Nobel-prize winning poet best known for his epic poem *Omeros*. Both were natives of places far from metropolitan centres, namely sixteenth-century Scotland and the twentieth-century Caribbean. Distance apart, these poets have other commonalities that invite an appreciation of Ovid as a poet who paid a huge price for his art but whose central concern, even in exile on the margins of the Roman Empire, remained the re-creative power of language. Both Douglas and Walcott are learned poets acutely conscious of their origins far from metropolitan centres. They thus share anxiety relating to their distance not only from Graeco-Roman culture but also from the dominant English-language literature of their day. Their imagined encounters with Ovid occur before they composed the works for which they are chiefly known, the *Eneados* in Douglas' case and *Omeros* in Walcott's. Narrative devices from Ovid's *Fasti* play a role in dramatizing each encounter. In his Ovidian dream poem *Palis of Honoure*, Douglas, hiding fearfully in the Scottish woods, encounters Ovid in the form of Actaeon, the mythic figure with which Ovid identified himself in exile. In Walcott's *Hotel Normandie*, written in the Caribbean, the poet engages in an urbane conversation with the exilic Ovid while both are lounging at a hotel swimming pool. Despite the stark differences in locale, Ovid appears in both instances as an outsider who authorizes marginality and offers both Douglas and Walcott the possibility of personal and generic change. Each poet's encounter with Ovid leads their art in new directions.