

Traub, Valerie, Patricia **Badir**, and Peggy **McCracken**, eds, *Ovidian Transversions: 'Iphis and Ianthe', 1300–1650*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2019; Ebook (ePub); pp. 344; R.R.P. £25.99; ISBN 9781474448925.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was a staple educational text in premodern Europe, but there are distinct disparities as to which tales have attracted the most modern scholarly attention. *Ovidian Transversions* fills one significant gap, the lack of interest paid to the tale of Iphis and Ianthe. A particularly useful component of the book is the inclusion of appendices translating several versions into modern English, which will allow for comparative classroom use. However, I have reservations about the volume as a whole, due to its treatment of issues of gender and especially its negligent deployment of transgender theory.

Valerie Traub, in her introduction, provides a thorough introduction to the tale of Iphis and Ianthe and to its premodern reception. She then sets the parameters for a capacious critical volume, offering the little-used term 'transversion' as an 'overarching rubric' for the tale's medieval and early modern reception. Her discussion of the analytical possibilities offered by the concepts trans, trans- and trans* cites intra-community trans debates about orthography, but does not acknowledge trans people's specific, lived experience as something which produces the analytical perspective of trans studies. The publisher's copy blurb, in describing the volume's breadth as addressing 'gender and transgender, sexuality and gallantry, anatomy and alchemy, fable and history, youth and pedagogy, language and climate change', represents with unfortunate accuracy the volume's overall approach to 'transgender' as somehow distinct from 'gender'—a novel supplement, if not in actual opposition.

The volume's consistent strength is in the historicist contributions, particularly those interested in scholastic context or in the generic context of particular adaptations. Katherine Eggert's essay on *Galatea* offers, in relation to the status of alchemy, the stimulating concept of 'disknowledge' as a framework approaching paradox. Kathleen Perry Long offers early modern French texts concerning intersex bodies as a context to Benserade's representation of Iphis's gender in his play *Iphis et Iante* (1634), while Susan Lanser's reading of 'sex, youth and modernity' in the same play places it in the context of comedies of misdirected love.

Nevertheless, there are significant weaknesses in the treatment of medieval Iphis texts. Miranda Griffin's piece, on Christine de Pisan's use of Iphis as a metaphor for the gender transition which the narrator asserts in widowhood, is one of the stronger chapters. Miranda

Griffin's piece on Christine de Pisan's use of Iphis as a metaphor for the gender transition, which the narrator asserts in widowhood, is a stand-out contribution. In addition to a detailed close reading of the *Mutacion de Fortune*, Griffin's work is the only contribution that foregrounds transgender experience and consistently deploys pronouns other than 'she' for a character (Christine-the-narrator) after a gender-transformative experience. However, Griffin's chapter shares with other essays a striking lack of engagement with the field of premodern trans studies. Essays in the medieval section do engage with contemporary theoretical work, mostly from *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, and with Robert Mill's work on medieval gender; but I believe Gabrielle Bychowski is the only trans scholar of premodern literature to be cited (although Blake Gutt contributed to one of the appendix translations; and of course, I may be unaware of some contributors or cited authors' specific identities). Moreover, Karma Lochrie's paraphrase of Bychowski's work misrepresents the latter's commentary on the lack of agency afforded to trans youth today, furnishing instead a claim about the 'medicalization' of children that echoes reactionary talking points.

Given her earlier work questioning the hetero/homosexual binary, Lochrie's essay is also strikingly lacking in rigour in its engagement with gender. Speaking from my own standpoint as a nonbinary trans person, her off-hand description of Ovid's androgynous Iphis as 'genuinely non-binary' was promising, but the essay (and indeed the book) exhibits no engagement with current nonbinary perspectives. At the time this book went to press, 'nonbinary' was well established as a term, and perhaps the *only* uniting feature among the nonbinary community is agreement that physical features read as androgynous are not the same as nonbinary gender (see for instance C. N. Lester, *Trans Like Me*, Virago, 2017). I am not calling for a transposition of a specific 'felt' gender (or lack thereof) onto fictions of the past, but a genuine engagement with nonbinary perspectives would take into account the material concerns, and specific perspectives on the workings of gender, which result from living one's life as neither, both, or outside of 'man or woman'—much as Valerie Traub's work of a decade ago called for insight-based rather than essentialist work in lesbian studies.

In fact, as well as a lack of engagement with trans studies across the volume, I found the essays explicitly or implicitly framed as lesbian readings are disappointingly lacking in nuance: multiple chapters reference Iphis's assertion, in Benserade, that she almost 'forgot I was a girl' on her wedding night; one even describes Iphis as butch, without interrogating that in relation to the text, or the specific arguments concerning early modern culture. Lesbian thought has a wealth of perspectives on gender, embodiment, and erotic roles that could have

been brought to bear here. In all, this volume fails to deliver the queer and trans readings its blurb promises, despite its strength in historicist research and comparative source studies.

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