

It is well known and highly documented that a strong Ovidian influence permeates William Shakespeare's works, and this paper explores specifically the role of morality in this relationship. Shakespeare's exposure to Ovid would likely have come both from reading the original Latin and from Arthur Golding's 1567 translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Taylor, 2000: 8). Golding, being a Calvinist moralist, superimposed a puritanical moral code upon his version of Ovid's work, and so two very different accounts emerge: one reflecting Ovid's morality, the other, Golding's. In this essay, I explore how Golding's morality may or may not have affected Shakespeare's use of Ovid, while also focusing on passages in which Ovidian morality shines through or has in some way been restored by Shakespeare. As I see it, there are three levels to this inquiry: Ovid's morality, Golding's interpretation (or corruption) of it, and Shakespeare's use of both. I focus first on Shakespeare's early narrative poem *Venus and Adonis* and its moral connection to both Golding's translation and to Ovid's original *Metamorphoses*, as well as to Ovid's erotic poems, the *Amores* and *Ars Amatoria*. I shall then test these conclusions against one of Shakespeare's other works, *Titus Andronicus*, to see if Shakespeare's use of Golding and Ovid is consistent across genres. Although a surprising conclusion, my research demonstrates that in some contexts, particularly erotic, Shakespeare presents Ovidian morality more directly than that of his near contemporaries, like Golding.

Golding present his translation of the *Metamorphoses* as a list of fables outlining how not to behave. Shakespeare adopts Golding's didactic tone in different and clever ways. In *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare's Adonis reproaches Venus and warns her about the dangers of confusing love with lust—clearly in line with Golding's didactic tone. However, he also eroticizes the poem in a variety of ways, making it even more erotic than Ovid's version. I argue that this is Shakespeare's way of salvaging Ovidian morality in the wake of moralizing which he may have felt to be obligatory. In *Titus Andronicus*, we see characters using the *Metamorphoses* in a didactic way, but not at all in the way that Golding intends. Characters in this play use the *Metamorphoses* as a handbook on how to *achieve* moral depravity, rather than how to or why one should avoid such behavior. Thus we see Shakespeare bound to Golding's translation but at the same time consciously responding to it in an attempt to restore Ovidian eroticism.