

Wolfram R. Keller
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik
Unter den Linden 6
D-10099 Berlin
<wolfram.keller@staff.hu-berlin.de>

Ovidian Abandonment and Poetic Tradition: The Case of the Victorian Novel

Students of the reception of the Roman classics in nineteenth-century British culture generally agree that Roman antiquity played little of a role in the Victorian literary world. Moreover, while Ovid was popular with the Romantics and the Moderns, critics assert that he certainly had no measurable impact on the Victorian novel. In this paper, I would like to suggest that Ovid's model of "heroic abandonment" (Lipking) is not only a key theme in many Victorian novels, but represented a widely-adopted poetological model for many Victorian writers, as will be shown primarily with reference to Charlotte Brontë—with a brief view to Charles Dickens. The emerging, hitherto unacknowledged Ovidian undercurrent in Victorian novels challenges standard accounts of (seemingly) important turning points in the British reception of ancient Rome.