

K. Sarah-Jane Murray
Great Texts/Honors College

The Ovide Moralisé and Medieval Bible Illumination

Like Dante's Divine Comedy, the Ovide moralisé (or Moralized Ovid) occupies a strategic place in the intellectual tradition of Western Europe. Composed at the beginning of the fourteenth century in France, it offers readers a complete verse translation and adaptation of Ovid's Metamorphoses (approx. 12,000 lines) in Old French as well as over 60,000 lines of philosophical and theological commentary. Informed by Ovid, the Christian Bible, and other Latin and vernacular authorities (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Boethius, Gregory the Great, Jerome, Ambrose, Bonaventure, Augustine, Aquinas, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, Chrétien de Troyes), the anonymous Franciscan friar who composed the Ovide moralisé guides his intended Christian readers on a redemptive quest, culminating in the promise of the Beatific Vision in which they will participate in Paradise, provided they purge themselves of the desires and misguided affections to which many of Ovid's protagonists succumb. Twenty manuscripts of the Ovide Moralisé have survived. The majority of these were composed for court audiences, and many contain a rich program of illuminations: the Rouen manuscript alone contains over 300 images, many depicting Biblical scenes. My specific goal for this project (which, in turn, fits into a broader, comprehensive and monograph-length introduction to the Ovide Moralisé in English) is to account for the relationship between the Ovide moralisé's use of Christian iconography and medieval (primarily French) Bible illumination of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. After reading manuscripts in Europe and the New York area thanks to funding from the National Endowment of the Humanities and the American Philosophical Society, this final phase of the project will take into account the rich manuscript collections of the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. A variety of rare secondary sources will also be available to me in the Getty research center and at the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at UCLA.