Writing Metamorphosis in the English Renaissance

Taking Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as its starting point, this book analyses fantastic creatures including werewolves, bear-children and dragons in English literature from the Reformation to the late seventeenth century. Susan Wiseman tracks the idea of transformation through classical, literary, sacred, physiological, folkloric and ethnographic texts. Under modern disciplinary protocols these areas of writing are kept apart, but this study shows that in the Renaissance they were woven together by shared resources, frames of knowledge and readers. Drawing on a rich collection of critical and historical studies and key philosophical texts including Descartes’ *Meditations*, Wiseman outlines the importance of metamorphosis as a significant literary mode. Her examples range from canonical literature, including Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*, to Thomas Browne on dragons, together with popular material, arguing that the seventeenth century is marked by concentration on the potential of the human, and the world, to change or be changed.

WRITING METAMORPHOSIS IN THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE

1550–1700

SUSAN WISEMAN
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2 Title page of *Blkke Dogge of Newgate* (1596). Copyright British Library.
4 Plaster relief, Orpheus taming the beasts, Haddon Hall, Derbyshire. Copyright Tim Armstrong.
5 Cat, Edward Topsell, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts* (1607) 103. Copyright British Library.
9 Dragon, St Mary’s Church, Wiston, Suffolk. Copyright Tim Armstrong.
10 Dragon made from ray, Ulisse Aldrovandi, *De piscibus* (Bologna, 1613). Copyright British Library.
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A note on texts

The text follows the spelling and punctuation of pre-modern texts and editions used. Where editions using modernised spelling have substantial advantages those have been used. Golding’s use of Roman numerals is followed but other Roman numerals are usually changed.
Abbreviations

AHR  American Historical Review
CSPD  Calendar of State Papers
EHR  English Historical Review
ELH  English Literary History
ELR  English Literary Renaissance
HLQ  Huntington Library Quarterly
HMC  Historical Manuscripts Commission
JHI  Journal of the History of Ideas
MLR  Modern Language Review
NQ  Notes and Queries
OED  Oxford English Dictionary
RES  Review of English Studies
SEL  Studies in English Literature
SP  State Papers
SQ  Shakespeare Quarterly