IN CORPUS CORPORE TOTO: MERGING BODIES IN OVID’S METAMORPHOSES

by

JACLYN RENE FRIEND

(Under the Direction of Sarah Spence)

ABSTRACT

Though Ovid presents readers of his Metamorphoses with countless episodes of lovers uniting in a temporary physical closeness, some of his characters find themselves so affected by their love that they become inseparably merged with the ones they desire. These scenarios of “merging bodies” recall Lucretius’ explanations of love in De Rerum Natura (IV.1030-1287) and Aristophanes’ speech on love from Plato’s Symposium (189c2-193d5). In this thesis, I examine specific episodes of merging bodies in the Metamorphoses and explore the verbal and conceptual parallels that intertextually connect these episodes with De Rerum Natura and the Symposium. I focus on Ovid’s stories of Narcissus (III.339-510), Pyramus and Thisbe (IV.55-166), Salmacis and Hermaphroditus (IV.276-388), and Baucis and Philemon (VIII.611-724). I also discuss Ovid’s “merging bodies” in terms of his ideas about poetic immortality. Finally, I consider whether ancient representations of Narcissus in the visual arts are indicative of Ovid’s poetic success in antiquity.

INDEX WORDS: Ovid, Metamorphoses, Intertextuality, Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, Plato, Symposium, Narcissus, Pyramus, Thisbe, Salmacis, Hermaphroditus, Baucis, Philemon, Corpora, Immortality, Pompeii
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In preparing to approach the intertextual connections that underpin this thesis, I offer a passage from Ciaran Carson’s novel *Fishing for Amber* which works particularly well if used as a metaphorical explanation of the process by which intertextuality is created. *Fishing for Amber*, a “long story,” as its author calls it, reconfigures Ovidian myths amidst a narrative infused with Irish fairy tales, descriptions of Dutch art, and accounts of history that sometimes depart from the strictly verifiable. The narrator (one of many, as in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*), having “imbibed excessively of pipes of opium,” gazes pensively at an Oriental rug, the characteristics of which he begins to attribute to himself. He proceeds to tell his life story as the carpet:

I’d been made up hundreds of years ago: sometimes woven on the back of a camel, and I felt it with every thread of my being, sometimes woven by a camp-fire of camel dung, while the stars blazed like algebra, and frost glittered on the violet-black roof of the tent. I was sifted by infinite sands. I was the smell of mint tea, mutton-fat and olives. Coffee, cardamom and cinnamon. Pigeon giblets, orange-flower water, garlic. Cumin, parsley, icing sugar, almonds, lentils, raisins, ginger, sweet red peppers, hot red peppers, chick peas, onions, aubergines and watercress: I was all these odours. I remembered the welcome smell of rain. I could practically taste myself: such a hubbub of competing buds! I was a sweet and sour bitter salty peppery self, all shivering tufts and knotted alleyways.

I was privy to many yarns and confidences: I became their compendium. After centuries, I realized that all stories are the same. I was walked upon by jackboots, and silk slippers. I was stabbed on three occasions. I felt my stitches. Men and women bled on me. I was copulated on. I was hung on walls for admiration. I was bartered many times: a bag of salt to begin with, then a knife. Later, an ivory snuff receptacle in the figure of a charmer holding two snakes to his head; a small Greek ikon of St. George; a scimitar; a book containing all the alphabets in the known world; a pair of bejeweled dueling pistols; an amber bee, attributed to
Phidias. My last transaction was a knife again, for I had recently come down in their world; but I had endured generations of them, and would endure more. Possession was their fantasy, not mine. Their habitats are fleeting, and the dogs bark forever.¹

The ways in which the passage recalls the concepts of intertextuality goes beyond the obvious (though pleasing) way in which it calls to mind the word “intertextuality” itself, the root meaning of which goes back to the act of “weaving together.” Being woven together, we must assume, by a specific “author,” the rug has absorbed many of the scents present in the environment in which the author created it. Whether the author noticed this at the time or not, the rug is conscious of the fact, and anyone lying upon the rug after its creation might recognize the scents embedded in its fibers if he or she had been previously exposed to such odors. Similarly, classicists expend a great deal of energy identifying, within particular classical texts, the traces of other texts marked by similar language. As Don Fowler explains, “We do not read a text in isolation, but within a matrix of possibilities constituted by other texts.”² Further, he continues, “authors and texts do not have a choice as to whether they participate in these systems of meaning…[I]ntertextuality is a property of language—and of semiotic systems in general—not simply of literature.”³ The main narrator of Fishing for Amber, as the rug, continues on in a more figurative vein with the suggestion that he has absorbed all of the stories of the people who have come into contact with him, stating, “I became their compendium.” In the same way, written works, classical texts not excepted, are “compendia” of all of the stories and ideas that have affected their composition by authors and their interpretation by readers, no matter how subtly, an idea which prompts

³ Ibid. 16.
the rug’s reflection that “all stories are the same,” because, Carson explains elsewhere in
*Fishing for Amber*, “everything…must connect, since what has happened is forever, and
behind the story that we tell today another story lies.”

This thesis will commence with an exploration of these ideas about how separate
works intersect as we examine the merging texts of Plato, Lucretius, and Ovid within the
*Metamorphoses* as marked, appropriately, by the merging bodies of Ovid’s lovers in the
stories of Narcissus (III.339-510), Pyramus and Thisbe (IV.55-166), Salmacis and
Hermaphroditus (IV.276-388), and Baucis and Philemon (VIII.611-724). Narcissus is
merged with the one he loves in that he is in love with himself, even uttering the
memorable wish:

\[
\begin{align*}
o \textit{ utinam a nostro secedere corpore possem!} \\
o \textit{ utum in amante nouum: uellem quod amamus abesset.} \\
(\textit{Met. III.467-8})
\end{align*}
\]

O would that I were able to withdraw from my own body! A strange wish
in a lover, I wish that what I love were absent.

Pyramus and Thisbe are merged in death, as their ashes, the remnants of their bodies, are
mixed in a funerary urn. Hermaphroditus is unwillingly merged with Salmacis, a nymph
who prays to be absorbed into the body of the youth and is granted her wish. Finally,
Baucis and Philemon, too, are merged at the end of their lives, as they grow together as
trees when metamorphosed at the time of their death. Like the text of which they are all a
part, the characters in these four stories find that, whether they desire it or not, their
bodies do not exist “in isolation,” as Fowler would say, but instead combine in ways that
preserve and expand their significance within the *Metamorphoses*.

---

4 Carson, *Fishing for Amber*, 75.
5 All Greek and Latin texts in this thesis have come from the Oxford Classical Texts and have been adapted
for consistency.
6 All translations of Greek and Latin in this thesis are my own.
When considering such images of the merging bodies of lovers in these stories, we may recall Aristophanes’ lovers in Plato’s *Symposium*, each of which is a half of what was once a rather interestingly-shaped whole:

> ὅλον ἦν ἑκάστου τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τὸ εἶδος στρογγύλον, νῶτον καὶ πλευρὰς κύκλω ἔχον, χείρας δὲ τέτταρας εἶχε, καὶ σκέλη τὰ ἰσα ταῖς χερσίν, καὶ πρόσωπα δύ’ ἐπ’ αὐχένι κυκλοτερεῖ, ὡμοία πάντη: κεφαλὴν δ’ ἐπ’ ἀμφοτέρους τοῖς προσώποις ἐναντίονς κειμένοι μίαν, καὶ ὡρα τέτταρα, καὶ αἴδοια δύο, καὶ τάλλα πάντα ὡς ἀπὸ τούτων ἄν τις εἰκάσει, ἐπορεύετο δὲ καὶ ὃρθιον ὁπέστερον ὥσπερ οἱ κυβιστῶντες κυβιστῶσι κύκλῳ, ὥσπερ οἱ κυβίστωσι κύκλῳ, ὠρθὸν τὴν ὁμοία τετταραπέντες στρογγυλὰ κυκλοφωροῦντα εἰς ὁμοίῳ κύκλῳ, ὡσπερ τὸ ἀνθρώπον ἀνεματικὸν ἐφέροντο κύκλῳ. (Plato, *Symposium* 189e5-190a9)

The shape of each person was wholly spherical, having the back and the sides in a circle, and each had four hands, and as many legs as hands, and two faces on a round neck, alike in every way. There was one head for both of the faces, which were facing in opposite directions, and four ears, and two sets of genitals, and all the other things were as one might imagine them. And each walked upright, as now, whichever way it wished. And whenever it began to move quickly, just as tumblers tumble moving around in a circle with their legs out straight, these creatures then had eight limbs which, supporting them, bore them along.

Love, Aristophanes explains to his fellow symposiasts, is the natural longing of the halves to reunite into this whole. Again, this is not far from Lucretius’ description of lovers in book four of *De Rerum Natura*, who press together in the throes of love so passionately that they seem to want *penetrare et abire in corpus corpore toto* (“to absorb and to penetrate wholly with body into body,” 1111). In fact, as Philip Hardie suggests, this line indicates that, “Lucretius may remember the speech of Aristophanes in the *Symposium*, which tells of the ever-frustrated desire of the human individual to join up in the primal union with his or her other half.” Phillip De Lacy includes this passage among those he cites as proof that “Lucretius did indeed have a first-hand knowledge of Plato’s

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writings and that he not only rejected Platonism but even derived anti-Platonic arguments from the *Dialogues*, thus turning Plato against himself.\(^8\) Doubtless, their similarity is intriguing.\(^9\)

But lest the discussion become entirely entrenched in ideas about love, we should at this point take a brief step back from this highly focused topic, the merging bodies of lovers in the *Metamorphoses*, to remind ourselves of the overarching theme it instantiates. “As a metaphor,” Stephen Wheeler explains, “metamorphosis gives coherence to change by revealing the mysterious interconnectedness and parity between things.”\(^10\) Ovid’s stories are intended not to make us think about love as much as to see the fluidity of the physical world he created as a representation of the fluidity of the intellectual, of the world of poetry and literature. His characters, their surroundings, what they metamorphose into, all preserve traces of one another in themselves in a way similar to that in which Ovid’s poem intertextually preserves the poetic characters and atmosphere and works of his age. The merging-body episodes are a particularly apt metaphor for this, as they present us with distinct forms within the story blending together into one while Ovid, in his position as storyteller, is blending the text of Lucretius and Plato into his own. Thus, the merged quality of his text itself reminds us not to see anything as isolated and wholly contained in its own form.

We shall begin this thesis with a detailed exploration of the specific intertextual connections that recall the words of Lucretius and Plato in each of the four

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abovementioned episodes from the *Metamorphoses*. Next, we will take a survey of Ovid’s potential mythological sources for these four stories, with an eye to determining in each case whether Ovid’s emphasis on the merging of the characters’ bodies was likely an original innovation on his part. From there, we will proceed to a discussion of the significance of the word *corpora* in the *Metamorphoses* and to an examination of Ovid’s ideas about the immortality of his poetic *corpus* as evinced by the final lines of his epic and modified later in his exile poetry. Finally, we will conclude by looking at a number of visual representations of Narcissus in the form of wall paintings from first-century A.D. Pompeii, evaluating the claim that these works reflect an Ovidian influence and suggesting alternative ways of reading them in relation to Ovid’s poem.
CHAPTER 2
INTERTEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

As we begin to examine the merging-body stories in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and the intertextual parallels that recall Plato’s *Symposium* and Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* within these stories, we should start by noting their thematic similarity. On some level, all three works deal with the relationships between bodies, whether human or animal or atomic, and with the joining and parting and transforming of these bodies. Ovid states his goal for the *Metamorphoses* at the beginning of the work:

In noua fert animus mutatas dicere formas corpora
(*Met.* I.1-2).

My mind urges me to speak of forms changed into new bodies.

Lucretius’ aim is not dissimilar:

…rerum primordia pandam,
unde omnis natura creet res auctet alatque quae eadem rerum natura perempta resolvat, quae nos materiem et genitalia corpora rebus reddunda in ratione uocare et semina rerum appellantare suemus et haec eadem usurpare corpora prima, quod ex illis sunt omnia primis.
(*DRN* I.55-61)

I will lay out the origins of things, from which nature creates all things and increases and nourishes them, and into which the same nature releases them again, having been destroyed, things which we are accustomed, when delivering a rational account, to call matter and the bodies of creation for things, and to name as the seeds of things, and to call them also the first bodies, because from these first everything else comes.
As with Ovid, Lucretius promises to tell the reader of *corpora* and of the generation of new things. Ovid focuses on the amorous couplings of *corpora* throughout the *Metamorphoses*, and Lucretius, too, treats the subject, spending the latter half of book four of *De Rerum Natura* supporting his admonishments about love. Lucretius’ caution to readers, however, is far from what we think of when we read Ovid:

```
   sed fugitare decet simulacra et pabula amoris
   absterrere sibi atque alio conuertere mentem
   et iacere umorem coniectum in corpora quaeque
   nec retinere, semel conuersum unius amore,
   et seruare sibi curam certunque dolorem.
   ulcus enim uiuescit et inueterascit alendo
   inque dies gliscit furor atque aerumna grauescit,
   si non prima nouis conturbes uolnera plagis
   uolgiuagaque uagus Uenere ante recentia cures
   aut alio possis animi traducere motus.
   (DRN IV.1063-72)
```

But it is fitting to flee from images and to drive off the fuel of love from yourself and to turn the mind elsewhere and to cast the collected liquid into any body whatsoever and not to retain it, once twisted up with the love of one, and to preserve for yourself care and certain grief. For the ulcer comes to life and establishes itself by feeding, and day by day the madness swells and distress grows heavy, if you do not mix up the first wounds with new cuts and take care of them, fresh, wandering with wide-ranging Venus, or if you are not able to direct your train of thought in another direction.

Lucretius writes of passion, so central to the plot of most of the stories in the *Metamorphoses*, as a vice, urging his readers to prefer satisfying their immediate physical desires with a prostitute over binding themselves unwaveringly to a single woman. “What Lucretius is attacking,” Aya Betensky states, “is a romantic and obsessive attitude to love which may have existed in life, then and now, and which we certainly find reflected and amplified in literature,” such as the poetry of Lucretius’ contemporary Catullus.11 And while Lucretius does not deny the possibility of achieving and sustaining a peaceful

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marriage, he asserts at the close of the fourth book of *De Rerum Natura* that it has nothing to do with passion and Venus:

\[
\text{Nec diuinitus interdum Uenerisque sagittis
deteriore fit ut forma muliercula ametur.}
\]
\[
\text{nam facit ipsa suis interdum femina factis}
morigerisque modis et mundre corpore culto,
ut facile insuescat te secum degere uitam.}
\]
\[
\text{quod super est, consuetudo concinnat amorem;}
\]
\[
\text{nam leuiter quamuis quod crebro tunditur icu,}
\]
\[
\text{uncitur in longo spatio tamen atque labascit.}
\]
\[
\text{nonne uides etiam guttas in saxa cadentis}
umoris longo in spatio pertundere saxa?}
\]
\[
(DRN IV.1278-87)
\]

Nor is it by divine influence and the arrows of Venus that sometimes a little lady with an inferior appearance is loved. For sometimes a woman manages, by her actions and her obliging ways and by her neat and well groomed body, to easily accustom you to spend your life with her. What’s more, habit creates love; for that which frequently is struck lightly with a blow, is nevertheless conquered in the long run and breaks. Do you not see that even drops of water falling on rock bore through rock in the long run?

As the poet indicates here, Betensky explains, Lucretius believed that love and marriage should be a “gradual, conscious, and realistic process of learning to live with another person,” as he “describes marriage in terms of friendship” instead of passion.\(^{12}\) The last two images of book four may cause us to smile: the implication that growing to love one’s wife is similar to being beaten down and worn away is surely an attempt at humor on Lucretius’ part. But Brown sees such joking as indicative of disdain on the part of the poet, suggesting that “[i]t is as if Lucretius recognizes the attraction of domestic intimacy but at the same time sees it as a surrender to human weakness and is careful to maintain the proper philosophical attitude of aloof independence. Ultimately, therefore, the conclusion is equivocal and ends quite fittingly with a question.”\(^{13}\) Of the characters from

\(^{12}\) Idem, 294.
\(^{13}\) Brown, *Lucretius on Love and Sex*, 372.
the *Metamorphoses* who allow themselves to feel passion for others, some fare well in their amorous pursuits, some poorly; however, those who attempt to repulse it outright fail overwhelmingly. Determining how and why (in light of the failure of Lucretius’ advice to prove entirely prudent in the world of the *Metamorphoses*) Ovid used Lucretian imagery in these stories of merging bodies is one of the goals of this chapter.

Turning now to Plato, we may justify our search for elements of the *Symposium* within the *Metamorphoses* by noting that the dialogue shares its apparent subject, the nature of love, with many of the stories in Ovid’s epic. Eryximachus proposes this topic of discussion to the symposiasts:

δοκεῖ γάρ μοι χρῆναι ἐκαστὸν ἡμῶν λόγον εἰπεῖν ἔπαινον Ἐρωτός ἐπὶ δεξιὰ ὡς ἂν δύνηται κάλλιστον, ἄρχειν δὲ Φαῖδρον πρῶτον, ἐπειδὴ καὶ πρῶτος κατάκειται καὶ ἔστιν ἅμα πατὴρ τοῦ λόγου. (*Symposium*, 177d2-d5)

For it seems to me that each of us ought to make a speech of praise for love [from left] to right, one as beautiful as he can, and that Phaedrus ought to begin first, since he is reclining in the first spot and at the same time is the father of the discussion.

It may, however, be worth asking why we can read features of Aristophanes’ speech in the *Metamorphoses* when the *Symposium* affords so many others, when Aristophanes’ speech might be said to serve merely as a stepping-stone leading up to Socrates’ superior description of love later in the dialogue. In answering this, we should consider that Aristophanes’ amusingly large, roly-poly humans cut apart by the gods for their sins against heaven hardly seem out of place in Ovid’s diverse landscape of *mutatas formas*. Further, the meaning behind the story, that there exists for each one of us a specific “other half” that will complete us, would be undeniably appealing to many of the lovers...
Ovid describes in the *Metamorphoses* and, indeed, to many of us today. As Allan Bloom explains,

To say, ‘I feel so powerfully attracted and believe I want to hold on forever because this is my lost other half,’ gives word to what we actually feel and seems to be sufficient. It does not go beyond our experience to some higher principle, which has the effect of diluting our connection to another human being, nor does it take us down beneath our experience to certain animal impulses or physical processes of which our feelings are only an illusory superstructure. Once one knows Aristophanes’ speech, it is very difficult to forget it when one most needs it. It is the speech for an experience that is speechless.¹⁴

Aristophanes’ ideas about love are rather more conventional than those of Lucretius and seem often to be shared by Ovid’s lovers. Robert Brown notes the disparity between the sentiments that characterize Lucretius’ and Aristophanes’ presentations on the subject, explaining that, “For Plato’s Aristophanes, sexual passion is symptomatic of a deep human need to achieve completion through an intimate relationship. Lucretius, in contrast, sees it as a superficial obsession and scornfully rejects the possibility of self-fulfillment through love—even in the union of bodies, let alone that of the souls.”¹⁵ In examining the parallels existing among the three texts, we shall keep in mind the apparent harmony between Ovid’s merging body stories and Aristophanes’ speech in the *Symposium*, and keep in mind as well the seeming discord between Lucretius’ recommendations in *De Rerum Natura* and the impact that shunning love has for many of Ovid’s characters. Let us now begin to lay out more explicitly what the merged quality of the text means within each of the four stories mentioned above.

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Narcissus

One of the first bits of information Ovid reveals when introducing Narcissus in book three of the *Metamorphoses* is that *multi illum iuuenes, multae cupiere puellae;/ sed (fuit in tenera tam dura superbia forma)/ nulli illum iuuenes, nullae tetigere puellae* (“Many youths desired him, many girls. But in his tender form was such unfeeling pride; none of the youths, none of the girls touched him,” III.353-55). In shunning these potential affairs and pursuing the hunt, Narcissus’ behavior seems in accordance with Lucretius’ advice on love cited above, *decec…alio conuertere mentem* (“it is fitting to turn the mind elsewhere,” *DRN*, IV.1063-64). Further, by viewing his admirers as inferiors, Narcissus appears to avoid one of the major pitfalls of men in love as described by Lucretius, who says that a man may remain unconquered by passion *nisi…praetermittas animi uitia omnia primum/ aut quae corporis sunt eius, quam praepetis ac uis* (“if you do not first overlook all the faults of the mind and body which belong to her whom you strive after and desire,” *DRN*, IV.1150-52). Reiterating that a man need not become a slave to his beloved if *alio possis animi traducere* (“you are able to direct your train of thought in another direction,” *DRN*, IV.1072), Lucretius seems to prescribe just the sort of life Narcissus has chosen for himself, a life uninterrupted by dependence on anyone other than himself.

Of course, it is precisely this sole dependence on himself that eventually becomes problematic for Narcissus. For the order which, according to Lucretius’ philosophy, should have followed from Narcissus’ purity of mind is quickly shattered. With the prayer of a youth spurned by him, *sic amet ipse licet, sic non potiatur amato* (“Thus, although he himself may be in love, so let him not attain what is beloved!” *Met*. III.405),
Narcissus is soon forced to suffer from the very same symptoms of extreme desire which his avoidance of passionate love should have rescued him from. What follows is, as Hardie puts it, “almost…a fantasy based on a dreamlike meditation on the Lucretian discussion of sense-perception and delusion.”

In identifying the textual parallels between Ovid’s Narcissus in the *Metamorphoses* and Lucretius’ lovers in book four of the *De Rerum Natura*, we shall start with Hardie’s discussion of the subject in “Lucretius and the Delusions of Narcissus.” Hardie points out how Ovid’s language “mirrors” Lucretius’ from the moment Narcissus sees his reflection in the pool. Both poets, he notes, describe love as a kind of thirst. Compare, for example, the following passages, in the first of which Narcissus, wandering in the forest, comes upon the little pool of water:

hic puer et studio uenandi lassus et aestu
procubuit faciemque loci fontemque secutus;
dumque sitim sedare cupit, sitis altera creuit

(*Met. III.413-15*)

Here the boy, weary with hunting and the heat, lay outstretched, drawn by the appearance of the place and the spring. And while he wants to allay his thirst, another thirst arises.

We see the repetition of the idea of love as an unquenchable thirst when Lucretius describes how desire for a lover cannot be satisfied by any amount of physical contact:

ut bibere in somnis sitiens quom quaeirit et umor
non datur, ardores qui membris stinguere possit,
sed laticum simulacra petit frustraque laborat
in medioque sitit torrenti flumine potans,
sic in amore Uenus simulacris ludit amantis

(*DRN IV.1097-1101*)

As when in dreams, a man, thirsting, seeks to drink, and there is no water given which could extinguish the burning throughout his body, but he seeks the image of water and labors in vain and in the middle of a rushing

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river he, drinking, thirsts, thus in love does Venus tease the lover with images…

Lucretius warns of *laticum simulacra*, and, soon after, Narcissus is enslaved by his own image in the spring. And even though he seems to take some pleasure in the act of gazing, it will never be a fulfilling act, for, Lucretius continues, *nec satiare queunt spectando corpora coram* (“bodies before one’s eyes are not able to satisfy one with looking,” *DRN* IV.1102). So, as Hardie suggests, “Narcissus becomes the Lucretian lover, thirst raging in the midst of water.” Narcissus himself recalls this later when, having recognized that he has fallen in love with his own reflection, he remarks, *quod cupio mecum est; inopem me copia fecit* (“What I desire is with me: its abundance makes me poor,” *Met.* III.466). Just like the extreme thirst they share, both Narcissus and Lucretius’ misguided lovers are described as burning with desire and bearing the fire of love, as is typical of elegiac lovers. Here, Narcissus describes his burning desire for the boy whose reflection he has just recognized as his own:

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iste ego sum! sensi, nec me mea fallit imago.
uror amore mei, flammas moueoque feroque.
(Met. III.463-64)
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I am he: I understand, my image does not deceive me. I’m on fire with love for myself; I both stir up and suffer from the flames.

With similarly fiery imagery, Lucretius explains why enjoying a lover’s body cannot ultimately satisfy desire:

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namque in eo spes est, unde est ardoris origo,
restingui quoque posse ab eodem corpore flammam.
quod fieri contra totum natura repugnat;
unaque res haec est, cuius quam plurima habemus,
tam magis ardescit dira cuppedine pectus.
(DRN IV.1086-1090)
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17 Hardie, “Lucretius and the Delusions of Narcissus,” 82.
For in this there is the hope that, from the same body from which the beginning of the burning comes, the flame might also be extinguished. On the contrary, nature wholly denies that this can happen; and this is the one thing of which the more we have, so much more does the breast burn with terrible desire.

Ovid has ensured that Lucretius’ predictions come true in Narcissus’ punishment: Narcissus surely cannot extinguish his burning with its source, as he himself is that very source. At this point, Narcissus almost appears to be a character in a comedy in which Lucretius’ dramatic love scenarios are played out point-by-point, scenarios involving dire consequences for falling in love. Ovid has, in a sense, inflicted Narcissus with a punishment from *De Rerum Natura* for seeming to follow Lucretius’ rather stoic advice.

With Narcissus’ recognition of himself as his own lover and beloved, we get another important Lucretian parallel, in which the image of merging bodies appears as Narcissus prays in vain:

_o utinam a nostro secedere corpore possem!_
_uotum in amante nouum: uellem quod amamus abesset._

(*Met. III.467-8*)

O, would that I could withdraw from my own body! A strange prayer for a lover, I wish that what I love were absent.

Narcissus’ prayer rings as a strange inversion of Lucretius’ remarks on the desperate movements of lovers:

_Neiquam, quoniam nil inde abradere possunt_
_nec penetrare et abire in corpus corpore toto;_
_nam facere interdum uelle et certare uidentur_

(*DRN IV.1110-12*)

[It is] in vain, since they are not able to rub anything off from there, nor to absorb into each other and to move with entire body into body; for sometimes they seem to wish and to strive to do this.
According to Lucretius, the couplings of lovers are *nequiquam* because lovers cannot achieve what seems to be the goal of the act: *abradere* and *penetrare et abire*. Narcissus, however, has a desire entirely opposite to the impossible wish of the Lucretian lovers, as he already shares a body with the one he loves. Alessandro Barchiesi and Gianpiero Rosati remark upon Narcissus’ acknowledgment that he is, in a sense, two bodies in one as evidenced by his switch from the singular to the plural in his speech to his reflection, explaining, “dopo una lunga sequenza di prime persone, il plurale, pur linguisticamente legittimo, ha un efetto patetico, perché implica il desiderio impossibile di trasformarsi da “uno” in “due”; al v. 473 Narciso chiuderà il suo monologo con un plurale che, nelle sue intenzioni, è vero: *moriemur*.”\(^{18}\) Narcissus has achieved the goal of the Lucretian lovers, to become two in one, but is miserable because of it.

To address the possible Platonic intertext, Hardie suggests that, “Ovid’s Narcissus suffers the fate of the Aristophanic halved beings before Zeus turned round their genitals”\(^ {19} \):

\[\text{ἐπειδὴ οὖν ἡ φύσις δίχα ἐτμήθη, ποθοῦν ἕκαστον τὸ ἡμισὺ τὸ αὑτοῦ συνήθει, καὶ περιβάλλοντες τὰς χεῖρας καὶ συμπλεκόμενοι ἀλλήλως, ἐπιθυμοῦντες συμφυνῆς, ἀπέθνησκον ύπὸ λιμοῦ καὶ τῆς ἄλλης ἄργιας διὰ τὸ μηδὲν ἔθελεν χωρίς ἀλλήλων ποιεῖν. (Plato, *Symposium* 191a5-b1)\]

When, then, our form was cut apart, each half, longing for its own other half, united with it, and casting their hands around one another and entwining, desiring to grow together, they perished from hunger and other forms of inactivity, not being willing on account of this to do things apart from one another.

Narcissus resigns himself to a similar fate, saying that he will die with his “lover” because he cannot bear his condition:

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\(^ {19} \) Hardie, “Lucretius and the Delusions of Narcissus,” 84.
nec mihi mors grauis est posituro morte dolores; 
hic qui diligentur uellem diuturnior esset. 
nunc duo concordes anima moriemur in una. 
(Ovid, *Met.* III.471-3)

Death is not difficult for me, who will lay down my cares in death; this one who is beloved, I wish, would live longer. But now, we two will die together in one spirit.

In Aristophanes’ account, Zeus, seeing the halved humans dying, moved their genitals to the fronts of their bodies so that they could bring them together. Before this alteration, their genitals were positioned so that they did not touch when the two halves clung together. Because of this, the halves could neither get any relief from their clinging nor produce offspring, as they were too preoccupied with the clinging to think of begetting children the way they did before they were cut apart, when ἐγέννων καὶ ἔτικτον οὐκ εἰς ἀλλήλους ἄλλ᾽ εἰς γῆν (“they begot and produced not on each other but on the earth,” *Symposium* 191b7-8). After Zeus’ action, the lovers found their clinging to produce satisfaction and children:

μετέθηκε τε οὖν οὕτω αὐτῶν εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν καὶ διὰ τούτων τὴν γένεσιν ἐν ἀλλήλους ἐποίησεν, διὰ τοῦ ἄρρενος ἐν τῷ θῆλει, τῶνδε ἔνεκα, ἵνα ἐν τῇ συμπλοκῇ ἰμα μὲν εἰ ἀνήφε γυναικὶ ἐντύχοι, γεννήσαν καὶ γίγνοιτο τὸ γένος, ἰμα δ᾽ εἰ καὶ ἄρρην ἄρρενι, πλησιονή γοῦν γίγνοιτο τῆς συνουσίας καὶ διαπαύοιτο καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἔργα τρέποιτο καὶ τοῦ ἄλλου βίου ἐπιμελοίτο. 
(Plato, *Symposium* 191c1-8)

Then in this way he moved [their genitals] to the front of them and because of this they created offspring in one another, the man in the female, for the sake of this: so that, in their intertwining, if a man should join with a woman, he might beget and the race would continue to exist, but even if a man should join with a man, satisfaction might at least come about from the union and he might rest and turn to his tasks and take interest in the rest of his life.

Narcissus’ physical form, based on Aristophanes’ speech, is the one described here (which we shall call the stable form). But, after his realization that he has fallen in love
with himself, he speaks of himself as being two people in one body (*Met. III.473*), like
the roly-poly humans before they were halved. Physically, he requires a specific other
half. But while this other half has come to exist in Narcissus’ emotional world, it is not
part of the physical one he inhabits. For this reason, he suffers the fate of one unsatisfied.
The youth, as Hardie noted, appears more akin in behavior to the intermediate humans
(the ones separated but with their genitals not yet repositioned), as he, like them, wastes
away by refusing to draw himself away from his reflection:

> Non illum Cereris, non illum cura quietis
> abstrahere inde potest, sed opaca fusus in herba
> spectat inexpleto mendacem lumine formam
> perque oculos perit ipse suos…
> …sic attenuatus amore
> liquitur et tecto paulatim carpitur igni.
> et neque iam color est mixto candore rubori
> nec uigor et uires et quae modo uisa placebat
> nec corpus remanet
> (*Met. III.436-40; 489-93*)

Neither a concern for food nor for rest can draw him away from there, but
spread out on the shadowy grass he looks at the deceitful form with
unfulfilled eyes, and through his own eyes he perishes…thus diminished
by love he wastes away and little by little he is consumed by a hidden fire.
And no longer is his color that of a blush mixed with whiteness, nor is
there vigor and strength and what used to be pleasing, just recently seen,
nor does his form remain.

We observe a similarly-worded passage in Lucretius, despite the fact that his lovers
should, by Aristophanes’ account, be stable:

> Adde quod absumunt uiris pereuntque labore,
> adde quod alterius sub nutu degitur aetas,
> languent officia atque aegrotat fama uacillans.
> (*DRN IV.1121-23*)

Add the fact that they use up their strength and they perish with the labor,
add the fact that their time is spent in obedience to the nods of another,
their duties languish and their reputation, tottering, sickens.
If we consider Lucretius’ lovers in the terms of Aristophanes’ speech, they certainly do not behave like the stable lovers; they behave, rather, like the intermediate lovers who perish through refusing to let go of one another. While Aristophanes’ stable lovers are able to complete their ὀργα, Lucretius’ lovers have abandoned their officia. And although the result of love in Lucretius is that a man’s reputation aegrotat, Aristophanes speaks of how joining in love allows his stable lovers ἴασασθαι τὴν φύσιν τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην (“to heal the human form,” Sym. 191d3). This ἴασασθαι is a jarring contrast to much of the language in the above passages from Ovid and Lucretius, in which we see so many verbs of weakening, sickening, and diminishing: pereo (to perish), carpo (to use up, consume), dego (to spend), langueo (to be weary, languish), etc. And to relate Plato directly to Ovid, while Aristophanes holds that love makes τὴν φύσιν τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην a stable one, nec corpus remanet in the case of Narcissus. Why do Lucretius’ lovers, being stable Aristophanic lovers in form, not behave thus? Because although Aristophanes says that συνουσία may provide enough satisfaction for lovers to be reasonably productive (Symposium 191c1-8), Lucretius seems to disagree. Rather, he characterizes the desire for συνουσία as unremitting and disruptive:

tandem ubi se erupit neruis coniecta cupido,
parua fit ardoris uiolenti pausa parumper.
inde redit rabies eadem et furor ille revisit,
cum sibi quod cupiant ipsi contingere quaeant,
nec reperire malum id possunt quae machina uincat.
usque adeo incerti tabescunt uolnere caeco.
(Lucretius, DRN IV.1115-20)

Finally, when the collected desire has erupted from their genitals, there may for a moment be a little break in the violent burning. Then the same madness returns and that fury comes back, when they seek for themselves what they desire to happen, and are not able to figure out what device might overcome the evil. Indeed, uncertain, they continually waste away from a hidden wound.
While Aristophanes speaks of συνουσία with one’s beloved as a cure, Lucretius describes it as a kind of drug.

In Narcissus’ situation, all of these ideas have appallingly converged. It hardly matters whether συνουσία is stabilizing or not, because Narcissus does not allow his stable physical form to be of use to him by choosing a lover from among his admirers, by considering that one might be the right other half for him. He is given a kind of corrupted merged form as a punishment, from which he paradoxically desires to withdraw so that he may have the pleasure of reuniting with it. Narcissus lives not wholly in Aristophanes’ world nor in Lucretius’, but in Ovid’s, where the suffering of Lucretius’ passionate lovers and of Aristophanes’ intermediate lovers is gathered up and hurled at him indiscriminately when he refuses to accept his form. Would he have suffered like Lucretius’ lovers if he had accepted the advances of one of the youths or maidens pursuing him? Or would he have found satisfaction like Aristophanes’ stable lovers? It hardly matters, because deviant characters like Narcissus have ensured that whatever Ovid might consider to be the normal course of passionate love is rarely realized. Instead, employing the language and imagery of Lucretius and Plato, Ovid has created a world that seems not to have fixed rules, with his own work pulling in other works like the De Rerum Natura and the Symposium to the point that the reader senses that the range of possible outcomes of love, indeed, of any action, is interminably expanded, entirely metamorphic, and infinitely variegated.

Pyramus and Thisbe

Compared to Narcissus, Pyramus and Thisbe have at least the physical potential for a stable union: Pyramus et Thisbe, iuuenum pulcherrimus alter,/ altera, quas Oriens
habuit, praelata puellis/ contiguas tenuere domos (“Pyramus and Thisbe, the one, most handsome of youths, the other, foremost among the young ladies the East has to offer, lived in neighboring houses,” Met. IV.55-7). They get to know each other, being neighbors, and fall in love; their parents, however, forbid them to marry. Of course, this does nothing to quell the lovers’ desires, and ex aequo captis ardebant mentibus ambo (“they, both, with minds captivated, were equally on fire,” Met. IV.62). Suppressed, their love burns all the more, Ovid says, but they find some gratification in communicating through a small chink in the wall separating their houses:

saepe, ubi constiterant hinc Thisbe, Pyramus illinc,
inque uices fuerat captatus anhelitus oris,
“inuide” dicebant “paries, quid amantibus obstas?
quantum erat, ut sineres toto nos corpore iungi?
aut, hoc si nimium est, uel ad oscula danda pateres!
nec sumus ingrate; tibi nos debere fatemur quod datus est uerbis ad amicas transitus aures.”
talia diuersa nequiquam sede locuti
sub noctem dixere ”uale” partique dedere
oscula quisque suae non peruenientia contra.
(Ovid, Met. IV.71-80)

Often, when they had positioned themselves, Thisbe on this side, Pyramus on that, and in turns the breath from each one’s lips had been sought, they said, “Hateful wall, why do you oppose us lovers? How hard would it have been for you to allow us to be united in entire body? Or, if this is too much, for you to open up for kisses to be given! We are not ungrateful; we owe it to you, we admit, that passage to loving ears has been given our words.” Having spoken such things in vain from their separate seats, they said, “Farewell!” under the night, and each one to his own side gave kisses not arriving at the other side.

The story of Pyramus and Thisbe recalls the plight of Narcissus in several ways. Anderson notes that up to this point in the Metamorphoses, no other story than that of Narcissus has focused entirely on love between humans.20 We should also remember that

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at the crux of all three lovers’ problems (when their stories begin, at any rate) is the fact that they cannot eliminate the unwanted boundary they perceive to be separating themselves from their beloved. Pyramus and Thisbe’s complaint that the wall alone stands in the way of their desired bodily union is quite similar to Narcissus’ laments at the pool before he realizes that he loves only himself: *quoque magis doleam, nec nos mare separat ingens/ nec uia nec montes nec clausis moenia portis:/ exigua prohibemur aqua* (“That I may grieve all the more, no vast sea divides us nor road nor mountains nor town walls with gates closed; we are hindered by a little water!” *Met*. III.448-50). Narcissus and Pyramus and Thisbe try to breach these boundaries (Narcissus can, at least, take in his beloved with his gaze, and also reaches into the water in an attempt to touch him at *Met*. III.427-9, while Pyramus and Thisbe strain to catch each other’s breath and whispers through the crack in the wall) but all remain unsatisfied and express the desire to negotiate a more significant physical interaction. Pyramus and Thisbe reveal this desire through their protest to the wall, *quantum erat, ut sineres toto nos corpore iungi?*, which strongly echoes the sentiment and the language of Lucretius when he says lovers seem to wish *penetrare et abire in corpus corpore toto* (*DRN* IV.1111), as well as Narcissus’ notably reversed desire with his cry, *o utinam a nostro secedere corpore possem!* (*Met*. III.467) after he realizes that he loves his own image.

With respect to the *Symposium*, the image of Pyramus and Thisbe pressing up against the wall reminds us of Aristophanes’ remark that the stable lovers:

> ὅταν μὲν οὖν οὖν καὶ αὐτῷ ἐκείνῳ ἐντύχῃ τῷ αὐτοῦ ἡμίσει καὶ ὁ παιδεραστής καὶ ἄλλος πᾶς, τότε καὶ θαυμάσται φιλίᾳ τε καὶ οἰκειοτητι καὶ ἔρωτι, οὐκ εἰθέλοντες ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν χωρίζεσθαι ἄλληλων οὐδὲ σμικρὸν χρόνον (*Symposium* 192b5–c2).
And so, whenever one of them, a lover of boys or any other sort, meets with his own half, and they are wondrously stricken with love and affection and desire, not wishing, as it were, to be separated from one another even for a little while.

For Pyramus and Thisbe’s situation is surely not quite as bad as that of the intermediate lovers, who waste away in clinging because of their attraction to one another; after all, they manage to devise a plan to prevent themselves from languishing at the wall day after day, to allow themselves the opportunity for the potentially relieving συνονεία of the stable lovers. In a sense, this plan promises to rescue them from suffering like intermediate lovers, who may as well be on opposite sides of a wall for all the good their clinging does them, whose unfortunately-positioned genitals are essentially kept apart by the “wall” of their clinging bodies.

Nevertheless, Pyramus and Thisbe’s scheme fails in an almost comical set of missteps, and while their bodies eventually merge, it is not in love, but in death. As Thisbe prepares to commit suicide when she sees that Pyramus has killed himself after mistaking her to have been eaten by a lion, she prays:

> “hoc tamen amborum uerbis estote rogati, 
> o multum miseris meus illiusque parentes, 
> ut quos certus amor, quos hora nouissima iunxit, 
> componi tumulo non inuidetis eodem. 
> at tu, quae ramis arbor miserabile corpus 
> nunc tegis unius, mox es tectura duorum, 
> signa tene caedis pullosque et luctibus aptos 
> semper habe fetus, gemini monimenta cruoris.”

> dixit et aptato pectus mucrone sub imum 
> incubuit ferro, quod adhuc a caede tepebat.

> uota tamen tetigere deos, tetigere parentes; 
> nam color in pomo est, ubi permaturuit, ater, 
> quodque rogis superest una requiescit in urna.

(Ovid, *Met.* IV.154-66)

> “Yet be implored of this by the words of us both, o you terribly miserable parents, mine and his, that you not begrudge us, whom firm love, whom
this last hour has joined, to be placed together in the same tomb. But you, tree, who with your branches covers the miserable body of one, you are soon about to cover those of two, preserve the signs of our death and keep your fruits dark and appropriate for mourning, memorials of our double bloodshed.” She spoke, and with the sword positioned under the deepest part of her breast, she fell on the blade, which was still warm from the blood. Nevertheless, her prayers touched the gods, touched her parents: for the color on the fruit, when it ripens, is dark, and what is left from the funeral pyres rests in one urn.

Thisbe desires to share death with Pyramus: she wants the mulberry tree they lie under to serve as a symbol for them both and prays that they have a single grave. Before Pyramus killed himself, thinking Thisbe dead, he, too, felt the need for this shared death: ‘una duos’ inquit ‘nox perdet amantes./ e quibus illa fuit longa dignissima uita,/ nostra nocens anima est’ (‘One night,’ he says, ‘destroys two lovers, of which she was the most worthy of a long life; my soul is guilty,’” Met. IV.108-10). Barchiesi and Rosati comment on this, saying that, “Il motivo della iuncta mors degli amanti (spesso espressa mediante l’accostamento dei numerali uno-due) è comune in poesia erotica,” noting that it reprises Narcissus’ statement, nunc duo concordes anima moriemur in una (Met. III.473).21 Not unexpectedly, we see this commonplace in the Symposium as well, when Aristophanes tells of Hephaestus helping a pair of lovers define exactly what they want from one another on the most fundamental level, suggesting the wish ὡστε δύ᾽ ὄντας ἕνα γεγονέναι καὶ ἕως τ᾽ ἂν ζῆτε, ὡς ἕνα ὄντα, κοινὴ ἀμφοτέρους ζῆν, καὶ ἐπειδὰν ἀποθάνητε, ἐκεῖ ἄδ᾽ ἐν Ἅιδου ἀντὶ δυοῖν ἕνα εἶναι κοινῆ τεθνεῶτε (“that you, being two, might become one, and that as long as you live, since you are one, you might both live a life together, and that whenever you should die, you might be one there in Hades instead of two, being dead together,” Sym. 192e1-e4). But as much as Pyramus and Thisbe try to bring themselves closer and closer together, to be halves of a whole, the confused circumstances of their

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21 Barchiesi and Rosati, Ovidio Metamorfosi Volume II (Libri III-IV), 264.
deaths underscore that they have failed to achieve this physically. They certainly behave as a complete unit in the first half of the story; even the lines Ovid gives them to speak are shared lines, neither Pyramus’ nor Thisbe’s to voice alone. But when they decide to join their bodies by consecrating their love at Ninus’ tomb, the unity that they have been striving toward is disrupted. Speaking of Pyramus and Thisbe’s separate proclamations that they would like to be together in death, Anderson comments that “these are the only individualized statements of either lover.”

When Pyramus decides to kill himself, he unknowingly removes himself further from Thisbe. And Thisbe’s speech about their togetherness in death reminds us that they never quite achieved a satisfactory togetherness in life. This was not for a lack of desire; they express the same sentiments as do the Aristophanic and Lucretian lovers. But the closer they try to get to one another, the clearer it becomes that death, not life, will offer them the only opportunity to join their bodies.

Of course, this particular episode is told not directly by Ovid, but by an internal narrator, one of the three daughters of Minyas, girls who refuse to join in the Bacchic rituals and instead stay indoors entertaining one another with stories as they weave. Should we regard the Pyramus and Thisbe tale as nothing more significant than a sentimental portrait of romantic love of the sort that would appeal to an idealistic young girl? Not quite; after all, there are clear parallels not only with the Narcissus story from book III, but also with the De Rerum Natura and the Symposium. These pieces from other sources remind us that the Theban princess’ voice is, at its core, Ovid’s voice. The subtle ways in which Narcissus is remembered in the telling of the Pyramus and Thisbe story, the traces we find of Lucretius and Plato and the theme of two in one, of merged bodies,

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22 Anderson, Ovid’s Metamorphoses Books I-V, 423.
emphasize the significance of the story within the *Metamorphoses* as a representation of the merged quality of stories, literature, art. Surely, it stands as another example of one of the many outcomes of love; but, as with the Narcissus story, it is also a testament to the fact that the stories within the *Metamorphoses* so often have a many-layered depth established by the combination of multiple voices within the work. The merged state of Pyramus and Thisbe’s ashes, their bodies, makes the *una urna* in which they rest more meaningful, meaningful enough for the daughter of Minyas, for Ovid, to make a point of mentioning it. Each individual is preserved because of the uniqueness of their shared form, a form more compelling than that of either one of them alone. Whether Ovid’s characters find it personally destructive or gratifying, merging always opens up new avenues of meaning, and, stepping back, we see that this is naturally true for Ovid’s story itself. The discovery of multiple voices in these merging body stories (just as in many other stories of the *Metamorphoses*) encourages us to revise and expand our thoughts as we read, to pay closer attention to the poet’s words because of the intriguingly merged quality of the literary form before us.

**Salmacis and Hermaphroditus**

With the introduction of Hermaphroditus shortly after the Pyramus and Thisbe episode, we come upon a youth whose age, beauty, and habits are so similar to Narcissus’ that we immediately feel apprehensive for the child of Hermes and Aphrodite. Just as Narcissus spent his time hunting, Hermaphroditus, too, is preoccupied with the natural world:

is tria cum primum fecit quinquennia, montes
deseruit patris Idaque altrice relict
ignotis errare locis, ignota uidere
flumina gaudebat, studio minuente laborem.
(Ovid, *Met.* IV.292-5)

As soon as he was fifteen, he abandoned his native mountains, and, with his foster mother Ida left behind he rejoiced to wander in unknown places and to see unknown rivers, his eagerness lessening the effort.

Coming to the land of the Carians near Lycia, he finds a pool that Ovid describes in some detail:

uidet hic stagnum lucentis ad imum
usque solum lymphae. non illic canna palustris
nec steriles uluae nec acuta cuspidie iunci;
perspicuus liquor est. stagni tamen ultima uiuo
caespite cinguntur semperque uirentibus herbis.
(Ovid, *Met.* IV.297-301)

Here he sees a pool of water sparkling right down to the bottommost part. There is no marshy reed nor fruitless sedge nor rushes with spiky tip; the water is clear. Nevertheless the edges of the pool are surrounded with fresh grass and plants forever green.

Here again, we think of Narcissus, whose pool is described as similarly clear and tranquil and surrounded by soft green grass (*Met.* III.407-12). Segal notes this similarity of settings, remarking that, of the various associations ancient readers would have made with water, “the virginal associations of fresh water and pools” was particularly useful for Ovid because “characteristically, it also symbolizes the reverse.”23 For, like Narcissus, the virgin Hermaphroditus is an object of desire for others, specifically, in his case, for the nymph Salmacis. It is in Ovid’s description of Salmacis that the themes of chastity and sensuality are brought to the forefront of the myth. Salmacis, who sola...Naiadum celeri non nota Dianae (“alone of the naiads is not known to swift Diana,” *Met.* IV.304), prefers bathing to the hunt and lounges at the pool admiring her appearance and arranging

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her hair, “implicitly for a man,” Anderson comments.\textsuperscript{24} This contrasts with “the characteristic mode of the chaste nymph,” he states, which is “neglect of her looks, to let her hair blow in the breeze, only loosely filleted, to bathe after hunting, never to consult a mirror.\textsuperscript{25} Salmacis inhabits the \textit{stagnum lucentis...lympheae} upon which Hermaphroditus happens, and she was picking flowers \textit{cum puerum uidit uisumque optauit habere} (“when she saw the boy and desired to have what she saw,” \textit{Met}. IV.316).

Approaching Hermaphroditus and praising his beauty, Salmacis expresses her desire and proposes either marriage or, alternatively, a \textit{furtiua uoluptas} (“secret pleasure,” \textit{Met}. IV.327)\textsuperscript{26} if he already has a wife. Like Narcissus with Echo, Hermaphroditus wants nothing to do with his admirer and is only embarrassed by her advances, \textit{nescit enim quid amor} (“for he does not know what love is,” \textit{Met}. IV.330). Crying out when the nymph begs for a kiss and tries to embrace him, Hermaphroditus warns Salmacis that he will depart if she does not leave off in her pursuit of his affection. Not to be dissuaded, she hides on the edge of the pool until the boy is bathing naked and, stripping off her own garments, ambushes him. Unlike Narcissus and Pyramus and Thisbe, Salmacis finds no physical boundary cutting her off from Hermaphroditus. The boy has removed it by undressing and immersing himself willingly in the pond, a pond which, Hermann Fränkel notes, Ovid seems to represent as an extension and embodiment of the nymph herself.\textsuperscript{27} And while Narcissus strove to reach someone immaterial in his empty pool, Hermaphroditus is horrified to find that his own is not empty after all. He

\textsuperscript{24} Anderson, \textit{Ovid’s Metamorphoses Books I-V}, 445. \\
\textsuperscript{25} Idem \\
\textsuperscript{26} Barchiesi and Rosati, \textit{Ovidio Metamorfosi Volume II (Libri III-IV)}, 288-90 provides a discussion of similarities between Salmacis’ advances on Hermaphroditus and Echo’s on Narcissus, as well more general commentary on verbal parallels in Ovid’s characterization of Hermaphroditus and Narcissus, observations which help to further establish the relationship between the two episodes. \\
\textsuperscript{27} Hermann Fränkel, \textit{Ovid: a Poet between Two Worlds} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945), 88.
tries to push away Salmacis, but she clings tenaciously to his body, catching him in her
embrace as if she were a snake or ivy or a sea-polyp, Ovid remarks in a series of similes
(Met. IV.362-7). Hermaphroditus cannot disengage himself from the nymph, and we see
once again our merging-bodies motif:

Perstat Atlantiades sperataque gaudia nymphae
denegat; illa premit, commissaque corpore toto
sicut inhaerebat, “pugnes licet, improbe” dixit,
“non tamen effugies. ita di iubeatis, et istum
nulla dies a me nec me diducat ab isto.”
Uota suos habuere deos; nam mixta duorum
corpora iunguntur faciesque inductur illis
una. uelut, si quis conducat cortice ramos,
crescendo iungi pariterque adolescere cernit,
sic, ubi complexu coierunt membra tenaci,
nec duo sunt sed forma duplex, nec femina dici
nec puer ut possit, neutrumque et utrumque uidentur.
(Met. IV.368-79)

The son of Atlas endures, and refuses the nymph her hoped-for delights;
she presses hard, and attached with her entire body as if she were fastening on, she said, “It is allowed, o wicked boy, that you fight, but not that you
flee. Thus let the gods decree, and let no day separate that boy from me,
nor me from him.” Her prayers compelled the gods; for the mingled
bodies of the two are united and one face is introduced to them, just as
when someone brings together branches under bark, and sees that they are
united as they grow and that they become strong together. Thus when their
limbs met in a firm embrace, they were not two, but their form was
twofold, so that it could neither be called a female nor a boy: they seemed
neither and still both.

Once again, we see definite verbal parallels with the merging-body passages of Lucretius
and Plato. As in the Pyramus and Thisbe story, we find a repetition of the Lucretian
lovers’ pressing together corpore toto (DRN IV.1111) when Salmacis clings to
Hermaphroditus corpore toto (Met. IV.369). Salmacis behaves exactly like the reckless
and impasioned lovers Lucretius warns us not to emulate. She exarsit (Met. IV.347)
when, after desperately begging Hermaphroditus to embrace her and subsequently being
rejected by him, she spies the youth swimming naked. She never entertains Lucretius’ idea that *consuetudo concinnat amorem* (*DRN* IV.1283), resorting, rather, to force and prayer to achieve her desire. But instead of allowing her to continue suffering like the misguided Lucretian lover who is crippled by his devotion to his beloved, Ovid has Salmacis’ wish granted, though perhaps not in the way she intended.\(^{28}\)

Here, the theme of two-in-one appears again, when *mixta duorum*/* corpora iunguntur faciesque inducitur illis/ una* (*Met*. IV.373-375) as the unnamed gods proceed, in the words of Aristophanes, *ποιῆσαι ἓν ἐκ δυοίν* (*Sym*. 191d2). And although Salmacis has not explicitly asked for a *iuncta mors* of the sort mentioned above, she has prayed that *istum nulla dies a me nec me deducat ab isto*, reproducing the Aristophanic lovers’ wish as explained by Hephaestus (*Sym*. 192e1-e4). Nevertheless, the *duplex forma* that results from the merging is not really what Salmacis seemed to desire. For, as she stated when she first met Hermaphroditus, she was after the *voluptas* that she believed would come from sex, be it *furtiva* or within the context of marriage. Her prayer that she never be separated from Hermaphroditus is an extension of this desire. But the gods take her words more literally than she seems to have intended them, and “Il s'agit à première vue, semble-t-il,” Jean-Marc Frécaut writes in considering the metamorphosis, “d'une application de la théorie exposée par Aristophane dans le *Banquet* de Platon.”\(^{29}\) But after the merging, we are left not with a pair of roly-poly Aristophanic lovers, but a distorted version of Hermaphroditus. For although the narrator at first refers to the merged form in

\(^{28}\) Matthew Robinson, “Salmacis and Hermaphroditus: When Two Become One,” *The Classical Quarterly* 49 no. 1 (1999): 222-3 proposes an interesting answer to the question of why the gods grant Salmacis’ wish, suggesting that the merging was affected by Hephaestus, who has the power to fuse together lovers in Aristophanes’ speech, and who likely resents Hermaphroditus, as the latter is proof that his wife Aphrodite was unfaithful to him: “The offer made by Hephaestus [*Sym*. 191e1-e4] to the two lovers is identical to the request made by Salmacis to the gods. The idea of some divine force actually physically merging two bodies into one is far from common, and this passage of the *Met*. cannot but recall the *Symposium*.”

the plural, *neutrumque et utrumque uidentur* (*Met.* IV.379),\(^{30}\) it is clear that the creature still considers himself to be Hermaphroditus and does not react to the change as if someone has been added to him, but as if he has lost some of himself: *se liquidas, quo uir descenderat, undas/ semimarem fecisse uidet mollitaque in illis/ membra* (“he sees that the clear waters, in which he had submerged himself as a man, had made him half-male, his limbs enfeebled in them,” *Met.* IV.380-2). His name is revealed explicitly as Hermaphroditus for the first time here (before it was only suggestively alluded to that, being the son of Hermes and Aphrodite, *nomen quoque traxit ab illis*, “even his name he took from both,” *Met.* IV.291), and he prays that men visiting the pond henceforward suffer a similar fate: *quisquis in hos fontes uir uenerit, exeat inde/ semiuir et tactis subito mollescat in undis* (“Whoever comes to these waters as a man, let him emerge from them a half-man and suddenly become soft in the waves he has touched,” *Met.* IV.385-6). Hermaphroditus views his body as a corrupted version of his original self; he has not been completed with an other half, but perverted with something foreign. Matthew Robinson explains his unexpectedly curious metamorphosis more fully, focusing on the adjectives Ovid uses to describe the transformed Hermaphroditus:

The problem is that Ovid, in spite of what he says at 378-9, seems to present the result of the metamorphosis not as a seamless combination of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis (*neutrumque et utrumque videntur*), but rather as just Hermaphroditus alone, angry at the loss of his masculinity: Salmacis has been removed from the narrative. Furthermore, although described as *biformis* at 387, Hermaphroditus is also described with terms more appropriate to effeminacy than to androgyny (381 *semimarem, mollita…membra*; 382 *non noce virile*), almost as if he himself were a victim of the curse he is about to put on the spring (386 *semivir, mollescat*).\(^{31}\)

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\(^{30}\) Barchiesi and Rosati, *Ovidio Metamorfosi Volume II (Libri III-IV)*, 292 notes that Ovid’s wording here is quite similar to Lucretius’ definition of the “androgynem” at *DRN* V.839.

Hermaphroditus becomes a Narcissus-like figure whose body is useless to him and cannot be categorized as half or whole. On the other hand, as Robinson indicated, Salmacis’ identity has virtually disappeared. The merging has caused her to become lost in Hermaphroditus. She neither completes him, nor is she able to gain her desired voluptas. Anderson explains her mistake:

Salmacis has achieved the very opposite of satisfactory love and sex. Instead of winning the heart and mens of the boy to mutual love, so that their separate bodies could then give and receive pleasure in intercourse, she has forced an unnatural physical melding that destroys sexual differentiation and ignores the incompatibility of feelings. Ovid strongly emphasizes in this poem that love results from the symbolic union of the mind and emotions, not mere physical linkage.\(^{32}\)

Salmacis and Hermaphroditus are, at least in Hermaphroditus’ opinion, not halves of a whole meant for one another. Salmacis, nevertheless, has tried to pretend otherwise by behaving as one of Lucretius’ or Aristophanes’ lovers while completely ignoring Hermaphroditus’ opposition to the idea. But the couple does not fit the type described by Lucretius or Aristophanes, and instead of going through any sort of desirable merging, they combine into a lonely amalgamation of male and female parts. We should note that this story, like Pyramus and Thisbe’s, is one told by a daughter of Minyas named Alcithoe, but that here, too, Ovid’s voice is discernible through her from the beginning, as the Minyeid, like Ovid, emphasizes the newness of her story: dulcique animos nouitate tenebo (“I will captivate your minds with a sweet novelty,” Met. IV.284). The subject matter, a willful nymph who does not conform to the ways of those around her, may fit Alcithoe, but Ovid remains in control of the narrative. Once again, we see a layering of old and new voices, a combination of the familiar and the unexpected. Much like Alcithoe describes the merging of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus in terms of the grafting

together of trees, we may consider how her voice has been grafted onto Ovid’s story, along with Lucretius’ and Plato’s. Looking closely, we may see these various voices crescendo iungi pariterque adolescere.

**Baucis and Philemon**

The grafting metaphor provides a link to the final merging-body episode, as it anticipates a peaceful actualization in the case of Baucis and Philemon. This episode stands separated by several books from the previous three discussed here, and is, perhaps, not quite as conspicuously influenced by Lucretius and Plato as they are. Nevertheless, it presents us with another case of merging bodies and of “il tema tradizionale, ma utopistico, dell'unità degli amanti di fronte alla morte,” as Barchiesi and Rosati put it. It is hard not to remember the earlier (and, of course, tragic) mergings from books III and IV as we read the story of Baucis and Philemon, and we are thus not remiss in considering this later story in relation to the same passages from Plato and Lucretius to which we compared the earlier merging-body stories. And with Baucis and Philemon we find an instance where the wish to become one from two, the striving to merge body into body has a satisfying outcome. The disguised Jove and Mercury are welcomed at the house of Baucis and Philemon, and the narrator introduces the couple:

sed pia Baucis anus parilique aetate Philemon
illa sunt annis iuncti iuuenalibus, illa
consenuere casa...
(Met. VIII.631-33)

But the pious old woman Baucis and her Philemon, of equal age, were joined there in their youthful years, and in that cottage they grew old together...

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33 Barchiesi and Rosati, *Ovidio Metamorfosi Volume II (Libri III-IV)*, 203.
Already, we recognize their similarity to the stable Aristophanic lovers, two halves of a whole:

καὶ οἱ διατελοῦντες μετ᾽ ἀλλήλων διὰ βίου οὗτοί εἰσιν, οἳ οὐδ᾽ ἄν ἔχοιεν εἰπεῖν ὅτι βούλονται σφίσι παρ᾽ ἀλλήλων γίγνεσθαι.

(Sym. 192c2-4)

And these are the ones who live on with one another throughout their lives, though they would not be able to say what they wish to gain from one another.

A matching pair of a man and a woman, both the same age, two halves of a whole as Aristophanes would say, Baucis and Philemon consenuere, just as Aristophanes lovers’ are διατελοῦντες μετ᾽ ἀλλήλων διὰ βίου. We are not told any details of the couple’s early days, which technically prevents us from conjecturing as to whether or not they were ever passionate lovers of the kind Lucretius warns us about. But Philemon’s gentle love for his wife seems to have a deeper source than contentment in her ability to make herself bearable suis...factis/ morigerisque modis et munde corpore culto ("by her actions and her obliging ways and by her neat and well groomed body," DRN IV.1280-1).

One of Lucretius’ complaints about the destructive effects of exclusively courting a single girl is that lovers who do so often waste all their money on banquets and parties. He proceeds to describe the lush, costly trappings of such banquets, expenses that often drain away a lover’s estate. In Ovid’s Baucis and Philemon, we see a different kind of banquet, as the bulk of the story is occupied by a description of the simple meal the couple is able to offer to Jove and Mercury, disguised as travelers. Certainly, this scene endows the story with a bit of rustic charm. Further, reading this “feast” scene alongside Lucretius’ banquet description might shed some light onto how Ovid recognizes the
existence of other kinds of love than the destructive and distracting force that many of his other characters (not to mention Lucretius’ lovers) experience.

First, it is important to note that, while Lucretius complains of banquets resulting in poverty, Baucis and Philemon’s intimate familiarity and cooperation allows them to produce a banquet from their poverty. Let us look at specific places where the two texts intersect, turning first to Lucretius’ banquet scene:

labitur interea res et Babylonia fiunt
unguenta et pulchra in pedibus Sicyonia rident,
scilicet et grandes uiridi cum luce zmaragdi
auro includuntur teriturque thalassina uestis
adsidue et Ueneris sudorem exercita potat.
et bene parta patrum fiunt anademata, mitrae,
inter dum in pallam atque Alidensia Ciaque uertunt.
eximia ueste et uictu conuiuia, ludi,
pocula crebra, unguenta, coronae, serta parantur
(\textit{DRN} IV.1124-1132)

Meanwhile, their property slips away and becomes Babylonian perfumes, and beautiful Siconian shoes laugh on her feet; and, to be sure, great emeralds with green light are mounted in gold, and the sea-colored clothing is worn constantly and, abused, drinks in the sweat of Venus; and the well-begotten wealth of the fathers becomes fillets, headbands, sometimes it changes into the cloak of Alinda and Ceos; banquets with excellent cloth and food are prepared, and games, drinking cups crowded around, perfumes, crowns, wreaths.

Compare to this excess and luxuriance, to the \textit{res} and the \textit{bene parta partum}, Baucis and Philemon’s humble circumstances. Ovid notes that the old couple \textit{paupertatemque fatendo/ effecere leuem nec iniqua mente ferendo} (“made their poverty light by acknowledging it and by bearing it with a mind not hostile,” \textit{Met.} VIII.633-634). Here, not only do we see poverty instead of riches, but Baucis and Philemon’s \textit{nec iniqua mente} is a far cry from the persistent \textit{rabies} and \textit{furor} with which Lucretius’ lovers are characterized (\textit{DRN} IV.1117) and because of which, we are to assume, they throw their
extravagant banquets. When looking at the banquet setup, we find that Baucis and Philemon *uestibus hunc uelant quas non nisi tempore festo/ sternere consuerant, sed et haec uilisque uetusque/ uestis erat, lecto non indignanda saligno* (“cover this [couch] with cloths, which they’d not been accustomed to lay out except during the festal season, but even this was an inexpensive and old cloth, not unworthy of the willow-wood couch,” *Met. VIII.657-9*). Again, these are rather pitiful *uestes* placed next to the *thalassina uestis* and the *eximia ueste* we find in Lucretius. We should also pay attention to the significance of color here, for in Lucretius, we find several bursts of color, not only the *thalassina uestis* but also the *grandes uiridi cum luce zmaragdi auro*. To this flash of the *uiridi zmaragdi*, we may compare the flash of green appearing in the Baucis and Philemon story, when *aequatam mentae tersere uirentes* (“green mint leaves rubbed clean the leveled [table],” *Met. VIII.663*). And what of *auro*? Baucis and Philemon only match this color with their *pocula…flauentibus inlita ceris* (“cups coated with yellow wax,” *Met. VIII.670*), and fail to match its value with anything in their home at all, as their most costly metal appears found when *caelatus eodem/ sistitur argento crater* (“a mixing bowl carved from the same silver is set out,” *Met. VIII.668-9*). Finally, though they have gone to every effort to offer everything they have, Baucis and Philemon *ueniam dapibus nullisque paratibus orant* (“ask for pardon for the banquet and the lack of provisions,” *Met. VIII.683*), sorry that they cannot do more for their guests, while the Lucretian lover at times actually begrudges much of what he has been able to do, *cum conscius ipse animus se forte remordet/ desidiose agere aetatem lustrisque perire* (“When by chance his conscious mind nags at him about how he spends his life slothfully and perishes in debaucheries,” *DRN VIII.1135-6*). In this way, Ovid’s banquet scene in
Baucis and Philemon serves as the antithesis of the banquets of Lucretius’ lovers. This is hardly surprising, for Baucis and Philemon are at the stage of their lives when they are not competing for each other’s attention but, rather, cooperating as a unit. At this point, we may ask whether their love is not merely the passionless friendship that Lucretius, if begrudgingly, allows for in *De Rerum Natura*. Could not the difference in the character of Lucretius’ and Ovid’s banquet scenes simply be accounted for by the fact that Ovid’s Baucis and Philemon followed Lucretius’ philosophy of avoiding passion in relationships with the opposite sex? Before we conclude this, we ought to point the parallels between Baucis and Philemon and the stable lovers of Aristophanes.

As the gods reveal themselves to Baucis and Philemon, offering to grant the couple a wish in thanks for their hospitality, we come upon several passages notably similar to Plato. Baucis and Philemon accept the wish, asking to be vicars of the gods’ temple that has sprung up in place of their old cottage and adding a further request:

> et quoniam concordes egimus annos,  
> auferat hora duos eadem, ne coniugis umquam  
> busta meae uideam neu sim tumulandus ab illa.  
> (*Met.* VIII.708-10)

> …and since we have spent the years together, may the same hour bear us two away, lest I should ever see the grave of my wife, or should be buried by her.

With this, we recall Aristophanes’ account of Hephaestus suggesting that lovers wish to be together always:

> …ὡστε δὺ ὡντας ἕνα γεγονέναι καὶ ἔως τ᾿ ἄν ζήτε, ώς ἕνα ὡντα, κοινὴ ἀμφότερους ζῆν, καὶ ἐπειδὰν ἀποθάνητε, ἐκεῖ ἂν ἐν Ἁιδοῦ ἀντὶ δυοῖν ἕνα ἐίναι κοινὴ ἀιθιώτε (Sym. 192e1-e4)

> …that you, being two, might become one, and that as long as you live, since you are one, you might both live a life together, and that whenever
you should die, you might be one there in Hades instead of two, being
dead together

In Ovid, we see Baucis and Philemon, concordes, just as the Aristophanic lovers live
their lives κοινῇ. As in Aristophanes’ version, Baucis and Philemon desire that they two
share in one death, that, as in Plato, δύ’ δύτας ἕνα γεγονέναι. At this point, we may recall
how Narcissus is distressed by the idea of being concordes with his lover in death (hic
qui diligitur uellem diuturnior esset/ nunc duo concordes anima moriemur in una, “This
one who is beloved, I wish, would live longer. But now, we two will die together in one
breath,” Met. III.472-3), and how Pyramus laments that his Thisbe deserved to outlive
him (‘una duos’ inquit ‘nox perdet amantes./ e quibus illa fuit longa dignissima uita,/ 
nostra nocens anima est,’ “One night,’ he says, ‘destroys two lovers, of which she was
the most worthy of a long life; my soul is guilty,’” Met. IV.108-10). Philemon not only
admits how much he relies on Baucis, but how much she relies on him, as well. It is this
shared understanding, this perfect harmony of desire that exists between the two that
shows that they have achieved what none of Ovid’s other merged characters have. We
come to realize that Baucis and Philemon feel a deep dependence on one another, but that
they cherish this dependence and have allowed it to become a part of their identities.
Though Lucretius considers such dependence potentially disabling, Baucis and Philemon
seem to have found it worth the risk over the years. The gods grant the wish of their
gracious hosts, and, just as the Aristophanic lovers desire when they meet, we learn that
the bodies of Baucis and Philemon have merged at the end of the story:

ostendit adhuc Thyneius illic
incola de gemino uicinos corpore truncos.
(Met. VIII.719-20)
Still yet, a Tyanian inhabitant points out neighboring tree trunks there from a double body.

We may compare with this what happens when two separated halves of a whole meet according to Aristophanes:

επειδή οὖν ἡ φύσις δίχα ἐτμήθη, ποθοῦν ἕκαστον τὸ ἡμισύ τὸ αὐτοῦ συνημέει, καὶ περιβάλλοντες τὰς χεῖρας καὶ συμπλεκόμενοι ἀλλήλοις, ἐπιθυμοῦντες συμφύναι (Sym. 191a7-9)

When, then, our form was cut in two, each half, longing for its own, would come together with it, and they, throwing out their hands and entwining with one another, desiring to grow together.

Of particular note is Plato’s use of συμφύναι in that συμφύω is a compound of φύω which often refers to plants growing, a nice parallel to the way in which Baucis and Philemon grow together as trees. We should also consider the Latin corpore, the sense of which in this passage is something of a blend of two of its meanings, namely “body” and “trunk.” Thus we see that Baucis and Philemon, rejecting the Lucretian notion of dispassionate love, have achieved the goal of Aristophanic lovers, to become one from two. As Ovid’s internal narrator (Lelex, who tells the story to a group of illustrious guests at the house of Achelous as an example of the power of the gods) comes to the close of the story, he remarks:

equidem pendentia uidi
serta super ramos ponensque recentia dixi:
“cura deum di sunt, et qui coluere coluntur.”
(Met. VIII.722-24)

Indeed, I saw wreaths hanging over the branches, and I, putting up fresh ones, said, “Those in the care of the gods are gods, and those who have worshipped are worshipped.”

With the mention of sertα, we might think once more of the banqueters in Lucretius with their coronae, but the reverential tone of the speaker’s prayer that the garlanded Baucis
and Philemon be considered as gods assures us, once again, that Baucis and Philemon have achieved far more than both Lucretius’ passionate lovers as well as his dispassionate married couple.

In this way, the Baucis and Philemon episode gives us something of a happy ending to Ovid’s series of merging-body episodes. As with the stories of Narcissus, Pyramus and Thisbe, and Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, it is colored by our recollection of Lucretius’ and Aristophanes’ lovers. Here again, we see how Ovid deepens and intensifies the characters in his stories by allowing them to come into contact with the ideas and issues and images presented by other writers. As the corpora of his lovers merge within his stories, we are alerted to the ways that Ovid allows his written corpus to be permeated by the corpora of Lucretius and Plato. We, as careful readers, find ourselves revisiting the words written by Lucretius and Plato through new avenues. We may begin to consider how literary corpora, like physical corpora, need not be crippled by their dependence on one another, but may join up to reaffirm their connection and to remind us of the importance of the whole. This process of creative merging allows the Metamorphoses to establish its place in the web of artistic creation that intertextually connects and preserves works in one another and in the minds of their readers.
CHAPTER 3

ALTERNATE VERSIONS OF THE MERGING-BODY MYTHS

In the previous chapter, we gathered evidence for the idea that Ovid’s merging bodies can justifiably be viewed as metaphorical representations of intertextuality by examining the intertextual presence of the texts of Lucretius and Plato in the stories of Narcissus, Pyramus and Thisbe, Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, and Baucis and Philemon. But in the *Metamorphoses*, this element of two-in-one, of bodies and stories containing other bodies and stories, is expanded to the point that we may pick out not merely two, but any number of voices in each of Ovid’s tales. Though we have thus far limited this discussion to the relationship between Ovid, Lucretius, and Plato in a group of four stories, we will see in this chapter that we can identify various other voices present in the same passages. Richard Tarrant explains Ovid’s eclectic approach:

Whatever the form with which Ovid is engaged, his eye takes in the full sweep of Greco-Roman poetry, and the story he tells about his work is always being rewritten. If ‘literary history’ connotes a stable record of writers’ careers and of their relations to one another, Ovid is an anti-historian, who delights in reshuffling the data and producing constantly new accounts.\(^{34}\)

Despite the challenges posed by Ovid’s “anti-historical” attitude toward literary history, we will begin this second chapter by determining, where possible, the degree to which Ovid was “reshuffling the data and producing…new accounts” when he wrote these four stories, with an eye to showing in each case whether the merging of the characters seems to have been an Ovidian innovation.

Though we have a rather vague idea of Ovid’s sources for our four myths, a review of recent scholarship on the origins of these stories will still be useful in suggesting that the merging of bodies in each story should be regarded as significant Ovidian inventions. In prefacing a case-by-case examination, we should note a number of general ideas about Ovid’s use of Greek and Latin works. Anderson offers a useful description of Ovid’s wide-ranging selection of material for the *Metamorphoses*:

Some of Ovid’s material came from finely worked literary or poetic treatments of the same myth; for instance, Lucretius 5 stands behind parts of the Creation story in 1; Vergil’s Council of the Gods and the councils in earlier epics help to shape Ovid’s account in 1.163 ff.; the battle of Perseus at the banquet against Phineus and his motley supporters in 5.1 ff. borrows from the scene of Odysseus and the Suitors in Homer’s epic and from heroic battle episodes in the *Aeneid*. The stories of Phaethon in 2 and Pentheus in 3 have models in Euripidean tragedy. And Callimachus stands behind Ovid’s pairing of crow and raven in 2.524 ff. Many of the stories, however, apart from Ovid, are known to us only from badly narrated summaries in mythological handbooks or from chance comments. The handbooks of Parthenius, Apollodorus, and Antoninus Liberalis (all in Greek) and of Hyginus (in Latin) have survived from the time of Ovid to the second century...They indicate, of course, that Ovid had much more to work with than we now possess; but they also suggest that he may have used his own creative genius to build upon bare handbook entries.\(^\text{35}\)

Of these handbooks, that of Antoninus Liberalis (2\(^{\text{nd}}\) century A.D.) preserves prose summaries of various myths from the *Heteroioumena* (Ἑτεροιούμενα, from ἐτεροίω, to alter, change) of Nicander of Colophon (2\(^{\text{nd}}\) century B.C.), a poem which has otherwise been lost apart from a few fragments.\(^\text{36}\) Like the *Metamorphoses*, the *Heteroioumena* was a poem about mythical transformations, and it is believed to have supplied Ovid with some of the material for his epic. By Alan Griffin’s count, Ovid tells twenty-one of the


twenty-six stories from the *Heteroioumena* summarized by Antoninus Liberalis. Fritz Graf comments that Nicander’s poem “provided the ancestry, though certainly not the poetology, for the *Metamorphoses.*” He cautions us not to assume too close a link between Ovid and the handbooks and remarks on the inventiveness of Ovid even in the face of well-established versions of the myths he tells in the *Metamorphoses*:

Ovid is in full command of his mythological tradition, wherever he picked it up; it has rightly become unfashionable to posit as his sources mythological handbooks, so favoured by nineteenth-century scholarship. Of course, there could always have been other précis besides the ones we have by Parthenius to assist Roman poets, although they elude us—yet there is nothing to prevent us from assuming that Ovid read avidly and systematically. Even the overall arrangement of the work owes less to the structure of mythological handbooks than to that of universal histories like the one of Diodorus Siculus. And where he had to cope with overpowering master-texts, from which he could not easily get away, he again decided to be short and to elaborate the stories not told by them…In all of this, he shows the sheer, infinite adaptability of mythical narratives.

Even when Ovid selected source material from other authors and traditions, he likely felt no qualms about manipulating the plot to fit his own purposes. Perhaps the most obvious example is Ovid’s subversion of traditional epic accounts of the Trojan War in *Met.* XII and XIII. Because Ovid was writing for a very specific and well-educated group of men familiar with Greek literature, his alterations may have been even more readily appreciated as clever innovations rather than deviations from established traditions. Graf explains that, “Where the collectivity of recipients is no longer society at large, but the group of like-minded literati and their patrons, literary or aesthetical strategies become the group concern that justifies choices of variants as well as changes and inventions in the tradition. Specific texts gain authority, and myths are chosen according to aesthetic

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39 Idem, 119.
Further, we should not neglect to consider the broader literary and historical context in which Ovid was writing, as well as the need for him to engage with and to revise the vast mythological repertoire available to him from Greek and Latin sources. “Ovid,” Anderson says, “has often been seen as occupying a transitional place in Roman literary history, between a ‘Golden’ and a ‘Silver’ Age. This depiction in part arises from another aspect of Ovid’s inclusiveness: he is the first and the last Roman poet to combine a broad knowledge of Greek literature with an intimate awareness of the new Latin ‘classics.’”

In departing from his sources, Ovid has certainly made the myths of the *Metamorphoses* discernibly his own. “The consistent quality of the *Metamorphoses*,” Anderson suggests, “whether in tales derived from recognizable sources of literary merit or in those so rare (such as Narcissus) as to defy all attempts to identify a source, attests to the fact that Ovid’s poetic genius shaped all stories regardless of origin.” Reading Ovid, we may feel that we would never mistake his stories for the work of another poet, and that even without having read all of his tales we would have no trouble identifying his version of a particular myth from a lineup of narratively similar stories. With this in mind, we shall begin to identify the possible sources of each of our four stories.

**Narcissus**

As Anderson mentioned above, it is difficult to determine Ovid’s source for the myth of Narcissus. The only extant treatment of the myth that may possibly predate Ovid’s version is found in P. Oxy. 4711, a sixth century A.D. papyrus containing elegiacs which narrate the metamorphoses of Adonis, Asterie, and a character who ἀπεχθαίρεσκε

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41 Tarrant, “Ovid and ancient literary history,” 19.
δ᾿ ἅπαντας and μορφῆς ἠράσατο σφετέρης (→ fr. 1.10-11, “detested all” and “loved his own form”), presumably Narcissus.43 The treatment is short and fragmentary, but the speaker says that the character, [δ]λοφύρατο τέρψιν ὀνείρου (→ fr. 1.12, “wept at his pleasure in the dream”).44 W. B. Henry, who published the editio princeps of P. Oxy. 4711, suggests that the verses were the work of Parthenius of Nicaea,45 the 1st century B.C. Greek poet brought as a prisoner to Italy in 73 B.C. during the Third Mithridatic War and said by Macrobius to have been Virgil’s teacher in Naples.46 Henry argues that the fragments might have come from Parthenius’ Metamorphoses. Enrico Magnelli accepts this hypothesis, noting that “[i]f Parthenius was the author of this poem, its structure becomes all the more interesting. It appears to be a series of mythical episodes, connected by nothing but the common theme of metamorphosis.”47 Gregory Hutchinson, who also supports the idea that Parthenius wrote P. Oxy. 4711, argues that the verses influenced Ovid, claiming that the work containing these fragments “probably stands further in form from Ovid than Nicander did; it may well show, like Ovid, an individual approach to the tradition. It still illuminates the poetic tradition, of which our knowledge was very faint; it is probably a well-known text, Parthenius’, and so one with which Ovid’s interacts.”48 In reading the Narcissus section of P. Oxy. 4711 alongside Ovid’s treatment of Narcissus, Hutchinson notes that, “Ovid’s work sets itself against poems at least one of which was extremely compact. The expansion of this episode through Echo

44 Idem, 50.
45 Idem, 47.
46 Macrobius, Saturnalia V.18.
and through Narcissus’ love-poem to himself is a striking illustration.” Nevertheless, both the identification of the author of P. Oxy. 4711 as Parthenius and the consequential dating of the fragments to a time before Ovid are contested. Hans Bernsdorff addresses the arguments of Henry and Hutchinson point-by-point, and proposes a later date for the fragments, one closer to the date when the papyrus was written in the sixth century. Bernsdorff prefers to “regard the fragments as a collection of thematically arranged δηγήματα in verse which are related to the production of progymnasmata in schools.” He suggests that P. Oxy. 4711 was based on a mythographical account and notes that there was “an interest in metamorphosis myth in the Hellenistic and imperial schools.”

More important than whether P. Oxy. 4711 influenced Ovid or not is, of course, the fact that works containing metamorphosis-stories from Greek mythology were popular around the time Ovid wrote the *Metamorphoses*, some of which may have included versions of the Narcissus story. Yet despite this, Louise Vinge is largely correct in claiming that, “Ovid’s story is the only narrative version from classical antiquity which has a complete and detailed artistic form. Others who tell Narcissus’ story do it briefly in prose without trying to depict events and figures or to use stylistic means which are particularly associated with the theme.” And aside from the possibility of P. Oxy. 4711

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49 Idem, 83. Hutchinson does not, however, believe that Echo was first paired with Narcissus by Ovid: “The evidence is quite inadequate to support a negative generalization; and it would be implausible to posit a Roman origin for the name ΗΧΩ in the Narcissus mosaic of the House of the Buffet Supper in Antioch (Daphne, Ankaya, Arch. Mus. 938; iii AD)” (81).
51 Idem, 1. To compose δηγήματα, “narratives,” on mythological and other subjects as part of progymnasmata, “preliminary exercises,” was a standard assignment for elementary students in rhetorical schools.
having been written before Ovid’s time, literary evidence for the myth’s features before it was told by Ovid is, as Barchiesi and Rosati relate, lacking: “Il personaggio non compare nella poesia greca arcaica e classica, e in età imperiale è presente in cataloghi di bei fanciulli amati dagli dèi e dagli eroi, come Ila, Ganimede, e in particolare Adone e Giacinto (che come lui danno origine a fiori), in contesti pederastici.”\[54\] Nevertheless, we should take note of the two other important extant versions of the myth found in Conon and Pausanias, as a comparison of these with the Metamorphoses may prove informative to our discussion of Ovid’s innovations.

The Greek mythographer Conon composed his Διηγήσεις (Narrations) sometime between 36 B.C. and 17 A.D. The Narrations was comprised of fifty short mythological stories in Greek, of which the twenty-fourth tells the story of Narcissus. Conon’s version is set in Boeotia, like Ovid’s, and his Narcissus is similarly proud in love: πάνυ καλὸς καὶ ύπερόπτης ᾿Ερωτός τε καὶ ἐραστῶν (very beautiful and disdainful of Eros and of his lovers, Διηγήσεις 24). According to Conon, Narcissus had one particularly persistent admirer named Ameinias. Narcissus rejects Ameinias and sends him a sword, with which Ameinias kills himself on Narcissus’ doorstep, an interesting variation on the paraklausithyron trope of love elegy. Before he dies, Ameinias begs an unspecified god to avenge him. One day, Narcissus sees his own reflection and falls in love with it. Conon says he is “ἀμηχανῶν” (“at a loss”) and is convinced that his suffering is just because of his treatment of Ameinias. Narcissus kills himself, and thereafter the Thespians show greater respect for Eros (who, presumably, is the god to whom Ameinias prayed). A narcissus flower, Conon says, grew from the bloody soil. Vinge thinks it unlikely that Conon’s story is based on Ovid’s, but says that it is possible that Ovid was aware of

\[54\] Barchiesi and Rosati, Ovidio Metamorfosi Volume II (Libri III-IV), 175.
Conon’s. Similarly, Barchiesi and Rosati, noting that the work was “databile probabilmente all’età augustea,” suggest that “la sua versione ha buone probabilità di essere stata anteriore a Ovidio e a lui accessibile, e sembra un tentativo di dare senso compiuto e articolato alla leggenda sull’ ‘errore di Narciso’.”

If Ovid was aware of Conon’s Narcissus story or another like it, his version in the *Metamorphoses* diverges in a number of interesting ways. First, Ovid’s version has no Ameinias. Samson Eitrem has pointed out, however, that Ovid’s decision to have an unnamed youth call down a curse on Narcissus after being rejected by him (“sic amet ipse licet, sic non potiatur amato” *Met.* III.405) may indicate Ovid’s knowledge of a version like Conon’s, in which a male admirer curses Narcissus after being rejected. Perhaps the most noticeable difference between Ovid’s Narcissus story and any other extant version of the myth is his inclusion of the character Echo, which Barchiesi and Rosati refer to as a “grande innovazione di Ovidio.” They are quick to admit, however, that “[n]on ci sono prove sicure che questo collegamento fra Narciso e Eco sia anteriore Ovidio, anche se sarebbe imprudente escluderlo del tutto,” referring us to a third-century A.D. mosaic from the House of the Buffet Supper in Antioch which depicts Narcissus beside a figure labeled Ἑχώ that cannot with certainty be traced back to Ovid’s influence. Though it is difficult to say whether the two characters had ever been linked before, Ovid’s inclusion of Echo allows for his undeniably clever treatment of the nature of echoes and reflections, and should be regarded as an interaction with Lucretius, not

59 Idem, 180. Barchiesi and Rosati also discuss the mention of Echo in Pindar, *Olympian* 14, as being associated with the location of the Cephisus river, given by Ovid as the father of Narcissus, 180.
merely as evidence for a borrowing from older traditions of Narcissus. The two versions also differ in that Ovid leaves out the etiology provided by Conon, that of the Thespian cult of Eros, for which the city was famous. Further, Ovid’s Narcissus does not commit suicide, like Conon’s, but rather wastes away like Echo. The yellow-centered, white-petaled flower that grows from the blood of Conon’s Narcissus (another etiology) is merely discovered later in place of Narcissus’ absent body in Ovid’s Metamorphoses. And most importantly, Ovid’s myth stands apart from Conon’s in that Ovid emphasizes Narcissus’ realization that he has fallen in love with himself, that he transitions, as Paul Zanker puts it, from “der naive” to “der bewußte Narziß.” Far from this, Conon is not even explicitly clear as to whether or not Narcissus knows that he loves himself. Ultimately, Conon’s version is aimed at warning the reader to respect Eros, and at establishing the origins of the narcissus flower and the cult of Eros in Thespiae. Ovid seems to have borrowed the general details of the story from an earlier version like Conon’s while refocusing our attention toward the image of Narcissus as lover and beloved, as a dysfunctionally self-merged entity. Conon wants to highlight Narcissus’ regret for his cruelty towards Ameinias and his disdain of Eros; Ovid chooses to focus more explicitly on the self-absorption that lay behind Narcissus’ cruelty and disdain by exploring the imbalance that this causes for him in his interactions with others and, consequently, within himself. “Narciso sperimenta sulla sua pelle l'impossibilità per un giovane,” Barchiesi and Rosati explain, “di essere nello stesso momento “amato”

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61 Barchiesi and Rosati, Ovidio Metamorfosi Volume II, 177.
(ἐρώμενος) e “amante” (ἐραστής), dato che una relazione pederastica presuppone asimmetria e differenza, non uguaglianza speculari fra i due partner.”

Much later, in the second century A.D., Pausanias records a third version of the Narcissus story in his description of Boeotia. Pausanias first tells of a spring where, it is said, Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection and died of love. Pausanias comments on the absurdity of the idea that Narcissus could not tell a real man from a reflection. Instead, he offers something of a euhemerization of the common myth. There is a less popular version, he says, that Narcissus had a twin sister with whom he fell in love. When she died, Narcissus would go to the spring and look at his reflection because it reminded him of his sister. Pausanias also mentions the narcissus flower, but says that it was called thus before the youth ever was. Of Pausanias’ first version, the closer of the two to Ovid’s, Barchiesi and Rosati comment that “[s]e si accetta che in questa versione ci sia un nucleo più antico, bisogna pensare che la storia di Narciso sia stata tramandata come leggenda locale legata a una fonte beotica, e che il suo contenuto di fondo sia l’idea di un fanciullo che si innamora per errore della sua immagine.” We find only the vaguest outline of Narcissus’ problem with no explanation of why it has befallen him, and again, as in Conon, we find no discussion of whether Pausanias’ “naive Narziß” ever became a “bewußte Narziß.” Thus, in the case of Narcissus, we seem to have no reason to doubt that Ovid’s emphasis on Narcissus as two in one, as a lover and beloved, was an original innovation.

63 Barchiesi and Rosati, Ovidio Metamorfosi Volume II, 180-1.
64 Shadi Bartsch, The Mirror of the Self (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 86 n. 88, finds Pausanias’ comment on the absurdity of this version “unmerited, given that Narcissus’ own mother is a water-nymph. Presumably the prospect of meeting his significant other in an underwater setting seemed quite reasonable for the boy.”
65 Barchiesi and Rosati, Ovidio Metamorfosi Volume II, 176.
Pyramus and Thisbe

In Ovid’s “Pyramus and Thisbe,” we find once again a story with no single obvious source. Indeed, Ovid tells us that the daughter of Minyas who narrates it remarks that she chose it over several others quoniam vulgaris fabula non est (“since it is not a common story,” Met. IV.53). Anderson suggests that Ovid may have known the story from some kind of handbook of near-Eastern narratives, as this story takes place in Babylon, and the other stories told by the Minyeides (that of Clytie, Leucothoe, and Helios as well as that of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus) are also set in the East. As Anderson concludes, “Whatever the source, Ovid has fully subordinated the story to his complicated purposes.”

Peter Knox discusses the episode at length in his study of a 2nd/3rd century A.D. Pyramus and Thisbe mosaic found in the House of Dionysus at Nea Paphos on Cyprus (fig. 3.1). He, too, notes the lack of evidence for Ovid’s source, writing that, “No earlier narrative survives, and all later references to the story in Latin literature clearly rely upon Ovid, deriving from his account the familiar elements of the tale: the secret tryst between the young lovers at the tomb of Ninus, Thisbe’s encounter with a lioness, and the mangled veil that convinces a tardy Pyramus that his beloved is dead.” And most of these later references, Knox says, are very brief. There are, however, a few mentions of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe in Greek literature. For example, in the sixth book of his epic Dionysiaca, Nonnus of Panopolis (ca. 5th century A.D.) briefly discusses the metamorphoses of Pyramus and his lover Thisbe into water.

This and similar references, according to Barchiesi and Rosati, “presupponevano invece

66 Anderson, Ovid’s Metamorphoses Books I-V, 418.
68 Knox, “Pyramus and Thisbe in Cyprus,” 324.
una versione che è l'eziologia del Piramo, fiume della Cilicia.” Knox mentions that earlier visual depictions of Pyramus support the existence of this version, explaining that, “Pyramus appears as early as the first century BC on the reverse of coins minted at Hierapolis-Kastabala, certain evidence that the personified river-god enjoyed a life before Ovid.” And the mosaic from the House of Dionysus suggests a story based on this version of the story rather than on Ovid’s. The house itself, made up of more than forty rooms and sumptuously decorated with painted walls and a total of fifteen floor mosaics, covered approximately 2,000 square meters and likely belonged to one of the local elites of the Roman province. Though the Pyramus and Thisbe mosaic depicts the two figures, labeled, along with a lioness carrying a cloth in its mouth, it lacks the tomb of Ninus, the spring, and the mulberry tree described by Ovid (Met. IV.88-90) and it represents Pyramus sitting by an urn as a river god with reeds and a cornucopia. Another interesting piece of evidence comes to us in a recently discovered papyrus, P.Mich.Inv. 3793, containing bits of a Greek prose text dated to the 1st century A.D. The text tells of two lovers, Pamphilos and Eurydike, whose story is markedly similar to that of Pyramus and Thisbe. Barchiesi and Rosati offer a summary of the extant portion of the text:

Due giovani (Panfilo ed Euridice), probabilmente di Cipro, bellissimi e innamorati, comunicando attraverso delle fessure prendono un appuntamento per incontrarsi (in un luogo all'aperto dov'è presente una fonte e, forse, una pianta). La fanciulla arriva per prima e, stanca, si toglie le vesti per un bagno ristoratore, quando sopraggiunge a dissetarsi alla fonte una fiera reduce da un pasto cruento. Lei fugge lasciando cadere qualche indumento che la fiera, prima di allontanarsi, insozza di sangue; così da indurre in Panfilo, che arriva più tardi, l'idea che l'amata sia stata

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69 Barchiesi and Rosati, *Ovidio Metamorfosi Volume II*, 256.
70 Knox, “Pyramus and Thisbe in Cyprus,” 331.
sbranata: le ultime righe del papiro contengono l'apostrofe del giovane alle fiere perché strazino anche le sue carni.\footnote{Barchiesi and Rosati, \textit{Ovidio Metamorfosi Volume II}, 257.}

The text cuts off before the end of the story, so we do not know whether Pamphilos and Eurydike died as Pyramus and Thisbe did, whether they avoided death through some kind of watery metamorphosis, or whether they met an entirely different fate. Nevertheless, the story is so similar to Ovid’s that the two seem to have shared some unknown Hellenistic model. Though it is impossible to determine the exact form of Ovid’s source, Knox and Barchiesi and Rosati seem to agree that it could very well have been a local Cilician myth about the Pyramus River.\footnote{Idem, 257; Knox, “Pyramus and Thisbe in Cyprus,” 332-3} If this was the case, Ovid seems to have changed the setting of the myth (from Cilicia to Babylon) and the metamorphosis of the myth (from the characters turning into water to the mulberry tree’s berries turning red). It is difficult to say, therefore, whether the emphasis on Pyramus and Thisbe becoming one in death (a common enough idea as we recall most memorably from Achilles’ wish in the \textit{Odyssey}) was unique to Ovid, but we have no reason to rule it out.

Salmacis and Hermaphroditus

As was true of the first daughter of Minyas to narrate a tale, Alcithoe desires to tell her audience an uncommon story: \textit{dulcique animos novitate tenebo} (“I will hold your attention with sweet newness,” \textit{Met.} IV.284). And, surely enough, we are once again uncertain of Ovid’s source for the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus. Nevertheless, Alcithoe goes on to preface her story:

\begin{verbatim}
Unde sit infamis, quare male fortibus undis
Salmacis enervet tactosque remolliat artus,
discite. Causa latet, vis est notissima fontis.
\end{verbatim}
\textit{(Met.} IV.285-7)
Learn, whence it is famous, why Salmacis weakens and softens limbs touched by its strong waters. The cause lies hidden, but the power of the spring is most famous.

Robinson points out that Alcithoe’s statement about the notoriety of the spring of Salmacis seems to have been accurate, and he cites various references to its enervating properties in the works of Strabo, Vitruvius, Festus, Vibius Sequester. Quoting from these, Robinson concludes that, “It is clear that whatever its precise nature, the rumored effect of the spring has something to do with sex (venerio morbo), and involves making those who drink it μαλακός, mollis, impudicus, and obscenus.” According to Vitruvius, however, this negative characterization of the spring of Salmacis developed out of earlier notions that the spring merely had a civilizing effect. He claims that the rumor of Salmacis’ waters having effeminizing properties is false, and that it developed after Greeks colonized the area. Vitruvius explains that the displaced Carian barbarians gradually re-entered the area to visit a newly established Greek tavern (built near Salmacis because of the spring’s excellent waters), and that the Carians became civilized by the customs of the Greeks and, consequently, softer (De Architectura II.8.12).

Hermaphroditus does not always appear connected with the spring (or nymph) of Salmacis. According to Allen Romano, “the only extensive accounts about both Hermaphroditus (as well as Salmacis),” apart from a second century B.C. inscription on the remains of an ancient wall in Halicarnassus which will be discussed below, “are from


75 Idem, 213.
Ovid’s time or later.”

Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood offers a useful summary of the Greeks’ initial conceptions of Hermaphroditus:

The earliest extant evidence for Hermaphroditos comes from early fourth century B.C. Attica [in the form of an epigraph on a statue base] and pertains to his cult. Scholars have long argued that the androgynous Hermaphroditos was connected with sexual unions, fertility and marriage: he was, it has been suggested, a protector of marriage, or, as Delcourt has argued, of the sexual union…The earliest extant source on his parentage is Diodoros, who tells us that Hermaphroditos was the son of Aphrodite and Hermes. No competing version of his parentage is known, and his name suggests that Hermaphroditos was always the son of Aphrodite and Hermes, a parentage which is also significant in terms of his nature and functions.

In Athens Hermaphroditos came to be identified with Aphroditos, the name attached to a bisexual persona of Aphrodite in Cyprus. Some time in the fifth century at least knowledge of some form of this Cypriot deity Aphroditos was imported in Athens…Since the evidence for Hermaphroditos’ cult in Athens suggests that his persona (at the very least in its basic lines) was not different from his persona elsewhere, it would seem that any elements of the persona of Aphroditos that may have been known to the Athenians had become submerged into the persona of Hermaphroditos; it is possible that such elements had consisted simply of the name Aphroditos and perhaps some notion of a connection with androgyne, and that the notion that Aphroditos was Hermaphroditos simply articulates the perception that Aphroditos was a name of Hermaphroditos.

The discovery of a late fourth-century B.C. terracotta mold for a figurine of Hermaphroditus in the anasyromenos pose found in the Coroplasts’ Dump in the Athenian Agora suggests that the figure was somewhat in-demand in Athens during the Hellenistic period, and such figurines may have been used as votive offerings.

Hermaphroditus also seems to have been a popular subject for full-scale sculpture in gymnasia, baths, theaters, and private settings. For example, replicas the well-known

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sculpture type representing Hermaphroditus lying on his stomach and thought to have originated in the second century B.C. have been found in a variety of Roman contexts including Hadrian’s villa at Tivoli.79

The first significant mention of Hermaphroditus in literature comes from Theophrastus (370-288 B.C.) in the Χαρακτῆρες, a work comprised of descriptions of thirty different characters who display aberrant behaviors. Theophrastus says that the “Superstitious Man” hangs garlands on Hermaphroditus on the fourth day of the month, which the Greeks believed to be sacred to Hermes and Aphrodite, but also on the seventh day of the month which the Greeks believed to be sacred to Apollo.80 Nevertheless, Romano claims that, “This particular Hermaphroditus is likely to be a herm and an inscription from the fourth century points to dedications to a Hermaphroditus also likely to be a herm. It may even be that it is in herms that we have the origin of Hermaphroditus himself since there are a number of examples of herms with the head of Aphrodite rather than that of Hermes.”81 Further, as Aileen Ajootian explains, various editors do not even accept the reading of Ἐρμαφρόδιτους in Theophrastus’ text, preferring Ἐρμᾶς, ἀφροεῖν or Ἐρμᾶς ῥοδίνοις.82 After its occurrence in Theophrastus’ work, the name was the title of Poseidippus’ third century B.C. comedy called Ἐρμαφρόδιτος, of which only two lines are extant.

The earliest surviving narrative concerning Hermaphroditus comes from a sixty-line Greek poem in elegiac couplets inscribed on an ancient wall at the site of the spring of Salmacis in Halicarnassus, discovered in 1995 and dated to the second century B.C

79 Idem, 276-7.
80 Idem, 269.
81 Romano, “The Invention of Marriage,” 553.
82 Idem, 269.
(figs. 3.2, 3.3). The wall was part of the central complex of a series of structures related to the monumentalization of the fountain on the Kaplan Kalesi or Salmakis promontory of Halicarnassus (fig. 3.4). In its first few lines, the poem, addressed to Aphrodite, poses the question of why Halicarnassus is honorable. Zeus, according to the inscription, was born at Halicarnassus and raised by the Earth-born Halicarnassians. As a reward, Halicarnassus was blessed with the spring of Salmacis, where Hermaphroditus was received by the spring’s nymph and raised into the man who invented the custom of marriage. The poet here speaks of Salmacis’ sacred streams softening the hard, uncivilized minds of men, a theme present in Vitruvius, as mentioned above. The inscription also asserts that Halicarnassus received the benefit of Greek colonization, which, as Sourvinou-Inwood explains, is not presented as “an incoming Greek elite imposing its ‘racist’ ideologies to an oppressed native population; it is the perspective of a multiethnic and multicultural Halikarnassos, in which the perceived superiority of Greek culture has dominated the Karian perspective—at least that of the elites who made the cultural choices—for centuries.”

Did Ovid know of the myth attested in the inscription at Halicarnassus? In the Greek inscription, we do not see the spring described as having any kind of a detrimental effect on men for which Ovid’s Alcithoe claims it is famous. But Romano believes that the seemingly opposed views on the spring of Salmacis as beneficially civilizing on the one hand and debilitatingly effeminizing on the other “results not from fundamental agreement or disagreement about the effects of the spring (such that we can triangulate

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84 Sourvinou-Inwood, “Hermaphroditos and Salmakis” 63.
between them to recover the true effect of the spring) but rather from the complexities of describing the aphrodisiacal effects of the spring: the right amount of potion does one thing but too much can cause the opposite effect.”

Romano argues for the possibility that Ovid was familiar with the myth from the inscription at Halicarnassus. He does not view the spring from the inscription and the spring from Alcithoe’s account in the *Metamorphoses* as having different effects on men. “Hermaphroditus suffers the consequences of too much love potion,” Romano argues, “and indeed the description of the young man floundering in the water, overwhelmed by Salmacis’ advances, seems a particularly striking translation of this idea. That Hermaphroditus’ state is permanent is an effect of the overdose rather than the powers of the spring in themselves.”

If Ovid has borrowed directly from this Halicarnassian myth, Romano concludes, he “transforms a story of blissful union into one of rape,” thus obscuring the idea of Hermaphroditus as the inventor of marriage and highlighting the Roman idea of marriage as rape as seen in the myth of the rape of the Sabine women.

Although Sourvinou-Inwood considers the idea of the spring as civilizing to be in opposition with the idea of the spring as effeminizing, she, too, sees the version present in the *Metamorphoses* as representative of innovation on Ovid’s part. She focuses on the difference in the relationship between Salmacis and Hermaphroditus as represented in the Halicarnassian inscription and in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, arguing that Salmacis did not have an erotic relationship with Hermaphroditus in the former account. Instead, she claims that:

85 Romano, “The Invention of Marriage,” 556.
86 Romano, “The Invention of Marriage,” 558.
87 Idem, 559.
A case can be made for the view that the erotic relationship had been invented outside Halikarnassos, almost certainly by Ovid, out of elements that had originated in the Halikarnassian myth, which were transformed through the deployment of, and in interaction with, elements from other Greek myths [such as that of Hylas], and that Ovid’s text signals its intertextual relationship to the Halikarnassian myth and also allows the possibility that the story it tells maybe [sic] untrue, simply its narrator’s [i.e. Alcithoe’s] invention.88

Thus, Sourvinou-Inwood concludes that Hermaphroditus was traditionally a Greek god androgynous from birth and associated with heterosexual union, fertility, and marriage. The civilizing powers of the spring of Salmacis, positive in the eyes of the Greek inhabitants, may have appeared to outsiders to be potentially weakening. And along these lines, Ovid seems to have reworked the traditional story of an androgynous god to tell of a reluctant male youth who became corrupted with the body of an aggressive female nymph. Thus, even if Ovid knew of this earlier story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, the merging of male and female into an androgynous mixture of the two seems to have been his own creation, as it is not attested elsewhere.

Baucis and Philemon

Having sought Ovid’s sources for the previous three stories with varying degrees of success, it should hardly be surprising that Anderson’s introduction to the story of Baucis and Philemon includes the rather bleak statement that, “We do not know where Ovid discovered this tale; no other Classical author tells it.”89 Nevertheless, the story does offer a number of clues as to its origins. Commentators are quick to point out that

the story is made up of a number of common religious motifs, and Griffin, relying on the work of Adrian Hollis and Franz Bömer, summarizes the major ones:

There is the motif of a sacred tree in a walled enclosure (Met. 8.621-2; 719-24), the motif of superhuman beings wandering the earth to test human behaviour (Met. 8.626-9; 689-90), the motif of entertaining a god or hero in an ordinary everyday environment (Met. 8.637-78), the motif of miraculous replenishment as a sign of divine goodwill (Met. 8.679-80), the motif of a flood as the punishment for human wickedness and the saving of one pious couple (Met. 8.689-97), and the motif of divine rewards for piety and hospitality (Met. 8.703-20).

With respect to the humble welcome offered by Baucis and Philemon, scholars have pointed to a number of texts that may have influenced Ovid, the earliest of which is, of course, Homer’s Odyssey in its description of the faithful swineherd Eumaeus receiving the disguised Odysseus at his home. Many scholars also see a significant intertext for Ovid’s Baucis and Philemon story in Callimachus’ Hecale, a fragmentary hexameter poem telling the story of the kindly old Hecale who welcomed Theseus into her modest home in Attica when the hero was on his way to capture the Bull of Marathon. Edward Kenney reads Ovid’s comment that the Baucis and Philemon story moverat…Thesea praecipue as an intertextual nod to the importance of Callimachus’ text to the episode (“had moved Theseus especially,” Met. VIII.726). Further, Hollis points to an episode in Callimachus’ Aetia, in which Heracles stays at the hut of old Molorchus in Cleonae while on his quest to kill the Nemean lion, as representative of the same motif. An additional parallel with the Baucis and Philemon story can be seen in this case in that Heracles prevents Molorchus from sacrificing his only ram in honor of Heracles.

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92 Griffin, “Philemon and Baucis in Ovid’s Metamorphoses,” 62.  
Between *Hecale* and the Molorchus episode, Hollis claims, “the two stories clearly set a vogue in Hellenistic poetry…Roman poets found the theme no less attractive, and were fully conscious of the tradition which they had inherited.”\(^9^4\) Anderson, nevertheless, is critical of the suggestion that Ovid has borrowed from Callimachus, claiming that “[t]he assertion is unprovable, since we possess so few relevant fragments of the Alexandrian poem, but also unnecessary. Simple meals had surely become a topos of poetry in the 250 years since Callimachus’ poem, and we need not limit Ovid merely because our sources are limited. After all, simple meals were a standard motif of Roman satire.”\(^9^5\) And Griffin, while accepting the validity of Hollis’ comparison of Baucis and Philemon with *Hecale*, warns us not to overestimate Ovid’s dependence on Callimachus:

Callimachus’ story about Hecale and her hospitality to Theseus on his way to destroy the bull of Marathon was not a theoxyen nor a theodicy as the *Philemon-Baucis* essential is. Nor was the *Hecale* related in any way to stories about the punishment of human wickedness by flood and the saving of a pious couple. The *Philemon-Baucis* belongs to the tradition of flood stories whose prime Greek example is the tale of Deucalion and Pyrrha. The major religious aspects of the *Philemon-Baucis*—theodicy, flood story, tree cult—owe nothing to Callimachus’ *Hecale*.\(^9^6\)

Aside from Homer and Callimachus, scholars have found in the Baucis and Philemon story a number of interesting parallels with the Old Testament, specifically with the Sodom and Gomorrah story (*Genesis* 19.1-29), among others. Griffin has compiled a useful summary of these parallels, and concludes that, “Old Testament material lies, at some distance or other, behind Ovid’s *Philemon—Baucis*, though Ovid, of course, is unlikely to have been aware of Jewish elements in the tale.”\(^9^7\)

\(^9^4\) Hollis, *Ovid, Metamorphoses Book VIII*, 106.
\(^9^6\) Griffin, “*Philemon and Baucis in Ovid’s Metamorphoses,*” 63.
\(^9^7\) Idem, 68-72.
But what of the origins of the story itself? The tale is set in the Phrygian hills (Met. VIII.621), and the mention of the Thyneius...incola (Met. VIII.719-20) who is present at the site of Baucis and Philemon’s trees seems to refer to a visitor from the island of Thynia, which, according to Griffin, “lies one mile off the southern Black Sea coast of Bithynia and belonged to the region of Bithynia often described as ‘Lesser Phrygia.’”98 Christopher Jones argues for the marshy region surrounding Mt. Sipylos as the setting of the story, noting that ancient writers called this area Phrygia, even though it was actually in Lydia.99 Some scholars posit the Heteroioumena of Nicander of Colophon (mentioned above) as a source for the story. Along with other evidence to support this theory (such as the location of Colophon a mere 30-40 miles from Mt. Sipylos), Griffin points out that, “Warm conjugal affection, such as that between Philemon and Baucis, was a congenial subject to Nicander who was Ovid’s source for the most moving account of married love in the Metamorphoses in the story of Ceyx and Alcyone in book 11.”100 Further, Hollis is impressed by the mention of Baucis and Philemon’s garlanded trees at the close of Lelex’s tale, commenting that, “To end a story by mentioning some local landmark or custom still observed by the ἐπιχώριοι (cf. 720 ‘incola’) seems to have been a regular practice in Nicander’s Heteroeumena, to judge from the paraphrases of Antoninus Liberalis.”101 The best that we can do, then, is to say that Ovid’s Baucis and Philemon story seems to have been a local Phrygian myth, perhaps made available to Ovid through Nicander, within which we see highlighted the Callimachean motif of

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98 Griffin, “Philemon and Baucis in Ovid’s Metamorphoses,” 64.
100 Griffin, “Philemon and Baucis in Ovid’s Metamorphoses,” 66.
101 Hollis, Ovid Metamorphoses Book VIII, 106.
Hollis also cites a story of Nicander (from Antoninus Liberalis 31) that ends with a transformation notably similar to that at the end of Ovid’s Baucis and Philemon story, 126.
peasants entertaining guests in humble surroundings. Nevertheless, whatever his source, Ovid once again prevents the story from being completely dominated by its Hellenistic elements. Hollis remarks that the meal prepared by Baucis and Philemon consists largely of Italian foods, and reads the episode as a glorification of the simplicity of Italy’s past. Likewise, Kenney writes of the episode as “particolarmente in sintonia con lo spirito romano, in quanto evocava un'immagine antica, che si può far risalire fino a Catone il Censore, di una classe contadina italica, resistente a tutto e autosufficiente, come spina dorsale del benessere nazionale e della potenza militare.” We are, of course, unfortunately prevented from speculating in this case as to whether the joined tree trunks were part of the original Phrygian tale, though we may recall that grafting imagery seems to have appealed to Ovid.

Our discussion of Ovid’s sources for the four episodes examined in this thesis should make it clear that whatever his source in each particular case, Ovid’s versions are unarguably his own. As Tarrant puts it, “[i]nnovation” for Ovid “consisted less in free invention than in seeing richer possibilities in existing material.” The presence of merged bodies within the stories of Narcissus and of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus (if not within those of Pyramus and Thisbe and Baucis and Philemon as well), potentially constitute Ovidian innovations. And, just as importantly, Ovid seems to have deliberately emphasized this presence of merged bodies in a way that is indiscernible in any of his proposed sources. Having established this, we may now focus our attention on the greater significance of corpora within the Metamorphoses.

102 Idem, 111.
104 See above, ch. 1, p. 34.
Figure 3.1: Mosaic, Pyramus and Thisbe
House of Dionysus, Cyprus
(Knox 2006, p. 322, fig. 14.1)

Figure 3.2: Salmacis Inscription at Halicarnassus (Column I)
(Isager 2004, p. 10, fig. 1)
Figure 3.3: Salmacis Inscription at Halicarnassus (Column II)  
(Isager 2004, p. 11, fig. 1)

Figure 3.4: Sketch of Salmacis Remains at Halicarnassus  
(in: inscription)  
(Pedersen 2004, p. 22, fig. 11)
CHAPTER 4

CORPORA AND IMMORTALITY IN THE METAMORPHOSES

In book fifteen of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the Greek philosopher Pythagoras interrupts the narrator’s account of early Roman history with a lengthy speech on the idea that “omnia mutantur, nihil interit” (XV.165). Though we shall deal with Pythagoras’ discourse on change at length later in this chapter, we may for now look to Pythagoras’ description of the life cycle of the phoenix as an introduction to the next phase of our exploration of Ovid’s merging bodies. We shall primarily be concerned here with the relationship between bodies and poetry, and with their classification in the *Metamorphoses* as mortal or immortal. The phoenix, one of the most captivating examples of natural regeneration presented by Pythagoras, falls curiously in-between all of these categories. It is at the same time a creature with a firmly fixed lifespan (five hundred years) but also a symbol of immortality; it has a distinct physical form and yet exists only in the poetic imagination. This phoenix emerges as the central image in Michael Longley’s poem “Phoenix” from the 1995 poetry collection *After Ovid: New Metamorphoses*, a project inspired by Ovid’s epic:

I’ll hand to you six duck eggs Orla Murphy gave me
In a beechwood bowl Ted O’Driscoll turned, a nest
Jiggling eggs from Baltimore to Belfast, from friends
You haven’t met, a double-yolk inside each shell
Laid by a duck that renovates and begets itself
Inside my head as the phoenix, without grass or corn,
On a strict diet of frankincense and cardamoms,
After five centuries builds with talon and clean beak
In the top branches of a quivering palm his nest,
Lining it with cassia, spikes of nard, cinnamon chips
And yellow myrrh, brooding among the spicy smells
His own death and giving birth to an only child
Who grows up to carry through thin air the heavy nest
- His cradle, his father’s coffin - to the sun’s city,
In front of the sun’s doorway putting his bundle down
As I shall put down the eggs Orla Murphy gave me
In a beechwood bowl Ted O’Driscoll turned for her. 106

Longley begins the poem with quaintly domestic imagery: we imagine Orla Murphy walking out to her duck coop in the morning to gather eggs, Ted O’Driscoll busy at his lathe. We soon find, however, that there is something special about these particular eggs: “a double-yolk inside each shell,” an intriguing and vaguely magical sign of good fortune. We may note, as well, the abundance of circular imagery with the eggs, the bowl, the yolks, even the nice round “O”s we see on the page before us in “Orla” and “O’Driscoll.” Sure enough, the duck soon “renovates and begets itself” into a symbol of the circular and cyclical, the phoenix. And this phoenix is definitely that of Ovid, as Longley produces a fairly close translation of Met. XV.393-407, sweeping us from the homely Irish beginnings of the poem into a mythical landscape. Then, just as our thoughts soar with the phoenix to the palace of the sun, Longley brings us suddenly back to the present and reminds us of how far we have traveled in contemplating a mere bowl of eggs. We have observed the metamorphosis of duck into phoenix, of Ted O’Driscoll’s carefully turned bowl into the phoenix’s fragrant nest, of modern Ireland into the ancient world of myth, of Longley’s poem into Ovid’s. Perhaps now the double yolk takes on a new significance as we see Longley encasing the presence of two, himself and Ovid, in one poem, two yolks encased in one egg. Viewed in this light, the double-yolk eggs are to Longley’s poem what Ovid’s merging bodies are to the Metamorphoses: physical

examples of two entities existing in a shared form that mark out places in the text where we should pay attention to the presence of more than one voice in the same passage. Certainly, we could argue that Longley shows a reverential attitude toward Ovid that Ovid did not adopt when engaging with the works of his predecessors. We are very aware that the metamorphosis in Longley’s mind would not have occurred without Ovid, and the ancient poet’s presence in “Phoenix” is nearly as strong as Longley’s. Ovid, on the other hand, often seems more a master of his sources than a student indebted to them. Nevertheless, both symbolically acknowledge within their poetry the presence of voices other than their own.

Having reason to believe that these merged bodies constitute a deliberately repeated image within the *Metamorphoses*, we may turn more generally to an exploration of the importance of *corpora* in Ovid’s works. In this chapter, we will discuss why merging human bodies, *corpora*, are particularly apt symbols for intertextuality, because the term *corpus* could be used, in Ovid’s time no less than in our own, to refer not only to physical forms but literary ones as well. With this established, we will also explore how these merging-body stories fit into the distinction Ovid makes between immortal poetic bodies and mortal corporeal bodies.

The significance of *corpora* in the *Metamorphoses* is apparent from the start of the poem, as it is the first word of the second line of Ovid’s epic:

> In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas
> corpora; di, coeptis (nam vos mutastis et illa)
> adspirate meis primaque ab origine mundi
> ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen!

(*Met.* I.1-4)
My mind moves me to speak of forms changed into new bodies; gods, (for you have changed even those) inspire my undertaking, and from first the birth of the world up to my own times bring forth a song uninterrupted.

Stephen Wheeler identifies the metamorphosis that occurs in the mind of anyone who reads or hears the first sentence of the poem and initially assumes that “in nova” is a complete phrase with “nova” substantively referring to “new things,” until he is surprised with the “corpora” at the beginning of line two:

In the example of our first sentence we see how ‘novelty’ is transmuted into ‘new bodies.’ The ambiguity of the opening sentence of the Metamorphoses, however, does not refer simply to two discrete statements in one. Rather it is a process of ambiguation, that involves the dissolution of one form and the reemergence of another form that in some way retains the original. Metamorphosis involves a continuation of the old identity in the new.\(^\text{107}\)

Wheeler’s definition applies perfectly to every level of metamorphosis in the poem. It works, as he notes here, to describe the syntactical metamorphosis that occurs from the first line to the second (and elsewhere), and to describe the physical metamorphoses of Ovid’s characters themselves. With respect to our theme in this thesis, Wheeler’s conclusion likewise explains what happens physically to the bodies of our merging characters and also what happens intertextually to the literary bodies that Ovid is introducing to his own body of work. Following Wheeler, we could easily say, for example, that the intertextual connections we are examining in the merging-body passages display “a process of ambiguation, that involves the dissolution” of Lucretius’ DRN and the reemergence of it intertextually in Ovid’s Metamorphoses in “another form that in some way retains the original.” Such a reading brings us to the main point of this section, namely, that we ought to recognize the potential for reading “corpora” in the Metamorphoses as intentionally connoting not merely physical bodies but literary ones at

\(^{107}\) Wheeler, A Discourse of Wonders, 15.
the same time. Just as we are accustomed to refer to an author’s collected writings as his “body of work,” classical writers accepted as commonplace the metaphorical use of “body” to refer to texts. Joseph Farrell explains the nuances of the word used in this sense:

A literary corpus in Latin (just like a σῶμα in Greek) can have the same meanings as in modern languages, but the word also applies more specifically to a collection of *libri* (or βιβλία) that together comprise a single, multivolume work. This usage thrived particularly during the period when ‘books’ were in fact ‘scrolls’, whether they contained an entire work or not, so that another term was needed to denote the entire work as distinct from the one or more books that it might comprise; and the term that was used to denote the entire work in this sense, in both Greek and Latin, was the same as the word for ‘body’.  

Farrell lists various instances of ancient writers (notably Cicero, Horace, Suetonius, Ulpian, and Ausonius) likening a poet’s writings with his physical body as evidence that the metaphor was in use at the time of the composition of the *Metamorphoses*. He cites, for example, a letter of Cicero to his brother Quintus referring to two works of the Greek historian Philistus of Syracuse (ca. 430-356 B.C.), the *Sicelica* (a history of Sicily) and a biography of Dionysius II (a mid-fourth-century B.C. tyrant of Syracuse), of which Cicero writes: *sed utros eius habueris libros—duo enim sunt corpora—an utrosque, nescio* (“but which of his books you had—for there are two collections—or whether [you had] both, I do not know,” *Epistulae ad Quintum fratrem* II.13). Here, Cicero writes of a number of “libri” making up a “corpus.” Farrell also presents various examples of classical authors punning on the metaphorical meaning of “corpus.” Most importantly, he concludes that,

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109 Idem, 130-1.
When a writer develops the image implied by the use of *corpus* and related words to denote a book, his point in doing so is to emphasize not the permanence, completeness, and perfection of the text, but rather the tendency to age, to decay, and to decompose, that the material book shares with the material body.\(^{110}\)

Ovid himself appears to have been interested in the *Metamorphoses*’ liminal position as an immortal poetic body existing in (and telling of) a world full of perishable physical bodies. He speaks confidently at the end of the *Metamorphoses* about the immortality of his work, juxtaposing his everlasting poem with his perishable self and showing that he has considered the relationship between his body, his work, and his poetic soul:

\[
\text{Iamque opus exegi, quod nec Io vis ira nec ignis}
\]
\[
\text{nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere vetustas.}
\]
\[
\text{cum volat, illa dies, quae nil nisi corporis huius}
\]
\[
\text{ius habet, incerti spatium mihi finiat aevi:}
\]
\[
\text{parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis}
\]
\[
\text{astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum,}
\]
\[
\text{quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris,}
\]
\[
\text{ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,}
\]
\[
\text{siquid habent veri vatum praesagia, vivam.}
\]

(Ovid, *Met*. 15.871-9)

And now I have finished a work which neither the fury of Jove, nor fire, nor the sword, nor consuming old age will be able to obliterate. When it wishes, let that day, which has nothing save authority over this body, finish the span of my undetermined lifetime: but by my better part I will be borne eternal above the high stars, and an indelible name will be ours, wheresoever Roman power extends over conquered lands, I will be read out by the mouth of the people, and by my fame through all ages, if the oracles of the prophets hold any truth, I shall live.

The conclusion here is optimistic: both the *Metamorphoses* and Ovid’s poetic spirit existing in the poem will survive eternally. In fact, he even seems to suggest that the *Metamorphoses* functions as a vehicle for preserving his poetic genius, in that it captures in material form (the physical book) his own intangible spirit as its author. If we read a

double meaning in *corporis huius* (XV.873), we may even claim that Ovid means that both his body and his book are subject to physical destruction, but that his poetic spirit and the words of his poem are not. And we would surely not be remiss in reading *corpus* as both “body” and “book” here; after all, Ovid proves his fondness for using words with two-fold significance time and again throughout the *Metamorphoses*, especially when describing a transformation and attempting to convey a character’s original and metamorphosed state at the same time. We saw this, for example, in the Baucis and Philemon passage discussed in chapter one when *corpus* was used to describe the couple’s joined tree trunks while also referring to their formerly human bodies at VIII.720.111 Reflecting on the similarity of the poet’s body and his book, and the relationship that these have with the poet’s own thoughts and those of others, Farrell connects the idea of perishable physical bodies and immortal poetic bodies with the idea that poets can be preserved in one another intertextually:

> Both the bodies of the readers who pronounce the words of the poem, and the bodies and texts of other poets who allow their predecessors to speak intertextually through themselves…stand in relation to the spirit that animates them in the same way as human bodies, which live for a fixed and relatively short span of years, do to the soul that animates them from the time of the body’s birth to that of its death, at which time the enduring, imperishable soul passes on to another temporary home.112

Poetry has the potential to achieve eternality, but in doing so it must rely on what is transitory. And it is in defining this relationship, in focusing on this transitory nature of bodies, that Ovid has created a corpus that is immortal.

111 Chapter 1, p. 33
For another particularly compelling example, see Allison Sharrock’s discussion of Myrrha’s transformation from girl to myrrh tree in “Representing Metamorphosis” in *Art and Text in Roman Culture*, ed. Jas Elsner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 120-21.
It has often been noted that Ovid’s assertion of immortality as achieved through the preservation of his poetry was a reaction to similar statements made by his predecessors, most notably Horace:

Exegi monumentum aere perennius
regalique situ pyramidum altius,
quod non imber edax, non aquilo impotens
possit diruere aut innumerabilis
annorum series et fuga temporum.
non omnis moriar multaque pars mei
vitabit Libitinam; usque ego postera
crescam laude recens…
(Horace, *Odes* III.30.1-8)

I have finished a monument more eternal than bronze and loftier than the royal seat of the pyramids, which neither consuming rain, nor the wild north wind can destroy, nor the innumerable secession of years and the flight of time. I will not all die, and a great part of me will shun Libitina; always afterward I will ascend anew in praise.

This may prompt us to question whether the final lines of the *Metamorphoses* were not merely an insincerely grandiose attempt at participating in this tradition. And such a cynical reading may be encouraged by our awareness that many of the works of poets like Horace and Ovid were not immortal after all, and have in fact been consumed by time. Before we entirely dismiss Ovid’s final statement in the *Metamorphoses* as a poetic trope, however, we should note that he reflects on the theme of poetic immortality further in the *Tristia*, albeit less optimistically. In the first poem of the collection, he addresses his book, bidding it to return to Rome as a stand-in for himself: *vade, liber, verbisque meis loca grata saluta: contingam certe quo licet illa pede* (“Go, book, and with my words greet the beloved places: at least I will touch them with what foot is allowed,” *Tr.* I.1.15-16). With the play on *pede*, Ovid again equates his body with his poem. As at the end of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid writes of his poem as something not bound by the same
physical limitations that restrict him, as something that can transport him to places where
his own body cannot go. Here, though, Ovid focuses less on the ability of his book to
serve as the corpus that will carry him into the future and more on its ability to serve as a
temporary surrogate for him at Rome. Indeed, throughout much of the poem he focuses
on the fact that he is removed from his book, as when he says: *tu tamen i pro me, tu, cui
licet, aspice Romam. di facerent, possem nunc meus esse liber!* (“But you, go in place of
me, you, to whom it is permitted, behold Rome. Would that the gods might allow that I
could be my book now!” *Tr.* I.1.57-8). With this exclamation, Ovid emphasizes the
frustrating distinction between himself and his book. And at other points in *Tristia* I.1,
the poet addresses the poem, rather, as a master to his slave. It is with this conceit that
Ovid opens the poem:

> Parve—nec invideo—sine me, liber, ibis in Vrbem,
ei mihi, quod domino non licet ire tuo!
vade, sed incultus, qualem decet exulis esse;
infelix habitum temporis huius habe.
(*Tr.* I.1-4)

Little book—I do not begrudge you—without me, you will go to the city,
because, alas, it is not permitted to me, to your master, to go! Go, but
rough, such as is befitting of an exile; unfortunate one, bear the look of
this time.

We may consider the double meaning of *liber* as both “book” and “free,” and Steven
Hinds urges us to observe “the strangely inverted nature of the master-slave relationship
here in *Tristia* I.1, evident in this opening couplet. Ovid is the *dominus* and his book is
the slave: yet it is the slave who is free to go where he wants (line 1) and the *dominus*
who is not." Towards the end of the poem, Ovid addresses the book as a father to his child:

cum tamen in nostrum fueris penetrale receptus,  
contigerisque tuam, scrinia curva, domum,  
aspicies illic positos ex ordine fratres,  
quos studium cunctos evigilavit idem.  
cetera turba palam titulos ostendet apertos,  
et sua detecta nomina fronte geret;  
tres procul obscura latitantes parte videbis;  
sic quoque, quod nemo nescit, amare docent.  
hos tu vel fugias, vel, si satis oris habebis,  
Oedipodas facito Telegonosque voces.  
deque tribus, moneo, si qua est tibi cura parentis,  
ze quemquam, quamvis ipse docebit, ames.  

(Tr. I.1.105-16)

When, though, you have been received into my chambers, and you reach your home, the curved bookcases, you will see your brothers there, placed in order, all of whom the same devotion carefully attended to. The rest of the crowd will display their titles plainly revealed, and will bear their own names exposed on the front; you will see three far off hiding in a dark place; so, yes, as no one doesn’t know it, they teach how to love. These you should either shun, or, if you have sufficient speech, do call them Oedipuses and Telegonuses. And I warn you, if any care of your parent is yours, may you not love anyone from the three, although he will teach you to.

In warning his little book to avoid the *Ars Amatoria* when he returns home to Rome, Ovid refers to himself as the *parens* of the book, and to his other works as the addressee’s brothers. The three volumes of the *Ars Amatoria* deserve to be called by the names of parricides, Oedipus and Telegonus, because they have sent their father Ovid into exile and brought about a kind of death for him. Not all of his works have behaved as the poet intended at the end of the *Metamorphoses*. He next moves onto the *Metamorphoses* themselves:

---

sunt quoque mutatae, ter quinque volumina, formae,
nuper ab exequiis carmina rapta meis.
his mando dicas, inter mutata referri
fortunae vultum corpora posse meae,
namque ea dissimilis subito est effecta priori,
flendaque nunc, aliquo tempore laeta fuit.
(Tr. I.1.117-22)

There are, also, the changed forms, thrice five volumes, poems recently carried off from my funeral. To these I entrust you to say that among the changed bodies the face of my fortune can be counted, for it was suddenly made unlike before, and now must be cried for, in another time it was happy.

Describing his *vultus* as being among the *corpora* found in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid once again associates his physical body with literary bodies. Here, though, Ovid’s *vultus* is not identified with that of work as a whole, as would be in keeping with the end of the *Metamorphoses*, but, rather, is merely one among the many individual characters contained the work, the *mutata corpora*. In *Tristia* I.7, Ovid requests that his portrait be taken down from the wall of his unnamed addressee, saying instead:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{...sed carmina maior imago} \\
\text{sunt mea, quae mando qualiacumque legas,} \\
\text{carmina mutatas hominum dicientia formas,} \\
\text{infelix domini quod fuga rupit opus.} \\
(Tr. I.7.11-14)
\end{align*}
\]

But my poems are fuller likenesses, which I trust you to read, of whatever quality they are, songs telling of the changed forms of men, an unfortunate work which the exile of their master interrupted.

Ovid suggests that his poems constitute his *imago*, but notes that this *imago* is not a glorious one, as he refers the imperfect state of the *Metamorphoses*. Later in the poem, Ovid even describes wanting to burn the *Metamorphoses* before his departure into exile:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{utque cremasse suum fertur sub stipite natum} \\
\text{Thestias et melior matre fuisset soror,} \\
\text{sic ego non meritos mecum peritura libellos} \\
\text{imposui rapidis viscera nostra regis:}
\end{align*}
\]
vel quod eram Musas, ut crimina nostra, perosus,
vel quod adhuc crescens et rude carmen erat.
(Tr. I.7.17-22)

As it is said that the daughter of Thestius burned her own son in the log
and was a better sister than mother, thus I placed my little books with me
on the consuming pyres, not deserving this, my vitals, ready to perish:
either because I detested the Muses, as my crimes, or because the poem
was still growing up and undeveloped.

Ovid likens himself to Althaea burning the log tied to the life of her son Meleager, as he
destroyed his children in attempting to destroy the *Metamorphoses*. Hinds notes the
appropriateness of the metaphor here, as the story of Meleager occurs at *Met*. VIII.445-
546, remarking, “What better way to illustrate this most crucial of all moments in the
history of the *Metamorphoses*, this very crisis of its existence, than through a simile taken
from what is, in terms of its position within the epic, the middle myth of the very middle
book? Nothing could more clearly emphasize the threat to its survival—as recounted, one
may add, in the centre of this elegy devoted to it.” Once again, then, Ovid represents
himself as one of the unfortunate characters contained in his work. In all of this, we see
Ovid has continued to define himself in terms of his relationship with his books as he did
at the end of the *Metamorphoses*. But instead of remaining an immortal work impervious
to fire, the *Metamorphoses* were nearly burnt by their author on a pyre. And instead of
having a *nomen indeleibile* and being read out *ore populi*, Ovid is begging a friend to read
them, *qualiacumque*.

One final passage from the *Tristia*, however, deserves our consideration, as the
poet speaks more explicitly about his relationship with his books, opening with an
address to them: *Quid mihi vobiscum est, infelix cura, libelli, ingenio perii qui miser ipse meo?* (“What is there with you, little books, my unlucky care, that belongs to me, who

\[114\] Hinds, “Booking the Return Trip,” 430.
myself have perished, miserable, by my own genius?”  

Tr. II.1-2). Ovid proceeds to question why he still feels compelled to write when his writings were responsible for his misfortunes. He asks for forgiveness from Augustus and refers to his *carmen et error* (Tr. II.207). When discussing the offending *carmen*, however, he departs from his customary assertion of closeness with his books:

```
sic ego delicias et mollia carmina feci,
strinxerit ut nomen fabula nulla meum.
nec quisquam est adeo media de plebe maritus,
ut dubius vitio sit pater ille meo.
crede mihi, distant mores a carmine nostrī—
vita verecunda est, Musa iocosa mea—
magnaque pars mendax operum est et ficta meorum:
plurima mulcendis auribus apta feret.
nec liber indicium est animi, sed honesta voluntas
plurima mulcendis auribus apta feret.
Accius esset atrox, conviva Terentius esset,

(Tr. II.1.349-360)
```

I have composed delights and tender poems in such a way that no rumor has stripped away my good name. Nor is there any married man, even from the middle of the commoners, that he is an uncertain father because of my crime. Believe me, my character stands apart from my song—my life is modest, my Muse, lighthearted—and a great part of my works is false and made up: it has permitted more to itself than to its own writer, nor is a book the sign of the soul, but an honest desire produces very many things suitable for delighting the ears. Otherwise Accius would be savage, Terence would be a reveler, they would be contentious who sing of savage war.

Ovid here puts a greater distance between himself and his works than in the passages examined above. Uneasily conscious of his tendency to associate himself so closely with his books, Ovid seems anxious to make a finer distinction for his accuser in these lines: *nec liber indicium est animi*. He has, in a sense, renegotiated the relationship here. But that he feels the need to attempt to remove himself from his works reminds us all the more of the close association he has maintained with them in the past. Thus, throughout
the *Tristia*, Ovid refigures his assessment of himself and of his works because of his own changed circumstances. But despite this complete reworking of what he proclaimed so confidently in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid, nevertheless, still writes of his works as having an inextricable, if not explicitly defined, connection with their poet and his existence outside of his own body.

Let us end our discussion of poetic immortality by turning our focus back to the *Metamorphoses* itself, to the rather puzzling figure of Pythagoras in the final book of the work (XV.60-478). For in the mouth of Pythagoras, we have yet another reflection on the theme of immortality:

> O genus attonitum gelidae formidine mortis, quid Styga, quid manes et nomina vana timetis, materiem vatum, falsique pericula mundi? Corpora, sive rogus flamma, seu tabe vetustas abstulerit, mala posse pati non ulla putetis! Morte carent animae, semperque priore relicta sede novis domibus vivunt habitantque receptae. *(Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XV.153-159)*

O you race stupefied by dread of cold death, why do you fear the Styx, why the shades and the empty names, the stuff of poets and the dangers of a made-up world? Your bodies—whether the pyre with its flame or old age with its decay will have carried them off—may you believe that they are not able to suffer anything bad! Your souls are free from death, and always, with the old seat abandoned, they are alive in new homes and, received there, they dwell.

That Ovid positions Pythagoras’ advice almost at the end of his work suggests that we may consider it, at least in part, as a comment on what we have just read. And, at first glance, Pythagoras’ assertions about the immortality of the soul seem very much in keeping with Ovid’s own prediction about the immortality of his work. And as Hardie postulates, “Pythagoras’ ecstatic fancy that he wanders through the stars, leaving behind the dull earth is close to Ovid’s prophecy of his own celestial destination in the epilogue
to the poem (871-9), as he is transformed into the immortal fame of his own poetry, escaping from the vicissitudes of the body."\(^{115}\) Pythagoras seems to offer a kind of grand synopsis of the themes of the entire poem:

Nec species sua cuique manet, rerumque novatrix
ex aliis alias reddit natura figuras:
nec perit in toto quicquam, mihi credite, mundo,
sed variat faciemque novat, nascique vocatur
incipere esse aliud, quam quod fuit ante, morique
desinere illud idem. Cum sint huc forsitan illa,
haec translata illuc, summa tamen omnia constant.
(Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XV.252-258)

Nothing’s original appearance endures, and nature, the renovator of things, renders some new forms from others: nor, believe me, does anything in the whole world perish, but it changes and makes its form anew; what is said to be born is what begins to be something other than what it was before, and what is said to die is what ceases to be the same. When, perhaps, those things are transplanted here, and these things there, nevertheless all things together continue on.

Scholars are quick to point out, though, that Pythagoras’ speech contains a number of inconsistencies that should make us question whether Ovid has some other purpose in mind. John Miller, for example, notes that Pythagoras’ alleged memory of one of his past lives, that of the Homeric warrior Euphorbus, is rather unreliable, as Ovid’s Pythagoras claims that he remembers dying after being stuck by Menelaus with a spear in the breast (*Met. XV.161-2*), whereas Homer’s Euphorbus died after the spear pierced his throat (*Iliad XVII.47-9*).\(^{116}\) “The philosopher’s much vaunted memory, ranging back through the centuries,” Miller comments, “is, after all, imperfect. As often, Ovid mischievously undercuts a grand assertion.”\(^{117}\) And Wheeler focuses on Pythagoras’ recollection of Helenus’ prophecy to Aeneas during the fall of Troy (*Met. XV.439-49*), which

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\(^{117}\) Idem.
Pythagoras uses to lend force to his prediction that Rome will someday be great. Although Pythagoras claims to have heard the prophecy of Helenus, Wheeler notes, his claim to have died on the battlefield at Troy would have entirely precluded his presence for the prophecy made during Troy’s fall. Finally, Miller sees Ovid’s attention to Pythagoras’ vegetarianism as something of a joke. He explains that, “When Ovid has Pythagoras in the argument subordinate the lofty concept of metempsychosis to vegetarianism, rather than vice versa, he seems to invert, if not trivialize, the logic of Pythagorean doctrine. And this highest principle of Ovid’s sage, a vegetable diet, was an aspect of Pythagoreanism frequently derided in the Graeco-Roman world.”

Perhaps, then, we should view Pythagoras’ discourse on change not as any kind of insightful reflection on Ovid’s themes, but, rather, as a superficial and reductive reading of the Metamorphoses, one that Ovid includes by way of offering a comically negative example of how to interpret his poem. In asserting that the soul never perishes but is perpetually recycled into new bodies, Pythagoras imagines in literal terms what Ovid intends to be taken symbolically, as in the case of the phoenix with which we started this discussion. To set us in the right direction, Ovid steps in for the last lines of the poem, to confirm that there does exist a kind of attainable immortality, but not the physical kind that Pythagoras suggests. For Ovid, immortality exists, if anywhere, in writing poetry. And that in the Tristia he seems to have struggled to such an extent with the conception of the relationship formulated at the end of the Metamorphoses between his body, his spirit, and his poetry, suggests that the theme was essential to his work, whether or not he ever resolved his attitude toward it. As we have seen, this idea of preservation through

118 Wheeler, 190-1.
participation in the poetic sphere has found symbolic expression in the changing and merging corpora of Ovid’s lovers. To have his corpus made immortal in the way that he predicts in the last lines of the Metamorphoses required Ovid not to work in isolation but, first, to embody the works of poets whose place in the literary tradition was already established; and, second, to be embodied by his audience who, through reading Ovid’s text, allow their thoughts and writings to be metamorphosed by it in some sense. Like the corpora of his characters in the Metamorphoses, Ovid permitted his poetic corpus to be permeated by the literary corpora of others, participating in the system that would allow the Metamorphoses to be preserved long after the death of his own mortal corpus.
Our discussion of *corpora* in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* has thus far allowed us to consider the process of metamorphosis and the merging of bodies as they relate to intertextuality, the existence of multiple voices within a single text, and the preservation of texts by other *corpora*. In doing so, we have, naturally, confined our remarks entirely to the realm of literature. At this point, it may be enlightening to engage with the exciting amount of recent scholarship that has focused on the relationship between ancient image and text. In particular, the abundance of evidence for ancient Roman domestic representations of the figure of Narcissus has drawn a great deal of attention in the past twenty years or so. Stories of metamorphosis as represented both by Ovid and in ancient art even constituted the theme of a 2012 exhibit at the Centro di Ateneo per I Musei in Padua entitled “METAMORFOSI: Miti d’amore e di vendetta nel mondo romano.” The exhibit featured a wide variety of Campanian wall paintings from the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples, including three Pompeian paintings depicting Narcissus, one found in the Casa dell’Argenteria, a second from the Casa di Marcus Lucretius, and a third from the Casa delle Vestali.

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121 For a general discussion, see Birgitte Rafn, “Narkissos,” in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* 6, no. 1 (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1992), 703-11; and Katharina Lorenz *Bilder machen Räume* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008).

Despite the amount of interest that ancient depictions of Narcissus have generated recently, interpretations of these visual works and how they should be viewed in relation to Ovid’s Narcissus story are surprisingly varied. Writing of the forty-some ancient representations of Narcissus discovered in Campania, most of which are dated to the first century A.D., Herica Valladares claims that Narcissus represented “vision’s fallacy and images’ seductive power...[as] Narcissus became a multi-faceted sign that drew viewers to contemplate and experience the delights and dangers of mimesis.”

But of the very same set of images, Paul Zanker concludes that, “Narcissus is portrayed exclusively as the epitome of a handsome young man (while the tragic aspect of the myth...plays no role).” Clearly, these two descriptions are not aligned. And one interesting distinction that separates Valladares’ analysis from Zanker’s is that Zanker is not here attempting to connect his interpretation of these works with the themes of Ovid’s account of Narcissus. Valladares, on the other hand, even goes as far as to claim that, “Campanian depictions of this self-enamored youth demonstrate the widespread diffusion of both Ovid’s work and its sophisticated conception of artistic illusion.” And this reading of Pompeian Narcissus imagery is not unique to Valladares. Ezio Pellizer similarly states of the large number of works portraying Narcissus starting in the first century A.D. that, “Si può postulare con altissima probabilità che si tratti di illustrazioni di Ovidio, le cui Metamorfosi dovettero avere una grandissima fortuna, in Italia e per tutto il mondo romano.”

Isabella Colpo concludes that, “l'esame del repertorio figurativo della prima

Allison Sharrock says that “all representations of metamorphosis after Ovid must be produced under his shadow.” And Stephen Hinds asserts that, “It would be perverse not to connect with the *Metamorphoses* an evident explosion of iconographic interest [in Narcissus] at Pompeii.”

To be sure, it is tempting to view the wealth of surviving images of Narcissus as indebted to Ovid’s treatment of the story in the *Metamorphoses*, the primary source from which our own society derives its understanding of the myth. And, to be sure, Valladares presents an incisive and intriguing argument, even if we find ourselves disagreeing with some of her conclusions in this chapter. So, too, for the purposes of this discussion, the idea that these visual images might embody and preserve a part of Ovid is particularly attractive. Nevertheless, scholars such as Michael Squire have warned against the pitfalls of our modern tendency of “measuring the visual in the sovereign currency of the verbal,” referring to the “logocentric bias of so much art history, Classical and otherwise.” For this reason, we should start our exploration of the ancient visual tradition of the Narcissus myth by examining critically the arguments for the purported interaction between these images and the text of the *Metamorphoses*. In doing so, we will focus in particular on the content and display context of the Narcissus wall painting from the House of Octavius Quartio in Pompeii. If after this examination, we cannot with

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128 Sharrock, “Representing Metamorphosis,” 114.
confidence support the above assertions of a substantial and causative link between Ovid’s Narcissus and the Narcissus so popular in first century A.D. Pompeii, we shall reflect on whether we can yet still identify some significance in the popularity of Narcissus images for our discussion of Ovid’s merging bodies.

A General Survey of Ancient Narcissus Imagery

Scholars have tried to categorize Narcissus images by type and to trace these types to Hellenistic Greek models. Lilian Balensiefen rightly warns us of the inherent difficulty of analyzing wall paintings by looking for the influence of different statuary types:

Die Unterschiedlichkeit gerade auch dieser einfachsten Narzissbilder in Details sowie ihre typologische Verwandtschaft mit jenen anderen Darstellungen mythologischer Gestalten verbietet...ein derartig direktes Rückschließen auf ein griechisches Original. Auch das Herausstellen eines einzelnen Wandbildes als getreue Kopie eines griechischen Vorbildes kann letztlich nur auf subjektiven Kriterien beruhen.131

Nevertheless, some general remarks on the loosely accepted types will help us get an idea of the range of imagery associated with the figure of Narcissus in antiquity.

One characteristic common to a number of images, that of Narcissus removing his mantle, can be observed in the only extant representation of Narcissus that clearly predates Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, a third century B.C. Greek terracotta statuette from Tanagra in Boeotia, now lost (fig. 5.1). A wreathed Narcissus here stands gazing downward as he lifts one corner of his mantle up and away from his body with his right hand, aided by Eros perched atop his right shoulder. Balensiefen hesitates after identifying the subject as Narcissus, noting that, “Da das Spiegelbild nicht beigefügt ist, 

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müß ihre Identifikation mit Narziß unsicher bleiben.” Further, Pellizer expresses doubt as to whether the statue is authentic, and a striking number of Tanagra statuettes have been exposed as forgeries by recent studies. Nevertheless, Clayton Zimmerman suggests that, “This modest statuette would have been quite suitable for a small shrine or enclosure dedicated to the local legendary figure of Narcissus” in Boeotia, arguing for the existence of a cult of Narcissus there based on literary evidence of shrines at Thespiae, Oropus, Tanagra, and possibly Eretria. Zimmerman cites Pausanias’ description of the spring of Narcissus in Thespia (discussed above in ch. 2), Strabo’s brief mention in the *Geographica* of Ναρκίσσου τοῦ Ἐρετριέως μνῆμα in Oropus (“the monument of Narcissus the Eretrian,” IX.2.10), and a second-century A.D. inscription from a dedication honoring the Emperor Hadrian’s hunting exploits near Thespiae, which opens by addressing Eros with the mention that he is Θεσπιαῖς Ἑλικωνίασι ναίων Ναρκισσοῦ παρὰ κῆπον ἀνθέοντα (“living in Heliconian Thespiae near the blossoming garden of Narcissus,” *Inscriptiones Graecae* VII.1828).

We may have variations of this type in which Narcissus removes his mantle in a number of figures clearly identifiable as representations of Narcissus from the first century A.D. and later. Doro Levi considers the Tanagra statuette to be evidence for a Hellenistic prototype, as Narcissus’ gesture of holding open his mantle is observable in

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132 Idem, 52 n. 224.
136 See Zimmerman, *The Pastoral Narcissus*, 12-3, for possible explanations of the description of Narcissus as an Eretrian.
various Pompeian paintings, including the Narcissus fresco from the Casa delle Vestali at Pompeii (VI.1.7, fig. 5.2). In this painting dated to the Vespasianic period, the wreathed Narcissus again lifts the edge of his garment from his body with his right hand, but is here sitting on a rock, propping himself up with his left arm and leaning over the water and his reflection. The figure of Eros is present, standing facing Narcissus and holding a torch upside-down, signifying the tragic end of the boy. In the painting, Zanker notes, “Völlig ausgeprägt tritt uns der bewußte Narziß,” as the gesture of removing the mantle and exposing his body suggest that Narcissus is aware that it is his own beauty that he desires in his reflection. Similar gestures are present in a number of other first-century wall paintings from Pompeii (figs. 5.3-5.7), in a handful of gems (figs. 5.8, 5.9), in reliefs (figs. 5.10, 5.11), and in mosaics (figs. 5.12, 5.13). Clearly, there is a great deal of variation among these images. In one of the wall paintings (fig. 5.7) and in a first-century relief from a villa rustica at Petraro (fig. 5.11) Narcissus is depicted reclining diagonally and propping up his body with one arm; but in various other wall paintings (figs. 5.2-5.6), a grave relief (fig. 5.10, now lost), and a second-century mosaic from Vaison-la-Romaine, Vienne (fig. 5.12), he appears kneeling diagonally and leaning forward. In the gems he appears standing.

Though, as noted, the mantle-removing gesture may suggest Narcissus’ self-awareness, the images in which Narcissus appears reclining diagonally share their posture with the wall paintings representing what Zanker calls “der naive Narziß” who reclines

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140 those from the Casa dell’Orso ferito [Pompeii VII.2.44-46]; Pompeii I.14.5; the Casa dei Postumii [Pompeii VIII.4.4-49]; and Pompeii VI.2.24: Colpo in Eidola, 76-7; also Rafn no. 48.
141 See Rafn, 711, entries 19, 20, 57-60.
142 Rafn no. 15, 18, 40.
143 Rafn no. 13, 14; Colpo thinks that the Narcissus in fig. 5.12 is removing his mantle, Colpo, Grassigli, and Minotti, “Le Ragioni di una scelta,” 76-7.
languidly, often admiring the beauty of the reflection he sees but seeming not to recognize it as his own (figs. 5.14-18). “Der in der pompeianischen Wandmalerei verbreitetste Bildertypus,” Zanker explains, “will Narziß ganz allgemein als schönen Jüngling vorführen, ohne näheres Interesse für sein Schicksal oder gar dessen Ausdeutung.” This pose, however, is a generic one, and is observable in paintings of other beautiful youths such as Adonis, Endymion, Cyparissus, and Ganymede (figs. 5.19, 5.20). Balensiefen suggests that it is likely that these images were based on “musterbuchartige Vorlagen…die—wohl in Umrißzeichnungen—Kompositionsschemata enthielten, die auf verschiedene mythologische Themen anwendbar waren.”

Depictions of Narcissus reclining draw the same sort of parallel between him and the abovementioned beautiful youths as does Hyginus’ list of characters “qui ephebi formosissimi fuerunt”:


Just as the copy-book form of Narcissus, the list characterizes the *ephebi* as generically *formosissimi*, hardly distinguishable but for the identity of their lovers. Along these lines, Levi says of the reclining pose that,

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144 Balensiefen, *Die Bedeutung des Spiegelbildes*, 51.
Generally speaking, not only was this figure not created for Narcissus, but it is not even particularly suitable for his myth, because it was specifically created to express a languid, erotic abandonment, rather than a grievous attitude of intense contemplation, such as is required by the legend of Narcissus... Even if we were tempted to admit the existence of a specific original image of the sitting Narcissus, this type in the Roman copies was in any case very soon confused and combined with the usual image of the reclining youth.  

Thus, Figures 5.2-5.7 are not of note because of the reclining pose of Narcissus, but, rather, because of the addition of the mantle-removing gesture to the standard reclining image. It is possible to imagine a Hellenistic prototype for the standing Narcissus removing his mantle as reflected in the Tanagra statuette and elsewhere.  

A second statuary type is suggested by a number of representations of Narcissus standing in repose with his arms above his head. This type seems to be reflected in a wall painting in the Casa del Ganimede in Pompeii (VII.13.4) dated to the Vespasianic period (fig. 5.21). Narcissus stands with his right hip thrust out and his right arm resting on top of his head, holding two spears in his left hand. His mantle is draped over his left arm, and he gazes down at his reflection, accompanied by Eros holding a bow. Levi explains that, “The painting appears to be a faithful reproduction of a statuary type, whose characteristics reveal it immediately as a post-Praxitelean and post-Lysippean work.... of the very early Hellenistic age.” The same general stance appears in a number of statues and statuettes from the Hadrianic and Antonine periods (figs. 5.22-5.24) and in several Roman sarcophagi from the late second and the third centuries A.D. (figs. 5.25-5.29). Narcissus’ gesture of resting his arms on his head is often interpreted as one of extreme repose, similar to that of the Apollo Lykeios or of the Sciarra Amazon type.

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147 Idem, 62.
Zanker has a slightly different take, suggesting that “[b]eim Apollon und noch eindeutiger bei der Amazone des Typus Sciarra ist die Gebärde des rechten Armes jedoch untrennbar mit dem Stützmotiv des linken verbunden. Das Fehlen des Stützmotivs beim Narziß bedingt eine völlig andere Körperhaltung, sie schließt einen Vergleich der beiden Gebärden aus.”\textsuperscript{148} Instead, Zanker encourages us to see the pose as representative of the self-aware Narcissus’ enjoyment of his own body, citing a similar gesture in various statues of Aphrodite from the second century in which the goddess raises her arms to her head to arrange her hair.\textsuperscript{149} From this, he infers a late Hellenistic prototype for the statue type.\textsuperscript{150}

Another interesting trend in much of Narcissus’ imagery is the soft, somewhat feminine appearance of the youth. As Rabun Taylor explains, “Although the Roman image of Narcissus became more virile over time, this pallid, almost androgynous manifestation was the one favored in the first century C.E.”\textsuperscript{151} Note, for example, Narcissus’ soft breast and broad hips in many of the images (for example, figs. 5.5, 5.32). And Zanker points out that Narcissus often appears similar in form to Hermaphroditus:

\begin{quote}
Wie sehr das Weibliche und die Selbstbefangenheit der frühen Kaiserzeit als Eigenschaften des Narziß vertraut waren, verdeutlicht die Annäherung seiner Gestalt an die des Hermaphroditen. In den pompeianischen Bildprogrammen findet man die beiden “juvenes formosissimi” als Pendantfiguren. Das allein würde nicht viel besagen wenn nicht die Bildtypen, die mythologischen Requisiten und selbst die Körperformen der beiden Gestalten miteinander vermischt und vertauscht würden.\textsuperscript{152}
\end{quote}

Zanker continues to explain that the Narcissus’ gesture on the gems (figs. 5.8, 5.9) is one characteristic of Hermaphroditus. In falling in love with his own image and being

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{148} Zanker, “Iste ego sum,” 160.
\item \textsuperscript{149} Zanker, “Iste ego sum,” 164.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Idem, 168.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Rabun Taylor, \textit{The Moral Mirror of Roman Art} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 70.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Zanker, “Iste ego sum,” 166.
\end{footnotes}
helplessly locked in the gaze of his reflection, Narcissus was at the same time lover and beloved, active and passive. This element of passivity makes Narcissus somewhat effeminate. And the extreme degree of his desire, too, would hardly have been in keeping with the traditional public persona of a Roman male. Thus the Pompeian paintings, according to Taylor, “transmit the youth’s fatal weakness by way of a somatotype known to every Roman viewer as that of Hermaphroditus.”\(^{153}\) Further, with his often almost fully nude body explicitly displayed for the pleasure of the viewer in these Pompeian paintings, he is again placed in a pathic role of one who may be gazed at by male viewers.

The Pompeian paintings of Narcissus, then, seem to draw from various sources, possibly including earlier Greek statue types of Narcissus removing his mantle or resting his arms on his head, and most also employ the generic copy-book form of the beautiful youth reclining diagonally. In many cases, Narcissus is distinguished from other beautiful youths merely by the presence of his reflection in the paintings. There may be a divide between those that, according to Zanker’s formulation, represent Narcissus as “bewußte” by including the gestures from the proposed statue types, and those that merely depict the “naive” Narcissus. He also often has noticeably feminine characteristics and appears similar to Hermaphroditus. And we commonly see additional figures accompanying Narcissus in these paintings, most often including Eros and a nymph, possibly identifiable as Echo in some cases. Levi explains that these figures, too, are standard and not unique to the Narcissus paintings, being “only the familiar elements of the erotic-idyllic repertory of Hellenistic art, available at will to the Roman copyists."\(^{154}\)

An Ovidian Narcissus in Pompeii?

Where, then, do the scholars mentioned in the introduction to this chapter find the influence of Ovid’s version of the Narcissus myth in some of these images? First, many scholars cite as evidence the presence of Echo, whose story, as we mentioned above, might have been first paired with that of Narcissus by Ovid.\textsuperscript{155} Rafn identifies an Echo in eleven of the works in her catalogue of ancient Narcissus imagery, including six first century A.D. wall paintings from Campania, a third century mosaic from Antioch, a mid-second century relief on a marble puteal from Ostia, a fourth century textile in the form of tunic trimmings from a Coptic grave at Antinoopolis in Egypt, a carnelian ringstone, and a second century marble statuette.\textsuperscript{156} This identification, however, may be problematic. Taylor states that Rafn “is mistaken…in identifying attendant nymphs in many of these scenes as Echo; often they are clearly water nymphs, perhaps representing, among others, Narcissus’ mother Liriope.”\textsuperscript{157} Taylor takes issue with Rafn’s identification because Echo is a mountain nymph, while some of the attributes of the figures Rafn identifies as Echo are more in keeping with those of water nymphs. In one Pompeian painting from the Vespasianic period (fig. 5.17), for example, a nymph identified by Rafn as Echo appears wreathed with reed and pouring water from a hydria into the pool in which Narcissus’ reflection appears. It would not be unusual for Narcissus to have been represented with generic water nymphs. In fact, it is clear that Narcissus was sometimes represented with nymphs other than Echo, as is attested by a Vespasianic painting from the Casa della Regina Margherita in Pompeii (V.2.1; fig. 5.30). Here, Narcissus is surrounded by three nymphs: one sits in the spring itself with

\textsuperscript{155} See ch. 2, p. 8
\textsuperscript{156} Rafn, “Narkissos,” 707.
\textsuperscript{157} Taylor, \textit{The Moral Mirror of Roman Art}, 216, n. 51.
her back to the viewer, turning and extending her arm toward Narcissus; two others are seated on a rock slightly higher than Narcissus, one of which rests her left arm on a jar while raising her right hand to her head. This is not to say that we ought to take issue with every one of Rafn’s identifications of Echo in these images. In a painting from the Casa dell’Efebo di Bronzo (I.7.10-12, fig. 5.31), for example, we find nothing that should explicitly cast doubt on Rafn’s identification of the female figure as Echo. Regardless, we should also keep in mind that the nymph Rafn calls Echo only appears in a small portion of the extant Pompeian Narcissus paintings. In sixteen of the examples catalogued by Rafn, Narcissus either appears alone or accompanied only by Eros, compared to six in which she identifies an Echo figure.\(^{158}\)

Aside from the possible presence of “Ovid’s Echo” in Pompeian Narcissus frescoes, another potential connection between Ovid’s Narcissus and these images has been suggested by Colpo, who has isolated a particular group of wall paintings (figs. 5.2-5.6) that she sees as depicting the specific movements of Narcissus in the *Metamorphoses* after he has come to realize that he has fallen in love with his reflection:

\[
dumque dolet, summa vestem deduxit ab ora
nudaque marmoreis percussit pectora palmis.
pectora traxerunt tenuem percussa ruborem,
non aliter quam poma solent, quae candida parte,
parte rubent, aut ut variis solet uva racemis
ducere purpureum nondum matura colorem.
\]  
\(\text{(Met. III.480-5)}\)

And while he grieves, he pulls off his cloak at the outer edge and he strikes his bare breast with his marble hands. His breast, struck, draws up a delicate red, not other than apples are accustomed to take, which, white in part, grow red in part, or as the grape in various clusters is accustomed to take on a purple color though not yet ripe.

In this passage, Ovid gives several details regarding Narcissus’ movements: he uses the verb “procumbere” (to lean forward, III.412) to describe Narcissus’ posture, says that Narcissus is “paulum…levatus” (raised up a little, III.440), and writes that “dumque dolet, summa vestem deduxit ab ora” (while he grieves, he pulls off his cloak at the outer edge, III.480). Colpo believes that the frescoes found in the Casa dell’Orso ferito (VII.2.44-46, figs. 5.3, 5.4), Pompeii I.14.5 (fig. 5.5), the Casa dei Postumii (VIII.4.4-49, fig. 5.6), the Casa delle Vestali (VI.1.7, fig. 5.2), and Pompeii V.2.24 illustrate what Ovid has described. “I quadri, in questo senso,” she claims, “rappresenterebbero non tanto un generico Narciso che si rimira nella fonte, come pure è stato sempre affermato, bensì proprio il momento (tema) del canto ovidiano di Narciso al proprio riflesso”\(^{159}\) It would be good, however, to raise a number of questions about this assessment. First, the Narcissus of the Casa delle Vestali (fig. 5.2), as noted above, seems to reproduce the gesture of the third century B.C. Tanagra statuette fairly closely and differs from some of Colpo’s other examples in that Narcissus lifts his mantle away from his body, not from above his head as do the Narcissi from the Casa dell-Orso ferito, Pompeii I.14.5, and the Casa dei Postumii (fig. 5.3-5.6). Next, the Narcissus from the Casa dei Postumii (fig. 5.6) presents some difficulties. The original painting is lost, and the sketch that partially preserves it lacks all of Narcissus’ body but the legs, although various catalogues mention Narcissus’ reflection with his cloak fluttering off in an arc over his head, Eros with an overturned torch, and Dionysian background elements (Wolfgang Helbig mentions a bronze statue of Dionysus, a kantharos, and a thyrsus).\(^{160}\) It is striking how much of Narcissus’ body, fully nude, appears in the reflection. Heinrich Brunn points out that

\(^{159}\) Colpo, Grassigli, and Minotti, “Le Ragioni di una scelta,” 77.

\(^{160}\) Wolfgang Helbig, *Wandgemälde der vom Vesuv verschütteten Städte Campaniens* (Leipzig, Breitkopf und Härtel, 1868) 300, no. 1356.
Narcissus seems to be in the middle of some vigorous movement and suggests the possibility that the painting represented Narcissus about to fall into the water and drown, which may have been a variant of the myth, referenced here, albeit inexplicitly, by Plotinus:  

\[\text{Idem, 300, no. 1356.}\]

For it is imperative that he, having seen beauty in bodies, not run to them, but, recognizing that they are likenesses and vestiges and shadows, to flee towards that of which those things are likenesses. For if someone hastens to grasp a beautiful image sailing on the water, wishing it were true, which some myth somewhere tells in riddles, I think, of a man who, wishing to grasp it and plunging below the stream, disappeared…

Callistratus’ ecphrasis of a statue of Narcissus also seems to suggest a version of the myth in which Narcissus drowns:

And the form in the water was so true to life and full of breath that it seemed to be Narcissus himself, whom, they say, coming to a spring, with his form seen by him upon the waters, he came to an end among the Nymphs, longing to unite with his image, and now he appears in the meadows, blooming in the springtime.

Though Ovid, too, describes Ovid removing his cloak (at Met. III.480), Callistratus seems to imply some kind of causative link between Narcissus’ desire to join with his image in the water and his subsequent death. Like Brunn, Zimmerman reads images like those in the Casa dei Postumii (fig. 5.6) and the Casa delle Vestali (fig. 5.2) to be part of a type
“which may reflect a tradition outside of Ovid…. This energetic action is completely opposed to the lethargy evident in the scenes [in which Narcissus merely reclines]. Narcissus appears as if ready to fling himself into the water.”\textsuperscript{162} Zanker responds somewhat neutrally to this idea, saying that “[d]ie alte Deutung, die hier unter Berufung auf spätantike Autoren den Todessturz des Narziß dargestellt sehen wollte, braucht nicht widerlegt zu werden.”\textsuperscript{163} That modern scholars do not find the imagery so specific that it definitively and exclusively calls to mind Ovid’s version of Narcissus should give us pause in accepting Colpo’s assessment of the gesture as based on Ovid’s account.

**Narcissus in the House of Octavius Quartio: Context and Meaning**

At this point, we should address Hinds’ claim that, “Even if, individually, [some of these paintings] were straight reproductions from a standard Greek image repertoire, there could still be an Ovidian impulse behind the home owner’s or designer’s selection of these mythic subjects over a host of others, and their combination into a compositional unit.”\textsuperscript{164} One commonly cited example is the house of Octavius Quartio (fig. 5.33), which was elaborately decorated with representations of Narcissus (figs. 5.32, 5.35) and Pyramus and Thisbe (fig. 5.37) in the pergola (fig. 5.34, 5.36) and of Diana and Actaeon in the portico. Verity Platt reminds us of the proximity of these three stories in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (they all occur within books III-IV), and notes that we do not have any images of Pyramus and Thisbe that predate the publication of the *Metamorphoses*.\textsuperscript{165} Platt, exploring what he calls the “visual paradox inherent in an image which portrays a viewer transfixed by an image,” suggests the following reading of the Narcissus painting:

\textsuperscript{162} Zimmerman, *The Pastoral Narcissus*, 17-18.
\textsuperscript{163} Zanker, “Iste ego sum,” 158.
\textsuperscript{164} Hinds, “Landscape with Figures,” 141.
The painting’s position next to the *euripus* is a reminder that the viewer might catch sight of himself in the water and lose himself in solipsistic desire. Indeed, the background of the painting, with its combination of architectural detail, pool and leafy *locus amoenus*, is remarkably similar to the portico’s setting between the house and garden...Alternatively, the beauty of Narcissus’s pale, undulating flesh might draw us into appreciative contemplation of his naked body, whether this be fuelled by voyeuristic desire to possess him or ‘narcissistic’ desire to be ‘like’ him.166

Platt is conservative in claiming a link between these images and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, merely suggesting that, “It is fair to say that Ovid was probably an inspiration at some stage in the selection and creation of the decorative scheme,” while asserting that the images should not be considered illustrations.167 But Valladares, whose interpretation of an ancient viewer’s response to the image is markedly similar to Platt’s, believes otherwise, suggesting that, “By admiring this painting, we ourselves have begun to fall for Narcissus’s charms just as he fell for his reflection—a sequence of responses that parallel those articulated by Ovid in his poem.”168

We have a model for the interpretation of a Narcissus painting in these terms in Philostratus the Elder’s third century description in the *Imagines* of a panel painting of Narcissus from the (probably fictional) picture gallery of a luxuriously decorated villa outside of Naples:

\[
\text{τιμῶσα δὲ ἡ γραφὴ τὴν ἀλήθειαν καὶ δρόσου τι λείβει ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθέων, οἷς καὶ μέλιτα ἐφιζάνει τις, ὥστε εἴδος εἰτ΄ ἐξαπατηθέεισα ὑπὸ τῆς γραφῆς, εἴτε ἡμᾶς ἐξηπατήσαται χρὴ εἶναι αὐτήν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐστω. σὲ μέντοι, μειράκιον, οὐ γραφὴ τις ἐξηπάτησεν, οὐδὲ χρώμασιν ἢ κηρῷ προστέτηκας, ἀλλ᾽ ἐκτυπῶσάν σε τὸ ὕδωρ, οἶον εἰδές αὐτό, οὐκ οἶδα, οὐτε τὸ τῆς πηγῆς ἐλέγχεις σώφισμα, νεῦσαι δέον καὶ παρατρέψαι τοῦ εἴδους καὶ τὴν χεῖρα ὑποκινῆσαι καὶ μὴ ἐπὶ ταὐτὸν ἐστάναι, σὲ δ᾽, ὥσπερ ἑταίρῳ ἑταίρῳ τάκειθεν περιμένεις. εἰτά σοι ἡ πηγὴ μύθῳ χρῆσεται; (Philostratus, *Imagines* I.23)
\]

166 Idem, 91.
167 Idem, 89.
The painting, staying true to reality, even pours forth some dew from the flowers, and on them some bee sits; I do not know whether it is deceived by the painting or whether we must be deceived that it is. But let it be. However, boy, no painting has deceived you, nor have you fixated on colors or wax, but you do not realize that the water represents you the same such as you see, nor do you question the trick of the spring; there is only need that you nod and change your expression and gently move your hand and not stand in the same position, but you wait there, as if you have met with a companion. Will the spring, then, answer you in conversation?

With the bee, Philostratus suggests the possibility of the viewer being deceived by the painting, before moving on to Narcissus immobilized by the gaze of his image. He thus implicitly likens the viewer’s uncertainty about the realness of an element of the painting with Narcissus’ misinterpretation of the realness of the boy he sees in the water. Philostratus attempts, John Elsner explains, to “remake the myth of Narcissus rhetorically into a meditation on viewing, naturalism, and erotic desire—which is to say, on subjectivity.” Valladares’ and Platt’s interpretations of the Narcissus in the House of Octavius Quartio have a clear affinity for Philostratus’ reading of the Narcissus panel painting at Imagines I.23. This does not necessarily affirm their validity, one way or another. We should keep in mind that Philostratus was a sophist, and the Imagines constitute highly erudite readings of visual art, models for elite and informed viewing. Also, we must not neglect to distinguish the quality and display context of the likely fictional Narcissus panel painting Philostratus describes in a picture gallery in a sprawling suburban villa, from that of the actual Narcissus fresco at the townhouse of Octavius Quartio. But what we should, for our purposes, take away from Philostratus’ text, is the understanding that an informed response to a Narcissus painting of the sort we have been examining does not require relating images of Narcissus to Ovid’s text.

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Though he may refer to, say, Homer’s version of a myth when discussing some of the other works in the *Imagines*, Philostratus does not find it necessary to relate his description of this Narcissus painting to any particular literary version of the myth, or even to interpret it according to the same themes. As Elsner suggests of both Callistratus and Philostratus:

Unlike Ovid (whose *Metamorphoses* preceded both these descriptions and must have been known to their authors), both the sophists ignore the story of Narcissus and Echo. Though Ovid’s Narcissus is a complex consideration of the theme of reflection in auditory as well as visual terms, the ekphrasts are interested much more specifically in issues of visual representations. Both texts are keenly aware of their own status as descriptions of a work of art—as imagined viewings of an image whose key theme is the act of viewing and as representations of a visual representation whose subject is in fact representation itself.¹⁷⁰

Philostratus’ description of the Narcissus painting does not overtly engage with Ovid’s story from the *Metamorphoses*. It engages, rather, with a painting itself, and with what a painting has to say about the nature of visual images.

To be sure, we should certainly not dismiss the idea that whoever commissioned the paintings of the pergola from the House of Octavius Quartio was familiar with Ovid: the significance of the placement of the painting by the euripus and the presence of the Pyramus and Thisbe nearby suggest something of a carefully designed ensemble. We should consider, though, that even this Pyramus and Thisbe painting raises certain questions. Namely, though the Pyramus in the House of Octavius Quartio does not appear to be dying of the same injury as Ovid’s Pyramus, who dies thus:

\[
\ldots\text{demisit in ilia ferrum,}
\]
\[
\text{nec mora, ferventi moriens e vulnere traxit.}
\]

\[
(Met. \ IV.119-20)
\]

¹⁷⁰ Idem, 250.
…he thrust the blade into his groin, and with no delay, he drew it from the hot wound, dying.

In contrast to the single wound to the groin that Ovid’s Pyramus inflicts on himself, the Pyramus from the House of Octavius Quartio (fig. 38) bears deep claw marks all over his body and appears to have been attacked by the lioness fleeing in the background. This does not absolutely preclude the possibility that the patron who commissioned this painting requested it because of some familiarity with Ovid, but it reminds us that we have no reason to identify the scene as one that would have represented Ovid’s Pyramus and Thisbe per se. We should also remember that these paintings were not alone in the pergola. As Zanker explains, “The entire length of the wall (over twenty-three feet long) to which the pergola was attached was covered with frescos depicting a variety of scenes—Orpheus charming the beasts, a hunting scene in a paradisus, and Venus hovering above a shell on the sea,” and the banks of the euripus were lined with statues typical of garden and watercourse décor: a river god, a Sphinx, herms, a satyr, hounds and quarry, the muses, etc. At the end of the pergola opposite to the one with the Narcissus and Pyramus and Thisbe paintings was a shrine to Isis. In fact, the pergola and garden of the house are so full of different features that Zanker remarks that “architectural elements borrowed from villas in the country or by the seaside are crammed together into a Walt Disney world…. [T]he owner, eager to imitate the lavish world of villas he so clearly admired, preferred quantity over quality.” Hinds counters that “this could strengthen the possibility that the Met. is by this date a routine source for

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171 As noted by Small, The Parallel Worlds of Classical Art and Text, 104.
173 Idem, 156.
visual art,” but this comment is quite speculative.\(^{174}\) Regardless, Zanker’s comments cast a bit of a shadow on the idea that Platt’s rather sophisticated reading of these images is one that, in her words, “engages with the normative, male Roman viewer.”\(^{175}\)

As we consider whether, in Valladares’ words, “it is undeniable that the wall paintings in the pergola of the House of Octavius Quartio in Pompeii form an Ovidian ensemble,”\(^{176}\) we should ask whether such assessments proceed first and foremost from a response to the visual imagery itself or whether, inversely, they are predetermined by notions of the predominance of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as the ancients’ source for the myth. In other words, do such observations actually originate at the level of the images? It would be difficult to say that ancient viewers would have had an automatic association of the myth of Narcissus with Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* regardless of context. While we may be able to say that, in the case of someone who was familiar with the myth of Narcissus through literature alone, Ovid’s version is the one most likely to have been available in first century A.D. Pompeii, it would be impossible to prove that a literary source in particular was primarily responsible for people’s familiarity with the myth. As Minotti emphasizes, “è fondamentale…ricordare che le società antiche si basano essenzialmente sulla comunicazione orale e che pertanto nella trasmissione di informazioni seguono dinamiche meccanismi sostanzialmente differenti da quelli che regolano la società moderna.”\(^{177}\) Even if the paintings in the House of Octavius Quartio presented to its owner what Valladares’ calls “a manifestation of the mimetic dynamics

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\(^{174}\) Hinds, “Landscape with Figures,” 141.
\(^{175}\) Valladares, “Viewing, Desiring, Believing,” 88.
\(^{176}\) Idem, 381.
\(^{177}\) Colpo, Grassigli, and Minotti, “Le Ragioni di una scelta,” 89.
articulated in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses,*” could we ever say that this would have been acknowledged by a casual visitor to the house?

Even in the literary versions of the myth we have observed a striking variety, such as Pausanias’ disbelief that a youth could ever fail to recognize his own reflection and his preference for the rationalizing account of Narcissus gazing at his reflection to recall his twin sister; such as Conon’s lack of specificity as to whether Narcissus actually recognized the reflection as his own; such as Ovid’s focus on Narcissus’s appropriate anguish at loving the only boy he cannot embrace and his transition from naïve to knowing; such as Callistratus and Philostratus’ interest in the myth because of its implications for the realm of visual art. And just as the different authors who have treated the Narcissus story vary in the degree to which we could call them philosophical or insightful interpreters of the myth, so, too, would it have been for viewers of the myth as represented on the walls of Pompeii. Surely, in some contexts and to some viewers, Narcissus was, in Zanker’s words, nothing more than “the epitome of a handsome young man,” only nominally different from other beautiful tragic youths like Ganymede and Cyparissos. But others may very well have had a deeper understanding of the myth, and of the peculiar implications of gazing at an image of a youth who is, himself, paralyzed by gazing at the same thing. Surely, in considering how an ancient viewer might have reacted to a painting of Narcissus, we should understand the possibility for a range of interpretations that neither would have necessarily been associated with Ovid’s Narcissus story, nor would have unfailingly picked up on the same themes as Ovid’s Narcissus story. At neither end of the spectrum of possible readings is a familiarity with Ovid’s text requisite for a viewer. This should, ultimately, be more interesting for those of us who are
familiar with Ovid’s version of the myth anyway: was not a man who enjoyed a Narcissus painting only because of the handsome youth it contained intriguingly similar to the naïve Narcissus, while a man who read the image as one that caused him, in Valladares’ words, “to contemplate and experience the delights and dangers of mimesis,” was rather like a sort of knowing Narcissus?

Connecting Thoughts

How, then, can we bring our discussion of these images back to our larger concern with the merging bodies in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*? Let us start with the basic observation that the Narcissus paintings are about viewing and being viewed. In reflecting on the art of the body in antiquity, Squire has noted the importance of viewing in ancient art:

An endless array of stories was constructed to theorise the dynamics of looking, each set in the misty half-light of the past. There was Narcissus, for example, who fell in love with his own ‘narcissistic’ reflection. Or think of Orpheus, forbidden from gazing upon his dead wife Eurydice until they had reached the light of day—albeit in vain. The visual depiction of such stories implicated their own material forms within the discourses of viewing that they mythologized. Did ever a culture weave so intricate a web of meta-pictorial thinking?178

Again, as with so many ancient myths, the merging-body stories, and especially the myth of Narcissus, were about loving and being loved, about being affected by what you see and by whom you are seen. By looking at something external to ourselves, we internalize it to some degree. In contemplating it, we situate it in relation to ourselves. This is what the Narcissus paintings invite us to reflect upon. And it is also what Ovid’s merging bodies suggest about his text. By participating in the intertextual tradition of Latin poetry, Ovid had to negotiate his sometimes ambiguous relationship with those who had written

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before him by engaging with their *corpora*, internalizing them in some way, and letting them be reflected back in his own *corpus*, the *Metamorphoses*. Thus, the Narcissus in Pompeian paintings could highlight the careful viewer’s process of reading the image before his eyes and interpreting it for himself in the same way that Narcissus and the merging bodies in the *Metamorphoses* could highlight Ovid’s process of reading the writings that came before him and interpreting them in relation to the *Metamorphoses*. 
Figure 5.1: Statuette, Narcissus and Eros now lost; from Tanagra (Lévy 1878, pl. 27)

Figure 5.2: Wall painting, Narcissus and Eros Naples, Museo Nazionale; from Pompeii VI.1.6 (Casa delle Vestali) (Colpo, Ghedini, and Salvo 2012, p. 107, fig. 61)
Figure 5.3: Wall painting, Narcissus from Pompeii VII.2.44-46 (Casa dell’Orso ferito) (PPM VI, p. 760, fig. 27)

Figure 5.4: Wall painting, Narcissus (reproduction by A. Ala, 1865) from Pompeii VII.2.44-46 (Casa dell’Orso ferito) (PPM VI, p. 760, fig. 28)
Figure 5.5: Wall painting, Narcissus and Eros from Pompeii I.14.5 (Taylor 2008, p. 73, fig. 40)

Figure 5.6: Wall painting, Narcissus and Eros (reproduction by A. Aureli, 1861) from Pompeii VIII.4.4-49 (Casa dei Postumii) (PPM VIII, p. 503, fig. 94)
Figure 5.7: Wall painting, Narcissus, Eros, and nymph
Naples, Museo Nazionale; from Pompeii
(LIMC VI.2, p. 419, no. 48)

Figure 5.8: Gem, Narcissus, Eros, and Artemis (?)
(LIMC VI.1, p. 708, no. 57)
Figure 5.9: Gem, Narcissus and Artemis (?)
Paris, Cabinet des Médailles
(LIMC VI.2, p. 420, no. 58)

Figure 5.10: Grave relief, Narcissus
once Arlon, Belgium; now lost
(LIMC VI.1, p. 704, no. 15)
Figure 5.11: Relief, Narcissus and Eros
Castellammare di Stabia, L'Antiquarium stabiano; from Petraro
(LIMC III.2, p. 678, no. 4)

Figure 5.12: Mosaic, Narcissus
Avignon, Musée Calvet; from Vaison-la-Romaine
(LIMC VI.2, p. 416, no. 13)
Figure 5.13: Mosaic, Narcissus
Boscéaz near Orbe
(LIMC VI.2, p. 416, no. 14)

Figure 5.14: Wall painting, Narcissus
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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In this thesis we began by examining Ovid’s merging-body stories of Narcissus, Pyramus and Thisbe, Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, and Baucis and Philemon as they relate to the larger intertextual framework of the *Metamorphoses*. We began by identifying the specific intertextual connections existing among Ovid’s merging-body stories, Lucretius’ discourse on passion in the *De Rerum Natura*, and Aristophanes’ speech on love in Plato’s *Symposium*. We determined that the potential for Ovid’s language and imagery to recall the words of the *De Rerum Natura* and the *Symposium* could have prompted a reader familiar with these earlier texts to recall them as he read the merging-body stories and to consider their thematic relationship to the *Metamorphoses*.

We next explored Ovid’s possible sources for the merging-body myths by discussing literary, visual, and epigraphic evidence for their history before Ovid. Though, ultimately, it is impossible to determine how he was familiar with each of the four myths in question, as the oral culture must have provided him with a significant portion of his repertoire of Greek myths, it is clear that Ovid’s innovations in telling these myths included either adding to them the motif of two becoming one, or, at least, placing a greater emphasis on the presence of merged bodies in a way that is indiscernible in any of his proposed sources.
From here we proceeded by considering the importance of *corpora* in the *Metamorphoses*, discussing various examples in which Ovid and other authors metaphorically referred to their books as *corpora*. We considered the final lines of the *Metamorphoses* in which Ovid presents the *Metamorphoses*, his poetic *corpus*, as achieving a kind of immortality for him that his mortal, physical body could not sustain. In his exile poetry, specifically the *Tristia*, Ovid picked up on this theme again, albeit with a less optimistic outlook. In the *Tristia*, he seems to have been redefining his earlier formulation of his poetic *corpus’* relationship to himself and its ability to earn him the everlasting fame of which he spoke so confidently at the end of the *Metamorphoses*. We ended the chapter with the suggestion that Ovid recognized the importance of participating in the intertextual tradition through embodying the works of his predecessors and being embodied by his audience of readers and later writers, as this was an indispensable step in achieving poetic permanence.

Finally, we took stock of several recent studies of Narcissus imagery that suggest an Ovidian inspiration for Pompeian paintings of the youth. We concluded that the evidence linking these Narcissus paintings with Ovid’s treatment of the Narcissus myth in the *Metamorphoses* is inconclusive, and that an ancient viewer would likely not have relied on a particular literary text to frame his interpretation of these images. Nevertheless, the way in which Narcissus paintings represent images within images, thus causing the reflective viewer to consider his own position in relation to what he sees, brings us back to our theme of texts within texts.

It remains, then, for us to speculate on what these investigations may mean when we take them together. First, we should reflect that, although Ovid’s myths are taken
from Greek sources, and although the motif of merging bodies seems to have come from Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* and Aristophanes’ speech in Plato’s *Symposium*, the presence of merged bodies within these myths means something uniquely different in Ovid’s text than it does in either that of Lucretius or Plato. In Plato’s *Symposium*, merged bodies are Aristophanes’ comical explanation of why love exists and what we desire when we pursue it, an explanation which, while appealing on an instinctual level, is subjugated to Socrates’ more philosophically useful explanation of the ladder of love later in the dialogue. In the *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius describes lovers who strive to merge *in corpus corpore toto* to show the deceptive nature of passion, which is similar to the phenomena of echoes and reflections in that it deludes its sufferers into forgetting the well-established rules of the physical universe. To be sure, the merged bodies in Ovid’s narrative form as a result of the passion of his characters, whether this love is perverse as with Salmacis and Hermaphroditus or endearing as with Baucis and Philemon. But unlike the *Symposium* and the *De Rerum Natura*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is not merely a comment on human conduct, nor is it a didactic or philosophical text describing how his readers should pursue love. Ovid’s stories are outwardly concerned with these things, with love and with the physical world in which his characters live; but, as we saw in our analysis of Pythagoras’ speech in book fifteen of the *Metamorphoses*, he transcends his models and the stories he chooses for his narrative by subjugating this physical world to his grander purpose of exploring the nature of poetic composition and the preeminence of the poet’s immortal words in a world where physicality precludes permanance. Ovid’s text is less about love, more about poetics.
When we consider this, we realize that the representations of Narcissus in Pompeian paintings cannot, ultimately, quite express the same range of meanings of the character within Ovid’s text. The Narcissus in Pompeian paintings is some form or other of the mythological Narcissus, the boy who fell in love with himself and whose story reminds us to be careful of what we view, and of how we view that which we assume to be external to us. It does not exactly matter what version of the Narcissus myth the patron intended to represent in the Pompeian paintings: by the most optimistic reading, the purpose of the painting is to make the viewer reflect on the nature of reflections and of viewing. Ovid’s poem does something different, something further: it makes the viewer reflect on the nature of poetry and of reading. In this sense, whether or not the Pompeian paintings represent Ovid’s Narcissus is rather arbitrary, because what Ovid wants his readers to take away from the *Metamorphoses* is not only a familiarity with a series of mythological narratives, however psychologically interesting they may be, but an understanding of his poetic commentary. This explains why he uses the last lines of the *Metamorphoses* to remind us of his preeminence as immortal poet. In the end, the *Metamorphoses* and the merging-body stories we have examined here show us the remarkable degree to which Ovid was concerned with his position in the literary sphere, with which other texts would have been reflected in his own, and with how his text would represent him after his death. In representing a physical world in which characters are constantly blending and becoming anew, Ovid draws his reader’s attention to his own skill at engaging with what has been written before him and working it into his own inimitable corpus.
REFERENCES


