

INTERPRETATIONS OF OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES* IN LITERATURE

by

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(Under the Direction of Katarzyna Jerzak)

ABSTRACT

The intent and influences behind Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is intentionally ambiguous due to the author's desire to be a poet first, and a sage second. However, a close reading of the text reveals influences from his philosophical predecessors, including Lucretius and Empedocles. Furthermore, later authors such as Dante, Milton, and Shakespeare pull out various aspects of the *Metamorphoses* for their own purposes, which provides an opportunity to back read the poem. This culminates in an effective renaissance of Ovidian interpretations in the twentieth century, with several noted poets and authors using episodes from the *Metamorphoses* in their own works, including Brodsky, Calvino, Eliot, Pound, Herbert, and Kafka.

INDEX WORDS: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Empedocles, Lucretius, Dante, Milton, Shakespeare, Brodsky, Calvino, Eliot, Herbert, Kafka

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is one of the most scrutinized works in all of literature, primarily because there are so many different angles by which to approach the poem. The intent of this thesis is to initially look at the work holistically, with a special emphasis on the significance of scenes in Book I and Book XV, and how the constant flux of the *Metamorphoses* was influenced by Ovid's predecessors. After using Ovid to look back on his precursors, the focus of the thesis shifts to later literature (starting with Dante and going through the twentieth century) to see how the *Metamorphoses* has been used in literature, thus giving readers another perspective of interpretation on this epic poem of transformation.

Publius Ovidius Naso was born in 43 BC in Sulmo (a valley east of Rome) and died in exile in Tomis (a city on the Black Sea) around 16 AD. Despite being born to a high ranking Equestrian family, Ovid chose to write poetry instead of entering politics and, starting around 25 BC, he spent twenty-five years writing love poems in elegiac meter in such collections as the *Heroides*, *Amores*, and *Ars Amatoria*. These poems are frequently erotic in nature and often extoll the author's own prowess in affairs (Ovid himself was married three times before he was thirty), and they also seemed to praise adultery, which may have been a factor in Ovid's exile. Ovid's writings in Tomis show a clear shift, as is evident in the despondent nature of his *Tristia* and his *Epistulae ex*

*Ponto*, both of which reflect on his loneliness and desire to return to Rome, which he never would.

Between his love poems and his desultory poems is Ovid's most acclaimed work, the *Metamorphoses*, which was completed shortly before the poet's exile. Consisting of an epic poem in fifteen books, the *Metamorphoses* is a distinct break from Ovid's earlier writing, both thematically and stylistically. The poem is written in dactylic hexameter, an entirely new style for the writer of elegiac couplets. The content and theme of the poem is a bit more difficult to explicate. On the surface, the *Metamorphoses* is a sort of mythological history, detailing the chronology and genealogy of the gods and other fantastical figures starting from the beginning of the universe through the apotheosis of Julius Caesar. This is not Ovid's only work on mythology, as his unfinished *Fasti* (written in elegiac couplets while he was in exile) details the mythological reasons behind the Roman calendar and various holidays. However, the *Fasti* seems to have a more straightforward narrative to it than the *Metamorphoses* because it is written in first-person and is almost entirely focused on explaining the causes of holidays. While causation is certainly an important factor in the *Metamorphoses* (with the creation of new species of animals and other physical creations emerging from transformations), it is hardly sufficient for understanding the overall theme and structure of the poem.

Indeed, one of the difficulties in studying the *Metamorphoses* is trying to understand in what context to approach it. There is certainly the historical context to consider. Ovid is writing at a time in which the newly formed Empire is recovering from the scars of nearly fifty years of continuous civil war and inner strife. His apotheosis of Caesar and his potential tongue-in-cheek remarks about Augustus's supposed humility at

the end of Book XV (which may have been a factor in Ovid's exile) both point toward a poet who was very conscientious of the times. Additionally, Ovid is certainly writing in response to his own literary predecessors. Besides clearly having to be well-versed in Greek literature and mythology to write many of the episodes of the *Metamorphoses*, there appears to be a connection to Virgil's *Aeneid* (published about twenty-five years before the *Metamorphoses*). While Ovid is known to have had friendships with other Roman poets, including Propertius, he establishes himself as a rival to Virgil. The *Aeneid* was written at the behest of Augustus, while in contrast, the *Metamorphoses* may have led to Ovid's exile. The *Aeneid* is an epic of Rome's foundation, but Ovid construes the *Metamorphoses* as an epic of the whole universe. Finally, the *Aeneid* is twelve books, but the *Metamorphoses* is three books longer (and, by no coincidence, Ovid includes the travelings of Aeneas in the thirteenth book). An examination of Ovid's dissension from both the political and literary establishments is certainly a fruitful and oft-repeated exercise, especially when considering the various allusions to rebellion in the *Metamorphoses* (Phaethon defying his father in Book II, Orpheus ignoring the warnings of Dis in the underworld in Book X, etc). There is no shortage of analysis on individual episodes of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid's use of the Latin language (which, along with the *Aeneid*, is still a text used by students today) and the historical context of the poem.

One area of the *Metamorphoses* that has been woefully under-scrutinized by commentators throughout the ages is the philosophical aspects of the poem, especially with regard to its structure. Brooks Otis's wonderful *Ovid as an Epic Poet* (1966) examines in detail the inner lay-out of the poem and its various subdivisions, revealing that Ovid has created a very carefully tuned structure with regards to the placement of



each episode. However, few works step back, look at the poem as a whole, and realize the implications of the work as a single unit. In the parlance of our times, Ovid has effectively written a “meta” work, something akin to Borges's labyrinths. Each story feeds into the next, with a new narrative frequently beginning without the previous one having been completed. Attempting to find a center to the text is fruitless – while the *Metamorphoses* has a beginning and end (both of which, interestingly enough, involve the poet himself), there is no central point, heroic character, or guiding moral behind the text's ever changing nature.

Actual philosophy in the *Metamorphoses* is effectively limited to the speech of Pythagoras in Book XV, which is important for its description of reincarnation. However, there are small hints of philosophy throughout the work that seem to develop an undercurrent essential to understanding the whole. That is where this thesis begins – hundreds of years before Ovid, with the philosophies of Empedocles and Pythagoras. Ovid appears to emulate the Empedoclean conception of the Universe in Book I and he explicitly states the Pythagorean conception of rebirth in Book XV. The *Metamorphoses* moves from the largest creation (the whole universe) to the smallest (an individual person), with the gods and heroes in between. Thus, these two Greek philosophers literally surround the whole work and begin to shed light on the sort of philosophy which Ovid is hiding in his text.

The philosophy of the *Metamorphoses* also has influence from Roman poets. As previously mentioned, Ovid was both friendly and competitive with his contemporaries, but there is also a strong sense in the poem that he is borrowing concepts from Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*. In a way, this is a continuation of the transfer of Greek philosophy

(besides a heavy influence of Empedocles, Lucretius's poem also espouses an Epicurean perspective on life). However, it is significant for understanding the philosophical concepts of the *Metamorphoses* to realize that Ovid is specifically referencing Lucretius at various times. Thus, just as *De Rerum Natura* is a combination of older philosophies with a new poetic approach, so is Ovid's reconstruction of Greek and Roman thought in his poem on transformation.

The *Metamorphoses* was received very well by his contemporaries, for Ovid had already made a name for himself with the *Amores*. However, the advent of Christianity in late Antiquity and through the early Middle Ages were less kind to the work of pagan mythology. St. Augustine's famous insistence on only reading pre-Christian works for allegorical value could have doomed the potential ramifications of Ovid's philosophy to obscurity. This is not to say that Ovid was not read in the early Middle Ages; indeed, there are several manuscripts dating back to before the tenth century, proof that the work retained some sort of value even to a Christian audience. However, much of the interpretation seemed to err on the side of allegory, as is famously seen in the fourteenth century *Ovide Moralisé*, a medieval interpretation of the *Metamorphoses* that focused on finding the hidden Christian meaning of many of the individual episodes in the poem.

However, in contrast to the allegorical interpretations of Ovid, there is some disentanglement of Ovid from Christianity in the Middle Ages, and a good example of this is in Dante. In a sense, this seems contradictory: the episodes from the *Metamorphoses* appear to be quintessential examples of allegorical moralizing, especially with the examples of various characters from Ovid who serve as signposts of sin in *Inferno*. However, *Purgatorio* changes the approach to Ovid in a way that is not done in

*Inferno* – Dante seems implicitly to acknowledge the overarching structural aspects of the *Metamorphoses* by taking the circular structure of the poem and, by infusing it with Christianity, making it a teleological work. Parsing this out is not a straightforward task; Dante has hidden the purpose behind his allusions to the *Metamorphoses*, precisely because his work is not meant to be simply allegorical or didactic, thus there is not necessarily a one-to-one ratio behind the allusions and their meanings. Despite these ambiguities, a careful examination of the individual episodes from the *Metamorphoses* that Dante chooses to treat in *Purgatorio* reveal an understanding of Ovid's nuanced structure. Just as important to the future receptions of Ovid is the fact that Dante is approaching and responding to the *Metamorphoses* through literature and poetry, a trend which continues well into the twentieth century. Thus, a large section of this thesis attempts to understand how Dante uses Ovid in *Purgatorio* because of its importance in establishing a precedent for authors to be examined later.

The Renaissance, especially in England, carries the thread of Ovidian interpretation through literature that Dante started. Milton's *Paradise Lost* appears to take the Dantean interpretation of a teleological Ovid and turn it upside down – scenes from the *Metamorphoses* are now examples of the faults that are present in all of humanity. This is not the same as the episodes of *Inferno*, which are explications of specific sins. Instead, Milton appears to be meeting Dante at a middle-ground (both poets have Narcissus reflected at a moment in Eden), but then having the narrative proceed in entirely different directions. The commonality here is that both Dante and Milton seem to recognize the almost shadow like nature of the *Metamorphoses*'s metaphysics; while its events occur in the realm of mythology and are ahistorical (as Eden symbolizes), the

consequences become a constant throughout the present time. The key difference between Milton and Dante is the focus. Dante puts the episodes of *Metamorphoses* in a cosmological context (similar to Ovid's framing at the beginning and end of the poem), while *Paradise Lost* reconfigures the episodes with a tint of humanism, showing the individual downfall of Adam and Eve.

Where a true jump appears to be made in Ovidian interpretations in literature is with Shakespeare's plays. While Dante and Milton certainly represent a break from previous allegorical works because of their subtlety and willingness to incorporate non-Christian philosophies, Shakespeare's works are almost purely secular, and thus provide a perspective on the *Metamorphoses* that had not always existed before hand. Some plays and poems do not stray far from the original source material (such as *Venus and Adonis* or *Romeo and Juliet*, which is based on the incident of Pyramus and Thisbe), but where things get truly interesting is in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Shakespeare's decision in this comedy to use Pyramus and Thisbe is not too remarkable (for it is a melodramatic episode in the *Metamorphoses*, thus making it ripe for satire), but the narrative structure in which the Ovidian story is inserted is significant. Act V has the Athenian nobility (with their conflicts now resolved) watching a comedic rendition of Pyramus and Thisbe, while they themselves are simultaneously being watched by faeries (and, of course, the whole scene is intended to be watched by an audience as a part of the play). This is not the only time that Shakespeare has played with the question of play watching and reality (with perhaps the most famous example being the play-within-a-play that summarizes the plot of *Hamlet*), but the inclusion of an Ovidian story (along with other allusions to transformation within *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) implies a recognition of the circular

and meta aspects of the *Metamorphoses*'s narrative well before traditional criticism recognized this crucial aspect of the poem.

What was an isolated incident in the sixteenth-century became much more commonplace in all forms of literature in the twentieth century, as the meta aspects and corresponding philosophical implications of the *Metamorphoses* appear in essays, poems, and works of fiction. Two essays on Ovid in the twentieth century are Joseph Brodsky's "Letter to Horace" and Italo Calvino's "Ovid and Universal Contiguity," both of which are very cognizant of aspects of the *Metamorphoses* that extend beyond the re-telling of myths. Brodsky in particular deserves special attention because of his fluid prose and his emphasis on the transformative nature of the *Metamorphoses* that encompasses both the work and reality, a theme that seems to be a reflection as much on other twentieth century allusions to Ovid as to the original source material. Calvino lays out a similar perspective in his essays, with a focus on the relationships between the various aspects of the poem, especially the language (from the grandest details of the gods to the smallest details of a chair leg). An analysis of Calvino's essay allows for a segue into his beautifully written *Invisible Cities*, which, besides seeming to mirror Ovid in the non-sequential approach of the narrative, includes several allusions to the *Metamorphoses* that hark back to the concept of all things being interrelated.

Not surprisingly, twentieth century poetry has the some of the greatest ties to the *Metamorphoses* as the medium allows for a connection with the poem on both a thematic and stylistic level. The English language continues to show an affinity for its Latin forerunner, as was previously seen with Milton and Shakespeare. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Ezra Pound's *Cantos* both contain a strong Ovidian influence, both in their

allusions to the *Metamorphoses* and in their overall content. Eliot writes of a world corrupted and losing its ability to change into something fertile and alive, while Pound creates a sort of modern-day *Metamorphoses* in his uncompleted attempt at creating a storehouse of myths and stories from Europe to America to China. However, even non-Romance languages hold an affinity to the poet from Sulmo and his themes of never ceasing change. Rainer Maria Rilke specifically focuses on the character of Orpheus as a surrogate for the poetry in “Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes” and, more extensively, in his “Sonnets to Orpheus.” Both works hint at the constant flow of the *Metamorphoses* and its relationship to the reality of our existence; Rilke draws Ovid down from the lofty perch of Christian allegory and into the constant rhythm of our existence. Likewise, Zbigniew Herbert, writing in Polish, extricates specific episodes from Ovid (such as in his “Apollo and Marsyas” and “Fragment of a Greek Vase”) and shows how no one scene can be taken as a solitary unit, but must be connected back to the whole of the cycles of transformation.

Themes and allusions from the *Metamorphoses* also creep their way into twentieth century fiction. The most illustrious example is Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, which, besides its clearly allusive title to Ovid, includes several of the themes of the epic poem. However, what makes Kafka's work different from other interpretations of the *Metamorphoses* is its emphasis on the individual's change. Gregor Samsa's transformation is not put into a cosmological context; instead, the narrative focuses on how his new identity alienates him from his family and humanity. This sort of alienation caused by change has a precedent in Ovid, but Kafka brings this frustration and

quasi-nihilism of the individual unable to communicate to the front and center at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Two considerations must be broached before beginning an in-depth analysis of the aforementioned works. The choice of which time periods to scrutinize may at first appear somewhat arbitrary. As with any literary analysis, it is presumptuous to place works together simply based on their time frame. Additionally, there is the fact that this analysis skims over nearly 1200 years of post-*Metamorphoses* history to land on Dante, fast forwards around 300 years to Shakespeare and Milton, and finally stops 400 years later at the twentieth century. No doubt, there are relevant, non-Christian based aspects of Ovid during the elapsed time, especially during the Renaissance, with its re-emphasis on an appreciation of the classics without the tint of Christianity. However, the emphasis of this thesis is on the overall structure of the *Metamorphoses* and the corresponding philosophy that Ovid melds together around the work. Even after allegory had become less of a driving force behind literature, interpretations and uses of the *Metamorphoses* did not focus on these aspects. Moreover, there are long periods of time in which Ovid has not been in vogue (such as during the nineteenth century, when Virgil, with his foundation epic of Rome, was more present in the zeitgeist of a Europe undergoing nearly-constant revolution and nation building). Dante, Milton, and Shakespeare are clear, established road-marks for this sort of approach to the *Metamorphoses*, with a large body of criticism focusing on all three authors and their relationship to Ovid, thus making them more accessible as foundation texts for this analysis.

The second point of contention may be the choice of twentieth century texts selected for examination. The list of twentieth century literature looked at in this thesis is

certainly not an exhaustive example of the works which could be analyzed under this mindset. Theodore Ziolkowski's excellent *Ovid and the Moderns* compiles most of the twentieth century references to the *Metamorphoses* (and, more, generally, Ovid, especially as a figure of exile) and was a wonderful resource for starting this thesis. However, some narrowing down of a prudent, non-arbitrary nature was necessary. Some works, despite fitting thematically, did not feel appropriate because they were overtly explicit in their connection to the *Metamorphoses*. This goes beyond the allusions in the works examined; the twentieth century has works that re-fashioned the *Metamorphoses* in new and creative ways (similar to the Middle Ages and the *Ovide Moralisé*), such as Ted Hughes's *Tales from Ovid* and Christopher Ransmayr's *The Last World*. Both works touch upon the themes examined in this thesis, but the approach of this analysis is to look at where Ovid intersects with literature as a part – not a whole – of a work, and the intentional connection that is present in these seems to steer away from that intent. On the other end of the spectrum are works that have no allusion or reference to Ovid at all, but carry on this thread of multiplicities *ad infinitum*. This metaphysical and philosophical approach became quite common in the twentieth century, especially with the rise of Joyce's stream of consciousness and Borges's labyrinthine fiction. It is the hope of this author that by examining the works that do at least have a casual connection to the *Metamorphoses* the relationship between Ovid (and his Greek philosophical predecessors) and the literature of the twentieth century is evident even if the reference is not present.



## CHAPTER 2

On the surface, there does not appear to be any unifying structure within the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid's work is “a blend of continuity and change, of epic uniformity and un-epic variety, of specious transition and careful progression” (Otis 89). Attempting to impose any sort of structure on the work, besides Ovid's own instruction of “bring down my song in unbroken strains” (1.4), seems impractical because of the diverse nature of the stories. There is no break in the structure of the *Metamorphoses*, with each tale aptly transforming into the next. In this fashion, the poem's structure reflects its subject matter. As a result, there are more lines focusing on the story of the mortal couple Pyramus and Thisbe (IV.55-166) than are spent on the divine affair of Mars and Venus which immediately follows (IV.167-189); no one story within the poem is given special attention, regardless of the characters involved. The only apparent constant in Ovid's structure is the changes which lead into the subsequent story; however, the nature of these transformations or their significance have no set pattern. There is no stability within the framework of the poem itself – characters are just as likely to have upward ascent (such as Io becoming a demi-god or Callisto becoming a constellation simply to avoid Juno's wrath) as they are to transform into animals (such as Procne, Philomel, and Tereus becoming birds or Arachne changed into a spider). Nothing is above this “state of flux” (XV.178) : while the gods are immune from transformation and death, their personalities do not transcend human affairs at all, but instead are frequently the causes for the metamorphosis, such as in the case of the numerous women affected by Jove's amorous

pursuits or Actaeon becoming a stag after seeing Diana naked. The only constant in Ovid's work seems to be its inconsistency. Equally as important as the continuous flow of change is that the “transformation alters only external forms (...) the reality of a world where human interaction is all too rarely controlled or tender” (Wetherbee 118). Thus, just as the gods are unchanged in the heavens, the human characters in the *Metamorphoses* are always defined by their attributes, regardless of physical shape. Tereus will eternally fly after Procne and Philomel, just as Echo is doomed to forever hear her own voice. This creates a sort of ironic duality within the *Metamorphoses*: there is no pattern to the flow of the stories, but within the individual episodes, the characters remain consistent. The tension between the physical changes and the retained non-physical attributes makes it even more difficult to find a unifying structure within the poem.

An answer to this paradox can be found when examining the poem as a whole. While there appears to be no consistency within the tapestry of the gods and men, there is an overarching framework above the Olympian deities, and this is where the *Metamorphoses*'s structure is established. The most obvious is Ovid's introduction to the poem, in which he announces that “my mind is bent to tell of bodies changed into new forms” (I.1-2), and thus introduces himself along with the work. However, there is no first-person verb in this introduction, which shows that Ovid is allowing himself to be swept up in these changes because he is acted on by the gods who “for you your yourselves have wrought the changes” (1.2). Book-ending this introduction is the conclusion, in which Ovid declares that (XV.871-2): “now my work is done, which neither the wrath of Jove, nor fire, nor sword, nor the gnawing tooth of time shall ever be able to undo.” (XV.871-2). Again, Ovid is not the subject, but it is instead his “opus.”

While this is not to imply that Ovid has a false sense of modesty (most of the last passage is focused on the conviction that his work will last forever), what this parallel structure shows is that the poet can not even place himself above these transformations, and thus is effectively caught up in his own creation. Indeed, in addition to the gods transforming the poem at the beginning, the final lines also imply that Ovid is effectively transformed by his work because he “shall be borne immortal far beyond the lofty stars and I shall have an undying name” (XV.875-6), and thus will live forever by virtue of his name and poem, his original transformation from Book I now complete.

However, too close an examination of these opening and closing passages may be a red herring when it comes to understanding the structure of the *Metamorphoses*. While they appear to neatly frame the work, they offer little insight into the nature of transformations or the text because Ovid creates a persona who is as hapless to affect the changes as any other mortal in his poem. However, the creation story of Book I (5-88) creates yet another framework, with Pythagoras's speech in Book XV (60-478) at the end of the work serving as confirmation of this overarching narrative. It is within this overarching narrative that patterns seem to arise which provide clues to deciphering the poem's structure. The unification between these two passages comes from the level of transformation which they describe. The creation myth begins with “a rough, unordered mass of thing, nothing at all save lifeless bulk and warring seeds of ill-matched elements heaped in one” (I.7-9), and then goes onto to describe the formation of the universe in which “God – or kindlier Nature – composed this strife” (I.21). Thus, the first transformation is that of the entire universe, establishing the setting for the stories to follow. In contrast, Pythagoras's speech in Book XV addresses the audience by

specifically stating that “our own bodies also go through a ceaseless round of change, nor what we have been or are to-day shall we be to-morrow. There was a time when we lay in our first mother's womb, mere seeds and hopes of men” (XV.214-6). This passage uses first person singular (“*latitavimus*” in the Latin) to draw in the audience. Ovid ends at a natural point: after fifteen books of discussing the gods and mythical humans, he shows his audience that they are also caught up in this continuous cycle of transformation. A framework thus appears to come into focus when examining the largest metamorphoses (the creation of the universe) with the smallest (the life and death of every individual). These concepts would not be foreign to his audience because they include clear allusions to the Greek philosophers Pythagoras and Empedocles, and also one of Ovid's precursors, Lucretius. However, Ovid creates a collage of these three philosophies in order to create his own doctrine which is encapsulated in the poem's continuous nature.

Despite the fact that “we may assume that there will have been no central text ascribed to Pythagoras that Ovid would automatically have turned to” (Hardie 140), Ovid still retains a lot of Pythagoras's philosophy in his long speech in Book XV. Most important for Ovid is the concept of reincarnation, in which “though, perchance, things may shift from there to here and here to there, still do all things in their sum total remain unchanged” (XV.258-9). Pythagoras's declaration that everything in the universe is constant fits perfectly with the constancy of the attributes of characters even after they have been transformed. Metamorphosis affects only the physical realm, while intrinsic qualities have been immutable since the creation of the universe. There is evidence that “Pythagoras is indeed at the origin of the conception of the soul as immortal and as reborn in different animal forms” (Kahn 14), thus establishing him as the forerunner of

reincarnation in Western thought. This is important because “Pythagoras is the only truly historical character in a poem which otherwise stars gods, demigods, gods 'in waiting' (...) heroes and legendary characters (...) Pythagoras could reinforce his role as a mouth-piece (...) since he has a certain aura of being a teacher of truth” (Barchiesi 295). By using the historical Pythagoras as the representation of reincarnation of every individual's soul, Ovid is further strengthening the link between his readers and the theme of continual change.

While Book XV's speech has obvious connections to Pythagoras's philosophy, there are also resonances of his thought in Book I's creation story. Ovid tells of how both the universe and our world are split into five zones (I.45-9), an idea that, along with the mention that “he first moulded the earth into the form of a mighty ball” (I.35) and the spherical conception of the Earth, comes from Pythagoras. Beyond these specific allusions is also the general sense in the creation story of the Pythagorean notion, as interpreted by Ocellus Lucanus, “that the universe is without a beginning, and without an end (...) Circular, is also the motion of the universe, but this motion is stable and without transition” (Navon 108). Again, Pythagoras's notion of constant change which retains stability fits Ovid's transformations perfectly – the Universe is always in balance despite the changes wrought within it, and, indeed, both Ovid and Pythagoras would seem to hold to the belief that the Universe is without end. However, where they do differ is in the concept of a Universe without a beginning. While Ovid's cosmology technically has always had at least “a rough and unordered mass of things” (I.8), this is clearly not the Pythagorean perception of “if the universe was generated, it was generated together with all things (...) This, however, is impossible. This universe is therefore without a

beginning (..) nor is it possible that it can have any other mode of subsistence” (Navon 105). Ovid's conception of a created Universe must be coming from another source.

One viable answer to this question is the Greek philosopher Empedocles. Pythagoras never postulates the process through which transformations occur, but Empedocles theorizes the concepts of Love and Strife, two opposing forces which create an eternal cycle in which “these things never cease their continual exchange of position, at one time all coming together into one through love, at another again being borne away from each other by strife's repulsion” (Wright 166 8(17)). Ovid's original cosmology, with its indistinguishable elements, is in fact a moment of pure Strife and it is the Love of the unnamed god which causes the creation of the knowable Universe by combining the four elements, which is another concept taken directly from Empedocles. Book I of the *Metamorphoses* is describing the Empedoclean notion of when “total Strife is followed by the gradual coming of all things together (...) Love now pushes Strife outwards to the circumference” (O'Brien 117). Ovid has combined Pythagoras and Empedocles to form a creation myth that is a macrocosm of the transformation instigated by Love that occurs throughout the rest of the text.

With a sort of Empedoclean Love at the beginning of the *Metamorphoses* creating time and space, it is only natural that Love continues to be the driving force throughout the rest of the work. Empedocles's theories of Love and Strife do not just apply to cosmic forces because, for Empedocles, “the study of human behavior enables one to understand the nature of the cosmic principles” (Wright 30). Nothing sounds more Ovidian than the Empedoclean concept that “of all mortal things no one has birth, or any end in pernicious death, but there is only mixing, and separating of what has been mixed, and to these men

give the name 'birth'" (Wright 175 12(8)), a line of thought that flows seamlessly from Pythagoras's concept of reincarnation. At the cosmic level, this constant mixing is induced by the unnamed god, but, within the mortal realm it is sex that drives the process of Love, which is constantly causing these transformations in the *Metamorphoses*. The creative power of sex is evident in the numerous affairs leading to children (such as Apollo's rape of Dryope leading to the birth of Amphisus [IX.356] or Autolycus being born of Mercury and Chione [XI.312-15]), however, it is also the cause of several transformations in a secondary manner, be it because of jealousy (such as Juno's transformation of Io [I.611]) or as a means of escape from unwanted advances (as in the case of Daphne's escape from Apollo [I.547-52]).

With Empedoclean Love directly alluded to at the beginning, and sexual Love as the driving force behind most of the transformations in the poem, it should come as little surprise that there is also a good amount of Empedocles's thought present in Pythagoras's speech at the end. On a pragmatic level, Ovid may have been using Empedoclean thought simply as a stand-in for Pythagoras because "Empedocles' poem (or poems) would be a most acceptable substitute given the belief, widespread in antiquity, that Empedocles is a Pythagorean, or even a pupil of Pythagoras" (Hardie 206). Hardie goes on to note that lines 15.252-8 are similar to Empedocles's eighth fragment with "Love joining things together and Strife drawing them apart (...) a bizarre picture that has an affinity with the unpredictability of the Ovidian world of metamorphosis" (Hardie 206). Just as Pythagoras's notions seem to serve as a parallel to the creation story because it applies the macro-scale of creation to each individual, the use of Empedoclean thought at the end echoes Empedocles's own notion that "the maturity of a vigorous life, all the limbs that

are the body's portion come into one under love (...) So it is too for plants, and for fish that live in the water, and for wild animals” (Wright 194 26(20). Like the unnamed creator of Book I and the gods and heroes throughout the *Metamorphoses*, every individual contains the ability to create through Love, the only difference being that the divine mixes the physical elements and humans create with sex. Thus, in a sense, the power of transformation itself has been changed from Book I's exclusively divine creation to Book XV's notion that all individuals are involved in a continual transformation through the cycle of birth and death.

While there is some uncertainty as to the amount of Pythagoras and Empedocles which Ovid had direct access to, there is no doubt that Ovid knew his fellow Latin poets. One poet with an obvious influence on the *Metamorphoses* was Lucretius and his *De Rerum Natura*. Hardie notes that the Lucretian lines “for change in anything from out of its bounds means instant death of that which was before” (I.670-1) are echoed in the Pythagoras's speech in Book XV (Hardie 140-41). Another similarity is *Metamorphoses* Book I's “the fiery weightless element that forms heaven's vault leaped up and made place for itself upon the topmost height” (I.26-7) and *De Rereum Natura* Book V's “and thus it was that ether that, fraught with fire, first broke away from out the earth parts and, athrough the innumerable pores of earth, and raised itself aloft, and with itself bore lightly off the many starry fires” (V.261-2) (Robbins 404). In both instances, Ovid is echoing Lucretian thought that overlaps with Empedoclean philosophy, to the point that it is appropriate to believe that “Ovid is affected by Empedocles only through the medium of Lucretius” (Robbins 403).



Lucretius also serves as a middle ground between the metaphysical Love of Empedocles and the sexual Love of Ovid. This is accomplished in the opening lines of *De Rerum Natura*, in which Lucretius calls on Venus by saying “Mother of Rome, delight of God and men, Dear Venus that beneath the gliding stars markest to teem the many-voyaged main and fruitful lands – for all living things through thee alone are evermore conceived, through thee are risen to visit the great sun” (I.1-5).

Lucretius has made the goddess of sexual love his pseudo-muse, thus connecting the “voluptas” (pleasure) of sex with the creative essence of the arts. This association of Venus with creativity serves to establish Love as strictly a means of procreation. This unites *De Rerum Natura* and the *Metamorphoses* because “Ovid and Lucretius analyze love as neither a search for transcendental goodness nor an encounter with virtue nor a mystical adventure beyond the ordinary world” (Singer 537). Singer notes that “both poets worship Venus as the generative power within the universe” (543). The one major difference in their view on sexuality is that Lucretius extols only the end result, having “little difficulty reducing human love to the mechanics of sexual impulse” (Singer 545), while, in contrast, the *Metamorphoses* focuses on the human and divine emotions, both positive and negative, associated with sexual desire. Such a difference is not surprising, considering Ovid's work previous to the *Metamorphoses*, the *Amores*, love poems that focused on how to win a woman's heart and bed. However, in the end, the Love of Empedocles retains its nature as a creative force in both Ovid and Lucretius, despite Lucretius's focus on the end result of procreation and Ovid's more explicit focus on the intrinsic value of the sexual act proper.

While the similarities in language and subject make it clear that Ovid wants his audience to think of Lucretius in Books I and XV, there are also several stark differences between the *Metamorphoses* and *De Rerum Natura*. One of the most important differences is Lucretius's contention that "eternal death shall there be waiting still; and he who died with light of yesterday shall be no briefer time in death's No-more than he who perished months or years before" (III.1092-4). Thus, *De Rerum Natura* has no role in Pythagoras's speech in Book XV because Lucretius believes that "mors aeterna" (eternal death) awaits all individuals. Further separating Lucretius from Ovid is the fact that "there is no suggestion of a divine origin for man in Lucretius as in Ovid" (Robbins 405). What these two discrepancies show is that Lucretius's philosophy is based upon a much more temporal universe which follows the observable laws of nature and thus does not postulate a divine origin or afterlife for men; in contrast, Ovid's cosmology is one of continuation, with an affirmation that there are processes above men. Of course, Lucretius is not the only Roman whom Ovid has disagreements with; besides his subtle taunts towards Virgil (both in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Amores*), this acknowledgment that there are powers above all men which may have factored into Ovid's exile by Augustus. However, the singling out of Lucretius seems important, especially because Ovid honored Lucretius in the *Amores* by writing that "the verses of sublime Lucretius will perish only then when a single day shall give the earth to doom" (I.15.23-4). A logical explanation is that Ovid respected Lucretius for bringing Empedocles's and Pythagoras's philosophies to the forefront, but he did not agree with the conclusions which Lucretius drew. Ovid is not content with basing the *Metamorphoses*'s cosmology entirely on one philosophy, thus he sifts through Lucretius to find the parts of

Empedocles in order to create Pythagoras's speech – a true transformation of thought in poetry.

Trying to understand the structure of the *Metamorphoses* through the lens of Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Lucretius may seem to only create a tenuous connection; however, the most important aspect is that Ovid does create an overarching framework to the poem. By carefully using aspects of all three philosophers, Ovid subtly inserts didactic thought within the poem. While this may appear to be lost in the randomness of the individual episodes within the work, the cosmology of Book I and the philosophy of Book XV show that the circular nature of existence is at constant work through the continual transformations. Love and Strife created the Universe in Book I; they are the driving forces of the transformations throughout the poem; and they are applied to the audience in Pythagoras's speech in Book XV. The individual episodes appear to be without significance to the overall structure because they are like arcs on a circle; it is only when taken as a whole that the structure becomes evident. However, such an interpretation has not always been the case with the *Metamorphoses*; we will now turn our attention to Christian attempts at linearizing Ovid's cyclical structure.

### CHAPTER 3

This thesis's analysis will now transition from looking at Ovid's sources for the concept of transformation in the *Metamorphoses* to looking at receptions of Ovid in literature, starting around the Middle Ages. While the jump in time may be jarring, this is because there are long stretches of time in which the *Metamorphoses* is not interpreted independently of Christianity, and thus analysis of its structure is lacking. The Christian tradition of allegorically interpreting classical works is summed up succinctly in St. Augustine, who writes in *De Doctrina Christiana* that “let every good and true Christian understand that wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master; and while he recognizes and acknowledges the truth, even in their religious literature, let him reject the figments of superstition” (II.28.45-8). However, despite being written in the early fifth century, allegorical readings of Ovid did not become prominent for nearly seven hundred years. Indeed, “no evidence of any systematic study of the works of Ovid during the early centuries of the Christian era has hitherto been found (...) especially [because of] the fact that his ideas and material could not be adapted to the then current ideas of philosophy and theology” (Born 362-3). The overt sexual content of the *Metamorphoses* appears to have doomed it to secondary status in the eyes of Christian theology, especially in comparison to the *Aeneid*, about which Augustine writes in his *Confessions* that “for what can be more wretched than the wretch who has no pity upon himself, who sheds tears over Dido, dead for the love of Aeneas” (I.13.21). Thus, while Augustine was led away from God by the *Aeneid*, Virgil and other classical writers (especially Cicero and

Statius) are still given prominent placing over Ovid, whom Augustine only mentions five times in all of his works (Keenan 36). However, the High Middle Ages saw Ovid re-examined in a Christian lens, with the most obvious example being *les Métamorphoses Moralisées*, which is “the longest example of allegorical interpretation (...) in some seven thousand verses” (Born 374). Alongside it was Giovanni del Virgil, who also “composed an allegorical treatise on the *Metamorphoses*,” which Born glibly refers to as “often ingenious, if not too edifying” with an example being “Daphne as the laurel is the soul of a Christian, and Apollo pursuing her is the devil, who does not cease his pursuit until, by her prayers to Christ, she is saved by her metamorphosis” (Born 375-6). Thus, while the *Métamorphoses Moralisées* and Virgil's interpretations serve the necessary gap of linking the *Metamorphoses* with Christian thought, their emphasis on discovering the Christian message in Ovid does not lead to much interest in the way of understanding the overall structure of the poem.

One of the first and best examples of using Ovid in a more subtle fashion is Dante's *Divine Comedy*, as is evident in both the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. *Inferno* seems to take a dual view on Ovid: while Dante places him as one of the five illustrious poets in Limbo (IV.90), he also singles out Ovid when he addresses the Roman poet and says “Let Ovid not speak of Cadmus or Arethusa, / for if his poem turns him into a serpent/ and her into a fountain, I grudge it not” (XXV.97-9). These lines appear to be more significant than Dante, a Christian poet, bettering his pagan counterpart because he goes on to describe how “for never did he change two natures, face to face, /in such a way that both their forms / were quite so quick exchanging substance” (XXV.100-2). Dante then goes on to vividly describe Francesco's transformation into a man and Buoso's transformation

into a snake over the course of forty-one lines (XXV.103-44). This is in stark contrast to Ovid, who describes Cadmus's transformation in seven lines of the *Metamorphoses* (IV.576-82) and Arethusa's change into a fountain in eleven lines (V.427-37). Thus, Dante appears to position himself as a superior poet to Ovid by lengthening his descriptions of the transformations and filling details that Ovid lacked. Equally important is Dante's assumed superiority over Empedocles, who was also in Limbo (V.138). Empedocles's Chaos is later re-told by Virgil, who describes the time after Christ's crucifixion in Limbo as "the world has many times been turned to chaos. / And at that moment this ancient rock, here and elsewhere, fell broken into pieces" (XII.43-5). However, as Hollander notes, "this 'circular' theory of history is intrinsically opposed to the Christian view, in which Christ's establishment of love as a universal principle redeemed history once and for all" (230). One of the most important philosophers for understanding the overall structure of the *Metamorphoses* is dismissed because conception of a universe created by Love and Strife does not fit with Christ's teachings, and thus a larger divide is created between Dante and Ovid.

Beyond the affronts to Ovid and his sources, the very nature of the *Inferno's* use of Ovidian myths also supports the notion of Dante placing himself, and thus Christian beliefs, as superior to pagan poets. By placing Ovid's stories in Hell, Dante is making an example of the sinful nature of the pre-Christian myths. Besides the previously mentioned Cadmus and Arethusa, there are other numerous examples of myths from the *Metamorphoses* in *Inferno*, especially in Book XXX, which contains references to Juno's punishment towards Semele and Ino (XXX.1-12), Hecuba's transformation into a dog (XXX.13-21), Myrrha becoming a tree (XXX.37-41), and Narcissus's self-love

(XXX.128-9). This sudden rash of allusions from the *Metamorphoses* towards the end of Dante's journey to the center of Hell seems to create an image of the pagan myths as being especially sinful because they serve no other purposes in *Inferno* other than to be examples of licentiousness. Coupled with his direct denouncement in Book XXV, it would seem that Dante continues to follow in the Augustinian tradition of marginalizing Ovid in favor of Virgil.

If Dante seems to be diminishing the utility of the *Metamorphoses* in the *Inferno*, the exact opposite appears to be true in *Purgatorio*. Instead, *Purgatorio* appears to be a re-working of the structure of the *Metamorphoses*: while Ovid introduces a world that comes out of Chaos and has transformations occurring arbitrarily and randomly, Dante creates a cosmology in *Purgatorio* that uses transformations to reflect the teleological nature of Christianity. In effect, Christianity has streamlined the Universe, and Dante reflects this by showing that the saved souls in Purgatory must inevitably ascend to Paradise. One reason for this is the separation of the divine from humanity in Dante's universe. Divinity in *Purgatorio* is portrayed completely differently from Ovid's meddling gods. Upon seeing an angel, Virgil tells Dante to "Look how those wings are raised into the sky/fanning the air with his eternal pinions / which do not change like mortal plumage" (II.33-6). Purgatory, unlike the universe of the *Metamorphoses*, lies within a strict framework that separates man's mortal state from the eternal steadiness of Paradise. Becoming one with the divine is not only a possibility, but it is the end result of Purgatory. Still speaking about angels, Virgil tells Dante that "Soon the sight of beings such as these / will not be burdensome, will give as much delight / as nature made you fit to feel" (XV.31-3). This stands in stark contrast to the *Metamorphoses*, where the gods

hide themselves amongst humans and, in the case of Actaeon seeing the nude Diana bathing or Phaethon taking the reins from Apollo, it is considered a mortal sin to see divinity in its truest essence or to attempt to reach that state. The entire purpose of Purgatory is to prepare an individual's soul for Paradise. The linear nature of Christianity allows for the creation of the firm frameworks and structures which give *Purgatorio* a certain sense of stability that appears lacking in the *Metamorphoses*. While Ovid feels free to move from episode to episode (with only the beginning of time and the reign of Augustus serving as a temporal framework), Dante sets up the soul's transition from Ante-Purgatory to the Garden of Eden with a sense of regulation and rhythm. Certain things come to be expected in each terrace (such as exemplars of the sin, coupled with classical and Christian allusions), the implication being that there is orderliness to Purgatory which each and every soul is to follow during its teleological ascension to Paradise.

This concept of an end goal for the soul – with the middle ground of Purgatory standing between our lives on Earth and eternal bliss in Paradise – is completely foreign to the individuals in the *Metamorphoses*. Indeed, as previously discussed, Ovid is explicit in his belief of continual transformation for all human beings, and it is crucial for the *Metamorphoses* that this be applicable to all human beings. This continuous creation, as driven by sexuality, is the undertone of Ovid's poem and goes hand-in-hand with Empedocles's conception of Love as a creative force. Dante, however, sees love as being more than physical desire, and it is Virgil who tells him that love is “directed to the primal good,/ knowing moderation in its lesser goals,/it cannot be the cause of wrongful pleasure” (XVII.94-6) and that love “must be the seed in you of every virtue/and of every



deed that merits punishment” (XVII.104-5). Thus, love reaches every man from the original source, God, but it is mankind's free will that causes him to pervert the purity of love. Virgil breaks down the entirety of Purgatory based on the sinner's transgressions against love: “the evil that is loved that must be a neighbor's” (XVII.112) leads to the first two terraces; “if the love that draws you on is laggard” (XVII.130) applies to the middle three; and love that “is not the essence or true source” (XVII.134) is the final group of sins to be purged in the top terraces of Purgatory. Transgressions against love are ultimately the defining attribute that tie together all of the soul's sins. Spiritual love of divinity does not exist in the *Metamorphoses*, but it instead becomes Lust in Dante’s Purgatory, with numerous other forms of perversions against divine love occurring in Ovid also being placed in the terraces. Thus, it should be of little surprise that numerous examples of characters from the *Metamorphoses* are recalled at various terraces in Purgatory for their transgressions against love, including Wrath, Pride, and, of course, Lust.

Canto XII of *Purgatorio*, besides containing Virgil’s discourse on love, opens with a classical example of corrupted love when Dante sings “of the impious deed of her whose shape was changed / into the bird that most delights to sing / a picture formed in my imagination” (XVII.19-21). Canto XII is a continuation of the Wrath terrace, thus it fits perfectly for there to be an allusion to Procne and the murder of her son, Itys. Beyond being an example of distorted paternal love, Procne’s action “is the almost inevitable answer to the violation of Philomela in a world from whose horrible symmetry the fantasy of metamorphosis is the only release” (Weatherbee 125). Procne is only responding to the violence of Tereus, who himself had monstrously distorted love with

his rape of Philomela. Dante retains this parallelism in his poem, having previously mentioned Philomel in Canto IX when he states at the gates of Purgatory that “at the hour near the verge of morning, / when the swallow begins her plaintive song” (IX.13-4). This Philomel allusion is immediately followed by “in a dream I seemed to see an eagle, / with golden feathers, hovering in the sky, / his wings spread wide, ready to swoop” (IX.19-21), a possible reference to how Jupiter’s amorous nature frequently becomes rape.

This coupling of Philomel and Jupiter is stark because, even though Philomel was not a victim of Jupiter’s, it shows the perversion of love in the mythological world. Dante makes this especially clear by invoking the bird personas of Philomel and Jupiter, a hierarchy which places Jupiter above her with the imagery of the swooping eagle above a song bird. The placement of Jupiter and Philomel at the gate of Purgatory is also important because it shows that rape “is its habit / to strike only here, disdainful to pluck from elsewhere any in its talons” (IX.26-27). Forceful lust has no place in the divine love of Purgatory, and thus Jupiter’s form of love is no longer applicable when approaching Paradise. This is evident in Jove’s recurrence at the end of Canto XXXII, in which “the bird of Jupiter swoop down and plummet / through the tree, ripping the bark, shredding flowers and fresh leaves” (XXXII.112-4), and then, later, it is reinforced with Beatrice, the epitome of divine love, who fights off the pagan symbol, “railing at its foul offenses, / drove it back in such retreat / as its fleshless bones allowed” (XXXII.121-3). By showing Procne, Philomel, and Jupiter as clear examples of sin, Dante is creating a contrast between the concept of Christian love and Ovid’s pagan love, with love in the *Metamorphoses* being distorted by its inability to be anything more than physical, hence

its manifestations in rape, murder, and, eventually, the physical transformation of the three into birds.

While Tereus, Procne, Philomel, and Jupiter represent the grotesqueness of love when forced upon others, Dante also focuses on other forms of selfish love that divert the individual away from God. Chief among these are Pride, and it is in this terrace that the poet again alludes to the *Metamorphoses*, with a special emphasis placed on Arachne. Arachne is especially important to Dante because “the special temptations that the particular sin of pride present to Dante ... make Arachne’s inscriptions within the pavement of pride significant to Dante’s progress as pilgrim and poet alike” (Macfie 167). Arachne in this passage is in a state of “incomplete metamorphosis ... suspended from the threads of her ruined embroidery, arrested at suicide, and half-transformed into a spider” (Wetherbee 139). This is a clear difference from Ovid, where Arachne “now changed to a tiny ball and her whole frame sunk in proportion / Instead of her legs there are spindly fingers attached to her side” (X.141-3), and thus had a complete metamorphoses. By presenting Arachne’s transformation as “all but turned / to spider, wretched on the strands / you spun” (XII.44-5), Dante is showing that Pride straddles its bearer between the human and the divine, but in a negative connotation because it is Pride that makes us falsely believe we have the powers of the divine. This is especially true because Pride is the first sin to be cleansed in Purgatory, thus its participants are closer to their original, sinful nature than those who have climbed higher terraces. In order to illustrate this, Pride is full of examples of others besides Arachne who come from the *Metamorphoses*, including how “my eyes beheld Thymbraeus, Pallas, and Mars” (XII.31), how “Niobe, I saw you sculpted on the roadway” (XII.33), and “how

Alcmaeon made that necklace, ill-omened, seem not worth the price his mother paid” (XII.49-50). While other forms of corrupted love involve loving the appropriate in inappropriate ways, Pride holds its position as a foundation terrace because it represents a love that is never appropriate, namely excessive love of the self, and Dante makes this point clear by using several examples of Pride from pre-Christian mythology.

However, even as Dante climbs the mount of Purgatory, the Ovidian allusions do not lessen. To the contrary, the topmost terrace before Eden, Lust, is full of references to the *Metamorphoses*. On the surface, this makes sense because most love in the *Metamorphoses* is in the pursuit of carnality, and thus would fall under the sin of Lust. The sinners’ invocation of Pasiphae, who “crawls into the cow / so that the bull may hasten to her lust” (XXVI.41-2), and the destruction of purity which informs how “Diana kept to the woods and drove Callisto out / for having felt the poisoned sting of Venus” (XXV.131-2), are both clear examples of Lust and perfectly fit this terrace. The question that remains, though, is why Lust is given primacy over Pride, especially since Lust is specifically tied to an example of bestiality in Pasiphae. If Dante is trying to move away from Ovid in his construction of love, why is it that Lust, the most common expression of love by Ovid’s gods and mortals, is the last sin to be purged from the soul?

One possible explanation lies in Dante’s simile of Pyramus and Thisbe in Canto XXVII, which is also the last canto that takes place on a terrace of sin. Upon hearing how close he is to Beatrice, Dante links his feelings to the Babylonian couple, noting that “as at the name of Thisbe, though on the point of death, / Pyramus raised his lids and gazed at her, / that time the mulberry turned red, / just so, my stubbornness made pliant, I turned / to my wise leader when I heard the name / that ever blossoms in my mind” (XXVII.37-42)

D). Pyramus and Thisbe seem to be an especially odd story to allude to at this moment since it is an example of Lust leading to death, whereas Dante is on the verge of achieving salvation. Equally odd is Ovid's description of the couple, for their love is clearly based on the physical when he describes that "their hearts belonged to each other and burned with an equal passion" (IV.62) or their empty pleas to the wall that separates them, "if you would only allow us to lie in each other's arms!" (IV.74) This paradox may find its explanation in the transformation that follows, with Pyramus' blood becoming "the colour of the mulberry fruit is dark red when it is ripe, and all that remained from both funeral pyres rests in a common urn"(IV.165-6). Dante may have seen Pyramus and Thisbe as "the idea of fertility points to resurrection, to the recurrent rebirth of the *arborei fetus*, the mulberries, purple-red with the assimilated blood of the suicide Pyramus (...). His end product as poet is his metaphorical transformation of the metamorphosis in Ovid's text" (Lorch 116). Lust in Ovid leads to death, but love in Dante leads to salvation, and the allegory of Pyramus and Thisbe giving way to Dante and Beatrice is an example of classical love giving way to the Christianization of the concept. Fittingly, an allusion to Pyramus and Thisbe returns in the very last Canto of *Purgatorio*, in which Beatrice chastises Dante by saying "and if vain thoughts had not been water of the Elsa / to your mind, and your delight in them / a Pyramus to make the mulberry turn red, / by such attributes alone you might have seen / the moral sense of the just of God" (XXXIII.68-71), is a final reminder of the sinfulness of obsessive desire.

The various descriptions of Venus in *Purgatorio* also embody the contrast between Lust and Love. In *Metamorphoses*, Venus shows up at numerous points as an instigator of various loves that eventually lead to transformations. She is the symbol of

sexual desire, and thus her presence in *Purgatorio* is aptly shifted in order to place her powers below divine love, and Venus's presence later in the poem is clearly one of inferiority to chastity. Dante mentions her as being suppressed by divine love, noting that the angels turn away from Lust when they sing that "Diana kept to the woods and drove Callisto out / for having felt the poisoned sting of Venus" (XXV.131-2). This theme of disavowing Venus in favor of chastity appears again in the Garden of Eden when, upon seeing the chaste beauty of Matelda, Dante remarks that "I do not think such a radiant light blazed out / beneath the lids of Venus when her son by chance, / against his custom, pierced her with his arrow" (XXVIII.64-6), an allusion to the myth of Venus's love affair with Adonis.

Another example of the transformation of Ovidian lust into Dantean love, although not specifically in the Lust terrace, is the implementation of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth in Purgatory. While Orpheus certainly shows more love for Eurydice than several of the previously listed characters (for he declares that "I have desired strength to endure, and I will not deny that I have tried to bear it. But Love has overcome." [X.25-6]), his desire for her is still rooted in a physical passion because she died in the prime of life and Orpheus wishes to have her in order to have "the enjoyment of her as a boon" (X.36). Dante changes Orpheus and Eurydice's lustful relationship into one of love when he writes how Virgil rebukes him by saying "why are you still distrustful / Do you not believe I am with you and guide" (III.22-3), an allusion to Orpheus's turning back to see Eurydice because he did not believe she was following him. By alluding to Orpheus's doomed Lust for Eurydice, Dante is drawing parallels to the relationship that Virgil and Dante have. However, Dante and Virgil's relationship is one united in divine love (as

Virgil has been sent as a precursor for Beatrice), and thus Dante only loses Virgil as a necessary step for his ascent into Paradiso (Virgil, as a noble pagan, cannot enter Heaven). In contrast, Orpheus's loss of Eurydice leads him to “seven day ... in filthy rags and with no taste of food” (X.75), and, eventually to his brutal death at the hands of the Thracian women. By coupling Orpheus and Eurydice with Dante and Virgil, Dante is showing that the sudden loss of lustful passion leads to tragic consequences, while true love of goodness is the key to eternal salvation.

Lust may have special characteristics because of its proximity to the divine love as represented in the Earthly Paradise. Lust is only a slight perversion off divine love – Dante is not saying that sexual love is necessarily immoral, but that those who fulfill their desires with only Lust fail because “they favor heresy over truth / and thus arrive at their opinions / without the use of skill or reason” (XXVI.121-3). Physical desires serve a purpose in the earthly realm, but the individual must be conscientious of the love that is essential for their eternal soul. The antagonism of Lust and Love is made evident partially because the Pyramus and Thisbe metaphor occurs right before Dante passes through the flames into Eden; however, just as tellingly, examples of Lust from *Metamorphoses* continue to pervade the poem even after Dante has supposedly been purged of all of his sins. The implication behind the continuation of Lust is that the transition from the Lust terrace to Eden, despite being separated by flames, is a smooth continuation in which the misplaced desires of Ovidian Lust are finely tuned and turned towards divine love.

The clear example of this is when Dante encounters Matelda and remarks to her that “you make me remember where and what / Proserpina was, there when her mother / lost her and she lost the spring” (XXVIII.49-51). Dante’s reflection on Proserpina’s lost

innocence comes from Ovid, who describes her immediately before the abduction “with girlish eagerness” (V.392). What Dante has encountered in Matelda is not just a symbol of pure innocence, but also is a symbol of “the Earthly Paradise, a region without change, free from the cycle of generation and corruption” (Brown 34). Paradise’s key distinction from Earth (and Inferno) is that everything in Paradise remains in a steady state. Lust is the representation of physical and active love, which by definition can only be temporary because all things physical are temporary. The Proserpina metaphor seems to bridge this gap, with the threat of action (and thus temporality) seeming to be imminent to the divine and unchanging Matelda. This metaphor illuminates the transformable aspect of Eden: while Dante has passed through the terraces of Purgatory, the destructive possibilities of Lust still linger because Eden and Proserpina are representative of an inevitable Fall; and it will not be until Dante reaches Paradise that he has fully escaped the threat of Lust. This is also made evident with a second classical reference to “those who in ancient times called up in verse / the age of gold and sang its happy state” (XXVIII.139-40). However, an implicit Fall is again linked to this allusion, with Ovid stating that the Golden Age ends with Saturn’s fall and that “Jove now shortened the bounds of the old-time spring, and through winter, summer, variable autumn, and brief spring completed the year in four seasons” (I.116-8). Eden, Proserpina, and the classical Golden Age all represent moments in which humanity has been close to pure love, but it is not until Dante reaches Paradise and is beyond Lust that he finds love in a permanent and unchanging state.

Other victims of Lust lurk within Dante’s allusions to the *Metamorphoses* in Eden. One such example is Beatrice comparing the angels to Argus, stating that “you



keep your watch in the eternal day / so neither night nor sleep deprives you / of a single step that times takes in its course” (XXX.103-5). This is not the first reference to Juno’s hundred-eye guardian, as Dante had previously described four six-winged creatures in the Garden as “so full of eyes that the eyes of Argus, / were they to come alive, would be just like them” (XXIX.95-6). Ovid describes Argus with a description of how “Argus’ head was set about with a hundred eyes, which took their rest in sleep two at a time in turn, while the others watched and remained on guard” (I.625-7), and, most importantly, he is placed there in order to ensure that the lustful Jupiter cannot return to his desired Io. Thus, these creatures and Beatrice’s angels “like Argus, are characterized as perpetually vigilant [...] The angels regard the world both day and night: ‘voi vigilate ne l’eterno die.’ [...] The singularity of the occurrence of the verb ‘vigilare’ in Dante’s poem [...] serves to reinforce the vigorous textual connection between the Io episode in the *Metamorphoses* and these cantos in *Purgatorio*” (Levenstein 195). However, the key difference between Juno’s Argo and the divine beings of the Garden is that Argo eventually succumbs to Mercury’s attempts to “overcome those watchful eyes” (I.683-4), whereas the angels of Paradise are implied to be eternally vigilant. Argus is doomed to fail in his goal of eternal vigilance against Jupiter’s Lust because nothing is eternal in Ovid’s universe; much like he uses other Ovidian myths, Dante inverts Argus’ eventual failure against Lust by showing that there is an escape from this cycle of love and strife in the form of heavenly salvation, as represented by the angels.

Another conversion of Lust into Love in the Garden of Eden occurs in the Narcissus allusion of Canto XXX. After finally seeing Beatrice, Dante “lowered my eyes to the clear water. But when I saw myself reflected, I drew them back / toward the grass,

such shame weighed on my brow” (XXX.76-8). Dante’s immediate rejection of Narcissus can be seen as an overall rejection of classical themes and the desire to replace them with Christian values. Indeed, Dante differs from Narcissus because “Dante immediately recognizes his own reflection (...) Dante reacts to his [correctly perceived] self-reflection with shame (...) [and] Dante’s view of himself causes him to turn his eyes away from his own reflection,” (Brownlee 201), all of which are actions that are in contrast to how Narcissus acts in the *Metamorphoses*. Narcissus’s downfall is originally caused by insatiable Lust because “at last one of these scorned youths, lifting up his hands to heaven, prayed: 'So may he himself love, and not gain the thing he loves!’” (III.404-5). Thus, Dante’s rejection of Narcissus is not just a rejection of the sin of Pride, but is also a rejection of the implicit lust which leads Narcissus to his doom. Unlike Narcissus, who is never given an opportunity for salvation, Dante recognizes that he must open his heart to divine love.

Lust appears to have one final appearance in Eden, at the beginning of Canto XXII. While there is no Ovidian reference, there is the strong implication that Dante errs looking at Beatrice for too long because “My eyes were fixed and so intent / to satisfy ten years of thirst / that all my other senses were undone” (XXXII.1-3). After this long stare, “my gaze was forced to travel left / as they cried out: ‘Too fixed!’” (XXXII.8-9). Dante’s prolonged gaze appears to be interpreted as sexual longing becoming conflated with his newly found divine Love. Thus, even this late in Purgatory (and after supposedly having his sins purged), lust still lingers. One reason for this is that lust does not have the same stigma as the other sins, as is evident in its proximity to Eden and the continuation of Ovidian metaphors in the Earthly Paradise. On Earth, Lust serves the same purpose of a

creative force as it does in the *Metamorphoses*. Sexual desire is still essential in the Earthly realm, and thus it retains an important role in both the classical and Christian world. Dante's fault on the brink of Paradise is still retaining earthly desires when he sees Beatrice instead of only loving her for the pureness and divinity which she represents. Sexual love ties us to the terrestrial, but love of the eternal and divine allows us to transcend the physical.

Inevitably, an analysis of Ovid in *Purgatorio* returns to the references in *Inferno*. While Dante confronts Ovid by openly contesting him and placing his characters near the center of Hell, he does not completely displace the Roman poet, but instead finds values in the myths in *Purgatorio*. In one sense, this is not different from the *Métamorphoses Moralisées* or the several other allegorical approaches to Ovid that followed during the Middle Ages, for Dante frequently uses the myths in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* to warn against sinful behavior. However, Dante does much more with the Ovidian myths in *Purgatorio* because he seemingly readjusts the structure of the *Metamorphoses*. Thus, in effect, Dante has transformed Ovid's sinful nature, as characterized by the chaotic structure of the *Metamorphoses*, as also seen in *Inferno*, into the teleological symbols of salvation in *Purgatorio*.

Despite using Ovid in a fashion beyond that of strictly searching for Christian truths, Dante is still tied to the medieval notion of allegorical literature and "Augustine's corollary: literature must observe Christian decorum, that is, it must design itself exclusively to teaching and illuminating the gospel" (Heyworth 261). While it would be incorrect to state that Dante was only using Ovid in a pragmatic manner and not an aesthetic one (for such dry examples, see the previously mentioned *Métamorphoses*

*Moralisées* or its countless imitators), there still exists an important link between Dante's poetics and Augustine's morals. Beginning in the Renaissance, the use of classics in literature becomes less associated with Christian morals and more used for its own aesthetic purposes. Perhaps there is no better example than *Paradise Lost* in which “Milton breaks every rule and, as if in obedience to his great theme, transforms each infraction into a legend of a fall that is also an occasion for poetic grace” (Heyworth 262).

## CHAPTER IV

The relationship between the English language and Ovid has two clear, but very different examples, in the Renaissance with John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This analysis will approach these two works in inverted chronological order; while Shakespeare came before Milton, his approach to Ovid is very different from his contemporaries that it serves as a good launching point into the twentieth century. Meanwhile, Milton adds his own twist to the linearization of the *Metamorphoses* that was displayed so prominently in Dante.

On the surface, it would appear that Milton is working in the same vein as Dante, namely writing an epic poem that satisfies both an aesthetic purpose while also presenting an extended (if not somewhat obscured) moral lesson. However, when comparing their usage of myths from the *Metamorphoses*, there appears to be a stark contrast between Dante's teleological approach in *Purgatorio* and Milton's poem about the Fall. Indeed, the difference between the two poems is most evident in their contrasting perspectives on Eden. In *Purgatorio*, Eden is Dante's last level before he ascends into Paradise with Beatrice; for Milton, Eden is the closest mankind gets to divinity before its Fallen state. Interestingly, both poets reference the same Ovidian myths in Eden, namely those of Narcissus and Proserpina. The differences in their usage of these stories illustrates the break in the use of the *Metamorphoses* between the moralistic Middle Ages and the humanistic Renaissance.

As previously mentioned, references to Narcissus in the *Divine Comedy* serve as warnings of excessive desire and pride, both in *Inferno* (the “mirror of Narcissus / would not take much by way of invitation” [XXX.128-9]) and in *Purgatorio*, as an opportunity for Dante finally to cleanse himself of Lust before entering Paradise. Narcissus shows up in *Paradise Lost* when Eve is first created, as is seen in the lines “As I bent down to look, just opposite, / A Shape within the wat'ry gleam appear'd / Bending down to look on me, I started back, / It started back, but pleas'd I soon return'd, / Pleas'd it return'd as soon with answering looks / Of sympathy and love” (IV.460-5). Part of what separates Milton from Dante in this instance is that Milton subtly alludes to the Narcissus episode, instead of directly calling upon Ovid's character. Unlike in Dante, though, Narcissus does not serve as a warning in *Paradise Lost*, but instead is a precursor for the inevitable Fall. Indeed, by telling Adam of this episode instead of keeping it to herself, “Milton and his God officially transfer narcissism from Eve to Adam” (James 134), as is seen in the lines when he fancies her as an extension of himself and declares “Out of my side to thee, nearest my heart / Substantial life, to have thee by my side / Henceforth an individual solace dear” (IV.84-6). Eve's narcissism was only at the moment of her creation, but Adam's extends his power over her into a fashion that actually transforms Eve into a sort of Echo, “women compelled to speak *after* (...) the model of fallen language for both” (Heyworth 282-3). Adam and Eve's narcissistic behavior creates a disconnect between the couple which continues after their Fall with Adam's “estrang'd in look and alter'd style / Speech intermitted” (IX.1132-3) that, for Heyworth, represents “Adam's narcissistic solitude (...) Like Narcissus's solitude, Adam's is marked by an inability to communicate” (283). Narcissus haunts humanity both in Eden and after the Fall, an

indicator of Milton's belief that humankind's propensity to splinter itself off one another is inevitable. Narcissus's transformation in *Metamorphoses* also parallels the Fall of Adam and Eve, as he is transformed from someone who “many youths and many maidens sought” (III.353) into a shade, who, even in the Underworld, “when he had been received into the infernal abodes, he kept on gazing on his image in the Stygian pool” (III.504-5). The great tragedy of Narcissus, as alluded to throughout Adam and Eve's descent, is not just the sin of Pride, but the inability to learn from one's mistakes.

Unlike the subtlety alluded to Narcissus, the myth of Proserpina is given a direct reference in *Paradise Lost*, in which Eden is compared to “that fair field / Of Enna, where Proserpine gathering flowers / Her self a fairer flower by gloomy Dis / Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain / To seek her through the world” (IX. 268-71). Much as in Dante, this use of Ovid is a natural fit because it is one of the best examples of corrupted purity in classical literature, but much like Narcissus, Milton uses the Proserpina myth much differently from Dante. Dante's image of Matelda in *Purgatorio* XXVIII is that of Proserpina immediately before her abduction by Dis; in contrast, Milton evokes the grisly image of Proserpina herself being a “fairer flower” and her abduction which “cost Ceres all that pain.” This is more in-line with Ovid, who spends thirteen lines (V.396-408) describing Proserpina's abduction, including the misery of “and such was the innocence of her girlish years, the loss of her flowers even at such a time aroused new grief” (V.400-1). Milton appears to be overtly drawing a comparison between Satan and Eve with the Proserpina episode because “throughout Book IX there is a strong hint that Satan is seducing Eve, while the Fall includes the corruption of innocent sexuality” (Martindale 315). Martindale goes on to state that “the Proserpina image is perhaps as near as Milton

comes to the *Ovide moralisé* (...) Milton almost certainly got the idea not from Ovid commentaries, but from one of his favourite poets, Dante” (Martindale 315-6). The similarities between Milton and Dante's use of Ovid's Proserpina ends at the allusion to a Fall. Dante is able to suspend his Proserpina image as eternally untouched because she is presented as a signpost along the way to Paradise; Milton, moving in the opposite direction of Dante, dwells on the violence and innocence lost in Proserpina's rape. Thus, both poets use the same Ovidian myth but in distinctly different manners.

One common bond between Dante and Milton is that both their poems are deeply rooted in Christianity. While it has been established that neither is working within a dogmatic framework, and thus is not just purely allegorizing classical mythology, they are both still re-constituting Ovidian myths to fit within another paradigm. The Renaissance also was the beginning of non-secular uses of Ovid in literature, and nowhere was this more evident than in the works of Shakespeare. The poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* are direct allusions to the *Metamorphoses*, events for the Trojans in *Troilus and Cressida* come from Ovid's account, and *Romeo and Juliet* bears a striking resemblance to the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. However, Shakespeare's greatest use of the *Metamorphoses*, both in allusions to the stories and in an homage to the poem's structure, is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The overt reference to Ovid in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the performance of Pyramus and Thisbe at the end of the play, with the participants bumbling through the parts, including a talking lion who is described as “A very gentle beast, and of a good conscience” (V.i.218) and a Pyramus who “With the help of a surgeon he might yet recover, and yet prove an ass” (V.i.291-2). A comical rendition of the Pyramus and



Thisbe myth is a perfect bookend to the play, as the strife between Lysander, Hermia, Helena, and Demetrius (as well as that between the faeries Oberon and Titania) has already been resolved, thus a mockery of a tragedy shows how “A fortnight hold we this solemnity, / In nightly revels and new jollity” (V.345-6). Unlike Pyramus and Thisbe, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ends happily for all of its characters, and Shakespeare's light mocking of Ovid underlines this difference. Pyramus and Thisbe is not the only Ovidian tragedy transformed into comedy, as Titania's misguided pursuit of Bottom resembles Venus's pursuit of Adonis. The overlap is evident, with “Cupid's mischievous nature and power to induce love are transferred onto Puck” (Forey 324) and “both women forcibly detain somewhat reluctant lovers (...) both women boast of supernatural power” (Staton 175). Indeed, even the source of Oberon and Titania's argument (which causes the misunderstanding on Puck's part that leads to Bottom's transformation) is Ovidian in nature, as it is a dispute over “A lovely boy stolen from an Indian king” (II.i.22). Just like the comical rendition of Pyramus and Thisbe, Oberon and Titania's strife is played for laughs and no one (not even Bottom) is hurt by their squabbling – a very different story from Venus's Adonis, who is killed by a boar and transformed into an Anemone (X.709-38), all instigated by a mistake of the gods.

Beyond alluding to Ovidian myths, Shakespeare also appears to be copying the chaotic and ever-changing style of the *Metamorphoses*. Three plots are occurring simultaneously (the lovers' dispute in Athens; Oberon and Titania's spat; the play practice), all of which converge happily at the end of the play. Even this convergence is Ovidian, as the Athenian characters are watching the performance of Pyramus and Thisbe while they are, at the same time, being watched by Oberon and Titania. Much like the

escalating levels of narration in the *Metamorphoses* which create the constant story-within-a-story influx, Shakespeare creates multiple levels of plays-within-a-play with different performers and audiences at each level. This metastability is much more akin to Ovid's original form (as borrowed from Empedocles and Pythagoras's philosophy) than the Christianized linearization of Dante's teleological journey through *Purgatorio* or Milton's Fall in *Paradise Lost*. Dante, Milton, and Shakespeare all represent the beginning of an important process in understanding the *Metamorphoses*, namely an interest in appreciating the text for both its internal qualities and a desire to re-work it for their own purposes. However, while these authors would re-introduce readers to the *Metamorphoses* in a non-allegorical context, it would not last, for "Ovid died, for at least the third time (...) and was buried deep under mountains of disparaging arguments to make a throne for Virgil" (Ziolkowski 98). Not until the twentieth century, with the rise of Modernism, Surrealism, and Magical Realism, would Ovid and the complex and ever-changing structure of the *Metamorphoses* be again unraveled for use in literary allusions, with echoes of Dante, Milton, and Shakespeare original re-interpretations still lingering in the background.

## CHAPTER V

Written at the end of the twentieth century, Joseph Brodsky's "Letter to Horace" is the quintessential example of how attitudes towards Ovid and the *Metamorphoses* have changed since the time of Dante and since Milton's attempts at linearizing the text. While ostensibly written to Horace, the letter has little praise for Horace, noting that "you never were a visionary (...) to imagine another land and another heaven – well, for that one should turn, I guess, to Ovid" (429). Indeed, Brodsky chooses Horace as the recipient of his letter because he is approachable and "the easiest to picture" whereas "the one I can't picture for the life of me is Ovid" (432). This discussion of their appearance is symbolic of the two poets' works. He tells Horace that "of all of you, Flaccus, it is you who are perhaps the most egocentric. Which is to say, the most palpable" (451), a sentiment that echoes Brodsky's previous ribbing at him for advising "a grief-stricken fellow to change his tune and sing Caesar's victory" (429). Ovid's direct rival, Virgil, is treated even more humbly by Brodsky, who notes that the underworld scene in *Aeneid* Book VI was "a waste of that stunning, mind-boggling idea about souls being entitled to a second corporeality and lapping from the river Lethe to cleanse themselves of their previous memories" (443) because Virgil "rehashes the official record and serves it as hot news (...) he blows it all for the sake of Caesar's lineage" (444). Towards the end, Brodsky seems to settle the age old dispute between Ovid and Virgil in a grandiose fashion by noting that he would like to see Ovid in the afterlife because "he never assumed anyone else's shape (...) even among souls he be a rarity" whereas Virgil has "been back to

reality, I should say, in so many guises” (458) (Brotsky does admit he'd like to find Horace in the netherworld because he “just got back from filling up your Pythagorean quota as Auden [...] though he was a far greater poet than you, of course” [457]).

However, Brotsky's purpose behind “Letter to Horace” is not simply to elevate Ovid by disparaging Horace and Virgil. Brotsky is more interested in establishing “the privileging of language and the associated anti-realist trends that have played such a prominent role in the thought of the last quarter of the twentieth century, and it is in such terms that (...) Ovid can be the man for the moment and metamorphoses its preferred trope” (Kennedy 332). Brotsky uses the terminology of language to define Ovid, noting that:

“Naso insists that in this world *one thing is another*. That, in the final analysis, reality is one large rhetorical figure and you are lucky if it is just a polyptoton or a chiasmus. With him a man evolves into an object, and vice versa, with the immanent logic of grammar, like a statement sprouting a subordinate clause (...) To him, language was a godsend; more exactly, its grammar was. More exactly still, to him the world was the language: one thing was another, and as to which was more real, it was a toss-up.” (452)

Brotsky is putting forth the conception that all of language is a metaphor, and his belief that “language issues from the inanimate; that a poet does not select from language; language chooses a poet” and that “poets live on in their work” (Hofmeister 81), which is echoed in the overall narrative of the *Metamorphoses*, with Ovid's own assertion that poetry transforms him at the beginning of Book I and that he also lives on forever through his poetry at the end of Book XV. This is a common twentieth century sentiment with regards to language theory, namely that all of language is circular and inevitably self-referential, or, as Borges wryly notes “how can we deny that each word is a unity of thought if the dictionary (in alphabetical disorder) records, isolates, and without further

consultation, defines them? (...) words – by themselves – do not exist” (34). Words can not exist without other words and thus no aspect of language can stand alone; in language, one thing has to be another, just as in Ovid, each physical form is only a placeholder until the next transformation occurs.

However, Brodsky is ironically using language as a metaphor for what Ovid has done in the *Metamorphoses*. While the transformation of language is certainly an aspect of Ovid's work, Brodsky's emphasis is on “this world,” and not just the metaphorical. Effectively, Brodsky is finding the Pythagorean and Empedoclean metaphysical aspects within Ovid. This is especially evident when Brodsky notes how:

To him, a body – a girl's especially – could become, nay, *was* – a stone, a river, a bird, a tree, a sound, a star (...) what Naso was after wasn't even a metaphor. His game was morphology, and his take was metamorphosis (...) The main thing is the sameness of substance (...) Since we are of this world (...) So we all contain water, quartz, hydrogen, fiber (...) Which already have been reshuffled into that girl. Small wonder she becomes a tree (454).

Brodsky is rejecting the allegorical interpretations of Ovid that Dante and Milton had put forth, and he does so by showing that the only metaphorical aspect of Ovid is the imperfect language he is forced to use to describe the wholeness of reality (for, because it is a part of reality, language cannot truly encompass what is it a part of). The transformations in the *Metamorphoses* are, in Brodsky's mind, not to be interpreted as symbols of the Divine or moral warnings, but as a firm reminder that “with our species, shifting from the animate to the inanimate is the trend” (454-55).

Hofmeister notes that this is not the first essay in which Brodsky has postulated these views, but is instead a refinement of what was “already bruited in 'Homage to Marcus Aurelius [1994] (...) a universal nature reshaping a universal substance” (81). In that essay, Brodsky does not use the same metaphorical conceit with language to

approach metaphysics (because Marcus Aurelius wrote as a philosopher, not as a poet like Ovid, and especially because Brodsky believes Marcus Aurelius would have considered Ovid “licentious and excessively ingenious” [295]), but his conclusion still appears to be the same, namely that, for Marcus Aurelius, “birth was an entrance. Death an exit, life a little island in the ocean of particles (...) you considered yourself a fragment, no matter how tiny, of the Whole, of the Universe (...) The eventual dance of particles, you held, should have no bearing on the animated body” (290-1). Brodsky selects certain quotes from the Emperor to conclude the essay, including “the universe is change, life is opinion” and “to turn against anything that comes to pass is a separation from nature” (297). These quotes seem to illustrate a commonality between Brodsky's interpretation of Marcus Aurelius and his interpretation of Ovid, namely that both, despite their differing approaches (one a “licentious” poet, the other a stoic Caesar), come to the same conclusions with regards to the individual's role as a mere cog in an infinite machine.

The distinction between Brodsky's postmodernism and Dante and Milton's allegorical reading of Ovid is especially clear in examining the episode of Narcissus and Echo. As previously noted, both Dante and Milton take a strong allegorical approach to this episode in their reworkings of the myth for their poems. Dante presents himself as anti-Narcissus by avoiding lingering too long at his own reflection in Eden (and this after Dante had mentioned Narcissus in Hell); similarly, Milton fashions the scene as an allegory of the inability for human beings to truly communicate with one another because of our vanities. However, Brodsky relates the episode back to Ovid himself, noting that “rhyme is when one thing turns into another without changing its substance, which is

sound. (...) It is a condensation of Naso's approach, if you will – a distillation, perhaps. Naturally, he comes frightfully close to it in that scene with Narcissus and Echo” (455). Brodsky then clarifies that the frightening aspect would have been “had he done so, for the next two thousands years we all would have been out of business (...) thank God for that myth's own insistence on keeping eyesight and hearing apart. For that's what we've been at for the past two thousand years: grafting one onto another, fusing his vision with your meters” (455-6). Brodsky sees no secondary interpretation within Narcissus and Echo, and believes that the scene itself is an ideal that requires no additional allegory to be appreciated. Only Ovid's self-imposed limitations of the hexameter and his lack of Horace's “forte”<sup>1</sup> with dactyls (a contrast to Ovid's “monotonous” meter, while Horace was “metrically [...] the most diverse among them”) (434) prevents the episode from being sublime.

In the same vein as Brodsky is Italo Calvino's 1975 essay “Ovid and Universal Contiguity.” Like Brodsky, Calvino examines metaphysical aspects of the *Metamorphoses* in a sly manner. He notes that the effect of the creation story in Book I and the re-telling of Pythagoras's philosophy in Book XV is “Ovid's way of expressing his world: this swarm and tangle of events that are often similar yet always different, in which he celebrates the continuity and mobility of all that is” (159). Calvino uses almost Deleuzian language<sup>2</sup> when he describes how the *Metamorphoses* is “a living multiplicity

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1 Brodsky is not the only famous intellectual to note Horace's elegant style with the Latin language. Nietzsche, in *Twilight of the Idols*, praises him greatly, stating that “I have not obtained from any poet the same artistic delight that was given to me from the first by a Horatian ode. In certain languages that which is obtained cannot even be hoped for.” And Dante puts Horace in the noble castle of Limbo as one of the five great poets along with Homer, Virgil, Lucan, and, of course, Ovid.

2 While never having written specifically on Ovid, Gilles Deleuze's concept of the rhizome, in which “there are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines (...) a rhizome or multiplicity never allows itself to be overcoded” (8-9), echoes Ovid's notion that there is no center to the universe and that all forms are constantly transforming (or, perhaps,

that excludes no god known or unknown” (152) and how “fauna, flora, mineral kingdom, and firmament embrace within their common substance (...) indistinct borderlands between diverse worlds” (147), language that is later echoed in Brodsky's girl who is a “a stone, a river, a bird, a tree, a sound, a star.” Thus, Calvino's essay further reinforces the notion that twentieth century intellectuals focused much more on the metaphysical aspects of the *Metamorphoses* than the Christianized, allegorical interpretations that Dante and Milton favored.

An examination of Calvino's works also creates a connection from essays on Ovid to fiction and poetry that both alludes to and encapsulates the themes of the *Metamorphoses*. Published in 1972, Calvino's *Invisible Cities* reads like a twentieth century version of the *Metamorphoses*, with each short section describing an imaginary and metaphorical city as part of a conversation between Kublai Khan and Marco Polo. The cities are then loosely grouped together into classifications that repeat themselves (including “cities and memory” and “cities and desire”), and chapters begin and are book-ended by conversation between Kublai Khan and Marco Polo. The introduction reads like Ovid's declaration that poetry outlives even empire, as Kublai Khan notes that his empire:

is an endless, formless ruin, that corruption's gangrene has spread too far to be healed by our scepter (...) Only in Marco Polo's accounts was Kublai Khan able to discern, through the walls and towers destined to crumble, the tracery of a pattern so subtle it could escape the termites' gnawing (5-6).

This “pattern so subtle” are these abstract notions (memory, desire, signs, and eyes) that permeate throughout all the cities and create “the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together” (165) – part of the “universal contiguity” that unites all cities in time. This is best summarized in the last city's description, Berenice, that, on the

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“becoming”).



surface, is a dual city that rotates between just and unjust, but in reality “all the future Berenices are already present in this instant, wrapped one within the other, confined, crammed, inextricable” (163). Kublai Khan's empire will never actually die, but it instead will transform into something new, be it a new physical form or into the wistfulness of memory.

The connection between *Invisible Cities* and the *Metamorphoses* goes beyond ideological, as Calvino has subtly alluded to Ovid with the names of some of the cities. Calvino draws attention to *Metamorphoses* by giving it prime place, as “Ovid's work enters the narrative directly in the third section of chapter 5: that is, the precise center of the nine chapters” (Ziolkowski 172). Two cities are named after characters in the *Metamorphoses*: the city of Ersilia (in the section “Trading Cities”) and the city of Baucis (in the section “Cities & Eyes”). Ersilia is the wife of Romulus, who “her hair bursting into flame from its light, goes up together with the star into thin air” (XIV.848-9), and thus is one of the noble Romans who undergoes apotheosis. In *Invisible Cities*, her city is filled with inhabitants who, in order “to establish the relationships that sustain the city's life,” they “stretch string from the corners of the houses” until “the strings become so numerous that you can no longer pass among” and they leave, and “only the strings and their supports remain” (76). This cycle repeats itself endlessly, with the inhabitants building and abandoning cities that are “without the bones of the dead which the wind rolls away: spider-webs of intricate relationships seeking form” (76). Thus, the divine Ersilia creates the intricate web of relationships that is seen in the *Metamorphoses*, a “pattern of strings” (76) that, like Ovid's poem, long outlives its subjects and author.

The city of Baucis sits on “slender slits that rise from the ground at a great distance” and “nothing of the city touches the earth except those long flaming legs on which it rests” (77). In the *Metamorphoses*, the couple of Baucis and Philemon are copiously rewarded by the gods for their humble hospitality; despite their poverty, they offer everything they have to the disguised Jupiter (VIII.611-724). Thus, on the one hand, it could be that the city of Baucis is raised slightly above the Earth to represent its namesake superior humanity. However, Calvino also makes reference to this specific myth in “Ovid and Universal Contiguity” when he notes how sometimes “to make it clear that the story is not in any hurry, he [Ovid] stops to gaze at the most minute details” (156). He then proceeds to quote a long passage from this story (VII.661-3 in the Latin, but Calvino continues on for a few more lines in translation) that details the short leg of Baucis and Philemon's table and the pottery used to hold it up. Calvino returns to the metaphysical implications, as he notes that Ovid uses this scene in “making his picture even richer in detail (...) For Ovid's way is always to add, never to remove” (156), a further reinforcement of the belief that nothing truly dies or is forgotten in Ovid's cosmology. Interestingly, Calvino notes in his city of Baucis that one of the reasons the inhabitants may remain above the Earth is because “with spyglasses and telescopes aimed downward they never tire of examining it, leaf by leaf, stone by stone, ant by ant, contemplating with fascination their own absence” (77). Thus, the complex intricacies and overarching structure presented in the city of Ersilia are subsequently contrasted by the minute details examined by the city of Baucis. Calvino presents two contrasting perspectives of the world as viewed from the divine, each with its own idiosyncrasies and connections to the *Metamorphoses*.

*Invisible Cities* is elusive in its reference to Ovid, however, this is not necessarily the standard in the twentieth century. While not as common as in medieval and Renaissance literature, direct allusions to the *Metamorphoses* still play an important role in twentieth century literature. The most famous of this is T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which, according to Eliot's own notes on the text, has two explicit references to the the *Metamorphoses*: the blinding of Tiresias (III.218-49) and the myth of Philomel, Procne, and Tereus (II.97-103, and then alluded to again in III.203-6 and finally at V.428). Other Ovidian myths also crop up in the text (such as Apollo and Hyacinth [I.36-7] and the opening prologue with Sibyl), but they are not specifically noted by Eliot (with Eliot using a quote from the *Satyricon* for his reference to Sibyl). Ovidian myths fit Eliot's theme perfectly, as he notes from the beginning that:

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain (I.1-4)

Much like Ovid's introduction, Eliot is making it clear that his poem is one of transformation, of the continual cycle of life and death. Thus, it comes as little surprise that the two explicit myths from the *Metamorphoses* are so crucial to the poem.

In his notes on *The Waste Land*, Eliot specifically mentions Tiresias as “a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character,' is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest (...) What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem. The whole passage from Ovid is of great anthropological interest: [and then he quotes *Metamorphoses* III.320-338 in Latin].” In the poem, Tiresias is a witness to the intercourse between “the typist home at teatime” (III.222) and “he, the young man carbuncular” (III.231) who “assaults at once; / Exploring hands encounter no defence”

(III.239-40). At the same time, Tiresias is a distant narrator who parenthetically notes that (“And I Tiresias have foresuffered all /Enacted on this same divan or bed”) (III.243-4). This is similar to the role that Tiresias plays at one point in Ovid, in which he sees two serpents engaging in intercourse and then he is transformed into a woman; seven years later, he again sees the same two serpents entwined and he is changed back into a man. When Jove and Juno argue about which gender enjoys the pleasures of sex more, they ask Tiresias because of his experience living as both genders. His answer that females enjoy sex more enrages Juno, who blinds Tiresias; however, Jove compensates him for this paralysis by giving him the gift of prophecy.

On the surface, Eliot is using Tiresias as a connective figure between his poem and the *Metamorphoses* because Tiresias is effectively serving as the narrator of this section. In this sense, Tiresias functions as a sort of guardian of transformation, with sex in both Eliot and Ovid being a necessity of creation. However, the nature of conception in *The Waste Land* is one of corrupted fertility, which is in contrast to Ovid's abundant reproduction. The unnamed typist “makes a welcome of indifference” (III.242) and once her lover leaves, remarks “Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over” (III.252). Even more tellingly, Tiresias is associated not just with sex, but as a bearer of death because he declares himself as “I who have sat by Thebes below the wall / And walked among the lowest of the dead” (III.245-6). Eliot's Tiresias exists in a liminal state – he is described as “though blind, throbbing between two lives, / Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see / At the violet hour” (III.218-220). While Tiresias cannot physically see, he is “throbbing between two lives,” the aggressive masculine of the sickly looking young man and the passive feminine of the indifferent typist. This disparity is a macrocosm of the

*The Waste Land's* unnatural state and “making Tiresias into the witness of the scene enables Eliot to wrest from it the highest degree of irony” (Ziolkowski 52). The “substance of the poem” that Tiresias sees is the listless and dead attempts at passion and fertility that define *The Waste Land*.

The other myth which Eliot explicitly extracts from the *Metamorphoses* is equally telling in its bleakness. While Eliot refashions Tiresias to serve as an example of despondent sexuality, little reworking is necessary to make the myth of Procne, Philomel, and Tereus (VI.511-674) fit his scheme of misplaced desire transforming fertility into death. Eliot has chosen one of the longest stories in the *Metamorphoses* and one completely devoid of Ovid's customary sly humor. Instead, the myth features Tereus's brutal rape and mutilation of Philomel (described with animal similes as “she trembled like a frightened lamb” [IV.526] and “like a dove which, with its own blood all smeared over its plumage, still palpitates with fright, still fears those claws that have pierced it” [IV.529-30]), the infanticide of Itys by Procne (Tereus's wife) in order to avenge her sister's desecration, and the eventual transformation of the three into birds (Philomel into a nightingale, Procne into a swallow, and Tereus into a hoopoe), with Tereus forever pursuing the two sisters. Eliot describes this in a tapestry upon “the sylvan scene / The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king / So rudely forced” (II.99-100) and twice evokes the swallow / Philomel, first with the sound of the bird (“Jug jug jug jug jug jug / So rudely forc'd. / Tereu” [205-7]) and again in direct address (“Quando fiam uti chelido [“When shall I be like the swallow?”] / O swallow swallow” [V.428]).

The myth of Procne, Philomel, and Tereus fits *The Waste Land* perfectly. The grotesqueness of Tereus's crime mirrors the insatiable masculine desire in the poem, as

seen with man with the carbuncular or Lil, who is told to prepare herself for Albert who has “been in the army four years, he wants a good time, / And if you don't give it him, there's others will” (II.148-9) and is asked “what you get married for if you don't want children?” (II.164) when she considers turning down his advances. Additionally, the death of the infant Itys fits the overall theme of infertility that is omnipresent in the work. Finally, Eliot's association with the transformed Philomel when he asks “quando fiam uti chelido” shows a deep connection between the metaphorical rape of *The Waste Land* and the literal transformation in the *Metamorphoses*. Eliot chooses this episode from the *Metamorphoses* to tie into his work because it is a prime example of the destruction wrought by violence and insatiable desire; he associates himself and his “Unreal City” (III.207) with a rape victim. For fertility to rise again, they need the purity of water to replace the “dry sterile thunder without rain” (V.342)<sup>3</sup>, “but there is no water” (V.358). The excessive violence and disillusionment of the post-World War I world has led to a metaphorical lack of fertility in *The Waste Land*, and Eliot reaches back to Ovid to find an example of this grotesque transformation, with the rape of Philomel and the death of Itys exemplifying how violence and perversion can lead to infertility.

One of Eliot's greatest inspirations was his good friend Ezra Pound, “Europe's most energetic advocate for Ovid, whose works he constantly urged friends to read and whose *Metamorphoses* he was touting, in 1922, as 'a sacred book'” (Ziolkowski 50), and who had an important impact on Eliot and his connection to Ovid. There is a clear Ovidian influence in Pound's largest work, the unfinished *Cantos*, which have a similar structure to the *Metamorphoses*, with “a flowing sequence from story to story that

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3 This also is resonant of Baudelaire's “Le Cygne,” where “Un cygne qui s'était évadé de sa cage” reaches up and “Vers le ciel quelquefois, comme l'homme d'Ovid.” The swan, the men of Ovid, and the denizens of *The Waste Land* all yearn for a lost future.

parallels Ovid's technique (...) tales are connected by a variety of means: metaphoric or metonymic transformation, parallel analogy, variation and permutation, intercalation, interlocking, or abbreviated allusion and listing (...) Pound's *Cantos* loom like a vast monument of high poetry to the memory of Ovid" (Ziolkowski 40). Pound's epic poem functions as a modern day *Metamorphoses*, with the opening cantos focusing on Odysseus and other characters from mythology and antiquity, before moving on to Chinese culture and eventually contemporary society, especially the United States. This chronological intermingling of cultures is a reflection of the *Metamorphoses*'s structure, but Pound has reworked it in modernist fashion, putting his work on a global scale.

The most abundant direct allusions to Ovid in Pound are in *Canto IV*. In this canto, Pound alludes to a whole catalogue of events from the *Metamorphoses*, including "Cadmus of Golden Prows," (IV.4) an allusion to Procne, Philomel, and Tereus with "all the while, the while, swallows crying: / Ityn!," (IV.15-6) and a brief allusion to Jove's conquests of "Hymenaeus Io" (IV.86) and "Danaë! Danaë! / What wind is the king's?" (IV.102-3) who "lay the god's bride, lay ever, waiting the golden rain" (IV.118) (In the *Metamorphoses*, Danaë had been confined to her room by her father in order to avoid a prophecy that she would be raped by Jove; the king of the gods circumvented this by coming to her as a shower of gold). However, the most striking of these allusions is to Actaeon, who encounters:

bathing the body of nymphs, of nymphs, and Diana,  
Nymphs, white-gathered about her, and the air, air,  
Shaking air alight with the goddess,  
fanning their hair in the dark (IV43-6).

Actaeon's punishment for this accidental indiscretion in the *Cantos* is the same as in the *Metamorphoses*, namely his transformation into a stag and then his death at the mouth of

his own hunting dogs when “the dog leap on Actaeon, / 'Hither, hither, Actaeon,' / Spotted stag of the wood” (IV.57-9). However, Pound conflates this episode by noting that:

The dogs leap on Actaeon.  
Stumbling, stumbling along in the wood,  
Muttering, muttering Ovid:  
'Pergusa ... pool ... pool ... Garaphia,'  
'Pool... pool of Salamacis.' (IV.63-7).

By specifically mentioning Ovid as a character, Pound is drawing emphasis to this scene. He mentions three pools of water that are sites of transformation in the *Metamorphosis*: Pergusa (a pool in Sicily near where Persephone was kidnapped by Pluto [V.386]), Garaphia (the pool where Actaeon stumbled upon Diana [III.156]), and Salamacis (a pool of water that was home to a nymph who fused with Hermaphroditus to create a male/female hybrid [IV.286-388]). Combined with the image of Jove coming to have sex with Danaë in the form of golden rain, it is clear that the image of water plays an important role in understanding Pound's interpretation of the *Metamorphoses*. Much like Eliot's quest for rejuvenating water in *The Waste Land*, Pound focuses on the transformative and fertile power of water, noting it as “the liquid and rushing crystal / beneath the knees of the gods” (IV.70-1). Beyond the obvious physical qualities of water involved in fertility and growth, this emphasis on water can also be seen as rhetorical. In both Pound and Ovid, water is a “shapeless, flowing element that treats whatever it contains with different laws than those of dust and time” (Davenport 60). Thus, its prominent placement for Pound echoes back to the unlimited potential of the chaotic universe in Book I and, like the overall structure of the *Metamorphoses* and the *Cantos*, water is symbolic of the unbroken continuity from scene to scene that defines both works.



English poetry is not the only poetry to make use of episodes from the *Metamorphoses*. Rainer Maria Rilke shows a special affinity with the character of Orpheus, crafting him as the inspiration for his “Sonnets to Orpheus” and “Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes”.<sup>4</sup> Ovid's use of Orpheus is twofold. Like all other characters in the poem, he is caught up in continual transformation and his death at the hands of the Ciconian women whom he rejects leads to his metamorphosis into a shade in the Underworld, where he rejoins Eurydice (XI.1-66). However, at the same time he is a poet who both creates new worlds through his songs (he is the narrator of the stories in Book X, which includes the famous myths of Ganymede [X.155-61], Pygmalion [X.243-97], and Venus and Adonis [X.503-707], which was later an inspiration for a poem by Shakespeare), and he also produces new physical realities, as his singing literally creates new trees, plants, and entices animals to the hill where he sits (X.86-125). Thus, Orpheus is symbolic of all poets with his ability to create new worlds through the power of language, yet, like Ovid, he is not above the subject of his songs and he is the recipient of a tragic life and death.

Of Rilke's two addresses to Orpheus, “Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes” actually has the least relationship to Ovid, despite appearing to be a retelling of the episode from the beginning of Book X. The poem (which caused Brodsky to “wonder if whether the greatest work of the century wasn't done ninety years ago” [376]) appears to go to great lengths to separate itself from the Ovidian retelling of the classic myth. Rilke adds the character of Hermes as a guide for Eurydice's ascent from the Underworld, whereas Ovid

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4 While the punctuation here looks unusual with the period outside of the quotation marks, Rilke intentionally punctuated “Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes” without a period at the end for stylistic purposes.

keeps the episode entirely between the doomed lovers. More tellingly, Rilke shifts perspectives, instead focusing more on Eurydice's "new virginity" (67) and how:

she was no longer that woman with blue eyes  
who had echoed through the poet's song  
no longer the wide couch's scent and island,  
and that man's property no longer (73-6).

We see Eurydice's point of view and her confusion as "she was filled with her vast death, which was so new, / she could not understand that it had happened" (83-4) This poem is about the unknowable gap between the dead Eurydice and the hasty Orpheus, who is described in pure corporeal terms as "the slender man in the blue cloak – / mute, impatient, looking straight ahead" (15-6) and his walk as "large, greedy, unchewed bites" (17). In this poem, Rilke expounds on the gap between the living and the dead, whereas Ovid recycles them, with Ovid barely describing Eurydice in the Underworld, only with the note of "she was among the new shades and came with steps halting from her wound" (X.48-9). Ovid quickly returns to his narrative after Orpheus fails to recover Eurydice, a stark contrast to Rilke's lingering with Eurydice's shade in the Underworld.

However, while "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes" diverts from the *Metamorphoses's* cycle of transformations by focusing on the shade of Orpheus's lover, Rilke's "Sonnets to Orpheus" can be read as a companion to the Ovidian notion of death begetting life. Rilke imagines Orpheus being transformed into all things, with "Orpheus's singing, which continues to resound in all of nature: in the birds, animals, trees, and stones" (Ziolkowski 60). Rilke writes:

Let the rose blossom each for his sake.  
For it *is* the god. His metamorphosis  
in this and that. We do not need to look  
for other names. It is Orpheus once for allegorical  
whenever there is song. He comes for and goes (I.v.2-6).

Orpheus's song lives on in all things that die, just as “all becomes vineyard, all becomes grape” (I.vii.7-8), and, most tellingly “We are involved with flower, leaf, and fruit” (I.xiv.1). Rilke is echoing the cosmology of Pythagoras in Book XV of the *Metamorphoses* and emphasizing that it is not just Orpheus and the poets who live forever. Nothing truly dies for Rilke because, just like Ovid, physical death is transformed into new life. Rilke also follows Ovid in believing that poetry lives through transformation, as is seen in Rilke's homage to his Latin forebears that “the cheerful water of Roman days / still glows through like a wandering song” (I.x.3-4). The beginning of Sonnet XIX is an echo of Ovid as Rilke writes that

Though the world keeps changing its form  
as fast as a cloud, still  
what is accomplished falls home  
to the Primeval” (I.xix.1-4).

Rilke's concept of this “Primeval” is the never ending process of transformation, similar to the nameless god who reigns over the original transformation of the Universe from Chaos at the beginning of Book I. In essence, Orpheus's song is a metaphor for our return to this Primeval through the transformed world and “all of nature – animal, vegetable, and mineral – take upon itself the Orphic essence and continues to sing on even after his death” (Keele 214). While the world is always changing, things already “accomplished” remain forever in the Primeval (with the physical form conserved in new life) because nothing, once created, can be annihilated from the Universe.

Part II of the “Sonnets” also contains two explicit references to Ovidian myths. In his sonnet that opens with “Mirrors: no one has ever known / to describe what you are in your inmost realm” (II.iii.1-2), Rilke ends with “But the loveliest will stay – until,

beyond, / into her all-absorbed cheeks she lets / Narcissus penetrate, bright and unbound” (II.iii.13-4). Rilke's subtle warning against vanity invokes the same feeling of Dante on the cusp of Paradise; it is foolish for any individual to dwell too long in a mirror because their ultimate fate will be the same of all things. Rilke also invokes Daphne in Sonnet XII (a sonnet that opens beseeching the reader to “*Will* transformation” [II.xii.1]) when he says that “the transfigured Daphne, / as she feels herself become laurel, / wants you to change into wind” (II.xii.12-4). In these lines, Rilke is using Ovid's Daphne as a starting point, but is showing that her physical transformation (from woman to laurel tree) is only the beginning of the cycle and that our true essence is like the wind – beyond corporeality, as a part of the Primeval.

Ovid's image of transformation also reaches to further outposts of twentieth century European literature, as is seen in the poetry of Zbigniew Herbert. Herbert's early poetry (such as “Nike Who Hesitates,” “To Athena,” and “To Apollo”) focuses on the abstract and allegorical natures of the gods intertwined with contemporary contexts, but they do not seem to draw on specific myths. However, two of his poems stand out as clear allusions to the *Metamorphoses*: “Apollo and Marsyas” and “Fragment of a Greek Vase.” In the *Metamorphoses*, Apollo defeats the presumptuous Marsyas at a music contest and, as a punishment for his belief that he was better than the god, has the satyr flayed alive; Marsyas's tears then become a river of the same name (VI.382-400). Herbert sees “the real duel of Apollo / with Marsyas” (1-2) as one between “absolute ear / versus immense range” (3-4). As Marsyas howls bound to a tree, Apollo is twice mentioned as “shaken by a shudder of disgust / Apollo is cleaning his instrument” (15-6 and 33-4), and, just as tellingly, he is described as “the god with nerves of artificial fiber” (40). For the

suffering Marsyas “relates / the inexhaustible wealth / of his body” (23-5) and is in the process of being transformed, causing Apollo to wonder if “there will not some day arise / a new kind / of art – let us say – concrete” (51-3). While Herbert lingers on the disturbing aspects of Marsyas's transformation (with him “meticulously stripped of his skin” [10], an echo of Ovid's “cutis est summos direpta per artus” [his skin is stripped off the surface of his body] [VI.387]), the lasting image is of Apollo's final look at the changing Marsyas, who is being compacted with Nature as “the hair of the tree to which Marsyas was fastened / is white / completely” (59-61) in the final lines. Despite his attempts to suppress Marsyas by physically torturing him, Apollo's tyranny cannot stop the proliferation of Marsyas art and the transformation of the satyr into something even greater upon his death.

Just as “Apollo and Marsyas” takes up the myth at the moment of the transformation between death and rebirth, “Fragment of a Greek Vase” similarly uses poetry as a medium to eternally pause the inevitable death of its subject. Despite being a Greek vase (perhaps as an allusion to Keats's “Ode on a Grecian Urn”), the scene Herbert is describing is fleshed out in greater detail in Ovid: Aurora, overwhelmed by grief at the death of her son Memnon in the siege of Troy, begs Jove for her son's honor after death. Jove relents and transforms him into a new species of bird, the Memnonides (XIII.574-622). However, the *Metamorphoses* focuses almost entirely on Aurora's perspective, not on Memnon himself (twice “vidit”[“she saw”] is repeated [XII.580-1] to emphasize the role of Aurora at the moment of Memnon's death). Thus, much like Rilke with Eurydice in “Orphes. Eurydice. Hermes,” Herbert changes the perspective and instead focuses how on the urn “in the foreground you see / a youth's handsome body” (1-2) and goes into

details on how “his beard leans on his chest” (3) and three times repeats how “he has closed his eyes” (6, 12, and 19). Aurora is still present (in her Greek incarnation, Eos), but Memnon “disavows” (7) her and she “makes the three circles of sorrow” (11). However, despite the violence and sorrow of the scene, Memnon never dies because he is forever entombed on the vase. Tellingly, the final image is

and only the cricket hidden  
in Memnon's still living hair  
speaks persuasively  
in praise of life (22-4).

Death may be the overwhelming force at this moment, but Herbert is emphasizing that life always prevails in some form (again, much like Rilke), even if it is a minute insect in a dying man's hair. In a sense, this makes the scene a touch absurd – Herbert has already transitioned from Ovid's image of the bereaved Aurora in the *Metamorphoses* to the lonely Memnon disavowing his mother and world in this poem, but the final image is a gentle reminder that the summation of life continues well beyond the dramatics of the men and gods.

Herbert's poems are good examples of the individuation of specific episodes of Ovid. So much of the literature written on or in homage to the *Metamorphoses* focuses on the grand metaphysical concepts (be it Dante and Milton reconfiguring the myth for Heaven and Hell or Eliot and Pound emphasizing the inescapable cycle of transformation), but the role of an individual in these systems is sometimes lost due to the abstract nature of transformation. Rilke's perspective from Eurydice and Herbert's from Memnon (and the cricket) show brief glimpses at how individuals are affected by these forces, as put forth by Ovid in the guise of Pythagoras at the end of the poem. However, perhaps no greater example of this exists than in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. Despite the

somewhat tenuous connection between the two works (there is no direct allusion to Ovid within Kafka's work besides the title and Gregor Samsa's transformation from a human being into a bug), there appears to be many aspects of Kafka's story of one man's downward transformation that relate back to the original *Metamorphoses*.

One of the most important facets of Gregor Samsa's change that relates back to the numerous human-to-animal transitions of the *Metamorphoses* is that, initially, Gregor retains his humanity. Calvino notes that “the greatest internal economy dominates this poem (...) the new forms should recover the materials of the old ones as far as possible” (157). As previously noted, characters in the *Metamorphoses* do not lose their humanity or their previously defining characteristics despite their transformations. Instead, Ovid incorporates these aspects into their new selves. Thus, Arachne continues to weave tapestries in her new animal stage and Echo forever hears only her chatter after her transformation into an abstraction (these conserved attributes go both ways, as is seen in Apollo still obsessing over Daphne after her transformation into a laurel tree). Despite his monstrous new form, Gregor's first thoughts are on the job that consumes him each day, as he thinks “don't stay in bed being useless” (6) and “whether something like what happened to him today could happen even to the manager” (8). Even towards the end, as he has become completely disconnected from human society and is nearing death, “he thought back on his family with deep emotion and love” (39) – the same family that has abandoned the transformed Gregor. However, this abandonment of Gregor is, much like his transformation, physical in nature, as his family has already emotionally abandoned him well before the start of the story.

Indeed, this concept of abandonment is key to understanding the personalized aspect of transformation, and it is something that is hinted at in Ovid. Gregor can not relate his changes to his beloved family, and they thus treat him as the monster which he appears, as “it did not occur to any of them, not even to his sister, that he could understand what they said” (19). Eventually he fulfills their prophecy and allows himself an “indifference to everything” (35) before his eventual and pathetic demise from a festering wound. The healthy, untransformed (his sister is tellingly described as having “blossomed into a good-looking, shapely girl” [42] at the very end, after Gregor's death) cannot relate to those who straddle the liminal space between being human and being other. Those untransformed only see human or animal, never understanding the reality that all living things are fated to become something else. Vladimir Nabokov writes that the true animals of the story are Gregor's family who “are his parasites, exploiting him, eating him out from the inside. This is his beetle itch in human terms” (261), and that the only humanity in the story is retained in Gregor (he further notes, with regards to his sister's healthy shape at the end of the story that “the soul has died with Gregor; the healthy young animal takes over. The parasites have fattened themselves on Gregor” [282]).

While Ovid does not normally over-emphasize the distress that transformation causes for individuals (instead defaulting to the over-all cosmological ramifications of change discussed in, and as seen in a single individual's change leading to the creation of new plants and animals), there are two episodes that do flesh out the individual's suffering and have a connection to Kafka. Much like Gregor, Actaeon, after being transformed into a stag by Diana, is unable to communicate his change and “he groans –



the only speech he has – and tears course down his changeling cheeks. Only his mind remains unchanged” (III.202-3). Also similar to Gregor, the change ends tragically for Actaeon, as he is unable to communicate who he is to his own hunting dogs, and is thus killed. Similarly, Io, after being transformed into a cow by Jove so that Juno could not find her, “and when she attempted to voice her complains, she only mooed” (I.637-8). Gregor, Actaeon, and Io appear to all encapsulate the same, private tragedy of the transformed (something also seen in the shaded Eurydice of Rilke and the Marsyas of Herbert): their inability to communicate their newly found status to the human world. Only through poetry can humanity begin to understand the depths of transformation.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been to understand how the interpretations of constant flux were transmitted to Ovid from Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Lucretius, but then changed to fit less of a didactic purpose in order to better suit poetry. From there, these notions have been taken back out of the *Metamorphoses*, allowing for modern day readers to effectively “back-read” Ovid's poem by seeing how later authors interpreted him and his work. Needless to say, the thoughts of Pythagoras and Empedocles have survived on their own (at least in the extant fragments that remain), and are still studied today without the aid of a poetic intercession. Similarly, there are clearer examples of their influence than in the elusiveness of Ovid – later Greek philosophers (especially Plato, and then Aristotle) show the teachings of their historical precursors, and they do not muddle their words in verse. However, Ovid was not simply reconstructing Ancient Greek thought and, indeed, it is not the only philosophy present in the *Metamorphoses*, as is evident with the hints toward Lucretius and his Epicureanism. Lucretius also serves as a predecessor for Ovid in the sense that *De Rerum Natura*, while it is a clear statement of Epicureanism, is not solely philosophy, but instead incorporates poetry to give aesthetic value to abstract thought.

However, Ovid's subject matter gives him a previously unseen opportunity in poetry, namely to have his poem mirror his philosophy. Lucretius would have been hard pressed to show Epicureanism in the structure of *De Rerum Natura* because the

philosophy does not lend itself to epic poetry, but instead to minimalism. Same for Virgil and the *Aeneid*; Aeneas's wanderings are carefully crafted in dactylic hexameter, but there is no true reflection of the themes within the structure of the text. Ovid has seized the opportunity: the *Metamorphoses* is about transformation, and thus the structure itself changes. The two main aspects of the *Metamorphoses* existed well before Ovid – Pythagoras's and Empedocles's philosophies predate Ovid by hundreds of years, and Greek/Roman mythology had been cataloged and compiled in several previous texts without a special structure (including, later, by Ovid himself in the *Fasti*). However, Ovid melds the known philosophy and mythology in a new fashion, and it is poetry that is the medium for this change. Nearly every episode in the text is dual change – first, the physical reshaping of the character, but then a literary transformation as the narrative moves to the next scene. Readers may find Pythagoras's philosophy of change explicitly in Book XV, but actual transformations occur in almost every line of the text.

In a way, this incorporation of structure with content is Ovid's greatest achievement and this is the lasting impact that the *Metamorphoses* has had on literature. While other poetry is certainly more lyrical (Homer) or perhaps more serene in its use of language (as Brodsky argues with Horace), Ovid is the first of the meta poets, creating a work that goes beyond the limits of language and even incorporates himself into the system of change. All of the works examined in this thesis show this as the greatest influence of Ovid throughout the ages. Dante goes as far as to make himself the protagonist in his work (along with his teleological re-working of the *Metamorphoses*), which is the logical next step after Ovid's inclusion of himself as a transformed subject at the beginning and ending of his poem; Milton operates similarly, with the creation of

human sin appearing in Eden before history itself. Shakespeare takes this meta-sense even further by forcing his audience to question the level of realities in the play by having them watch three different levels of audiences who are watching Pyramus and Thisbe (which itself is a parody of the original Ovidian episodes). And, of course, the twentieth century works examined are ripe with this recognition that the audience, reader, or author is not necessarily separate from the text, be it Brodsky reaching out to Horace in a dream so he can talk about Ovid or Rilke's sonnets to the cosmic cycle that incorporate us all.

The *Metamorphoses* is its own universe. It creates its rules for transformations and then contains them within the poem, with Ovid standing as the gateway at the beginning and end for “our” reality. However, as Empedocles and Pythagoras show, nothing truly stands independent in any universe. Just as important, the thoughts of these two philosophers (and their envoy in poetry) remain omnipresent in the Western mindset because they transcend the minutia of history or religion, and instead attempt to understand the role of each individual thing in the context of the whole. Thus, the universe of the *Metamorphoses* and its corresponding philosophy continues to bleed into literature to this day because that is the nature of all things, be they human, god, plant, rock, or poem: incessant transformations.

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