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Aspects of Love

Some critics have argued that love is the real theme of Ovid's great poem, and there can be no doubt that what Brooks Otis (1970) called "the pathos of love" is the heart of the central section of *Metamorphoses*, from the Tereus episode in book 6 to the end of book 11. By the end of book 6, however, the poet has only added one particularly cruel human counterpart to the earlier divine rapes. With the story of Medea that opens book 7, Ovid introduces his first love-struck girl and uses her confused response to this new emotion as a model for what will be a series of women in love. But by referring to "the story of Medea" I am begging the question. This seventh book follows Jason and the other Greek heroes to barbaric Colchis in his quest for the golden fleece, which is the talisman ensuring the prosperity of King Aeetes' land. In Colchis, Aeetes sets Jason the terrible tasks of yoking fire-breathing bulls to plow the earth with dragon's teeth. All this was familiar to Ovid's readers: they would know from Apollonius's *Voyage of the Argonauts*, or its Latin adaptation by Varro of Atax, how Jason succeeded with the help of Aeetes' young daughter, so smitten with love that she fled with the Greek stranger and even murdered her brother on the dangerous return voyage to Greece. They would be even more familiar with the tragic outcome of this adventure, in the version first shaped by Euripides. In this tragedy Jason abandoned Medea to marry a Greek princess. Threatened with exile, Medea destroyed the bride and killed both their sons, expressing in an extended soliloquy the torment of this decision. Euripides' play was closely adapted by Ennius early in the second century, and Ovid himself had composed both a dramatized monologue in the form of a letter to Jason (*Heroides* [Letters from heroines] 12) and a tragedy about Medea's terrible vengeance.

The Medea who falls in love with Jason in *Metamorphoses* 7 is altogether different: for her Ovid composes a soliloquy of sixty lines to reflect the struggle between reason and passion in her heart. She does not understand her emotional confusion; can this be what is called loving? Why is she so anxious for the handsome stranger? "My reason urges me one way, my desire another; I see the better course of action, but I am following the worse" (7.20–21). Her love for this stranger is unauthorized and entails a betrayal of her country. To this extent, Medea foreshadows the unlawful passions of Scylla, who kills her own father to win the love of Minos, her country's enemy; of Byblis, who suffers an impossible desire for her brother; and of Myrrha, who actually has a child by her own father. Much of Medea's stream of consciousness is peculiar to her situation. First is Jason's immediate ordeal—how can she watch him die? Ovid follows her daydreaming vision of binding him to marry her and take her to Greece, where she will be glorified by the married women as savior of the Greek heroes, and lets her speculate about the famous hazards of the clashing rocks that will beset their journey.

Even though Ovid's narrative will concentrate on Medea's exercise of magic to save Jason's father and destroy his enemy Pelias, readers of this first monologue will feel the dramatic irony generated between her expectations and the future tragedy. But what this monologue has in common with its successors is the Euripidean battle of conflicting purposes, as the imagined future triggers a renewal of wishful thinking and desire. Repeatedly, the voice of reason addresses Medea in the second person (17–8, 21–4, 69–71), and the narrative reports that duty and chastity have triumphed—until

she happens to meet Jason alone in the precinct of Hecate. Then love takes control and duty is forgotten.

Perhaps the variety of both love itself and Ovid's narrative presentation are best illustrated by the story of Orpheus and the lays which Orpheus himself tells in book 10. Orpheus, originally the model poet and singer, had become the model of a tragic lover in Virgil's rewriting of his journey to the underworld. Before Virgil the myth had celebrated his successful recovery of his bride. But the fame of Virgil's account in the fourth *Georgic* both imposed the same tragic outcome on the loving couple and challenged Ovid to offer a different emotional tonality. So the relatively short narrative that opens *Metamorphoses* 10 imports an element of calculation into his journey "after he had lamented Eurydice enough to the upper air" and into his rhetorically plausible appeal to the rulers of Hades: even Orpheus's prolonged mourning, first outside the gates of Hades, then after he had fasted for a week on the slopes of Rhodope, is somehow discolored by his concern first with rejecting female suitors, then with recommending the love of boys as more satisfying because of their freshness in the springtime of life before manhood sets in (10.72–80).

Tragic Tales of Divine Love for Boys

These details are purposeful, and the entire construction of this book is ingenious. As Orpheus sings on the mountain he needs shade, and a forest of trees comes to screen him from the sun. He has just suffered a double bereavement: the tragic accident of his bride's death by snake bite and the second loss of Eurydice in Hades, which is his own fault. Although Orpheus will announce a formal program of singing about the love of gods for boys, before he tunes his lyre Ovid himself narrates one tale of a boy beloved by Apollo. The grief of Apollo's beloved Cyparissus after he has accidentally struck his pet stag is one of three tales of tragic accident reported in book 10, but the other two accidental deaths are part of Orpheus's double program, for he also announces a second theme, the unlawful loves of human girls. Orpheus's stories of Venus's rewards to those who love well also relate her punishments for abusing love, as in the tale that Orpheus composes for Venus to justify first her reward, then her punishment, of Atalanta and her lover, Hippomenes. The scale of the different tales increases from the short narratives of the first phase (up to the happy marriage that rewards Pygmalion and his statue-girl) to the extended miniature epic of Myrrha (10.298–502) and to the last lay, in which the tragic death of Venus's beloved Adonis is expanded by Venus's complex cautionary tale.

If we compare the apparently similar tragedy of Apollo's beloved Cyparissus, told by Ovid, with Orpheus's telling of the death of Hyacinthus, Apollo's other beloved boy, it is clear how the poet has exploited the similarities and differences between these two tales. The Cyparissus tale is offered to explain the origin of the cypress tree and mentions the love of the lyre-playing Apollo chiefly as a preliminary to the sad tale of Cyparissus's pet: the boy's devotion to his tame stag (modeled on the pet stag of Silvia mistakenly killed in *Aeneid* 7) parallels the god's love for the boy. It is the boy who accidentally wounds his own pet, and the god is affected only because the grieving boy asks the gods to let him mourn forever: as he mourns his hair grows shaggy, his limbs grow rough with bark, and his arms become outstretched branches. Grieving in his turn, the god has conferred on his beloved the honor of becoming the tree of mourning that comforts the bereaved.

Within Orpheus's song sequence, the untroubled love of Jupiter for Ganymede, raised to the skies to become divine cupbearer (10.155–61), precedes Apollo's second loss. (Orpheus has returned the theme to the loves of gods, and Venus will follow.) Orpheus begins by addressing Hyacinthus in his new form as flower. "Whenever spring drives off winter . . . you grow with your flowers from the green turf. It is you whom my father loved above all others; for you, Delphi at the earth's center lacked its presiding god while Apollo stayed by the Eurotas and unwalled Sparta. He paid no honor to his lyre nor his archery" (10.164–70). Then he returns to

narrative: the boy was tragically killed while running to catch the discus thrown by the god. After desperately trying to bring him back to life, Apollo uttered the lament that Orpheus reproduces, ending with the promise that a new flower would imitate in writing his cries of grief, which would gain a second meaning in honoring a hero. Here the poet cleverly alludes to the letters AIAI, supposedly inscribed on the hyacinth's petals, and to the death of Ajax (AIAS), which Ovid will narrate in book 13. To Apollo's memorial flower Ovid adds the commemoration of the Spartans in an annual festival, the Hyacinthia, which "endure[s] to this very age" (10.217–8). We might compare this brief reminder of Ovid's own time with the less specific promise of Venus to dead Adonis that "the memory of my grief for you will persist for ever. Each year the representation of your death will reenact my mourning." Both stories are *aitia* (tales of origin), which gain solemnity from the continued rituals of commemoration.

The Wicked Passion of Girls

Two short tales of how Venus punished human evil link the guest-slaying Cerastae with the more relevant Propoetides, women who abused their beauty or shape (the key word *forma* becomes more prominent in these tales) in prostitution and were turned to stone. It was supposedly loathing of such women that led Pygmalion (in a counterpart of Orpheus's own loathing) to create his ideal woman of ivory and earn from Venus the reward of her animation into a live woman and the happy man's wife.

At this point the poet has to negotiate a violent change of mood from good love to its evil form, from innocent happiness to the deepest guilt. It takes a complex second proem to prepare the tone for the dreadful tale of Myrrha, the daughter of Pygmalion's grandson Cinyras. Orpheus opens in the tones of a priest and prophet, first with an oracular utterance "Cinyras could have been thought happy, if he had never had a daughter," then a solemn warning to daughters and fathers to shun his tale, but he undercuts his ban by adding that if they must hear it, they should not believe it ever happened or, failing that, believe that it was punished (10.298–303). This is one of those terrible tales that happen in foreign parts, and Orpheus congratulates the land of Thrace (where he himself will shortly be lynched by maenads) for being far from the spice-bearing lands where that tree, the myrrh bush, grows. We are, then, about to read the origin of another tree.

From myrrh Ovid cuts to Myrrha, whose passion can only have been induced by a Fury; Cupid denies all responsibility. This girl had many suitors but loved only one man—the worst of choices. After twenty lines, Orpheus has still not named her sinful passion. But Ovid and his readers knew the story from the celebrated miniature epic of Catullus's friend Cinna; its title was *Zmyrna*, another form of Myrrha's name. Orpheus leads from the girl's agonized soliloquy (10.320–55) to her conviction that her desire is inspired by the Furies and her decision to hang herself. But she is interrupted by her faithful nurse, from whom she tries in vain to conceal her incestuous love. For their dialogue and the nurse's wicked undertaking to arrange an assignation in disguise, Ovid has borrowed from the notorious scene in Euripides' *Hippolytus* in which Phaedra's nurse propositions her chaste stepson and destroys Phaedra's honor. Another premonitory sequence shows the moon and stars leaving the darkened sky in revulsion as the disguised girl is taken to her father's bed (446–64) and conceives from this first incestuous union. But as with the lustful Tereus, once is not enough, and she returns again and again until Cinyras finds a light and discovers the identity of his bedmate. He draws his sword to kill her but she escapes and wanders distraught in the wilderness, begging the gods to let her die in such a way that she will pollute neither the living nor the dead. Only metamorphosis can resolve this dilemma, and Myrrha feels her legs covered in earth and her feet taking root. Her torso becomes a long trunk in which the blood turns to sap, and her arms become branches. As the tree engulfs her growing womb, she buries her face in its bark, welcoming transformation—the very opposite

of the feelings of poor Dryope (see ch. 5). Myrrha has lost human perceptions but her tears ooze from the bark and are honored by men with the girl's own name.

This is a harrowing tale, but the baby is still unborn. Always insisting on the new identity of the tree (10.495, 500, 505, 509, 512), Orpheus tells how it had no voice to cry out in labor pain to Lucina, but Lucina (in contrast with her appalling treatment of Alcmene) gently reaches out to the laboring tree and utters the words that induce birth. The tree splits and drops its burden on the ground: the baby wails healthily and becomes a beautiful child whom even Envy would praise, as lovely as naked Cupid himself.

Once again the key word *forma* (529) stresses the beauty of this growing adolescent as he approaches manhood, growing most handsome (*formosissimus* 522), even more handsome than himself (*se formosior ipso*), that is, than he was already. The transition converts the child born of a girl's unlawful love into the boy beloved of a god (the first category in Orpheus's program), but this time it is a female god, Venus herself, accidentally grazed by Cupid's erotogenic arrows as he kissed his mother.

Venus and Adonis

Orpheus describes Adonis (or Tammuz) as a man, but Venus's relationship with him is more like that of a mother, and his behavior that of a rash boy. In the last lay of book 10, Venus and Adonis hunt small game together and she begs him not to hunt dangerous beasts like lions or boars for fear that they will kill him. Since Adonis was killed by a boar, Ovid's readers may well have wondered at Venus's allusion to the anger and power of lions and her own hatred of the species. It is the cue for a story. Leading Adonis over to a pleasant shade, Venus lies with her head in his lap, interrupting her story to kiss the boy. The atmosphere has become quite cloying, but Orpheus's language betrays no emotional reaction to the goddess or her tale.

It begins with the girl athlete Atalanta, who could outrun all men. She had once consulted a god (unnamed) and been given the sinister oracle: "shun marriage; but you will not escape it and will be deprived of your identity while you still live" (10.566–7). So she devises a footrace to eliminate her suitors. If they want to marry her, they must outrun her; but if she wins, they must die. The hunter Hippomenes deplores the risk, but as he watches the contest and sees her face and body stripped for speed, he is overwhelmed with love. Venus narrates in character, dwelling lovingly on the power of Atalanta's beauty (*forma* again) to compel suitors, and her glorious body, "like mine, or even yours, if you became a woman" (579). Now Hippomenes risks his life by challenging her, and she in turn becomes enamored of the handsome athlete and devotes a soliloquy to him (10.611–35): "what god hates the handsome [*formosis*] and wants to destroy this man, forcing him to risk his life for marriage with me? I am not worth it" (a phrase Marsyas has already used for his discovery of the flute [6.386] and Orpheus for myrrh [10.310]). In her innocence, Atalanta, like young Medea, loves and does not realize this feeling is love (10.687). When Hippomenes turns to Venus for help, she provides him with three magic apples from a special sacred tree in Cyprus, to help him distract and overtake Atalanta. Since the myth of their race was familiar, Ovid/Orpheus gives Venus the expertise of a running commentator—but one who herself intervenes, forcing Atalanta to stoop for the last apple.

But this is a tale of ingratitude: Venus had rewarded Hippomenes' devotion before the race but now he did not even present to her a minimal offering of incense. The goddess describes her anger and its effect on the lovers, who in their mutual lust enter the shrine of Cybele and pollute it with intercourse. Cybele's image turns its gaze away and the mother goddess, after considering plunging them into the underworld, decides it is too small a penalty. She turns them into lions, which roar with anger, terrifying other animals, but are subjected to the yoke and pull her chariot (19.695–707).

Venus has demonstrated the consequences of disregarding her godhead; now she comes to the moral of her story, to warn Adonis

against provoking big game. But it is useless. As soon as she has mounted her chariot and departed, he provokes a fatal hunting accident. He hurls his javelin at a wild boar, which is enraged by the glancing wound and gashes his thigh. As he groans in dying pain, Venus hears and returns, consoling him with the promise of perpetual imitation of her mourning. This was the festival of Adonia, celebrated with women's laments over the Mediterranean world and a more famous counterpart to the Hyacinthia, the mention of which ended Orpheus's group of boy deaths. To prepare for his metamorphosis, Venus invokes the precedent of Persephone, who turned her attendants into the mint plant to vindicate her right to transform Cinyras's heroic descendant. (Ovid/Orpheus is reminding his public of the connection between the middle and the final lay.) As she sprinkles Adonis's blood with nectar, a scarlet anemone springs up; but it is short-lived and shattered by the same winds from which it takes its name. This "dying fall" brings together both the short lives of these rash boys and the cult practice of planting shallow gardens of quick-growing flowers for the Adonia, which bloomed and died in a few days. Orpheus does not impose his own closure to this epilogue but falls silent. The next book will bring his death at the hands of the women he has rejected. Does Ovid consider it as his punishment for denouncing heterosexual love? Wisely he avoids any hint of moralizing over the poet's tragic end.

The Sorrows and Consolations of Mutual Married Love

After Orpheus's savage fate, the tone of book 11 soon changes: more than half of the narrative is occupied by the love story of Ceyx and Alcyone. So now let us consider Ovid's stories of true married love. The simple piety of Deucalion and Pyrrha is reproduced in affectionate detail in book 8, and then another narrator, Lelex, describes the hospitality shown by the old couple Baucis and Philemon toward the disguised Jupiter and Mercury. Asked by the grateful gods to name their wish, Philemon asks only that they may

live and die together: "Grant that the selfsame hour may take us both, / That I my consort's tomb may never see, / Nor may it fall to her to bury me" (8.709–10). This wish is fulfilled when, after serving the new shrine of the gods, they are ready for death and are transformed into two trees growing from a common trunk (8.720).

Such union in death and transfiguration is denied to the tormented love of Cephalus and Procris but will be the consummation of the tragedy of Ceyx and Alcyone. Each story helps to cast light on the distinctive qualities of the other.

It is Cephalus himself who narrates the tragedy of his marriage, an aging Cephalus who has come as envoy from Athens to ask the help of Aeacus and his sons against the threatened attack of Minos, king of Crete. Aeacus agrees and sends Telamon and Peleus to organize his supporting force, leaving his youngest son, Phocus (Ovid will report his murder incidentally in 11.267), to entertain his guest. When Phocus asks Cephalus about the curious hunting spear that he is carrying, one of his companions confirms that it has magical powers, homing in on whatever the hunter aims at and returning after it has hit its prey. But Cephalus himself is pained by the question, which recalls the tragic loss of his wife. He answers with a flood of memories, but, as Ovid indicates, he is both revealing and suppressing the truth of his marriage. He declares bitterly that the hunting spear destroyed him as it did his wife. But although he stresses his love for Procris throughout his narrative (7.690–862), theirs was a troubled and jealous relationship. Only a month after their wedding, while out hunting alone, he was seized by the dawn goddess, Aurora, who kept him against his will until she was persuaded by his longing for Procris to let him go. But he acted on her suggestion and returned home in disguise, to test his wife's fidelity. Finding her faithful and grieving for her lost husband, the false suitor persisted until she yielded, and then revealed himself, covering her with reproaches. In anger Procris left him and sought isolation from men in the mountains, hunting with Diana. Only when Cephalus begged her to forgive him did she return to him, and the hunting spear (a gift from Diana) was the gift of Procris to him on their reconciliation, along with a marvelous hound that always caught its

prey. (Mention of the hound leads Cephalus to digress, explaining how he had used the hound to track a fierce fox that was ravaging Thebes. Since the fox was supernaturally immune to being caught, the gods had resolved the logical dilemma of this chase by turning both hound and prey to stone.)

Phocus persists (794–5): how did the hunting spear cause Cephalus so much grief? It seems Cephalus had learnt nothing from his early experiences and, despite his great happiness with Procris, persisted in going out alone to hunt. As he explains it, he loved to enjoy the breezes when he rested after his exertions and would call on Aura (Breeze) to enfold him and bring him repose. A meddlesome informer told Procris that her husband was engaging in a liaison, and she was tormented into suspicion. To paraphrase Cephalus's account, "when the next light of Dawn [*aurora*] drove away the night, I went out to hunt and Procris followed me into the wild, and as I called, as usual, for Aura to refresh me, Procris rushed out of the thickets. I thought it was a game animal, and discharged my unerring spear, which gave her a fatal wound. But her cries showed me my terrible mistake." He rushed to bind her wound and cradled her in his arms, and quotes her last words: "by the bonds of our marriage, and by the gods . . . by whatever I did for you, and our enduring love which caused my death, do not accept Aura into our bed" (7.852–6). It was small comfort that he was able to convince her of his love before she breathed her last.

This complicated tale of misadventures is in fact less complex than the Greek myths associated with Cephalus and Procris, which Ovid had refined. Ovid's Procris is innocent of yielding to persistent seduction in her husband's absence. Indeed, Ovid's first version of her story was introduced in the third book of the *Art of Love* in order to warn women against unwarranted suspicion of their lovers, using her accidental death as an example. But Nicander and other Greek writers recorded further infidelities and jealousies on both sides. In one version, Cephalus had stayed away from his bride for eight years to test her, before returning in disguise at the malicious suggestion of Aurora. In another, Procris had fled to King Minos of Crete, become his mistress, and cured him of a loathsome sexual

disease, in return for which Minos, not Diana, gave her the magic spear. She then disguised herself as a young man, made friends with Cephalus, and offered him the spear in return for allowing homosexual penetration. (Since Cephalus has the spear, we must assume he consented.) There are traces of a shameful origin to the spear at line 587 when Ovid introduces Cephalus's speech—"he keeps silent on the price he paid for it"—but the line has been suspected by scrupulous editors. Instead, it seems Ovid has inscribed Cephalus's infidelity through the punning affinity between Aurora and Aura (impossible in Greek) and even the conventional epic use of Aurora's name quoted above ("next light of dawn"). Yet no one can deny Cephalus's belief that he loved Procris, reiterated eight times during his embarrassed tale.

In comparison, the mutual love of Ceyx and Alcyone is as innocent as it is intense. This is the achievement of Ovid himself, who eliminated a less sympathetic Greek narrative in which the gods drowned Ceyx to punish him and his wife, either for calling themselves Zeus and Hera or for boasting that they were the equals of the divine couple. Not only did Ovid eliminate any blame from their story, but he enriched it with a wealth of grandiose natural phenomena, new elements of the marvelous, and speeches that expressed the loving woman's perspective. But Ovid has also taken pains to link the two stories of married love. He introduces Ceyx, king of Trachis, when Peleus comes to him for purification after killing his brother Phocus (11.267–70; cf. 7.669–71) and prefaces Alcyone's first appearance with another episode of a supernatural predator, a wolf destroying Peleus's cattle (11.379–84). As Ceyx is preparing to join a punitive expedition, Alcyone rushes in begging him not to go but stay and, by saving his own life, save hers also. This is the highly emotional language of Roman elegy and prepares the readers for renewed anguish.

This is a false alarm: Ceyx reassures her (11.389–92) that he will not join the wolf hunt because he must supplicate Thetis, whom Peleus has offended. And Thetis responds, turning the wolf, like the Theban fox of Cephalus's tale, into marble. But unfortunately, the pious Ceyx is still troubled by another family sorrow, the metamor-

phosis of his angry brother Daedalion (11.290–345), and tells his wife that he must sail to Claros in Asia Minor to consult Apollo. Ovid stresses this moment by writing from Alcyone's viewpoint, sharing her terrors as she grows pale and weeps, almost unable to protest at the risk to her husband. She dreads the wanton violence of the winds, whom her father, Aeolus, can barely control, and begs Ceyx, if he must sail, to let her go with him: "Together what may come we both shall bear, / Together on the wide seas we shall fare" (11.441–2, tr. Melville). He promises to return, and she follows his ship as he sets out, collapsing when she can no longer see it.

Inevitably, the ship is destroyed by a powerful storm, which Ovid describes in virtuoso detail, and Ceyx is drowned, murmuring "Alcyone" until the wild waters overwhelm him. (In fact, Ovid deliberately uses the phrase "Alcyone is on his lips" [11.544] to recall Cephalus's protestation that he kept Procris ever on his lips [7.708].) All this time Alcyone prays constantly to Juno for her husband's safe return, but once he is drowned Juno finds the prayers intolerable and sends Iris to ask the god of sleep to send Alcyone a dream in the form of Ceyx to reveal his death to her. (We shall return to Sleep and the world of dreams in ch. 8.) The dream impersonator Morpheus appears to the sleeping Alcyone, swearing he is Ceyx and asking her to give him ritual lament so that he will not go to Hades unmourned.

There are many ancient poems mourning those drowned at sea; the worst aspect of such a death was the loss of the body, which deprived the corpse of burial and the mourners of completing their ritual. As the deceptive dream-ghost prepares to depart, Alcyone begs him, as she had done when Ceyx departed, to stay or let her come with him (676). Convinced she has seen her drowned husband, she rushes at dawn to the pier where she last saw Ceyx. There she sees a body being carried on the water, which is gradually revealed as Ceyx, and she cries out, evoking his last promise. "Is this how you return to me, my dear and pitiable beloved?" This is when the miracle occurs. As she leaps from the pier, hoping to die near him, Alcyone begins to fly, crying out piteously, and she reaches and embraces the chill body. Yet onlookers believe the dead Ceyx felt her kisses. The gods take pity (this is the third time in this love story that Ovid has invoked the concept of pity) and Ceyx too is transformed into a halcyon bird. The pair cherish their love together and reproduce, hatching their young on miraculously calm seas each winter while Alcyone's father, Aeolus, restrains the winds from rampaging in storm.

Ovid has found many ways of steeping this miniature epic in emotion: Ceyx himself is both devout and troubled by grief for his brother Daedalion; Alcyone, from beginning to end, is moved only by anxious love for her husband. The poet repeatedly puts expressions of devotion and then grief into her mouth so that his audience must share her emotions: neither the terrible storm and shipwreck in the central part of the narrative nor the mysterious house of Sleep and his specialized dreams allow the readers to forget husband and wife. As with the innocent Baucis and Philemon, transformation is salvation, guaranteeing continued union, but instead of inanimate trees, these lovers are sentient and reproductive birds, protected by the very elements that destroyed the human Ceyx. Cephalus's strange tale of jealousy and intrigue found no better resolution than his reassurance to his dying wife of his lasting love. We may feel that he did not deserve the release of sharing her death. Certainly, Ovid shows by his treatment of these stories of married love (and we might add the love of Cadmus and Harmonia, 4.583–603) that he could see no happier end than a shared transformation from human consciousness. There is no clearer proof that in its idealized form metamorphosis was seen as escape from both life and death.

Further Reading

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Heroes—Old Style and New

The Earliest Greek Heroes

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* derives much of its vitality from the poet's sheer delight in adventure, and many of the most colorful tales are of the old pre-Homeric heroes, who were sent on missions or wandered the Greek world when it was still underpopulated, confronting monsters and ridding local communities of brigands and pests. We have already met the dragon that consumed Cadmus's men when he came to Boeotia to found the city of Thebes, and the heroes of Ovid's poem hunt down and exterminate other, more conventional pests, such as the fox that Cephalus hunted for the Boeotians, the wolf that preyed on Peleus's flocks in Thessaly, and most memorably the boar sent by Diana to ravage Calydon, which is hunted by all the brightest and best young warriors of Greece.

While the term "hero" properly meant the son of a god and a mortal, not all heroes had a divine parent. Of the classic adventurers Ovid gives varying degrees of attention to four heroes: Perseus, son of Jupiter and Danae; Theseus, son of Neptune and Aethra; Jason, son of mortal parents; and Hercules (Greek Herakles), son of Jupiter and Alcmene. But while Greek and Roman audiences may

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

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