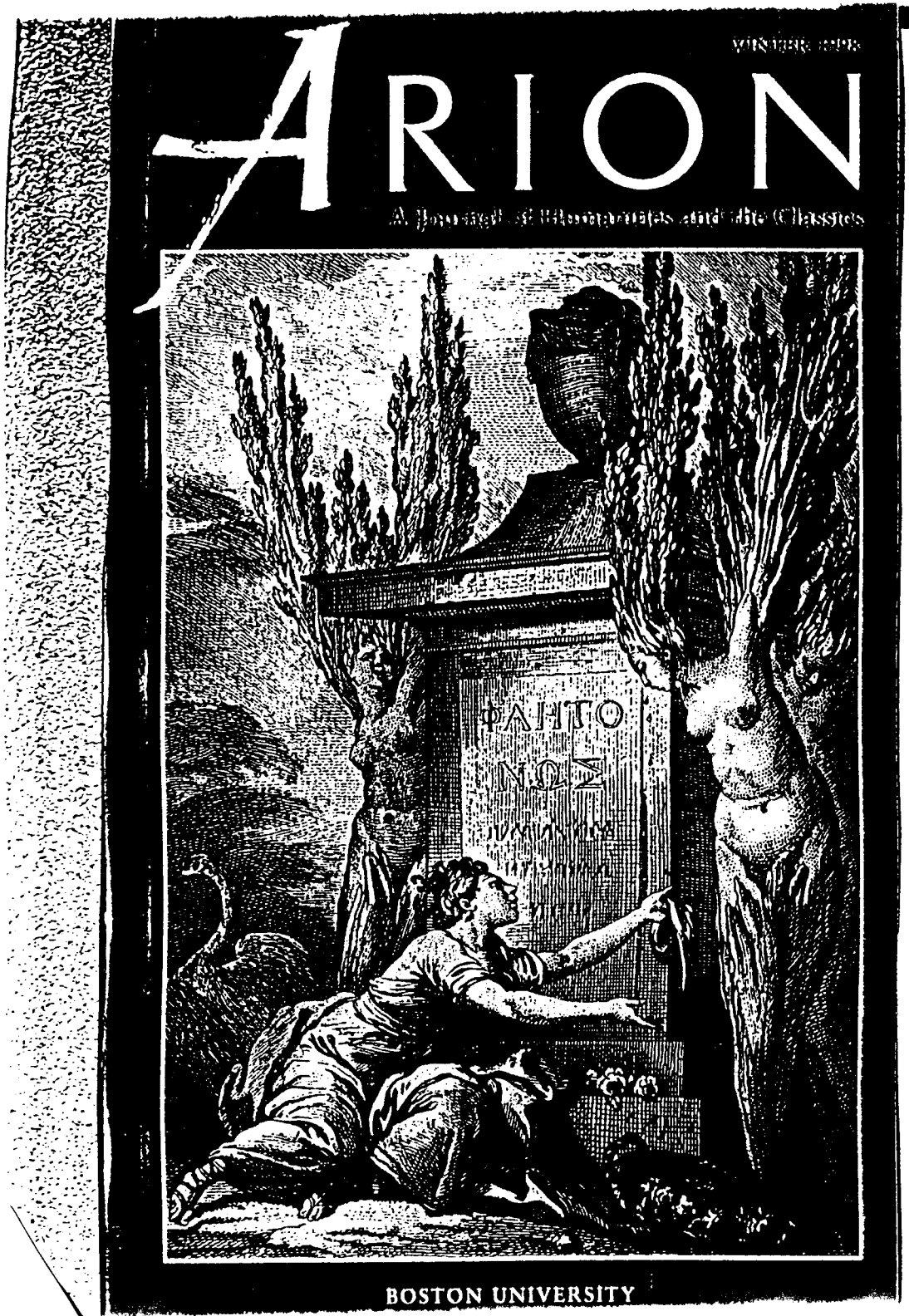

Ovid's Metamorphic Bodies: Art, Gender, and Violence in the *Metamorphoses*

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Current literary criticism has been much concerned with the ways in which the construction of identity—that is, definitions of the self and the person, of gender, and of the individual's roles and functions in society—depends on basic conceptions of the body. Serious study of this subject for classical literature begins with Lessing's *Laocoön* (1766), but it has received fresh impetus from the work of Michel Foucault, with his insights into the representation of the body as part of a cultural discourse, with its implicit hierarchies and ideological constructions.[1] It is peculiar that the *Metamorphoses*, a poem whose main subject, in one sense, is the body, has not played as significant a role in this discussion as it should. There are two antithetical but complementary reasons for this neglect: a tendency to dismiss the poem as frivolous parody and a tendency to limit its discussions of the body too narrowly to sexuality. The poem, as we shall see, uses the body as its focus for its view of the human condition, of art, and of male and female identity. Particularly when read alongside Lucretius, Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, and Seneca, the *Metamorphoses* is revealing for the ways in which the materiality of the body becomes the focus for the conflict between the potential disorder of the material world on the one hand and the drive for order and transcendence on the other. In addition, recent work on the body in Roman society and art, including the role of violence, the gladiatorial games, and corporal punishment in a slave-holding society, have opened new and not altogether pleasant perspectives on the *Metamorphoses*, and indeed on Roman Imperial culture as a whole.[2]

Given the *Metamorphoses*' brilliant style and coruscating narrative virtuosity, scholarship has concentrated, not unreasonably, on literary form rather than conceptual issues: Ovid's problematical relation to heroic epic, the elusive structure and design of his kaleidoscopic poem, his use of allusion, wit and irony, his intertextuality, his combination of different genres, and his "remythologizing" of Lucretius and Virgil.[3] Alongside this formalistic

approach, there has been renewed interest in Ovid's view of art and the artist, his conception of the gods, and the problem of violence, especially sexual violence.[4] A perceptive critic (not a professional classicist) has described Ovid as a "poetical anthropologist";[5] and this essay, broadly speaking, is about Ovid's "anthropology" and psychology in both its literary and cultural context. My approach may be situated, in part, in a continental tradition, concerned with Ovid's vision of the human condition and his implicit definition(s) of identity.[6] Any study of the *Metamorphoses*, however, must avoid separating form from content and so must attend to Ovid's wonderfully elegant surface.

Like his great predecessor in Roman didactic epic, Lucretius, Ovid views the body as vulnerable, penetrable, and porous. But whereas Lucretius' materialist philosophy seeks escape from anxiety about the body, the *Metamorphoses* exults in the body's seemingly endless subjection to physical change and continually finds new metaphors and situations that intensify rather than allay anxiety. Lucan will go far beyond Ovid in the dissolution of corporeal boundaries; his overheated rhetorical fantasy reflects a world on the edge of total chaos, held in check precariously by the courage and will of the Stoic hero, whose own existence, however, has no certain extension beyond his doomed body.[7] Ovid's metamorphic world, for all its strangeness, retains a sense of coherence and control that begin to dissolve in Lucan and Seneca. Yet in some essential respects he challenges one of the pillars of the classical epic tradition, that is, the classical definition of human nature, which, from Homer through Plato and Aristotle, is founded on the antithesis of human and bestial. In place of this view of a stable human nature, Ovid presents a world where the boundaries between humans and animals are dangerously fluid. Sometimes this fluidity produces pathos, as in the case of Io turned into a cow by an embarrassed Jupiter caught *in flagrante delicto*. Sometimes there is a grotesque humor, as in the case of Europa, seduced by a handsome bull (Jupiter in disguise), who allows himself to be patted and kissed (2.866–69). Sometimes there is a Kafkaesque nightmare of a human mind trapped inside an animal or a monstrous body, as in the case of Callisto turned into a bear or Actaeon torn apart by his own hounds. These last two episodes touch on some of the most significant themes in Ovid's depiction of the body, its representation of a world in which reason and order decompose into frightening confusion and chaos.

Thoughout Western literature the body recurs as an expression of just this kind of anti-order. From Aristophanes to Bosch, from Rabelais to Swift, from Kafka to Fellini's *Satyricon*, writers and other artists have used the grotesque physicality of the body to comment on the darker, less organized, perhaps more primordial or infantile visions of the self and the human condition. Indeed, Jacques Lacan theorizes an early stage of human development in which the infant struggles to make sense of himself corporeally and so perceives himself as a *corps morcelé*, or "body in pieces."[8]

Ovid's poem, one could say, creates a kind of Bakhtinian carnival world in which the metamorphic body occupies a precarious place between creative exuberance and terrifying disorientation.[9] Bakhtin describes this carnival world as "a temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men and of certain norms and prohibitions of usual life" (15). This freedom from restraints has a positive side in the development of new types of communication and new energies in language that create "new forms of speech or a new meaning given to old forms" (16).

Although Bakhtin's primary concern is the high Renaissance, he traces the carnivalesque spirit back to classical antiquity, to the Menippean satire of the Hellenistic period (preserved and transmitted largely through the work of Lucian in the second century A.D.), and to the Roman festival of the Saturnalia (6ff., 69ff.). In Roman literature he notes strong carnivalesque tendencies in Petronius, Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, and Apuleius, to which I would add, following Alessandro Barchiesi, parts of Ovid's *Fasti*.[10] On the Roman Saturnalia Bakhtin remarks,

> While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time, life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants. It was most clearly expressed and experienced in the Roman Saturnalias, perceived as a true and full, though temporary, return of Saturn's golden age upon earth. (6–7)

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* creates an analogous freedom, releasing the creative energy in which new forms are continually coming into being and normal limits are suspended. Human and bestial,

animate and inanimate, male and female can flow into one another. As in Bakhtin's carnivalesque world, this suspension of the laws of life and matter can produce a golden age or a nightmare, miracle or monster.

Bakhtin's grotesque body, that is, the body in the culture of the carnivalesque, is characterized by fluidity rather than sharp, impermeable boundaries, by a blurring of the division between inner and outer, by porosity or leakiness rather than contained and defined units. To quote once more, "[. . .] the grotesque ignores the impenetrable surface that closes and limits the body as a separate and completed phenomenon. The grotesque image displays not only the outward but also the inner features of the body: blood, bowels, heart and other organs. The outward and inward features are often merged into one" (318). Bakhtin's remarks fit Lucan even better than Ovid, but the *Metamorphoses* too depicts the body through its detached parts rather than the whole, through distorted or exaggerated organs, and physical processes. By choosing metamorphosis as his theme, Ovid focuses on the moments when stable forms and familiar norms dissolve in order to tap creative, if necessarily disorderly, energies that are usually kept beneath the surface, under the control of political, social, and symbolic systems that insist on coherence and order.

In one important respect, however, Ovid operates with an underlying assumption of classical Greek poetry, namely that there is a correspondence between our physical and our emotional or spiritual life and that the art of language, and indirectly of the visual arts, has the power of making visible the invisible movements of soul. The pervading trope of the *Metamorphoses* rests on the premise that its world of myth and art can convert into physical form some underlying quality of mind, character, or emotion, whether these are a lasting feature of personality or a transient mood or emotion. It is a corollary of this premise that through this mechanism of physical convertibility the poet can reveal the hidden essence of a personality—its needs, longings, passions, fears—in a form that is closely tied to the physicality of the body.

Classical antiquity contains many discourses about the body, from the Homeric battle scenes on to the medical writers of late antiquity. The literary conventions of hexameter poetry permit spectacular physical details, especially in the case of love and war; but there is a certain inhibition about more trivial physical matters, unless one is writing satire. Horace is one of the few classical

Latin poets to mention the nuisance of the common cold. Lucretius too is an exception, in part because he is expounding a scientific theory that attempts to account for all of the physical processes in the universe, from microcosm to macrocosm. Hence he can describe small corporeal details like the sensation of cold on the teeth.

In the grander reaches of the poetic tradition stand Homer's depiction of the body's physical suffering in war in the *Iliad*, the disguising and clothing of the body in the *Odyssey*, Sophocles' dramatization of the body in pain in *Philoctetes*, or Lucretius' profound and disturbing meditations on the physicality of the body in its relation to death and the anxieties surrounding death that derive from our sense of the vulnerability of human flesh. Virgil had achieved a brilliant Roman synthesis of Greek poetry's language of the passions expressed in physical or physiological terms: the seething of the blood in anger or love, fire running through the veins or bones, a wound of longing fixed deep in the breast, desire devouring the inmost marrows. He also borrowed and emulated (in the full sense of the term) the Homeric battle scenes, with their gory woundings and mutilations. Ovid draws on all these traditions and brings them together in surprising ways and—being Ovid—also in irreverent ways.

In Latin poetry, as in Greek, such descriptions of the body easily become part of a discourse of mortality, infused by a generalized compassion for the human condition, of which the specific suffering is exemplary. To speak of the body in classical literature is to speak of mortality. The body is the constant reminder of our creatureliness, our kinship with other living, and dying beings, and so our distance from the undying gods, who, in Ovid's highly anthropomorphic world, have physical bodies with the needs, desires, and satisfactions of our bodies, but with limitless power and without death or decay. To contemplate the body is to become aware of our pitiful mortal condition as much as to feel interest in individual personal lives. Thus in the *Iliad*, although the dead and wounded number in the hundreds, the deaths of individuals remain moving because they are paradigms of mortal suffering and loss; and the poem pauses to reflect on them with a combination of distance and broad compassion that belongs to the wide, omniscient perspective of this narratorial voice. The manner of the death is itself part of the exemplarity of the life, and only the most essential details are given—a grieving parent, a widowed wife, a

youth that will not find fulfillment in marriage—enough to make it possible to extrapolate the generality from the specific instance.

The modern literary sensibility, confronted with a body, tends to elaborate a highly individualized life story, with all the pathos of intensely personal details. In the *Metamorphoses,* however, it is not the body that leads the narrator to the story, but the story that is forced to end in something that happens to the body. This is clear from the very first metamorphosis in the poem, the tale of Lycaon, a man of wolflike savagery whose body, transformed into a wolf, sums up what he is. Ovid's narrative works on two temporal planes, history and exemplarity.[11] On the one hand metamorphosis provides an aetiological myth to answer the question of origins: how did the first wolf, weasel, frog, or laurel tree come into being? On the other hand, it is often the external realization of a type of character.

Critics in search of a stable moral center in Ovid's poem can point to such translations of character into physical state. The stony-hearted Propoetides of Book 10, for example, are made literally stones as the appropriate punishment for profaning Venus' gifts by becoming the first prostitutes. But Ovid often explores the discrepancy between the metamorphosis and the person changed, as in the case of Dryope in Book 9 or Scylla in Book 14. More disturbing still, he shows us the body taking over the mind, matter controlling spirit. In Book 2 Envy, Invidia, breathes a kind of psychotropic poison into her victim, the Athenian princess Aglauros, jealous of Mercury's love for her sister; and in Book 8 Hunger, Fames, changes Erysichthon in a similar psychosomatic way. Each of these quasi-allegorical beings is envisaged as a kind of incubus that visits her victim at night and, by distilling her poison into his or her inmost veins and organs, fundamentally alters his or her being.

For such effects the closest contemporary equivalent is the eerie power of the vampire in the movies or of extraterrestrials in the ever-proliferating accounts of alien abduction. In both Ovid and the contemporary stories a monstrous or outlandish form, possessed of supernatural power, takes control of the body in sleep and infuses into the veins poisons or powerful drugs that act on both mind and body, effecting a change in the personality so that the victim loses control of his will or vital processes and gradually sees himself becoming a kind of monster. Ovid conveys the horror in part through a lurid mysterious atmosphere, often at night or in

sleep (the Ovidian equivalent of Hollywood's abundant carbon dioxide), but mostly through concrete visual descriptions of parts of the body; and the change is often morally or psychologically appropriate. Envy enters Athens as a divine force that withers the fields and dries the grass and brings a corrupting taint to human life as her breath "pollutes cities and homes." Finding her way to Aglauros' bedroom, she "touches (Aglauros') breast with a hand tainted with rust and fills her breast with barbed briars and breathes into her the noxious poison and spreads the pitch-like venom through her bones and lungs" (798–801). The metaphors of Aglauros' mental suffering visualize the emotional life of this tormented girl in a nightmarish world of disease, blighted growth, and poisonous effluences. By entering Aglauros' bloodstream and vital organs, Envy transfers her own monstrosity to her victim. Even when Mercury finally changes the jealousy-maddened girl into stone, we still feel the infectious power of Jealousy working within her. Here is a literal translation of the metamorphosis that ends the episode (2.823–28):

> But the joints of her knees grow stiff and the cold slips through the toe- and fingernails, and her veins grow pale with the loss of blood. And just as an evil, incurable cancer is wont to creep in and add the uninjured parts (of the body) to those that have been corrupted, so the deadly wintry cold little by little comes into her breast and closes off the paths of life and breath.

In the Erysichthon episode a cruel tyrant's internal monstrosity is externalized by the visitation of a nocturnal demon, Hunger herself, who transforms his entire identity into a new but truer form of his inner being. His organs become "measureless entrails" in their insatiability: *per immensa viscera regnat,* "Hunger rules throughout his measureless vitals" (829).[12] Hunger's pallor, scabrous skin, empty space instead of a belly, and swollen joints (8.801–8) hint at what this murderous tyrant will become, but they also point toward the monstrosity that is becoming visible in him. The raging furor of his hunger (*furit ardor edendi,* 828) is likened to an all-devouring conflagration (837–39) and then actually becomes a "fire" that "flourishes in his insatiable gullet" (*inplacataeque vigebat flamma gulae,* 845f.). His body now becomes a version of the phantasmagoric anti-body of Hunger herself. In fact,

the expression *semperque locus fit inanis edendo* ("and by his eating there is always made an empty place for eating," 842) recalls the emaciated body of Hunger, in which "there was a place for a belly instead of a belly" (*ventris erat pro ventre locus,* 805). The monstrosity that is taking over Erysichthon now makes corporeally visible the homicidal fury that led him to chop down Ceres' sacred tree and turn his axe against the pious servant who tried to stop him. In an inversion of the corporeal and political, the king's tyrannical power turns inwards against himself, and his "rule" becomes the measureless kingdom that hunger has established inside his own body (829). In the last stages of this transformation his belly is a deep abyss or whirlpool that, like a sea-monster, swallows all the goods of his house (*altique voragine ventris,* literally, "the whirlpool of his deep belly," 843).

The Body and Art

The body, always ambiguously situated between nature and culture, is the field for the intersection of the natural and the artificial in the realm of art. Indeed metamorphosis itself is both natural and artificial. In the Daedalus episode, for example, Ovid emphasizes the transgressive nature of Daedalus' fashioning of wings and simultaneously reveals the ambiguity that Daedalus' "imitation" of nature becomes a dangerous violation of nature. Like Pygmalion, Daedalus molds the softened wax with his shaping thumb (8.198f.) in his wish "to imitate true birds" (*ut veras imitetur aves,* 8.195); but this juxtaposition of "truth" and "imitation," as in the case of the phantasms in the cave of Sleep, only reveals the gap between mimesis and reality when the false wings do not serve Icarus as they do his father.[13] This imitative art shows its darker side in the simile that compares Daedalus' instruction of Icarus in flight to a bird encouraging its "tender offspring" to leave the nest and fly "and urges it (him) to follow and teaches it (him) the destructive arts" (*hortaturque sequi damnosasque erudit artes,* 8.215). This simile is so placed that it can describe either the mother-bird or Daedalus, and so skillfully suggests the ambiguous unnaturalness of this "imitation" of nature.

In Ovid, then, metamorphosis is both an aetiology for natural processes or events and itself a miraculous event that disturbs the natural order. The painter or sculptor practices metamorphosis on the human body and so makes us aware of our corporeality by

demonstrating how body's form can be rendered in an alien material. Yet the Ovidian artist is himself subject to those laws of matter that human flesh must also obey, as Ovid shows in his tales of Marsyas, Arachne, Daedalus, and Orpheus.[14] On the other hand, the artist, like nature, controls the creative energies that shape new forms. The second creation of mankind after the Flood shows this three-way connection between metamorphosis, the creativity of nature, and the creativity of art. When Deucalion and Pyrrha throw the stones to replenish mankind, the transformation is compared to unfinished statues. For both art and nature, the creative process lies in giving "form" to inchoate matter, and Ovid significantly repeats the word *forma* (1.402 and 405). Thus metamorphosis, and especially the metamorphosis of bodies, parallels the process of the poem itself, that is, it makes the change of bodies an aesthetic object. Ovid's poem everywhere asserts the magical power of art to cross the boundaries between solid and liquid, inanimate and animate, and to make matter flow with supple vitality. This fluidity is a feature of what is sometimes called his "baroque" style, the translation of a scene or image from one medium to another, in the way that Bernini makes marble look like cloth or the cupolas of seventeenth-century Italian churches vaporize their ceilings into roseate clouds.[15]

Ovid's most famous treatment of the interrelations between the materiality of the body and art is his story of Pygmalion in *Metamorphoses* 10, which depicts the supreme power of the artist as the ability to give warm life to the cold marble statue. Ovid's concern here is not just the transformation of stone to flesh, but the creation of a living and responsive human being from a lifeless work of art. The softening of the ivory, like Hymettian wax, for Pygmalion is the same process as the softening of Deucalion and Pyrrha's stones to flesh so that they resemble half-finished marble statues (cf. 1.402, *mollirique mora mollitaque ducere formam,* "the stones are gradually softened and, when softened, take on [human] form," and *cera remollescit,* "the wax grows soft," 10.285). Ovid thus draws together remote anthropogonic creativity and a mythical equivalent to contemporary artistic creativity. But Pygmalion's miracle is as much about love as art; and without Venus' intervention he might have fared no better than his maddened prototype in the Greek version.

Ovid leaves it open whether this love is pathological infatuation (as it seems to have been in the Greek version of the myth, where a

king falls in love with a statue of Aphrodite and eventually goes mad) or a comment on the artistic vision, the artist's deep investment in his work and his power to transform his desires into images of the beautiful. Pygmalion's first kiss of the statue suggests infatuation and delusion as he "thinks the kiss is returned" and "believes that his fingers sink into the limbs that are touched" (256f.). The mood of folly continues in the extravagant behavior of addressing endearments (*blanditiae*) to the statue. In a parody of the lover in Roman elegy, Pygmalion adorns it with precious jewels and places it on a feathered couch (259–69). Ovid clearly marks these gestures as silly, and in another mood they could be signs of incipient madness. Here they project into remote, fantastic myth the lover's exaggerated gestures of passion.[16] Fortunately, Venus intervenes to change the statue into a living woman, which gives the story a happy ending (again in contrast to the grim myth that Ovid seems to have inherited); but this ending also leaves it ambiguous whether Pygmalion is just a lucky fool or a creative genius.

The Gendered Body

Another ancient model underlies the Pygmalion episode, however, namely the Hesiodic Pandora. As in the Pandora myth, the female body is a creation of a higher shaping power, an object of aesthetic or erotic observation for the male gaze, and a beautiful decorative surface (*chrôs*, *Works and Days* 74) to be adorned by baubles, fine clothing, and jewelry (cf. *Works and Days* 73–75, *Met.* 10.259–75). Ovid removes Hesiod's deep misogyny in which the Pandora myth is embedded (cf. *Theogony* 591–612) and transforms an aetiological creation myth that blames women for the woes of human life into an amusing parody of the Roman elegiac lover offering gifts to his mistress (*modo grata puellis / munera fert illi*, 10.259f.).

When Pygmalion's statue does come to life, it restores us to the familiar hierarchies between male and female. Awakened by his kiss, she becomes the ideal sex-object, submissive and erotic at the same time (292–94). Her entire existence consists in her love for her creator, to whom she owes her life: "She sees the heavens and the lover at the same moment," *cum caelo vidit amantem*, 294. Her sole future role, as far as this narrative is concerned, is to bear Pygmalion a child. Yet these divisions are, as always in Ovid, unstable. The dependency of the woman on her creator/husband has been undercut by his own infatuated devotion. The child who might perpetuate his name is a daughter, Paphos, not a son, and she is in fact associated with Venus and love, not with art ([Paphos] *de qua tenet insula nomen*, "Paphos, from whom the island holds its name," 297). The heritage of this birth, moreover, is not glory but infamy, for Pygmalion's great-granddaughter is Myrrha, a *nefas*, a source of evil and pollution, against whose "unbelievable" crime the narrator warns daughters and parents as the prelude to her story (10.300–10).

If Pygmalion's love-object *is* a statue, Perseus' beloved in Book 4 *resembles* a statue. His encounter with Andromeda is less extreme, but equally revealing for the role of the female body. The tale begins with the hero's "seeing her" chained to a rock, immobilized and statue-like, except for the hair blown by the wind and the warm tears that flow from her eyes (4.672–75):

> *quam simul ad duras religatam bracchia cautes*
> *vidit Abantiades (nisi quod levis aura capillos*
> *moverat et tepido manabant lumina fletu,*
> *marmoreum ratus esse opus), trahit inscius ignes*
> *et stupet et visae correptus imagine formae*
> *paene suas quatere est oblitus in aëre pennas.*

Both of these signs of life, however, are not just objective descriptions but indications (with hints of parody) of an erotic mood. Completely and helplessly exposed to his vision, Andromeda is the inverse of Pygmalion's beloved, a living body made into a statue-like spectacle for a male viewer. So "seized" is Perseus at the "image of this beauty so beheld" (*visae correptus imagine formae*, 676) that he nearly forgets to beat his wings. This phrase, with its juxtaposition of "seeing" and beautiful "form," emphasizes both the motifs of vision and of statue. Perseus makes her a pretty little speech: "O you who do not deserve these chains but such chains as join desiring lovers" (4.678f.). His words translate heroic quest into elegiac romance. In its metaphorizing of "chains," the passage also eroticizes, almost allegorizes, the scene of bondage. It enlarges and translates into literally corporeal terms the conceit of *Ars Amatoria* 3.429–30: *quid minus Andromedae fuerat sperare revinctae / quam lacrimas ulli posse placere suas* ("What would the chained Andromeda less have expected than that her tears could be pleasing to anyone?").

Andromeda's response, given as the omniscient narrator's reading of her mind, far from making her a genuine subject, continues her role as erotic object (4.681–84):

primo silet illa nec audet
adpellare virum virgo, manibusque modestos
celasset vultus, si non religata fuisset;
lumina, quod potuit, lacrimis inplevit obortis.

At first she keeps silent, nor does she, a maiden, make bold to address a man, and she would have hidden her modest face with her hands if she had not been bound; but she filled her eyes—which was all that she could do—with the tears that rose up.

The editorial addition describing her eyes filling with tears in 684, *quod potuit*, "which was all that she could do," repeats the opening situation (674) and strengthens its erotic tone with a sadistic touch, even a hint of rape. Similar phrases, indicating hopeless resistance, occur in the poem for actual rape, like Jupiter's rape of Callisto, who "fights him *as much as a woman could*, . . . but fight him she does" (2.434–36, *illa quidem contra*, quantum modo femina posset / . . . *ille quidem pugnat*). As in the case of Pygmalion's beloved, this statuesque role is Andromeda's only function in the episode. Once her naked body has attracted Perseus, the action shifts to the male contestants for her hand, and she is not mentioned again except for the wedding.

Perseus' misrecognition of a body as a statue in a tale of love corresponds in the next book to a misrecognition of statues as bodies in a tale of war. The epic battle between Phineus' followers and Perseus ends with the hero turning them into statutes with Medusa's head. Phineus at first takes the statues to be his still living comrades, and he "addresses each one by name and, incredulous, touches the bodies nearest to him: they were marble (*marmor erant*, 5.210–14). Through the combination of the elegiac-erotic and the epic contexts of the body/statue confusion, Ovid enables his metamorphic theme both to embrace and to contrast the discourses of love and war, except that what was figurative in Book 4 has become solidly literal in 5. As the two scenes bring together the two genres, so they bring together male and female bodies, each in its characteristic role. The woman as statue is an object of stupefying beauty; the warrior as statue is arrested in the midst of violent martial acts (see 5.200–6). Perseus also spans the two genres: we see him as a lover winning his way by words and as a warrior victorious in his deeds. Truly one could say of him, *militat omnis amans* ("every lover serves as a soldier").

To return to Andromeda, the immobilization of the female body as a statue or in a statue-like pose helps to legitimize male erotic viewing under the rubric of art; but this immobilization has a more sinister side elsewhere in the poem, where the female victim of rape is often described as "entrapped" or "enclosed." These accounts run the gamut from the more or less conventional myth of Danae "enclosed" when Jupiter "filled her with the fecundating gold" (*quam clausam inplevit fecundo Iuppiter auro*, 4.698) to the rape of Philomela, "enclosed" in her forest prison (*includit*, 6.524; cf. 6.546, *si silvis clausa tenebor*, "if I am held shut up in the forest"), where Tereus keeps her under guard (*fugam custodia claudit*, "he closes off her flight by guarding her," 6.572), until her sister, Procne, leading a band of maenads, "breaks down the gates" to rescue her (6.597, *portasque refringit*). The statuesque immobilization that appears as elegiac play in the Pygmalion and Andromeda episodes here emerges as sadistic detail as Tereus grabs Philomela's hair, ties her hands behind her back, and forces her "to endure bonds" when he cuts out her tongue (6.552f., *adreptamque coma flexis post terga lacertis / vincla pati cogit*)—a scene that Seneca may have had in mind in Hippolytus' murderous response to Phaedra, also in an erotically charged atmosphere (*Phaedra* 707f.: *en impudicum crine contorto caput / laeva reflexi*, "Behold, with my left hand I have bent back her head, twisting her hair").

The exception to the pattern proves the rule, for it is only amid the extreme gender reversals of aggressor and victim in the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus that the female "enfolds" (*implicat*) her male victim as a snake entwines itself around an eagle, as ivy twists itself around a tree, and as an octopus seizes and holds her prey with its tentacles (4.361–67).[17] As these similes imply, the sexually aggressive female is not only dangerous but potentially monstrous, or capable of producing monstrous effects, like Circe in Book 14 or, in different ways, Medea in 7 and Scylla in 14. Salmacis, like Teiresias in the previous book, seems to suggest the fluidity of gender divisions and to question their rigidity (cf.

3.330–35); but in fact her story reinstates sexual difference by a nightmarish enactment of what happens when the familiar gender roles are reversed.[18]

In the Proserpina episode of Book 5 Ovid brilliantly interweaves three parallel and complementary tales of male sexual violence against a more or less helpless and passive female body. All three tales gloss over the raw violence by metaphorical or symbolic representation: Pluto's forced passage through Cyane's watery home, the floating belt of Proserpina, and Alpheus' pursuit of Arethusa after her watery transformation "so that he may mingle himself with (her) waves" (5.638). In the case of Cyane and Arethusa, moreover, the violence is further elided by the mythical metamorphosis of the nymphs into springs. Nevertheless, both of these tales also use this miraculous event to suggest a psychological equivalent to physical violation. Cyane "wastes away" (5.427) as a result of Pluto's aggressive overriding of her rights and dignity as he drives his thunderous steeds back to Hades with Proserpina as his prize. Arethusa, terrified by the pursuit of the river-god Alpheus, liquefies into a cold sweat before Diana completes her rescue and transports her to Sicily. Pluto's wounding and penetration inflicts on Cyane an "inconsolable wound," and so she "is entirely consumed in tears and is dissolved into those waters of which she was just now a great divinity" (*lacrimisque absumitur omnis / et, quarum fuerat magnum modo numen, in illas / extenuatur aquas*, 5.428–29). This "inconsolable wound" is both the physical injury caused by the violence of Pluto's forceful entry and the psychological wound of her helplessness and ineffectuality. Unable to defend her waters, she undergoes an irremediable insult to her divinity, and she "grieves at the flouted rights of her spring" (425f.). In her metamorphosis she becomes just what Pluto has made of her body, a yielding passage to his force and his will.[19] Like so many other female victims, Cyane bears her "inconsolable wound in silence" (*inconsolabile vulnus / mente gerit tacita*, 5.426f.). Like Io, Callisto, Philomela, and many others, her body speaks where her "mind" cannot; and it is through these elaborately enumerated changes in her corporeal substance that both her physical and emotional suffering become visible.

The Male Body

If the female body in the *Metamorphoses* is characterized by its status as a visual object, its passivity, its appropriation by the male libidinal imagination, and its role as a vessel to be "filled" by male seed to continue a heroic lineage, the ideal of the male body is impenetrability. The stories of Cygnus and Caeneus, both in Book 12, are paradigm cases. Both figures are introduced in the midst of the Trojan war. Cygnus is Achilles' antagonist in the first and only major Trojan battle. Ovid obviously delights in effacing Homer's war-poetry with his own fantastic, metamorphic narrative. He calls attention to his non-Iliadic approach by having the raging Achilles "seek out either Cygnus or Hector" (12.75), as if they were equivalent in poetic fame and martial glory. This exaggeration, however, cleverly enables Ovid to replace Homer's *Iliad* with his own, for he adds in the next line that Hector's death "was postponed to the tenth year" (12.67f.), thereby embracing the entirety of the Homeric poem. He also links his own version up with the death of Protesilaus at the hands of Hector a few lines earlier (12.68f.), following the *Iliad*, with the exception that in Homer his slayer is a nameless "Trojan hero" and not Hector (*Il.* 2.698–703). Because in the *Cypria* the death of Cygnus takes place at the beginning of the war, Ovid can also lay claim to covering the whole Epic Cycle, thereby again challenging traditional epic with his metamorphic quasi-epic.[20]

By replacing Hector's death with Cygnus', Ovid re-envisages the Iliadic wounds and mutilations through a metamorphic theme of physical invulnerability, which is the total negation of the heroic sufferings of epic warfare. The destructive wounds of war become only an incidental feature of this tale of marvels. Achilles, puzzled and frustrated by Cygnus' invulnerability, finally tests his spear on a minor Lycian warrior named Menoetes (not accidentally the name of Patroclus' father in the *Iliad*), and the spear "bursts through the breastplate and the chest placed beneath, and as he [this Menoetes] strikes the heavy earth with dying breast, Achilles draws forth the weapon from the warm wound and says, 'This is the hand, this the spear with which we have now conquered'" (12.117–20). Then, hurling it at Cygnus, he is delighted at the mark of blood that it leaves, only to become even more enraged when he realizes that the blood is that of his previous victim, Menoetes (117–27). At this point Achilles takes on the full *furor* of the

enraged epic warrior, in the Homeric and Virgilian modes (*tum vero praeceps curru fremebundus ab alto / desilit* . . . , "Then in truth in full fury he leaps headlong from the lofty chariot," 12.128ff.). Ovid's Achilles here behaves like Homer's when he is frustrated by Apollo's rescue of Hector and then turns his rage upon lesser men (*Il.* 20.339–54, 455ff.) or when he encounters Lycaon still alive and wonders at "those Trojans whom I killed rising up from the murky darkness . . . But come, let him have a taste of my spear's point, so that I may see in my mind and learn if he will escape equally from here too, or if the life-giving earth will hold him, the earth that holds down even the strong man" (*Il.* 21.54–63). Ovid's ensuing details of the torn armor, the chest, the still warm wound, the blood, all evoke the physical reality of the body's suffering in Homer; but Ovid turns Homer upside down. His atmosphere is one of miracle rather than realism or the high heroism of defying a painful death. Achilles finally has to resort to the non-Homeric expedient of strangling his foe (140–43). When Cygnus' body is then changed into a white swan, the narrative not only deprives Achilles of the Iliadic triumph of stripping the body (143f.) but also flaunts its non-epic tone as a tale of metamorphosis.

Nestor would trump this story of one who is a "scorner of iron, penetrable by no weapon" (12.170) with the tale of Caeneus, whom he introduces in a more or less familiar martial setting as "enduring a thousand wounds with body uninjured" (12.171–73). Then comes the startling genealogy, "He was born a woman." These grizzled, macho veterans are, not unreasonably, "moved at the novelty of the monstrous event," as Ovid says, and they ask for details (174–76). The sequence of the two stories overdetermines the theme of male invulnerability (cf. 170f. and 206f.) and provides the strongest possible negative definition of the female body. It is penetrable, as the male is not (166), is subject to *iniuria*, outrage (202), and to rape.

Caeneus' story is held in suspense, characteristically, for some 250 lines, during which the physical details of battle that were muted in the account of the Trojan war are given full scope in the fight between the Centaurs and Lapiths. If you were feeling cheated of blood and guts by the ineffectuality of Achilles' spear at Troy, Ovid seems to say, you can now take your fill of outrageous woundings and watch the free flow of blood and brains, hear bones crack, and enjoy a fine display of disembowelments, gouged

out eyes, burnt beards, and assorted other mutilations (12.210–458). Even here, however, there is a shift of tones analogous to that in the Marsyas episode, to be discussed later. The quasi-epic battle between Centaurs and Lapiths contains a pastoral love-story, complete with the death of two lovers together (12.393–428). The Centaurs, instead of being uniformly brutal, savage males, prove to be diversified both in sex and conditions of life. Cyllarus and Hylonome are an amorous centaur couple whose story relieves the extreme physical violence. Yet this equine version of the Pyramus and Thisbe episode, for all its idyllic-comic coloring, still takes its tone from the mutilations that enframe it. The amusing account of Hylonome's toilette is followed by the Homeric death of her mate (12.419–22), to be succeeded in turn by the Liebestod of her suicide with the weapon that killed him.

When Ovid returns to Caeneus, he uses the stock epic motif of insulting one's foe as a woman (470–76), which in this case happens to be true, but Caeneus fully proves his manhood by the marmoreal impenetrability of his skin on the one hand and by plunging his own sword deep into his enemy's vitals on the other (12.482–93). After a second round of emasculating insults, however, Caeneus is overwhelmed by the trees that the Centaurs pile on top of him and is suffocated in a way that recalls the death of Cygnus (cf. 508f. and 142). Like Cygnus, he escapes the epic inevitability of the fated end and is miraculously transformed into a bird.

These two tales, which are carefully linked by the narrator, are exemplary not only of the maximum and most essential difference between the male and female body but also of the tendency in the *Metamorphoses* to pay rather more attention to the male body when it is dealing with what psychologists have come to call primary boundary anxiety—that is, anxiety about maintaining the integrity of the body, keeping its surface areas intact, and protecting its cavities from painful penetration. When this boundary anxiety gets played out with the female body, it is accompanied, and often overshadowed, by anxiety of another kind, namely about female sexuality. Scylla, as we shall see, is the most striking instance. Such boundary-disturbing images as dismemberment, decapitation, disembowelment, and other grisly events receive extended treatment in the two great battle scenes, obviously involving male warriors, namely Perseus' combat in the house of Phineus in Book 5 and the Centauromachy in Book 12.

That such violations should involve the male rather more than the female body may result simply from the division of sexual roles in the ancient world: men are the warriors, exposed to these physical risks; women lead more sheltered and private lives. The greater emphasis on the suffering of the male body may also reflect the point of view of a male-authored text.[21] Philomela is the only woman in the poem to undergo anything approaching the extreme mangling suffered by Actaeon, Pentheus, and Marsyas; and that is perhaps why her story stands out with such stark horror. Even in her case, however, Ovid in the sequel gives an equally horrible account of the Fury-like Procne contemplating the castration and dismemberment of her criminal husband, Tereus; and this is followed by the gory scene of Procne actually dismembering her young son. This description almost rivals the flaying of Marsyas in the slitting of the throat and the tearing apart, spitting, and cooking of the "limbs that still retained some life" (6.643ff.). Procne strikes her child as he cries "mother, mother," "nor does she turn her face away" (642). The killing of Pelias by his daughters, engineered by Medea in the next book, receives a similar fullness of description (7.328–49).

Where there are simultaneous male and female victims, the males tend to get more attention. The sons of Niobe, for example, die in more painful and physically vivid ways than the daughters (6.235–38, 244–51). Only one of the daughters receives a detailed wound as "she draws forth the arrows sticking in her flesh," but even she collapses rather gently (*relanguit*) in a dying embrace with a brother (6.290f.). Thisbe in a sense dies twice, first in Pyramus' mistaken inference, and then in fact (4.107–18, 162f.); but the physical details are limited to falling on the still warm blade (162f.), whereas Pyramus, as he dies, "draws the knife forth from the hot wound," and then has his blood shoot out like water from a broken pipe (121–24), another of those passages whose tone is hard to gauge. The story of Cephalus and Procris in Book 7 has many parallels with that of Pyramus and Thisbe. A lover's mistake leads to the fatal wounding of the woman. In this case, however, only the woman dies; and, despite her Dido-like suffering at the end (cf. 7.845, 854f., and *Aen.* 4.686), Cephalus, not Procris, is the emotional focus of the tale, which he recounts in the first person. Scylla, of whom I shall speak later, is a partial exception to this tendency to concentrate details of mutilation on the male body; but her story, like Philomela's, belongs to the area of sexuality

rather than violence *per se*; and in that realm the female body, as the primarily sexualized body, is dominant.

Yet Ovid is unusual among classical authors, and especially epic authors, for his attention to one uniquely female experience, birth and motherhood. The act of impregnation itself remains firmly in the tradition of male-centered heroic conquest. The female body is a vessel to be filled by male seed to continue a heroic lineage. Ovid regularly uses words of filling, like *plenus* or *impleo*, for impregnation. One heroic impregnation is noteworthy for Ovid's parody of the heroic tradition, namely the climax (in every sense) of Peleus' wooing of Thetis in Book 11. Defeated by his entrapment, "the hero embraces her as she admits (defeat), and he possesses what he prayed for and fills her with huge Achilles" (11.264f.). Thetis is then forgotten; and the narrative continues in the next verse with Peleus as a success story where heroism and triumph remain ambiguous: "Happy Peleus, happy in his son, happy too in his wife, a man who got everything—if you should remove the crime against his brother Phocus whom he murdered" (267f.). In many of these episodes the act of birth is omitted or only briefly mentioned (so, e.g., Callisto, Liriope, Pygmalion's bride, Chione, Thetis), even in the proto-caesarian deliveries of Bacchus from Semele and Aesculapius from Coronis.[22] Two episodes, however, dwell at length on the pain of childbirth: Alcmena giving birth to Hercules in Book 9 and Myrrha in Book 10.

Alcmena's giving birth to Hercules interestingly juxtaposes both the male-centered heroic view of the birth of an heir and a more woman-oriented point of view. The abrupt shift from Jupiter's palace on Olympus to the women's quarters at Argos undercuts the grandeur of the great hero's ultimate triumph, with its high ideological implications of *augusta gravitate* ("august solemnity," 9.270).[23] Immediately after the gods decree Hercules' apotheosis, we encounter the aged, long-suffering Alcmena, with her old-woman's worries and complaints (*longis anxia curis* and *questus aniles*, 9.275–76), conversing with her daughter-in-law, Iole, who is now pregnant by Hyllus. The scene begins with the heroic view: Hyllus has "filled (Iole's) womb with the noble seed" (9.280). But we turn suddenly to the intimacy of women's talk as Alcmena recounts her exceptionally hard labor and gives the expectant mother precise physical details: the heaviness of her womb that so weighed her down that she was sure the child was Jupiter's (288f.), the pain for seven days and nights, her cries and

prayers (292–94). Even in remembering she feels a chill shudder and pain (290f.).

Alcmena's conversation then shifts from the domestic to the mythical as she tells how Juno's enmity kept the birth goddesses, Lucina and the Nixi, from aiding her (294–96). The suffering woman's condition receives a graphic representation in the constricted posture of Lucina, sitting by the altar with her knees crossed and her fingers tightly interlocked, (298f.). In her pain Alcmena shouts insults at Jupiter, weeps, and wants to die. Ovid vividly describes the disturbance in the household: the ladies of Thebes offer prayers and encouragement, until finally the maid Galanthis tricks Lucina into releasing her knees, and for this help to her mistress is changed by Juno into a weasel. Now the mythical slips into folk belief and practice, where untying knots or similar acts of freeing the body from constraints belongs to popular sympathetic magic supposed to aid birth. But despite the mythical and folkloristic detail, Alcmena's relief in giving birth (315) sympathetically conveys the difficulty of her travail.

Ovid uses this episode for one of his sharpest contrasts. On one side is the Olympian apotheosis granted to the greatest of the heroes, with its obvious reverberations of Augustan ideology and its foreshadowing of the divinizations of Julius and Augustus Caesar at the end of the poem; on the other side is an old woman's advice about childbirth to a pregnant daughter-in-law. The contrasting realms of men and women are thus forced into the same frame. The story of Lucina and Galanthis brings a set of secondary contrasts between mythical personification and domestic realism and between plausible human experience and folktale. Yet the degree of detail accorded to a scene of childbirth and the intrusion of the woman's experience and point of view into high heroic narrative are remarkable and characteristic of the "baroque" quality of the poem. It also reminds us of Ovid's spirit of innovation. We may recall his two poems on Corinna's abortion in the *Amores* (2.13 and 14), again a subject not treated by other elegists, even if here the point of view is strictly masculine. In dealing with such subjects, Ovid, as often, may be experimenting with the limits of the genre, but he may also be writing with an awareness of an audience of women readers.

Dryope's story, coming directly after Alcmena's, is also about motherhood, especially the intimacy between mother and infant child and the pathos of their separation. As the transformation

begins, the child feels his mother's breasts drying up and the flow of milk stopping (9.356–58). A few lines later Dryope herself, in the last speech that she can utter, requests that the child's nurse let him drink his milk and play under the tree into which she is now being transformed so that he may know his mother's presence (376–79). Dryope's arboreal transformation resembles Daphne's, but with a very different twist: instead of a virgin fleeing rape, there is a mother surrounded by her family: husband, father, and sister (363f.).

The tale of Dryope was narrated by Iole, and the tearful response of her audience testifies to the emotional tone (9.394–96); but Ovid again exploits the contrast between the human pathos and the fabulous event, especially in details like Dryope's request to keep the sheep away (384) and to reach up to her for the final kiss since she is now immobilized (385f.). Yet the particular circumstances of the narrative frame—a young wife expecting a child and learning about giving birth from her elderly mother-in-law—makes the contrast between myth and ordinary reality especially piquant. It is a part of Ovid's amusing humanizing of myth that he allows these intensely female concerns to appear at the acme of macho achievement and reward, the divinization of Hercules.

Myrrha's giving birth to Adonis in Book 10 resembles the Alcmena episode both in the combination of fantasy and realistic physical detail and in the radical shift of mood. Myrrha's story begins as a characteristically Hellenistic tale of desperate passion, guilt, and incest but ends in a gentler sympathy and pathos. The criminal portion is essentially completed with her flight and metamorphosis into a myrrh tree (10.476–572). Her conception of a child belongs to the criminal atmosphere of the incest (469f.), but her nine months of wandering leave this behind, and the narrative arouses sympathy through her flight and the physical details of the burden of her womb that she can scarcely endure (481). This sympathy continues in her contrite prayer, her mixture of fear of death and disgust with life (482f.), and her feeling of being cut off from all creatures, living and dead (485f.). In her metamorphosis, "the tree covered over her heavy womb" (*iamque grauem crescens uterum praestrinxerat arbor*, 495) and so keeps her pregnant condition in view, especially as *praestrinxerat* implies a tight covering of the surface of her body that would keep the pregnancy visible.

Despite the magical transformation, Myrrha goes through a recognizably normal pregnancy, and Ovid's mixture of arboreal and human features is a tour de force, ingeniously combining myth and realism. In the tree's straining and bending Myrrha "is like a woman giving birth (*nitenti similis*, 10.508: *nitor*, "to strain with effort," is the regular verb for giving birth in the poem); and her "groans" and "tears" convey the physical pain (508f.). Even the branches are in pain (*dolentes*, 510). The birth-goddess Lucina of course has to be present for birth to take place. Thus in the sympathetic mood of this portion of Myrrha's story, the goddess is "gentle" (*mitis*) and "applies her hands to the suffering branches and speaks the words that effect childbirth" (511f.). The splitting of the tree and its bark and the wailing of the newborn take us back to the physical realities, but the role of midwife is here taken over by the nymphs, who bring us back to myth. They anoint the child with his mother's tears, which of course are the perfume, myrrh. Among the nymphs, however, these tears are the perfume appropriate to the "soft grass" where the Naiads lay the baby (*quem mollibus herbis / naides impositum lacrimis unxere parentis*, "whom the Naiads anoint with the tears of his mother when he is lain in the soft grass," 10.513f.).

This mythical atmosphere dominates the closing lines of the episode, which compare the beautiful baby Adonis to Cupid with his quiver of arrows (515–18), and thus moves the narrative back to the image-world of Graeco-Roman myth and art. But the emphasis on the delicate male beauty may also be a reminder that the narrator is Orpheus, the poet who has turned pederast after his disappointment with Eurydice. Yet Orpheus' shift from accusation to compassion within his tale is remarkable, especially as he began with such dire warnings about Myrrha's crime (10.300–15). Given the fact that Orpheus' narrative voice is so strong throughout this book, we may wonder whether Ovid is suggesting that the greatest poet of the literary tradition is able to view a human life, even one as dark as Myrrha's, from different perspectives and encompass an area of experience so far from his own. Does Ovid thereby suggest something about his own poem's breadth of sympathies when he makes his archetypal poet change his mind about this girl and show pity for her mute suffering, fantastic though it is? After all, Ovid is among the most sensitive of poets to the ways in which a narrative can take a direction and meaning beyond an author's

avowed intentions and contain diverse, even contradictory points of view.

At the opposite extreme from these sympathetic accounts of birth is the monstrous version of parturition in Scylla's story in Book 14, one of the uglier metamorphoses in the poem. Circe, jealous of Scylla's beauty, poisons her cove transforming her into a monster with barking dogs protruding from her lower parts. Ovid describes her as virtually giving birth to these creatures (14.63–65):

> *sed quos fugit attrahit una*
> *et corpus quaerens femorum crurumque pedumque*
> *Cerbereos rictus pro partibus invenit illis.*
>
> But she drags along with her (the creatures) that she flees, and looking for the bodily substance of her thighs, legs, and feet, she finds Cerberus-like gaping jaws in place of those parts.[24]

The unusual sense of *corpus*, here in the meaning "bodily substance" rather than "whole body," depicts Scylla's alienation from herself. In place of the familiar *corpus*, "body," that she knows, she finds only the alien flesh of "thighs, legs, and feet" that is both hers and not hers as she "finds Cerberus-like gaping jaws" replacing her own "body parts." In the densely entangled syntax of the closing lines, she is puzzled by her new state as she tries to check the beasts that are part of her. Yet she is also a monster who "controls" (*coercet*) these multiple creatures:

> *statque canum rabie subiectaque terga ferarum*
> *inguinibus truncis uteroque exstante coercet.*
>
> She stands there amid the rage of the dogs and with her mutilated thighs and protruding womb she checks (contains) the backs of the beasts thus placed beneath her.

Scylla is thus both one and many, both a confused victim (cf. *quaerens*) and an active force. Her monstrous metamorphosis confuses bestiality and humanity on the one hand and associates female sexuality and maternity with monstrosity on the other. In the poem's other descriptions of birth, the maternal woman tends to be separated from the sexual woman, as in the case of the elderly Alcmena

and Dryope nursing her small child. Myrrha begins as a paradigm of female lust and becomes sympathetic when she is no longer in human form but is only an arboreal womb trying to give birth. In the story of Scylla, however, female sexuality is presented through a polar opposition of reluctant virginal nymph (Scylla as we see her at the beginning of her story in Book 13) and sexually aggressive enchantress in the figure of Circe.[25] Birth is here perverted into another instance of the terrible violations of the interior of the body that divine or semi-divine, arbitrary power can inflict.

Bodily Parameters, Stable and Unstable

Metamorphosis is in itself anxiety-provoking, and Ovid's choice of his poem's subject probably has something to do with the individual's sense of losing autonomy and control as Augustus' regime became more authoritarian. As the center of power seems increasingly remote, the abrupt transformation of one's life by sudden, arbitrary violence seems more possible, and orientation seems more difficult in an ever-expanding bureaucratic and autocratic government. Metamorphosis is the fantasy projection of such concerns into a distant mythical realm; and the violation of personal, physical boundaries serves as an especially intense form of these anxieties about one's control of one's movements in a larger world.

This explanation, which, of course can only be partial and in any case speculative, would also hold for the increasing level of boundary-violating acts in the poetry of the Empire. Glenn Most has collected some interesting statistics on the increase of amputations in the Neronian poet Lucan. Lucan has approximately one amputation for every puncture wound, whereas in Homer the ratio is 1 to 13.5, in Virgil 1 to 4.3. The figures even out again in Silius Italicus (5.4) and Statius (4.1). Most does not include the *Metamorphoses*; but in any case it is clear that Roman epic prefers increasingly complicated and bloody deaths, even by comparison with Homer's already none too gentle descriptions.[26] Most is probably right to interpret these figures as reflecting the great increase in gladiatorial combats and brutal exhibitions in the circus during the Nero's reign;[27] and the same factors perhaps also influence Ovid to a lesser degree; but I don't think that this can be the entire reason, at least for the *Metamorphoses*.

It is the pervasive corporeality of the *Metamorphoses* that keeps the threat of violence so close and so present. Where the body is so prominent, its pain or injury is always a possibility. A poem about bodies is almost inevitably also about violence to the body. The vulnerability of the human body stands out all the more in contrast to the gods' absolute power, invulnerability, and human bodily desires. Ovid's proem, on the creation of the world, reveals an interesting irony in this relation between the human and divine body. One version of the creation privileges the human form because of its closeness to the divine substance (1.80f.); and Ovid, following Plato and Platonizing stoicism, singles out man's erect posture and his consequent ability to gaze upward at the heavens and the stars (1.78–86):

> So man was born, whether the artificer of the world, the world's better origin, made him of divine seed, or whether the new earth, only recently separated from the lofty aether, retained seeds of the kindred heavens. This earth Iapetus' son [Prometheus] mixed with the moisture of rainwater and formed into the image of the gods who rule all things; and, although the other creatures look face downward at the earth, he gave to man a lofty visage and bade him to behold the sky and to lift his countenance on high toward the heavens (*os homini sublime dedit caelumque videre / iussit et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus*).

The word *vultus*, visage or countenance, in this passage (1.86) suggests that this heavenward glance is connected with the particular form of the human countenance (*erectos ad sidera tollere vultus*, 1.86). That human countenance (*vultus*) is deformed in the bestial metamorphoses of Lycaon, Io, Callisto, Actaeon, etc. (e.g., 1.238, 1.738, 2.481, 3.241). Io is allowed to become "erect" again in her reverse metamorphosis from cow to girl (*erigitur*, 1.745); but Callisto is thrown "face downward on the earth" in the double humiliation that Juno inflicts on her (*prensis a fronte capillis / stravit humi pronam*, 2.476f.).

The body can be the ideally beautiful object; but it may equally be an object of horror or disgust. Hellenistic art typically explores these limits (we may recall the statue of the Old Market Woman in the Metropolitan Museum or of the Drunken Woman in the Munich Glyptothek), and so does Ovid, although epic decorum

obviously keeps him far from, say, the no-holds-barred exuberance of Rabelais. Still, he goes far beyond Homer and Virgil in mixing high and low styles. The ugly wounds of Homer and Virgil, after all, are ennobled by the heroic atmosphere and the grandeur and seriousness of the issues. Ovid, on the other hand, can concentrate on the physicality of a grotesque figure like the satyr, Marsyas, himself half human and half bestial; and he highlights the grotesqueness by juxtaposing him with one of the handsomest of the gods, Apollo. Marsyas' ugliness makes him a more appropriate victim for the ghastly punishment of being flayed alive. Ovid shows us the throbbing flesh laid bare beneath the skin and forces us to become spectators of the "pulsing entrails" (*salientia viscera*) and the exposed organs "shining in the breast" (6.388–91). "You would be able to count them," *possis numerare,* Ovid says, addressing the reader in his accustomed break with the epic convention of third-person narration (6.391f.). The cries of the victim just preceding make this a scene of torture as well as of anatomical dissection. True, Marsyas is not human, and the myth is a well-known subject for artistic representation. Yet Ovid has gone out of his way to emphasize the violation of the body's cavities and the pain. Titian's *Flaying of Marsyas* adds a little dog lapping up the blood while Apollo or Orpheus plays a violin just above—an interpretation that responds both to the divine cruelty and the sheer physical horror of the scene.

The ending of the Marsyas episode is a particularly good example of Ovid's probing of aesthetic boundaries. This is a tale where, literally, blood is everywhere (*cruor undique manat,* 6.388); but the forest nymphs and running water that follow immediately afterwards belong to the traditionally "beautiful place," the *locus amoenus,* associated with pastoral, the landscape of art, and an atmosphere of gentle loss and sweet, mild sadness (6.392–400). Ovid's little scene upsets the traditional categories. He makes us ask whether he is just aiming at shock effects, or experimenting with a range of stylistic registers, or enjoying a display of a "baroque" or "anti-classical sensibility" that jumps abruptly from one mood or one genre to another. None of these is to be excluded; but Ovid uses these vivid details of the body to raise the question of what constitutes ugliness and beauty. The jarring effect is similar to that of the death of Actaeon, where the pastoral *locus amoenus* precedes rather than follows the violence (3.155–82). It is similar too to the Acis and Galatea episode in Book 13, where the

buffoonish Cyclops of Theocritean and Virgilian pastoral suddenly reverts to his ugly, homicidal Homeric counterpart—as if Ovid suddenly runs the track of literary history backward, from Theocritus to the *Odyssey*—and has the Cyclops crush the unfortunate Acis with a piece of the mountainside.[28]

Ovid explores the limits of aestheticized violence even where that violence is firmly fixed in the literary tradition. In the dismemberment of Pentheus that ends Book 3, for example, the symmetry of the two aunts, the sisters of Agave, tearing off the right and left arms in the previous lines becomes a cartoon-like, choreographed stylization of the act of dismemberment (3.721f.). As Actaeon earlier in the book tried to supplicate his attackers with arms that he no longer has (3.240f.), so Pentheus "does not—O woeful man—have arms to stretch forth to his mother, but shows her his mutilated wounds where the limbs have been torn away and cries out to her, 'O my mother, behold.'" One is tempted to translate, irreverently, "Look, Ma, no hands!"—a flippancy that (for once) is not in Ovid's text; but a clash of tones is very much present in the closing simile (3.729–31):

> *non citius frondes autumni frigore tactas*
> *iamque male haerentes alta rapit arbore ventus,*
> *quam sunt membra viri manibus direpta nefandis.*
>
> Not more quickly does the wind snatch away the leaves touched by the autumn's cold and now scarcely clinging to the lofty tree than were the limbs of the man snatched apart with the criminal hands.

The lines echo Virgil's famous simile describing the multitude of the dead on the bank of the Styx whom Aeneas encounters on his entrance to the Underworld (*Aeneid* 6.309–12):

> *quam multa in silvis autumni frigore primo*
> *lapsa cadunt folia . . .*
>
> As many as the leaves in the forests at the first cold of autumn slip down and fall . . .

It is hard to gauge Ovid's effect; but he certainly juxtaposes the emotional and physical violence of the Euripidean scene that is his

immediate source with the calmer epic distance and compassion of Virgil.[29]

Virgil's simile, like its imitation in the third canto of Dante's *Inferno,* belongs to the poetry of mortality in the epic tradition that goes back to Homer, acknowledging the suffering inherent in human life. Ovid changes the gentle falling of leaves in Virgil—*lapsa cadunt folia*—to the wind's violent tearing (*rapit*); but by echoing this famous Virgilian passage he is doing all he can to call attention to the literariness of his text, reminding us that the scene itself was once part of a play and we readers are also in a play of sorts. The intertext within the intertext is like a play on a play, a kind of game. Perhaps too Ovid means to imply that we can take in only so much horror and that after a certain point such scenes become self-conscious spectacle, a literary equivalent of the games and gladiatorial combats in the circus. In any case, this simile, which comes two lines before the end of the book, destabilizes our expectation of resolution and renders problematical any closure or palliation of these bloody events. The ending is a good example of what Ralph Johnson called the anti-classical sensibility; and here, as elsewhere, Ovid adopts Virgil's classical style to create exactly the opposite effect.

Conclusion

I conclude with some generalizations and speculations. Throughout the poem, the body is the means whereby Ovid evokes men and women's subjection to arbitrary violence, their helplessness and the abrupt tearing away of everything that makes their lives worthwhile. They often lose the power of speech and become totally disoriented in an unfamiliar, sometimes savage world. This is a world in which one's life can be overturned by a sudden, unexpected intervention from above, as Ovid's was to be by Augustus' order of exile. Indirectly, animal metamorphosis may also reflect broader cultural anxieties, though still specifically Roman anxieties, for example, the horror of a free person's reduction to slave status, in which he or she is only a body, and a body subject to physical punishment or sexual exploitation by the master. The body is also central to the poem's main themes and motifs: love and art, but also violence and pain.

It is hard to know whether Ovid is just opportunistically exploiting the tastes of his time—tastes formed by the brutality of the amphitheater and circus—or whether he protests against them. The truth is probably somewhere in between. Most of the suffering is inflicted by remote, powerful gods or by psychopathic rulers like Tereus or Erysichthon, and occasionally by crazed or murderous women. Generally, the human perpetrators are in some way punished, but the gods get away with their crimes, although Ovid sometimes raises the question of divine justice, as he does in the case of Actaeon or Niobe. Of course there are numerous cases of condign punishment (Lycaeon, Arachne, Tereus, Erysichthon) and some cases (though not many) of virtue rewarded (notably the couples Deucalion and Pyrrha, Philemon and Baucis, and, in a rather mixed and sad way, Ceyx and Halcyone). The suffering seems divided about equally between men and women: but, while men suffer more direct physical violence, some of the worst suffering is the sudden, arbitrary loss of human form inflicted on completely innocent women: Io, Callisto, Cyane and Arethusa, Dryope, Scylla.

The fate of the body in the poem resembles the fate of the landscape. In both cases beautiful, innocent forms are evoked, only to be unexpectedly violated or transformed into suffering, loss, and sorrow.[30] One of the surprising things about this poem, in fact, is how little joy or pleasure the body affords. It shows little interest too in the ideal or beautiful body as cultivated in fifth-century Greece or twentieth-century California. The poem alludes to a huge amount of sexual activity, but rarely presents it as enjoyable, except for the male rapist-gods who quickly take their pleasure and depart, often with terrible consequences, direct or indirect, for their victims, as in the case of the fourteen-year old Chione, raped on the same day by both Mercury and Apollo and killed by being shot through the tongue by a jealous Diana, to the inconsolable grief of her father (11.301–45).

This is a very different world from elegy; and we never approach anything like the sensual abandon of a poem like *Amores* 1.5 (*aestus erat*), the happy lover's afternoon, or the rare moment of postcoital oblivion in the union of Venus and Vulcan in *Aeneid* 8. Even when Ovid might linger over a moment of conjugal bliss, as in the union of Pygmalion and his new bride (10.291–97) or of Vertumnus and Pomona (14.770f.), he compressed the hints of pleasure into a few words, like the *mutua vulnera,* the "mutual wounds," of Pomona and Vertumnus (14.771).

Ovid, so fond of exploring the limits of genres, positions himself in a post-elegiac or anti-elegiac world. The vagueness and idealization of the female body in elegy here change to an explicitness of physical detail that recalls Horace's *Epodes* and satire, at least insofar as it suggests the ugly and the grotesque (as in the metamorphoses of Callisto or Scylla) rather than the beautiful. Even the detailed enumeration of Corinna's naked charms in *Amores* 1.5, for example, ends with the generalized *singula quid referam: nil non laudabile vidi* ("why should I relate individual details: I saw nothing that was not worthy of praise").

Elegy views the female body in terms of a more or less homogeneous, stable elegance of cultivated surface; the *Metamorphoses* depicts a wide variety of female bodies—young and old, virginal, and pregnant, human and divine—and draws on the classical tradition where physical change and process tend to be marked as female. Hence the monstrosity of parturition in Scylla or its gentler form in Myrrha, or the representation of Envy and Hunger as grotesque female bodies whose inner organs are horribly exposed to view. The female body of the *Metamorphoses* is the body given us by nature, in all its subjection to the physical processes of change and corruption, rather than the body of elegy, adorned by *ars* and *cultus* (see *A. A.* 3.261ff.). In the *Metamorphoses* it is the unadorned, uncultivated body that attracts, like Daphne's or Atalanta's, but the attention is unwelcome. In such settings the arts of feminine adornment are grotesque or misplaced, as in the Pygmalion episode or in the story of the female centaur Hylonome, who will soon die alongside her centaur-husband and whose *cultus*, "as much as was possible" in such a form, consists in washing in mountain streams and wearing the most becoming skins of "select wild beasts" (12.408–15 and see above). Beauty of countenance or grace of carriage, far from being the center of attention, are only precarious states of a vulnerable physical surface, all too easily violated and destroyed. In elegy, by and large, the male viewer and the male perspective are taken for granted (though some might contest this); in the *Metamorphoses* that male gaze is much more aggressive (as in the Daphne and Philomela episodes) and so far more problematical, even though Ovid gives it a counterpart in aggressive or illicit female sexual desire, as in the stories of Salmacis, Byblis, or Circe. For all of the poem's emphasis on the erotic, it is not flirtation and seduction *per se*, but the very unelegiac experiences of impregnation and birth that carry the plot forward,

another feature that the poem shares with the tradition of epic rather than erotic poetry.

Although the poem is all about bodies, the body, ultimately, is only a trope for something else, that is, the instability and vulnerability of the human condition. The body is our clearest hostage to the vicissitudes of fortune and the power of nature. It is the most visible sign of a human being's subjection to forces over which he or she has no control. This is a world polarized between those who have absolute power (the gods) and those who are powerless to defend their bodies against *force majeure*, whether that comes from an unforeseen storm at sea or a violent passion that suddenly and obsessively takes over one's life. This is a poem of extraordinary beauty of language and setting and yet of extraordinary pain. Should we read the *Metamorphoses* as the darker side of what the author of the *Ars Amatoria* saw as he walked about this center of empire, with its opulence and its poverty, its emperor and its slaves, its pleasure-loving crowds in the theaters and circuses and the bleeding beasts and gladiators in the amphitheaters? The *Metamorphoses*, like the *Ars Amatoria*, reflects the witty, urban world that Ovid loved so much; but perhaps it also reveals aspects of that world that Ovid did not or perhaps could not fully acknowledge, even to himself.

NOTES

1. See especially M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. R. Hurley, vols. 1–3 (New York 1980, 1985, 1986). For more recent work see, for example, Peter Brooks, *Body Work* (Cambridge, Mass. 1993); David B. Morris, *The Culture of Pain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1991); Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone* (New York 1994); Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (New York 1985).

2. On this very large subject see, e.g., Paul Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque* (Paris 1975); Carlin A. Barton, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster* (Princeton 1993); K. M. Coleman, "Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments," *JRS* 80 (1990), 44–73; Keith Hopkins, *Death and Renewal* (Cambridge 1983), 1–30.

3. Frederick Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1985), is probably the extreme of the formalist approach to Ovidian language. Of recent work see, e.g., A. M. Keith, *The Play of Fictions* (Ann Arbor 1992), and Garth Tissol, *The Face of Nature* (Princeton 1997), with his programmatic statement, 3–10, and Chapter 1. I make no attempt at bibliographical completeness. For a survey of recent trends see Michael von Albrecht, "Ovidian Scholarship: Some Trends and Perspectives," in Karl Galinsky, ed., *The Interpretation of Roman Poetry*, with Comment by Elaine Fantham (Frankfurt am Main 1992), 176–99.

4. See, for example, Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh* (New Haven 1986), D. C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic* (Oxford 1991), and Amy Richlin, "Reading Ovid's Rapes," in Amy Richlin, ed., *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* (Oxford and New York 1992), 158–79, respectively.

5. Richard Lanham, *Motives of Eloquence* (New Haven 1976), 59f.

6. See Hermann Fränkel, *Ovid: A Poet Between Two Worlds* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1945), especially 80–101, and Ernst Schmidt, *Ovids Poetische Menschenwelt* (Heidelberg 1991), 48ff.

7. See Shadi Bartsch, *Ideology in Cold Blood: A Reading of Lucan's Civil War*, forthcoming.

8. J. Lacan, "Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je," *Écrits* 1 (Paris 1966), 93–95.

9. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (Cambridge 1968). References are given in the text.

10. Cf. Alessandro Barchiesi, *Il poeta e il principe* (Rome and Bari 1994), 226–41; see also Bakhtin (note 9), 150.

11. On the interaction of chronology and exemplarity, see Schmidt (note 6), 21ff., 31ff., 44ff. ("Es geht Ovid um thematische Analogie, nicht um Geschichte," 45).

12. Heinsius' *incensaque* for the manuscripts' *immensaque* of 8.829 is ingenious but unnecessary.

13. Note the similar collocation of "truth" and "imitation" in the "dreams that by their imitation equal true forms" (*somnia, quae veras aequant imitamine formas*, 11.626), in a context that emphasized the insubstantiality of these phantoms (11.612ff., 633ff.).

14. See, e.g., Eleanor W. Leach, "Ecphrasis and the Theme of Artistic Failure in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *Ramus* 3 (1974), 102–42.

15. For "baroque" in Ovid see, e.g., Henri Bardon, "Ovide et le baroque," in *Ovidiana*, ed. N. I. Herescu (Paris 1958), 75–100; W. R. Johnson, "The Problem of the Counter-Classical Sensibility and Its Critics," *CSCA* 3 (1970), 123–51; Charles Segal, "Senecan Baroque: The Death of Hippolytus in Seneca, Ovid, and Euripides," *TAPA* 114 (1984), 311–25.

16. See Alison Sharrock, "Womanufacture," *JRS* 81 (1991), 39ff.; also Eric Downing, *Artificial I's: The Self as Artwork in Ovid, Kierkegaard, and Thomas Mann* (Tübingen 1993), 57ff.

17. On these reversals see, e.g., Richlin (note 4), 165f.; Mario Labate, "Storie di instabilità: L'episodio di Ermafrodito nelle Metamorfosi di Ovidio," *MD* 30 (1993), 54ff.

18. The sex-changes of Teiresias end with Juno's blinding of him at his judgment that women have greater pleasure in sex, and Jupiter's amelioration of that punishment (3.320–38). Both the dispute and its aftermath confirm the division of the sexes, here embodied in the quarrel of Jupiter and Juno. The first two similes that describe Salmacis' sexual aggression also restore the familiar gender divisions. In the first she is serpent to Hermaphroditus' eagle, and in the second she is the clinging ivy, he the tree. On the fluidity of gender in this passage see Georgia Nugent, "This Sex Which Is Not One: De-constructing Ovid's Hermaphrodite," *Differences* 2.1 (1990), 160–85, especially 163ff.

19. Feeney (note 4), 235 describes Cyane's end as "a final collapse of *numen* into physicality," although it should be noted that nymph's numinous status is not clearly defined in the poem. On Cyane's suffering as implict rape see also 5.492 and see Leo C. Curran, "Rape and Rape Victims in the Metamorphoses," *Arethusa* 11 (1978), 222.

20. See Proclus' summary of the *Cypria* (*Homeri Opera*, OCT, vol. 5, p. 105, 1–3, ed. Allen), where Hector's killing of Protesilaus and Achilles' of Cycnus are conjoined as the two opening events of the battles at Troy. Pindar, *Isthmian* 5.39, also joins Cycnus and Hector as two of the great triumphs of the Aeacid line ("Who slew Cycnus, who Hector . . . ?"); and the following references to the slaying of Memnon and the wounding of Telephus makes it clear that he means Achilles.

21. This is rather different from Greek tragedy where, although there is abundant physical suffering by men, there is also a tendency to project the consciousness of the suffering, vulnerable body upon women: see, e.g., Nicole Loraux, "Le lit, la guerre" (1981) in Loraux, *Les expériences de Tirésias: Le féminin et l'homme grec* (Paris 1989), 29–53, especially 48ff.

22. *Met.* 2.609–30, 3.308–14. There is some recognition of the pain and effort of childbirth in Ovid's recurrent use of the verbs *nitor* or *enitor* for the woman's travail; cf. Lucr. 5.210ff. In *Met.* 5.259 Ovid describes the bloody birth of Pegasus from the neck of the decapitated Gorgon (*materno sanguine nasci*), an upward displacement of the pain and violence of birth (developed even further in *Fasti* 3.450–52); but these are tempered by the mythical unreality of the setting. The classical poetic tradition generally does not go into details of birth, even though it sometimes recognizes its dangers and pain, as in the *Homeric Hymn to (Delian) Apollo* 91–126 (cf. 91f., "for nine days and nine nights Leto wsa pierced by hopeless birthpangs"), or Euripides, *Medea* 250f. ("I would rather stand three times by the shield [in war] than give birth once"). On the other hand Ovid gives Semele's death, which coincides with Bacchus' birth, barely a line and a half (3.308f.).

23. Although critics generally give Hercules' apotheosis a prominent place in their discussions, they rarely mention Alcmena or the contrast with her travail: so, e.g., Brooks Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge 1970), 166ff., 217, 325, 349ff.; Feeney (note 4), 206f. Otis does not even list Alcmena's story in his table of narrative events on 168.

24. In describing Scylla's combination of girlish beauty (*pulchro pectore virgo*) and monstrosity, Virgil also describes the lower parts as a "womb" (*uterus*) from which the wolves come forth (*Aen.* 3.426–28).

25. For the contrast within Scylla cf. *Met.* 13.735–37, where she is a beautiful nymph who rejects her many suitors.

26. G. W. Most, "*Disiecti membra poetae*: The Rhetoric of Dismemberment in Neronian Poetry" in Daniel L. Selden and Ralph J. Hexter, eds., *Innovations of Antiquity* (New York 1992), 398–400.

27. Most (note 26), 401ff.

28. On the multiple literary echoes in the Cyclops see Joseph Farrell, "Dialogue of Genres in Ovid's 'Lovesong of Polyphemus' (*Metamorphoses* 13.719–897)," *AJP* 113 (1992), 240ff. and especially 259f.

29. The relevance of the simile also becomes clearer in the next book (4.420ff.), when Juno descends to Tartarus to punish Athamas and Ino, with echoes of *Aeneid* 7. Here she explicitly cites Bacchus' revenge on Pentheus as a model for her own vengeance (4.429–31).

30. See Charles Segal, *Landscape in Ovid's Metamorphoses*, Hermes Einzelschriften 23 (Wiesbaden 1969), 74ff.