Imago Mundi: Another View of the Creation in Ovid's Metamorphoses

Stephen M. Wheeler

IMAGO MUNDI: ANOTHER VIEW OF THE CREATION IN OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES*

I

   Ovid opens *Metamorphoses* (1.5–88) by telling how a god or better nature (*deus et melior . . . natura,* 21) artfully designs the universe from chaos. Traditionally, interpretation of this episode has focused on Ovid's variety of philosophy rather than on his use of poetic models.[1] While criticism of late has begun to redress the balance by recontextualizing the cosmogony in the traditions of poetry, Ovid's self–conscious choice of a "creationist" account has still not been fully understood in relation to its poetic antecedents. We are told, for example, that it is principally a realization of the scientific cosmogonies outlined programmatically by Apollonius Rhodius in the song of Orpheus (*Arg.* 1.496–502) and by Vergil in the song of Silenus (*Ecl.* 6.31–40).[2] Yet Ovid does not follow these models in one important regard. Whereas they describe the evolution of the universe through purely physical causes, he depicts the same event as the work of a divine craftsman.[3]

   He alerts us to this point of disagreement when he imitates and "corrects" the beginning of the song of Orpheus.[4] Orpheus sings how the primordial union of elements (ἔτ' ἀλλήλοισι μιῇ συναρηρότα μορφῇ, *Arg.* 1.497) was first separated by the force of strife (νείκεος ἐξ ὀλοοῖο διέκριθεν ἀμφὶς ἕκαστα, 1.498), thereby setting the evolution of the cosmos in motion. Ovid, on the other hand, presents strife as a force that perpetuates chaos, causing the confusion, not the separation, of elements and qualities (cf. *Met.* 1.9, *non bene iunctarum discordia semina rerum*; 18–19, *corpore in uno / frigida pugnabant calidis*). To resolve this chaotic strife and set the universe in order, Ovid introduces instead the external figure of a deity (*hanc deus et melior litem natura*

---

   [1] For a survey of scholarship on the question of Ovid's philosophical borrowings see Bömer, *Die Metamorphosen* 15–17; also useful are the overviews of Maurach, "Ovids Kosmogonie" 132–34, and McKim, "Myth" 97–99.
   [2] Knox, *Ovid's Metamorphoses* 10–12; Helzle, "Ovid's Cosmogony" 123–25.
   [3] Feeney (*Gods in Epic* 189–90) contrasts Ovid's divinely directed universe with the random and undesigned universe portrayed in the Vergilian song of Silenus.
   [4] For the Alexandrian type of reference "correction" see Thomas, "Art of Reference" 185–89.

diremit, 21). This revision of the Apollonian model, striking in itself, is thrown into greater relief by Ovid's parallel cosmogony in *Fasti* 1, in which he imitates the same passage but maintains, with Orpheus, that strife was the catalyst for the separation of the elements (*haec rerum secessit lite suarum* / . . . *massa, Fast.* 1.107–8).[5] It appears, then, that Ovid is purposely setting the divine creation in *Metamorphoses* against the evolutionary type of cosmogony exemplified in Apollonius' *Argonautica* and in his own *Fasti.* This polemical stance also holds for the Vergilian song of Silenus and the other evolutionary cosmogonies to which Ovid alludes in his opening lines (i.e., Hesiod *Theogony* 116ff.; Lucretius *De Rerum Natura* 5.416–563; and his own *Ars Amatoria* 2.467–74). If Ovid distinguishes his "creationist" account from these poetic backgrounds, we may ask what model he imitates and why.

One possible answer is that Ovid imitates *cum variatione* the cosmogonies in the songs of Orpheus and Silenus by versifying a philosophical prose model that advances the theory of the universe's creation by a divine craftsman. Ovid's conception of a divine *fabricator* is clearly comparable with the demiurge in Plato's *Timaeus* (cf. 30a2–6) and with Stoic accounts of divine providence (cf. Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.58; Diog. Laert. 7.136–37, 156).[6] Yet we have no specific philosophical model for the pattern of Ovid's created world.[7] For instance, it has been recently suggested that the Ovidian vision of the creation strongly resembles the description of the universe by the Stoic speaker in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* (2.98–104).[8] But the differences are more telling than the similarities. First, Ovid presents a panoramic view of the universe's regions and then divides his account into a region–by–region survey with careful observance of the relative position of details. By

[5] On the contrast of motivation between the cosmogonies in *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* see Maurach, "Ovids Kosmogonie" 134; for the general importance of the cross–references between these two passages see Hinds, *Metamorphosis* 42–43, and Hardie, "Janus" 52–53.

[6] Robinson ("Ovid and the *Timaeus*" 254–58) argues that Cicero's translation of Plato's *Timaeus* is a model for Ovid's demiurge (cf. Cic. *Tim.* 6; *Nat. D.* 1.18–19); but, as Schmidt notes (*Ovids poetische Menschenwelt* 29 n. 31), Poseidonius remains a favorite candidate for Ovid's mix of Platonic and Stoic doctrines.

[7] It is likely that Ovid practices a philosophical eclecticism and does not depend on a single source: for details see Solmsen, "Chaos" 235; Spoerri, *Spähellenistische Berichte* 34; Lämmli, *Vom Chaos* 133; Due, *Changing Forms* 97–98; Knox, *Ovid's Metamorphoses* 10–12.

[8] Leach, *Rhetoric of Space* 447–48.

contrast, Cicero's Balbus does not give a totalizing picture of the universe but examines each region in isolation and lists individual details without attention to their spatial arrangement. Second, Ovid narrates and describes the creation of the world from chaos, whereas Balbus seeks only to prove the existence of divine reason (*providentia*) from the beauty (*pulchritudo*) of the orderly universe.

Given the truism that Ovid has little interest in philosophy for its own sake and given his cosmogony's explicit references to poetic models, it may be more fruitful to analyze his departure from those models in terms of another well–known poetic text in which a demiurge creates the world. Here the field of inquiry is certainly limited by the loss of Hellenistic cosmogonic epics familiar to Ovid and his contemporary audience.[9] But speculation about lost sources need not be the last refuge of a critic. In a suggestive but tantalizingly brief footnote, Denis Feeney (*Gods in Epic* 189 n. 4) observes that "*Metamorphoses* begins as if it were an epic ecphrasis" and compares the beginning of the Apollonian song of Orpheus. What Feeney implies, if I do not misinterpret, is that the Apollonian and Ovidian accounts both open with reference to the tripartite division of the universe (*ante mare et terras et quod tegit omnia caelum*, 1.5), a formulation that originates with the Homeric ecphrasis of the shield of Achilles (ἐν μὲν γαῖαν ἔτευξ᾽, ἐν δ᾽ οὐρανόν, ἐν δὲ θάλασσαν, *Il.* 18.483). The question then is, does *Metamorphoses* begin with reference to the Homeric shield of Achilles? As far as I know, this is a point that has not received attention in the scholarship, but nonetheless one that warrants serious consideration.[10] Ancient critics of Homer, influenced by Stoic cosmology, interpreted Hephaestus' manufacture of the shield as a philosophically conceived allegory

---

[9] The papyrus fragment P.Oxy. 2816.9–16 (= *SH* 938.9–16) offers a glimpse of one such hexameter cosmogony, in which a demiurgic "father" makes places for his "children" by dividing the universe into its constituent parts; cf. also the fourth–century A.D. Hermetic cosmogony, the so–called Strassburg Cosmogony (most conveniently found in Page, *Select Papyri* III 544–50, no. 136), which exhibits some striking similarities with Ovid's demiurgic account; cf. also Spoerri, *Späthellenistische Berichte* 45–46. For details on the Hellenistic poetic tradition before Ovid see Schwabl, "Weltschöpfung" 1544–46.

[10] Due, *Changing Forms* 24: "Homer would be a model of reading not only in cases of close imitation or special allusions but also in a varying degree throughout the whole poem, simply because the *Metamorphoses* was an epic poem and Homer was *the* epic poet." While the assumption that *Metamorphoses* is intrinsically an epic is open to doubt or qualification (cf. Farrell, "Dialogue of Genres" 235–40), Homer still remains a primary model for imitation.

of the creation of the universe by a demiurge.[11] As a result of this type
of exegesis, Roman poets came to regard the shield as a primary model
for describing the origin and structure of the universe.[12] Ovid's famil-
iarity with this sort of allegorization of the shield of Achilles is evident
from his subsequent imitation of the same model at the beginning of
Metamorphoses 2, when he presents an *imago mundi* engraved by Vul-
can on the doors of the palace of the sun god (2.5–18).[13] In fact, the
artistry of Vulcan in book 2 parallels that of the demiurge in book 1, and
thus implies a common source in the artistry of the Homeric Hephaes-
tus.[14]

    Accordingly, my aim in this essay is to show that Ovid uses the
shield of Achilles as a model for his own version of the divinely created
universe. The argument is divided into three parts. I first present evi-
dence for Ovid's allusive engagement with the Homeric shield in his
account of chaos. I then show that Ovid's description of the universe
resembles the ecphrasis of a work of art in the tradition of the Homeric
shield, and that it prefigures other divine works of art in *Metamorpho-
ses*. Finally, I offer some explanations why Ovid opens his poem with
reference to the Homeric shield and how this background is to be read
in light of obvious allusions to Hesiod's *Theogony* and the Apollonian
song of Orpheus.

---

    [11]Cf. [Heracl.] *All.* 43.2, ὅθεν γὰρ αἱ πρῶται τοῦ παντὸς ἔφυσαν ἀρχαὶ καὶ τίς ὁ
τούτων δημιουργὸς καὶ πῶς ἕκαστα πληρωθέντα διεκρίθη, σαφέσι τεκμηρίοις παρέσ-
τησε, τὴν Ἀχιλλέως ἀσπίδα τῆς κοσμικῆς περιόδου χαλκευσάμενος εἰκόνα; cf. 43.1–14,
48–51; Eust. 1154.41–1156.9, esp. 1155.4–8. These and other sources are collected and
discussed with reference to Crates of Mallos in Mette, *Sphairopoiia* 36–43, 177–88. For a
recent overview and bibliography on Hellenistic interpretation of the Homeric shield and
its influence on Roman poetry see Hardie, "*Imago Mundi*" 15–17 and *Virgil's Aeneid*
340–43.
    [12]Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid* 66–70, 346–58; cf. Farrell, *Virgil's Georgics* 269.
    [13]Cf. also the *iudicium armorum* of *Metamorphoses* 13, in which Ajax argues that
the cosmic grandeur of the shield (*clipeus vasti caelatus imagine mundi*, 13.110) does not
suit the ignoble Ulysses, and Ulysses retorts that the meaning of the shield, that is,
its allegorical significance, is lost on Ajax (13.288–95). Hardie ("*Imago Mundi*" 16–17)
makes a case for Ovid's (and Ajax') allusion to the shield's cosmogonic implications by
reading the variant *concretus* for *caelatus* in 13.110. On Ovid's awareness and use of the
allegorization of the Homeric shield in *Metamorphoses* 2 see M. Lausberg, "Zur Bild-
beschreibung" 120–21.
    [14]On the self–reference of *Met.* 2.5–18 to *Met.* 1.5–88 see Brown, "Palace" 215.

II

In discussing the poetics of allusion, we must always acknowledge the possibility that a given expression may not be charged with intertextual meaning, but may only be a *topos*. Furthermore, in the case of cosmological poetry, we must also allow that terms such as "sky" may just mean "sky," and not "a conventional epic sky," let alone "Homer's sky." Yet when Ovid begins his cosmogony with mentions of the tripartite division of the universe, the sun and the moon, and the ocean encircling the earth, he makes it clear that these terms allude to a specific set of well–remembered poetic models, including that source of sources, the Homeric shield of Achilles. Indeed the opening two lines of the cosmogony show that Ovid is not just describing the first state of things, but evoking the most important examples in the tradition of poetry that addresses the theme of first things. Ovid starts with the tripartite division of the universe, or rather before it: *ante mare et terras et quod tegit omnia caelum* (1.5). The formulation of the three world divisions may at first seem commonplace, since it is a well–established one in Greek and Roman thought and poetry.[15] But as Ovid proceeds to describe the uniform appearance of the pre–divided universe, *unus erat toto naturae vultus in orbe* (6), the reader may remember the beginning of Apollonius' description of the song of Orpheus:

ἤειδεν δ᾽ ὡς γαῖα καὶ οὐρανὸς ἠδὲ θάλασσα,
τὸ πρὶν ἔτ᾽ ἀλλήλοισι μιῇ συναρηρότα μορφῇ
νείκεος ἐξ ὀλοοῖο διέκριθεν ἀμφὶς ἕκαστα·   (*Arg.* 1.496–98)

Three points of contact with the first two lines of the Apollonian model can be discerned. First, Ovid begins from the same point as Orpheus does: the three world divisions. Second, he translates the adverbial τὸ πρὶν with the preposition *ante* (5). Finally, he renders ἀλλήλοισι μιῇ συναρηρότα μορφῇ as *unus . . . erat naturae vultus* (6).[16] The certainty of Ovid's opening allusion to the song of Orpheus raises the possibility of a double allusion to the Homeric shield of Achilles, since the first line of Orpheus' song patently "quotes" the first line of Homer's description of the image on the shield of Achilles (ἐν μὲν γαῖαν

---

[15] See Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid* 322–25.
[16] Cf. similar imitations of Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 1.496–97 in Ov. *Ars Am.* 2.468, *unaque erat facies sidera, terra, fretum*, and *Fast.* 1.106, *ignis, aquae, tellus, unus acervus erat.*

ἔτευξ’, ἐν δ’ οὐρανόν, ἐν δὲ θάλασσαν, *Il.* 18.483).[17] Equally significant, Orpheus sustains his allusion to Homer by singing of the motions of the stars and the sun and moon (*Arg.* 1.499–500; cf. *Il.* 18.484–89), and so indicates that the first part of his song is an allegorizing interpretation of the shield.[18] It seems likely, therefore, that Ovid's "quotation" of the authoritative first line of the Apollonian bard includes reference to the authoritative Homeric original, which, after all, represents "the most famous and influential archaic formulation of a tripartite division of the universe."[19] Ovid's subsequent imitation of the third line of the Apollonian model quoted above supports this interpretation. As discussed in the introduction, Ovid contradicts Orpheus' account of how strife divides the earth, heaven, and sea, when he replaces strife with a benevolent creator: *hanc deus et melior litem natura diremit* (21). This is not a case of arbitrary inversion. Ovid corrects Apollonius with reference to the Homeric original in which it is the "demiurgic" Hephaestus, not strife, that separates the parts of the universe.

The likelihood of Ovid's double allusion to both the Apollonian song of Orpheus and the Homeric shield of Achilles increases if we consider the parallel of the cosmological song of Iopas in Vergil's *Aeneid* (1.742–46).[20] Like Ovid's cosmogony, the song of Iopas takes its cue from the song of Orpheus.[21] Unlike Ovid, Iopas does not begin with the tripartite division of the universe but with the sun and the moon (*hic canit errantem lunam solisque labores, Aen.* 1.742), an allusion to the second line of the Homeric shield (ἠέλιόν τ’ ἀκάμαντα σελήνην τε πλήθουσαν, *Il.* 18.484), which is replete with the scientific learning of

---

[17] For this type of allusion see McKeown, *Ovid: Amores* 37–45 (cf. Hinds, *Metamorphosis* 56, 151 n. 16) and Thomas, "Art of Reference" 188, who calls it "window reference."

[18] See Nelis ("Song of Orpheus" 158), who points out that Apollonius reads the Homeric shield allegorically as a cosmogony, and that his imitation lifts the veil of allegory and presents the true meaning of the model. I think Ovid may be taking the hint of Apollonius and realizing the Homeric shield's physical allegory on a larger scale in his cosmogony.

[19] Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid* 322.

[20] On the song of Iopas being a model for Ovid's cosmogony see Schmitzer, *Zeitgeschichte* 36.

[21] On the influence of the Apollonian model on Vergil see Brown, "Song of Iopas" 323–24; Hunter, *Argonautica* 176.

the philosopher–poet.[22] Vergil thus recognizes Apollonius' allegorizing engagement with the Homeric shield but pointedly varies the intertextual link by "quoting" the second line instead of the first. Furthermore, just as Apollonius continues to allude to the shield of Achilles in the song of Orpheus, so too does Vergil in two out of the four remaining lines of Iopas' song (*Aen.* 1.744 ~ *Il.* 18.486; *Aen.* 1.745 ~ *Il.* 18.489), thereby maintaining the structure of his double allusion.[23] In view of the importance of the Homeric model to Apollonius and his imitator Vergil, it is very possible that Ovid, who treats the same cosmological material, would engage in the same kind of play with literary models when he begins with reference to the tripartite division of the universe.

As we read on, we find that Ovid follows the example of the songs of Orpheus and Iopas in sustaining his allusion to the Homeric shield. After defining chaos as the state *before* the division of the universe into three regions, he repeats and varies the same idea by observing that the sun and the moon were not yet present: *nullus adhuc mundo praebebat lumina Titan, / nec nova crescendo reparabat cornua Phoebe* (10–11). One well–recognized model for these lines is the Lucretian description of the first state of things: *hic neque tum solis rota cerni lumine largo / altivolans poterat nec magni sidera mundi* (5.432–33).[24] It is noteworthy, however, that Ovid replaces Lucretius' stars with the moon. The pairing of the sun and moon is, of course, a commonplace of cosmological poetry, appearing with some frequency in *De Rerum Natura* (cf. 1.128, 5.76, 5.418, 5.751). But this motif also calls to mind the second line of the ecphrasis of the shield of Achilles (*Il.* 18.484), famously imitated in the song of Orpheus (*Arg.* 1.500) and the song of Iopas (*Aen.* 1.742)—a set of contexts that Ovid has already evoked. In addition, Ovid's image of the waxing moon (*nova crescendo reparabat cornua Phoebe,* 11) may be a learned "correction" of Homer's "full moon" (σελήνην τε πλήθουσαν, *Il.* 18.484), through which he displays a philosopher–poet's interest in

[22] Cf. also Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 1.500, σεληναίης τε καὶ ἠελίοιο κέλευθοι; Verg. *G.* 2.478, *defectus solis varios lunaeque labores*. The connections between the song of Iopas, the song of Orpheus, and the Homeric shield of Achilles are noted in Brown, "Song of Iopas" 325–26 and n. 17; cf. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid* 63 n. 72.

[23] On Vergil's use of the Homeric shield in the song of Iopas see Brown, "Homeric Background."

[24] Robbins, "Creation" 403.

lunar phases.[25] This allusive technique would be familiar from the song of Iopas in which Vergil reinterprets Homer's image of the "weariless sun" as solar eclipses (*solisque labores, Aen.* 1.742).

The reader may also notice that the opening sequence of cosmological topics—tripartite division of the world, and the sun and moon—is a pattern that derives from the first two lines of the shield of Achilles. Again, the pattern may be thought conventional. For example, Lucretius introduces his own cosmogony this way: *sed quibus ille modis coniectus materiai / fundarit terram et caelum pontique profunda, / solis lunai cursus, ex ordine ponam* (5.416–18). And the speech of Anchises in *Aeneid* 6 follows the same pattern with some variation in order: *principio caelum ac terras camposque liquentis / lucentemque globum lunae Titaniaque astra* (6.724–25). Yet it is also evident that the Vergilian text is directly indebted to the Homeric shield of Achilles.[26] And the same is probably true for Lucretius, who reproduces the exact order of Homer's topics.[27] Could Ovid therefore be indifferent to the Homeric effect of beginning with the sequence of the tripartite universe and the sun and the moon? One further piece of evidence suggests not. Ovid calls the sun *Titan,* a metonymy that points to the phrase *Titania astra* in the speech of Anchises (*Aen.* 6.725; cf. also *Aen.* 4.119). This allusion indicates Ovid's awareness of Vergil's imitation of the Homeric pattern, and hence the tradition of the cosmological poetry that the cosmological section of the shield of Achilles engenders.

In his sketch of what is missing from chaos, Ovid does not go on to Homer's next cosmological topic, the stars (cf. *Il.* 18.485–88), but focuses on the round earth balanced in midair (12–13). He thus contents himself at this point with an evocation of the opening two lines of the shield description.[28] The subject of the spherical earth, on the other hand, may not be so far removed from Homer; it could reflect theories

[25] Cf. Prop. 3.5.25–28, *tum mihi naturae libeat perdiscere mores / . . . qua venit exoriens, qua deficit, unde coactis / cornibus in plenum menstrua luna redit.* Ovid's "correction" of πλήθουσαν with *crescendo* is by chance paralleled by Eustathius, who on his own authority interprets the Homeric epithet to mean αὔξουσαν (1155.25–28).

[26] Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid* 70.

[27] For Lucretius' view of Homer as a natural philosopher and epic model see *De Rerum Nat.* 1.124–26 and the discussion in Farrell, *Vergil's Georgics* 305–6.

[28] Cf. Lucr. 5.417–18, which similarly limits its enumeration of cosmological topics to the first two lines of the Homeric model; but contrast Verg. *Aen.* 6.724–25, which not only covers the first two lines but also alludes subtly to the lengthier topic of the stars when dealing with the topic of the sun in the phrase *Titania astra.*

of *sphairopoiia* which allegorizing critics, such as Crates of Mallos, applied to the shield of Achilles.[29] Be this as it may, Ovid concludes his negative account of cosmic order with the image of the ocean (not) encircling the earth, *nec bracchia longo / margine terrarum porrexerat Amphitrite* (13–14). Although this line–and–a–half is redolent of neotericism, it clearly descends from Homer's famous closing lines about Ocean being placed around the rim of the shield (*Il*. 18.607–8).[30] What stands out, then, in Ovid's negative description of chaos is an *imago mundi* that recalls the opening two lines and closing two lines of the description of the shield of Achilles (*Met*. 1.5 ~ *Il*. 18.483; *Met*. 1.10–11 ~ *Il*. 18.484; *Met*. 1.13–14 ~ *Il*. 18.607–8). This allusive strategy is comparable with that observed in the Apollonian song of Orpheus and the Vergilian song of Iopas and so hints that the cosmogony itself is a revelation of the physical allegory underpinning the famous Homeric background.

III

Thus far I have observed Ovid's method of evoking Homer in the midst of chaos. Now let us turn to the proposition that Homer furnishes an important conceptual model for the creation. As a preliminary, it is useful to consider the role that the shield of Achilles plays as a model for the conventional epic "cosmic setting." Philip Hardie (*Virgil's Aeneid* 66–67) observes that the epic poet typically prefaces mythological, heroic, or historical themes with a prelude on natural philosophy—the cosmic setting—which establishes "a relationship between particular places, people, or events and the most general structure or history of the universe." He divides the cosmic setting into two types: one marked by chronological sequence, the other by spatial sequence. The former has a large–scale model in Hesiod's *Theogony*, which serves as a cosmogonical prelude to *Eoiai*; and the latter is represented by the Homeric ecphrasis of the shield of Achilles, in which the three world divisions and heavenly bodies (*Il*. 18.483–89) function as a cosmological prelude to the subsequent scenes of human life. Although Hardie's

---

[29] See Mette, *Sphairopoiia* 36, 39, with n. 2; cf. also [Heracl.] *All*. 48.

[30] On the Homeric association of these lines see Bömer, *Die Metamorphosen* 23. The *spondeiazon* with Amphitrite is a well–known neoteric effect (see Helzle, "Ovid's Cosmogony" 127–28) but also perfectly Homeric (cf. *Od*. 3.91, 5.422, 12.60, 12.97).

divisio may be oversimplified, especially seeing that the cosmological shield of Achilles was also understood and imitated as a cosmogony, nevertheless it remains a helpful tool for analyzing the character of Ovid's cosmic setting at the beginning of *Metamorphoses*.

First of all, Ovid clearly alludes to the Hesiodic cosmic setting by calling the first state of things Chaos (*quem dixere Chaos*, 7). And since he is relating a cosmogony, chronological sequence is more or less present. His account may be divided into four successive periods of time: (1) the demiurge's separation of chaos into four regions and elements (21–31); (2) his arrangement of the typical physical features in each region (32–71); (3) the appearance of *animalia* (72–75); (4) finally, the creation of man (76–88). Despite this general chronological framework, however, Ovid gives few explicit indications of temporal sequence within each phase; his use of *principio* (34) followed by *tum* (36) at the beginning of the second stage is exceptional. Moreover, towards the end of his account he telescopes time (cf. the use of *vix . . . cum*, 69–70; *nuper*, 80; *modo*, 87), giving the impression of the cosmogony's suddenness.[31] If the chronological connection between events is weak, the spatial relation among cosmic features is strong. The demiurge divides and disposes the contents of chaos in a spatially sequential manner corresponding to his point of view. Thus while Ovid alludes to the Hesiodic cosmic setting, he comes closer to realizing the ecphrastic structure of the Homeric model. The conceptual affinity between Ovid's cosmic setting and the shield of Achilles is further strengthened by the parallelism between the demiurge and Hephaestus.

But similarity of motivation and structure is not all. In his cosmic setting Ovid introduces the theme of art, representing the creation of the universe as the manufacture of an artifact. This particular emphasis makes sense as a response to the artistic significance of the shield of Achilles. Indeed we might venture to say that Ovid's cosmogony activates both literal and allegorical levels of meaning in the Homeric shield but reverses them so that natural philosophy veils the deeper truth of art. In the following analysis I am concerned with the way that Ovid invites the reader to view the creation as a work of art and how the structure of the whole reflects ecphrastic conventions. It is on these grounds that the Homeric shield is most directly relevant to the cosmogony as a conceptual model. And as we shall see, it is on these

---

[31] On the lack of temporal duration in the cosmogony see Lämmli, *Vom Chaos* 6; cf. also Schmidt, *Ovids Menschenwelt* 16 and n. 8.

grounds that the cosmogony is relevant to other works of art in *Meta-morphoses*.

The creation of the universe is, of course, not exactly the same as that of a picture on a shield. The latter represents nature mimetically, whereas the former *is* nature. Thus we do not find in the cosmogony those features of ecphrasis that make us aware of the mimetic qualities of a work of art: that is, references to the artistic medium's texture and color, or comments on how images look like what they represent. On the other hand, Ovid does draw an analogy between cosmic order and art in the description of chaos.[32] The phrase *rudis indigestaque moles* (7) hints that chaos is a raw material that awaits refinement in the hands of an artist (*OLD* s.v. *rudis* 1a).[33] Repeating and varying the idea in the next line, *nec quicquam nisi pondus iners* (8), Ovid makes a pun on *iners*, meaning both sluggish and lacking art, which clarifies the absence of *ars* in *rudis indigestaque moles*. The phrase *pondus iners* itself derives from *Ars Amatoria*, where Ovid describes the formless stone that is improved by the sculptor's art: *quae nunc nomen habent operosi signa Myronis, / pondus iners quondam duraque massa fuit* (3.219–20). What distinguishes chaos from cosmos, then, is the ameliorating influence of art. Ovid makes a similar point when introducing the silver doors ornamented by Vulcan at the beginning of book 2: *materiam superabat opus* (2.5). Here, as in the creation, it is quite apparent where the poet places his priorities.

Ovid's presentation of "god or a better nature" as an artist fulfills the expectations raised by the raw material of chaos. After the separation of the elements, the creator gathers the earth into a perfect sphere (*terram . . . magni speciem glomeravit in orbis*, 34–35). The verb *glo-mero* suggests the image of wool gathered into a ball, particularly if we remember the earlier idea of *rudis indigestaque moles* (6).[34] Comparison

[32] Some of the following points are discussed with a different emphasis in Solodow, *World* 213–15; cf. also Lateiner, "Artists" 11–12.

[33] On the artistic connotation of *rudis* cf. *Met.* 1.87–88, *sic, modo quae fuerat rudis et sine imagine, / tellus*, where *rudis* is glossed as *sine imagine*; *Met.* 1.406, *non exacta satis rudibusque simillima signis*; *Trist.* 1.7.22, *vel quod adhuc crescens et rude carmen erat*, where I believe (following Hinds, "Booking" 22–23) that Ovid alludes to the chaos account in the *Metamorphoses* and so equates the unfinished *Metamorphoses* with the rude state of chaos; for further discussion of Ovid's use of *rudis* in the context of literary composition see Harries, "The Spinner" 66.

[34] Cf. *TLL* 6.2.2058ff. s.v. *glomero*. While the term *glomus* may indicate the earth, it commonly refers to a ball of wool: cf. Lucr. 1.360; Hor. *Epist.* 1.13.14.

with the wool–gathering of Arachne, *tantus decor adfuit arti, / sive rudem primos lanam glomerabat in orbes* (6.18–19), confirms this interpretation of *glomero*.[35] Feeney (*Gods in Epic* 191) concludes from the verbal echo that Ovid casts Arachne as a demiurgic figure. But the converse is also true: the demiurge engages in an activity characteristic of Arachne, "the paradigm of human artistic skill."[36] As the account progresses, Ovid explicitly identifies the creator's artistic status: *mundi fabricator* (57), *opifex rerum* (79). These terms have philosophical overtones, but at the same time they bear witness to the especially Ovidian idea that art lies behind the order of nature.[37]

Given his careful development of the idea that the creator is an artist and that the stuff of chaos is his raw material, it should not be too surprising that Ovid represents the universe as though it were a work of art, utilizing ecphrastic devices to give it the requisite vividness. It is in this regard that we might begin to consider the opening episode of *Metamorphoses* as a large–scale imitation of the Homeric ecphrasis of the shield of Achilles, the archetypal *imago mundi*. Ovid's descriptive method matches Homer's in several respects. First, both poets depict an object as it is made. This is not the standard technique of ecphrasis, in which the poet describes an already completed work of art.[38] Rather Homer and Ovid exploit the paradox between the dynamic process of creation and the static quality of the finished product.[39] Second, in each

---

[35] The verbal cross–reference links books 1 and 6, the beginnings of the first and second pentads of the poem, and so strengthens the parallel between the demiurge and Arachne. On signs of book arrangement by pentads in *Metamorphoses* see Rieks, "Zum Aufbau."

[36] Lateiner, "Artists" 15.

[37] Solodow, *World* 213. Leach (*Rhetoric of Space* 448) claims that *opifex* is "scarcely the most honorific of Roman terms for a maker but implies the limited operations of mechanical craftsmanship." Though the term may be contemptuous when applied by a leisured aristocrat to the laboring craftsperson, it is surely not when applied to the divine creator; cf. Pease, *De Natura Deorum* 175 on 1.18; *TLL* 9.2.704.63ff. s.v. *opifex*. Furthermore, the phrases *melior natura* (1.21) and *mundi melioris origo* (1.79) prompt the reader to evaluate the *opifex rerum* positively; cf. Persius' ostensible praise of Caesius Bassus as a lyric poet at 6.3–4: *mire opifex numeris veterum primordia vocum / atque marem strepitum fidis intendisse Latinae*.

[38] Friedländer, *Johannes von Gaza* 19.

[39] Hubbard ("Nature" 18) observes with regard to the shield of Achilles (and the *Iliad* itself): "This paradox is in some sense at the root of all great works of art, which constitute themselves as both action and artifact, process and product, becoming and being."

case, the creative artist plays the same role of establishing the point of view from which we see what is created.[40] Ovid alerts us to the demiurge's controlling perspective, for example, when he shapes the earth into a perfectly spherical globe (*terram, ne non aequalis ab omni / parte foret, magni speciem glomeravit in orbis,* 34–35).

Ovid then proceeds to a step–by–step survey of what the demiurge designs on and above the earth, articulating his description with a succession of active verbs whose subject is the creator himself. This pattern of description has obvious affinities with the way that Homer presents the scenes on the shield of Achilles.[41] Especially striking in this respect is Ovid's repetition of the verbal phrase *iussit et* in the first foot of lines 37, 43, and 55 (cf. also the reuse of the phrase at 86). Each time the verb governs a series of infinitives detailing specific cosmological arrangements: first for the ocean, then for the earth, and finally for the air. The unusual repetition of the phrase *iussit et* has, to my knowledge, received no comment. But if we compare the description of the pictures on the shield of Achilles, we find that Homer regularly begins a new scene by repeating a verb phrase like ἐν δὲ . . . ποίησε (*Il.* 18.490, 573, 587) or ἐν δ' ἐτίθει (*Il.* 18.541, 550, 561, 607). This sort of repetitive introduction to each scene becomes a standard structural feature of post–Homeric ecphrases.[42] Vergil follows the Homeric precedent in his description of the shield of Aeneas by introducing new scenes with the repetition of *fecerat* (*Aen.* 8.628, 630, 710). And in *Metamorphoses* 6 Ovid alludes to the Homeric/Vergilian pattern in describing the representations on the tapestry of Arachne: *fecit et Asterien aquila luctante teneri / fecit olorinis Ledam recubare sub alis* (6.108–9). Considered in this context, Ovid's recurrent use of *iussit et* may be an adaptation of the Homeric/Vergilian technique of repeating a verb of making to introduce new scenes in an ecphrasis. Of course, the first example of *iussit et* would not be recognizable as a substitute for *fecit et,* but Ovid may hint at the substitution when the demiurge "commanded" the formation of the ocean and then "added" bodies of fresh water: *addidit et fontes et*

---

[40]On "point of view" or "focalization" in ecphrasis see Fowler, "Narrate and Describe" 27–31; cf. Hubbard, "Nature" 17–18.

[41]See Harries, "The Spinner" 69.

[42]Hellenistic poets prefer, however, to follow the example of the Hesiodic *Scutum,* introducing individual scenes by ἐν μέν, ἐν δέ, as the artifact is no longer described in a state of manufacture: cf. [Hes.] *Sc.* 161, 168, etc.; Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 1.730, 735, etc.; Mosch. *Eur.* 44, 50; for further details see Bühler, *Die Europa* 94; cf. also Clausen, *Virgil's Aeneid* 79; Harries, "The Spinner" 69.

stagna inmensa lacusque (38). The verb *addo* typically appears in Vergil-ian and Ovidian ecphrases as a variation on *facio* when the transition is made to a new vignette.[43] In Ovid's cosmogony, therefore, the phrase *addidit et* could be a signpost for interpreting the repetition of *iussit et,* the demiurge's distinctive *modus operandi,* as the equivalent of *fecit et.*

While Ovid may imitate the description of the shield of Achilles in narrating the creation from the artist's point of view, it is important to recognize that he also employs conventional ecphrastic devices that are developed after Homer. In the description of a work of art, Richard Thomas ("Ecphrastic Centerpieces" 175–76) observes that the poet's concern is to "situate and relate to each other details appearing in the work." The border of the composition is commonly defined, as is the relative position of details, including especially references to centrality. The reader thereby acquires, according to Thomas, "an image of vi-gnettes, if not of the entire structure." Ovid's presentation of the *imago mundi* exhibits the same attentiveness to borders, to structural arrange-ment of details, and to medial position, thereby giving the reader a sense of discrete parts within a consolidated whole. In this respect the cosmogony anticipates the ecphrases of other works of art in *Meta-morphoses* (for example, Vulcan's chasing on the doors of the sun god, and the tapestry of Minerva) in which the field of view is neatly de-limited and filled with vignettes.

In the first act of creation, Ovid explicitly defines the borders of the cosmos and the relative position of its elements and regions. The demiurge separates the four regions of the world (21–25), an event that is restated and visually realized in the spatial scheme of the four ele-ments (26–30). Although the four elements are a conventional topic in scientific poetry, Ovid exploits their ecphrastic possibilities, enumerat-ing them in spatial sequence from top to bottom, correlating weight with position.[44] Fire, the lightest element, makes a place for itself at the top (*summaque locum sibi fecit in arce,* 27) and sets the upper limit of the cosmos. Air is closest to fire in weight and hence adjacent to it (*proxi-*

[43] Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 8.637, *addiderat* (shield of Aeneas), which follows the repeated use of *fecerat* (628, 630); Ov. *Met.* 6.110, *addidit* (tapestry of Arachne), which follows the repeated use of *fecit* (108–9); Verg. *G.* 3.30, *addam* (doors of temple vowed to Octavian), which follows *faciam* (27); cf. also Verg. *Aen.* 8.666; Ov. *Met.* 6.85; Claud. *Rapt. Pros.* 1.259. More generally, see *TLL* 1.581.41ff. s.v. *addo.*

[44] The four elements are frequently treated with attention to their spatial hierarchy (cf. Ov. *Fast.* 1.109–10; Man. 1.149–61), but contrast Ovid's speech of Pythagoras, in which they have no fixed position and are fluidly interchangeable (*Met.* 15.239–45).

mus est aër illi levitate locoque, 28). Earth assumes a position below fire
and air, being more solid (*densior his*, 29); significantly, however, Ovid
avoids specifying its medial position—a point that I shall address
shortly. Finally, water encircles the earth and occupies the "edges" of
the lower limit of the cosmos (*circumfluus umor* / *ultima possedit soli-
dumque coercuit orbem*, 30–31).[45] In the first act of creation, then, Ovid
explicitly defines the borders of the universe and the relative position of
its elements and regions, and so establishes a visual framework for the
developments that follow.

The central part of the cosmogony (32–68) elaborates and embel-
lishes this framework. Ascending the scale of the elements—water (36–
42), earth (43–51), air (52–66), and aether (67–68)—the poet both nar-
rates and describes the disposition of cosmological features in each
region.[46] The transitions to the upper regions illustrate the predomi-
nantly spatial rationale that governs the order of the account. After the
demiurge attends to the creation of the five terrestrial zones, Ovid goes
on to the next topic by specifying the location (and threatening aspect)
of the region of air: *inminet his aer* (52). After arranging meteorological
matters, the demiurge finishes things off by placing aether on top of the
other regions: *haec super inposuit liquidum et gravitate carentem* / *ae-
thera* (67–68).[47] Interestingly, both of these transitions recur in the
ecphrasis of the *imago mundi* engraved by Vulcan on the doors of the
palace of the sun. Ovid uses the verb *inminet* at the beginning of the
description to specify the sky's physical relation to earth (*caelumque,
quodque inminet orbi*, 2.7). And the phrase *haec super inposuit* re-
appears in the passive voice at the end of the ecphrasis, once again to
describe the position of the sky: *haec super inposita est caeli fulgentis
imago* (2.17).[48] Thus, returning to the cosmogony, we see that it is struc-
tured in the way that other ecphrases are in the *Metamorphoses*.

In addition to defining the relative position of the four parts of the
universe, Ovid enumerates the contents of each region exhaustively,
presumably to achieve vividness. According to rhetorical theory, enu-

[45] Cf. *Met.* 6.127–28, *ultima pars telae, tenui circumdata limbo*, / *nexilibus flores
hederis habet intertextos*, where Ovid describes the "edges" of Arachne's tapestry.

[46] Cf. Lucr. 5.251–305, where the argument for the perishability of the cosmos is
made from the instability of the elements in ascending order, beginning with earth.

[47] The spatial rationale of lines 67–68, in fact, creates a chronological inconsis-
tency, since the demiurge divides the sky into five zones in lines 45–48.

[48] *Met.* 2.17, *haec super . . . caeli fulgentis imago*, is also indebted to *Aen.* 8.671–
72, *haec inter tumidi late maris ibat imago* / *aurea*, describing the shield of Aeneas.

meration helps effect visual immediacy or *enargeia*—the goal of ecphra-sis.[49] So Ovid catalogs bodies of fresh water (springs, swamps, lakes, and rivers, 38–43), terrestrial formations (plains, valleys, forests, and mountains, 43–44), meteorological phenomena (fog, clouds, thunder, lightning, and winds, 54–66), and the *animalia* that inhabit each region (72–75). Here we may want to compare again the example of Balbus' description of the universe in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* (2.98–104), which is also marked by an enumerative plenitude of details. But Ovid differs from Balbus in that he concludes each regional catalogue (water, earth, and air) with a fully developed picture, a technique that parallels the description of vignettes on visual works of art. The first list of bodies of fresh water fans out into the image of rivers:

> fluminaque obliquis cinxit declivia ripis,
> quae diversa locis partim sorbentur ab ipsa,
> in mare perveniunt partim campoque recepta
> liberioris aquae pro ripis litora pulsant.   (*Met.* 1.39–42)

Ovid enhances the vividness of his description by splitting the rivers into different parts (*partim . . . partim*) and relating them to land– and seascape.[50] Skipping over the list of terrestrial formations for the mo-ment, we come next to the list of meteorological phenomena, which Ovid tops off with a six–line visual diagram of the cardinal winds (61–66). Here he enumerates the points of the compass and provides a new set of spatial coordinates by which to view the earth.[51]

Coming back to the list of terrestrial developments, we find that it culminates in the topic of the five celestial and terrestrial zones (45–51). Flanked on either side by the vignettes of the rivers and winds, this set of subdivisions functions as the centerpiece of the cosmogony. Ovid begins by enumerating the array of the zones in heaven, splitting them into groups and directing the eye right and left (*utque duae dextra cae-*

---

[49] Cf. Quint. 9.2.40, *illa vero, ut ait Cicero, sub oculos subiectio tum fieri solet, cum res non gesta indicatur, sed ut sit gesta ostenditur, nec universa, sed per partes.* On enumeration as a means of achieving vividness see Roberts, *Jeweled Style* 40–41.

[50] On the ecphrastic device of division into groups see Roberts, *Jeweled Style* 41. Cf. also Ovid's use of same technique in the ecphrasis of another river, the Nile, on the shield of Nileus in 5.188–89, *clipeo quoque flumina septem / argento partim, partim cae-laverat auro.*

[51] Ovid's treatment of the four winds became a popular subject for ecphrasis in later Latin poetry; see Roberts, *Jeweled Style* 43 and n. 20.

lum totidemque sinistra / parte secant zonae, quinta est ardentior illis,
45–46).[52] He repeats and varies this scheme for the five *terrestrial* zones
(*totidemque plagae tellure premuntur,* 48), designating medial and inter-
mediate positions instead (*quarum quae media est, non est habitabilis*
aestu / nix tegit alta duas: totidem inter utrumque locavit, 49–50). As has
been well documented, the definition of the center plays a prominent
part in ecphrasis, whether within the described work as a whole or in a
scene that forms a part of the whole.[53] Up to this point in the cos-
mogony, Ovid avoids explicit mention of medial position—surprisingly
so, since he has had ample opportunity to observe the mythological and
scientific commonplace that the earth is the middle of the universe.[54]
The section on the five zones (46–51) finally answers to expectations of
a structural midpoint, and quite appropriately, because it is located at
the center of the cosmogony (21–75).[55] Indeed, in the middle of this
central section Ovid introduces the five terrestrial zones and explicitly
identifies the medial position of the torrid zone: *quarum quae media est,*
non est habitabilis aestu (49).[56] The torrid zone thus functions as a surro-

[52]Cf. Verg. *G.* 1.235–36, *quam circum extremae dextra laevaque trahuntur / cae-*
ruleae; Ovid uses the same distributive pattern in the ecphrasis of Vulcan's door reliefs in
Met. 2.18, *signaque sex foribus dextris totidemque sinistris.*

[53]For the two types of centrality in an extended ecphrasis see Thomas, "Ecphras-
tic Centerpieces" 176.

[54]In the diagram of the elements (26–31), earth's centrality is not specified (*densior*
his tellus elementaque grandia traxit / et pressa est gravitate sua, 29–30), though it is
intimated elsewhere in the cosmogony (*nec circumfuso pendebat in aëre tellus / ponderi-*
bus librata suis, 12–13; *sic onus inclusum . . . distinxit,* 47). Later imitations of Ovid's
cosmogony make a point of mentioning the medial position of earth: Sil. Ital. 11.456–57,
tum deus . . . tellurisque globum media compage locasset; Claud. *Rapt. Pros.* 1.252, *in*
medium graviora cadunt. On earth's medial position in scientific accounts cf. Cic. *Nat. D.*
2.98 and Pease, *De Natura Deorum* on 1.103; in ecphrases, cf. *Met.* 2.6, *aequora caelarat*
medias cingentia terras; Nonn. *Dion.* 25.386–90.

[55]Here I reckon the sections on chaos (5–20) and the creation of man (76–88) as
separate paragraphs.

[56]Ovid's explicit reference to the medial position of the torrid zone involves a
correction of his Vergilian model (*quarum una corusco / semper sole rubens et torrida*
semper ab igni, Verg. *G.* 1.233–34) in light of Eratosthenes' original: ἡ δὲ μία ψαφαρή τε
καὶ ἐκ πυρὸς οἷον ἐρυθρή. / ἡ μὲν ἔην μεσάτη . . . (*Hermes* fr. 16.5–6 P). Cf. also Claud.
Rapt. Pros. 1.259–60, *addit quinque plagas: mediam subtegmine rubro / obsessam fer-*
vore notat, where the description of Proserpina's tapestry of creation emphasizes the
medial position of the torrid zone, recognizing Ovid's play with the same idea: at 259
mediam not only occupies the center of the line but also the middle of the ecphrasis,
which begins at line 248 and is interrupted at 270.

gate for an omitted reference to earth's medial position, and so satisfies expectations of a middle within the ecphrastic exposition of the cosmogony.[57]

We have now seen that Ovid's cosmogony exhibits a variety of features that commonly occur in ecphrases. The ecphrastic nature of the cosmogony is, as I have suggested, a reflection of its structural and conceptual imitation of the large–scale cosmological model, the Homeric shield of Achilles. This interpretation helps explain the source of the cosmogony's similarity to the opening ecphrasis of book 2, in which Ovid again imitates the Homeric shield when describing the *imago mundi* engraved by Vulcan on the doors of the sun's palace (2.5–18). Robert Brown points out ("Palace" 215–17, 219) that Ovid carefully associates the artistry of Vulcan with that of the demiurge through structural, thematic, and verbal parallels. But clearly Ovid also designs the cosmogony so that it prefigures the artwork of Vulcan in book 2. In describing the latter, Ovid presents its cosmological features just as he does in the cosmogony. He begins by establishing the point of view of the artist from whose perspective the picture of the world is conceived: *nam Mulciber illic / aequora caelarat medias cingentia terras / terrarumque orbem caelumque quod inminet orbi* (2.5–7). While these lines are modeled on *Iliad* 18.483, two points evoke the earlier context of the cosmogony. The identification of Vulcan as Mulciber, the softener of metals, reminds us of the demiurge's capacity for shaping raw material. Secondly, the creation of the three great world divisions alludes to the first line of the cosmogony (*ante mare et terras et quod tegit omnia caelum*, 1.5), as is evident from the same vertical spatial sequence of sea–earth–sky (contrast the Homeric formulation earth–heaven–sea) and the same way of ornamenting the sky with a relative clause.

The structure of Vulcan's *imago mundi* is also quite comparable with the creation account. Just as in the cosmogony, Ovid presents his material region by region, in ascending order (sea, earth, and sky). He first enumerates individual marine deities in the sea (Triton, Proteus, and Aegeon, 2.8–10) and concludes this survey with a more fully realized scene of sea nymphs separated into distinct groups and engaged in different activities (*quarum pars nare videtur, pars in mole sedens virides*

----

[57]The reader may detect irony in the fact that the position of honor in an ecphrasis—the middle—is here reserved for the uninhabitable torrid zone, a point which seems to undercut the Stoic idea (*pace* Schmidt, *Ovids Menschenwelt* 16) that the universe is designed for man's dominion.

siccare capillos, pisce vehi quaedam, 2.11–13). This technique of descrip-
tion recalls the section on bodies of fresh water in the creation account,
which begins as a list and ends with the more developed picture of
different types of rivers. Ovid next enumerates the inhabitants of earth
and their places of habitation (2.15–16), a section that parallels and
expands upon the cosmogony's account of the world's *animalia* (1.72–
75): for example, 2.15, *terra viros urbesque gerit silvasque ferasque*, de-
velops 1.75, *terra feras cepit*. The description of the doors closes with
heaven and the Zodiac (2.17–18), where Ovid alludes again to the struc-
tural design of the demiurge's work (cf. 2.17, *haec super inposita est caeli
fulgentis imago*, with 1.67–68, *haec super inposuit liquidum et gravitate
carentem / aethera*).[58] The verbal echoes and similarity in structural
disposition of details between the two passages at the beginning of
books 1 and 2 indicate that we are to read them in the same way. We may
even surmise that Vulcan's work represents an artistic model of the
universe created in book 1.

The demiurge's creation also sets an example for the work of
another divine artist in *Metamorphoses*: Minerva. From the outset, the
Minerva and Arachne episode (6.53–128) is remarkable because it too,
like the cosmogony in book 1, revives the Homeric precedent of narrat-
ing and describing the manufacture of a work of art. The structural
parallelism of the cosmogony with the weaving contest of Minerva and
Arachne (each beginning a pentad) reinforces the thematic association
of the two episodes.[59] It is therefore not accidental that Minerva's work
of art begins from the same point as the cosmogony: *pingit et antiquam
de terrae nomine litem* (6.71). The word *lis* refers to the famous dispute
between Minerva and Poseidon over Athens, the resolution of which is
the subject of the goddess's tapestry. It also echoes the original "dis-
pute" of chaos settled by the demiurge: *hanc deus et melior litem natura
diremit* (1.21). Like the demiurge, Minerva produces a work of art that is
rationally segmented and symmetrically proportioned, illustrating and
simultaneously justifying her victory in the dispute (6.70–102). By con-
trast, her opponent, Arachne, produces a stream of images whose more

---

[58] The arrangement of the Zodiac in 2.18, *signaque sex foribus dextris totidemque
sinistris*, also resembles the description of the five celestial zones in 1.45, *utque duae
dextra caelum totidemque sinistra*.

[59] Significantly, Claudian's ecphrasis of Proserpina weaving a picture of the cre-
ation (*Rapt. Pros.* 1.246–75) conflates both episodes as imitative models, thereby recog-
nizing and commenting upon their thematic connection.

loosely defined structure reflects the subject matter of amorous gods deceiving their victims with shape–changes (6.103–28). We have already noted an important connection between the demiurge and Arachne in that they both gather their raw material into a ball. But Arachne's tapestry pictures a world of flux that blurs the boundaries of the demiurge's carefully subdivided universe. It is Minerva's aesthetics and iconography that more nearly resemble the art of the demiurge, translating the order of the natural world into a mythology of Olympian majesty.[60]

IV

It remains now to evaluate the significance of the Homeric shield of Achilles as a background to the beginning of *Metamorphoses* and to explain how it squares with Ovid's obvious allusions to Hesiod's *Theogony* and the Apollonian Song of Orpheus. First of all, the imitation of the shield of Achilles, a well–known emblem of the universal scope of Homer's poetry, is an unmistakable sign of Ovid's epic pretensions in composing *Metamorphoses*.[61] It is necessary, however, to set these pretensions in context. While I have emphasized the Homeric dimension of the cosmogony, it is right to observe that Ovid also evokes Hesiod's *Theogony*, identifying his cosmogony as the beginning of a Hesiodic universal mythological history.[62] He thus starts *Metamorphoses* by alluding to, or conflating, the two types of cosmic setting identified with Homer and Hesiod; that is, he simultaneously presents spatial and temporal orders of reality. The inclusion of the Homeric cosmic setting within the ostensibly Hesiodic structure of a collective narrative poem is not a literary historical improbability. Homer was conventionally regarded as the source of all poetry, including didactic epic.[63] In fact,

---

[60] On the much–discussed programmatic differences between the tapestries of Minerva and Arachne see Leach, "*Ekphrasis*" 102–6, 115–18; Hofmann, "Ovid's *Metamorphoses*" 230–34; Brown, "Palace" 219; Feeney, *Gods in Epic* 190–94; Harries, "The Spinner."

[61] See Due, *Changing Forms* 120. Knox (*Ovid's Metamorphoses* 10–12) argues against epic affiliations in the cosmogony; but see counterarguments by Hinds, review, 269–70; Schmitzer, *Zeitgeschichte* 35–36; Feeney, *Gods in Epic* 189–90.

[62] See Ludwig, *Struktur* 74–75; Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid* 66–67; Helzle, "Ovid's Cosmogony" 126.

[63] See Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid* 22–23; Farrell, *Vergil's Georgics* 216 n. 21, 317.

Ovid's imitation of Homer, and specifically the shield of Achilles, is a perfectly proper place to begin a Hesiodic epic. We know that this is so from Apollonius and Vergil, whose Hesiodic songs of Orpheus and Iopas begin by quoting the Homeric shield of Achilles. The conflation of the conventionally opposed traditions of Homer and Hesiod is thus a well–established feature of the didactic poetic tradition.[64] By claiming to be the heir of both Homer and Hesiod, Ovid situates his own poem as successor to and summation of the two great models of didactic epic.[65]

At the same time as he conflates, Ovid also plays Homer off against Hesiod. I have argued that he turns to the Homeric shield for a poetic model of the creation of the universe by a divine craftsman. In so doing, he departs from the cosmogonies in Hesiod's *Theogony,* the Apollonian song of Orpheus, Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura,* and the Vergilian song of Silenus, all of which explain the origin of the universe as an evolutionary process through physical causes. In particular, Ovid pointedly contradicts Orpheus' account of how strife divides the earth, heaven, and sea. By replacing strife with a benevolent creator, he returns to the original motivation of the Homeric shield, in which it is Hephaestus who creates the tripartite division of the world. He thus draws attention to the Homeric basis of his "creationist" account, correcting the "evolutionary" rationale of the song of Orpheus.

This correction raises an important issue. In choosing a divine craftsman, Ovid implicitly rejects the possibility that an erotic principle fosters cosmic order.[66] His allusion to Hesiod's Chaos in the *Theogony* should call to mind the role that Eros plays in bringing about the evolution of the universe (cf. *Theog.* 120–22). Similarly, the reference to the Apollonian song of Orpheus and the Empedoclean principle of Strife should alert the reader to the corresponding cosmogonic principle of Love.[67] Finally, the reader may also think of the proem of Lucretius' *De*

---

[64] See Farrell, *Vergil's Georgics* 213–16, 317.

[65] This claim is hardly new to Ovid; in *Ars Amatoria* he compares his work with both Homer and Hesiod (*laetus amans donat viridi mea carmina palma / praelata Ascraeo Maeonioque seni,* 2.3–4). For further discussion of Ovid's free movement between Homer and Hesiod see Farrell, *Vergil's Georgics* 339–43.

[66] Schmidt, *Ovids Menschenwelt* 97–98.

[67] See Nelis, "Song of Orpheus" 159–60 n. 28. The importance of love as a cosmogonic principle will not escape readers familiar with Apollonius' other Homeric model, the second song of Demodocus (*Od.* 8.266–366), whose subject, the adultery of Ares and Aphrodite, was interpreted allegorically as the creation of the universe through the forces of strife and love.

Rerum Natura (1.1–20), in which the poet acknowledges the creative power of Venus Genetrix, and hence also Empedoclean Love. Thus when Ovid presents the cosmogony as the creation of an artifact by a demiurge, we may sense his deliberate exclusion of love as a cosmogonic principle. Its absence becomes more evident when we consider that Ovid introduces the Hesiodic (and Ovidian) theme of the universal power of love in programmatic fashion after the great flood (*primus amor Phoebi*, 1.452).[68] Just prior to this important transition, as the floodwaters recede, Ovid also alludes to the generative force of love. First, he recounts how the conjugal love of Deucalion and Pyrrha leads to the recreation of human life from stones (348–415). Thereafter, he describes the spontaneous generation of animals through the *discors concordia* of the elements (416–37), a passage that not only testifies to the creative forces of strife and love but also exemplifies the evolutionary type of cosmogony rejected at the beginning of the poem. It would appear then that Ovid's avoidance of love at the very start of *Metamorphoses* is deliberate, as he seeks to emphasize the authority of the Homeric artist.

Ovid's emphasis upon divine control over chaos inevitably raises comparison with the Augustan program of Vergil's *Aeneid*.[69] Ovid describes chaos as a civil war of elements (*discordia semina rerum*, 1.9) which a *deus* pacifies (*dissociata locis condordi pace ligavit*, 1.25). This pattern of divine control over the violent and destructive forces of nature parallels Neptune's quelling of the storm in *Aeneid* 1. Ovid, in fact, alludes to Vergil's storm winds (*Aen.* 1.50–63) when he observes the measures that the demiurge takes to prevent the winds from destroying the world (57–66).[70] The political symbolism of the cosmogony also summons to mind the Vergilian shield of Aeneas, which—concerned as it is with the themes of chaos and order, cosmogony and cosmology—cannot but be an intermediary model that influences Ovid's imitation of

[68] For a full discussion of the programmatic significance of this transition and its context see Nicoll, "Cupid."

[69] Hardie, *Epic Successors* 60–61: "In Virgilian terms the act of creation represents the stability that is the epic's goal, and which in this epic seems to have been reached when we are scarcely under way." On the Augustan allegory of the cosmogony cf. Maurach, "Ovids Kosmogonie" 134–40.

[70] On parallels with *Aeneid* 1 see Schmitzer, *Zeitgeschichte* 38; cf. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid* 93 n. 23; Feeney, *Gods in Epic* 190. On the parallelism of *Aeneid* 1 and *Metamorphoses* 1.1–415 see Nicoll, "Cupid" 179–80.

the Homeric shield of Achilles. Indeed Ovid's creation episode may be read as the philosophical counterpart to both the shield of Achilles and the shield of Aeneas.

Ovid's choice to begin *Metamorphoses* with an epic ecphrasis also highlights his own self–consciousness as a poet. It is well known that the device of ecphrasis offers the poet an opportunity to reflect upon his own art while describing the art of another.[71] The *deus et melior natura* may therefore be read as a figure for the poet, and the ordering of the universe as a metaphor for creation of the poem; thus the "real" subject of Ovid's cosmogony may be the literary creation of *Metamorphoses*, just as the shield of Achilles is emblematic of the creation of the *Iliad*.[72] But if the epic symmetry and order of the opening episode is a reflection of the form of *Metamorphoses*, it proves to be inconsistent with the poem's pull toward asymmetry and flux.[73] In the first half of book 1 the orderly arrangement of the universe falls into an ever deepening state of confusion exemplified by the race of iron (127–50), gigantomachy (151–62), Lycaon (210–43), and the flood (252–312). Ovid repeats this pattern of the collapse of an ideal order in book 2. He begins by describing the palace of the sun god in a manner reminiscent of the decorum of Homeric epic and, equally important, the cosmogony of book 1; he then proceeds to show how this order disintegrates through Phaethon's desire to usurp divine prerogatives.[74] In the case of both the flood and the fire, a new equilibrium is achieved, but the face of the world (and the poem) changes. The reader thus learns that the *imago mundi* projected in the cosmogony is not a fixed and final scheme but subject to the transformational forces of the passions, human and divine. Against (or out of) the poetics of order emerges a poetics of flux, a phenomenon that Ovid later dramatizes in the weaving contest between Minerva and Arachne.

What then are we to make of the cosmogony if it does not fully represent the metamorphic world of the poem? A common answer is that it represents "a foil to Ovid's own sense of reality reflected in the

---

[71] See Leach, "*Ekphrasis*" 104 and *Rhetoric of Space* 311; on ecphrasis as a metaphor for poetry see Becker, "Reading Poetry" 6.

[72] On this important aspect of the shield in the *Iliad* see Hubbard "Nature."

[73] Hinds, review, 270: "The subsequent development of the *Metamorphoses* reveals the high epic pretension of its opening episode to be more than a little disingenuous."

[74] See Brown, "Palace" 216–17.

mythological tales."[75] In other words, a fixed and unified picture of the world serves as a backdrop against which the poem's changes and plurality of perspectives are foregrounded. While this interpretation is generally persuasive, it runs the risk of reducing the cosmogony to a negative exemplum. The point of this essay has been to show that Ovid begins *Metamorphoses* with an imitation of the Homeric shield of Achilles, wherein he finds and develops the idea that the creation of the universe is a product of artistic transformation. Far from devaluing the demiurge's art, he celebrates its power to order chaos (*melior natura,* 5; *mundi melioris origo,* 79). By this reading, the creator's handiwork is not an unimaginative scientific mechanism set up to illustrate the superiority of Ovid's subsequent mythological world. Rather it represents an original interpretation of the epic tradition, by which Ovid calls attention to his new role as "epic" poet and creator of cosmic order. The very provisionality of this cosmic order serves only to highlight Ovid's continual redefinition of his poetic project.[76]

STEPHEN M. WHEELER

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Becker, Andrew Sprague. "Reading Poetry through a Distant Lens: Ecphrasis, Ancient Greek Rhetoricians, and the Pseudo–Hesiodic 'Shield of Herakles.'" *AJP* 113 (1992) 5–24.
———. "The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Homeric Description." *AJP* 111 (1990) 139–53.
Bömer, Franz. *P. Ovidius Naso: Die Fasten.* Vol. II, *Kommentar.* Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1957–58.
———. *P. Ovidius Naso: Die Metamorphosen.* Vol. I, *Kommentar, Buch. I–III.* Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1969.

[75] Brown, "Palace" 217; cf. McKim, "Myth"; Leach, *Rhetoric of Space* 446–48; Feeney, *Gods in Epic* 189–90; Hardie, *Epic Successors* 62–63.
[76] Versions of this essay were presented at the 1992 meeting of the American Philological Association in New Orleans and at Yale University in February 1993; my thanks go to both audiences, whose questions and suggestions have been of benefit. I am also indebted to Elaine Fantham, Garth Tissol, Joseph Farrell, Archibald Allen, Damien Nelis, and *AJP*'s anonymous referee for helpful comments and advice.

Brown, Robert D. "The Homeric Background to a Vergilian Repetition (*Aeneid* 1.744 = 3.516)." *AJP* 111 (1990) 182–86.

———. "The Palace of the Sun in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*." In *Homo Viator: Classical Essays for John Bramble,* edited by Michael Whitby, Philip Hardie, and Mary Whitby, 211–20. Oak Park, Ill.: Bolchazy–Carducci, 1987.

———. "The Structural Function of the Song of Iopas." *HSCP* 93 (1989) 315–34.

Bühler, Winfried. *Die Europa des Moschus: Text, Übersetzung, und Kommentar.* Hermes Einzelschriften 13. Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1960.

Clausen, Wendel V. *Virgil's Aeneid and the Tradition of Hellenistic Poetry.* Sather Classical Lectures 51. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987.

Due, Otto Steen. *Changing Forms: Studies in the Metamorphoses of Ovid.* Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1974.

Farrell, Joseph. "Dialogue of Genres in Ovid's 'Lovesong of Polyphemus' (*Metamorphoses* 13.719–897)." *AJP* 113 (1992) 235–68.

———. *Vergil's Georgics and the Traditions of Epic.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Feeney, D. C. *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

Fowler, D. P. "Narrate and Describe: The Problem of Ekphrasis." *JRS* 81 (1991) 25–35.

Friedländer, Paul. *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentarius: Kunstbeschreibungen justinianischer Zeit.* Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, 1912. Reprinted. Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1969.

Hardie, Philip R. *The Epic Successors of Virgil: A Study in the Dynamics of a Tradition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

———. "*Imago Mundi*: Cosmological and Ideological Aspects of the Shield of Achilles." *JHS* 105 (1985) 11–31.

———. "The Janus Episode in Ovid's *Fasti*." *MD* 26 (1991) 47–64.

———. *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.

Harries, Byron. "The Spinner and the Poet." *PCPS* 216, n.s. 36 (1990) 64–82.

Helzle, Martin. "Ovid's Cosmogony (*Met.* 1.5–88) and the Traditions of Ancient Poetry." *PLLS* 7 (1992) 123–34.

Hinds, Stephen. "Booking the Return Trip: Ovid and *Tristia* 1." *PCPS* 211, n.s. 31 (1985) 13–32.

———. *The Metamorphosis of Persephone: Ovid and the Self–Conscious Muse.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

———. Review of *Ovid's Metamorphoses and the Traditions of Augustan Poetry,* by Peter E. Knox. *CP* 84 (1989) 266–71.

Hofmann, Heinz. "Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Carmen Perpetuum, Carmen Deductum." *PLLS* 5 (1985) 223–41.

Hubbard, Thomas K. "Nature and Art in the Shield of Achilles." *Arion,* n.s. 3, no. 2 (1992) 16–41.

Hunter, Richard. *The Argonautica of Apollonius: Literary Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Knox, Peter E. *Ovid's Metamorphoses and the Traditions of Augustan Poetry*. Cambridge Philological Society Supplementary Volume 11. Cambridge, 1986.

Lämmli, Franz. *Vom Chaos zum Kosmos: zur Geschichte einer Idee*. Schweizerische Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft 10. Basel: F. Reinhardt, 1962.

Lateiner, Donald. "Mythic and Non–mythic Artists in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*." *Ramus* 13 (1984) 1–30.

Lausberg, Heinrich. *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik: eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft*. Munich: M. Hueber, 1960.

Lausberg, Marion. "*Archetupon tes idias poieseos*: zur Bildbeschreibung bei Ovid." *Boreas* 5 (1982) 112–23.

Leach, Eleanor Winsor. "*Ekphrasis* and the Theme of Artistic Failure in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*." *Ramus* 3 (1974) 102–42.

————. *The Rhetoric of Space: Literary and Artistic Representations of Landscape in Republican and Augustan Rome*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Ludwig, Walther. *Struktur und Einheit der Metamorphosen Ovids*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965.

McKeown, J. C. *Ovid: Amores*. Vol. I, *Text and Prolegomena*. ARCA Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs 20. Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1987.

McKim, Richard. "Myth against Philosophy in Ovid's Account of Creation." *CJ* 80 (1985) 97–108.

Maurach, Gregor. "Ovids Kosmogonie: Quellenbenutzung und Traditionsstiftung." *Gymnasium* 86 (1979) 131–48.

Mette, Hans Joachim. *Sphairopoiia: Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie des Krates von Pergamon*. Munich: Beck, 1936.

Nelis, Damien P. "Demodocus and the Song of Orpheus." *MH* 49 (1992) 153–70.

Nicoll, W. S. M. "Cupid, Apollo and Daphne (Ovid *Met.* 1.452ff.)." *CQ*, n.s. 30 (1980) 174–82.

Nuttall, A. D. *Openings: Narrative Beginnings from the Epic to the Novel*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

Page, D. L. *Select Papyri*. Vol. III, *Literary Papyri, Poetry*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970.

Pease, A. S. *M. Tulli Ciceronis De Natura Deorum*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955.

Rieks, Rudolf. "Zum Aufbau von Ovids *Metamorphosen*." *WJA*, n.s. 6b (1980) 85–103.

Robbins, F. E. "The Creation Story in *Met*. i." *CP* 8 (1913) 401–14.

Roberts, Michael. *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Robinson, T. M. "Ovid and the *Timaeus.*" *Athenaeum* 56 (1968) 254–60.

Schmidt, Ernst A. *Ovids poetische Menschenwelt: die Metamorphosen als Metaphor und Symphonie.* Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophische–Historische Klasse, Bericht 2. Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1991.

Schmitzer, Ulrich. *Zeitgeschichte in Ovids Metamorphosen: mythologische Dichtung unter politischem Anspruch.* Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 4. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1990.

Schwabl, H. "Weltschöpfung." *RE* suppl. IX (1962) 1453–1589.

Solmsen, Friedrich. "Chaos and *Apeiron.*" *SIFC* 24 (1950) 235–48.

Solodow, Joseph B. *The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Spoerri, Walter. *Späthellenistische Berichte über Welt, Kultur, und Götter.* Schweizerische Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft 8. Basel: F. Reinhardt, 1959.

Thomas, Richard F. "Virgil's Ecphrastic Centerpieces." *HSCP* 87 (1983) 175–84.

———. "Virgil's *Georgics* and the Art of Reference." *HSCP* 90 (1986) 171–98.