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FLIGHT MYTHS IN OVID'S METAMORPHOSES: AN INTERPRETATION OF PHAETHON AND DAEDALUS

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Several myths of the *Metamorphoses* are stories about flights. These imaginary voyages are taken either by artists or by characters granted an experience analagous to artistic experience. The possibility of vision made available through the act of flying provides the immediate connection between flight and art. Characters within the fictive world of the poem achieve literally a perspective on the cosmos analogous to Ovid's metaphoric vision of his poetic universe. Insofar as vision is the initial act of artistic creation, characters who engage in flying, whether specifically artists or not, enact within the context of the narrative this part of the creative process. Because the attempt at vision is only a preliminary, Ovid must find a way for the metaphor of flight to express the rest of the creative process and its culmination in an artifact. The means of flight, whether Apollo's chariot or the wings designed by Daedalus, are therefore works of art that express both the mimetic and interpretive aspects of this process. Artifacts created by Ovid's fictive artificers repeatedly prove inadequate or ambiguous, however, and they fail as their makers' attempts at vision fail. These characters are unable to sustain vision or interpret what they see, and so the efficacy of their art is called into question. In telling their stories, Ovid conveys the powers and limitations of vision and art. At the same time, he implies his own success as poet through the ironic treatment of the artists within the poem.

I

Phaethon was in the habit of boasting about his parentage to his companion Epaphus. Impatient with his friend's pride, Epaphus finally mocks him for taking his mother's word that he is the son of Apollo. Phaethon makes no reply, but recounts the incident to his mother. He complains about his inability to respond to the taunting and insists that he had no basis for an answer. Ironically, he invokes his identity in imploring her assurance, demanding proof of Apollo's paternity in his own name, his brother's and his sisters' names. Clymene swears that he is the son of Apollo and sends him to ask the sun god himself. Just as he had found the word of his mother insufficient, so Phaethon also refuses to accept Apollo's word alone as evidence of their relationship. In response to his demand for concrete proof, Apollo grants his son any favour, and Phaethon seizes the opportunity to ask for control over the winged horses.

Phaethon's flight across the heavens and ultimately his death originate in his failure to demonstrate by words alone his relationship to Apollo and his refusal to accept the verbal proof that is twice offered him. Yet even before he is silenced by the insulting taunts of Epaphus, his distrust of language, of the real power of words to express the truth, is revealed in his boasting. His repeated allusions to the fact of Apollo's paternity and the prideful insistence on his relation to the sun god are psychologically accurate, if ironic, manifestations of this distrust: if Phaethon himself had been convinced of the truth of his lineage, he might not have found it necessary to vaunt it publicly.

Because Phaethon cannot believe in a real correspondence between words and things, between a verbal assertion and the fact of Apollo's paternity, he demands concrete phenomenal proof for the event in whose concrete reality he wants so much to believe. Since he himself is unable to use language in response to verbal provocation, he cannot accept the efficacy of anyone else's verbal powers. He is therefore incapable of assenting to the story of his origins, even when told by its author, and this very incapacity ends in his death. Phaethon's preference for and reliance on phenomena has an effect opposite to that which he anticipated or desired: rather than achieving a sense of identity distinct from and superior to his peers by virtue of his parentage, Phaethon is in part absorbed by, in part dispersed over the universe. The self-definition he so ardently sought led only to a state of being essentially undifferentiated from physical nature.

With ironic deliberateness, Phaethon seeks out the agent of his destruction: he chooses to drive the chariot of the sun in an attempt to define who he is, but his choice leads instead to his annihilation. Phaethon's initial refusal to use language ends in an incapacity to use language. In this, he resembles other Ovidian characters who undergo metamorphoses into vegetal or animal forms in which the final stage is the inability to produce speech. But whereas other characters are quite literally 'captured in . . . materiality',[1] confined within tree trunks or animal bodies, Phaethon's captivity to phenomena is paradoxically imaginative. He cannot conceive of any reality besides material reality, and conversely, he can only acknowledge something as real if it has material existence. The destruction of Phaethon's verbal powers coincides with his death, whereas transformation into vegetal or animal nature, despite the accompanying loss of speech, often preserved an essential aspect of identity, such as virginity. Perhaps material reality provided a refuge for these characters for the very reason that they, unlike Phaethon, did not overestimate its importance. They did not insist exclusively on the importance of things over words, nor make an attempt at self-definition through material rather than imaginative means. In the broader context of metamorphoses that entail the loss of verbal powers, Phaethon's death,

with his loss of both speech and identity, has a particular poignancy: he dies captive to his idea of material reality, confined within the narrow strictures of his own imagination.

The flight with its capacity for universal chaos, for the confounding of all elements and the destruction of civilization, is the unhappy consequence of Phaethon's inability to make and accept verbal constructs. His impotent silence in response to Epaphus' taunting and his rejection of Clymene's word that Apollo sired him precede his exposure to the palace of the sun. Phaethon is inattentive, if not oblivious, to the palace doors on which Vulcan has carved a universe in silver. Though impressed and somewhat awed by the radiance confronting him, he does not consider the meaning of the artifact. Phaethon has already demonstrated an inadequate response to language. His failure to interpret the story portrayed on the doors of his father's palace is a more blatant instance of the limitations of his imagination. The carvings on the doors are a work of art and demand interpretation even more clearly than Clymene's story. Moreover, Ovid points specifically to the supremacy of imaginative power over phenomenal reality, the very concept Phaethon cannot comprehend. On the doors of the sun palace, reality is ordered by art:

> materiam superbat opus: nam Mulciber illic
> aequora caelarat medias cingentia terras
> terrarumque orbem caelumque, quod imminet orbe. (2.5-7)
>
> Manner there
> Had conquered matter, for the artist Vulcan
> Carved, in relief, the earth-encircling waters,
> The wheel of earth, the over-arching skies.[2]

Ovid here presents a vision of the universe that focuses on the cyclical nature of the elements in relation to one another and on the symbol of flux itself, *Proteaque ambiguum* ('Proteus who changes always', 2.9). Yet even Proteus, embodiment of perpetual change, is contained by the sea, so the carving seems optimistically to suggest a cosmic capacity for ordered flux.

Portrayed also are the daughters of the sea-nymph Doris, engaging in various activities appropriate to their nature: some swim, others ride fishes, and still others dry their hair while sitting on rocks. The nymphs 'seem different, but alike, as sisters ought to' (*facies non omnibus una,/ non diversa tamen, qualem decet esse sororum*, 2.13-14). Through their familial relationship, Ovid conveys the fitness of their resemblance to one another while maintaining their individual identity. Similarly, their distinct but related activities express different aspects of what it means to be a sea-nymph. Since each activity expresses something essential about

the state of being called 'sea-nymph', it implies the capacity of each nymph for amusing herself in the manner of her sisters. Ovid suggests in the several forms their diversions take the multiple nature of sea-nymphs: not only are the expressions of their being, of that which characterizes them sea-nymphs, varied, but they are also subject to variation. The idea of change itself as inherent in the nature of a creature evolves from an interpretive response to the art of the palace doors.

The visual repetition entailed in the portrayal of the sisters and the relation of their activities to their nature as nymphs present a conceptual truth of primary importance. Ovid's tales of metamorphoses assert his belief in the multifariousness of reality and in the essential nature of reality as subject to flux. In order to suggest the latent capacity of all things for functioning in various and disparate ways, he creates imaginative events that symbolize this capacity. That is, Ovid perceives something about the nature of reality; as a poet, he creates an artifact to convey his perception and the artifact expresses the felt truth. Consequently, his poem presents repeated examples of change or of exchanged modes of existence.

The metamorphoses enact the possibility for change insofar as each metamorphosis is understood as meaning that possibility and as being only partly that possibility, since every living thing has the capacity to change into many different forms of being, rather than only one. Thus any particular metamorphosis expresses only a partial reality. The representation of the sea-nymphs, however, with its simultaneous portrayal of several aspects of a single essence, conveys the meaning of metamorphosis itself: it is an exemplar of Ovid's presupposition about the nature of reality as subject to flux and infinitely various in *potentia*. Thus the verbal art of the poem describes a plastic artifact visually developed in a linear mode, substantial in form and extended in space; the artifact itself suggests different aspects of a single essence, each aspect participating in that essence. Within the fiction of his poetic universe, Ovid is presenting the idea that informs his entire poem, the idea of the transformation of a being from one life form to another that equally embodies an essential aspect of its nature.

In the stasis of the descriptive moment, or perhaps through simultaneity of perception available to visual art, Ovid captures a particular vision of the cosmos. In choosing to present that vision ecphrastically,[3] he insists upon the necessity of interpretation. That art demands an interpretive act on the part of its audience seems more or less self-evident; that art itself is interpretation, that it conveys a preconceived notion of some significance in the mind of the artist, presumes a greater degree of perception. We are meant to understand both the meaning of Vulcan's artifact and that its meaning derives from the artistry of its creator. In presenting a particular vision of the universe as the product of a con-

sciously interpretive act of the mind, Ovid suggests that his own conception of the cosmos dramatized by the myth is similarly interpretive.[4] Since both world views – the view on the doors of a universe characterized by ordered flux and the distorted vision of universal destruction that unfolds in the course of the narrative – are contained by the larger fiction of the poem, the demand for interpretation extends outward to include the entire *Metamorphoses*. The significance of the *ekphrasis* reverberates: by its very presence Ovid is making a statement about the comprehensiveness of his poetic universe, about its ability to contain radical flux, even the violent transformations in which Phaethon's ill-conceived voyage culminates.

In the presentation of the cosmos, the images on the doors reflect the meaning of the myth insofar as the story of Phaethon concerns itself with his attempt to achieve a visionary perspective. The discrepancy between Vulcan's and Phaethon's perceptions of the world points to the inadequacy of Phaethon's response to his experience of vision. In the immediate narrative context, the doors constitute an instance in the progression of his imaginative failures. Ironically, the cosmic view carved into the very structure of the sun palace is available to Phaethon only from the vertiginous perspective of his flight across the heavens. But the vision becomes a nightmare: only as an artifact, it seems, can the universe be contemplated as a whole and in calm.

The doors of the palace anticipate and announce the meaning of the voyage as the attempt to achieve a visionary perspective, whether of the cosmos itself or of the most intimate fact of Phaethon's parentage. Phaethon has sought some concrete experience as an indication of his relationship to Apollo because he cannot imaginatively conceive of an objective truth without a concomitantly objective means of proving it so. Driving the chariot of the sun is a concrete experience he can understand, but its real value as a vehicle for vision is lost on him. Ovid's repeated pointings to the fictive nature of the myth and of the voyage in particular acquire an obvious significance in this context: the anthropomorphizing of the constellations, the mythic explanations of race and geography, the naive allegory in the presentation of Apollo's attendants contribute to the impression of the voyage as imaginary and hence as related conceptually to the imagination.

Phoebus himself appears at the center of a symmetrically arranged tableau, flanked on either side by the days, the months, the years, and the hours *spatiis aequalibus* ('at even spaces', 2.26). His entourage includes the seasons in conventional regalia. To the left and right of his throne stand spring in floral coronet, summer bearing grain, grape-stained autumn and hoary winter. The minimal, thoroughly conventional, description reflects the one-dimensional quality of these characters. Their function in the narrative is wholly emblematic: they are what they represent and only what they represent. Their relation to Apollo, defined almost exclusively in spatial terms, is as limited as they themselves. Yet the very emphasis on the horizontal dimension of their arrangement in space is significant for the impression of stasis that it conveys. By placing these figures on a single and horizontal plane, and by placing them in symmetrical relationship to each other and to a central figure, Ovid draws attention to the similarity between the iconography of a façade and the characters of a story. In fact, the description of Phoebus with his attendants bears a striking resemblance to Vulcan's carving on the doors of the palace, a resemblance suggested by the juxtaposition of the two passages, and reinforced by the symmetry of the final details of the doors, the equally divided symbols of the zodiac in the image of the sky. The allegorical versions of hours and seasons form part of Phaethon's impression of the sun palace. They participate directly, then, in the unfolding of the narrative. By presenting characters in a manner that recalls the stasis of plastic art, Ovid connects the action of his story with the artifact that precedes it. The idea of the action itself as artifact follows easily from the nature of the connection.

In attempting to dissuade Phaethon from his journey, Apollo describes the potential dangers of the constellations animated in their hostility. Although the anthropomorphic descriptions are more extensive in the account of the journey itself, Apollo's warning contains a number of details that add to the cumulative impression of the fictive nature of the myth, and hence of its relationship to the imagination. Because Phaethon refuses to accept the 'most convincing proof' of the sun god's paternity (*patrio pater esse metu probor*, 'I am proved a father/By a father's fear', 2.92), Apollo leads him to the chariot. Like the palace doors, it is the work of Vulcan, made of gold and silver and shining with jewels that reflect its radiance. Perhaps because the chariot has a pragmatic function that is to some degree separable from its nature as artifact, or perhaps because it is a part of his conception of driving the horses of the sun, Phaethon is more attentive than he was at the moment of entering the palace. That Phaethon *miratur opusque/perspicit* ('was marvelling at the craftsmanship', 2.111-12) of the car does not suggest any interpretive act on his part, however, but seems to be of the same order of descriptive detail as the *aurea summae/curvatura rotae, radiorum argenteus ordo* ('tires of gold,/And spokes of silver, 2.107-8) and the reflexive brilliance of the car's jewelled surface. That the chariot is a more literal vehicle for achieving vision serves merely to emphasize Phaethon's imaginative failure, since there is no indication that he perceives any similarity between it and the palace doors, nor that he recognizes its significance in any but the most narrowly defined personal terms.

Phaethon encounters a zodiac more fully animated than Apollo's own references to the Archer and the Scorpion, the Lion or the Crab. That

he encounters it at all originates in his final refusal to accept the sufficiency of language. Apollo urges Phaethon to take his counsel rather than his chariot in a last attempt to prevent the journey. The meaning of these alternatives – and the necessity of accepting a verbal imperative over the impulse to secure oneself to phenomena – is at this point in the narrative clear to Ovid's reader, if not to Phaethon. And so he takes the reins in hand, but the car bounds out of control, impelled by the unleashed power of the horses. Phaethon does not know their names, and unable to comprehend or express their nature – acts implicit in the activity of naming – he cannot control them. This particular ignorance, the ignorance of a verbal expression of the identity of a living thing, is integrally related to the origins of the flight: it is Phaethon's disbelief in the spoken assertion of his own identity that motivates his voyage. Doubtful of the truth of words, he chooses in the chariot of the sun a concrete object to prove Apollo's paternity. But his origins are not to be discovered in, or confirmed by, objective phenomena. Phaethon is wrong-headedly in pursuit of a certitude he can achieve only through an act of imagination. The inability to name and therefore control Apollo's horses reveals merely the obverse of his scepticism of language. It never occurs to him that phenomena can be affected by verbal events, that things, like horses, can be controlled by words, such as their names. Again Phaethon is thwarted by his inability to conceive truth imaginatively.

The constellations respond to the chaotic motion and intolerable heat of the flight: the Bear seeks cooling oceans, the Serpent grows furious, and the Ox runs off terrified. Phaethon's own terror is multiplied as he sees *miracula caelo/ . . . simulacra ferarum* ('strange figures in the sky and savage beasts', 2.193-94), the Scorpion, for example, with its members spread over infinite space and its threatening stinger. Whereas the animation of the zodiac provides Ovid with an occasion for imaginative play[5] and consequently intensifies our sense of the fictive nature of the myth, the anthropomorphic character of the stars fills Phaethon with terror for the very reason that he cannot project imaginatively on to his universe. The fear he experiences derives from his belief that the Bear really seeks the oceans, and that the Scorpion really will envelop him in his outstretched arms. He is totally submerged in a world not of his own making, in part because he cannot imaginatively conceive it otherwise. Unlike the artist who interprets his universe and re-creates it according to his perceptions, Phaethon passively experiences his world. He assumes not only that objective phenomena, like Bears and Scorpions, are real, but that being real, they are also unchanging. He does not understand, with Ovid, that reality is characterized by flux rather than stasis and that living things are constantly metamorphosing, perpetually changing into different expressions of their essential nature. Phaethon does not transform

his world because he does not recognize its capacity for transformation. He is helpless in confronting a hostile universe because of his own limited conception of the world.

The necessary coincidence of Phaethon's terror with the act of flight that would provide him with a visionary perspective is not the sole irony here. Phaethon clearly fails to demonstrate the interpretive capacity of the artist. The discrepancy between his and Ovid's perceptions of flight and cosmos is painfully obvious. Ovid characteristically treats his own fictive artist with ambiguous irony, Phaethon's failure signalling his own success. Ovid's achievement of vision becomes not only a means of asserting his poetic virtuosity, but also a literary joke at the expense of his protagonist.

From the vantage point of the chariot bounding through unknown regions of air (*et modo summa petunt, modo per declive viasque/ praecipites spatio terrae propiore feruntur*, 'now high, now low, toward Heaven/Or plunging sheer toward earth', 2.206-7), we have a vision of the cosmos – of scorched clouds, cracked earth, dried up rivers, and civilization in ashes. The people of Africa turned black then, the story goes, their blood driven by the heat to the surface of their bodies. The terrified Nile hid its head so that even today its source is unknown. These cosmic metamorphoses are clearly fictive accounts of racial history imply the force of the imagination in the real universe. In order to and geographic phenomena. They suggest the universal and profound effect of unleashed imaginative energy within a mythic universe and establish these metamorphoses unequivocally as acts of the imagination, Ovid specifies the response of Doris, Nereus and their daughters to the heat of the chariot. In case this is insufficient to recall Vulcan's carvings. Ovid prefaces the Earth's appeal to Jove with a description that presents an anthropomorphized version of the iconography on the doors, the Earth

> inter aquas pelagi contractosque undique fontes
> qui se condiderant in opacae viscera matris
> sustulit oppressos collo tenus arida vultus
> opposuitque manum fronti . . . (2.273-76)
>
> Amid the waters and the shrinking fountains
> Contracting into her darkness, parched by heat,
> Raised up her stifled face, and put a hand
> To shield her forehead . . .

The insistence on fiction and the allusions to the carvings of the sun palace combine to reassert the meaning of the myth. Ovid dramatizes once again the need for imaginatively conceiving and interpreting the

cosmos, in this instance, by means of the animation of mythic characters. The reference to the sea-nymphs and the particular details selected in describing Earth allude to an artifact and to its demand for interpretation. The transformation of a pictorial representation of sea-nymphs and Earth to an animated version of these characters points to a relationship between the different parts of the myth in which they function. The meaning of their reappearance seems clearly to derive from their associations with art and the original cosmic vision presented by the myth. Their very presence, then, suggests the kind of interpretation demanded by this part of the story, with its animated geography and fictive history.

Phaethon fails in trying to achieve the sort of cosmic overview available to the artist. Consciously unresponsive to the products of the imagination, either graphic or verbal, Phaethon enacts metaphorically the quest for vision that precedes and motivates artistic endeavour. Although he is potentially in a position to see, his flight is characterized by vertiginous movement and a speed that makes vision impossible to sustain and ultimately incomprehensible. Any question of reproducing and interpreting his world through art is extraneous: Phaethon is destroyed in the very process of achieving vision.

Insofar as he is the audience for the divine artificer Vulcan, or the divine storyteller Apollo, the failure of his flight does not necessarily entail a negative conception of the efficacy of art. Rather the demand for a more extensive exposure to art, for heightened sensitivity to the import and value of plastic arts, offers itself as a response to this failure. Yet to the extent that Phaethon himself metamorphically dramatizes the initial activity of the artist – the achievement of vision, and thus the conceptualization that precedes mimesis itself – his failure expresses a darker view of the possibilities for art.

Phaethon cannot interpret his universe; he cannot convey an ordered conception of his view of the world, since he never reaches a point of vision that offers both the distance and the equilibrium necessary for perspective. Viewing the earth from his vantage point in the heavens, *sunt oculis tenebrae per tantum lumen obortae* ('darkness came/Into his eyes from too much light', 2.181). Measuring the sky before and behind him, *quid agat ignarus stupet* ('he is dazed and stunned and dazzled', 2.191). Phaethon cannot bear the vision of light, of civilization being consumed in flames, or the actual experience of fire. When finally a river god receives him and bathes his burning face, he has been deprived of all consciousness, broken in mind and body by the lightning bolt of Jove. Phaethon's relation to the elements and forces of nature lacks any aspect of self-determination: he is carried on a voyage whose significance he does not understand and whose course he cannot control. His passivity, his terror, and his intermittent losses of consciousness are the antitheses of a creative response to vision. Through his portrayal of Phaethon, Ovid

presents simultaneously the incapacity for sustained vision and the necessity of recognizing and assenting to the products of vision.

II

As a figure for both artist and audience, Phaethon even in his failure points to the initial act of artistic conception. In the myth of Daedalus, Ovid suggests the mimetic process and its culmination in an artifact. Phaethon and Daedalus share the common experience of flight, and thus metaphorically of the possibility for a perspective on the cosmos and artistic vision. But whereas the Phaethon story focuses on the achievement of vision itself, vision has preceded the activity of creating the labyrinth for the minotaur or the wings for Daedalus' own escape. Consequently, the description of the flight receives less attention in this myth and the vision of the cosmos is similarly less detailed.

Daedalus' construction of the wings as the product of artistic conception is an aspect of the creative process which Phaethon never attempts. It suggests Daedalus' greater success as 'audience' at a time previous to his flight and as 'artist' during the flight insofar as he is in fact borne aloft by the wings and exercises control over them. If one understands the artistic process as initially conceptual or visionary and then mimetic and interpretive, one can see in the myth of Daedalus the completion of the process metaphorically begun in the Phaethon story. Moreover, the larger frame of Phaethon's experience as failed vision, Daedalus' wings as ultimately failed art, and Icarus' fall as failed response to vision enclose a more compressed version of the cycle in the story of Daedalus itself. The cycle of vision, creation, and imaginative response to vision begins with Daedalus rather than Phaethon; it is completed, though unsuccessfully, by Icarus' use of the wings. The sense of concentric circles of visionary process is reinforced by the ambiguous position of Icarus. He fails to exercise self-discipline in response to the artifact created by his father, thereby completing one cycle of vision; at the same time, his flight is an attempt to achieve vision itself, which is conceivably the beginning of another cycle. Like Phaethon and Daedalus, Icarus is potentially both audience and artist, and the almost imperceptible shifts between the two roles within a single personality suggest the smallest, but most significant, cycle of all.

The cyclic nature of the artistic process as expressed by these myths ironically suggests the theme of perpetual change that inspires the *Metamorphoses*. The irony lies in the similarity in process between artistic creation and metamorphosis. Since Ovid's transformations are most often transformations into lower states of being, a merely elevated view of art would not take into account the resemblance of the creative process to ambiguous, frequently arbitrary, change. Phaethon's fiery fall through the

air and Icarus' terrified plunge into the ocean dramatically enact the descending pattern of transformation. In fact, they present a more vivid, more literal example of a downward movement in nature than do the metamorphoses that are changes 'downward' to less complicated, non-human life forms. Because of their relationship to the imagination, they can be regarded as metaphors for metamorphosis itself.

The flights entail extension through space, and so one has a more directly visual perception of them than of metamorphoses generally. The flight from one realm to another enacts in geographical, external space the translation of a character from one physical realm (the human) to another physical realm (the vegetal or bestial). Moreover, the movement from one geographical, or at least spatially identifiable, location to another is a metaphor in a very specific sense for one kind of metamorphosis – the particularly intimate relationship between vegetal location and the characters who inhabit, quite literally, the landscape of the poem. Characters transformed into plants fall into this category generally, but the best example of a change in space that is almost identical to a change in the nature of a being is the pool of the naiad Salmacis, who also is the pool.[6]

To posit the flights as metaphors for transformation is to recognize yet another way in which Ovid conveys the focus and meaning of his poem as flux. Just as the activities of the sea-nymphs on the doors of Apollo's palace presented a graphically conceived and executed version of metamorphosis, so also the descending movement of characters through space dramatically enacts the process of metamorphosis itself.

The concept of flux and transformation into another mode of existence or realm of being lies behind stories whose theme is metamorphosis. To give descending movement through space the status of a narrative event is to portray visually the idea of downward change in nature. Characters proceeding through upper regions of air, across continents, and plunging into oceans thus enact the meaning of their stories. Movement to a lower level in the cosmos is sufficiently analogous to the transformation of a creature to a lower sphere of being that spatial descent can be regarded as a metaphor for existential descent, while at the same time providing its literal vehicle. The notion of flight as metaphor emerges from the general pattern of movement from one point in the cosmos to another, from the duration and direction of progress through a fictive universe.

Dramatized as part of the narrative itself, the tenor of the metaphor, for which flight is the vehicle, is literalized for the reader. The perception of the metaphorical value of flight does not occur at any single moment, but evolves during the telling of the story. The idea of metamorphosis is thus conveyed gradually, continuously unfolded by the verbal art of the poem. The flight perceived from within the framework of the fiction, on the other hand, does not possess an expansive quality at all. On the

contrary, the speed of Phaethon's voyage, the vertiginous quality of his descent, and the involuntary and chaotic interaction of the elements combine to suggest the mutually rapid destruction of boy and universe. Whereas the meaning of the fall of Phaethon for the poem is deliberately and even slowly presented, the meaning of his fall for the fictive universe in which it occurs is conveyed by speed and disorder.

Before approaching further metaphorical dimensions of flight, it would be useful to recapitulate the pertinent details of the Daedalus myth. Events that directly relate to Daedalus' capacity as artist form a narrative frame around the story of the escape from Crete. Preceding the focal point of the myth as a whole is the tale of the labyrinth built by Daedalus to house the minotaur. The success of his art depends not on his ordering his universe, but on his giving substantial form to confusion and conflict, and his ability to 'deceive the eye/with devious aisles and passages' (*lumina flexu/ducit in errorem variarum ambage viarum*, 8.160-61). Although the windings of the labyrinth bear a mimetic relationship to the wanderings of the river Maeander, although this fact is conveyed by means of a simile which syntactically emphasizes their resemblance, there is an ironic and immediately apparent discrepancy between the playful, relaxed movement of the Maeander (*refluitque fluitque*, 'Flowing and looping back', 8.163) and the deceptive twistings (*fallacia*, 8.168) of the artifact that theoretically imitates it. This part of the narrative frame immediately establishes the skill of Daedalus in a morally ambiguous context, since his artistry was employed in concealing the minotaur, the monstrous result of aberrant sexuality. Moreover, in his capacity for interpreting disorder, Daedalus virtually reverses the creative function of art.

The audience for this particular artifact is Ariadne, and ironically, her ability to interpret the maze coincides with its failure: because she supplied Theseus with the key to finding his way out of the labyrinth, the deceptions of the maze and their mortal consequences were circumvented. Ariadne's response to art leads ultimately to her own unhappy fate, but Bacchus transforms her jewelled crown into a gleaming constellation:

Immediately preceding the story of Daedalus' flight is a brief version of the myth of Ariadne. It focuses not on her aid to Theseus, nor especially on his betrayal of her, but on the metamorphosis of her chaplet into a coronal of stars. This metamorphosis is a form of compensation for Theseus' betrayal. It is also a positive version of the transformation of Icarus: a mirror image that reflects, in miniature, the story that follows. Her crown spirals upward in the process of its metamorphosis; it is changed into a stellar body, unlike Icarus' change because of a stellar body (the sun). Ariadne achieves immortality as part of the cosmos, rather than death and absorption by the cosmos. These details

all suggest an 'upward' metamorphosis that corresponds to the 'downward' metamorphosis of Icarus.

This particular rendering of Ariadne's story expresses the poet's sense of perpetual change as the sole constant of reality. Given this assumption about the world, the story also conveys the necessary relationship between change and art. Not surprisingly, then, there appears again the cycle of artifact (labyrinth), response to art, that is, vision (Ariadne's idea, the golden thread), and a response to vision itself that culminates in creation (the transformed coronal of stars). The cyclic artistic process and the cycles of metamorphosis seem juxtaposed one to another rather than interwoven. This impression evolves from the fact that the elements of artistic process and phenomenal change are drawn from mythic sources that are separable. The creation of the labyrinth by Daedalus, the defeat of the minotaur through Ariadne's perception of the maze, and the response of Bacchus to her plight are not necessarily parts of a single story. Yet a cyclic pattern of vision and response is recognizable even though these stories or parts of stories need not be told in conjunction with one another. The integral relationship between art and the perpetuity of change is established even more clearly because the points of emphasis in the progression from art to vision to interpretation derive from separable mythic sources. The disturbing nature of Daedalus' art, the role of Ariadne as audience, and the result of her interpretive act combine to alert the reader to the meaning of the story that follows.

In seeking a means of escape from Crete, Daedalus *ignotas animum dimittit in artes/naturamque novat* ('turned his thinking/Toward unknown arts, changing the laws of nature', 8.188-89). This constitutes a further step from the labyrinth that allegedly imitated the windings of nature towards an artifact that is overtly unnatural in its conception. The wings Daedalus designs resemble pan-pipes, the feathers arranged according to their length, as *fistula disparibus paulatim surgit avenis* ('the way that pan-pipes rise in gradual sequence', 8.192). Thus art imitates art, artifact imitates artifact and the movement away from nature resonates since we remember the ambiguous discrepancy between art and nature in the deceptive and intricate windings of a maze that supposedly resembled a river's course. Because the wings as artifact are touched by this ambiguity, so also is the idea of art as a means of escaping confinement, limitations, or boundaries.

The panorama spread out beneath Daedalus and Icarus in flight substantiates this interpretation. Juxtaposed with the father's glance back toward his son is the description of those watching from below. The point of view shifts from the heights of a visionary perspective to the vantage point of ordinary reality. Those with limited vision look up at those airborne. The focus of the description is on the mundane activities of the observers – the fisherman dipping his rod in the water, the shepherd

leaning on his crook, the plowman on his ploughshare – rather than on any broadened perspective of the universe. Even when the point of view shifts to Daedalus and his son—

> Iunonia laeva
> parte Samos (fuerant Delosque Parosque relictae)
> dextra Lebinthus erat fecundaque melle Calymne (8.220-22)

> Over Samos, Juno's sacred island,
> Delos and Paros toward the left, Lebinthus
> Visible to the right, and another island,
> Calymne, rich in honey

– there is only the iteration of place names. The limited nature of the description of vision possesses a relevant irony within the context of the myth. However limited our perception, and therefore however limited vision is in fact, Ovid suggests, it is wonderful to Icarus, who soars 'higher and higher drawn to the vast heaven' (*caelique cupidine tractus/altius egit iter*, 8.224-25). As he flies too near the sun, the wax that held the wings melts, and he plunges into the sea. We are told neither the nature of his descent, nor the appearance of the cosmos as he passes through it.

In choosing these particular islands to appear beneath the gaze of Daedalus and Icarus, Ovid refers to his earlier version of their story in the *Ars Amatoria*. The nearly identical arrangement of syntax makes the allusion unmistakable.[7] The reference to Lebinthus and Calymne, place names he probably found in a Hellenistic source, receives only a minor variation in epithet: Calymne is *fecunda melle* rather than *silvis umbrosa*. Ovid draws attention to his recondite knowledge of the Hellenistic Greek tradition and to his own poetic art. Since Daedalus and Icarus cannot know either his own poem or the Hellenistic literature, Ovid's assertion of artistry is at the expense of his own artificers. The absence of description of Calymne and Lebinthus, or of Paros and Delos, is not the only way he suggests his characters' limited experience of vision.

Pleased by the death of Icarus, a noisy partridge beats his wings in approval. The bird was Daedalus' nephew, transformed by Minerva as he plummeted through the air. He had been hurled headlong from her temple by his uncle, out of envious resentment for his creation of saw and compass. Daedalus as audience is thus even more dangerous (and concomitantly, less ambiguous) a figure than Daedalus as artist. The overtly negative and even destructive response of Daedalus to art other than his own now reflects back on the story of his flight with Icarus. The flight itself was motivated by rebellion, and the wings were the concrete manifestation of that impulse. Had Icarus proved a more atten-

tive audience to the exigencies of the artifact, he might have been successful in achieving a visionary perspective of his world. Yet how would the father have dealt with independent creation by the son? This question is external to the immediate textual material, but it is relevant in that the brief tale of the transformation of Perdix raises the issue. The artist who would give form to deception is the same artist who jealously destroys another being with a capacity for invention.[8] Daedalus as artist and as audience subverts the artistic process and its end: the creation of disorder characterizes his endeavour in either capacity.

The building of the labyrinth and the metamorphosis of Perdix chronologically precede the escape from Crete. In providing a narrative frame for the story of the flight, Ovid has altered the chronological order of events. This editorial decision indicates an intended reciprocity of meaning between the tales of the frame, and the central story which is the focal point of the myth.

The myths of Daedalus and of Phaethon are a vehicle for Ovid's ideas about art. The use of flight and its achievement literally and metaphorically of a visionary perspective would alone suggest this thematic interest, but the flights are also accompanied by a plethora of details, both descriptive and structural, that substantiate this view of Ovid's concern. One other relationship between flight and art, specifically literary art, will serve to illustrate.

The flights as literal transitions in geographic space dramatize the literary transitions from story to story within the poem. Both poet and character must achieve movement within and between fictive worlds. The identification of the poet with his characters, then, originates in their analogous activity in relation to the poem, since the poet makes his characters enact literally that which he must execute within his narrative. Because of the analogous relationship between the creation of a poetic structure and part of the action of the story, the flight becomes a means whereby Ovid enters the world of his poem. Conversely, by dramatizing the literary transition in the form of a literal transition, he gives his characters an overview of the poetically created universe. Whereas the poet oversees this universe in an act of creation, his characters achieve their vision simultaneously with their own destruction, and even with the destruction of the poetic universe. Only the poet of the *Metamorphoses*, unlike even his own fictive artificers, can achieve a vision that will not destroy. Insofar as the flights of Daedalus and Phaethon succeed as metaphors for literary transitions, that is, insofar as phenomenal events like flights reflect literary events like transitions from story to story, nature mirrors art. This inversion of the mimetic function of art is one of [illegible]ways Ovid as poet and supreme controller of the world of his poem toys with, mocks, and escapes the limitations of his art. But within the world of the poem, the flights fail as experiments with phenomena: the means of flight, the wings or chariots, are inadequate for sustaining vision. Whereas the function of phenomena within the world of the poem is limited, providing a partial vision that is doomed, the structural transitions of which the flights are the metaphorical expression, succeed. Ovid thus presents an ironically optimistic view of the efficacy of his own art: only the magic of poetry escapes destruction.[9]

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NOTES

1. Charles Altieri, 'Ovid and the New Mythologists', *Novel* (Fall 1973), p. 35.
2. All quotations from the *Metamorphoses* are from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, The Loeb Classical Library 2 vols. (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1921). The translations are taken from Rolfe Humphries, trans., *Ovid: Metamorphoses* (Bloomington, 1955).
3. For an excellent study of *ekphrasis* in the *Metamorphoses* see Eleanor Winsor Leach, 'Ekphrasis and the Theme of Artistic Failure in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', *Ramus* 3 (1974), 102-42. I am indebted to this article for pointing to the significance of artifacts within the poem, though Professor Leach does not discuss Vulcan's carving on the palace of the sun. She focuses on stories that emphasize the personality of the human artist and his consistently disastrous fate.
4. Leach, *op. cit.*, 104.
5. See Altieri's remarks on the story as a basis for imaginative play, *op. cit.*, 34-35.
6. Hermann Fränkel, *Ovid: A Poet between Two Worlds* (Berkeley, 1945), 88. Fränkel sees the play on the double nature of the nymph as an example of the 'dialectical wit' of romantic writers.
7. Lines 79-81 from the second Book of the *Ars Amatoria* are as follows:

> iam Samos a laeva (fuerant Naxosque relictae
> et Paros et Clario Delos amata deo),
> dextra Lebinthos erat silvisque umbrosa Calymne.

8. Leach observes that 'the human artists of the *Metamorphoses* show that art can have many effects other than that of creating order. It can provide a perilous, self-destructive isolation from reality; it can stir up jealous passions or provoke the anger of the gods. Indeed, the artist is unable to predict or govern the consequences of his own work' (*op. cit.*, 133).
9. Charles Segal, in his article 'Myth and Philosophy in the *Metamorphoses*', *AJP*, 90, No. 3 (1969), 257-92, suggests that poetry is the one constant amid perpetual change (290). See also Leach, 134-35.