International Journal of the Classical Tradition (2019) 26(4):446–469
https://doi.org/10.1007/s12138-019-00523-5

ARTICLE

After Ovid, After Theory

'Our songs are alive in the land of the living.' Bob Dylan, Nobel Prize in Literature Lecture, 4 June 2017

Victoria Rimell[1]

Published online: 8 April 2019

It is difficult to overstate the extent to which Ovidian poetry has stimulated and framed classicists' engagement with philosophical ideas that have emerged since the mid-twentieth century, in the fields of critical theory, cultural studies and psychoanalysis. The multiform and palimpsestic dialogues that have grown out of this specific engagement seem to encapsulate the evolution not just of Latin literary studies but of classics as a discipline, in the wake of post-war, post-colonial thinking across the humanities. Of all the Ovidian 'revivals' through the twentieth century, beginning with Pound, Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Picasso, Dali, Freud and Lacan in the 1910s-30s, the 'third wave' of the late 80s onwards (and the fashioning of a 'postmodern Ovid' in criticism, literature and visual art) has been by far the most expansive and the most problematic.[1] It is this Ovid, an Ovid who in the second decade of the new millennium feels standardized and endlessly reiterable, but who is animated by contradictions, repressions, critiques, misreadings, and connections not quite made, who will be the focus of this essay. My discussion will be punctuated by speculative pointers towards new shores, just as the wave ebbs.

[1] T. Ziolkowski, 'Ovid in the Twentieth Century', in *A Companion to Ovid, ed.* P. Knox, Chichester, West Sussex, 2009, pp. 455-68 (455), identifies 'three principal waves' in twentieth-century engagement with Ovid. See S. Butler, 'Beyond Narcissus', in *Synaesthesia and the Ancient Senses*, ed. A Purves and S. Butler, London and New York, 2013, pp. 185-201, on the *aetas ovidiana* of the 1920s-30s, which drew together writers, painters and thinkers.

✉ Victoria Rimell
v.rimell@warwick.ac.uk

[1] Department of Classics & Ancient History, University of Warwick, Humanities Building, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK

Surface

Ovid and 'theory', the story goes, are natural twins. As Terry Eagleton joked, 'there is always something rather navel-gazing and narcissistic about theory, as anyone who has encountered a few prominent cultural theorists will be aware'.[2] Who better to sell theory to newly liberated philologists than the narcissistic writer of Narcissus, 'bent over', after Quintilian's jibe, 'in admiration of his own virtuosity'?[3] If digesting post-1970s 'theory' means appreciating that so many of the notions we might regard as basic 'givens' of our existence (gender identity, selfhood, what literature is, what theory is, etc.) are actually fluid and unstable rather than fixed and reliable essences, that there no such thing as disinterested inquiry or a 'non-theoretical' interpretation of a text or aspect of culture, that meaning is produced at the point of reception, and that politics is pervasive, then Ovidian poetry – in all its performative thematization of self-consciousness, self-reflection, fictionality, duplicity, ambiguity and contingency – has helped *teach* us that, as well as offering a laboratory to test out the political-poetic potential of such ideas. Efrossini Spentzou, in her 2009 review 'Theorizing Ovid', observed that 'Ovid's protean propensity for transgression, instability, and experimentation has eased the way for critical theorists and exponents of contemporary theoretical approaches to engage with Ovid', an interesting and not atypical formulation in that it locates the contemporary *in* Ovid.[4]

Yet most Ovidian criticism by classicists in the 1990s and 2000s latched onto a particular strand of what it understood as postmodern or poststructuralist thought (which tended to blur into a whole, led by the triumvirate Foucault-Derrida-Lacan, featuring the occasional French feminist, often over-ridden by or problematically conjoined with Judith Butler),[5] which was read out as a form of linguistic idealism. The 2014 Oxford conference at which many of this volume's papers germinated, entitled 'Ovid after Postmodernism', began its program by stating: 'It is by now a critical commonplace to demonstrate the affinity between Ovidian and postmodern concerns: a playful insistence on the rhetorical nature of "reality" … ' This Ovid, a fashionably complex 'poet of surfaces' and scholarly master of the so-called 'Alexandrian footnote', was designed to oust (or subtly rebrand) the 'unserious', sub-Virgilian, vacuous Ovid known to a previous generation of critics. Postmodernist irony and self-reflexivity made silliness recondite, play seductively adult rather than infantile, and desire a compelling, legitimate object of study. Ovid's lifelong experiment in elegiac metre as an engine of creative-libidinal flow, his constant, self-referential destabilization of form (the shape of words, genres, poems, gendered bodies), his

[2] T. Eagleton, *After Theory,* London, 2004, p. 27.

[3] G.-P. Rosati, *Narciso e Pygmalione: illusione e spettacolo nelle* Metamorfosi *di Ovidio*, Pisa, 1983, p. 50.

[4] E. Spentzou, 'Theorizing Ovid', in *Companion to Ovid*, ed. Knox (n. 2 above), pp. 381-93 (382).

[5] Butler has explicitly stated that feminist analyses of the gendered structures of power do not interest her (e.g. in *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London and New York, 1999, p. xxx: 'The radical dependency of the masculine subject on the female "Other" suddenly exposes his autonomy as illusory. That particular dialectical reversal of power, however, couldn't quite hold my attention – although others surely did').

wry, often ingenious involvement of audiences as co-creators, made him a poster-boy for the postmodern, and therefore for the striking presence and relevance of Roman antiquity in the modern West. This trend was perhaps best captured by Sara Myers's borrowing of Terry Eagleton in her *Journal of Roman Studies* survey article of 'recent criticism on Ovid' back in 1999, at the apex of what Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos called the 'new formalist revolution' in the study of Ovid's 'literary artistry'.[6]

> The typical postmodern work of art is arbitrary, eclectic, hybrid, decentred, fluid, discontinuous, pastiche-like. True to the tenets of postmodernity, it spurns metaphysical profundity in favour of *playfulness* and *lack of affect*, an art of pleasures, surfaces, and passing intensities. Suspecting all assured truths and certainties, its form is ironic and its epistemology relativist and sceptical. Rejecting all attempts to reflect a stable reality beyond itself, *it exists self-consciously at the level of form or language*. Knowing its own fictions to be *groundless and gratuitous*, it can attain a kind of negative authenticity only by flaunting its ironic awareness of this fact, *wryly pointing its own status as a constructed artifice.*[7]

Compare Hinds: 'Ovid's mastery is above all a mastery of words…I hope my readers will respond to my pleasure in teasing out the implications of Ovid's words'.[8] Recall Hardie: 'what was formerly seen as superficial wit and as irredeemable lack of seriousness has been reassessed in the light of a postmodernist flight from realism and presence towards textuality and anti-foundationalism'…'Perhaps the most instantly recognizable quality, strikingly uniform throughout [Ovid's] career, is his style, insistently calling attention to the linguistic surface of the texts.'… 'An awareness of the way in which we construct the world through language, always in danger of revealing itself as nothing but language, comes through in Ovid's dealings with personifications…';[9] and Green's later observation: 'One apparent trend of more recent times has been to revert back almost to the view that the poems are an essentially harmless and witty literary game…'.[10] Remember Gildenhard and Zissos: 'Ovid slyly manipulates the narrative surface…He disowns the primacy of plot in favor of stylistic thrills'.[11] Or Fowler: 'Their [Pyramus's and Thisbe's] failure is

[6] I. Gildenhard and A. Zissos, '"Somatic Economies": Tragic Bodies and Poetic Design in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', in *Ovidian Transformations. Essays on Ovid's Metamorphoses and its Reception*, ed. P. Hardie, A.Barchiesi and S.Hinds, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 162-81 (163).

[7] T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory. An Introduction*, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1996, p. 212, quoted in S. Myers, 'The Metamorphosis of a Poet: Recent Work on Ovid', *Journal of Roman Studies,* 89, 1999, pp. 190-204. My italics.

[8] S. Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone: Ovid and the Self-Conscious Muse*, Cambridge, 1987, pp. xi-xii.

[9] P. Hardie, Introduction, in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. P. Hardie, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 1-12 (4-5).

[10] S. Green, 'Lessons in Love: Fifty Years of Scholarship on the *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*', in *The Art of Love: Bimillennial Essays on Ovid's Ars Amatoria and Remedia Amoris*, ed. R. Gibson, S. Green and A, Sharrock, Oxford, 2006, pp. 1-22 (10).

[11] Gildenhard and Zissos, 'Somatic Economies' (n. 7 above), p. 165.

therefore inevitable. Because there can be no such escape from language: meaning only exists within language…The story thus makes the very Ovidian point that it is better to accept and revel in the possibilities offered by this inevitable descent into language than to long pointlessly for an impossible escape from language'.[12]

Postmodern Ovid and his multiple artist figures make it up, all the way, and in this poetry desire is nothing but, ultimately, the desire to compose, to read on, or lure readers to read on:[13] first the poet-lover 'falls in love' in the *Amores*, only *then* does he invent the beloved, Corinna, the *puella* who is nothing but an empty cipher, a made-up diminutive of κόρη, little girl, and a collection of body parts, pieced together and then possessed to become the very *materia* of elegy in *Amores* I.5. The inseparability of creative and libidinal production results, paradoxically, in a flattened or absent libido, while poetic artifice automatically entails insincerity and 'lack of affect'. Critics wrote at length of the 'textuality' of Ovidian desire, which became another way of saying that it is an illusion or delusion: reduced to words, and implicitly to written, silent images of words, 'empty' signifiers which no longer contain the essence of anything, it almost does not exist. Or rather, it need not scare or move us as it does the lovers and rape victims of the *Metamorphoses,* who are regularly traumatized or annihilated by (Lacanian) *jouissance*. We were invited to laugh at *amor – Roma*'s bright new reflection – and in the meantime to seek consolation for desire-as-loss in the order and polished curves of Ovid's lines, as they refer back to themselves. Postmodern Ovid, in other words, was a hybrid creature born of a strange intercourse between (interpretations of) Derrida, Lacan, Foucault and Butler and the bodies of criticism those giants of theory have headlined. Thus Derridean *texte* was understood as language rather than the web of life, and Derrida married to Lacan to promote a reality that is itself textual or inaccessible via anything else but language.[14] We conjured an Ovid who invited us to celebrate a triumph of the Symbolic over the Imaginary (unless we preferred, with Trevor Fear, to envisage a pre-adult, aberrant poet whose entry into adult sexuality has stalled, positioning the elegist as 'failure' and exemplum of 'poetic immaturity and excess'),[15] and largely forgot about the Real.[16] Exiled, counter-cultural, 'subversive' Ovid, who mocked Augustan regulations of sexuality, was reclaimed for the sex-positive post-60s revolution, then recast as a mediator of and interlocutor in Augustan discourse.[17]

[12] D. Fowler, *Roman Constructions: Readings in Postmodern Latin,* Oxford, 2000, p. 161.

[13] Cf. especially A. Sharrock, *Seduction and Repetition in Ovid's* Ars Amatoria II, Oxford, 1994.

[14] See, e.g., P. Barry's summary of post-structuralism in *Beginning Theory. An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory,* 2nd ed. New York, 2002, p. 64; Fowler, *Roman Constructions* (n. 13 above), pp. 199-200. Cf. 'Dialogue with Jacques Derrida', in *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers,* ed. R. Kearney, Manchester, 1984, pp. 105-23 (125).

[15] T. Fear, 'Propertian Closure: The Elegiac Inscription of the Liminal Male and Ideological Contestation in Augustan Rome', *Gendered Dynamics in Latin Love Elegy*, ed. R. Ancona and E. Greene, Baltimore, 2005, pp. 13-40 (30).

[16] For example Fowler, *Roman Constructions* (n. 13 above), pp. 156-67, with P. Hardie, *Ovid's Poetics of Illusion*, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 144-5, on Pyramus and Thisbe, discussed below. I also discuss the later Lacanian readings of Miller (whose work in the early 2000s is all about the Real) and Janan below.

[17] Reading Ovidian politics was a game of polarities until well into the 2000s, despite Kennedy's unpicking of oppositions in his 1992 article (D. Kennedy, '"Augustan" and "Anti-Augustan": Reflections on Terms of Reference', in *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus,* ed. A. Powell, Bristol,

Postmodern Ovid spoke directly to the scholarly reader to offer joyful immersion in the Symbolic and an almost guilt-free, 'ironic' detachment from intimacy.[18] Ovidian-Lacanian desire was staged as a restless libidinal circling and ultimately as tragic sacrifice (of the now disappeared mother). Meanwhile, Ovid's ventriloquism of women, his elaboration of 'unconventional' masculine positions, his writing of sexual violence, of wavering gender identities and of split selves, came to be viewed through the lens of a generalized liberal feminist anti-essentialism, and more specifically through Judith Butler's development of Foucauldian biopolitics. Gender, as Butler argued, is constructed in and through a microphysics of power and multiple acts of bodily performance, a truth which for Ovidian critics seemed more liberatory than disciplinary. Gender came to be understood not just as a social construct, but as a labile, elusive category subject to a transformation that itself harbours the potential to defy authoritarian discourses, those always oppressive Foucauldian norms.

Flesh

Yet as much as this postmodern Ovid became the mainstream by the late 1990s, and continues to underpin much work by classicists, it did not of course pass unchallenged, and has since been subject to robust critique – although the ways in which it has been re-examined both within and without the academy have not yet quite coalesced into a new, recognizable paradigm. The videocentric, 'essentially formalist and idealist approach'[19] to Latin literature that pivoted around Ovid's dazzling poetics spurred a new commitment to cultural-materialist readings.[20] As some have dared to pronounce, to say that any happening is always permeated by discourse is not to say that any happening is only ever discourse. People are more than the sum of social performances that correspond to an ascribed identity and associated norms. To suggest that all rhetoric is bodily in Ovid's texts does not entail that Ovidian bodies be purely rhetorical. Humans beings are not like Ovid's mischievous gods, who can try on any bodily guise and discard it like an old dress when it suits them,

Footnote 17 (continued)
1992, pp. 26-58) and A. Barchiesi's nuanced *Il poeta e il principe* (1994, published in English three years later as his *The Poet and the Prince: Ovid and Augustan Discourse*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1997). The work of Thomas Habinek in the late 90s and early 2000s (T. Habinek, *The Politics of Latin Literature:. Writing, Identity and Empire in Ancient Rome.* Princeton, NJ, 1998; and T. Habinek, 'Ovid and Empire', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Hardie (n. 10 above), pp. 46-61, was also important in shifting critical terrain.

[18] Fowler, *Roman Constructions* (n. 13 above), p. 162, spells this out: 'My preference for the Symbolic over the Imaginary and for a joyous acceptance of the mediated nature of language may also be a male flight from intimacy and preference for distance over immediacy'.

[19] Habinek, *Politics of Latin Literature* (n. 18 above), p. 9.

[20] E.g., Habinek, *Politics of Latin Literature* (n. 18 above); D. Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History,* Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2007; A. Feldherr, *Playing Gods: Ovid's* Metamorphoses *and the Politics of Fiction,* Princeton, 2010.

although one of the key questions implicit in Ovid's writing of metamorphosis is whether we are in bodies, or *are* our (sexed) bodies. Critics like Lynn Enterline in 2000 – or indeed Amy Richlin back in 1992 – began from the understanding that the body is both irreducible *and* shaped by discourse, both a bearer of meaning *and* a linguistic agent.[21] Shane Butler's recent work on Ovid (2015) works with Enterline to reveal the extent to which the constructed poet of the textual, visual surface emerges not so much in an allergy to depth but in a retreat from *flesh,* and from the (extra-linguistic?) reverberations that enter our heads, pulse through us, and confound an intertextuality which operates only as a mechanistic, Oedipal model of patrilineal tradition.

Few people would object to the argument that the experience of listening to Mahler's Sixth Symphony, Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited*, or Prince's *Purple Rain,* is not adequately communicable in (human, verbal) language, let alone in academic prose. The fact that a songwriter, in one of recent history's seismic events, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016 does nothing to change that, although it does prompt academics to question again what exactly such an experience consists in and to what extent it is speakable, by them. As Butler's *Phonograph* points out, the scholarly recuperation of Ovid as poet of the (complex) surface in the light of postmodernism necessarily involved turning down, or even turning off, the volume of Ovid's music.[22] This move is inseparable from the need to remove the philologist's desiring body from Ovidian *corpora nova* by concealing it beneath the silent reader impermeable to sound. For as ancient literature from the *Odyssey* onwards teaches us, and as Dylan's Nobel lecture reiterates, it is difficult to claim mastery of music that comes *at* you and alerts you to your own porosity by entering your ears.[23] Yet this is not the same as arguing, in the spirit of Lacan's conviction, that this experience is unrepresentable.

In this (post-)critical reaction lurks both an implicit alliance with the poets and musicians of the twentieth and twenty-first century who have claimed Ovid poet of metamorphosis as their own, and the question – taboo, old-fashioned or over-simple for most philologists, a constant ear-worm for the singers – which boils down to: what is poetry for? And then: who does Ovid belong to, anyway? The academic footnoters, or the poets? The wordsmiths, or the visual artists, the choreographers, the dancers, the composers?[24] The masters of language, or the raped? With Rita Felski, do we need to think again about 'what exactly we are doing when we engage in

[21] L. Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare*, Cambridge, 2000, p. 6; A. Richlin, in her 'Reading Ovid's Rapes', in *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, ed. A. Richlin, Oxford, 2002, pp. 158-79, is already speaking of an Ovidian subject who 'oscillates among the terms of the fantasy' (p. 176).

[22] S. Butler, *The Ancient Phonograph,* New York, 2015, pp. 82-3 and surrounding chapter.

[23] https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2016/dylan-lecture.html [accessed 17 May 2018]. Dylan ends his lecture by talking about the *Odyssey* and citing the first line of the poem in translation. Compare Butler, *Phonograph* (n. 23 above), pp. 16-17. On lines from Ovid's exile poetry (inspired by Peter Green's 1994 translation) in Dylan's album *Modern Times*, see R. Thomas, 'The Streets of Rome: The Classical Dylan', *Oral Tradition,* 22, 2007, pp. 30-56.

[24] The National Gallery's *Metamorphosis: Titian 2012* united all these art forms in one 'total art spectacle'. J. Casid,, 'Alter-Ovid – Contemporary Art on the Hyphen', in *A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid,* ed. J. Miller and C. Newlands, Hoboken, 2014, pp. 416-35 (418).

"critique" and what else we might do instead'?[25] The politics of Ovid's text have been reagitated again around the body, especially in its associations (of which Ovid was all too aware) with lesser artforms and forms of knowledge, with the low-class, womanly, bestial, and those not much interested in the feigning of unfeeling. As Kate Tempest, the latest and youngest poet to make Ovid hers, puts it:

> The clever folk talk in endless circles and congratulate themselves on
> Being so untouched by passion.
> But since when did the clever folk ever know anything?[26]

The clever folk, who like Tempest read Ovid in libraries and on buses, will sense here not just a 'post-critical' vibe, but also an Ovidian engagement with (embodied) knowledge, with the highly Ovidian questions of what poetry knows, what it can or can't teach, and how poetry might say or be what the body knows.[27] Those questions are shot through, now, with Second-Wave feminism and perhaps also with the many-headed twenty-first-century impulse to forget it ever happened. For Tempest, rewriting the *Metamorphoses* for an angry, anxiously numb tribe of UK millennials, Ovid's poetry is both the lure of the postmodern, or posthuman, and the just-make-it-all-stop claustrophobic horror of twenty-first-century *translatio imperii*, played out in a borderless web that is exciting and creative and joins all the dots, but is at the same time frightening, stultifying and increasingly the medium through which we are observed and manipulated as civic subjects. This is the generation of post-Ovidian *iuvenes* and *puellae* who must perform continually before the looking glass, locked into Narcissus's teenage ping-pong of liking and receiving likes ('qui probat, ipse probatur', 'He praises, and himself is praised', *Metamorphoses,* III.425), before gazing with loathing at themselves-as-others, the catalyst for self-harm ('He beats his bare breast with marble-hard hands', *Metamorphoses*, III.481). In 2017 (the year in which I am writing this essay) as global and local tensions build in a perfect storm of economic, socio-political and ecological precarities, Ovidian dismemberment as an edgy queer experiment in destabilized identities can somehow, uncannily, coexist with the horrorism of bodies blown to bits by drones, and of bodies themselves turned into exploding weapons that explode others, on a street near you.[28] Astute Lacanian readings of Ovid in the last decade, especially those developed by Paul Allen Miller and Micaela Janan, have been crucial in drawing out and historicizing the 'extreme tensions which constitute the elegiac subject position'[29], and in revealing the extent to which classicists' appropriation of Kristevan intertextuality have served to validate the philologist as 'master of meaning'.[30] Yet such readings

[25] R. Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, Chicago and London, 2015.

[26] K. Tempest, 'These Things I Know', in *Hold Your Own*. London, 2014, p. 70.

[27] On what has often been described as a 'post-critical' fatigue with critique, especially 'when it hardens into a self-regarding posture', see H. Foster, 'Post-Critical' in *October,* 139, 2012, pp. 3-9 (6-7).

[28] On what Cavarero calls 'horrorism', see A. Cavarero, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence,* transl. W. McCuaig, New York, 2009.

[29] P. Miller, *Subjecting Verses: Latin Love Elegy and the Emergence of the Real*, Princeton, NJ, 2004, p. 2.

[30] M. Janan, *Reflections in a Serpent's Eye: Thebes in Ovid's* Metamorphoses, Oxford, 2009, p. 12.

now seem curiously sterile – repressive of feminist and Deleuzian devastations,[31] removed from the rhythms of Ovid's poetics, transparently invested in the evacuating ironies of postmodern discourse,[32] and inadequate to respond to current political issues and new crises of the subject as they are refracted by Ovidian violence.

Just as scholars are re-mapping not necessarily paradoxical pairings in Ovid – of linguistic surface and flesh, ludic delight and political seriousness – those interactions are being pressured in new ways by a generation of readers who spend hours of every day flicking between snippets of (heart-)*Breaking News,* Instagram selfies, and pictures of desirable shoes (see again the end of Tempest's 'Tiresias' in *Hold Your Own*, cited in the introduction to this volume). The most compelling new Ovid is not the alienated ironist basking in the impossibility of resistance, or the theorist of desire for whom voice is only an effect of the Symbolic, but an electric-eyed female rapper who sings, dead seriously, that 'all life is empathy'. Her blind prophet is a crazy homeless man with a cane, who 'spits brown phlegm at the oncoming darkness'.[33]

Excess

Tempest's brand new 'Tiresias' performs 'gender fluidity' as psychophysical torture and ecstasy, chucking a series of small hand grenades towards the contemporary nexus of feminisms and trans politics. Feminist Ovidian critics have long struggled with the tensions and conflicts within their own camp in response to the provocations of Ovid's texts, and such debates have exposed and reflected differences within feminism as a plurality of twentieth- to twenty-first-century discourses and practices. More or less old-fashioned yet still jagged questions include: how does a postmodern enjoyment of the play of language react to Ovid's accumulation of sexual violence? Is the literary criticism of rape scenes always meta-pornography?[34]

[31] Feminist critiques of Lacan are too many to list comprehensively here. Fundamental are: E. Grosz, *Jacques Lacan. A Feminist Introduction,* New York, 1990; *Feminine Sexuality*, *Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*, ed. J. Mitchell and J. Rose, New York, 1992; and L. Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman,* Transl. G. Gill, Ithaca, NY, 1985. For further bibliography see D. Leupnitz, 'Beyond the Phallus: Lacan and Feminism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. J.-M. Rabaté, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 221-37. On Derrida's readings of Lacan see especially M. Lewis, *Derrida and Lacan, Another Writing,* Edinburgh, 2008. On Deleuze, see especially G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* transl. R. Hurley, M. Seem and H. Lane, Minneapolis, MN, 1983; with B. Nedoh and A. Zevnik, *Lacan and Deleuze: A Disjunctive Synthesis,* Edinburgh, 2016. My own work on Ovid – V. Rimell, *Ovid's Lovers: Desire, Difference and the Poetic Imagination*, Cambridge, 2006 – reads Ovid through Irigaray's critique of Lacan.

[32] See especially Miller, *Subjecting Verses* (n. 30 above). p. 236: 'In the world of empire it is no longer possible to revision the world as a collective endeavor or project. All that is left is the micropolitics of self-fashioning and ironic resistance, functionally indistinguishable from flattering acceptance: a condition not that different from our own.' Cf. M. Lowrie's review, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 12, 2005, pp. 108-16.

[33] K. Tempest, 'Radical Empathy' and 'Prophet' in Tempest, *Hold Your Own* (n. 27 above), pp. 103, 107.

[34] Richlin, *Pornography* (n. 22 above), p. 159.

How to read the relation between multiple permutations of Ovidian ego-dissolution – as unspeakable horror (rape, dismemberment, enforced cannibalism), as *ecstasis* (orgasm, out of body Bacchic states, the pleasure of creative-libidinal flow), or as exciting reinvention that triggers new understandings of the potential communications between human and animal, between the sexes, or between humanity and the natural world?

Tempest's explosions are welcome, for since the late 1980s, opposition between Resisting Readers of Ovid in the liberal feminist mode[35] and the radical feminist critics out to spoil everyone's fun[36] has been less worked through than softened in the dissemination of slightly varying approaches (postmodern fragmentations, as many have noted, tend to disable resistance and allow it to be swallowed up, or reterritorialized, in the service of existing structures). Many of the former seem to have bought the trickle-down Foucauldian belief that words make worlds to the extent that we can describe things into (and out of) existence, and risk enacting victimization by describing it. Such critics have trawled Ovid in search of female agency and empowerment even, or especially, in cases where the objectification and silencing of female figures is overt, as if the delineation of structures of oppression is itself a feminist betrayal.[37] Yet as much as the politics of positivity can be frustratingly, dangerously naive (as Richlin reminded Curran, when the poet depicts Daphne's terror that's not empathy, it's domination's necessary turn-on),[38] Ovid's texts can be seen to invite this kind of engagement in their intertwining and juxtaposition of gendered perspectives which open up space for thinking about female experience despite being male creations. Addressing a 'female' audience and miming female voices will always involve (gendered) readers in negotiating the difference between speaking *as*, *over* or *with* a woman. Scholars like Spentzou, Lindheim and Fulkerson – alongside poets like Clare Pollard – have been outspoken in declaring that we should take seriously the fantasy, or metaphor, of women's agency and power to make their own narratives in the *Heroides*.[39] They push back against those predominately male critics who tended to envisage these characters as puppets of the male

[35] E.g., L. Cahoon, 'Calliope's Song: Shifting Narrators in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 5', *Helios,* 23, 1996, pp. 43-66; L. Curran, 'Rape and Rape Victims in the *Metamorphoses*', in *Women in the Ancient World: The Arethusa Papers,* ed. J. Peradotto and J. Sullivan, Albany, 1984, pp. 263-86; G. Liveley, 'Reading Resistance in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', in *Ovidian Transformations*, ed. Hardie et al. (n. 7 above), pp. 197-213; A. Sharrock, 'The Love of Creation', *Ramus* 20, 1991, pp. 169-82; E. Spentzou, *Readers and Writers in Ovid's* Heroides: *Transgressions of Genre and Gender,* Oxford, 2003, after J. Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader. A Feminist Approach to American Fiction.* Bloomington, IN., 1978.

[36] E.g., Richlin, *Pornography* (n. 22 above), especially p. 178: 'Revolutionary discourse is intrinsically unamusing'; see also Enterline, *Rhetoric* (n. 22 above).

[37] See, e.g., Liveley, 'Reading Resistance' (n. 36 above), p. 209, where Pygmalion's misogynist fantasy of the statue as 'modest' is cast as her 'resistance to Pygmalion's attentions, as she aims to conceal and to satisfy her natural desires by playing the role of a modest lover'.

[38] Richlin, *Pornography* (n. 22 above), p. 162; Curran, 'Rape and Rape Victims' (n. 36 above).

[39] L. Fulkerson, *The Ovidian Heroine as Author: Reading, Writing and Community in the* Heroides. Cambridge, 2005; S. Lindheim, *Mail and Female: Epistolary Narrative and Desire in Ovid's* Heroides. Madison, WI, 2003; Spentzou, *Readers and Writers* (n. 36 above); C. Pollard, *Ovid's Heroines*, Hexham, 2013.

author, and who perceive the game of reading the *Heroides* as one of revelling in the natural superiority of a patriarchal literary knowledge by definition not shared by the simpleton heroines themselves, whose writing 'against the grain' does nevertheless spin the *divertissement* of dramatic irony.[40]

One strategy was to show that the 'weakness' of these writing women in the *Heroides* is rhetorically calculated and cunning. As readers we must tune into the oxymoronic nature of female persuasion in a man's world, where 'admitting' your 'inferiority' and 'subservience' may at least allow you to get your own way on occasion, or to manipulate the situation to your advantage. Feminist critics also repeatedly asked whether the 'voicelessness' of writing, framed often as a kind of impotence in the poems, is actually another rhetorical ploy to conceal the power of the poison pen. They led us into the fictional world of this text, listening for how Ovid's heroines intervene in the myths we take as etched in bronze by male writers: are they really written over, doomed to fail, or do they give us a window into parallel literary universes and temporalities in which protagonists take control of their own myths? To what extent is Ovid himself a 'resisting reader'? Or to put it another way, to what extent can we read the heroines as fantasies of modern, Augustan women, the kind tutored – fictionally or not – by Ovid in *Ars Amatoria* III, women up to date on Roman law, who are themselves scholars of Greek and Latin literature and who can even be seen to interact with each other in a virtual sisterhood, borrowing each other's strategies and tricks? Are *they* expert readers or is Ovid? Yet the interpretative challenge of these poems consists in inhabiting the performativity of this (temporal) dilemma *as a contest* – we cannot recoup a pure female voice from this text which would then enable a straightforward conversion of inferiority into empowerment (or at least we can only do this if we play the pseudo-naïve reader – which may nonetheless be a valuable intermediary move), any more than we can shut down the contest before it starts without stamping out the very 'possibilities' readers such as Alessandro Barchiesi are bound to recognize.[41]

Mairéad McAuley's thought-provoking recent work on mothers in the *Metamorphoses,* which begins with the observation that mothers are given remarkable prominence in the poem, suggests that female figures in Ovid already incarnate the kinds of contestations they catalyse in the *Heroides*. The female body, she notes, 'with its potential to metamorphose into two', might be thought as a 'paradigm for thinking differently about the relationship between matter and form, substance and

[40] See A. Barchiesi, *Speaking Volumes. Narrative and Intertext in Ovid and Other Latin Poets*, London, 2001, p. 114 on the *Heroides*: 'We are superior to the heroines; we know the unavoidable ends – but while we look at their illusions from the vantage point of irony, we are framed too: our ironical vantage point is built on the acceptance of a master fiction which controls us as we control intertextual ironies'. Cf. S. Casali, 'Ovidian Intertextuality', in *Companion to Ovid*, ed. Knox (n. 2 above), pp. 341-54: the heroines 'know their past . . . but they do not know their future, and readers will amuse themselves in recognising the unintentional quotation, behind the heroine's back, as has recently been lamented by scholars who have tried to confer new power to the Ovidian heroines'.

[41] Barchiesi, *Speaking Volumes* (n. 41 above), p. 117: 'The idea of allowing "feminine" voices to make themselves heard through the gaps in the opus of the past is full of possibilities, which are by no means limited to intertextuality and poetics'.

essence'.[42] This (potential) more-than-oneness, or *copia* ('excess'), which echoes the principles of key continental feminist texts, often manifests itself in a 'maternalized rhetoric of internal self-division' and in economies of substitution that amount to more than an Ovidian fantasy of swapping one pretty young woman for another (Corinna-Nape, Corinna-Cypassis, mistress-fill-in-the-gap). Procne and Philomela stand in each other's roles, for example, and Procne is divided between her names of *mater* and *soror,* while tragic female characters are torn both bodily and symbolically between their multiple familial roles. Althaea both is and is not her son Meleager, and as she decides whether or not to throw the log on the fire, her plural 'maternal names' ('maternaque nomina') 'break her down' ('frangunt', *Metamorphoses* VIII.508). MacAuley is wary that her reading might be seen uncritically to channel a 'nostalgia' for the maternal, yet her work develops the notion that Ovid's non-diffusion of the 'threat' of maternal power doesn't just dramatize a misogynistic fear of the feminine as code for a regressive merging or vulnerability. It also, she suggests, allows for an exploration of dissolution as a source of immense creative power whose directionality is multiple but which nevertheless leads to 'radical and transformative action'.[43] The tension between these two movements, insofar as they bear consequences for the interpretation of Ovidian erotics and for the spatial models that underpin the prevailing paradigm of intertextuality in Latin literary studies, have yet to be processed by classical scholars.

Solids

When we shift attention away from the Lacanian male subject, who boomerangs between his unified but alienating image and his body-in-pieces (so suggestive a template for Ovid's Actaeon, Narcissus, Pentheus and Orpheus) and towards the female, maternal subject *in extremis*, how might our poet of transformation continue to emerge anew? We might start by revisiting how Latinists, often *through* Ovid, have absorbed the post-structuralist injunction to experience literary texts as dynamic processes rather than still artifacts, and to understand interpretation as live negotiation rather than the application of archaeological expertise to unmoving objects.[44] Yet some of the best and most influential work on intertextuality by Latinists in the last twenty years (work in which Ovid's texts always loom large) is fraught by philosophical contradictions. Hinds's *Allusion and Intertext* (1998) rightly credited with 'broadening the critical horizons within which students of Latin literature perceive their texts to relate to one another',[45] made full use of the

[42] M. MacAuley, *Reproducing Rome. Motherhood in Virgil, Ovid, Seneca and Statius*, Oxford, 2016, p. 117.

[43] Ibid., p. 136.

[44] Cf. L. Edmunds, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Roman Poetry,* Baltimore, MD, 2001, pp. xi, xx, comparing the 1990s boom in intertextuality studies to the California gold rush of 1848.

[45] I. Gildenhard and A. Zissos, Review of Janan's *Reflections in a Serpent's Eye* (2009), *BMCR,* 30 March 2011, p. 2; S. Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext. Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry*, Cambridge, 1998.

post-structuralist, post-modern Ovidian lexicon of ambiguity, process, bidirectionality, dialogue, dynamism, complexity, self-referentiality and anything but the monolithic. Yet it also retained, and made intertextuality constitute and continually perform, a model of tradition and creative evolution as a geometric, linear, Oedipal battleground, and accepted the Freudian-Lacanian law of primary hostility as engraved in stone.[46] For Hinds, a voice of intellectually brilliant, third-way moderation in Classics, all human/literary interaction is a Bloomian game of control, power, appropriation, domination, competing 'master texts', father-son rivalry, 'weak/strong gestures', authentication, competing authorities, one-upmanship, hierarchies, and bids for superiority. Phrased as such, this view might sound polemically extreme, yet it is representative of a still entrenched and even consolidated status quo that posits itself as responding to ancient conceptualizations of literary tradition. To an extent this is right – large swathes of classical literature are concerned in some way or another with (the metapoetics of) Oedipal struggle, and Habinek's articulation of the claim that Latin literature is 'instrumental to the maintenance of aristocratic cultural hegemony' in Rome is crucial.[47] It is also of course the case that not all literary bids for authority and moves to appropriate are patriarchal (feminist or queer reclaimings can be aggressive in infiltrating and rerouting arborescent traditions). Yet underexamined, culturally and politically specific investment in this model produces an oddly limited and limiting experience of ancient texts.

This is especially true of Ovidian poetry, which for us amounts to antiquity's most ambitious, developed literary experimentation with time and with the unpredictable exchanges and wefts of relation constitutive of human identity. Ovid is just as interested in sisterhood, mothering, and the possibility of sustained erotic pleasure that is not haunted by loss or directed towards the dissipation of phallic tension, as he is in sadomasochistic drama and the violence of father-son rivalry. And this is a poet for whom tradition is not so much a path, tree or ladder as a vital maze of networks, a density of vibrating bodies whose interactions are mutually transformative.

For Hinds and many others, however, the non-monolithic has become the complicatedly geometric, textual 'dynamics' are inevitably violent, and what really counts in 'process' is not the movement itself but the resulting, changed positionalities. Paradigmatically, on pages 128-9 of *Allusion and Intertext,* the chosen metaphor for the intertextual event is Michael Baxandall's imagining of complex causality on the snooker table, where it is not simply the case that X hits Y (text engages with other text). Instead, each time a ball is hit by a cue, its movement both causes and is influenced by the resulting movement of one or more further balls, so that it ends up 'in a new relation to the array of all the other balls'. The model is one of solid entities clashing on a two-dimensional surface, observed from above, precipitated by an intentional 'hit' and resulting in an altered still-life or diagram, the components of

[46] Miller's review notes this 'schizophrenia' in P. Miller, review of Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext* (1998). *Classical Philology*, 94, 1999, pp. 351-55. Cf. Gildenhard and Zissos, Review (n. 46 above), p. 2, on the outcome of *Allusion and Intertext* as 'a Cartesian hermaphrodite that … combines the boundless possibilities of the mother with the intentionalist discipline and historicist sense of the father'.

[47] Habinek, *Politics of Latin Literature* (n. 18 above), p. 5.

which remain entirely unchanged in their form. Hinds needs to recoup intentionality and is motivated to misinterpret (the perceived critical consequences) of Barthes's 'death of the author' as 'intertextualist fundamentalism', not because he knows any intertextualist fundamentalists (none are cited) but because he requires us to imagine the male subject whose drive towards self-sufficiency via domination/appropriation *is* the energy that animates his imperial Latin texts. It is this subjectivized yet disembodied energy which is invested in producing poetry as the enactment of tradition, understood as a genealogical drama of spatio-temporal positionality in which individual poems find their place in what Conte called a 'chain of poetic discourse'.[48]

Yet we should not forget that there are many thinkers for whom the law of primary hostility is not a given, and that there are different ways of understanding desire and human/poetic interaction. Hindsean intertextuality, like Habinek's sociology of Ovidian empire, is also implicitly a reading of Ovidian sex and intersubjectivity as ultimately a zero-sum game (albeit with multiple agents). 'One is either conqueror or conquered, *triumphator* or *praeda*.'[49] Yet as much as the Ovidian poet-lover can often be seen to rehearse that game of domination and submission, or to play out its various possible permutations (as in Miller's flippable scale, where 'everyone is getting screwed'),[50] across Ovid's oeuvre we can also find – often in the interstices between whole and split subjects – the coming together of forces, texts and bodies in ways that require a different set of nouns and verbs. Instances or movements of embrace, mingling, symbiosis, intercourse, contiguity, touching, cohabitation, oscillation, merging, simultaneity, haunting, dialogue or singing in chorus, involve or result in not simply altered positions but morphing states or shapes, and make the involvement, desire, even somatic empathy of an audience necessary in the execution of such metamorphoses.

Ebb-Flow

In this and the following subsection, I offer two examples of where this might lead us. The first is the tale of the two young lovers Pyramus and Thisbe in *Metamorphoses* IV, a narrative long held up to ratify a Lacanian reading of Ovidian desire as defined by frustration, lack, and the impossibility of escaping the Symbolic into real presence that would mark the 'satisfaction' of desire.[51] The lovers want to marry, but are prevented from doing so by their respective fathers. They live next door to one another, so meet illicitly at the adjoining wall, and seduce each other through a vulval slit (*rima*) that is the wall's 'flaw' or 'sin': the word is *vitium,* which can be used in Latin to indicate a defect in law or speech, or the 'defect' in a woman

[48] G.-B. Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, ed. C. Segal. Ithaca, NY, 1986, p. 42; Edmunds, *Intertextuality* (n. 45 above), p. 9.

[49] Habinek, 'Ovid and Empire' (n. 18 above), p. 59.

[50] Miller, *Subjecting Verses* (n. 30 above), p. 177.

[51] See especially Fowler, *Roman Constructions* (n. 13 above), pp. 156-66, and Hardie. *Ovid's Poetics* (n. 17 above), pp. 144-5.

who has been penetrated,[52] and here signals a disturbing rupture in the very domestic enclosures, policed by paternal law and figured by the virgin's bodily integrity, which should prevent the lovers from meeting at all. In this now classic revision of the elegiac *paraclausithyron,* the lovers' attempt at full bodily union is tragically derailed when Pyramus misreads a series of signs – the tracks of the lion (IV.105), Thisbe's cloak (101, 115) – and kills himself, leaving a bereft Thisbe to fall on the same bloodied sword in a scene thick with almost cartoonish innuendo. In his well-known article, Fowler first suggests that this might be a 'universal parable' for the necessary, tragic triumph of the Symbolic over the Imaginary (oddly, the two orders are set up as if to oppose one another), and admits that this is his 'preference', before thinking through the discomfort this admission induces.[53] As a result the Hindsean impulse towards the mapping of resulting positionalities is, at the very least, deferred. Alluding to Irigaray and Kristeva, Fowler proceeds to recognize and question the implicit gendering of (male) Symbolic and (?female?) Imaginary, in parallel with constructions of male phallic drive vs. female delay or circular desire. Can('t) we understand the lovers' erotic communication through the wall, he asks, in terms of a 'feminine economy of desire in which delay is a necessary component'? Yet, he suggests, is female desire not also a thrust towards a particular end? And doesn't masculine lingering in the realm of the Symbolic overlap with 'feminine' enjoyment of *mora* ('delay')?[54] We are reminded that the story itself is told within a rebellious female zone, by women (the Minyeides) who are defying Bacchus's instruction to join the revelry by continuing to weave, spin and sew, just as Pyramus and Thisbe disobey *their* fathers ('sed vetuere patres', 'but their fathers forbade it', IV.61).[55]

Yet there is something odd and truncated about this reading, despite its sensitivities. The notion that the lovers' meeting on either side of the wall is a pure representation of the Symbolic, that the tiny crack in the wall *is* language and precludes erotic intimacy,[56] and that the encounter is frustrating and unsatisfying (delay as foreplay is a 'necessary component', for women, not the 'goal' or *thing in itself*), is never at issue. But perhaps it should be. Fowler's Freudian-Lacanian template forecloses the possibility that desire be perceived as productive in itself, or as a non-productive pleasure that reproduces itself as drive, and entails what Adriana Cavarero would call a 'devocalization of logos', a splitting of speech from the forgotten 'corporeality of breath and the voice'.[57] To begin with, we should remember that the 'language' Pyramus and Thisbe use is not just, or not primarily verbal, but bodily

[52] *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *vitium* 5 and 6, with J. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary,* London, 1982, p. 199.

[53] Fowler, *Roman Constructions* (n. 13 above), p. 162. He states, 'I am a little disturbed by the possible implications for the gendering of the episode and the poem'.

[54] I paraphrase Fowler, *Roman Constructions* (n. 13 above), p. 163.

[55] Cf. M. Janan, '"There Beneath the Roman Ruin Where the Purple Flowers Grow": Ovid's Minyeides and the Feminine Imagination', *American Journal of Philology*, 115, 1994, pp. 427-48. Janan does not discuss Pyramus and Thisbe.

[56] Fowler, *Roman Constructions* (n. 13 above), p. 161.

[57] A. Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression.* transl. P. Kottman, Stanford, CA, 2005, p. 62.

(they 'speak' in nods and signs, 'nutu signisque loquuntur', IV.63): the Oxford Latin Dictionary defines *nutus* as 'inclination of the head; nod (used instead of speech)', and we might add that *nutus* is the Latin for consent. Interestingly, the communication between Pyramus and Thisbe expressed in this line – imagined through the silent exchanges between the poet-lover and Corinna in the theatre of the dining room in *Amores* I.4 and II.5 – must be visible, and so hints at something unseen or unseeable. At the beginning of their love affair (and it is important to note that their *amor* evolves over time, *tempore,* IV.60), *did* Pyramus and Thisbe have the opportunity to stand face to face, before 'discovering' the erotic site of the wounded adjoining wall and the opportunities for pleasure it might afford them? Did they have no go-between (IV.64) because they were deprived of one, or because they did not need or want one? On either side of the pervious wall, their desiring mouths seem to issue not quite speech but vocalizations ('vocis fecistis iter', 'you made it the path for your voice', IV.69), the kinds of sweet mumbles, whispers and moans (*murmura*) whose function is perhaps not, strictly speaking, linguistic.[58]

We do not, with Lacan, have to believe that the voice is merely an effect of the Symbolic, or that to think otherwise is to perpetuate the illusion that the voice bears some profound originary meaning or lost presence. Indeed, Derrida's critique of phonocentrism is directed towards (Husserl's understanding of) *phone* as the vehicle of immaterial ideality, the voice 'phenomenologically taken', not the 'physical voice' in its 'sonorous substance', in 'the body of speech in the world'.[59] Ovid makes us hear this sonorous voice in the soft, seductive humming and hissing of his verse ('murmure blanditiae minimo transire solebant', 'your sweet nothings used to pass across in tiny whispers', IV.70), and that which the lovers grasp repeatedly from each other is not speech but *anhelitus oris* (IV.71), the quick breathing, panting, or 'last breath' of their (single-as-plural) mouth.[60] But *anhelitus* is not the same as *spiritus*: it means, and *sounds like,* something like 'panting', gasping – *asthma*, not *pneuma* (compare *Ars Amatoria* III.803: 'quam iuvet, et voces et anhelitus arguat oris', 'may your voices and your panting make your pleasure clear', together with Apuleius *Metamorphoses* II.17: 'inter mutuos amplexus animas anhelantes', 'caressing each other and panting out our life breath'). Niall Rudd, in a rather amusing passage, grapples with the verse through Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* and Arthur Golding's 1575 translation of the *Metamorphoses,* arriving finally at Bottom's joke in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. He cannot conceive of panting in the context of anything other than the light exertion of 'dashing down the garden', and through Shakespeare's comedy, pictures the scene as an exchange of pleasant perfumes, in witty contrast to Ovid's warning to male lovers in *Ars Amatoria* I.521, 'nec male odorati sit tristis anhelitus oris', 'don't let the breath of your mouth smell

[58] See Butler, *Phonograph* (n. 23 above), pp. 62-3, 64, 121 on *murmura*.

[59] J. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, transl. D. Allison and N. Garver, Evanston, 1973, p. 15; Cavarero, *More Than One Voice* (n. 58 above).

[60] Cf. Juvenal VI.37, Tibullus I.8.37, Petronius 87.7. Adams, *Sexual Vocbulary* (n. 53 above), p. 195, compares the use of *suspirat* at Lucretius IV.1192, and *suspiria* at Anthologia Latina 253.18. Cf. N. Rudd, 'Pyramus and Thisbe in Shakespeare and Ovid', in *Creative Imitation and Latin Literature,* ed. T. Woodman and D. West, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 173-93 (182).

unpleasant' (note, as he does, the identical hexameter line ending).[61] Yet of course when Ovid advises on mouth hygiene – and bear in mind he did not have to use the word *anhelitus* – he is enticing his readers to looking towards those moments of sexual proximity marked by further uses of the word in *Ars* II and III, which Rudd ignores. The point of using *anhelitus,* other than it being overtly bodily (*Oxford Latin Dictionary* has cf. *spiritus,* but this is a prime example of where *confer* conceals much), is that we are already imagining the lover panting, millimetres away from his future partner. The conventional translation of *anhelitus* as 'breath' (*spiritus*) rather than 'panting' (compare *Ars Amatoria* III.803, kills the (Kristevan) *jouissance* of this line, rendering the lovers' pleasure inaccessible. As Luce Irigaray writes in *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger,* 'air does not show itself. … It allows itself to be forgotten.'[62] Rosati explains that the word *anhelitus* 'expresses the shared anxiety (*ansia*) of loss (*privazione*) and of unfulfilled desire (*del desiderio inappagato*), yet as much as *ansia* suggests *ansimare* (to pant, to gasp), he risks confusing frustration with lust, and can only conceive of desire in Lacanian terms as a pulsion towards an ultimately unsatisfying climax which perversely gratifies and reinvigorates the drive itself.[63] The commentary must suppress the very movement of Pyramus and Thisbe's mutual breathing, the rhythmical inhalation and exhalation which enacts desire not as frustrated drifting but as joyful ebb and flow, and which exists outside a reversible opposition between (male) teleology and (female) circularity. Postmodernism – inseparable, here, from Lacanian criticism of Ovid –tends to envision repetition in terms of the monotonous, 'ironic' thwartings and failures of desire.[64] It might help to return to another songwriter, poeta e principe lost in the maelstrom of 2016, to remember that 'there is joy in repetition' (*anhelitus oris:* 'two words falling between the drops and moans of his condition…').[65]

Rosati notes, further, the 'tragic irony' of evoking the gesture of catching the last breath of a dying person. But he does not acknowledge that when lovers 'die', panting, death is a metaphor for the ego-loss of ecstasy.[66] Finally, he observes that the frequentative verb *capto* ('inque vices fuerat captatus anhelitus oris', 'in turn they grasped at each other's breathing') is used of and recalls Tantalus's grasping of forbidden fruits.[67] Yet intertexts can light up differences as well as similarities: as well as the fact that each lover's breath *can* move through the crack, and be 'caught' by the other, each desiring breath moves both in and out, and towards the other lover

[61] See Rudd, 'Pyramus and Thisbe' (n. 61 above), 173-93 (181-3).

[62] L. Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger,* transl. M. Mader, London, 1993. Also see *Breathing with Luce Irigaray.* ed. L. Skof and E. Holmes London and New York, 2013, on the role of breath in Irigaray's writings, and Cavarero (n. 58 above), especially pp. 62-7.

[63] G.-P. Rosati in *Ovidio,* Metamorfosi *Volume II, Libri III-IV*, ed. A. Barchiesi and G.-P. Rosati, Milan, 2006, p. 261.

[64] See, e.g., Miller, *Subjecting Verses* (n. 30 above), p. 211.

[65] Prince, 'Joy in Repetition', track eight on his twelfth album, *Graffiti Bridge* (1990).

[66] Rosati, *Ovidio* (n. 64 above), p. 261. Cf. Propertius I.10.5; Petronius 79.3, Ausonius, *Cento nuptialis*120 p. 217P., with Adams, *Sexual Vocabulary* (n. 53 above), p. 159.

[67] Cf. *Amores* II.2.43-4, *Amores* II.19.31-2, *Heroides* XVIII.181 and Horace, *Satires* I.1.68.

– it does not simply pull itself away like water or fruit from Tantalus's mouth, and when the two lovers then inhale, the air 'pulled away' is their mingled breath.

Is the act of listening to and absorbing an aroused lover's deep breathing not intimate? Is it the case that 'The Intimate Requires Separate Dwellings'?[68] It is only after their panting little deaths, face to face and in turn, just like Ovid advised in *Ars Amatoria* II.727-8, that Pyramus and Thisbe speak conventionally to one another, bemoaning the obstacle that prevents their bodily union. But before they make the joint decision to elude their guardians and meet in person, they 'come together' again, after making 'little moans', then many 'laments', that *mmmm* their way to our ears ('ad solitum coiere locum. tum murmure parvo / multa prius questi …'), 'They came together at the usual spot. Then with little murmurs they lamented bitterly…', a joining that again stands in contraposition to paternal law ('taedae quoque iure coissent, / sed vetuere patres'), 'they would have been joined in marriage, but their fathers forbade it'.[69] In *coiere* we perceive a 'bitter irony', comments Rosati, who has Echo's innuendo in mind ('"coeamus" rettulit Echo').[70] But irony again veils something, the possibility that two lovers, lying separately side by side, divided yet connected, might come together, in turn, and get off on the music of each other's moaning, set to elegiac rhythms. For oriental Pyramus and Thisbe, that place they go to becomes *normal* ('ad solitum … locum'), a slit in the wall that is the conduit for all kinds of language, but is not reducible *to* language, and stands now for *that* overdetermined Ovidian bodily poetic *locus*, where a woman loves to touch and be touched (compare the use of *loca* and *locus* at *Ars* II.719, III.799-800). Pyramus and Thisbe's decision to leave this place, or to go to that 'other place' promised elsewhere in Ovidian elegy,[71] ends in tragedy. But their desire to meet does not render the transitory experience inside their houses incomplete or unsatisfying in itself (although 'unsatisfying' is the wrong metaphor) – only a Lacanian interpretation does. Their love, in those moments, is not 'conducted through words'[72] but in gestures, vocalized sounds and an encounter of breaths that link body with spirit, flesh with word.

Empathy

I want to turn, for my second example, to another of Ovid's best-known episodes, the dismemberment of Pentheus by his mother and aunts in the Bacchic frenzy at the end of *Metamorphoses* III, which I quote below (my translation):

But wounded he said, 'Aw Aunt-Autonoë, help me!

[68] A title of a chapter in L. Irigaray's *La voie de l'amour* (*The Way of Love*), 2002, transl. H. Bostic and S. Pluháček, London and New York, 2002, pp. 148-57.

[69] *Metamorphoses* IV.83-84 and IV.60-61.

[70] *Metamorphosis* III.387.

[71] See *Amores* III.2.84. Cf. V. Rimell, *The Closure of Space in Roman Poetics,* Cambridge, 2015, pp. 286-95, on over-determined *loci/loca* in Ovid's exile poetry.

[72] Hardie, *Poetics* (n. 17 above), p.145.

Let the phantoms of Actaeon move your heart!' 720
She knew not this Actaeon, and as he begged his right hand
She ripped off; by Ino's theft the other hand was torn.
Forlorn, he did not have what he stretched out to mother – the arms,
But showed the mangled wounds with limbs removed.
'Look mother!' said he. Agave wailed at things she saw 725
and threw her necks and moved her hair through streaming winds
and the torn head embraces between bloodied hands,
shouting, 'Yo comrades, this work is our victory!'
No less speedily than leaves touched by autumn's chill –
wind rips now barely clinging to the tops of trees – are 730
a man's limbs snatched away by wicked hands.[73]

Ovid's poetry does not make a clear picture of this scene for us, despite the emphasis on the visual (*spectabilis…cernentem…vidit…visis*),[74] so that we are invited to enter into both the wild audio-visual hallucinations of the Bacchants themselves and the shocking, confusing, untrackable velocity at which Pentheus's world view and body is torn apart. The Latin allows us to feel, as a fuzzy image, echo or uncanny perception of phantom-limbs, the perceived time-delay between each act of dismemberment and Pentheus's realization that he is losing bits of himself in tandem with the ability to engage in meaningful verbal communication. The Bacchants hear his pleas for a mercy and a mother's love, almost infantile in their threefold repetition of the syllables that make up *ma-ter* ('mother') and *ma-ter-ter-a* ('aunt') as unintelligible animal sounds. Human individuality is lost in this new, orgiastic, sisterly collectivity. Notably, Ovid omits the detail in Euripides's tragedy that the Theban women are infected with madness as a punishment for their rejection of Dionysus, and oppositions between disbelievers and believers, the rational and the crazy, are already collapsing in vv.706-7, where Pentheus is 'struck' with the infectious groove of Bacchic ululations which 'moved him and heated his rage white-hot'. Now, Pentheus does not have (*non habet*) those arms which (even now) he holds out to his mother (*tendat*), in line 723. His left arm (*altera*) appears as the subject of line 722 *after* the verb of rending that contains its very letters, grotesquely reordered (***la**c**erat**a*). In line 724 he shows his *trunca…vulnera,* 'mangled wounds', or rather the absence of his limbs that have at some indeterminate point been torn off (*dereptis…membris*). In this same line, the adjective and verb of tearing (*trunca…dereptis*) are themselves detached from their accompanying nouns, and wounds (*vulnera*) have lost something (*trunca*) rather than being the holes that testify to loss. In their brief reading of this moment in a 1999 article, Gildenhard and Zissos observe that the text 'invites the reader to sort out the logic behind' this 'drastically graphic phrase'. Yet their appreciation of Ovid's 'clever style' and 'wit'[75] postpones the difficult process of this sorting, hiding the desiring-production it involves and the uncanniness

[73] *Metamorphoses* III.719-33.
[74] *Metamorphoses* III.701, 711, 725.
[75] Gildenhard and Zissos, 'Somatic Economies' (n. 7 above), p. 165.

that elicits the very sentiments excluded from what they picture as Ovid's Tarantino-inspired 'tragic theme park': (Kate Tempest's) horror and empathy.[76] The 'ludic' (from *ludus*, meaning both play and school), seems to have stood for scholarly pleasure by blocking out something else that is difficult to speak.[77] *Pulp Fiction* feels light years away now.

In v. 725, Agave ululates at *visis,* indeterminate things/people (we can't see them) which may or may not be that which Pentheus has just instructed her to see ('Look, mother!' 725). Then (or simultaneously – it's not clear we can imagine a linear sequence of events), she tosses her head and moves her hair in the wind, which may be one movement or two. Climactically, in 726-8, the decapitation of Pentheus by the brute force of tearing is placed *before* the grabbing or 'embrace' (*amplexa*) of the head itself, as male and female heads rotate together as one streak of paint. The hard c's in *caput…conplexa cruentis* (727) intertwine mother and son's body parts (head-hands) in sounds that evoke the Bacchants' clashing cymbals and pervert the almost erotic intimacy of *complexa,* as well as the verb's now lost/sadly remembered connotations of intellectual grasping. Ovid's scene begins by tracing the symmetries of Euripides *Bacchae* 1125-31 (Agave tears out Pentheus's right arm, then Ino attacks his other side, while in Ovid his aunt Autonoe rips off his right arm, before Ino takes the left). But then, Euripides's sequence of events (Pentheus's entreaty, removal of arms, then feet, then the stripping of flesh from his sides, followed by Agave's fixing of his head on her thyrsus) is no longer recognizable. Ovid's Pentheus is a living, speaking, writhing body entwined with and interacting with the bodies of the women until the end.

Ovid finds a new way of expressing the horrific, time-torturing simile of Theocritus, *Idyll* XXVI.20-1 ('the mother gave a roar as she carried off his head like a lioness just delivered of her cub').[78] In Theocritus's line, *tokados* is commonly translated vaguely as 'with/over her cubs' (see, for example, Hopkinson's Loeb, and Verity's 2008 Oxford translation), deleting the productive movement captured by this adjective. *tokas* is equivalent to the Latin *fetus,* meaning 'one who has just brought forth'. We are reminded that in Euripides's *Bacchae*, Pentheus is compared to a lion or lion cub three times (at vv. 990, 1142, and 1196-7). What the Theocritean simile does, if we can go there, is to place Pentheus' head in Agave's crotch as she yanks it towards her in a perversion of a birthing mother's expulsion of her baby's head. In Ovid, Pentheus's final cry, 'Look, mother!' (replacing the longer, articulate supplication of Euripides, *Bacchae,* 1118-21) is that of a 'defenceless child'[79] (his height shrunk to the dimension of his limbless head and torso) just at the moment of his beheading. Yet after Theocritus, this Pentheus's body, half dead, half alive, is both inside and outside his mother's as she completes her labour. For this excruciating, drawn-out moment in the Bacchic dance, we cannot quite see where she begins, and he ends.

[76] Ibid., p.163.

[77] See, e.g., Habinek, *Politics of Latin Literature* (n. 18 above), pp. 4-5.

[78] For discussion of this poem and further bibliography see E. Sistakou, *Tragic Failures: Alexandrian Responses to Tragedy and the Tragic,* Berlin, 2016, pp. 115-21.

[79] Rosati, *Ovidio* (n. 64 above), p. 261.

The *opus* the Bacchants make (III.728) is closer to a symphony, a dance or a painting than it is to narrative, and is incompatible with a metaphysical model of solids, or with a world of 'playing mommy and daddy'.[80] When the artist responsible for the image of the same *sparagmos* on the walls of the House of the Vettii in Pompeii (fig. 1) joined up the arms of Agave, Autonoe and Pentheus, so that Pentheus's own self-defending arm almost mirrors Agave's arm on the other side about to tear off his head, and merges into the wrenching arm of Autonoe in a streak of flesh that is symmetrical with his outstretched right arm, he painted what Ovid sang, or captured visually, or makes demands on his audiences to imagine.[81] This is not simply to propose that Roman art is influenced by Latin poetry, as in Horace's famous dictum *ut pictura poesis*: it seems more likely, as many scholars have suggested, that these two art forms (in conjunction with others, like pantomime and dance) were always symbiotic.[82] Perhaps, via a lost maze of intermediary compositions in a range of media, both painter and poet toyed with what it would be to remake the strangely inhuman symmetries of Pentheus and his murderesses on an Athenian red figure kylix (fig. 2).[83] Has the right arm of Ino, standing on the right in this image of the vase, *become* Pentheus's left arm in the Pompeian painting?

I am reminded of Tempest's writing of a moment not quite told in another *Metamorphoses* III tale, where female Tiresias makes love with a man, and for a moment their bodies – and specifically their arms – are almost indistinguishable:

[80] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (n. 32 above), p. 7. On Ovidian poetry and dance see Richlin, *Pornography* (n. 22 above), p. 175; K. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture. An Interpretative Introduction*, Princeton, 1996, pp. 265-6; Habinek, 'Ovid and Empire' (n.18 above), pp. 52-3.

[81] For discussion of wall paintings of 'Ovidian' myths in Pompeii see D. Fredrick, 'Beyond the Atrium to Ariadne: Erotic Painting and Visual Pleasure in the Roman House', *Classical Antiquity,* 14, 1995, pp. 266-88; B. Severy-Hoven, 'Master Narratives and the Wall Painting of the House of the Vettii, Pompeii.' *Gender and History,* 24, 2012, pp. 540-80; cf. V. Platt, 'Viewing, Desiring, Believing: Confronting the Divine in a Pompeian house', *Art History,* 25, 2002, pp. 87-112; P. Knox, 'Ovidian Myths on Pompeian Walls' in *Handbook to the Reception of Ovid*, ed. Miller and Newlands (n. 25 above), pp. 36-54. On ways of imagining the relationship between Greek and Roman art, see B. Bergmann, 'Greek Masterpieces and Roman Recreative Fictions', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 97, 1995, pp. 79-120. On representations of the *sparagmos* of Pentheus in Greco-Roman art, see H. Philippart, *Iconographie des Bacchantes d'Euripide,* Paris, 1930, and T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources,* Baltimore, 1993.

[82] Recent bibliography on the enmeshing of literature and the visual arts (and their discourses) in Greco-Roman antiquity includes *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture,* ed. S. Goldhill and R. Osborne, Cambridge, 1994; J. Elsner *Roman Eyes. Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text,* Princeton, 2007, and *Art and Rhetoric in Roman Culture,* ed. J. Elsner and M. Meyer, Cambridge, 2014; *The Epic Gaze: Vision, Gender and Narrative in Ancient Epic,* ed. H. Lovatt and C. Vout, Cambridge, 2013; M. Squire, *Image and Text in Greco-Roman Antiquity,* Cambridge, 2009; P. Zanker, *Modes of Viewing in Hellenistic Poetry and Art.* Madison, WI, 2004. However, the impetus has been overwhelmingly to explore what Zanker calls the 'sister arts' of poetry and visual art (p. 3), and wider interactions between poetry, dance, music, performance and visual art have yet to be explored in detail.

[83] R. Neer, *Style and Politics in Athenian Vase-Painting: The Craft of Democracy, ca. 530-460BC,* Cambridge, 2012, argues that ambiguity is a defining characteristic of Athenian red-figure vase-painting. Also see R. Osborne, in 'Inter-personal Relations on Athenian Pots: Putting Others in their Place', in *Kosmos. Essays on Order, Conflict and Community in Classical Athens,* ed. P. Cartledge, P. Millett, and S. von Reden, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 13-36, which argues that Athenian vase-painting of this period imagines, and was used to envisage, (changed) interpersonal relationships.

Fig. 1 Wall painting, House of the Vettii, Pompeii, 60-79 CE (This image and the next (fig. 2) are taken from Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=Pentheus+House+of+the+Vettii+Pompeii&title=Special:Search&go=Go&searchToken=5nzn5rlfc2afn36q6o2i7xk7j#/media/File:Pompeii_-_Casa_dei_Vettii_-_Pentheus.jpg. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Pentheus_in_ancient_Greek_pottery#/media/File:Raffigurazione_di_Penteo_su_un_vaso_greco-_2014-02-08_01-13.jpg)

She can feel

His blood in her veins.
He can feel
Her pulse in his wrists.
And they kiss.[84]

[84] K. Tempest, 'Tiresias', in Tempest, *Hold Your Own* (n. 27 above), p. 8.

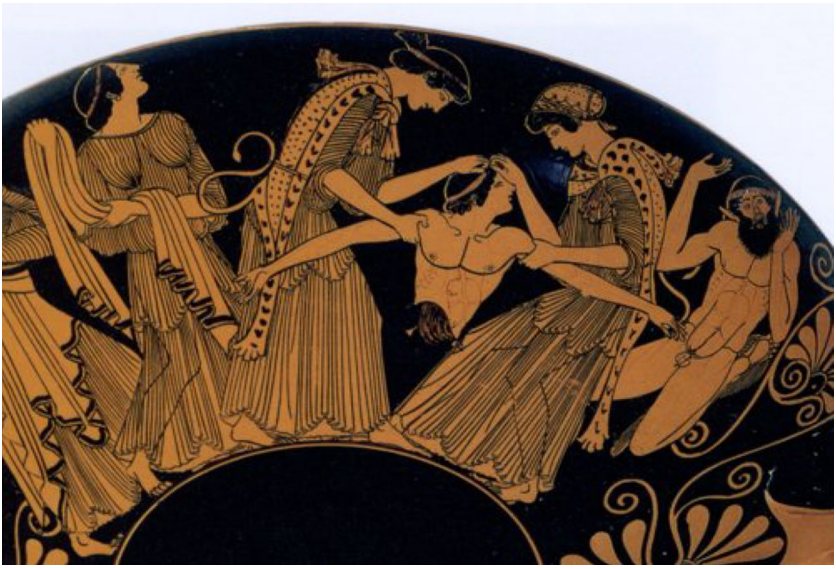

Fig. 2 Athenian red figure kylix, 5th century BCE

In a parallel world, the catalogue *to Titian: Metamorphosis* (2012), a collaboration between the Royal Ballet and the National Gallery, featured a photographic montage by renowned dance photographer Christopher Nash in which a male and female dancer's bodies are intertwined in such a way that their arms blend into one another's, creating elegant yet almost inhuman shapes. Over the woman's body, Nash has overlaid a section of Titian's *Actaeon and Diana* (1559), Actaeon's left hand stretched as if to touch the dancer's chest, his right merging with hers on her hip.[85]

But let us return, finally, to Ovid's passage. The 'torn off head' (*avulsumque caput*) at the start of *Metamorphoses* III.727 registers as an allusion to decapitated Priam in the literary past of *Aeneid* II.557-8: 'his huge trunk, his head torn from his shoulders (*avulsumque caput*), his body without a name, lie on the shore'. This is one of the many links between the 'two capital cities of tragic epic', Thebes and Troy, that punctuate *Metamorphoses* III. As snooker balls knock, new patterns form, and old heads roll again. Ovid's Thebes overwrites Virgil's Troy, contaminating audiences' memories of honorable Priam (or of beheaded Pompey, or Crassus…) with a graphic vision of hubristic Pentheus, taken down by women who will not be moved by ghosts or lessons of the past (III.720-1). Virgil's lines – the past participle *avulsum* referring to a now distant event never described, Priam's head lying static on the shore (*Aeneid* II.557) – are flooded with violent movement and noise (*iactavit…movit… /avulsum… complexa…./ clamat,* 'tossed…moved…torn…embraced…yelled', *Metamorphoses* III.726-8). Timing and directionality are again warped in the final simile, where the

[85] The Titian 2012 catalogue is: M. Moore Ede, *Metamorphosis: Art, Music, Dance*, London, 2013. Unfortunately, Titian's *Actaeon and Diana* could not be reprinted here.

ripping off of Pentheus's limbs is compared to autumn leaves clinging on to branches and suddenly whipped off by the wind. Leaves go through a process of decay so that they are hanging by a thread before they are blown away, an image that lingers now in the slow-motion haze of arms and head wrenched off perhaps not so cleanly, a scene that the falsely elegiac simile now stains with autumnal colours, from fatty yellow to bloody crimson. Yet this is a palette only creatively implicated readers can envision, or hallucinate. There is no safe place in this amphitheatre. Commentators note Ovid's macabre and 'provocative' reuse of the Homeric topos of passing generations of men (one generation grows, the other fades and falls like leaves: *Iliad* VI.146-9, cf. *Aeneid* VI.309-10. Note that Ovid echoes Virgil's *autumni frigore* at *Metamorphoses* III.729), revived by many poets, including Bacchylides, who uses it to refer to souls (V.63-7), Horace (*Ars Poetica* 60-3), when he imagines the natural extinction of some words in favour of new ones, and most recently Alice Oswald in her 'excavation of the *Iliad*', *Memorial.*[86]

Yet if this is, as critics suggest, a metapoetic reflection on literary traditions via a topos already reclaimed by Horace as code for linguistic inventiveness, it must do more than simply to confirm the poet's new place in a subtly revised, or playfully chopped-up tradition, after Horace's *disiecti membra poetae* ('the poet's torn-off limbs', *Satires* I.4.62). In order to make sense or order of the scene, we first have to have some inkling of the embodied experiences both of Pentheus, still conscious as he is dismembered, and of the Bacchic women, whose vision is not just false but blurred as they frantically toss their heads.

and all of it continues[87]

So what is it to channel Greco-Roman artistic traditions through Bacchic delirium, whose agents do not recognize patriarchal ties or obligations, are blind to allusions and to lessons of the textual past, and would burn Hinds's snooker table after eating the balls? Ovid's *avulsumque caput,* unlike Virgil's, is felt in live time, and is followed by no still life. What we focus on is the kinesis of metamorphosis itself, *that place* not of striving or loss or even *amor,* but of pleasure and pain – *voluptas* and *poena*[88] – where the future is yet to come. Ovid the poet of surfaces has always plunged us into flesh – or rather, to borrow from Alex Purves's reassessment of Homer, Ovid invites us to 'rethink surfaces as unstable forces'.[89] I mean to suggest, and have attempted to suggest in this essay, that a sustained and ambitious critique of postmodern Ovid might reveal a poetry that prompts us to pose and respond to questions that are gaining momentum as I write – questions about the role of literature, philology and critique in our culture and education systems, about how we

[86] A. Oswald, *Memorial: An Excavation of the* Iliad, London, 2011 p. 73: 'Like leaves, who could write a history of leaves /The wind blows their ghosts to the ground…'

[87] K. Tempest, 'Radical Empathy', in Tempest, *Hold Your Own* (n. 27 above), p. 103.

[88] Cf. the epigram prefacing the *Amores*, III-IV.

[89] A. Purves, 'Feeling on the Surface: Touch and Emotion in Fuseli and Homer', in *Deep Classics: Rethinking Classical Reception,* ed. S. Butler, London and New York, 2016, pp. 67-85 (77). Cf. Butler's introduction to the volume, pp. 1-20.

inhabit time in conditions of interdependency, and with what consequences for our understanding of economic, political and social life, in a context in which technology is rapidly locking us into dopamine-boosting/cortisol-fueling feedback loops, to the detriment of impulse-control, concentration, intellectual life and artistic process. Ovid can live on in this way precisely as a result of his postmodern reinvention, which has made him not just the poet most often used to introduce students to Latin verse, but a popular artist of our time. Yet we need to take the opportunity now, and in the future, to dwell on Ovid's undeniably material impressions of simultaneity, intimacy, and interconnectedness – not as products, positions or as 'passing intensities', but as movements we might reinhabit and allow to take us elsewhere.

Acknowledgements Many thanks to David Fearn, Elena Giusti, Dan Orrells, Tessa Roynon and anonymous readers for their patient reading and stimulating comments.