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# Ovid: a poet of transition?

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## OVID: A POET OF TRANSITION?[1]

The modern critical rehabilitation of Ovid received a decisive impetus with Hermann Fränkel's Sather Lectures, delivered at Berkeley in 1943, and published in 1945 with the title *Ovid. A poet between two worlds*. Hermann Fränkel attempted to revise the picture of Ovid as a basically unserious poet, dazzled by his own wit and endless capacity for fluent and entertaining narrative, through an appeal to psychological and metaphysical categories. For the psychological Fränkel goes above all to the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid, in keeping with the precepts of ancient rhetoric, does his utmost to involve the reader's emotions in his narratives. One of the most effective ways to do this is through an empathetic identification with the perceptions and feelings of a character in the process of undergoing metamorphosis, or coming to the realization of a metamorphosis. For example, the girl Io, turned into a cow, comes to the banks of the river where she used to play; we read 'when she saw her strange new horns in the water, she was terrified and, driven out of her wits, she fled from herself' (*Met.* 1.640-1 *nouaque ut conspexit in unda | cornua, pertimuit seque exsternata refugit*). Fränkel was one of the first critics to focus attention seriously on the poem's titular device of metamorphosis, often regarded as merely a peg on which to hang a narrative; for Fränkel metamorphosis 'gave ample scope for displaying the phenomena of insecure and fleeting identity, of a self divided in itself or spilling over into another self' (99).[2] This sense of a 'wavering identity' located within the individual psyche, has a supra-individual correlative for Fränkel in Ovid's sense of himself as placed uncertainly on the cusp of a

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1 I am very grateful to the University of Sydney, and in particular to Frances Muecke and Professor Kevin Lee, for the honour of the invitation to deliver a Todd Memorial Lecture.

2 Fränkel's notion of a split self is criticized by Herter (1980) and Schmidt (1991) 48-55. For more sympathetic approaches to a psychoanalytical reading see Skulsky (1981) 24-61; Hershkowitz (1998) ch. 4 (using Laingian psychology and post-modernist constructions of the subject). For his English audiences Fränkel avoided Freud's German term *Ichspaltung*, embraced by later German critics: Doblhofer (1960) 83-91; Voigtlander (1975). The further implications of Fränkel's 'wavering identity' for Ovid's representation of his psychological reaction to exile are explored by Claassen (1990).

metaphysico-historical crisis between two worlds: the pagan world confidently at home in the here and now, and the Christian world which subordinates present existence to the greater reality of a transcendental world. Fränkel concludes (163 ) '[Ovid's] place in the history of mankind was between two worlds, between the wonderful self-contained world of Antiquity and that newer one which was to bring Christianity and a different civilization, but which began with empty disillusion and dumb, hopeless confusion... It was Ovid's mission to sing the song of Dawn and to perpetuate the fugitive beauty of that uniquely precious moment of transition.' Fränkel is not of course suggesting that Ovid was somehow a Christian *avant la lettre*, although it is a helpful accident of history that Ovid was the only great Augustan poet to survive into what would be known as the first Christian century. Fränkel's more general claim is that (3) 'he was born a true child of an age of transition, and thus he could not help feeling as he did and betraying the forces that were at work.'

Contemporary reviewers did not spare the cold water. Ronald Syme accused Fränkel of placing an excessive 'confidence ... in the superior insight of the blessed twentieth century'. Syme put Ovid back where he thought he belonged, in the ancient equivalent of an eighteenth-century age of urbanity and wit. 'Ovid is a wit, a humourist, a parodist. That is what he tried to be, and he succeeded.'[3] Brooks Otis saw the problem as 'really a reading of nineteenth-century ideas into Ovid's most unnineteenth-century soul',[4] ideas about the creative imagination and an autonomous world of art. From our late twentieth-century perspective it is easy enough to see how Fränkel is a true child of his own age. Another contemporary reviewer, Patrick Wilkinson, had already sneered at the popular Freudianism in the notion of a 'divided self'.[5] From the point of view of history, 1945 was as good a year to publish a book about a transition between two worlds as 1939 had been for Ronald Syme's *The Roman revolution*, that study of the *Realpolitik* of an ancient dictator. There is another aptness in the situation of the author, a European in exile in the other world of California — Fränkel had

3 Syme (1947) 221.
4 Brooks Otis (1947) 61.
5 Wilkinson (1946) 77.





fled from Nazi Germany to Stanford in 1935.[6] In his book he shows a greater sympathy towards Ovid's exile poetry than was customary at that time. Although he reads it with a biographical literalism that today would be regarded as naive, there are also sharp insights: (163) 'It was the poet's destiny to spend his last years "at the banks of the Styx", as he puts it (*Tr.* 4.5.22; *P.* 1.8.27), in between the realms of the quick and the dead. His bodily sojourn at the shores of the Black Sea was certainly not of his own choosing, but his mind was ever used to haunt the difficult regions of some Inbetween.' (263) ['Index to Ovid'] 'Ovid felt he had lost his identity when he was banished.'

Despite the contemporary scepticism, Fränkel's tag, 'a poet between two worlds', has proved tenacious. For example, in a recent book Stephen Wheeler discusses the way in which the *Metamorphoses*, obviously the product of a culture of writing and scholarship, 'effaces its own textuality by imitating an "oral" performance ... It is in this sense that the Metamorphoses is a poem divided between two worlds'[7] — although it has to be said that the same is true of many other Latin literary products of the period, which in a thoroughly Alexandrian way tease the reader in a highly developed literate culture with the illusion of the immediacy of an earlier oral culture. Ted Hughes, in the 'Introduction' to his acclaimed *Tales from Ovid*, sees in Ovid's treatment of human passion something 'belonging to that unique moment in history — the moment of the birth of Christ within the Roman empire'. Hughes talks of 'the psychological gulf that opens at the end of an era', when the Empire, '[f]or all its Augustan stability, ... was at sea in hysteria and despair, at one extreme wallowing in the bottomless appetites and sufferings of the gladiatorial arena, and at the other searching higher and higher for a spiritual transcendence — which eventually did take form, on the crucifix.'[8] This colourful picture of an Augustan age of anxiety is one which most Roman historians today would disown. Indeed Ted Hughes holds up a mirror in which a certain present-day strand of end-of-the-millennium consciousness might find itself reflected.

6 For an account of Fränkel's life see the obituary by von Fritz (1978).
7 Wheeler (1999) 92.
8 Hughes (1997) pp. x-xi.

But at the risk of merely betraying my own intellectual prejudices, I will venture to suggest that Hermann Fränkel did put his finger on something, or rather a cluster of things, that are close to the heart of Ovid's dealings with the world and with the word. As we peer uncertainly over the edge of a new millennium, this is perhaps a good moment to revisit Fränkel's two worlds.

I start with an especially insightful formulation of Fränkel's, on the Ovidian narrative of Apollo and Daphne: 'The fabulous nature of the *Metamorphoses* made it possible to offer half-satisfactory solutions for situations which were entirely hopeless otherwise. Daphne's lover Apollo was likewise only half-frustrated ... Ovid makes the ambiguous character of the ending obvious when he says that friends who came to call on Daphne's father after the event were in doubt whether they should condole or congratulate him. This is characteristic; Ovid had a natural propensity to undecisive compromises.'[9] Ovid certainly has a liking, perhaps even a fatal weakness, for states of suspension, poised betwixt and between. This manifests itself in the phenomenon of what might be called the frozen transition, a paradoxical state that at one and the same time yields closure and thwarts closure. Such states are often the deposits of narratives of metamorphosis.

Ovid's dealings with change and mutability are complex. The *Metamorphoses* can be viewed as a celebration of changeability, a treasure-house of stories of transition from one state to another. From another point of view the poem is a colossal aetiology of the present state of affairs, and that is a steady state of affairs — products, rather than processes. The typical episode closes with a 'terminal metamorphosis', an irreversible passage from one state to another. The girl Arachne changes into a spider, and remains a spider. Change in the past has led to the stable world that we see around us today. But, from a third point of view, the products of metamorphosis frequently preserve frozen traces of the previous existence, resulting in what might be labelled 'monuments of transitionality', often given pointed verbal formulation. An extreme example is the end-product of the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, the lustful nymph who succeeds in luring the naive boy into her pool, where she entwines

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9 Fränkel (1945) 78-9.





his body in hers so tightly that they merge into one: 'They two were two no more, nor man, nor woman — One body then that neither seemed and both.' (transl. Melville) (*Met.* 4.378-9 *nec duo sunt sed forma duplex, nec femina dici | nec puer ut possit, neutrumque et utrumque uidentur.*) The hermaphrodite as it were fossilizes, in a perpetual betwixt and between, the history of a transient erotic encounter between two individuals. Here the product of metamorphosis is a doubly determined signifier of that history. Firstly, the hermaphrodite is the physical residue of the desire of Salmacis, which, according to Plato and Lucretius, is the desire of every lover, for total and lasting union with the object of desire. But secondly, in this case a confused liminality had characterized both individuals even before their fatal conjoining: the boy Hermaphroditus, the son of Mercury and Venus (Hermes and Aphrodite), was an adolescent at that epicene age where he looked like both his mother and father; while the nymph Salmacis had displayed an unfeminine forwardness in her sexual advances to the boy.

The transition between the states of life and death is another obsessive Ovidian interest. In general, metamorphosis is a surrogate for death as a form of narrative closure; but, unlike death, it is an imperfect end, for existence is replaced not by non-existence, but by another form of existence, which, as we have just seen, may preserve traces of the previous existence. From this point of view the transformation undergone by Myrrha, the girl who seduced her father, is paradigmatic for many metamorphoses. When her father realises that he has been sleeping with his daughter, Myrrha, now pregnant, flees until she falls exhausted, and asks to be punished for her crime : 'But lest I outrage, if I'm left alive, The living, or, if I shall die, the dead, Expel me from both realms; some nature give That's different; let me neither die nor live!' (transl. Melville) (*Met.* 10.485-7 *sed ne uiolem uiuosque superstes | mortuaque extinctos, ambobus pellite regnis | mutataeque mihi uitamque necemque negate.*) Her sin is so dreadful that she prays to be consigned to a limbo where she can pollute neither the living nor the dead. Her prayer is answered. But the punishment for her uniquely monstrous crime turns out to be a metamorphosis of a kind with which, by this stage in the poem, the reader is very familiar — transformation into a tree, just another in a series that begins with Daphne's transformation into the laurel in the first book.

These inbetween states are not new to the *Metamorphoses*. One of the most notorious examples, in which linguistic form perfectly matches content, is a line from the second book of the *Art of Love*, describing the Minotaur: 'a half-bull man and a half-man bull', (*Ars* 2.24 *semibouemque uirum semiuirumque bouem*).[10] Betwixt and between is here expressed through the repetition of each of the four elements that make up the line, *semi* (the programmatic element, flagging both content and form, and beginning each half-line), *bouem*, *-que*, and *uirum*. The divided identity of the metamorphic monster, a hybrid as it were frozen in passage from being a bull to a man, or vice versa, finds a verbal homology in the division of the pentameter between two metrically identical halves.

Modern accusations against Ovid of facility and self-indulgent wit are nothing new: the Elder Seneca tells a story that, if it is not true, is certainly *ben trovato*, to illustrate the charge that in his poetry Ovid 'was well aware of his faults — and in love with them. What can make this clear is that once, when he was asked by his friends to suppress three of his lines, he asked in return to be allowed to make an exception of three over which they should have no rights. This seemed a fair condition. They wrote in private the lines they wanted removed, while he wrote the ones he wanted saved. The tablets of both contained the same verses. Albinovanus Pedo, who was among those present, tells that the first of them was: "Half-bull man and half-man bull", the second "Freezing north wind and de-freezing south". It is clear from this that the great man lacked not the judgement but the will to restrain the licence of his poetry. He used sometimes to say that a face is the more beautiful for some mole.'[11] Seneca's story itself has a very Ovidian quality to it, taking to the limit the inscription of difference in sameness that characterizes an Ovidian suspension. The two writing tablets contain exactly the same three lines, but with exactly opposed valuations: both to be erased, and inerasable. The result is *impasse*, like the story told in *Metamorphoses* 7 of the fox that cannot be caught and the dog that cannot be outrun, a dilemma solved, naturally enough, or rather supernaturally, by the metamorphosis of both beasts into stone, so that they are for ever frozen in pursuit and escape, both unbeaten

[10] Discussed by Fränkel (1945) 183 n. 38.

[11] Sen. *Controv.* 2.2.12.





(*Met.* 7.791-3 *fugere hoc, illud latrare putares.* | *scilicet inuictos ambo certamine cursus* | *esse deus uoluit, siquis deus adfuit illis*). But can we go further than noting the deft mirroring of form and content in a line like *semibouemque uirum semiuirumque bouem*? Is Ovid doing anything more than playing in a formalist hall of mirrors? Fränkel's attempts to ground the verbal phenomena in psychological and historico-metaphysical realities have not worn well, at least in the particular models employed, a popularizing Freudianism and a sub-Hegelian view of historical process. Other psychoanalytical models, and other ways of constructing historical narratives, may be more promising. I shall return to historical frameworks in the last part of the lecture. But Ovidian transitionality or suspension answers to other later twentieth-century theoretical concerns. One of the most productive shifts in recent Ovidian criticism has been the turn to language and textuality, in two areas in particular: firstly, Ovid's use of the structures of linguistic figures; and, secondly, his exploration of fictionality and the authority of the text.

## Language

Stories of transformation, tales about physical bodies in the material world turning into different shapes, can often be thought of as the narrativization of linguistic figures, or tropes — the Greek word τρόπος literally means a 'turning'. A metamorphosis is a metaphor made concrete. A bereft mother is stony in her grief, and so Niobe turns into a rock, marking the landscape with a material hieroglyph. What I referred to earlier as the survival of traces of a former existence in a new existence is another way of referring to the interaction between the tenor and vehicle of a metaphor or simile.[12] A metaphor is a figure of passage — the Greek μεταφορά means 'carrying across', *translatio* in Latin. But the dynamism of metaphor is located in the space between tenor and vehicle, a space of suspension. This is a space between two mental signifieds. Figures of speech also produce a suspension between language and the extralinguistic world. A metaphor or simile pretends to connect

[12] For a more detailed analysis of the relationship between metamorphosis and metaphor see Hardie (1999), developing Pianezzola (1979) and Schmidt (1991); see also Lieberg (1999).

things out there, in 'reality', but the relationships that it constructs are purely linguistic relationships.

This slippage between the linguistic and non-linguistic, abstract and concrete, is particularly clear in one of Ovid's favourite figures, syllepsis. Take an Ovidian example of syllepsis: 'he was an exile from his wits and from his home' (*Met.* 9.409 *exul mentisque domusque* [Alcmaeon]). The same word, 'exile', functions both literally and figuratively in its relationship to two other elements in the utterance, literally in relationship to 'home', and figuratively in relationship to 'wits'. Garth Tissol, in an important recent discussion of Ovid's use of language, makes extensive analysis of Ovid's dealings with syllepsis; Tissol goes so far as to ascribe to Ovid a 'sylleptic imagination', one always ready to slip back and forth between the figurative and the literal, the conceptual and the physical — a kind of binocular, or suspended, vision of the world.[13]

Closely related to syllepsis is another favourite Ovidian device, personification. As it happens, this is a feature where Ovid seems to stand between two literary worlds, to put it very crudely, between the literature of antiquity, whose dominant mode of relating to reality is mimesis, and the literature of the middle ages, whose dominant mode is allegory. Personifications are already found in Homer and Hesiod, but there survive no major pre-Ovidian examples of personifications as characterful agents interacting with human characters.[14] Tissol again has some excellent discussion of Ovid's transformative use of language in his personifications.[15] In ancient rhetoric personification is closely linked to the production of *enargeia*, the vivid illusion of the presence of something absent, whether of a person removed in space or time, or of an abstract concept that has no physical presence. But Ovidian personifications, perhaps like all interesting examples of the figure, have a way of calling attention to their own linguistic constructedness, of deconstructing their own presence. Ovid seems deliberately to choose for personification abstractions whose essence is that of an absence: Hunger, whose body cannot be fully visualized, since 'instead of a stomach she has the place for a stomach' (*Met.*

13 Tissol (1997), esp. 18-26.
14 See Feeney (1991) 241-2.
15 Tissol (1997) 61-72.





8.805 *uentris erat pro uentre locus*); Sleep, the nightly reduction of a person to a non-person (*Met.* 11.592-632), and climactically Fame or Rumour, the personification of the word itself (*Met.* 12.39-63). Fame's presence is vividly felt but not seen: it is only her House that we actually see, not her person itself. This is a very forcible way of making the point about the duplicity inherent in personification, the use of mere words to evoke things seen.

Akin to personification is the device of the 'split divinity',[16] the god who is both a feature of the natural world and the genius of that feature — the river-god; the nymph who, in Fränkel's words (88) 'both is and is not identical with the pool she inhabits'; Bacchus who is both a glass of wine and a rosy-cheeked youth. In *Amores* 1.13 Ovid constructs a poem around the split divinity of Aurora, both a female goddess who knows about love, and a purely material, meteorological phenomenon. Dawn arrives, the moment passes, the poem ends; but it ends with a suspension of logic: 'I had finished my rebuke; she blushed; no doubt she'd heard me. But day dawned promptly in the usual way.' (47-8 *iurgia finieram. scires audisse: rubebat, | nec tamen adsueto tardius orta dies*). Jim McKeown's comment ad loc. is to the point: 'This witty conclusion depends on <u>simultaneous</u> [my emphasis] personification and non-personification: dawn [with a small *d*] reddens and day comes, Dawn [with a capital *D*] reddens *but* day comes.'[17] The poem ends at a moment when a liminal suspension of a linguistic or textual kind, caught between two readings of 'dawn', slides into a point of temporal transition, dawn as the threshold between night and day.[18]

## Fictionality

Tissol describes Ovid's 'explorations of paradox in personification' as 'encouraging us to take <u>simultaneously</u> [my emphasis] both a

16 See Fränkel (1945) 88; Bernbeck (1967) 112-13; Solodow (1988) 94-6; Feeney (1991) 233-5.
17 McKeown (1989) 362.
18 *Amores* 1.13 is the subject of Fränkel's opening reading at 11-17, and of his closural move at 163, where the daily dawn becomes a figure for the dawn of the new world, 'It was Ovid's mission to sing the song of Dawn and to perpetuate the fugitive beauty of that uniquely precious moment of transition.'

literal-minded and an allegorically interpretive view'.[19] The double-minded perspective imposed on the reader by syllepsis and personification characterizes all of Ovid's dealings with fictionality, and with the authority of the narrator of fictions. Duality may be the condition of the sophisticated reader's response to all fictions, a simultaneous disbelief and suspension of disbelief. Robert Newsom describes this as 'having it both ways': 'we divide our beliefs between real and fictional worlds ... It is insisting on our belief in the fictional world even as we insist also on our belief in the world in which the reading or make-believe takes place.'[20]

What distinguishes Ovid is the self-consciousness of his procedures. This is the self-consciousness analysed by Robert Alter, in his study of the tradition of the self-conscious novel, defined by Alter as 'a novel that systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice and that by so doing probes into the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality'.[21] This is the tradition that goes from Cervantes through Sterne and Diderot, to any number of post-modern novels, but it is a tradition that also goes back to Ovid — who does not even figure in Alter's index. Alter highlights the 'ontological doubleness of language' in such works, and quotes another critic's formulation of 'the quixotic word' of Cervantes' novel as 'invocation and critique, conjuration and radical probing, both one and the other with their risks and perils'.[22] Ovid's novelistic narrative poem, the *Metamorphoses*, develops this simultaneous conjuration and probing to a high degree, for example in the episode at the very heart of the poem where internal narrators at the dinner-table of a river-god — a good example of a split divinity — contest the reality of tales about gods and metamorphosis, fictional characters discussing fictionality.[23]

But the double vision is already fully worked out in a poem like *Amores* 3.12. Here the love-elegist complains that since he has

19 Tissol (1997) 62.
20 Newsom (1988) 134-5, cited by Feeney (1993) 237-8.
21 Alter (1975) p. x.
22 Alter (1975) 11, citing M. Robert *L'Ancien et le nouveau: de Don Quichote à Kafka* (Paris 1963) 25 n.
23 Excellently discussed by Feeney (1991) 229-32.





'prostituted' his girl-friend through his books of elegy he has had to share her with all and sundry; the poet is pimp for his own beloved. Ovid then protests that poets are liars, and the reader shouldn't believe a word they say: we gave you Scylla, the Gorgon, stories about Jupiter turning into a swan, and so on. No more should you believe the wonderful things I say about my girl-friend. The rhetorical strategy of this poem is caught in a double-bind: the only reason that the poet can have to insist that the reader should not believe in the reality of the girl, and instead enjoy her solely as a textual construct, is that she is real. The reader is suspended between the conjuration and radical probing of the reality of the elegiac girl-friend. These kinds of games with fictionality are very familiar from the illusionistic medium of the stage: famous examples such as the masque and magic of Prospero in *The Tempest*, or the statue scene in *The Winter's Tale* are Ovidian both in a general sense, and with regard to specific Ovidian models.

## History

I turn now from text to history, making my approach to Ovid via another author. In Hermann Fränkel's account of Ovid as a poet between two worlds there is a deafening silence. Fränkel has almost nothing to say about another great Roman poet who for centuries had famously been seen almost as the angel of annunciation of the Christian era — I mean, of course, Virgil. The fourth *Eclogue*, the so-called Messianic eclogue, announcing the birth of a miraculous child and the coming of a new Golden Age, continued even into the present century to be read as expressive of a spirit that nourished the conditions for Christianity's world domination. Through the post-classical centuries Virgil is the 'soul Christian by nature', *anima naturaliter Christiana*, in Tertullian's phrase (*Apol.* 17.6). Theodore Ziolkowski in his study of Virgil between 1914 and 1945, *Virgil and the moderns*, shows how deeply a view of the poet as harbinger of a new age spoke to a Europe, and particularly to a Germany, obsessed with a sense of its own historical crisis. The Virgilian scholar Friedrich Klingner writing in 1943 observed that Virgil lived through 'a boundary situation between the ages, surrounded by the horror of the end.'[24] Bruno Snell's classic, if misguided, essay on the *Eclogues*, 'Arcadia: the discovery of a spiritual landscape' was first published in 1945, the same year as Fränkel's book on Ovid; in it Snell reveals the pressure of his own historical context in his romanticizing account of Virgil's Arcadia, which he describes as 'set half-way between myth and reality; it is also a no-man's land between two ages, an earthly beyond, a land of the soul yearning for its distant home in the past.'[25] More influential with a wider public was Theodor Haecker's much reprinted and much translated *Vergil. Vater des Abendlandes* (1931).[26] For Haecker, an outspoken anti-Nazi, Virgil is the spiritual father of the West, the adventist pagan who, only a few years before 'the fullness of time' anticipated the Christian mysteries of grace and freedom. Haecker's book had a great influence on T. S. Eliot's views on the place of Virgil in western civilization, and on Hermann Broch's classic novel, *The death of Virgil*.[27] Broch, speaking in 1939 of his work in progress, claimed that 'Virgil, standing on the threshold between two ages, ... summed up antiquity, as he anticipated Christianity.'[28] Like Fränkel, Broch, an Austrian, was a refugee from the old world in the new; *The death of Virgil*, like Fränkel's *Ovid. A poet between two worlds*, was published in 1945. One can only speculate on the reasons that led Fränkel to shut out of his mind, or at least out of his book, the long tradition of an adventist Virgil, a tradition that reached a climax at precisely the time that Fränkel was busy with the final formulation of his views on Ovid.

But of one thing we may be certain, that Virgil paves the way for Ovid. From the first word, *arma*, 'weapons', of his first work, the elegiac *Amores*, Ovid defines his own poetic career as 'after Virgil'

[24] Ziolkowski (1993) 25, citing Klingner (1961) 296 'Es ist eine Grenzsituation zwischen den Zeiten, die Virgil durchlebt hat, umwittert vom Grauen des Endes'; cf. also Ziolkowski (1993) 54 on the Ecuadorian Espinosa's view of Virgil's awakening of a sense of religiosity, his monotheism and belief in original sin, making of him an 'apostle of peace', the herald of a pagan Rome destined by God to pacify the world in anticipation of the coming of Christ.

[25] Snell (1953) 301.

[26] Ziolkowski (1993) 48-52.

[27] Ziolkowski (1993) 203-22.

[28] Lützeler (1976) 204-5.





(*arma* provocatively repeats the first word of the *Aeneid*). Now, post-classical constructions of Virgil as a poet between two worlds take their cue from Virgil's own myths and narratives of passage, and two in particular: the fourth *Eclogue*'s prophecy of the imminent transition from the present corrupt age to a renewed Golden Age; and the *Aeneid*'s plot of the passage from one city to another, from Troy sacked to Rome founded, from east to west, from Greece to Rome.

I want to put the following question: what does Ovid make of Virgil's myths and narratives of transition, given that he views his own career and works as a transformation of, a transition from, the Virgilian career and works? The answer is that he reacts in different ways. Sometimes he is the easy inhabitant of the triumphant Roman world of Augustus, of which Virgil had been the prophet. The Golden Age has returned, and Ovid is very much at home: 'Once life was rude and plain; now Rome is golden, and she holds the wealth of the conquered world ... Let others enjoy the old ways; I am thanks, be, This age's child: it's just the place for me.' (transl. Melville) (*Ars amatoria* 3.113-14 *simplicitas rudis ante fuit; nunc aurea Roma est | et domiti magnas possidet orbis opes*; 121-2 *prisca iuuent alios, ego me nunc denique natum | gratulor: haec aetas moribus apta meis.*) A simple and irreversible passage from a before to an after, even if what Ovid means by the Golden Age is not quite what Virgil intended in the fourth *Eclogue*.

At other times Ovid unsettles, or suspends, the linearity of Virgilian narratives. At the cultural level '[t]he *Aeneid* itself is the monument to the final naturalization on Roman soil of Greek cultural goods transported from east to west, a journey parallel to that of its hero, Aeneas, from east to west, from the world of Homer to the world of Augustus.'[29] This east-west passage is recapitulated repeatedly in the last books of the *Metamorphoses*, as a whole series of characters, starting with Aeneas, make the journey: Diomedes, the Greek hero at Troy who has settled in Apulia, Myscelos, the Argive who founds the Greco-Italian city of Croton, Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher who has fled to Italy from tyranny in Samos, Virbius, formerly the Greek tragic hero Hippolytus, miraculously brought back to life and installed under his new name in the Arician grove near Rome; and Aesculapius, the Greek god of healing, transported

[29] Hardie (1998) 71.

from Epidaurus to a temple in Rome. Repetition hammers home the point, but repetition also weakens the teleological force of the Virgilian plot. It is true that in the *Aeneid* Aeneas is not alone in having made a journey from east to west: there are also Diomedes, and Evander, the Arcadian king who has settled on the future site of Rome. But their journeys are subordinated to the master plot of the wanderings of Aeneas, whereas in the *Metamorphoses* the journey of Aeneas occupies no such privileged position. This indefinite repetitiousness is one of the features that makes the *Metamorphoses* a forerunner of the romance, the genre of repeated wanderings towards an indefinitely deferred goal, rather than of the epic journey or transition definitively completed. Ovid's hexameter narrative poem is moving away from the classical Homeric and Virgilian pattern of epic, offering a model for medieval and Renaissance romance. Here is another way in which Ovid might be said, in literary-historical terms, to be between two worlds.

Even in terms of the Roman appropriation of Greek cultural goods, the *Metamorphoses* leaves the reader at the end in a state of suspension. Virgil's career is often envisaged as working through a transition from Greek to Roman, from the highly Alexandrian *Eclogues* through the *Georgics*, another Callimachean poem but with a centrally Roman and Italian subject, to the *Aeneid*, where Virgil transforms himself into the Roman national poet. Ovid's 'epic', the *Metamorphoses*, ends in the city of Rome with the deification of Julius Caesar, adoptive father of Augustus, and the worldwide domination of Roman arms. But this defining moment of Roman apotheosis is drawn back into a Greek, Alexandrian world: Venus' reaction to the imminent death of Julius is to beat her breast in words that echo the Hellenistic poet Bion's bucolic *Lament for Adonis*; while the description of the transformation of Julius' deified soul into a star alludes to Alexandrian Ptolemaic apotheoses, including Callimachus' *Lock of Berenice*, the episode which probably concluded the elegiac *Aitia*. Captured Greece has indeed made a captive of her conqueror.[30] This equivocation between Greek and Roman translates easily into a generic tension between epic, after Virgil the Roman genre, and slighter forms with a pronounced Greek, Alexandrian identity, such as bucolic and Callimachean

[30] See Barchiesi (1999) 117-19.





elegy. Ovid's ever-inventive exploitation of generic tensions is very familiar; a state of generic suspension characterizes all of his works, the *Metamorphoses* in particular.[31]

This tension between a transition from something old to something new and a continuation of the old in the new informs the political, as much as the cultural, histories peddled by Virgil and Ovid. Ronald Syme in his dismissive review of Fränkel suggested more promising ways of framing a thesis about Ovid 'as "a poet between two worlds"'. Syme asks:

> Which are these two worlds? Suitable and perhaps instructive contrasts might be discovered in the life of the poet and the history of the times. Thus Italy and Rome — the generation of Ovid's grandparents among the Paeligni belonged to the confederate revolt against the tyrant city. Or Republic and Monarchy — the infant born on 20th March, 43 B.C., Hirtius and Pansa being consuls, might have a technical and tenuous claim to have "seen the Republic".[32]

The two worlds that Virgil most obviously straddles are those of the Republic and the Empire. The *Aeneid* tells of a journey by a proto-Augustus, Aeneas, away from a wrecked polity, Troy, whose last king, Priam, is left a vast headless trunk on the beach, in clear allusion to the fate of the last Republican leader, Pompey the Great, towards a new series of cities that will culminate in the new Augustan order. At the same time by writing an epic about the legendary past Virgil locates the origin of the virtues and values of the Augustan present in that remote past. This combination of transition and continuity articulates a central tension in Augustan ideology, between Augustus' claim to have renewed Rome, and the claim to have restored the Republican order and values of the past. At the beginning of the last book of the *Metamorphoses*, the book which reaches a climax with the apotheosis of Julius Caesar and the world rule of Augustus, Ovid spins a fable on the subject of simultaneous transition and continuity.[33] In what is the first example

[31] For a survey of recent work on genre in Ovid see Myers (1999) 191-4.
[32] Syme (1947) 221.
[33] For a more detailed reading see Hardie (1997) 195-8.

in book fifteen of an east-west journey, Myscelos, a pious citizen of the Greek city Argos, is visited in a dream by Hercules, that most Greek of heroes but also a crucial model for the virtues and immortal yearnings of the Roman emperor. Hercules commands Myscelos to leave his fatherland and settle in Italy. Argos has a law that forbids its citizens to leave, and death is the penalty for one who wishes (literally) 'to change his fatherland', as the Latin puts it at line 29 (*patriam mutare uolenti*). But Hercules' command is not to be taken lightly either. Myscelos prays for help to Hercules. The solution is a fine example of how a transition is effected through a change that masquerades under continuity. At line 41 we read 'There was an ancient custom', *mos erat antiquus*, an allusion to a famous line of Ennius that sums up the Roman sense of the importance of the traditional ways, *moribus antiquis res stat Romana uirisque*, 'the Roman state is founded on the ancient customs and men' (Enn. *Ann.* 156 Skutsch). According to the Ovidian ancient custom of Argos black pebbles were cast to condemn, white to acquit a defendant. All the pebbles go in black, they all come out white. By this metamorphosis of colour Myscelos is acquitted, and free to make his journey from east to west. Ancestral tradition is preserved unchanged, but black is turned into white. The new city, Croton, is founded, but the old, Argos, remains as it was. All change, but no change, a pointed comment on the nature of the Augustan revolution, suspended between change and continuity.

Syme notes that Ovid was born in 43 B. C., the year that the two consuls, Hirtius and Pansa, were killed; Ovid's birthday was 20th March, a few days after the first anniversary of the murder of Julius Caesar, and eight months before the establishment of the Second Triumvirate. Syme, like Fränkel an early connoisseur of Ovid's exile poetry,[34] knew very well that the synchronism with the year of the two dead consuls is made, in no accidental way, by Ovid himself, in the exilic autobiographical poem *Tristia* 4.10. Here, as Janet Fairweather has shown, Ovid develops a provocatively close correspondence between his own biography and that of the emperor.[35] Ovid goes out of his way to locate his own beginning on a

[34] See the admission in Syme (1978) 'Preface' to 'an ancient predilection for the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, reinforced by that faithful companion, portable on long peregrinations'.

[35] Fairweather (1987).





cusp of history, born in the same year that, arguably, the last consuls of the free Republic were killed in battle. The start of a new political age is also the start of the *aetas Ovidiana*.

But poets have other ways of figuring their autobiographies than by reference to the fixed points of official history. At the beginning of his career Virgil brings on stage two shepherds in the first *Eclogue*, each of whom reflects an element of his own experience as historical individual and artist: firstly Tityrus, reclining in the shade of a tree, fortunate in having gained from the young god in Rome the privilege of remaining in his rural home, pasturing his cattle as before (*ut ante*, 45); and secondly Meliboeus, whose future, that of an exile wandering to the ends of the earth, has been rudely severed from his past, when he was a peasant farmer in the Italian landscape. In his epic poem, the *Aeneid*, the poet Virgil shadows the footsteps of his hero, Aeneas, like Meliboeus forcibly ejected from his homeland into exile, but unlike Meliboeus brought to harbour in the new promised land of Italy.

The *Metamorphoses* has no single hero, but a host of legendary characters thrust themselves forward as figures of the poet. Prominent among these is Pythagoras, whose inordinately long speech on mutability and metempsychosis in the first half of the last book reflects, in complex ways, on the poem as a whole and on the traditions in which it is embedded. Pythagoras is a wanderer in three ways. Like Aeneas he is an exile who has come from east to west, although in flight from a tyrant rather than from an invader. This is a journey with an end. Pythagoras is also the intellectual wanderer, whose mind, subservient to no tyrant, ranges freely through the universe. This wandering too has a terminus, set by the total comprehension of the nature of things, which, Ovid assures us, Pythagoras has achieved (15.65 *uigili perspexerat omnia cura*). But Pythagoras is also the wanderer through time, in his successive reincarnations, and of this wandering there is no clearly fixed limit. Pythagoras is the man whose life is a transit lounge, or rather an endless suite of transit lounges. His message is that 'nothing in the world remains constant, all things are in flux' (15.177-8 *nihil est toto quod perstet in orbe. | cuncta fluunt*). It is only epic poets, emperors, prophets of revealed religion, philosophers of history, and literary historians, who believe in beginnings and endings, and in clearly structured passages from one age to another, from one world to another. We Ovidians are always in the very midst.

If Ovid is Pythagoras, he is also an epic poet, and so under pressure to impose closure on his own narrative and life. He does this in the nine-line epilogue to the *Metamorphoses* (15.871-9). Here he establishes a parallel between his own immortalization as a poet and the apotheoses of Julius Caesar, and, in prospect, of Augustus.

parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis
astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum,
quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris,
ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,
siquid habent ueri uatum praesagia, uiuam.

Yet I'll be borne,
The finer part of me, above the stars,
Immortal, and my name shall never die.
Wherever through the lands beneath her sway
The might of Rome extends, my words shall be
Upon the lips of men. If truth at all
Is stablished by poetic prophecy,
My fame shall live to all eternity.
(transl. Melville)

The deification of the emperor, the divine stamp of approval of the new age of Augustus, is as final an ending as you get in a Roman epic, and Ovid signs off his epic by hitching his own wagon to the imperial star. Ovid's posthumous journeying above the stars is also a repetition of Pythagoras' mental wanderings through the heavens, and in this role Ovid is immune from, rather than a mirror of, the Jovian power of the emperor (or tyrant, depending on your point of view). Ovid's immortal part, however, is not his literal soul, but his book, his 'better part' and figurative soul — and as such, one might suppose, freed from further wandering and transitions? Yes, and no — Ovid's future life will be 'on the lips of the people', *ore populi* (878), as the body of his book is given breath by each succeeding generation of readers, on an endless journey down through time. My selective sampling of the critical reception of Ovid's poetry has been object lesson enough in the shifting nature of this kind of afterlife.





The conversion of the flesh-and-blood Ovid into his own book is also the last instance of that book's titular subject of metamorphosis. Paratextual appendix is sucked back into the main body of the text, enacting the conversion of the person of Ovid into the book of Ovid. It is also, fittingly, the perfect example of a metamorphosis that yields a state suspended between life and death. The epilogue is Ovid's epitaph, containing allusions among other things to Ennius' epitaph for himself, and to Horace's inscription for his own monument in *Odes* 3.30, 'I have completed a monument more long-lasting than bronze' (*exegi monumentum aere perennius*); the poet's death coincides with the end of his *magnum opus*, as in the case of Virgil. But the last word of this epitaph is *uiuam*, 'I shall live', hurling the poet's life forwards into future ages.

Ovid closes with a moment of suspended transitionality, marking the end of a journey, a life and a career, but sign-posting the way forward to an itinerary through eternity. But this was not the only afterlife that awaited him. Ovid did not have the good fortune to die Virgil's physical death. Donatus' *Life of Virgil* says that Virgil died in his fifty-second year, and this tends to get repeated in modern lives of Virgil. In fact it was in his fifty-first year, as the *Vita Probiana* correctly reports;[36] and as Professor Todd carefully notes in his 'Commemorative oration' on 'Virgil', given in the Great Hall of Sydney University on 15th October, 1930, at the celebration of the two thousandth anniversary of Virgil's birth:[37] some grounds perhaps for supposing that Todd would have found my own millennial musings not uncongenial.

Ovid tells us that it was in his fifty-first year that he was sent, in a very real sense, to another world (*Tristia* 4.10.95-6): from the urban sophistication of Rome to the barbarian wilderness of Tomis on the Black Sea coast, at the edge of the Roman empire. He was not, however, exactly cheated of death; the dominant Ovidian image of exile is of death; the exile poems are letters written from the other side. This is the life-in-death not of the poet triumphant, but of the poet at the mercy of Augustus. In one of his endless rewritings from exile of the epilogue to the *Metamorphoses* Ovid tells one of his

[36] *Vita Donati* 35; *Vita Probiana* 17.
[37] Todd (1930). I am grateful to Tom Hillard for referring me to this material.

friends : 'For I who died to you, Maximus, long ago, strive through my poetic talent not to have died' (*ex Ponto* 3.5.33-4 *namque ego qui perii iam pridem, Maxime, uobis | ingenio nitor non periisse meo*).

One of the effects of Ovid's exile is to disrupt the sequential linearity of Roman narratives of transition. This cataclysmic end to Ovid's existence in Rome is a return to the very beginning of Roman history; in *Tristia* 1.3 Ovid figures his departure from Rome as a repetition of Aeneas' departure from Troy. Expulsion from the city paradoxically coincides with the originary myth of the city's founding. At the moment of his separation from Rome, Ovid becomes more Roman than ever. There is an important sense in which Roman self-identity is founded on the sense of exile, in contrast, for example, to the Athenian myth of autochthony; Romulus was also an outcast, and the first male inhabitants of Rome were misfits who came to the Roman asylum.[38]

Ovid also represents himself as the original Greek wandering hero, Ulysses, but a Ulysses in reverse, travelling from west to east, and away from, not in the direction of, home. Ovid's exile is an *Odyssey* without an end. As a figure of the poet this revisionary Ulysses converges with Pythagoras, both in transition but with no goal in sight. Ovid's Ulyssean transitional figure served well the purposes of a later poet who was much concerned with the passage from one world to another, from pagan antiquity to Christianity, and from the world of our temporal existence to the world of eternity, Dante. Janet Smarr has argued that Dante's Ulysses (*Inferno* 26) is an Ovidian figure.[39] Ulysses, who foolishly heads out to sea and is shipwrecked, is the negative counterpart of Dante's own journey, drawn like a shipwrecked sailor out of the sea towards God. Smarr argues that Dante combines two Ovidian exilic images of himself, firstly that of a Ulysses who never comes home, and secondly that of a shipwreck; the wider implication being that Dante sets himself against the self-destructive poetics of Ovid, and reverses in his own journey through the three *cantiche*, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise the three stages of the Ovidian career, poet of love, poet of transformations, poet of exile. Dante travels from the realm of exile, through the realm of

38 See Edwards (1996) ch. 5 'The city of exiles'.
39 Smarr (1991).





transformation, to the realm of love, but now revalued as divine love. If this is correct, there will be a further contrast with Dante's Virgil, who travels with Dante for two thirds of his journey, before handing him over to the guidance of Beatrice for the passage to Paradise, a very dramatic way of presenting a Virgil between two worlds. I would suggest that this contrast between Virgilian and Ovidian journeyings has a validity even outside a Christian teleology, and in particular that it reflects Ovid's own construction of the trajectory of his personal and poetic careers against the foil of the Virgilian pattern.

In 1943 Hermann Fränkel spoke about Ovid before an audience on the coast of America furthest from his native Germany. I stand before you, a European on a shore even further from home, talking about the same ancient poet and his place between two worlds. But for an Englishman to call himself a European is problematic, and not merely with regard to the Treaty of Rome. For Virgil's archetypal exile Meliboeus, the remotest and most alien destination is 'the Britons utterly cut off from the whole world' (*Eclogues* 1.66). David Malouf notes this secret of the earlier history of the metropolitan centre in an article entitled 'Putting ourselves on the map'.[40] 'By a freak of nature, or perhaps a fated affinity, the colonizers of our out-of-the-continent had themselves once been on the fringes of the known world.' Theodor Ziolkowski in his book *Virgil and the moderns* makes no mention of any Australian versions of Virgil. It may be that the central Virgilian narrative of exile and transition, the story of Aeneas, does not speak to the Australian experience in the way that it does to the North American sense of a divinely guided mission to a new world that could be represented in that image of a Garden of Eden or land of the Golden Age, that Italy held up for the Trojan exiles. The Ovidian exile, forced transportation to an utterly alien land as far from Rome as possible and where nature behaves in an upside-down way,[41] might seem to fit the Australian case like a glove, even if you are spared the Scythian winters. Irina Pana goes so far as to identify a 'Tomis-complex' in modern Australian literature, crystallized in Malouf's *An imaginary life*, a fictionalization of

40 *Saturday Age Extra* (Melbourne), 23 January 1988, 1-2, quoted by Pana (1993) 524.
41 On Ovid's Herodotean image of Tomis as 'Scythia' see Williams (1994) 8-25.

Ovid's experience in Tomis. Malouf's novel is a transparent parable about the reconciliation of a fugitive from the Old World to the landscape and native peoples of Australia. *An imaginary life* is in the end a wishful tale of reconciliation and reintegration, telling of a journey into exile that ends up with a return to a lost childhood, and with Ovid's consciousness of becoming one with nature — a kind of homecoming that, wittingly or not, is reminiscent of Virgil's dying reunification with the All in the last section of Hermann Broch's novel, entitled 'Homecoming'.[42] For Malouf's Ovid the final transformation is not into a book, or into any other form of living death, but into nature (145): 'I am turning into the landscape.' The shape of Malouf's plot is determined by a reaction against a very conventional understanding of Ovid, as presented in the 'Afterword' to the novel: Ovid is 'the most modern of the Latin poets, the most worldly and accessible, the most human, his skepticism balanced by a love of the fabulous, the excessive'; the 'glib fabulist of "the changes"'. The 'imaginary' in Malouf's novel lies in attributing to Ovid 'a capacity for belief that is nowhere to be found in his own writings'. But I am not sure that Ovid would have been grateful for this spiritual redemption. If there is no hint in Ovid's own exile poetry of any moral growth into a primitivist place of origins, this need not be because Ovid's 'glib' spirit was incapable of any moral seriousness. Rather, what is 'for real' in the exile poetry is a perpetuation of that sense of being in between, of suspension, of being in transition but to no final goal or origin, that marks the pre-exilic works.

The recent critical rehabilitation of Ovid's exile poetry, the last part of his œuvre to have been brought in from the cold, has revealed the strong lines of continuity that link the Black Sea poems to the Roman poems. Less often remarked is the way that the bringing to centre stage of this marginal poetry can decentre the old stereotype of the pre-exilic Ovid as a poet thoroughly at home in Rome, celebrating the here and now of a sophisticated and worldy culture. The earlier poetry too is permeated with a sense of suspension, of not being securely in place, of being caught in transition — a sense of exile. Ovid's interest in transitions and transitional states is the occasion for endless displays of wit and linguistic fireworks, but I hope that I have given some grounds, plausible at least at our particular moment in history, for reassessing it as something other than glib and superficial, and seeing in it instead a response to an experience of the self and of history that goes all the way down.

[42] Virgil's final vision is of a child in his mother's arms; 'but at this point, that image is no longer the recollection of a scene from his own fourth *Eclogue* but an anticipation of the birth of the new era that is on the point of replacing the glory of the Roman empire' (Ziolkowski (1993) 206). One might also compare Fränkel's closural use of an image from Ovid's own poetry, the dawn of *Am.* 1.13, to symbolize the Ovidian heralding of the dawn of a new world (Fränkel (1945) 163).

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