

Nulli sua forma manebat (Met. 1.17): On the Corporeality of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

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ABSTRACT

The starting point for recent analyses of the corporeality of the narrative of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is the double semiotics of the Latin word *corpus*, which refers to both the living human body and the book. My own reading is inspired by the fact that the narrative body (*nova corpora*) of the poems prologue and the flesh-and-blood body (*corporis huius*) of its epilogue unite the textual body of the *Metamorphoses*, which can be read as a performance that takes place between these two points. This essay reads Ovid's *Metamorphoses* through the lens of this performance that takes place in the *corpora* represented in the *Metamorphoses*' creative process of both the textual (Daphne, Io, Syrinx, Echo, Pierides, Marsyas, Orpheus) and the visual (Deucalion and Pyrrha, Arachne, Narcissus, Pygmalion) artwork.

KEYWORDS

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, textual and visual creative process, corporeal narrative of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

INTRODUCTION

While the modernist interpretation regards bodies as the text's organizing components, as participants in the unfolding of the story, Charles Segal, in his influential study published in 1998,¹ was one of the first to emphasize a different sense in which the body is a prominent

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¹SEGAL (1998).

theme in the *Metamorphoses*. Segal claims “it is not the body that leads the narrator to the story, but the story that is forced to end in something that happens to the body”.² The analysis driven by the perspectives of creative aesthetics, gender and violence is summed up in the experience that in Ovid’s poem the body is subjugated and exposed, and as such is the trope of the instability and vulnerability of human existence.

Segal saw Ovid’s bodies as the object of aspirations directed towards them or rather against them; that is, he saw the body as an object. The starting point of the more recent analyses is the double semiotics of the Latin *corpus*, which is associated with both the biological and the textual body: in the latter case with a collection of papyrus scrolls (*libri*), which includes a conceptual unit, a specific work. Joseph Farrell³ has pointed out the network of associations in the language of the *Metamorphoses* that implicates the written and spoken forms of poetry. To Alison Keith,⁴ the Ovidian use of the words *forma* and *corpus* refers very specifically to literary forms and texts. Elizabeth Marie Young⁵ interprets the corporeal Orpheus narrative of the *Metamorphoses* as the vulnerable formation of the Augustan idea of literature, the organic unity and wholeness of Greek and Roman literature.

Researchers sometimes call the interplay of the various meanings of *corpus* in the poem an association network, sometimes a metaphorical chain, but in essence they point out the performativity of the *corpus* in the *Metamorphoses*. Drawing inspiration from this approach, I examine the corporeal narrative of the *Metamorphoses* by observing the creative process,⁶ namely the method of creating both the textual and the visual art work, and interpret the narrative as staging of this performance. This way of reading is inspired by the reader’s experience, especially the fact that the narrative body⁷ (*nova corpora*: 1.1–2) of the poem’s prologue⁸ and the flesh-and-blood body (*corporis huius*: 15.873) of the epilogue unite the textual body of the *Metamorphoses*, which takes place between these two points⁹ and can also be read as a performance that constantly reflects on itself and shapes itself.

DEUCALION AND PYRRHA

This performance begins in the first book of the *Metamorphoses*, with the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha (1.400–415). The “stones [thrown back] begin to yield from their hardness” (*saxa [...] /*

²SEGAL (1998) 14.

³FARRELL (1999).

⁴KEITH (2002).

⁵YOUNG (2008).

⁶On the use of words and the inextricable interplay of formation, creation and art that covers the entirety of the *Metamorphoses*, see SCHEIDEGGER LÄMMLE (2021) 365–366.

⁷Narrative body is a central term in the theory of corporeal narratology associated with Daniel Punday. Punday’s fundamental premise is that the body is always inscribed into some form of discourse or narrative – that is, it is a linguistic construction. One of the core questions of corporeal narratology is how the body can participate in the story and how the representation of body constructs the narrative: PUNDAY (2003).

⁸On the recurring variants of the first four lines of the *Metamorphoses* in the elegies of the *Tristia* and Latin epic poetry, along with the intertextual network, see WHEELER (2009).

⁹Cavazzani interprets the transformations of form and *corpus* expressed in the first line of the poem not as a static polarity, but as an instance of their dynamic flow into each other, and this interpretation is projected on to the *Metamorphoses* as a whole: CAVAZZANI (2021).

ponere duritiam coepere: 1.400–401) and “as they become softer, they are also shaped” (*mollitaque ducere formam*: 1.402) and when they rise, “they assume a form that resembles the human body” (*ut quaedam [...] videri forma potest hominis*: 1.404–405).¹⁰ The chain of metamorphosis from stones through soft form to human form (*saxa – mollita forma – forma hominis*) in itself implies the process of creating a sculpture. This is made clear by the description of the stones as they are forming “like a marble sculpture that has been started but not finished, therefore it is most similar to rudimentary sculptures” (*uti de marmore coepta, / non exacta satis rudibusque simillima signis*: 1.405–406).

The transformation of the material from hard to formable, which is strongly emphasized by the double reference *mollirique mora mollitaque* (1.402), recalls not only the work of sculptors in general, but also the story of Pygmalion (10.243–297). Pygmalion’s statue is so perfect that it acts as a living body, which eventually softens – like Hymettian wax under the sun – into a truly living *corpus* (10.283–286). In the cosmogony of the *Metamorphoses*, the paradigm of human formation appears in the shaping of the material in the timeless sculptor’s hands, the creative activity of the visual artist. The people formed from stone show the archaic initiative of this *ars* as well as the first steps of creating a statue. The process will be completed in Pygmalion’s ivory *virgo*, a shape so perfect that not even nature could create it: “he formed it to a shape, in which no woman can be born” (*formamque dedit, qua femina nasci / nulla potest*: 10.248–249).

In a metapoetic reading, the simile, according to which the spontaneously formed stones imitate (*simillima*: 1.406) the still unfinished, rudimentary sculptures, is the first formulation of the question that will be fully explained again in the Pygmalion and even more so in the Narcissus narrative. It raises the issue of imitation, specifically the relationship between *ars* and *natura*, which already has an aesthetic stake here, at the beginning of the *Metamorphoses*. This is because, contrary to the general norm of art imitating nature, in the Deucalion and Pyrrha narrative, the natural form shaped spontaneously by nature is the reproduction of the artist’s work.

The *corpus* embodied in an archaic form thus transcends itself. The fine art analogy formulated in the narrative of Deucalion and Pyrrha, and its introduction into dialogue with the narrative of Pygmalion and Narcissus, initiates a formation of meaning that brings the creative activity itself to the fore. *Corpus* refers not only to the sculptural body, but also – already in Book 1 – to the question of creating the body of the text. Joseph Farrell’s analysis pointed out that the twin motif of text and song, the written and spoken/sung form of poetry, runs through the *Metamorphoses* from beginning to end as a coherent metapoetic theme.¹¹

However, this experience can be applied not only to textual but also to visual creation. Moreover, the material, technical and aesthetic issues of textual creation and visual creation unfold with such consistent parallelism from the prologue to the epilogue of the poem that it emerges as another aspect structuring the entire textual *corpus* of the *Metamorphoses*.¹²

¹⁰I quote the *Metamorphoses* in Latin using TARRANT’s edition (2004). The English translation of all Latin quotations is my own.

¹¹FARRELL (1999) 128.

¹²Regarding the structure of the *Metamorphoses* and its Ovidian intentions, classical philology is strongly divided. The only point of agreement is the fact that the epic can be separated into three big units (gods, heroes, historical era). On this topic, with further references, see BARCHIESI (1997) 182.

DAPHNE, IO AND SYRINX

In Book 1, read from the perspective of creating a text, the consecutive stories of Daphne, Io and Syrinx form an inseparable unity, wherein all three narratives include moments that can be read both as a means of creating the text and as a mode of being.¹³ Daphne's breasts are surrounded by *liber*, thin bark – “her soft breasts clasped by thin bark” (*mollia cinguntur tenui praecordia libro*: 1.549) and her laurel-shaped body becomes the attribute of Apollo, the lyre player, that is, of poetry itself: “you are mine, he said, laurel, forever, in my hair, on my lyre, my quiver” (*semper habebunt / te coma, te citharae, te nostrae, laure, pharetra*: 1.558–559). Io, who has been turned into a cow, jots a *littera*, a letter, in the dust with her hoof as a sign of her true identity – “in place of words, a letter which her foot drew in the dust was left as a sign of her body's sorrowful transformation” (*littera pro verbis, quam pes in pulvere duxit / corporis indicium mutati triste peregit*: 1.649–650). With the transformation of Syrinx (1.705–712), *ars nova*, a new art, is born, the music of the panpipe, whose sweet melody also brings the musical aspect of poetry into play: “captivated the god with the sweetness of the new art's sound” (*arte nova vocisque deum dulcedine captum*: 1.709). Letter and melody, lyre and pipe, the form of a book that includes the body of the text – by the end of Book 1, almost all the mediums for the creation, presentation and transmission of the poetic text have been called into play.

ECHO AND NARCISSUS

Sound and sonority come into play in Book 3 with the story of Echo (3.356–401) and thus complete the genesis unfolding in the first three books of the *Metamorphoses* of the creation and transmission of the poetic text. In the origin narrative of the *vocalis nymphe* (3.357), the *resonabilis Echo* (3.358) prominently emphasizes the dichotomy of the easily destroyed *corpus* and the indestructible *vox/sonus*: “What is a voice now, used to be a body” (*Corpus adhuc Echo, non vox erat*: 3.359). Echo's decaying body encased in the lifeless stone, the inverse of the formation of the stone men. “Only her voice remains” (*vox tantum [...] vox manet*: 3.398–399); it lives its eternal life as an acoustic voice independent of her body (*sonus est qui vivit in illa*: 3.401).¹⁴ The juxtaposition of the mortal body with the immortal voice is a motif that appears at two other prominent points in the *Metamorphoses*: in Book 11's Orpheus narrative at the opening of the third *pentad*, and then in the epilogue, as a formulation of the eternal Ovidian voice. The *corpus-vox* dichotomy of the Echo narrative is also an unmistakable allusion to the *corpora* and *voces* of the mythical and contemporary poets, Orpheus and Ovid himself.

Gianpiero Rosati's analysis has left no question, that Ovid connected the metamorphoses of Echo and Narcissus into a single and mutually explanatory narrative by weaving the thread of love into the story.¹⁵ It is also productive to read the two narratives not from the perspective

¹³This metapoetic connection of the three stories was pointed out in Joseph Farrell's analysis: FARRELL (1999) 133–135.

¹⁴For the semantics of the articulate human *vox* and the acoustic *sonus* in general and in Ovid's Io narrative, see TAMÁS (2020) 207–208.

¹⁵ROSATI (1983) 20–31. [ROSATI (2021) 38–55.] tied the figures and metamorphoses of Echo and Narcissus into a single narrative, organizing the two stories not just in respect of causality, but also of intertextuality. He uses Quintilian's pair of concepts, illusion and irony, in approaching Narcissus and Echo's narrative – not independent from Pygmalion's story, either: KRUPP (2009) 85–120.

of the tragic love thread, but from the creative aesthetic issue of auditory and visual imitation. Juno punishes the nymph by depriving her of the ability to speak autonomously, that is, of her own voice – in both the physiological and poetic sense: “nature prevents her the first utterance” (*natura repugnat / nec sinit incipiat*: 3.376–377). Echo is only capable of imitating another’s voice and reproducing the other’s words. Still, the imitation is not perfect, because the echo is fragmentary, and consequently unreliable and misleading; it deceives Narcissus: “tricked by the illusion of an answering voice” (*alternae deceptus imagine vocis*: 3.385).

The Narcissus narrative (3.407–510) – which can also be interpreted as an explanation of the fine art¹⁶ analogy formulated in the creation of men in Book 1 – also raises the issue of imitation.¹⁷ What Narcissus sees in the reflection, and falls in love with, is actually the image of a work of art. “The double he had glimpsed enraptures him” (*visae correptus imagine formae*: 3.416), just like “a statue cut from chiselled Parian marble” (*e Pario formatum marmore signum*: 3.419). It is not by chance that the narrator constantly calls Narcissus’ interpretation of the image a mistake (3.431, 3.447),¹⁸ and the boy unwise (3.425) and credulous (3.432), because “he considers the sight to be a living body” (*corpus putat esse*: 3.417), when it is actually an image – *imago* (3.414, 432, 461), *simulacra* (3.430) – or rather, “a reflection of an image” (*ista repercussae, quam cernis, imaginis umbra est*: 3.434). The water mirror – in other words, nature – imitates a sculpture¹⁹ – a work of art – the *imago* of Narcissus, similar to the gods, “uniquely beautiful” (*puer unice*: 3.454), standing out in its immobility like a Parian marble statue.

In both the Echo and Narcissus narratives the mode of creation is imitation. However, imitation does not take place in the traditional manner, but in the exact opposite way. Instead of the human voice or creation imitating nature, *natura* produces the imitation of an articulated voice or a work of fine art. The exact imitation of the audible and visible reality of nature, reproducing and duplicating it, the traditional practice of *imitatio*, is not possible in Ovid’s narrative, because *natura* is a continuous movement and change.²⁰ The narratives of Echo and Narcissus also articulate this, the impossibility of auditory and visual imitation in the traditional sense. The two syntagms or sentences that imitate each other give this experience a special

¹⁶On the reception of Ovid’s Narcissus as an Artist-narrative, see the list of [ELSNER \(2007\)](#) 137.

¹⁷The narrative of Narcissus in the *Metamorphoses* is approached from the connection between illusion and art by [ROSATI \(1983\)](#); [HARDIE \(2002\)](#) 143–172 and [KRUPP \(2009\)](#) 85–120.

For a detailed comparison and examination of the narratives of Narcissus and Pygmalion in the *Metamorphoses*, especially regarding the issue of *imitatio* and *phantasia*, see [DARAB \(2018\)](#). In this study I make use of the conclusions and findings of my previous analysis.

¹⁸In the *error* of Narcissus – and several other characters of the *Metamorphoses* – Rosati sees the reaffirmation and illustration of the epic’s main motif: the changeability of things, and as a result, the expression of the spectacle’s illusory nature: [ROSATI \(1983\)](#) 39; 52–53.

¹⁹Krupp discards this interpretation: “Man möchte meinen, dass sich der Vergleich auf das Bild beziehen sollte, das Narcissus erblickt. Dies würde dann bedeuten, dass er sein Spiegelbild betrachtet, als sei es ein Kunstwerk. In den *Metamorphosen* liest man davon jedoch nichts. Im Gegenteil.” Still, Narcissus sees a work of art in Krupp’s reading as well, but not the Parian marble, but its imaginary ivory “counterpart” created in fiction, which is constructed by the youth’s (or rather, the narrator’s) gaze: [KRUPP \(2009\)](#) 101–104.

²⁰The lack of fixedness and permanence is a worldview and also the poetics that determine the entirety of the *Metamorphoses*, which is already formulated at the beginning of the epic, when the creation of the world is described. As Stephen M. Wheeler notes, the *imago mundi* exteriorized in the Ovidian cosmogony is not a fixed and ultimate form, but a matter subjected to the transformative powers of human and divine passions: [WHEELER \(2009\)](#) 117.

emphasis. The reverberation of Echo's speech is not a voice, *vox*, but an imitation of voice, *imago vocis*, and it deceives the young man (*alternae deceptus imagine vocis*: 3.385). The image of Narcissus reflected in the spring water is not a living figure, *forma*, but a double, *imago formae*,²¹ the sight of which encharms, or rather, captures the deluded observer (*visae correptus imagine formae*: 3.416). The topic of nature imitating art, which was introduced in the narrative of Deucalion and Pyrrha, is not closed by the narrative of Echo and Narcissus but only suspended with the confinement of the nymph into the voice and the boy into the image. The continuation and conclusion of the theme occurs in Book 10's Pygmalion narrative and in the story of Orpheus in Book 11.

THE PIERIDES, ARACHNE, AND MARSYAS

The narrative of Book 5 on the competition between the Muses and the Pierides (5.294–340, 5.662–678) focuses on the selection of poetic theme. The same topic is thematized in Book 6's narrative about Minerva and Arachne (6.1–145), along with the aesthetic quality of representation in visual art. Finally, Book 6 contains the competition between Apollo and Marsyas (6.382–400) – the lyre (*cithara*) and the flute (*tibia*) –, which can be read allegorically as a competition between lyre and elegy. The three contest-narratives – text (the Pierides), sight (Arachne) and melody (Marsyas) – present the tension between themes, aesthetic norms and genres, and are placed at key points in the epic: in the closing book of the first *pentad* (the Pierides) and the opening book of the second *pentad* (Arachne, Marsyas).

In a performance where the body is an event of transformation, where the aesthetic practice of creating a textual and visual work is embodied, these contest narratives represent a turning point. In contrast to Echo's voice (*imago vocis*) and the reflection of the statue of Narcissus (*imago formae*), with the Pierides, Arachne and Marsyas, the autonomous creator, the self-conscious artist, takes the stage. The Pierides' own poem is heard – albeit mediated by the Muses –, the narrative of Arachne's loom becomes visible and Marsyas' *elegeion* accompanied by the *tibia*, his song of complaint distorted into a howl, is heard. The mutually reflective language, which almost interweaves the three stages of the competition, invites you to read the three *certamina* in the context of each other. "Contend with us, goddesses of Thespieae, we cannot be outdone in voice or art" (*Thespiades, certate, deae, nec voce nec arte / vincemur*: 5.310–311) – thus the Pierides provoke the Muses, assured of their victory. "Contend with me," she said, "I will have no objection if I am beaten" (*Certet, ait, mecum, nihil est quod victa recusem*: 6.25) – thus Arachne confidently challenges Minerva to a race, also hinting at the possibility of her own defeat. Marsyas no longer has a chance to win, because the narrator speaks of him as a loser suffering his punishment from the beginning, "who was defeated and cruelly punished" (*victum / adfecit poena*: 6.384–385) by Apollo.

The context of the Pierides' and Arachne's stories is created not only by the dramaturgical analogies – the narrative organized around the motif of the contest and the defining role of Minerva – but also by the theme of the works: the battle of the gods. However, there is a striking contrast between the two narratives: while we hear the poem of the Pierides not in the process of

²¹On the complex meaning of *imago* in the entirety of the *Metamorphoses* but with the term always being used in the context of fine arts – sculpture, painting, representation, illusion, mirror, image – see SOLODOW (1988) 205–209.

the performance, but in the retelling of the Muses, the imagery of Arachne's weaving unfolds before us in the process of its making.

Both the Pierides' poem and Arachne's weaving depict the battle of the gods. However, the poem reciting the gigantomachy "shows the giants in a – although classified as false – glory" (*falsoque in honore Gigantas / ponit*: 5.319–320), while "the effort of the gods is not only belittled" (*extenuat magnorum facta deorum*: 5.320), but "for the most part, it is their flight" (*cunctosque dedisse / terga fugae*: 5.322–323), their fear and their transformation into animal form that is highlighted. On Arachne's tapestry, the same gods, also in animal form, resolutely fight and triumph over women, who are exposed and vulnerable in every sense.

The Muses, the opponents, are the narrators and focalizers of the Pierides' poem, and they – unsurprisingly – classify its deheroizing representation as false (*falso*). The focalizer of Arachne's pictorial narrative – as well as Minerva's textile – is the external narrator. In the battles of Arachne's weaving, we can perceive not only the rape stories of the gods – *caelestia crimina* (6.131) – narrated in the *Metamorphoses*, but also the love battles of Ovid's elegiac poetry, but without its playfulness.

Competing with the gods equals suicide. In the textual world of the *Metamorphoses*, however, the three narratives about *hybris* (the Pierides, Arachne, Marsyas) are transformed into artist and art contest stories, the most important consequence of which is that the *certamen* will have stakes in the sphere of aesthetics. The Ovidian reshaping of the myth does not place the cause of defeat and punishment primarily in the *hybris* of mortals but shifts the emphasis to the choice of theme in their artistic product and the aesthetic quality of their narrative. The song of the Muses, with which they triumph over the Pierides, is performed by the reluctant Calliope at Minerva's request: "Do not stop, sing your song in order" (*ne dubita vestrumque mihi refer ordine carmen*: 5.335). It is hardly a mistake to read the words of the goddess not only in the sense "straight through", but also as a justification for the defeat of Pierides, who sang the battle of the gods not in order (*ordine*), that is, with the proper glory befitting the order of the cosmic hierarchy.

Since Eleanor Winsor Leach's analysis,²² it has been a literary commonplace that in the competition between Minerva and Arachne, and the tapestries made by the rival weavers, two moral, ideological and aesthetic paradigms are straining against each other:²³ the heroic and the deheroizing, the solemn and the mundane, the order of symmetry and the tangle of the Hellenistic baroque, closure – "and crowns her work with an olive-tree" (*operisque sua facit arbore finem*: 6.102) – and the aesthetics of sustained non-closure with the possibility of continuous weaving – "the edge of the tapestry ornamented with flowers interwoven with entangled ivy" (*ultima pars telae [...] nexilibus flores hederis habet intertextos*: 6.127–128) – the classicism of the Augustan age and its opposite embodied in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.²⁴

Although Arachne's loom is out of order in its depiction the gods of Olympus, she does not lose the contest: "Neither Pallas, nor Envy itself could criticize that work" (*Non illud Pallas, non illud carpere Livor / possit opus*: 6.129–130). The narrative mentions only Arachne's "fatal

²²LEACH (1974) 102–106, 115–118.

²³Including but not limited to: GALINSKY (1975) 210–261; SZILÁGYI (1982); OLIENSIS (2004); ROSATI (2006) 347–350.

²⁴KAILBACH-MEHL (2020) 188–191. provides a good overview of the research history of the Arachne narrative in the *Metamorphoses* and its main directions.

success” (*doluit successu flava virago*: 6.130), but neither the goddess’s nor the girl’s victory. The narrator does not explicitly mention, but weaves into the text what at least implies Arachne’s victory. The fine description of the two weavers’ virtuoso technique (6.53–69) leaves no doubt that their craftsmanship is equivalent. The narrator calls the subject of Minerva’s tapestry an ancient dispute (*antiquam [...] litem*: 6.71), which can also be read as a remark on the choice of subject: the struggle with Neptune for the possession of Athens is old, and thus often told, unimaginative, even boring. This contrasts with the undoubtedly original choice of theme in Arachne’s loom, the sins of the gods (*caelestia crimina*: 6.131).

As for the aesthetic quality of the depictions, the choice of words is very telling. Minerva’s creative work is characterized by *facit* (6.76, 6.102) and *simulat* (6.80); that is, like her Muses, she prepares the otherwise unexceptional loom properly, in an orderly fashion. Arachne weaves the threads, depicts her choice of subject in such a way (*designat*: 6.103) that the imagery of the weave comes to life, and its characters perceive the events with their bodies (*sensit, sensit*: 6.119; *sensit*: 6.120) and also make them palpable for the beholder. Every detail of Europa’s abduction seems real: the scene is brought to life by movement and sound: “one would think it a real bull and real waves, she appears gazing back to the shore left behind, calling to her companions, displaying fear at the touch of the surging water, and drawing up her drenched feet” (*verum taurum, freta vera putares, / ipsa videbatur terras spectare relictas / et comites clamare suas tactumque vereri / adsilientis aquae timidasque reducere plantas*: 6.104–107).

Minerva tears apart the tapestry animated by poetic *ekphrasis* and turns the girl into a spider. The *certamen* has no winner. In a metapoetic reading, the image of the spider-Arachne hanging on the thread of the spider’s web can even be interpreted as the suspension of the competition. Nonetheless, Arachne’s real punishment is not the transformation itself, but the *opus* that her spider body must weave forever: “the spider weaves old fabrics every day” (*antiquas exercet aranea telas*: 6.145). In the tragically ironic sentence that closes the narrative, the same language used in the appraisal of Minerva’s weaving returns. The web that the spider-Arachne must weave forever, is old, old-fashioned (*antiquas*), and its making requires only practice (*exercet*), not the imagination of the creator. The cruelty of Arachne’s punishment is found not in the metamorphosis of the girl’s body, but in the destruction of the autonomous art that exists in the body.²⁵ And this makes her the companion of Echo, deprived of her own voice.

The true punishment of the autonomous artist is the coercion imposed on the spider’s body, to always do the same thing with the same method in the same regulated order, to imitate the same composition with no exceptions, soberly and unimaginatively: to weave a spider’s web.²⁶ If one considers the meanings of yarn (*tela*) and tapestry, and the spider silk and web, then extends this dual semiotic to the body of the text as its main thread and fabric, it is easy to conclude that the Arachne narrative of the *Metamorphoses* stages the human/artistic threat that looms over the creator of the image and text, exposes the vulnerability that comes from a bodily existence, and brings out the aesthetic issue of free creative *phantasia*.

²⁵THEODORAKOPOULOS (1999) 158.

²⁶DARAB (2022) 46; FORMISANO (2024) 290. In the alternative reading of OLIENSIS (2023) 10: “To this extent Minerva is successful: the tiny spider, spinning its webs on ceilings and in fields, can no longer stake a claim to Jove-like creativity. Yet stubborn Arachne, diminished though she may be, finds a way to spite Minerva and reassert herself: she returns to the loom, reconstituting herself as the ‘mother’ of textiles. This may not be a happy ending, but it is also not the ending that Minerva had in mind.”

MARSYAS

The most terrible episode of the corporeal performance of the *Metamorphoses* is the story of Marsyas (6.382–400), which fits into the texture of the Book 6 as a manifold embedded narrative.²⁷ After the story of the Pierides and Arachne, which can be read as a performance of epic poetry and visual imagery, the Marsyas narrative takes over with music, the *tibia*'s voice and the accompanying elegiac poetry. The short narrative is framed by the allusion, in just a few words, to Apollo's victory (6.384–385) and ends with the moment of transformation, which is not the metamorphosis of the satyr's body, but the transformation of the mourning forest companions' tears into the river of Phrygia named after Marsyas.

This is a confounding narrative, because the event framed by Apollo's victory, as well as the mourning and the transformation, is actually a brutal execution – tearing off the skin of the satyr with a single movement (6.387) – followed by the naturalistic description of the body²⁸ that has become a living wound – “nothing but a grievous wound” (*Nec quicquam nisi vulnus erat*: VI 388). There is no story, only the representation of the tragic experience of being in the body, being locked in the body. Ovid's text on the body is in sharp contrast with the classicism of the Augustan age, not only in its gruesome content, but also in its aesthetics. The employment of the repulsive, the horrible as a theme and as an aesthetic quality²⁹ is also what makes the Marsyas narrative stand out, with its astonishing novelty, among the artistic stories of the *Metamorphoses*.

This narrative is also confusing because neither the competition nor the present opponent Apollo can be seen or heard. All the artistic stories of the *Metamorphoses* – except Pan³ – are from the middle *pentad* – Books 6–10. In the *Metamorphoses*, Apollo as the god of music and poetry appears a total of twelve times, five of them in this middle *pentad*.³⁰ Among the series of artist narratives, it is only in the story of Marsyas that the god of poetry is present not as an allusion or metaphorically, but physically and actively. Among the artists of the *Metamorphoses*, Marsyas suffers the most terrible punishment, and it is in this story that Apollo's darkest side is revealed. Safe to say that Apollo delivers the punishment not as a mythical god, but as the representative of the world *Divus Augustus* declared as a new golden age,³¹ and one can rightly see in Marsyas, the confessor, the mythical representative of the master of the genre accompanied by the *tibia*. The elegiac poet Marsyas suffers a terrible death here, and one is hardly

²⁷For a detailed analysis of the Marsyas narrative, along with its mythic, literary and artistic antecedents, see DARAB (2016).

²⁸According to Eleanor W. Leach, Marsyas' flayed body is a metaphor for the deprivation of artistic ambition: LEACH (1974) 124. Andrew Feldherr reads the description as a wordplay. The still-twitching tendons and throbbing veins of Marsyas' flayed body are also attributes of Apollo. The sun's glow (*perlucentes, micant*), the nerves of the bow (*nervi*) and the strings of the lyre (*nervi, fibras*) are still reminiscent of Apollo's victory after the satyr's death: FELDHERR (2004) 82–83.

²⁹According to Charles Segal's interpretation from an aesthetic-poetic point of view, Ovid's image of the inanimate body raises the question of what creates the repulsive and the beautiful, and where the boundaries between these two aesthetic qualities lie: SEGAL (1998) 34.

³⁰FONTENROSE (1940) 432: *Met.* 1.518, 1.559; 2.601, 2.682 ff.; 6.384 (Marsyas); 8.15 ff.; 10.108 (The song of Orpheus), 10.170, 10.205; 11.155 (Pan), 11.165–171 (Pan), 11.317.

³¹FELDHERR (2004) 85: “His Apollo cannot be read in isolation from Augustus.”

mistaken to see in this disproportionately cruel punishment the self-reflection of the Roman master of elegies, Ovid, who was under the threat of exile.³²

The throbbing veins on the flayed body of Marsyas (6.390) are the last signs of life, while those on the body of the ivory statue of Pygmalion (10.289) are the first signs of life. The two artistic destinies enter into a dialogue with each other with a dramatic play on words. Marsyas' flayed body became a grievous wound (*vulnus erat*: 6.388) while Pygmalion's statue girl became a living body (*corpus erat*: 10.289). In a broader context, the Pygmalion narrative (10.243–297) with its spectacular corporeality³³ becomes part of the visual artistic performance that is constituted from the scope of aesthetics starting from the sculptural allusion of the Deucalion-Pyrrha narrative, the *imitatio* aesthetics of the Narcissus narrative, and the *phantasia* aesthetics that can also be discovered in the Arachne narrative.

PYGMALION

The narrator consistently describes the ivory statue of Pygmalion as a living body (10.250–251). Pygmalion himself sees it not as a statue, but as a living body and treats it as such “touches it time and again, feeling his work, whether a real body or ivory, and he still refuses to admit it is ivory” (*saepe manus operi temptantes admovet, an sit / corpus, an illud ebur, nec adhuc ebur esse fatetur*: 10.254–255). With wonderful art (*mira arte*: 10.247) the sculptor carves ivory, the inanimate material produced by nature, into a shape – (*formamque dedit*: 10.248) – that not even *natura* can create (10.248–249). The narrator never calls this material *opus* (10.249) *imago* or *signum* or *simulacrum*, but *virgo* – “virgin” (10.250, 10.275, 10.292) – and then, when it comes to life, *puella* – “girl” (10.280).

In Ovid's story, Pygmalion is in one person the creator and beholder of the statue.³⁴ As a creator, he sculpts the perfect image of the much-desired femininity by imitating the images he calls up from memory. What makes the inanimate matter contained in the form come to life, what turns the ivory into flesh and blood, is Pygmalion's illusory gaze: his vision that awakens in the process of long contemplation, in which the virgin (*eburnea virgo*: 10.275) reminiscent of the – otherwise not immaculate – girls turns into an image (*simulacra suae puellae*: 10.280). The

³²Feldherr, albeit with different logic, reaches a similar conclusion. In the narrative, Ovid's role is doubled: he is the narrator of Marsyas' death, and also Marsyas himself. The reasoning behind that is identified in the poet's vulnerable position vis-a-vis Augustus: FELDHERR (2004) 84–85. A defining characteristic of the world of the *Metamorphoses* is that the fate of its characters takes an unexpected turn. Patricia JOHNSON (2008) 121. interprets this as Ovid's “hindsight” in the context of competing artists. In the background of this peculiarity, Charles Segal perceives the experience that Ovid had to go through, namely, the imperial decree of his exile: SEGAL (1998) 36. The latter two interpretations are of course inseparable from the unanswerable question of the dating of the *Metamorphoses*. Johnson's interpretation is based on pre-exile dating, Segal's on post-relegatio. Whether we interpret it as an experience or – as I think – a premonition, the sudden turns of fate in the artist stories can be understood as a metaphor for the strong limitation and at times, impossibility of free creative activity.

³³For further details, see DARAB (2018).

³⁴SHARROCK (1991) 36. suggests that Ovid's Pygmalion, both as artist and lover, is acting elegiacally: “The *Metamorphoses* myth of the art-object which becomes a love-object mirrors the elegiac myth of love-object as art-object. The elegists represent the *puella* as both art and flesh.” EMMRICH (2020) 44. treats Ovid's Pygmalion-narrative as a narcissistic relationship between creator and creation: “Mit seiner paradigmatischen und traditionsbildenden Künstlerfigur veranschaulicht Ovid, dass die Kunst vielmehr auf “hochkarätiger Erotik” gründet; auf einer narzisstischen Mesalliance des Künstlers zu seinem Werk.”

twofold operation of *phantasia* becomes visible in this story: the creation of a statue that creates the illusion of reality, and the appearance of the created statue as real, are both the product of subjective visualization, *phantasia*.³⁵ Pygmalion excludes women from his life for a long time, and then creates a *corpus* after the truly existing female body, whose liveliness and femininity – seen in the beauty of modesty and purity – he creates with his fantasy (*formamque dedit*: 10.248).

The perfectly formed ivory statue of Pygmalion is the end point of the performance that begins with the archaic stone sculptures of man's creation in *Metamorphoses*. The starting and ending narratives of this visual art performance are brought into dialogue by their identical scheme: the inanimate material takes shape and then comes to life. The raw material and human form of the archaic *kuros* and *kore* are provided and created by nature imitating art. The perfection of the ivory girl is realized by art, not by imitating nature, but by the imagination of the artist whose creation comes from the images of nature preserved in the mind. The sculpture girl is brought to life by the sculptor's loving gaze. This perplexing moment of the narrative³⁶ can be understood not only as a parable of "*omnia vicit amor*", but also as an achievement of unhindered creation and vision provided by artistic *phantasia* or *phantasia*-aesthetics, which – at least in the world of the *Metamorphoses* – can bring forth the unattainable desire from the tangible, from reality, as well as from the imaginary.

ORPHEUS

The *Metamorphoses* boasts another artist who achieves the impossible by crossing the spheres of life and death, *corpus* and *anima*: Orpheus, whose human/artistic ambition is as driven by love as Pygmalion's. The poet, who withdraws from the world in the same way and escapes into the creation of images conjured up by his imagination upon finding solitude in nature, is just like Pygmalion who shuts himself up in the solitude of his studio. He is the poet in love, whose longing gaze, however, does not bring Eurydice back to life, but forces him back into the eternity of death. Orpheus' figure unites and holds together the entire narrative of Book 10, which concludes the second *pentad* of the *Metamorphoses*. The narrative begins with the poet's *katabasis* (10.1–90) and concludes with the body's *sparagmos* and the soul's repeated *katabasis* in Book 11. The Pygmalion narrative is embedded in this *monster* narrative, in the song of Orpheus framed by the two *katabases*, also points out the essential connection between the poet and sculptor figures *par excellence* in the *Metamorphoses*.³⁷

³⁵DARAB (2018) 112–119.

³⁶Some interpret the statue girl's coming to life as a symptom of the sculptor's intense love turning into madness: SEGAL (1998) 18: "Ovid clearly marks these gestures as silly, and in another mood they could be signs of incipient madness. [...] this ending also leaves it ambiguous whether Pygmalion is just a lucky fool or a creative genius." ELSNER (2007) 137: "we might say that Pygmalion is either the recipient of a divine miracle or finally and certifiably mad."

³⁷For the most part, interpreters of the *Metamorphoses* mark the Orpheus narrative as the pendant for the story of Pygmalion. The poet – whose song Pygmalion's story is inscribed into – and the sculptor, in this reading, are artists *par excellence*, who demonstrate infinite artistic freedom and its creative powers: VIARRE (1968); SEGAL (1972). Irrespective of the Orpheus narrative, see also SOLODOW (1988) 219: "The story of Pygmalion [...] demonstrates most vividly the power of artist and his art." Leach's interpretation is also built on the Orpheus-Pygmalion analogy, which, in her understanding, turns into its own reverse when Pygmalion falls in love with his creation, and thus ceases to exist as an artist: LEACH (1974) 102–142, 123–125.

Elizabeth Marie Young may be right when she interprets the Orpheus narrative of the *Metamorphoses* in a literary historical context. She claims that Ovid's corporeal Orpheus gives flesh to the Augustan idea of Greco-Roman literature as an organic whole. Accordingly, Orpheus' dismembered body exposes the paradoxes and vulnerability of this synthetic literary *corpus* that incorporates the Greek and Roman tradition.³⁸

The lyre and Lesbos in the Orpheus narrative are truly an unmistakable allusion to the roots and classics of Greek lyric, reminding the reader not just of Sappho and Alcaeus, but Catullus and Horace too, who had brought the tradition of Lesbian lyric to Rome. However, the singer's still-sounding lyre and singing head finally held by Lesbos are characterized not as *Lesbida* ("Lesbian") but more precisely as *Methymnea* (11.55): "Leaving the country stream they came to open sea, and were received on Methymna shore in Lesbos" (*iamque mare inuetae flumen populare relinquunt / et Methymnaeae potiuntur litore Lesbi*: 11.54–55). And Methymna is an unmistakable allusion to another, the archaic Greek poet Arion, who was from Methymna on Lesbos (Hdt 1.23–24) and whose tale appears in Ovid's *Fasti* (2.79–118).

The beginning of the month of February, whose astronomical sign is the Dolphin, prompts Ovid to narrate the story of Arion and his lyre. Ovid gives two explanations for the dolphin's catasterism, the second of which is that "he carried the Lesbian lyre with its master" (*Lesbida cum domino seu tulit ille lyram*: 2.82). Ovid thus creates the opportunity to tell the tale of Arion in detail, in thirty-six lines.

As Carole Newlands demonstrates convincingly, Arion is a programmatic figure for Ovid the elegist.³⁹ In Newlands's reading, Ovid's Arion and the song of his lyre connect him metapoetically to the figure of Ovid himself. Arion, the archetypal figure of lyric poetry, represents Ovid not just as a poet, but as the elegist of the *Fasti*.⁴⁰ Ovid's reference to the myth of Neptunus and Amphitrite at the beginning of the Dolphin-narrative (2.81) evokes Ovid's erotic elegy, which is now replaced with a new kind of elegiac poetry, a calendar poem. Newlands also points out that the image of the dying swan in Arion's final song, with its "mournful rhythm" (*flebilibus numeris*: 2.109) indicates elegy, a genre whose "supposed origin in mourning" Roman poets never forgot. So "Arion's final song is appropriately imagined as a lament for himself which he sings in elegiacs".⁴¹

Lauren Curtis takes Newlands's argument about the programmatic status of Ovid's Arion further "by considering how his version of the story reimagines Posidippus' and Propertius' earlier appropriation of Arion into the elegiac tradition".⁴² She demonstrates how Ovid articulates the authority of his elegiac voice and asserts that his poem, the *Fasti* represents a new kind of Roman elegy. When Ovid uses the story of Arion and his lyre "to introduce his new type of elegy in the *Fasti*, he returns to elegy's most profound association with commemoration."⁴³ Curtis argues that although Arion is an archetypal lyric figure, "his biography also contains the seeds from which would grow the elegiac genre".⁴⁴

³⁸YOUNG (2008) 2.

³⁹NEWLANDS (1995) 175–208.

⁴⁰NEWLANDS (1995) 185–192.

⁴¹NEWLANDS (1995) 183.

⁴²CURTIS (2017) 302.

⁴³CURTIS (2017) 303.

⁴⁴CURTIS (2017) 306.

Newlands's and Curtis's claims can be taken further by considering how the *Metamorphoses*' Orpheus narrative relocates the mythical poet from the epic poetry into the elegiac tradition. In the Orpheus narrative Ovid alludes to his Arion narrative in the *Fasti* at the level of language. When Ovid uses the adjective *Methymnaea* (11.55), which refers to Arion's home, he recalls his elegiac predecessor. Orpheus is mourned by birds, beasts, trees and rivers (11.44–49), just as Marsyas is mourned by satyrs, nymphs and grazing flocks (6.391–397). In both, one can recognize the mourning song, the *threnos*, the putative origin of the Greek elegy. Orpheus' tongue and lyre echo the same, and the banks of the Hebrus echo "the head and the lyre you, Hebrus, received, and (a miracle!) floating in the stream, as if the lyre lamented mournfully, mournfully the lifeless tongue murmured, mournfully the banks replied" (*caput, Hebre, lyramque / excipis, et (mirum!) medio dum labitur amne, / flebile nescio quid queritur lyra, flebile lingua / murmurat exanimis, respondent flebile ripae*: 11.50–53). Just as the sounds of Orpheus' sorrowful love elegies traverse the entirety of the natural landscape, so does nature echo – with the triple repetition of the *fleBILE* – the mourning song of Orpheus' lyre and head, which is at the same time a mourning song for Orpheus. When Ovid uses the adjective *fleBILE* to characterize Orpheus' lyre and song and the nature that echoes them, he refers to Arion's swan song, with its "mournful rhythm" (*flebilibus numeris*: 2.109). By these allusive means, Ovid takes Orpheus back to the origin of elegy and shows him as the most excellent poet of the elegiac poetry, whose *carmen* reverses the cycle of life and death, and whose *carmina* suspend the immobility of trees and stones and create peace in the animal world, that is, override the laws of nature.

At the same time, the songs of Orpheus connecting Book 10 and 11 (Cyparissus, Ganymede, Hyacinthus, Pygmalion, Myrrha, Adonis and Atalanta) have the exclusive theme of love: longing, love sorrow, love tragedy and fulfilled love. In the opening lines of the Ganymedes narrative, the poet, speaking in the voice of Orpheus, says goodbye to epic poetry – *cecini plectro graviore Gigantas* (10.150) – and introduces a new theme and a new tone – a new genre: "now a lighter lyre is needed; we will sing of boys beloved by the celestials, and of girls in love who have been punished for their sinful lust" (*nunc opus est levio re lyra; puerosque canamus / dilectos superis inconcessisque puellas / ignibus attonitas meruisse libidine poenam*: 10.152–154). Both the characters (boys and girls – *pueri* and *puellae*) and the subject matter (erotic love) are particularly representative of the world of the Roman elegiac poetry.

The narrative of Orpheus and Eurydice ends in line with the Roman traditions of the genre: with a playful image of the happiness of finding each other. Grotesquely, the lovers are safe in the Underworld, and "Orpheus looks back – with impunity – at Eurydice whenever he feels like it" (*Eurydicenque suam iam tuto respicit Orpheus*: 11.66). The poet suffering from love and fighting for his love finally succeeds.

In a literary historical reading, the corporeal Orpheus narrative appears as the organic body of Greek and Roman elegy, the text *corpus* of the Greek *threnos* and the Roman love elegy. Ovid's Orpheus incorporates the tradition of Greek and Roman elegiac poetry rather than that of the Greek lyre and the Roman elegy.

CONCLUSION

Farouk F. Grewing argues that the textual body of the *Metamorphoses* can be described as a series of narrative zeugmas, because the meaning of each story unit is a matter of perspective.

In other words, the meaning depends on whether we interpret the story on its own or read it from the perspective of the other narrative with which it overlaps. The narrative of the *Metamorphoses* is a dynamic process of transformation, in which the meaning of a textual unit – like a zeugma – is transformed according to different points of view and is completed in the process of reading.⁴⁵

The performance that takes place in the *corpora* of the *Metamorphoses* becomes visible through this way of reading. The half-finished stone sculptures in the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha, the issue of *mimesis* and *phantasia* found in the narrative of Narcissus and of Pygmalion, the autonomous artist appearing in Arachne's contest narrative, and the problematics of theme selection and composition embodied in the texture, and finally, the beholder's timeless expectation (the work should create such an effect of reality that it appears live) taking form in Pygmalion's sculpture – they all call attention to the entire process and the aesthetic issues of the visual work's creation. The process of creating the text takes place with consistent parallelism throughout: Daphne's body, the print of Io's hoof, the whistle body of Syrinx and Echo's voice are the performance of the poetic text's creation and delivery. The bodies of the Pierides, Marsyas and Orpheus are the fields of theme selection and the aesthetics of the epic and elegiac poetry, and also the fields for the competition and (the not necessarily poetically founded) hierarchy between lyric and elegy.

In the world of the *Metamorphoses*, the boundaries of the body are flexible and permeable. Narcissus considers the figure emerging on the rippling surface of the water to be a living body (*corpus putat esse quod / unda est*: 3.417–418). Echo used to have a body but now is reduced to a voice (*corpus adhuc [...] non vox erat*: 3.359). Perseus first believes the motionless body of Andromeda chained to the rock to be a marble statue (*marmoreum ratus esset opus*: 4.675), which he looks at with such admiration that he almost forgets to move his wings. Phineus thinks he is touching a living body, though it is marble (*tangit corpora; marmor erat*: 5.213–214). Marsyas used to have a body but now is a living wound (*nec quidquam nisi vulnus erat*: 6.388). Pygmalion's lifeless ivory statue, his *virgo eburnea*, became a living body (*corpus erat*: 10.289). This apparently conscious repetition of the syntagm – *corpus erat, vox erat, marmor erat, vulnus erat* – shows the experience of blurred body boundaries as paradigmatic rather than unique. The *corpus* existing in matter – whether a living human body or a body of text carrying a textual or visual narrative – is not only easy to permeate but is also easily destroyed. Minerva tears Arachne's web, Apollo tears Marsyas' skin, the group of Maenades tear Orpheus' body. The sight of Orpheus' body parts scattered on the land of Thrace can also be read as an extension of this experience beyond the limits of the narrative. Only sound is indestructible. The mountains reflect Echo's voice, the reed rustles Syrinx's, the swift river in Phrygia preserves the sound of Marsyas' flute, the lament of Orpheus' lips and lyre continues even after the death of his body.

In the final reading, the creative process completed in the corporeal narrative of the *Metamorphoses* is the creation of the textual body of the *Metamorphoses* itself, its performance. The epilogue (15.871–879) invites the reader to consider this reading, by not only closing this process, but also opening it up for the continuation.⁴⁶ The poem, which reshapes the mythical matter with free creative imagination and turns it into a new body of text, is completed (*Iamque*

⁴⁵GREWING (2017) 160–161.

⁴⁶On the lack of closure of the *Metamorphoses*, see GREWING (2017) 144–145.

opus exegi: 15.871). The poet's body will not survive: "the day, which only has power over my body, can end my uncertain span of years, when it will" (*cum volet, illa dies, quae nil nisi corporis huius / ius habet, incerti spatium mihi finiat aevi*: 15.873–874). The *opus*, however, sounds like a continuous *viva voce*⁴⁷ (*ore legar populi*: 15.878). In the interplay of Orpheus' *vocalia ora* and Ovid's *ore legar*, the voices of the mythical master and his student⁴⁸ merge into one: the poetic voice that lives not in space, but in the eternity of time. The *carmen perpetuum* (1.4) at the beginning of the *Metamorphoses* can be understood not only as a definition of the genre, but also as Ovid's self-reflection, the never-ending echo of his poem – *perque omnia saecula* (15.878) – as the eternity of existing in the resounding body of the text, as the foundation of the last word of the poem – *vivam* (15.879).

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⁴⁷FARRELL (1999) 132.

⁴⁸Researchers frequently identify the Orpheus of the *Metamorphoses* with Ovid: GALINSKY (1975) 90; SOLODOW (1988) 39–40; BARCHIESI (2001) 61.

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