

Apollo and Daphne (1.452–567)

The story of Apollo and Daphne signals a major shift in both tone and theme for the *Metamorphoses*, marked by Apollo's own abrupt transformation from monster-slaying epic hero to frustrated elegiac lover. For, as the god of poetry, Apollo's transformation here indicates that the poem itself is about to undergo a significant metamorphosis. Indeed, the story opens with the introductory formula, 'Apollo's first love was Daphne' (*primus amor Phoebi Daphne* – 1.452), implying that, although Daphne may be the first, she will not be the last, confirming that we are now about to embark upon a series of elegiac love stories concerning the amorous (mis)adventures of the gods – for which Daphne's attempted rape will provide the narrative template.⁸

Echoing his own self-styled metamorphosis as a poet, supposedly forced by Cupid to give up epic and to write love elegy instead (*Amores* 1.1), Ovid directly attributes the cause of Apollo's transformation to the interference of Cupid and, in an inspired metapoetic competition sets Cupid and elegy against Apollo and epic. Still bragging about his recent conquest of the Python, Apollo mocks Cupid and his bow, belittling the god of love as a 'mischievous boy' playing with 'grown-up weapons' (1.456).⁹ Cupid responds to this insult with all the dynamism of an epic hero, flying swiftly up to the peak of Parnassus and shooting two arrows: one, made of gold, into Apollo, instantly inflaming him with *amor*, and a second, made of iron, into the unsuspecting Daphne, causing her to flee from the very idea of *amor* and, of course, from Apollo.¹⁰ With evident irony, Apollo, the virile hero of martial epic, is penetrated and un-manned by Cupid the playful love-god of erotic elegy.

The painful paradox of Daphne's role in this situation is highlighted in Ovid's apostrophe to the girl: *votoque tuo tua forma repugnat* (1.489), literally 'your form/beauty fights against your desire', where the juxtaposition of the Latin *tuo/tua* perfectly

conveys her inner conflict – but also darkly hints that part of Daphne herself is actively complicit in her own attempted rape.¹¹ Indeed, the emphasis here upon Daphne's beauty or *forma* actively mitigating against her own wishes adds a disturbing tone to this tale: it is as if Daphne's beauty makes her 'fair game' for Apollo – a trope that will reappear in Ovid's other rape stories. Ovid, however, playfully revels in the comedy of this situation: Apollo sees Daphne with her long hair flowing loose and wonders what it would look like put up (that is, he immediately desires to change her); he admires her fingers, hands, wrists, her arms and bare shoulders and he imagines how much more beautiful the rest of her must be (that is, he immediately imagines her breasts); and fearing that she may scratch her bare legs as he chases her through rough scrub, he begs her to slow down, promising that if she does, he himself will run more slowly too! The uneven syntax of the Latin further adds to the comedy of this chase scene, ingeniously reproducing the effect of Apollo's breathless panting speech as he tries to run and talk at the same time, puffing '*nympha, precor, Penei, mane!*' (1.504).

Apollo tries in vain to persuade Daphne to stop running, boasting about his godly attributes, but eventually gives up any attempt at persuasion and puts all of his energy into the chase. Here too Ovid changes to a more serious tone and introduces an epic-style simile, likening Apollo to a hound and Daphne to a fleeing hare, only inches away from the dog's muzzle as it closes in behind her (1.533–9). This striking simile prepares us for the inevitable end of the chase, as Daphne's strength and speed fade and Apollo gains ground. Praying to her father, the river-god Peneus, in desperation she pleads: 'If rivers have power over nature / mar the beauty which made me admired too well, by changing / my form' (1.546f). Metamorphosis comes swiftly and almost before she has finished praying her transformation into a laurel tree has begun, her feet turning into roots, her arms into branches and her hair into leaves (1.548–52). Ovid's Latin conveys subtle effects here that an English translation cannot capture: the suddenness of Daphne's transformation is caught neatly by the description of her swift feet, abruptly changed into sluggish roots (*pes modo tam velox pigris radicibus haeret* – 1.551), where the juxtaposition of *velox* (swift) and *pigris*

(sluggish) conveys the very moment of metamorphosis. What is more, Ovid's Latin description of the transformation of Daphne into laurel here inscribes the intriguing possibility of an extra-textual parallel metamorphosis: that of Daphne into a character in Ovid's own *Metamorphoses*. The layer of bark or *liber* (*libro* – 1.549) that encases her body could also be taken to refer to the book or *liber* in which she is now bound in her new form. Like Apollo, with whom Ovid identified at the beginning of this tale, the poet also gets his hands on the girl in the end.

At the level of the narrative, the beautiful nymph has now become a beautiful tree, her external form but not her essential *forma* (beauty) has been changed. This effect of continuity through change is further enhanced by Apollo's response to finding the object of his desire suddenly transformed into a tree: even in this new form, Ovid tells us, Apollo still loved and desired her, feeling her breast encased in bark, embracing her branches as if they were still arms, and planting kisses upon the wood of the trunk, which shrinks back from his touch (1.553–6). Apollo's attempts to possess Daphne physically – that is, to rape her – have been thwarted, but he is still determined to have her as his own, declaring that her evergreen leaves will henceforth be his, that in the future they will wreath the heads of victorious Romans at their triumphs, and hang on the door of Augustus himself.¹² Having made his possession of Daphne complete – even up to Ovid's own Augustan age, (recall Ovid's prologue at 1.4) – Apollo falls silent and the newly formed laurel sways her head/tree top in the breeze (1.566f). Apollo chooses to interpret this as a sign of Daphne's consent, but Ovid leaves room for other interpretations of this, and of the story as a whole. For Daphne only 'seems' (1.567) to nod her assent, and the verb which Ovid chooses to describe this action (*agitasse* – 1.567) carries with it connotations of agitation, of upset and distress. Perhaps Daphne refuses her consent to this final act of (mis)appropriation, just as she refused her consent to Apollo's initial attempts to physically possess her. It is left up to the reader to decide.

Tiresias (3.316–38)

This tale is presented as a light-hearted interlude, introducing Tiresias into the narrative and preparing us for the key role he will play as prophet and seer in the longer stories of Pentheus and Narcissus that follow.⁴³ For, having lived as both a man and a woman, Tiresias has unique insights into the sex lives of both men and women – his sex change(s) resulting from his seeing and striking two mating snakes with his staff in a violent act that is significantly described in the Latin as a religious and sexual violation (*violaverat* – 3.325). When the gods disagree over who enjoys sex more (Jupiter claims that women do; Juno disagrees) Tiresias is called in to arbitrate, but when he agrees with Jupiter, Juno blinds him – in punishment for violating her divine authority, and for intruding upon the sacred mystery of sex, perhaps. His blindness is ostensibly ameliorated by the compensatory prophetic sight that Jupiter bestows upon him, yet this powers of foresight turn out to bring no benefit either to Tiresias or anyone else – as we see in the next story.

Echo and Narcissus (3.339–510)

Tiresias uses his newly acquired powers to predict the future of a new-born babe named Narcissus – the result of yet another rape of a beautiful nymph, this time by the river-god Cephisus. Asked by the child's mother if her son will live a long life, Tiresias replies: 'If he never knows himself' (*si se non noverit* – 3.348) – an ironic inversion of the Greek maxim 'Know thyself' (*gnothi seauton*) famously inscribed on the temple of the oracle at Delphi. Narcissus will not live to see a ripe old age (3.347) because of something he will see that will lead to an early death, in a variation of the motif of the dangerous gaze that runs throughout book 3. What Narcissus sees, of course, is his own reflection in a forest pool. But his obsessive, destructive self-love also results in the death (of sorts) for his narrative

double, his story *imago* (reflection or echo), the nymph Echo, whose story as told here cleverly intersects with and reflects Narcissus' own tale: she too sees this beautiful boy, falls instantly in love, and then pines away when she finds herself and her love rejected.

The story of Narcissus is now one of the most well-known of all ancient myths, not least of all because of the use made of the story by Freud. But, for Ovid's Augustan audience, the tale of Narcissus and his novel type of madness (*novitasque furoris* – 3.350) is likely to have been an entirely new tale.⁴⁴ Indeed, there is much in this characteristically Ovidian new story to appreciate – in particular the reworking (metamorphosing) of motifs familiar from love elegy, interwoven with a witty word-play that makes language itself the subject of a kind of transformation here. When we first meet Echo, she has already lost the power of independent speech, and is able only to repeat the words spoken by others – Juno's punishment for the once talkative nymph's attempts to distract her with idle chatter while Jupiter enjoyed yet another of his adulterous affairs. But this speech impediment does not prevent Echo from (more-or-less) successfully playing the role of an elegiac lover here as she actively pursues Narcissus, repeating his words and in so doing reminding us – as Ovid himself had previously reminded us in his *Amores* – that every lover always already speaks a kind of script, using words that a million lovers have used before them.⁴⁵ Narcissus meanwhile, similarly woos his own reflection by playing the role of an elegiac lover: like a stereotypical locked-out lover or *exclusus amator*, he lies on the side of the pool in which his image is reflected, forgetful of both food and sleep (3.437f); inverting the traditional elegiac lover's complaint that oceans, mountains, walls or doors separate him from his beloved, Narcissus complains about the superficial barrier of water that keeps him apart from the one he loves (3.448–50); and, repeating the consolation voiced by every elegiac lover that he and his beloved will be united after death, he comforts himself with the thought that he and his beloved will die together (3.473).

When the paths of Echo and Narcissus finally cross, Echo is unable to initiate the sweet-talk (*blanditiae*) traditionally employed by the elegiac lover to win-over his or her beloved, so

instead she waits for Narcissus to make the first move in their one-sided courtship, and then mirrors back to him his words – transforming their original meaning into her own. Here it is worth looking at the original Latin to see how Ovid produces this ingenious echoing effect – Narcissus’ words are in bold and Echo’s echoes are italicized (3.379–92):

forte puer comitum seductus ab agmine fido
dixerat: **‘ecquis adest?’** et *‘adest’* responderat Echo.
hic stupet, utque aciem partes dimittit in omnes,
voce **‘veni!’** magna clamat: vocat illa vocantem.
respicit et rursus nullo veniente **‘quid’** inquit
‘me fugis?’ et totidem, quot dixit, verba recepit.
perstat et alternae deceptus imagine vocis
‘huc coeamus’ ait, nullique libentius umquam
responsura sono *‘coeamus’* rettulit Echo,
et verbis favet ipsa suis egressaque silva
ibat, ut iniceret sperato bracchia collo.
ille fugit fugiensque **‘manus complexibus aufer!’**
ante’ ait **‘emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri’**;
rettulit illa nihil nisi *‘sit tibi copia nostri.’*

Narcissus once took a different path from his trusty companions. **‘Is anyone there?’** he said. *‘. . . one there?’* came Echo’s answer. Startled, he searched with his eyes all round the glade and loudly shouted, **‘Come here!’** *‘Come here!’* the voice threw back to the caller.

He looks behind him and, once again, when no one emerges, **‘Why are you running away?’** he cries. His words come ringing back. His body freezes. Deceived by his voice’s reflection, the youth calls out yet again, **‘This way! We must come together!’** Echo with rapturous joy responds, *‘We must come together!’* To prove her words, she burst in excitement out of the forest, arms outstretched to fling them around the shoulders she yearned for.

Shrinking in horror, he yelled, **‘Hands off! May I die before you enjoy my body.’** Her only reply was *‘. . . enjoy my body.’*

Echo’s transformation of Narcissus’ words here is both pathetic and brilliant: *veni* (3.382) as spoken by Narcissus, suggests an

entirely innocent desire on Narcissus' behalf for Echo to 'come' to him. Interpreted and repeated by Echo, however, *veni* also suggests a desire of a more sexual nature. Similarly, *coeamus* (3.386) as spoken by Narcissus, suggests his wish for them to 'come together'. Interpreted and repeated by Echo, however, *coeamus* euphemistically suggests, once again, a desire of a more erotic nature, as she turns Narcissus' invitation (We must come together – 3.386) into an acceptance (We must come together – 3.387), and his curse (May I die before you enjoy my body – 3.391) into an invitation (enjoy my body – 3.392).

Readers and critics of the *Metamorphoses* are divided in their responses to Echo's echoes. Naomi Segal suggests that however brilliant her twisting of Narcissus' words, Echo remains a passive and pathetic figure.⁴⁶ Garth Tissol, on the other hand, sees Echo as a creative force as her punning word-play makes Narcissus' words her own.⁴⁷ In fact, in her creative appropriation, translation and transformation of another's words, Echo can be seen as a model for the poet Ovid himself, her words echoing his own poetic project in the *Metamorphoses*, where he too creatively appropriates, translates and transforms the words and stories of others into a text that fully represents his own designs and desires.

So crucial is this metamorphic aspect of the story, and so cleverly interwoven into the texture of the narrative is this motif of linguistic transformation, that the physical metamorphoses of both Echo and Narcissus are tagged on to the end of this tale, seemingly as an incidental and anticlimactic afterthought. So, the lovelorn Echo physically fades away, leaving only her voice and her name – in the form of the echo we find in lonely spots. And the lovelorn Narcissus similarly pines away and dies – leaving only a flower in place of his body (*pro corpore* – 3.509): a strange kind of transformation (if that is what this is). The yellow and white flower that we know as the narcissus seems to be a replacement *for* rather than a transformation *of* the narcissistic boy here – its colours reflecting the similes Ovid uses to describe the marble and ivory whiteness (3.419–23) of his skin, and the yellow of the melting wax to which Ovid likens his wasting away (3.487–93). The Narcissus-flower seems just another metaphor for the boy. After his death we see Narcissus in the underworld, still gazing at his reflection in the

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pools of the river Styx (3.505) and Echo again echoing the sad laments of the mourners at Narcissus' funeral – a fitting conclusion that figures both continuity and change for these characters.

Book Ten

Orpheus and Eurydice (10.1–85)

From the happy wedding of Iphis and Ianthe, Ovid segues cinematically into the next book by following the god of conjugal union, Hymen, tracking the god as he flies on to his next booking at the wedding of Orpheus and Eurydice. But Hymen fails to bring lucky omens or happy faces to this couple (10.4f). In direct contrast to the joyous wedding of Iphis and Ianthe, the union between Orpheus and Eurydice is not a happy occasion, and the spluttering of the wedding torch as it refuses to catch fire (10.6f) adds an unlucky omen to the marriage. After this dark foreshadowing of future disaster for bride and groom it hardly comes as a surprise when Eurydice is bitten by a snake and falls down dead. Sara Mack succinctly highlights the prosaic character of Ovid's description of Eurydice's death:⁴⁶

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‘Nothing is chosen for emotional effect. Eurydice drops dead, no suspense, no pathos, just *occidit* [she dies], bitten by a snake.’ Orpheus then makes his way down to the underworld with (what Ovid represents as) something of a half-hearted attempt to persuade the gods there to give her back (10.12). But, as he makes his way back to the upper-world with Eurydice following behind him – permission for her return granted only if Orpheus does not look back at her (10.50f) – he is unable to control the desire to look and he turns only to see her slip back to Hell, his triumphant quest transformed into a pitiable failure at the climactic moment (10.55–63).⁴⁷

There is no physical metamorphosis here, but this version of the story of Orpheus, narrated across books 10 and 11 of the *Metamorphoses* (10.1–11.84), is effectively a transformation of Virgil’s *Georgics* 4, a re-reading that turns tragedy into comedy, and Virgilian pathos into Ovidian bathos.⁴⁸ In fact, Ovid seems to challenge every detail of Virgil’s famous version of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth: Virgil avoids quoting Orpheus’ song to the gods of the underworld, Ovid reproduces it in full; Virgil’s Eurydice speaks a lament as she dies for a second time, Ovid’s Eurydice says nothing; Virgil’s Orpheus mourns Eurydice for seven months, Ovid’s Orpheus mourns for seven days; Virgil’s Orpheus rejects women, Ovid’s Orpheus also turns to boys for his sexual fulfilment; and finally, while the decapitated head of Virgil’s Orpheus floats down the river Hebrus calling plaintively to his Eurydice, the head and lyre of Ovid’s Orpheus produce an elegiac lament, a pathetic ‘weepy something or other’ (*flebile nescio quid* – 11.52).