

## XXV. Cupid and Venus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

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This study\* is an investigation of the possibility that a level of religious and philosophical significance exists in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, even—and especially—where Ovid concerns himself with his favourite theme, love. Indications may be found that Ovid makes use of traditions in which Cupid and Venus have far more than erotic importance. It will be argued that Cupid is to be seen in the light of the “Orphic” Phanes and Empedocles’ *Philotês*, and that Venus is presented in three dimensions by Ovid, the cosmological and patriotic dimensions as well as the erotic. Finally, it appears that Ovid has deepened the significance of the love-motif itself, by adding implications which are not to be found in the earlier elegiac works.

For many years, Ovid has been regarded as a poet whose work, at least before his exile, might be summed up as “cheerfully immoral” or even “naughty.”<sup>1</sup> His concern with love—Roman love in the *Amores* and *Ars*, mythical love in the *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses*—seemed to issue in sophisticated but morally subversive poetry. Apparently that stern old moralist Augustus thought so, at any rate,<sup>2</sup> and this man with a personal grievance against Ovid has been followed by the majority of modern critics.

Love, in which the soul is laid most bare, had an undenied attraction for Ovid, whose interest in psychology was great. As Rand, Fränkel, and Otis (among others) have shown,<sup>3</sup> the *Amores* delights in the ironic twists of the situation between lover and mistress; both here and in the *Ars* Ovid found ample scope for his

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<sup>1</sup> The words are Highet's: *Poets in a Landscape* (New York 1957) 177.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Tristia* 2, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> E. K. Rand, “Ovid and the Spirit of Metamorphosis” in *Harvard Essays on Classical Subjects*, ed. by H. W. Smyth (Cambridge, Mass. 1912) 209–38, especially 229; Hermann Fränkel, *Ovid: A Poet between Two Worlds* (Berkeley 1945) 10–35; Brooks Otis, “Ovid and the Augustans,” *TAPA* 69 (1938) 194–211.

wit. When he turned to myth, Ovid attempted to penetrate more deeply into the soul, and both the *Heroides* and the *Metamorphoses* contain many large-scale psychological studies. These poems are less "naughty," more analytical.

Is there more to the *Metamorphoses* than this? The histories of literature seem to say that the poem's chief value is in pulling together an extraordinarily large range of mythology. An extreme statement of this view calls the *Metamorphoses* "a sort of *Golden Bough* in poetry: a collection of all the strangest myths."<sup>4</sup> This approach suggests to the reader that Ovid's epic is a mere versified handbook, or a kind of spicy Bulfinch.

The Middle Ages did not look upon Ovid in this way.<sup>5</sup> His work was thought to be more profoundly meaningful, even moral, when the reader went beneath its glittering surface. *Ovide moralisé* has become something of a joke among scholars, yet Fränkel has shown that morals may not inappropriately be drawn from some of the stories in the *Metamorphoses*;<sup>6</sup> and Robertson has argued powerfully in defense of the mediaeval approach.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the most important contribution of these scholars has been the suggestion that Ovid's understanding of the human situation shines through his poetry and that we may have something to learn from it. By following this thought, the present study seeks to examine the erotic element of the *Metamorphoses*, to weigh the mediaeval belief that the poem contains important meaning.

A test of this view is provided by the first love story. After an introductory philosophical passage describing the creation, and after an account of Lycaon's crime, followed by the deluge and the repopulation of the earth, Ovid moves to the story of Apollo's destruction of Python. Immediately after this tale the love

<sup>4</sup> Highet (above, note 1) 183. I have quoted an extreme example, but this attitude toward the poem seems to prevail in the handbooks, giving the student the notion that there is little more to find in the poem; e.g. W. Y. Sellar, *The Roman Poets of the Augustan Age—Horace and the Elegiac Poets* (Oxford 1899) 347; J. W. Mackail, *Latin Literature* (New York 1895) 140–1; M. M. Crump, *The Epyllion from Theocritus to Ovid* (Oxford 1931) 200.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. D. W. Robertson, "Chrétien's *Cligés* and the Ovidian Spirit," *Comparative Literature* 7 (1955) 34–7 and L. P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled* (Cambridge 1955) 383–4 for recent discussions of this matter.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. his treatment of the Narcissus story (above, note 3), 82–5.

<sup>7</sup> Above, note 5.

theme is first brought into the poem. Apollo, pleased with his prowess, does not take the little boy Cupid seriously (1.452–65):<sup>8</sup>

Primus amor Phoebi Daphne Peneia, quem non  
 fors ignara dedit, sed saeva Cupidinis ira.  
 Delius hunc nuper, victa serpente superbus,  
 viderat adducto flectentem cornua nervo  
 “quid” que “tibi, lascive puer, cum fortibus armis?”  
 dixerat: “ista decent umeros gestamina nostros,  
 qui dare certa ferae, dare vulnera possumus hosti,  
 qui modo pestifero tot iugera ventre prementem  
 stravimus innumeris tumidum Pythona sagittis.  
 tu face nescio quos esto contentus amores  
 inritare tua, nec laudes adsere nostras!”  
 filius huic Veneris “figat tuus omnia, Phoebe,  
 te meus arcus” ait; “quantoque animalia cedunt  
 cuncta deo, tanto minor est tua gloria nostra.”

Except that Jupiter himself appears in the stories of Lycaon and the flood, this is the first story in which the gods take any part; we may expect that Ovid would indicate here his attitude toward them. While recognizing that Ovid's love of paradox would add to his relish of Cupid's answer to Apollo, we may also find a deeper significance in the last sentence and in the subsequent fulfillment of Cupid's threat, for, with Apollo's own weapons, Cupid demonstrates his authority. And the substance of the *Metamorphoses* goes to show that his superiority extends over all of the gods, as will be seen below.

The passage begins with the simple words *primus amor* (1.452), a device which Tacitus was to employ when he began his account of Tiberius' principate with the phrase *primum facinus* (*Ann.* 1.6). The implication is clear: just as we are to view the principate as a series of crimes, the *Metamorphoses* is meant to be a series of love stories, of Apollo and of others. This is hardly surprising and accords very well with the usual interpretation of Ovid's work. But there may be more here. The very first poem of the

<sup>8</sup> The text used in all quotations of the *Metamorphoses* is that of M. Haupt, O. Korn, H. J. Müller, and R. Ehwald, *Die Metamorphosen des P. Ovidius Naso* (vol. 1<sup>8</sup>, Berlin 1903; vol. 2<sup>3</sup>, Berlin 1898). Quotations from other Ovidian works are taken from the Loeb text.

*Amores* also begins with a conflict of Cupid and Apollo (*Am.* 1.1.13-16):

sunt tibi magna, puer, nimiumque potentia regna;  
 cur opus adfectas, ambitiose, novum?  
 an, quod ubique, tuum est? tua sunt Heliconia tempe?  
 vix etiam Phoebus iam lyra tuta sua est?

These lines say that Phoebus' lyre is no longer his, that Cupid encroaches on what was once Apollo's sole domain. Ovid is clearly employing his wittily paradoxical manner. But to this meaning the passage from the *Metamorphoses* adds a wider significance, for Cupid now asserts and maintains his superiority in *gloria* (1.465), showing that he is supreme among the gods.

Because of his *saeva ira* (1.453), Cupid takes action against Apollo. Here may be seen a reflection of the common theme of a Wrath at the beginning of an epic poem, but Ovid adds an element not present in Apollonius or Vergil, the fact that the victim deserves his fate. Apollo is *superbus* (1.454), insults Cupid as *lascive puer* (1.456), and tells him to be content *amores inritare* (1.461-2). His pride in his victory over Python makes him lose perspective on the relative power of Cupid and the other gods, and Cupid is compelled to teach him his place.

It is noteworthy that Cupid meets Apollo on the latter's own ground, defeating him with Apollo's characteristic weapons, the bow and arrow. In this way Cupid asserts his supremacy in the most convincing way possible; perhaps it was for this reason that Ovid chose this story to introduce the erotic theme. Apollo admits the conclusiveness of his defeat, using the very word *certa* of which in 1.458 he had boasted (1.519-20):

certa quidem nostra est, nostra tamen una sagitta  
 certior . . .

Apollo is forced to yield, and Cupid's claim is justified (1.464-5):

quantoque animalia cedunt  
 cuncta deo, tanto minor est tua gloria nostra.

Apollo suffers for his blindness. His failure to recognize Cupid's superiority is symbolic of his devotion to the arts of strength—hunting and fighting. The *Amores* makes clear Ovid's sympathies on this question: he favors love, which Apollo here

thinks puerile. The god, although confident in his strength, is doomed. Parallel in some respects is Ovid's account of the debate between Ajax and Ulysses over Achilles' armor (13.1-398). Strength is not sufficient, for the mental power of a Ulysses can overcome it (13.383):

. . . fortisque viri tulit arma disertus.

Mental or spiritual power always wins out over the physical, and love is triumphant over violence.

Cupid's first appearance, then, serves to emphasize his great superiority over the other gods, who are as far below him as mortal beings are below the gods. That this is not too much to draw from one passage is shown by an important speech of Venus to her son just before the rape of Proserpina (5.365-79):

"arma manusque meae, mea, nate, potentia" dixit,  
 "illa, quibus superas omnes, cape tela, Cupido,  
 inque dei pectus celeres molire sagittas,  
 cui triplicis cessit fortuna novissima regni!  
 tu superos ipsumque Iovem, tu numina ponti  
 victa domas ipsumque, regit qui numina ponti:  
 Tartara quid cessant? cur non matrisque tuumque  
 imperium profers? agitur pars tertia mundi,  
 et tamen in caelo, quae iam patientia nostra est,  
 spernimur, ac mecum vires minuuntur Amoris.  
 Pallada nonne vides iaculatricemque Dianam  
 abscessisse mihi? Cereris quoque filia virgo,  
 si patiemur, erit; nam spes adfectat easdem.  
 at tu pro socio, si qua est ea gratia, regno  
 iunge deam patruo!"

The authority of Venus and Cupid has been challenged by Hades and by the virgin goddesses, and under this provocation Venus and Cupid act. Ovid is careful to justify their retribution, as he was in the Apollo story and will be in Book 10, where the stories of Venus' vengeance are told.

"*Superas omnes*," says Venus to Cupid (5.366), rightly assuming as true what the Daphne and Apollo story proved. Cupid rules the gods on Olympus (*superos*, 5.369), the gods of the sea (5.369), and Neptune (5.370), as well as Jupiter himself (5.369). The Proserpina story, among its other functions in the poem, shows Cupid's conquest of Hades (the third of the kingly brothers) and of one of

the virgin goddesses. Only here in the tradition does the story of Proserpina emphasize the power of Cupid in such a way; only here is the motive Venus' anger at being slighted and the moral Cupid's irresistible might. Even Ovid's other version, in *Fasti* 4.419–620, does not give this background. But here the story is told to show Cupid's power, for after his mother's appeal he once more asserts his supremacy by overcoming Dis and, through him, Proserpina. Later, Orpheus does not fail to mention this earlier occasion on which Love was victorious over Hades (10.29):

vos (*sc.* Dis and Proserpina) quoque iunxit Amor.

These two stories, the only exploits of Cupid which are told in full detail, represent him as conquering gods of three different types: Apollo in the heavens, Proserpina on earth, and Dis beneath it. And we may be sure that these are not the only victims of the god, for we have Venus' words that Cupid conquers all the gods (5.369–70). None of these other conquests is told at any length in the *Metamorphoses*, but there is confirmation of Cupid's powers in many stories throughout the poem. Mention of some may be found in the account of Arachne's web (6.103–28), although Cupid is not mentioned and the words *caelestia crimina* (6.131) imply some responsibility on the part of the gods for their actions, even in love.

It is true that in most of the love stories Cupid is not named, but there is no reason to doubt his activity in them. His specific denial of responsibility for Myrrha's passion (10.311):

ipse negat nocuisse tibi sua tela Cupido,

indicates that in most cases he is accountable. Venus' words quoted above may be taken as the truth; for only Cupid has the power to make gods (even Venus, 10.525–30) fall in love, and no god can harm him.

For the purposes of his poem, then, Ovid has established the convention that Cupid is supreme among the gods, having the same relationship to them that they have to mortals. Even Venus must seek his aid, as she does in Book 5. And after the victory over Dis he rules the triple kingdom of Heaven, Sea, and Hades.

It is to be expected that a poet of Ovid's temperament would exalt Cupid. But the stories which have just been considered

seem to imply a more than erotic significance to the god, and only by insisting on viewing the *Metamorphoses* as nothing but graceful mythology can this possibility be ignored. Such an insistence must ignore the philosophical passages (1.5–88 and 15.75–478), for they indicate that Ovid tries to do more than tell stories for amusement alone. They must be examined before we dismiss Cupid as does Apollo, calling him *lascivus puer* and allowing him no importance.

Since it is in the philosophical passages that Ovid most clearly has a serious purpose, perhaps in them a hint may be found giving aid in the interpretation of the bulk of the poem. There is an interesting relationship between the two passages. Although the first has strongly Stoic leanings, it also includes many ideas which are derived, perhaps indirectly, from Empedocles.<sup>9</sup> The second passage is put into the mouth of Pythagoras. Both of these philosophers are traditionally linked with the rather amorphous body of thought known as "Orphism", their vegetarianism and belief in reincarnation being the most important connections.<sup>10</sup> Nor

<sup>9</sup> Carlo Pascal, "L'imitazione di Empedocle nelle Metamorfosi di Ovidio" in his *Graecia capta* (Firenze 1905) 129–51, was the first to notice many of the parallels. Some of his findings were criticized by F. E. Robbins, "The Creation Story in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1," *CP* 8 (1913) 401–14, but for the most part Pascal's conclusions stand up. Among the important similarities may be cited the following:

<i>Met.</i> 1.5	parallel to Apollonius, <i>Arg.</i> 1.496–7 (Empedoclean, according to the scholiast on 1.498).
1.6	„ „ Empedocles B 27.3–4.
1.9	„ „ Apollonius 1.498 (a line which Ovid knew, and translated in <i>Fasti</i> 1.107).
1.10–4	„ „ Empedocles B 27.1–2.
1.24–5	„ „ Empedocles B 35.3–5.
1.80–1	„ „ Empedocles B 62.4–5.

Further discussion of Ovid's debt to Empedocles may be found in Luigi Alfonsi, "L'inquadramento filosofico delle Metamorfosi ovidiane" in *Ovidiana*, ed. by N. I. Herescu (Paris 1958) 266.

<sup>10</sup> I do not wish to make much of the word "Orphism," but it is necessary to the argument that a minimum understanding be reached. Destructive criticism (e.g. I. M. Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus* (Berkeley 1941)) has cleared away much of the confusion about the word "Orphism," leaving a small but solid foundation on which to build. Dodds provides what is perhaps the best summary of the current situation:

"I do know on good authority that three things were taught in some of [the early religious poems ascribed to Orpheus], namely, that the body is the prisonhouse of the soul; that vegetarianism is an essential rule of life; and that the unpleasant consequences of sin, both in this world and in the next, can be washed away by ritual means. That they taught the most famous of so-called 'Orphic' doctrines, the transmigration of souls, is not, as it happens, directly attested by anyone in the Classical

is this the only hint that Ovid is thinking along Orphic lines, for Orpheus himself is given more than an entire book, 10.1–11.84, in which his story is told and in which he sings a long song detailing the power of love. This passage is placed at a climax of the *Metamorphoses*, where Ovid is on the point of shifting his focus from the realm of myth to the legendary past of the Trojan War and Rome's genesis. Orpheus' song brings to a virtual end the cycle of myth and introduces Venus as a powerful deity in her own right.

"Orphism," we may say, forms a bridge in the *Metamorphoses*, linking the Empedoclean beginning and the Pythagorean ending by means of Orpheus' song at the turning point. Ovid's use of Cupid, too, may be related to the Orphic tradition, at least in its roots, for the Orphics thought of Eros or Phanes as the supreme deity, the oldest of the gods and creator of all.<sup>11</sup> It was this idea which Empedocles put into philosophical verse when he made *Philotês* the organizing principle of the universe.<sup>12</sup>

Age; but it may, I think, be inferred without undue rashness from the conception of the body as a prison where the soul is punished for its past sins." (E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* [Berkeley 1951] 149.)

He adds, "There cannot in fact have been any very clear-cut distinction between the Orphic teaching, at any rate in some of its forms, and Pythagoreanism."

For the argument here, the important facts are the belief in vegetarianism as "the Orphic way of life" (Plato, *Leg.* 6.782c), the doctrine of transmigration (taught by Pythagoras in *Met.* 15. 75–478), and the close connection between Orphism and Pythagoreanism. To this I would wish to add the connection between Orphism and Empedocles, who also taught vegetarianism and transmigration of the soul, and who was believed to have been a pupil of Pythagoras (Timaeus, *apud* Diogenes Laertius 8.54).

An important connection between Orpheus and Pythagoras in the *Metamorphoses* has been noticed by R. Crahay and J. Hubaux, "Sous le masque de Pythagore" in *Ovidiana* (above, note 9) 293.

<sup>11</sup> W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*<sup>2</sup> (London 1952) 95–7, argues convincingly for the identification of Phanes Protogonos and Eros. Cf. O. Kern, *Orphicorum fragmenta* (Berlin 1922) fr. 1, 61, 72–4, 82–3, and 85, *inter alia*; the beginning of Phaedrus' speech in Plato's *Symposium* 178A–c is interesting in this connection, because it seems to give the ordinary interpretation of Eros in classical Athens.

<sup>12</sup> It may seem to be going too far to call *Philotês* the organizing principle, inasmuch as Empedocles himself says nothing that can be strictly interpreted to support the statement. But the Empedoclean line of Apollonius (1.498):

νείκεος ἐξ ὀλοοῦ διέκρiven ἀμφὶς ἕκαστα

indicates that an easy simplification of the doctrine was commonly made—that Strife causes disorder and *Philotês* order.

The Stoics, who were also an important source for Ovid's philosophical passages

Seen in this way, the supremacy of Cupid in the *Metamorphoses* seems no accident, nor is it simply a continuation of the erotic interest of the earlier elegies. Cupid's supremacy is associated with the philosophical bases of the poem: the Empedoclean scheme of creation, and the Orphic-Pythagorean idea of reincarnation, which helps support the idea of metamorphosis. This association is the closer for the fact that the Daphne-Apollo story follows hard upon a brief account of the spontaneous generation of life (1.416-37) which owes much to Empedocles. The ideas of the philosopher are in the background of the whole of Book 1 and are used to interpret the stories told there. Their presence allows us to give Cupid his due importance as cosmological force, not merely emotion.

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In many stories Venus fulfills the same function as Cupid in the stories discussed above. Again Ovid is using a deity who may be thought of as a personification of a natural force; Empedocles five times uses the name Aphrodite instead of the abstraction *Philotês*.<sup>13</sup> To the Orphic, as to Lucretius (1.1-49), Aphrodite or Venus meant the source of all things, e.g. in her Orphic *Hymn* (55.4-5)

πάντα γὰρ ἐκ σέθεν ἐστίν, ὑπεξεύξω δέ <τε> κόσμον  
καὶ κρατέεις τρισσῶν μοιρῶν, γεννᾷς δὲ τὰ πάντα .

Later in the same *Hymn* she is called *biodôti* (55.12).

This Greek notion of Aphrodite is carried over into Latin in the concept of *alma Venus*, who appears at the beginning of *De rerum natura* (1.2), at the very end of Horace's *Odes* (4.15.31-2), twice in the *Aeneid* (1.618 and 10.332), and four times in the *Metamorphoses* (10.230, 13.759, 14.478, and 15.844). The epithet *alma* applied to Venus may well be interpreted as having a cosmological significance, for the idea of fostering is closely related to the thoughts expressed in the Orphic *Hymn to Aphrodite* quoted above. And in Latin the notion of Venus as fostering is

(cf. the notes on 1.5-88 and 15.75-478 in the edition of the *Metamorphoses* by Haupt *et al.* (above, note 8)), seem to have followed some of Empedocles' ideas on the importance of love; cf. Ernesto Rebechesu, *L'interpretazione stoica del mito* (Todi 1924) 77-8.

<sup>13</sup> Empedocles B 17.24; 22.5; 71.4; 86.1; 87.1.

inseparably linked to the idea of Venus as ancestor of the Roman race through her son Aeneas. It is for this reason that the epithet appears thrice in the closing books of the *Metamorphoses*, after the theme of the Trojan migration to Italy has been introduced. Venus, then, has a triple function in the poem: first, through her usual position as goddess of love; secondly, through her cosmological attributes, seen in Empedocles and some of the earlier stories in the *Metamorphoses*; finally, through her relationship to the Romans and the great metamorphosis of Troy into Rome at the end of the poem. In many of the stories more than one of these functions is involved.

Venus does not appear prominently in the early books of the *Metamorphoses*. In 3.132 she is barely mentioned as the mother of Harmonia, in 4.288 as the mother of Hermaphroditus. In 4.171-92 Ovid borrows from *Odyssey* 8.266-366 (the Lay of Demodocus) the story in which Hephaestus traps Ares and Aphrodite in adultery. But after Book 4 the stories of Venus seem to take on a greater significance. We have already considered the meaning of her speech in Book 5, asserting the authority of love over the gods.

There are two long stretches in the *Metamorphoses* where special attention is paid to Venus. The first is Orpheus' long song (10.148-739); the second is the last two and a half books, beginning with the introduction of Aeneas in 13.625. Interestingly enough Venus is not mentioned at all in the interval between these two places, nor does she appear from the middle of Book 5 until 9.424, where Ovid notes that she attempted to gain Anchises' rejuvenation.<sup>14</sup>

The song of Orpheus, which comprises almost all of Book 10, has love for its theme. The singer announces this (10.152-4):

. . . puerosque canamus  
dilectos superis inconcessisque puellas  
ignibus attonitas meruisse libidine poenam.

<sup>14</sup> Crump (above, note 4) 274 remarks that the *Metamorphoses* has three major divisions, ending at 6.420, 11.193, and 15.879. Subtracting an introduction of 451 lines from the first, we find that each division is of approximately the same length—3836, 3774, and 3927 lines respectively. Each time Venus appears in the poem in an important way, it is near the end of one of these sections, e.g. the Proserpina story at the end of the first, Orpheus' song in the second, and her appearances as protectress of Rome from 13.625 on.

That Orpheus, himself unhappy in love, should sing on this theme is not surprising, but it may add to our understanding of his song to realise that the Orphic tradition has important connections with the idea of love, as sketched above. Is it possible that Orpheus is sometimes seen by Ovid as more than a legendary bard, as the eponymous ancestor of the Orphic tradition current in Ovid's day?

Venus is a leading figure in the stories Orpheus tells, and a hint of what is to come is given in the first, brief song at the court of Dis (10.26–9):

vicit Amor. supera deus hic bene notus in ora est;  
an sit et hic, dubito: sed et hic tamen auguror esse,  
famaque si veteris non est mentita rapinae,  
vos quoque iunxit Amor.

Orpheus is referring to the story of Proserpina's rape, and in so doing he ties Book 10 to Book 5, reinforcing the connection noted above. The theme of love's power is to run throughout Book 10, where gods are shown succumbing to it and where the punishments of those who defy it are told.

Orpheus' longer song opens with the declaration, conventional enough, that all things yield to the rule of Jupiter (10.148):

. . . cedunt Iovis omnia regno.

But what follows undercuts this traditional belief, for Jupiter is immediately shown to be subject to love and to wish to be something other than what he is (10.156–7):

. . . et inventum est aliquid, quod Iuppiter esse,  
quam quod erat, mallet.

A similar story of homosexual attraction between a god and a youth is the subsequent account of Apollo and Hyacinthus. Venus appears in neither of these stories, but the more general power of *Amor* may be said to be operating here.

Venus first comes on the scene in the story of the Propoetides and the digression about the Cerastae. The latter were impious maidens who sacrificed their guests (10.228) on the very altar of Jupiter Hospes. Since their city was sacred to Venus, she—not Jupiter—undertook their punishment. Her intention was to leave the city altogether, but she remembered the innocent people

there and determined to inflict a special punishment on the Cerastae alone (10.232-4):

exilio poenam potius gens inopia pendat  
vel nece vel siquid medium est mortisque fugaeque.  
idque quid esse potest, nisi versae poena figurae?

The idea of metamorphosis as a compromise between two states occurs again in the song, in the story of Myrrha, whose transformation into a tree left her between the worlds of the living and the dead. The idea is crucial for an understanding of what metamorphosis meant to Ovid.

The story of the Propoetides again illustrates Venus' anger. In spite of the horrible example of the Cerastae, who were turned into bulls, the Propoetides scorned the divinity of Venus. They showed their contempt of her by becoming prostitutes and fell victims to a curiously appropriate punishment, for they were turned to stone "as their shame left them and the blood in their faces became hard" (10.241), i.e., they were unable to blush.

The Pygmalion story, which follows immediately and is indeed connected to the account of the Propoetides, is carefully shaped to provide an exact reversal of the situation.<sup>15</sup> Pygmalion had become disgusted with women because of the Propoetides, and he, like Orpheus himself, *diu consorte carebat* (10.246). The Propoetides, because they defied Venus, were turned to stone; Pygmalion's statue, because he honored Venus, was turned to human flesh. The similarities and differences between the two situations, even to the blushing, are well summarized in the lines (10.292-4):

. . . dataque oscula virgo  
sensit et erubuit timidumque ad lumina lumen  
attollens pariter cum caelo vidit amantem.

As, in a sense, Pygmalion married his daughter,<sup>16</sup> the next story takes up a similar relationship among Pygmalion's descendants. But this time Venus and Cupid take no responsibility for the unhappy outcome (10.311):

ipse negat nocuisse tibi sua tela Cupido.

<sup>15</sup> Fränkel (above, note 3) 95.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 96. Cf. also P. Ferrarino, "Laus Veneris" in *Ovidiana* (above, note 9) 310.

All blame for the incestuous love lies on the human plane. Venus again figures in the succeeding story, which continues the history of Pygmalion's family. The introduction shows Cupid's power even over his mother. While he was kissing her, one of his arrows grazed Venus, and she fell in love with Myrrha's son, Adonis. In her love for a mortal, she loses some of her divine characteristics (10.532):

abstinet et caelo: caelo praefertur Adonis.

Smitten herself, she becomes helpless before mundane forces (10.547-9):

non movet aetas  
nec facies nec quae Venerem movere, leones  
saetigerosque sues oculosque animosque ferarum.

This love, like that of Apollo at the beginning of the song, has an unhappy outcome, and all Venus can do after Adonis' death is transform his blood into a flower; here at the close of the song we are reminded of the beginning, where Apollo performed the same metamorphosis on his lover's blood.

The story of Hippomenes and Atalanta is told as a digression in the middle of the Adonis story. Once more Venus is shown as the helper of love, ready to grant prayers made to her. When mortals acknowledge her power, Venus is propitious. But the end of the story illustrates the converse, that when Venus is neglected or scorned, she punishes swiftly (10.682-5):

. . . nec grates inmemor egit,  
nec mihi tura dedit! subitam convertor in iram,  
contemptuque dolens, ne sim spernenda futuris,  
exemplo caveo meque ipsa exhortor in ambos .

When Hippomenes defiles Cybele's temple, he and Atalanta are changed into lions, and Venus admits her part in causing their sin (10.689-90):

illic concubitus intempestiva cupido  
occupat Hippomenen a numine concita nostro.

This series of stories making up Orpheus' song illustrates one point: the overwhelming power of love. In this respect Ovid is emphasizing nothing new; but when Venus' son Aeneas is introduced (*Cythereius heros*, 13.625), Ovid begins to place a new emphasis on the goddess. Although the significance which has already

been given her is not lost, she is seen more and more as the ancestress of the Roman people, guiding their destiny at the crises of their national life. That the conceptions of Venus as natural force and as protectress of Rome are not, for Ovid, mutually exclusive is shown by an important passage of the *Fasti* (4.91-5, 117-9, 123-4):

illa (*sc.* alma Venus) quidem totum dignissima temperat orbem;  
 illa tenet nullo regna minora deo,  
 iuraque dat caelo, terrae, natalibus undis,  
 perque suos initus continet omne genus.  
 illa deos omnes (longum est numerare) creavit .

quid, quod ubique potens templisque frequentibus aucta,  
 urbe tamen nostra ius dea maius habet?  
 pro Troia, Romane, tua Venus arma ferebat .

Assaricque nurus dicta est, ut scilicet olim  
 magnus Iuleos Caesar haberet avos.

These lines show a clear progression of thought, moving from the cosmological functions of Venus in the first bit quoted, to her specifically patriotic function in the third. In a recent article, Ferrarino examines the importance of Venus in Ovid's poetry as a whole and finds in her a symbol, "Venere civilizzatrice: dea della vita e dell'amore, del progresso civile e del conforto umano."<sup>17</sup> And, although in the passage quoted above the cosmological and the patriotic are not unrelated, the opening lines, from *Venus . . . alma* in line 90, stress her function as the foundation of life and creator of the gods.

The Roman theme is carried on in Books 14 and 15. Venus watches Aeneas' triumph over Turnus and takes the initiative in securing her son's deification (14.584-608), as she had already done for Ino and Melicertes (4.531-42). At the end of Book 14 Ovid tells the story of Venus' saving Rome at the time of the Sabine invasion (14.772-804). And finally she carries Caesar's soul to heaven (15.843-6):

Vix ea fatus erat, media cum sede senatus  
 constitit alma Venus nulli cernenda suique  
 Caesaris eripuit membris nec in aera solvi  
 passa recentem animam caelestibus intulit astris .

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.* (above, note 16) 315.

If there is any serious meaning in the poem, much of it must lie in the extended significance of Venus. Taking the guardian deity of his youthful verse, Ovid adds philosophic and patriotic dimensions to her; that change in the goddess is a mirror of the change in the poetry. Much of the old erotic element remains, to be sure, but Ovid's new concern transcends that element while making use of it. Here is no real break with the earlier elegy, but a natural broadening of its scope and meaning.

The passage from *Fasti* 4.91–124 indicates that Ovid was aware of the possible meanings of his mythological figures. The philosophical significance of love in Orphism and Empedocles, the patriotic element which Roman tradition assigned to Venus—both were available and known to Ovid. When he demonstrates the superiority of love at the very beginning of the *Metamorphoses* and a third of the way through the poem, when he stresses its powerful influence over the affairs of men and of gods in Book 10 (where Orpheus is the speaker), and when Venus takes such a prominent part in the patriotic climax, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Ovid intentionally is using love as more than a simply erotic force. Viewing the *Metamorphoses* as sheer entertainment must neglect these significant facts and their significant placing in the poem. Ovid, as the Middle Ages saw, has inserted greater meaning into his myths than appears on the surface.