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Defamiliarizing Latin Literature, from Petrarch to Pulp Fiction*

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SUMMARY: In line with a growing trend to approach classics of Roman literature as much through their successors as through their antecedents, this essay offers a pair of case-studies in the post-antique reception of Cicero and Ovid. With an eye to the brief of the present volume, each case-study moves towards a crux locatable in the last decade, trying to show that our characteristic ways of interpreting a Latin author are implicated in changing ideas about the so-called "Classical Tradition" inside and outside the academy. The first part of the essay offers snapshots of the "Ciceronian man" from Petrarch to the present day; the second considers a new Ovidianism outside the academy, which has yielded a surprising range of re-readings of the *Metamorphoses* since the early 1990s.

BECOMING CICERO (1)

> … Viewed from this perspective, the text of the *Aeneid* becomes not merely a narrative, but a kind of script for the establishment of Latin culture, a script that might support a limitless series of performances, each with its own variations, but all sharing certain crucial features. The series begins on the mythic level with the labors of the founder, Aeneas. It includes the political level and the establishment of stable government by the *princeps*, Augustus. And, I sug-

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> gest, it extends to the education of the neophyte who by acquiring the skills necessary to read the national epic gains full membership in Latin culture ... The culture of latinity is not the same thing as a hermeneutics of reception, not a sum total of "influences," direct and indirect, upon modern encounters with the latinity of the past. It may indeed be related to this. But even more, it is the culture *embodied by* the language, to which all who study and value latinity belong.
>
> (Farrell 2001: 7)

MY FIRST CASE-STUDY BEGINS IN EARLY SUMMER 1345. The great Italian scholar and poet Petrarch, Francesco Petrarca, has just discovered in the cathedral library at Verona the text of hundreds of Cicero's private letters to Atticus, along with others to Brutus and to his brother Quintus, a major collection missing (to all intents and purposes) for several centuries, and cited by no known writer in the Middle Ages.[1] Cicero's philosophical and rhetorical works, and to some extent his speeches, were fundamental to learning in the medieval period,[2] but this is something new. Suddenly the Cicero with whom Petrarch and his contemporaries had grown up acquires an entirely fresh aspect, and speaks with an immediacy never before heard in any voice from antiquity. Small wonder that, in the heat of the moment, the author of the find (already by this point in his life an assiduous letter-writer) should be driven to respond to this unprecedented wealth of personal correspondence with a reciprocal epistle of his own, sent back across the gulf of fourteen centuries to the newly rediscovered Cicero; eventually Petrarch will broaden the terms of his imitation by gathering his own accumulated correspondence with his own friends and contemporaries into a self-consciously post-Ciceronian collection of *Familiarium rerum libri*, to which this and nine later Petrarchan "Letters to ancients" will serve as a coda.

Here are the opening lines written by Petrarch to Cicero, in which the living writer opens up this new connection with the long-dead one; it is a measure not just of Petrarch's real genius but also of his talent for self-mythologization that they have so often been read as a kind of *incipit* to the Renaissance itself (*Fam.* 24.3.1):[3]

[1] On the role of such "discoveries" in the period of Renaissance Humanism see, succinctly, Reeve 26.

[2] For a good distillation of Cicero's reception through the ages see Conte 203–7.

[3] See esp. Spitzer 925–30; caveats at Quillen 106–13. The moment can still compel: Cynthia Damon draws my attention to a recent post-Petrarchan epistle sent to Cicero from Cambridge, Mass., at Budenz.

> Franciscus Ciceroni suo salutem. epystolas tuas diu multumque perquisitas atque ubi minime rebar inventas, avidissime perlegi. audivi multa te dicentem, multa deplorantem, multa variantem, Marce Tulli, et qui iampridem qualis preceptor aliis fuisses noveram, nunc tandem quis tu tibi esses agnovi.
>
> Francesco sends his greetings to his Cicero. After a lengthy and extensive search for your letters, I found them where I least expected, and I then read them with great eagerness. I listened to you speak on many subjects, complain about many things, waver in your opinions, O Marcus Tullius, and I who had long known the kind of preceptor that you were for others now at last recognize who you were for yourself.[4]

What interests most specialists in the period is the achievement, in the epistle thus begun, of a newly vigorous and informed critical posture in relation to an ancient writer. Petrarch will have brought to the newly discovered letters a fully formed and somewhat idealized picture of his favorite author, based upon the canonical late-medieval Ciceronian corpus; and it quickly becomes clear in this epistle that the unexpected and all too fallible character traits revealed by the new "unplugged" Cicero of the private correspondence have come to the 14th-century Italian as a considerable shock. More on this shortly.

However, in considering this famous moment of rediscovery, I myself am concerned (first in a 2004 article,[5] and now in this essay) to focus not so much on the "what" of Petrarch's critique of his predecessor as rather on the "how"; viz., on the terms used simultaneously to acknowledge and to elide the huge gulf between Petrarch himself and Cicero, one alive and one long since dead, one present in body and voice, and one achieving presence and audibility solely through the medium of his books, and even then only through the books that have survived without loss or major mutilation. Here is Petrarch's own later description of what is going on in the lines quoted above, in one of many subsequent reframings of the moment (*Fam.* 1.1.42; emphases added):

> quibus [*sc.* epystolis] legendis delinitus pariter et offensus, temperare michi non potui quominus, ira dictante, *sibi tanquam coetaneo amico, familiaritate que michi cum illius ingenio est, quasi temporum oblitus, scriberem* et quibus in eo dictis offenderer admonerem.
>
> In reading Cicero's letters I felt charmed and offended in equal measure. Indeed, beside myself, in a fit of anger I wrote to him *as if he were a friend and*

[4] The Latin of Petrarch's *Familiarium rerum libri* is quoted from Rossi/Bosco; translations are adapted from Bernardo. Translations of ancient passages are taken (with occasional modification) from the Loeb Classical Library.

[5] Hinds 2004, an essay on Petrarchan reception of Virgil as well as of Cicero.

> *contemporary of mine, forgetting, as it were, the gap of time, with a* familiaritas *appropriate to my intimate acquaintance with his thought*; and I pointed out those things he had written that had offended me.

Epistolarity always entails tensions between presence and absence, but never more so than here; *familiaritas* ("familiarity" or "intimacy") is the titular principle of Petrarch's entire 24-book corpus of correspondence, but rarely is the word's sense of contact and immediacy worked harder than in the sentence just quoted. Let me throw a spotlight on that word *familiaritas*, since I want now to mobilize it as a unifying concept for my essay, venturing beyond the terms of the 2004 article that I have been tracking thus far.

The sentence above is to be found in the preface to Petrarch's eventual multi-book collection of private correspondence. In writing here of his *familiaritas* with Cicero, Petrarch is alluding to the title of his own epistolary collection, *Familiarium rerum libri*. Indeed, he is alluding to the very passage in which he has just *invented* this title for his collection, just a couple of pages earlier in this prefatory letter, a passage that goes out of its way to showcase the range of association of the words *familiaris* and *familiaritas* (*Fam.* 1.1.32, 33, 34):

> I shall for the most part follow the example of Cicero rather than that of Seneca in these letters. While Seneca brought together in his letters all the moral matter to be found almost anywhere in his books, Cicero restricted philosophical concerns to his books (*philosophica in libris agit*), and included in his letters accounts of the personal, novel, and varied goings-on of his time (*familiaria ... in epystolis includit*) ... .
>
> Therefore you will find many things in these letters written in an intimate style to a number of friends (*familiariter ad amicos ... scripta*), including yourself ... .
>
> After some thought on the title, I initially concluded that the name "Epistles" (*Epystole*) would be suitable to them. But because many ancients had used that title, and because I myself had done so for various metrical pieces that I had directed to my friends (as I said previously), I did not want to use the same title twice, and liking the idea of a new one, I decided to call the collection *Familiarium rerum liber*. In it you will find very few letters of a highly polished kind, and many more written in an intimate style on a variety of personal matters (*multa familiariter deque rebus familiaribus scripta*); though sometimes, when the subject matter so requires, this simple and unstudied manner is seasoned with interspersed moral considerations, an approach observed by Cicero himself.

What emerges from a reading of the first segment of this quotation against the second and third is that, in seeking to establish a relationship of *familiaritas*

with his contemporary correspondents, Petrarch is applying an idea explicitly borrowed from Cicero himself. Cicero himself was sufficiently aware of the sense of intimacy created by his private letters, and sufficiently alive to the possibility of their eventual publication, as to lay self-conscious emphasis upon that intimacy for the benefit of future readers, and Petrarch will not have failed to notice that the adjective *familiaris* is something of a buzz-word in Cicero's collected correspondence; as he read the newly rediscovered letters to Atticus and others in 1345, Petrarch will have encountered the adjective and its cognates several dozen times.

To unpack the thought in 1.1.42, then (... *familiaritate que michi cum illius ingenio est* ...), Petrarch is allowing himself to write back across the centuries to Cicero with a "familiarity" equal to that which he cultivates with his own contemporary correspondents, and modeled upon the "familiarity" with which Cicero had interacted with *his* contemporary correspondents; and this claim to a special intimacy with Cicero is sharpened by Petrarch's status as the first modern man to feel the force of Cicero's private letters.

There is an interesting and seldom-remarked footnote to all this, by the way, which encapsulates as well as anything the pleasure of double-take that the study of reception can offer to the classical Latinist. When, fifteen years after Petrarch's death, a further collection of Cicero's letters to his friends, unknown to Petrarch, reemerges in northern Italy, it will come to be known as the *Epistulae ad familiares* (the title by which *we* still know it). This is not an ancient or medieval title; and the likeliest hypothesis is that it actually derives *from* Petrarch's *Familiarium rerum libri*; in other words, in a splendid instance of reverse-chronological influence, some Renaissance scholar gives to this second trove of Ciceronian letters a title back-formed from the title of Petrarch's own Cicero-influenced correspondence. A careless observer might assume that Petrarch's *Familiares* got their title from Cicero's; but the probability is that Cicero's got their title from Petrarch's.[6]

This is also the moment to come clean about the first syllable in my own essay title. Why *de*familiarizing? Well, because I was unable to resist an adventitious punning contrast between Petrarch's aspiration to achieve *greater* familiarity with Cicero, and the modern literary theoretical slogan that sets a premium on the epistemological leverage gained when something known or habitual is rendered *less* familiar, made strange, "defamiliarized." (In its original application the term belongs to the early 20th-century Russian formalist de-

[6] Cf. Schmidt 52 n. 82 (my thanks to Michael Reeve for the reference). Fuller discussion of the point will be included in a further planned paper on Petrarch's letters to classical authors, entitled "ProtoPetrarchan Ancients."

scription of ways of meaning peculiar to literary texts.) Although I planted this contrast mainly for the sake of the second half of my essay, in which some very recent literary and artistic interventions will be argued to do something to "defamiliarize" the tradition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the fact is that a customized notion of "defamiliarization" has some explanatory power for the present case-study, too. Petrarch's discovery of Cicero's letters to Atticus and others has two simultaneous and opposite consequences for the early modern author's reading of his ancient predecessor. (1) Cicero becomes more familiar to Petrarch through the new, and newly intimate, information contained in the private correspondence. But also (2) Cicero becomes newly *un*familiar to Petrarch, in that the settled impression of Cicero formed by Petrarch on the basis of the established canon of Ciceronian texts now has to be reevaluated in light of the new information in the letters; with the shift in Petrarch's view of their author, those canonical texts themselves become newly strange—in other words, *de*familiarized—and will be read by Petrarch with fresh eyes from now on.

When I explore Petrarch's epistles to ancient authors with undergraduates (taking the letters to Cicero and Livy in Craig Kallendorf's useful Bryn Mawr sampler as my starting point[7]), I offer them in part as an exercise in self-recognition, as a window onto a habit of willed identification with ancient authors that in some sense underlies all our own responses as modern students of Latin literature—despite the best efforts of contemporary demystifiers of the author-function to break us of the habit. Petrarch's dramatic discovery of the letters to Atticus is in one sense for us a myth of the unattainable (what are our own chances of finding a comparable trove of lost material to transform our understanding of a major classical author?). However, in another sense, the Petrarchan moment operates as an allegory of our own less spectacular project of rediscovery, whereby we attempt to open ourselves to any and all terms of reference that may render a canonical author more familiar—or, when a paradigm-shift is called for, less so.

Now, another long-established characteristic of students of Latin literature is that we are, or at least are thought to be, book-worms, or more politely, bibliophiles; and here, too, Petrarch's epistles can offer us a little *frisson* of self-recognition. The fact is that there is another side to the story of Petrarch's interaction with the ancients, which will show him focused not just on the imaginative conjuring up of the dead author himself but also on the

[7] Kallendorf, including text and brief commentary for *Fam.* 24.3 and 24.8. Cosenza offers translation and valuable literary historical commentary on all the letters to classical authors.

fetishization of the actual books containing that author's works (in a move that includes but also goes beyond mere personification).[8] Here, too, the foundational anecdote belongs to the epoch-making moment of Petrarch's discovery of Cicero's letters to Atticus; the anecdote could be titled "Book Culture As an Extreme Sport" (*Fam.* 21.10.16–18):

> But now listen to how I was teased by Cicero about whom I started speaking, whom I have always loved and cherished from boyhood. I have an enormous volume of his letters that with my own hand I transcribed some time ago while in bad health because the transcription proved difficult for the scribes. Despite my body's discomfort and the hard labor involved, my love and pleasure and my desire to possess it won out. As you have seen, so as to have the volume always close at hand, I usually kept it at the doorway to my library resting on the doorpost. As I entered the room, thinking of something else as I often do, it happened that a fold of my garment inadvertently caught the book; when it fell, it struck me lightly on the leg a little above the ankle. I picked it up and jokingly said: "What's this, my Cicero? Why do you strike me?" *('quid' inquam 'rei est, mi Cicero, cur me feris?'*) He said nothing (*ille nichil*), but the next day, as I again returned to the room, he again struck me and again I jokingly picked him up and put him in his place. Why go on? After being repeatedly injured, I bestirred myself and raised him to a higher position, in response to his complaint (as it were) about lowly ground-level placement.

Petrarch goes on to relate how these repeated Ciceronian book-impacts gave him a sore which became so infected over the course of the next year that he came close to losing a leg. It is left to his famous friend and fellow-writer Boccaccio to draw a moral from the story that brings us back to our main theme. According to Boccaccio, Petrarch suffered this undeserved injury from Cicero precisely because he had formed too close a bond with him, *propter coniunctionem tamen nimiam*.[9] Or as the modern police blotter would put it, aggravated assaults are more often perpetrated by family members than by strangers.

Petrarch's attempt to establish a relationship of "familiarity" with Cicero is bound up with a kind of interested self-fashioning that, as we shall see

[8] In a characteristically rich and suggestive paper delivered at a recent MLA meeting, entitled "Text As Ruin," Leonard Barkan characterizes the language in which Petrarch describes his longing for lost and fragmentary ancient books as "almost pathologically lurid"; my thanks to him for showing me his typescript.

[9] Cf. *Var.* 25 (Petrarch to Boccaccio) [= *Disperse* 46 Pancheri, ll.96ff.] *quod proximum in tuis litteris erat elegantissime cavillaris, quod a Cicerone scilicet, etsi non merear, propter coniunctionem tamen nimiam laesus sim: coniunctiores enim saepe nos, ut ipse ais, infestant* ...

shortly, is characteristic of the operations of the classical tradition closer to our own time, too. Petrarch often presents himself in his writings as a man alienated from the debased times in which he is forced to live, and his quest for a kind of "virtual community" with the Roman past is an attempt to bring some of the prestige of the past to bear upon his self-positioning in the present. Hence the project of the post-Ciceronian *Familiarium rerum libri*. If Petrarch can make his own community of friends and associates into an extension of *Cicero's* community of friends and associates, he can impart to his own latter-day world some of the sense of consequence that he associates with the world of Ciceronian Rome.

But Petrarch's self-fashioning is Ciceronian in another way, too. The fact is that the very idea of defining oneself as the inheritor of an idealized past is itself a Ciceronian one. It is thus that the Cicero of the key philosophical works, alienated from the shifting political and military currents of Rome in the 40s B.C., seeks a kind of validation for himelf by positioning his dialogues in the imagined historical milieu of the so-called "Scipionic Circle" a century earlier—much as Petrarch will seek *his* validation in Cicero's own milieu.

Here is Cicero in the preface to the *Laelius de amicitia*, talking to his dedicatee Atticus about his decison to use distinguished Romans of past generations as his mouthpieces both in that dialogue and in the *Cato Maior de senectute* (*Amic.* 4–5):

> Besides, discourses of this kind seem in some way to acquire greater dignity when founded on the authority of men of former times (*in hominum veterum auctoritate*), especially such as are renowned; and, hence, in reading my own work on *Old Age* I am at times so affected that I imagine Cato is the speaker and not myself ...
>
> In the present treatise the speaker on friendship will be Laelius, a wise man (for he was so esteemed), and a man who was distinguished by a glorious friendship. Please put me out of your mind for a little and believe that Laelius himself is talking.

It so happens that there is a moment at the beginning of a *second* letter sent by Petrarch to Cicero (*Fam.* 24.4), a few months after the first (*Fam.* 24.3), in which Petrarch does precisely what Cicero suggests at the end of the passage just quoted, and collapses Cicero into his Scipionic-era surrogate Laelius. I adduce it here (in a final return to my 2004 article) because Petrarch here employs his Ciceronian buzz-word *familiaris* in a way that at first seems to involve a mere chronological error until we recognize it as an active chronological paradox. (I can be brief because a fine note in Mario Cosenza's commentary on the letters to classical authors has already put the matter in a

nutshell.) Here are *Fam.* 24.4.1 and Cic. *Amic.* 89, with Cosenza ad loc. (emphases added):

> Franciscus Ciceroni suo salutem. si te superior offendit epystola—*verum est enim, ut ipse soles dicere, quod ait familiaris tuus in Andria*:
> obsequium amicos, veritas odium parit—
> accipe quod offensum animum ex parte mulceat ... .

> Francesco sends greetings to his Cicero. If my previous letter offended you—*for as you yourself are wont to say, it is true, as your* familiaris *says in the Andria:*
> "Complaisance gets us friends, plain speaking, hate"—
> accept the following as in some measure a balm for your injured feelings ... .

> sed nescio quo modo verum est, quod in Andria familiaris meus dicit:
> obsequium amicos, veritas odium parit.

> *But somehow it is true, as my* familiaris *says in the Andria*:
> "Complaisance gets us friends, plain speaking, hate."

> Petrarch ... has either momentarily lost sight of the speaker, or, realizing full well that Laelius is Cicero's mouthpiece, has consciously identified the two. This would, of course, make Terence a friend of Cicero; the "familiaris meus" of the *De amicitia* and the "familiaris tuus" of Petrarch both, therefore, become equivalent to "familiaris Ciceronis."

Cicero in the *De amicitia* had had his 2nd-century mouthpiece Laelius refer to the comic poet Terence, author of the *Andria*, as *familiaris meus*. Petrarch quotes the passage back at Cicero, and refers to Terence as *familiaris tuus*; so that in this reworking the Terence who had been Laelius' intimate is now, anachronististically, Cicero's intimate. Either Petrarch has committed an error and forgotten that the 1st-person speaker of the *De amicitia* passage is not Cicero but a surrogate from a century before (unlikely); or he knows exactly what he is doing, and is embracing the chronological slippage to make a very Ciceronian (*and* Petrarchan) point about *familiaritas*, which for Cicero (as for himself) allows a dead authority to become the intimate, *or* even the surrogate, of a like-minded living one.

Let me try to sum up the first part of my Ciceronian case-study. In responding to his discovery of Cicero's correspondence with reciprocal letters of his own, Petrarch seeks to become one of the *familiares* of Cicero—rather as Cicero himself in his philosophical dialogues becomes the *familiaris* of Terence, Laelius, and Scipio. More fundamentally, Petrarch seeks to become a "Ciceronian man," capable of *familiaritas* with like minds not just in his own age but across the ages—in all the word's traditional senses, then, a "classic."

He will not be the last reader of Cicero to show such an aspiration; this moment looks very like the beginning of our own field of Classics—at least as our teachers, and our teachers' teachers, knew it.

And that point serves to introduce a Ciceronian sequel. We stay with the pair of texts just adduced, Cicero's *Cato Maior de senectute* (*On Old Age*) and *Laelius de amicitia* (*On Friendship*), and in particular with the prefaces to those late philosophical works; but we fast-forward from Verona in 1345 to Fort Smith, Arkansas in 1922.

BECOMING CICERO (2)

Our text is the translator's preface to a 1923 Loeb Classical Library volume containing Cicero's dialogues *On Old Age*, *On Friendship*, and *On Divination*. Two stories are told here, one explicit and one implicit: (1) how the translation was written, and (2) how the translator became Cicero.

> While my uncle [translator's footnote: Gen. H. B. Armistead, of Charleston, Ark.; b.1832 in Fauquier Co., Virginia; Secretary of State of Arkansas, 1892–1896], then in his eighty-first year, was confined to his room by a serious illness, he received a letter of consolation from a friend, who quoted from Shuckburgh's translation of the *De Senectute*. This quotation, though short, brought solace and cheer to the invalid and made him eager to hear more of Cicero's views on old age, and, as a result, he asked me to bring him the essay in the Latin and read it to him. Twenty years had passed since I had read the tractate at the University of Virginia under my revered old professor, Dr. Wm. E. Peters, and hence my rendering at sight must have done violence to the original in many places; but just as "honor peereth in the meanest habit," so the light of Cicero's genius was not wholly obscured by the medium through which it passed. At any rate, when I had finished, my uncle begged me—more, I think, for my good than for his own pleasure—to write out a translation of the original treatise. I pleaded that my Latin was too rusty and that my judicial duties did not leave me leisure for such a task. He replied that my Latin would brighten with use and that an hour or half-hour spent upon it now and then would not be missed and would afford me needed recreation. In his earnestness he exacted a promise which his death a few months later made only the more sacred. And so, on the trains as I went about the circuit, in hotels at night after trying cases all day, and in odd moments at home, I strove to redeem that promise. After several revisions a translation was completed and put into type.
>
> My version had passed from hand to hand for two or three years with no thought of publication, when my poet-friend Brookes More asked permission to show it to his brother, Dr. Paul Elmer More of Princeton University, who brought it to the attention of Dr. Edward Capps, the American Editor of the L[oeb] C[lassical] L[ibrary] … . Four years have gone by since this work was

> begun. It has been carried on amid many interruptions. Ill-health and, more often, the prior claims of professional and official duties have made the task an arduous one; and yet, because of these studies in classical learning and my contact with great scholars, living and dead, no other period of my life has brought me so much pleasure of mind and soul: *qua voluptate nulla certe potest esse maior.*
>
> WILLIAM ARMISTEAD FALCONER
> Fort Smith, Arkansas, U.S.A.
> March 15, 1922

Falconer's closing Latin quotation is taken from the *De senectute* itself.[10] A predictable gesture; but also symptomatic of something larger. What is striking about this translator's preface as a whole is how closely it replicates the terms of one of Cicero's own typical prefaces to a philosophical work—as contained in the Loeb volume that it introduces. To make this point, I set out below a series of excerpts from the preface, not of the *De senectute* itself, but of the dialogue that immediately follows it in Falconer's Loeb volume, the *De amicitia* (dedicated, like the *De senectute*, to Atticus); I add for good measure the first sentence of the *Tusculan Disputations* (from a different Loeb), in which Falconer's idea of learned study as a release from the toils of a career in law or public life finds its canonical Ciceronian form.

> (Cic. *Amic.* 1–4, tr. Falconer, excerpted)
> Quintus Mucius Scaevola, the augur, used to relate with an accurate memory and in a pleasing way many incidents about his father-in-law, Gaius Laelius, and, in every mention of him, did not hesitate to call him "the Wise." Now, I, upon assuming the *toga virilis*, had been introduced by my father to Scaevola with the understanding that, so far as I could and he would permit, I should never leave the old man's side. And so it came to pass that, in my desire to gain greater profit from his legal skill, I made it a practice to commit to memory many of his learned opinions and many, too, of his brief and pointed sayings. After his death I betook myself to the pontiff, Scaevola, who, both in intellect and in integrity, was, I venture to assert, quite the most distinguished man of our State ...
>
> And so, Scaevola ... proceeded to repeat to us a discussion on friendship, which Laelius had had with him and with another son-in-law, Gaius Fannius, son of Marcus, a few days after the death of Africanus [i.e., Scipio Aemilianus, in 129 B.C.]. I committed the main points of that discussion to memory, and have set them out in the present book in my own way ...

[10] *Sen.* 50 (tr. Falconer) "... so that there is truth in what Solon says in a certain bit of verse, already mentioned, that, as he grew old, he learned many things every day; and surely there can be no greater pleasure than the pleasures of the mind (*qua voluptate animi nulla certe potest esse maior*)."

> For while you [i.e., Atticus] were pleading with me again and again to write something on friendship, the subject appealed to me as both worthy of general study, and also well fitted to our intimacy. Therefore I have not been unwilling to benefit the public at your request ...
>
> Besides, discourses of this kind seem in some way to acquire greater dignity when founded on the influence of men of ancient times, especially such as are renowned; and, hence, in reading my own work on *Old Age* I am at times so affected that I imagine Cato is the speaker and not myself.

(Cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 1)

> On at last securing a complete or at any rate a considerable release from the toils of advocacy and from my senatorial duties, I have once more—chiefly, Brutus, on your encouragement—returned to those studies, which, though stored in memory, had been put aside through circumstances, and are now revived after a long interval of neglect.

The location of the origins of the project in a dramatic vignette from the writer's own past; a promise made to an aged relative; a chain of connection with revered men of a previous generation, the formative influences of those elders upon the present writer, and the use of that prosopography to open up glimpses of the larger history of that earlier time; the study of philosophy as a gentleman's diversion, undertaken in the intervals and points of retirement from a public and legal career; consequent self-depreciation about the writer's level of preparation for the enterprise at hand; the impetus to publication arising from the intervention of one of the writer's own literary friends; the writer's sense of being a "medium" for a great predecessor; and the overall power of learned study to open up contact between the living and the dead: all pure William Armistead Falconer; but all pure Cicero, too.

Something rather more active than mere parallelism is going on here. Our early 20th-century translator, by showing himself to be such a "Ciceronian man," lays implicit claim to a right to transmit the Ciceronian (and classical) tradition; and at the same time, Cicero's experience and Cicero's writing become complicit in and constitutive of the translator's own self-fashioning as a man of letters in the history-laden South. The old General and Secretary of State, to whom he exercises his *pietas*, becomes his Scipio, in an Arkansas that acquires the resonance of old Rome; the translator's education at the hands of his venerable professor at the University of Virginia acquires the prestige of Cicero's own early formation at the side of Scaevola. The relationship between the translator and his poet-friend Brookes More is elevated into a sort of Cicero-Atticus relationship. The translator's aspiration to mediate the ge-

nius of Cicero finds precedent in Cicero's own imaginative claim to speak in the voice of Cato. And, of course, the translator's rigors on the legal circuit in Arkansas are heroized by becoming Cicero's vicissitudes in the forum in the time of Roman civil war (perhaps unlocking, in the mind of the nephew of a southern general, some kind of association with the disappointments of public life in the wake of a more recent civil war).[11] I will not be the only reader to wonder whether the translator's uncle, General Henry B. Armistead, born in 1832 in Virginia, belongs to the same Virginian military family as the celebrated Brigadier General Lewis A. Armistead, born in 1817 and killed in action at Gettysburg, and himself the nephew of the Colonel George Armistead who kept a fabled flag aloft as garrison commander at Fort McHenry in the War of 1812. If we can allow the family name its full resonance, the implicit genealogical layering of generations of public men, and the chronological reach back to a defining epoch in history, is complicit with and gains resonance from Cicero's own explicit and implicit layering of generations of Scaevolas and Scipios, and his characteristic ways of using such *imagines* to build a sense of connection between the past and the present.

One idea common to the Loeb volume preface and to Cicero's own *De amicitia* preface is that Latin learned studies are something to be *performed* and *re*-performed; in both cases, moreover, this idea serves to elide distinctions between oral and written communication.[12] Cicero claims to re-perform for Atticus a discussion on friendship that Scaevola had performed for him following his memory of an earlier, original conversation in which he, Scaevola, had been a participant. Cicero's Southern translator re-performs for us a version of Cicero that he had performed for his uncle twenty years earlier, and that was itself a kind of supplement to Shuckburgh's earlier written version of the Cicero, as excerpted for the uncle in a friend's letter. And, in turn, we as readers will perpetuate and re-perform the Ciceronian and classical tradition when we re-read Cicero's discussion, with the help of Falconer's version, whether alone or with a class of students. It is striking, too, that in the case of Falconer's translation, urged on him by his uncle "more, I think, for my good than for his own pleasure," the very point would seem to be in the (re-)performance of philological learning. Otherwise the General could have heard the rest of Cicero's views on old age by the simple expedient of

[11] For a more uncomfortable nexus of associations between the Classical Tradition and the South cf. Habinek 18–25 on Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve (I imply no assimilation of Falconer's politics to Gildersleeve's).

[12] Suggestive contexts for this paragraph in Habinek 103–21, "Writing As Social Performance."

having his nephew buy a copy of Shuckburgh's existing version, to supplement the excerpt quoted in his friend's letter, rather than asking him to embark on a new version of his own. Only through the discipline of grappling with Cicero's Latin in the original, it seems, can Falconer reap the combined ethical advantages of reading Cicero on old age and reading a Latin master in the original.[13] As an event in the history of Latin book culture, Falconer's Loeb preface shows a very Petrarchan sense of the book as at once an object for contemplation and a catalyst for living communication.

Is any of this surprising? No; what happens with unusual clarity in Falconer's preface is perhaps just the universal story of what Cicero always did, or was supposed to do, to shape the values and priorities of the possessor of a classical education. Almost 600 years after Petrarch picked up his pen to write to Cicero, the habit of willed identification with this dead Roman orator and statesman was still living on in Falconer's Arkansas. The only key difference is that over the intervening centuries Petrarch's hard-won "familiarity" with Cicero had become the common property of all men of letters (and in this context the word "men" can be allowed to stand)—internalized, one might say, as a kind of institutional routine.

So, moving on finally towards the present day, why is this an interesting time to study Cicero? Because, for the first time since Petrarch's revelation of *familiaritas* with Cicero, a text like Falconer's preface now looks a bit strange; we have almost lost our own living connection to the time when Cicero was at the center of the curriculum for "making men" in the real world. As long as a classical education was a normal part of the *curriculum vitae* of a lawyer or statesman, Cicero was at the center of that education. But as Classics became a more marginal field in the mid- to late 20th century (a niche market within the humanities, albeit a flourishing one, rather than a curriculum for public life), Cicero's stock fell even within that newly downsized economy of Classics; in other words, as the market for "Ciceronian men" slumped in the real world, Cicero (along with the version of Classics that he had come to represent) became more marginal even within the curriculum of our own field.

However, the interesting twist (given the conference's brief to focus on developments specific to the past decade) is that right now, in the small world of our field-specific journals and curricula, Cicero's stock is beginning to rise again. I wonder why. Is it that Cicero's self-evident centrality to the western tradition—and in particular to the western educational tradition—is now being recognized again by classicists after a brief period of denial or inattention? That is part of it; but I suspect the more immediate reason for the in-

[13] My epigraph from Farrell 2001 finds especial pertinence here.

cipient Ciceronian revival is that a new generation of Latinists has grown up, many among them women, who have never lived with the Cicero-centered kind of Classics, let alone with a "Tulliocentric" world; and the result is a new sense of *defamiliarization* that is enabling a kind of rediscovery of Cicero's enormous interest and influence as a cultural player. Whether this rediscovery will matter only in our own thriving niche market, or whether the study of Cicero can be reconnected with larger worlds in academe and beyond (departments of law and political science, think tanks, cabinet rooms), is still an open question; one of my fellow-contributors to this volume, Joy Connolly, is better equipped to answer it than I.[14]

AFTER OVID (1)

> Ovid's epic has always belonged not least to the wider constituency of poets and readers of poetry, right through the deepest troughs of his standing among classicists; and this audience has generally shown itself keen to share promising perspectives from Latin critics. So the two worlds overlap, and rebound. But there is no presumption that literary enthusiasts and poetniks will just roll over before the intellections of academic expertise ...
> So can the new *Metamorphoses* in Classics tap into the marketplace of NOW? Then HOW?
>
> (Henderson 302)

Now for an abrupt change of subject, softened by an element of continuity with the most recent phase of my discussion. The second half of my essay will pick up an issue just now raised, namely, the behavior of the Classical Tradition in a turn-of-the-millennium culture that can construct the Classical Tradition *either* as something familiar *or* as something a little strange; and its readings will focus on a Latin author who has recently enjoyed a major academic revival followed by a not inconsiderable revival outside the academy, too. However, we are done with Cicero; the spotlight now falls on Ovid.

Perhaps it is unnecessary to apologize for yoking together Cicero and Ovid in a volume whose agenda is driven in part by questions of Latin pedagogy. In the experience of many students of Latin, after all, Cicero and Ovid have long enjoyed a low-level partnership as two of the first Latin authors encountered *as* authors in the intermediate Latin curriculum; in my own department they even share a course-number, Latin 306. The association can claim Shakespearean precedent. In Act 4 Scene 1 of *Titus Andronicus* (a play to which

[14] For the range of possibility cf. the titles of Connolly's two books, respectively forthcoming and in progress: *Citizens and Subjects: The Uses of Rhetoric in Ancient Rome*; and *Talk About Virtue: Roman Republicanism and the Making of the Modern Citizen.*

we shall return), when young Lucius is afraid to hand over one of his schoolbooks to his aunt Lavinia, he is thus reprimanded (4.1.12–14; emphases added):

> TITUS [OR MARCUS]
> Ah, boy, Cornelia never with more care
> Read to her sons than she hath read to thee
> *Sweet poetry and Tully's Orator.*

Ciceronian rhetoric features on Lucius' intermediate Latin reading list. But "sweet poetry" is prescribed, too; and (as we soon learn) there is one poetic book in particular that Lucius' aunt is anxious to retrieve (4.1.42–43):

> YOUNG LUCIUS
> Grandsire, 'tis Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*
> My mother gave it me.

Ovid's mythological epic, the *Metamorphoses*, merits a starring role in almost any kind of history of the Classical Tradition. No Roman poem with the possible exception of the *Aeneid* has had a greater impact upon western culture at large; no poem of any period has had a greater impact upon the western visual arts. Not for nothing was the *Metamorphoses* known in the Renaissance as "the painters' bible"; and, in recent years, some of the best scholarship on the poem has been generated by studies of its reception in early modern times. As in the case of Cicero, Ovid's success was such that over the centuries it became almost a matter of routine; the Romantic period shows distinct signs of fatigue with Ovidianism both in academe and in the arts, even before the idea of the Classical Tradition itself comes under pressure.[15]

In terms of the years under especial review here, the "new" academic renaissance of Ovid (as it has been termed) is already old news; the boom began over a generation ago, and many younger scholars cannot imagine a time when Ovid was anything other than central to the research canon. What does still feel fresh, however, at least in the Anglophone world, is a new level of visibility for Ovidian myth in the broader realm of literature and the arts. This has been building for a while, as a matter of Zeitgeist helped along not so much by the academic scholarship itself (let us be realistic about the reach of our learned publications) as by a new generation of translations influenced by the academic scholarship. Ovidian myth, which failed to register with romantics and ritualists, found a new lease of life among postmodernists and magic

[15] See Vance (an essay in Martindale), esp. 225, on the 19th-century problem of "Ovid's smooth secondariness, his unexciting position near the end of a long chain of tradition." Important qualifications, however, in Brown, esp. 141 and 155.

realists, and has not looked back since[16]; meanwhile Ovidian exile seems to have reclaimed its political as well as its mythic potency.[17] Ovid's poetry may never again be as central as it was for Shakespeare or for Titian; but what we can say is that, in recent years, it has been at the leading edge of contact between academic Classics and the larger artistic marketplace.

For the *Metamorphoses*, the Ovidianism of the past decade can conveniently take its bearings from the publication of a poetry book by Faber & Faber in 1994, entitled *After Ovid: New Metamorphoses*. The editors of that volume, Michael Hofmann and James Lasdun, wrote to a "who's who" list of major English-language poets, some of them conversant with Latin and others not, and challenged them to translate or to retell an episode of the *Metamorphoses* in a verse style of their own choosing; the result was an anthology that (in the editors' own words, xii–xiii) "in place of the unbroken song, the 'perpetuum ... carmen' Ovid promises in the fourth line of the original, [offers] the more modern, casual satisfactions of montage, repetition, obliquity, sampling, channel hopping." One of the contributors to *After Ovid* was the then British poet laureate Ted Hughes, who went on to publish his own anthology of versions of the *Metamorphoses* in 1997, *Tales from Ovid*.[18] Hughes' version was highly rated (perhaps even overrated) by mainstream critics, and achieved a kind of fast-track canonization through its closeness to the poet's death in 1998; in 2000 it was adapted as a piece of "story theater" for the stage in Stratford and London. Meanwhile on the American side of the Atlantic the *Metamorphoses* reentered the artistic mainstream with the dramatization of an interlocking group of Ovidian episodes (along with the Apuleian *Cupid and Psyche*) for the play *Metamorphoses* by Mary Zimmerman, memorably set on a stage made entirely of water.[19] After a premiere in Chicago in 1998,

[16] See esp. Italo Calvino's "Ovid and Universal Contiguity," originally published as the introduction to a 1979 Italian edition of the *Metamorphoses*, and translated in Calvino 146–61.

[17] On Ovid's exile in modern poetry, the influence of Joseph Brodsky spans three decades: Kennedy 332–35; compare the "Ulster Ovids" discussed in Kerrigan. Bio-mythic novels and stories about Ovid's exile abound since 1988 (in chronological order: by Christoph Ransmayr, Antonio Tabucchi, David Wishart, Marin Mincu, and Jane Alison), following upon earlier fictions by Vintila Horia and David Malouf, and renewing a centuries-old tradition of folding Ovid's poetry into fantasized versions of his biography: cf. Kennedy 323–27 and Miller, with Lyne 2002b.

[18] Anthologies compared: Henderson (from which my section epigraph comes); Brown 217–27; Lyne 2002a: 259–63.

[19] Zimmerman; a preliminary version entitled *Six Myths* was produced at Northwestern University in 1996. For an excellent discussion of the play's Ovidianism see Farrell 2002.

and a tour of the west coast, Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses* made its way to New York City. It opened on October 9, 2001, and acquired a more potent set of associations, and perhaps a wider audience, than could have been anticipated had it opened in any other autumn; *Metamorphoses* was received in New York as a play about the redemptive power of art in a newly traumatized city.[20]

No systematic survey of contemporary Ovidianism yet exists to continue for our own time the story that Leonard Barkan's *The Gods Made Flesh* tells so well for the Middle Ages and Renaissance[21]; nor could such a book be written in the same terms. The new "after Ovid" phenomenon (if we may call it that) is gratifying; but we should not exaggerate its scale, small and fragmented as it is in comparison with the grand Ovidianisms of times past. However, this latest quickening of artistic interest does offer something distinctive to the academic critic (already hinted at earlier), namely, the opportunity to observe the behavior of the Ovidian tradition among artists and audiences who live in a culture capable of constructing the Ovidian tradition *either* as something familiar *or* as something strange.

Let me approach this matter through an observation about the characteristic ambience of Ovidian myth. Despite the succession of first-rate poets and artists who reinvent it so beautifully and vitally over the centuries, the *Metamorphoses* finds itself in some growing danger of sliding into empty prettiness and mere ornament in its Renaissance and post-Renaissance receptions. (I stop just short of making this point in a 2002 article on landscape and the aesthetics of place in the tradition of the *Metamorphoses*.[22]) Given the poem's status as the main channel for the early modern transmission of Greco-Roman myth at large, its settings and locales are apt to be flattened into a generic mythological "décor" in the work of less inspired producers of art, or indeed in the perceptions of less inspired consumers of art; this susceptibility to routinization, mentioned above, undoubtedly hurts Ovid in the 19th century. The new "after Ovid" generation of artists has a clear advantage here; it is inconceivable that the *Metamorphoses* will regain enough centrality in our own time for this kind of "décor fatigue" to recur as a problem.

[20] Cf. esp. Ben Brantley in *The New York Times*, 5 March 2002 (reviewing the play's move from off-Broadway to Broadway).

[21] Barkan. For English literary Ovidianism, Martindale and Brown take the story up to the early 20th-century modernists; Brown's brief postscript on the 1990s surge has already been cited. [With the present article in production, the announcement of Theodore Ziolkowski's *Ovid and the Moderns* (Ithaca 2005) now promises a new wave of attention to the new Ovidianism, and renders instantly obsolete the first half of my sentence above; it will be interesting to see whether the book will put pressure on the remainder of my sentence too.—SH]

[22] Hinds 2002, esp. 147–49.

Mary Zimmerman's classically beautiful *Metamorphoses* remains more heavily invested in the traditional ambience of Ovidian myth than do other recent reinterpretations to be discussed below. Her staging at once exploits and transcends the mythological décor of early modern Ovidianism; the novelty of the play's aquatic set both celebrates and crucially reimagines the sharply visualized settings of the *Metamorphoses*, and in particular the poem's use of the recurrent well-watered mythological landscape or *locus amoenus*.[23] The final sentence of Zimmerman's initial staging note is immediately indicative of the play's intuitive engagement throughout with an Ovidian sense of place (emphases added):

> The stage is entirely occcupied by a square or rectangular pool of water, of varying depth, bordered on all four sides by a wooden deck approximately three feet wide. Hanging above the pool is a large crystal chandelier ...
>
> *The staging should rarely be a literal embodiment of the text; rather, it should provide images that amplify the text, lend it poetic resonance, or, even, sometimes contradict it.*

Zimmerman's play may be compared and contrasted with a less well-known dramatic *Metamorphoses* produced in the late 1990s, in which the discontinuity with the inherited décor of mythological classicism is more abrupt. Naomi Iizuka's *Polaroid Stories* (1997) rejects "classical" beauty outright and replaces the ideal landscape of Ovidian myth with a stylized urban dystopia located in an (almost) unnamed New York City[24]; the protagonists in her retellings of the *Metamorphoses* are not gods, nymphs, and ephebes but king-pins, dope-heads, and teenage runaways. Here is the start of one of *her* play's key staging directions (the foregrounding of sound-effects is characteristic) (Iizuka 215):

> PHILOMEL'S STORY—blood song
> techno music underneath.
>
> Philomel emerges from an empty building onto the street. the sounds of the street: traffic, a telephone ringing, the sound of glass breaking, the sound of a siren. the sound of breathing. a pulse.

It is symptomatic of Iizuka's rejection of mythological harmony that a recurrent *Leitmotiv* in her play is the most graphically narrated rape in the *Meta-*

[23] Hinds 2002: 145–46.

[24] Iizuka 187 "SETTING: a pier at the edge of the city." But cf. 188 "this is how it begins, this is where—/ i seen him out of nowhere, crazy amped out boy crazy oklahoma boy, / i found him up by port authority, / scheming and scamming, nickel diming what he can —"

morphoses, that of Philomela. Here is the continuation of the stage direction above:

> Philomel opens her mouth. no sound comes out. blood instead of sound. she touches the blood with her fingers. and then touches the chainlink fence, the cement, the walls. and everywhere her fingers touch, she stains the world red. in the darkness, the red turns into blood red flowers.
>
> techno music grows louder.

As we shall see from a parallel case in the next and final section of my essay, Iizuka's emphasis here on a blood-drenched rendition of a bloody myth offers a characteristically late 20th-century way of defamiliarizing the *Metamorphoses* and shaking it out of mere mythological prettiness. But a qualification should immediately be added to this easy periodization; in fact Ovid's disturbingly violent treatment of the Philomela myth has always, from Seneca's time at least, offered a point of access to readers of the *Metamorphoses* who want to bring the poem's latent shock value to the surface. And arguably the key (early) modern text here is Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*.[25] Let us return to the vignette of young Lucius and his school-books (with which the present section began). Why does the boy shrink from his aunt Lavinia? Because she is a very spectacle of horror; a mutilated rape victim, her tongue has been cut out to enforce her silence, as happened to Philomela in the Ovidian myth; and, more than that, her hands have been cut off, too, so that, unlike Philomela, she cannot use them to denounce her rapist through picture or inscription (cf. Act 2 Scene 4). And why does Lavinia want Lucius' school copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*? Precisely so that she can open it to the myth of Philomela, and point with her bloody stumps, on stage, at the story that will operate as a surrogate witness to *her* story, and thus incidentally do her playwright the service of bringing before the eyes of his audience the actual book on which his play is based (4.1.45–50):

> TITUS
> Soft, so busily she turns the leaves.
> Help her. What would she find? Lavinia, shall I read?
> This is the tragic tale of Philomel,
> And treats of Tereus' treason and his rape,
> And rape, I fear, was root of thy annoy.

[25] Shakespeare's tragedy of blood in *Titus* as a reading of Seneca's *Thyestes* and of that play's reading of Ovid's Philomela/Procne/Tereus: Schiesaro 70–89. In the other temporal direction, the shock of Shakespeare's play finds definitive late 20th-century expression in Julie Taymor's 1999 film *Titus*.

MARCUS
See, brother, see. Note how she quotes the leaves.

There can be few moments in the history of Ovidian reception, or in the history of post-Petrarchan book-learning, quite as bizarre and unsettling as this.[26]

And so back to the 1990s for one more (extended) case-study in neo-Ovidian myth-making.

AFTER OVID (2)

Alex Shakar's *City in Love: The New York Metamorphoses*, published in 1996, is a book of closely interlinked short stories, varied and experimental in style, and in their ways of treating the Ovidian myths on which they are based; a virtuoso performance, it deserves more notice than it has received as an event in modern Ovidianism. Like Iizuka, Shakar sets his myths in a denatured version of New York City. There seems to be a pattern here worth pondering. The city as the new landscape of myth, but not just any city: a city complex enough to be a microcosm, bold enough to figure itself as the actual universe. Remember that it was in New York that Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses*, too, even in the absence of reference to the city in its staging, achieved its fullest artistic epiphany.

Shakar's Herculean hero inscribes his deeds on the major landmarks of the city before finding apotheosis in the dome of a museum planetarium; his Pygmalion is a deranged street-person nicknamed Junk Man, surrounded by Alphabet City prostitutes, using garbage to sculpt his ideal woman; the presumptive father of his Phaethon drives, not the chariot of the sun, but a subway train that tows a sun-fragment under Manhattan to generate light and heat for the city's fabled skyscrapers; his Ceyx, a sanitation worker whose body is washed away in the Hudson River after a fatal accident, finds an afterlife (with his wife) not as a halcyon bird, as in Ovid, but as a sewer-dwelling alligator; their story connects with that of their downstairs neighbor in Hell's Kitchen, a barbiturate-popping method actor named Morpheus, father of a boy named Orpheus; after a street-chase by an Apollo-analogue, Shakar's Daphne (like Petrarch's, called Laura) is transformed not into a nodding tree but into a pedestrian light that flashes WALK, DON'T WALK, DON'T WALK; finally, his new Narcissus and Echo are visible in the reflecting glass of an of-

[26] Cf. Barkan 243–51. Bate 102–17, esp. 104, finds issues of classical pedagogy thematized and problematized throughout *Titus*: "[Lavinia's] reading signals that the play is itself both a revisionary reading of the Ovidian text and an examination of the efficacy of humanist education. . . . The language of the schoolroom suffuses the play."

fice building and audible in the disembodied whisper of a bedside phone, before disappearing into a textual *mise en abîme* at the end of the book.

The above summary omits the story to which I am going to devote this last section of my essay, *Maximum Carnage*.[27] As in the case of the Phaethontic tale that immediately precedes it, the protagonist is a vulnerable grade-school child.

From *Metamorphoses* 12.146–535 Shakar takes on the story of Caeneus, an invulnerable Lapith hero and transsexual, who causes mayhem in the Battle of the Centaurs and Lapiths before being crushed to death (or metamorphosis) under a mound of rocks and tree-trunks. A 300-line blood-bath dominates Ovid's treatment of the battle, with the bestial Centaurs' half-human half-equine forms adding an element of the bizarre; and Shakar's story offers a vivid response. Shakar also shows an especial interest in the implications of the *Metamorphoses*' flash-back story of the origins of Caeneus' invulnerability, according to which the then-female nymph Caen*is* was granted a simultaneous sex-change and powers of inpenetrability as compensation for her rape by the sea-god Neptune.

Now Shakar's *Maximum Carnage*. A psychologically disturbed ten-year-old girl in P.S. 96 in Flushing, Queens, lives in and out of a morbid fantasy life in which she is not a little girl called Roxanne but an indestructible male super-hero called Roxor. Roxor defends the school playground against an army of mutant half-men and half-motorcycles, called (and misspelled) "SENTORS," in obsessively imagined episodes of highly sexualized violence. Simultaneously Roxanne's teacher is running a series of class reports on "my superhero"; Roxanne's own ridiculed report on her *alter ego* will be the timebomb that seals her fate as a playground victim. The surface of the text explores different representations of violence at the interface of reality and make-believe, all focalized through Roxanne's pre-adolescent consciousness. The story's dark subtext traces the origins of Roxanne's disturbance to her sexual molestation in the bathroom by an uncle with a marine tattoo (the analogue of Ovid's predatory Neptune figure), which can then be seen to infect every aspect of the story's scenes of violence; the "Sentors" are the school bullies, but they are also displaced versions of Roxanne's own internal demons. At the end of the story Roxor/Roxanne suffers a fate that corresponds to that of her mythic prototype Caeneus/Caenis, crushed under a pile of bullying children in the playground. In an equivalent of the metamorphic release in Ovid's story she finds a final refuge (or something) in the fantasy worlds that have come to

[27] Shakar 91–104.

constitute her universe; as the story ends she escapes the confines of the playground, and of a time-expired video game, in a kind of textualized immortality that contains trace-elements of the epilogue of the *Metamorphoses* itself (104 "Something rises up out of the carnage. . . . A picture and twisting words").

How does all this speak to a contemporary reader and teacher of Ovid? In terms of episode choice, Shakar earns points for picking up a piece of the *Metamorphoses* usually skipped by anthologists; until Shakar's treatment, modern critics and creative writers alike have tended to shy away from the center of an Ovidian episode in which several hundred lines of hyper-epic violence ("maximum carnage") all but eclipse a flashback tale of erotic pursuit and transformation more representative of the *Metamorphoses* favored by the casual modern user. Shakar's tale, like its Ovidian counterpart, is something of an endurance test, a grim *tour de force* that eschews for special effect some of the wit and sparkle characteristic of other parts of Ovid's, and of Shakar's, *Metamorphoses*.

In terms of narrative construction and detailed intertextual intelligence, what is impressive in *Maximum Carnage* is Shakar's way of focalizing everything through Roxanne, the Caeneus/Caenis figure, so that the entire gory battle of Centaurs and Lapiths is internalized within her and subordinated to her story of sexual abuse. Paradoxically, that story of sexual abuse is even more briefly adumbrated in Shakar than in Ovid, even though it now drives the whole battle narrative in its almost-explicit psychoanalytic mode. For me at least, Shakar's refocalization is so compelling here that it becomes impossible not to read his psychoanalytic slant back into the Ovidian original itself; in other words, the Shakar story reads, not as a grafting of psychoanalytic terms onto Ovid's version of the battle narrative, but as an eliciting of psychoanalytic terms that now seem *already immanent* in Ovid's battle narrative. The doubling and switching of character roles between Ovid's myth and Shakar's is sometimes a matter of formal virtuosity and sometimes, perhaps, a commentary on the cyclical tendencies of violence and abuse. "SENTOR" is simultaneously Roxanne's schoolgirlish misspelling of "Centaur" and an anagram of "Nestor" (the internal narrator of the bloody battle narrative in the Ovidian orginal, and also himself a combatant, but on the *anti*-centaur side). Roxanne, who is traumatized by (the threat of) bodily penetration, has graphic fantasies in which she herself violently penetrates the bodies of others; her new adversaries, the Sentors, merge imagistically with her old adversary, the uncle with the "curly chest" and marine tattoo.

This last point can cue some comparative quotation (Ovid, *Met.* 12.487–93 and Shakar, *Maximum Carnage* 93–94; emphases added):

> The blow [from the centaur's sword] resounded on the flesh as if on stricken marble, and the blade, striking the hardened skin, broke into pieces. When long enough he had stood unharmed before his amazed enemy, Caeneus exclaimed: "Come now, let me try your body with my steel!" and clear to the hilt he drove his deadly sword in the other's side, and there in his vitals twisted and plied his invisible hand, *and made a wound inside the wound* (*vulnusque in vulnere fecit*).

> The sentor who ran over Kenny's head sees me and revs his engine and charges. He charges with a lance which is a pointy pole. I am not worried. When the lance hits me in the chest it doesn't even go through my skin. Nothing can go through my skin. The lance breaks in half. And the sentor says uh-oh. And I pick up the sharp half and push it into the sentor's curly chest. And it makes a squishy sound. And when I take it out again there is a red wound. And I do it again and *I make a wound inside the wound.*

> (Cf. 98: "Uncle Edward has a blue anchor on his curly chest. Anchors sink but his doesn't. In the bathtub it bobs on the water.")

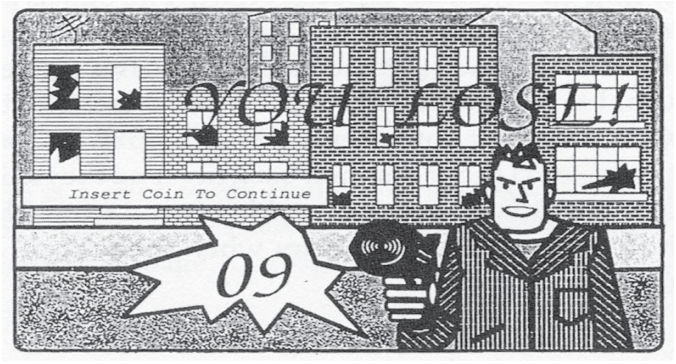
What will hover somewhere between familiarity and unfamiliarity for a student of recent trends in the academic criticism of Ovid is Shakar's very unsettling treatment of the *Metamorphoses*' uneasy nexus of erotics and violence. It is crucial, I think, that the battle narrative finds both means and motivation throughout to stay bloody and unseemly—e.g., 96 "I take out my hand and the knife has blood all over it, and I say to the sentor Look at the mess you made! That's very bad of you. Clean it up now. Lick it clean."—rather than acquiring the safe remoteness of, say, a classicizing marble relief. And in terms of the disturbing back-story of child-abuse, the vignette of the molestation of a ten year old in a shared bath (adumbrated in the last quotation above) carries a very particular shock of genre-recognition for a Latinate reader conversant with the Ovidian tradition of erotic pursuit in a well-watered landscape, discussed earlier in connection with Mary Zimmerman.

Lastly, style. Striking throughout *City in Love: The New York Metamorphoses* is the varied experimentation in the writing, which prevents these urban modernizations of myth from becoming merely literal or quotidian. For *Maximum Carnage* in particular, Ovid's characteristic literary genre-play finds a vivid response in Shakar's pasting in of vignettes from modern *sub*literary genres (picture book, comic magazine, video game[28]) which operate at the

[28] Incidentally, at least on a 2004 Google search, Roxanne's *alter ego* Roxor names a video-game design company in Austin, Texas (where Shakar worked on *City in Love*), and a favorite *nom de plume* of individual video-gamers; behind these usages may lurk a megalomaniac villain played by Bela Lugosi in the 1932 film *Chandu the Magician.*

interface of reality and fantasy, and of death and some kind of alternative version of death—like (but also unlike) the *Metamorphoses* (*Maximum Carnage* 99):

> And the windy sky is red like a wound, and P.S. 96 is redder *like a wound inside the wound*. And there are broken windows, and there are booming noises from the guns because now the sentors have guns, and uh-oh.



> That's not how you do it.
>
> 08
>
> Let me show you.
>
> 07
>
> The older boy presses up from behind, and his hand is reaching into his pocket and his knuckles are bony, and he puts a quarter in.

Like Petrarch and William Armistead Falconer on Cicero, then, Alex Shakar on Ovid offers a text that enters a relationship of familiarity or intimacy with classical Latinity, but that can also be used to *defamiliarize* Latin classicism. To the question, "Who nowadays would read the world like a character in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*?" this particular story's answer is (in the words of the school counsellor's handwritten report on Roxanne, pasted into the story; 93) "... a very bright 10 year-old, who suffers from low self-esteem, a disturbance of the aggressive drive, and a fixation at the anal-sadistic stage."

In terms of thinking about the functions of metamorphic myth in general, what is especially provocative in Shakar's book as a whole is its treatment of metamorphic myth-making as the recourse of the young, the infantile, the disturbed, the lonely, the obsessed.[29] We see the instability of Ovid's meta-

[29] "In this city, there are as many insanities as people!": thus a programmatically-charged remark put in the mouth of a criminal psychologist early in the book's first story (14). Cf. Henderson 322 for an intuitively similar approach.

morphic universe projected onto the world-view of such marginal and marginally competent individuals, the movement of narrative authority in and out of the consciousness of such individuals, and ultimately, in a sense, the ceding of narrative authority to such individuals. This represents a kind of defamiliarization of classical myth as a whole; perhaps only in a culture that has ceased to take the Classical Tradition for granted can such a radical rereading arise. However, *Maximum Carnage* also remains invested in some of the more familiar concerns of classical mythic tradition; the story even cites the defining exercise of Great-Books pedagogy, viz., the course in "the ancient hero,"[30] by being structured around a grade-school exercise (the "superhero report") that is a low-level participant in that tradition. What is more, this structuring device actually refers back thematically to the Ovidian model, since in the *Metamorphoses* itself the highly meta-epic story of Caeneus and of the Lapith-Centaur battle is told as part of a campfire conversation at Troy about the nature of *virtus*; in other words, Ovid's Greek chieftains are themselves represented, metaliterarily, as "back at school," engaged in the ancient world's primal scene of epic-as-education, making men by studying *klea andron*.[31]

So does *Maximum Carnage* offer a radical reconfiguration of the Classical Tradition, or something rather less revolutionary? One can hardly claim that Shakar is escaping much of the tradition's weight and authority. The challenge to think in new ways about myth in Alex Shakar's New York is hardly less deeply rooted in traditional classical learning than is any myth-making in that earlier world-city, 3rd century B.C. Alexandria; only those who bring an "Alexandrian" knowledge of classical myth to *The New York Metamorphoses* will appreciate the full subtlety of the book's Ovidian references. Like Petrarch back in 1345 or Falconer in 1922, Shakar is a bookman. Even as it mimics the fragmentation of art and narrative in its postmodern world, this particular story remains firmly grounded in a knowing classical-tradition epistemology. Its P.S. 96 is a locale in which to defamiliarize Ovidian myth; but Shakar is not in the business of telling us how Ovidian myth might be read (or not) in an actual P.S. 96. Or is he?

Like Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Shakar's *Maximum Carnage* brings into its violent plot an actual violent book to be read by one of its characters,[32] a book that is also (as in *Titus*) a significant model for the work in which

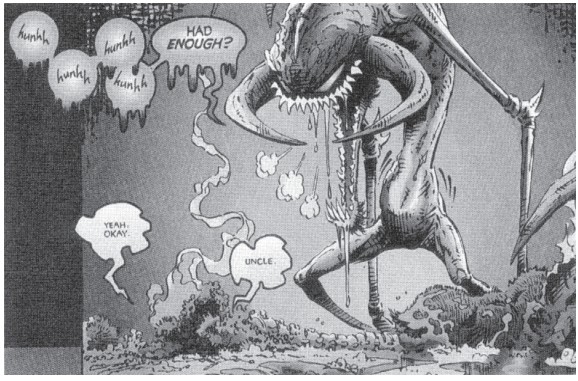
[30] The investment in the mythology of the hero is felt throughout *City in Love*: cf. again the opening story, at 18: "Something like that comes around only once in two thousand years. . . . All the astrologers agreed. A new race of heroes were gonna be born that day."

[31] Cf. Keith 8–35.

[32] Actually, two books feature in the plot, neither of them the *Metamorphoses*. One is a benign children's picture book found by Roxanne on the sidewalk; the other, the antitype of this, is *Violator*, the unsuitable out-of-school comic-book.

it stands; not the *Metamorphoses*, however, but the *Violator*, a publication of Image Comics in Anaheim, California, created by Todd McFarlane. Lucius' copy of the *Metamorphoses* was a school text-book; Roxanne's copy of *Violator* is a lurid comic book surreptitiously read outside school (*Maximum Carnage* 98):

> The comic book store has millions of comics. The best one is Violator. Violator grabs the little badguy and first he takes his head and pulls it halfway off his neckbone. Then he jumps on the badguy with feet that have claws, over and over until the badguy is a shriveled up pile of skin and blood. He does it again and again until he is very tired and sweating and drooling.



> Uncle Edward has a blue anchor on his curly chest ...

For Roxanne, the demonic Violator models the spirit of violent revenge that animates her fantasies throughout the story. At the moment (above) when citation becomes actual collage, Violator has just torn to pieces a monstrous victim who voices his surrender through the conventional call of "uncle"—a call that is then disconcertingly juxtaposed with the naming of the Uncle who is the source of Roxanne's disturbance (as already quoted earlier).

Now, when I gave the first version of this paper at the "Critical Divergences" conference in October 2003, a couple of the participants used this moment to challenge my proposition (in the last paragraph but one) that the only really competent reader of this story is one fully versed in its Ovidianism. What, my challengers asked, about the competence of the reader versed in the lore of comic books? Was I myself perhaps oblivious to an intertextual engagement with *Violator* beyond the single frame "quoted" by Shakar (above)? They were right, of course. Through a generous intermediary with a contact in the

comic-book business, I acquired for myself two of the three issues of *Violator*, published in 1994. Having acquired these volumes, I can now see a path to a differently intertextual reading of *Maximum Carnage*, as much in dialogue with the violent fantasies of comic-strip art as with Ovidian hyper-epic; this brings us, at last (as Shakar himself does not, despite appearances), to "pulp fiction."

First, *Violator*—whose title character is defined (as I now know) by his own dysfunctional family—turns out to be an apt choice of reading matter for Shakar's disturbed girl-hero Roxanne. As the son of a mortal mother and divine (well, demonic) father, and as a powerful creature metamorphosed into a vulnerable human form and then back again, Violator has the pulp-mythic version of the genealogy of an Ovidian protagonist, and a metamorphic profile with which Roxanne herself can identify—just as much as the Ovidian reader will make the identification with Caeneus. In the frame pasted in by Shakar, the "badguy" whom Violator is dismembering is one of his own younger demon-brothers (who had tried to destroy him first). The psychoanalytic dimension is overt, here and throughout[33]; even the brother's surrendering "uncle" as he is pulverized by Violator may already in the original strip hint at messed-up family dynamics[34]—just as it does in Shakar's reappropriation.

Second, the whole *Violator* comic strip (like Shakar's book, only even more dystopically) is set in a distorted version of a New York cityscape, in which mobsters, superheroes, and centuries-old demons pop in and out of their own levels of reality to do unspeakable things to one another. Even beyond the pages of *Maximum Carnage*, *Violator* lends occasional color to Shakar's New York mythology—in one instance, through a lexical allusion that operates in much the same way as an Alexandrian play on a Homeric *hapax*. A striking double-page frame in *Violator* #2 shows a Manhattan-like skyline enveloped in a magically-created "hemisphere of *nacreous* containment" (emphasis mine). Shakar "banks" both the image and the stand-out adjective, with its unexpected elevation of the comic's stylistic register[35]; as the final story in his book

[33] Cf., e.g., (from *Violator* #2; emphases original): Impaled head (ventriloquized by Violator): "What I *mean* is, this all sounds like a classic *Oedipus complex*! So *tell* me, how did you *resolve* your *subconscious desire* to kill your *father*?" Violator (in propria persona): "Well, mainly by *killin*' him."

[34] The following exchange between the warring brothers immediately precedes the "uncle" frame (*Violator* #3; emphases original): Violator: "Boy, takes ya *back*, huh? Remember how I'd get you to play *horsey* back when we was *kids*?" Vandalizer: "*K-kids*?? Ghaak ... You were *fifty-eight* and I was *seven*!" Violator: "*So?!* I make my *own* rules, bro! ..."

[35] The response of the demon who is asked to generate the "hemisphere" is not without self-irony on the part of *Violator*'s caption-writer: "'Nacreous containment'! Jeez! Ask me something *easy*, whydoncha?"

ends (or, more precisely, modulates into an endless loop), the last of the heroes to embody the "city in love," a new Narcissus, is listening to a disembodied voice that blends with reflections and echoes "in this *nacreous* space of your mind, intensifying the trance you are in. The voice is telling you a story that goes "*In a city* ..." (164; cf. 150; emphases mine). We have seen that, for a number of recent readers, New York City has become a place of the Ovidian metamorphic imagination. But for Shakar in *The New York Metamorphoses* Ovid's is not the only discourse to contribute to a vision of myth and the modern city.

Finally, and most importantly for the intertextual trace of *Violator*, the question of violence. A reader conversant with *Violator* (that is, a reader like Roxanne herself) will put Shakar's *Maximum Carnage* in dialogue with the violent fantasies of comic-strip art, rather than with those of Ovidian hyper-epic; and this is where the intertextual situation becomes (for us) most interesting, as the claims on the Shakar story of the hyper-epic and of the comic-strip codes compete with one another, and perhaps even coalesce.

Even before reading Shakar's story, one might already have had the idea of describing the violence in Ovid's Caeneus episode as "cartoonish." Thanks to *Maximum Carnage* and its intertexts, we get to think through this idea in some detail. Consider the following overt gloss by Roxanne (101–2):

> and I swing the sword and cut off the sentor's head. And the head flies through the air. And the head is still alive, because cut-off heads live for ten seconds. That's what it says in Violator. So the cut-off head is still alive flying through the air, and it watches the place where it used to be, where there is a colory fountain of blood.

Now *we* know, and no doubt Shakar knows, too, that the prolonged life of cut-off heads, attested in *Violator*, is no less distinctively attested in the high-cultural traditions of Ovidian and hyper-epic battle narrative (Ovid, *Met.* 5.103–6):

> ... Chromis cut off his head with the sword: the head fell straight on the altar, and there the still half-conscious (Lat. *semianimi*) tongue kept up its execrations and breathed out its life in the midst of the altar-fires.

So, too, when *Maximum Carnage* describes the innards of hurtling sentors spilling out and skidding on the ground, it is clear that the allusion is to the corresponding battle narrative in the Ovidian model (*Maximum Carnage* 100 and *Met.* 12.388–92):

> My turn, I say. I squeeze the triggers and watch the bullets go into their bellies until they are bloody messes. They try to get away, and I shoot out their back

> tires and they skid out, and their hearts and intestines and livers and stomachs spill out from their opened-up bellies when they scrape across the concrete.
>
> While the centaur stood pinned and helpless with that sore wound, Peleus smote him with his sword full in the belly. He leaped fiercely forward, trailing his entrails on the ground; and as he trailed he trod upon them and burst them as he trod, tangled his legs in them, and fell with empty belly to the earth.

However, Shakar's girl-hero Roxanne is surely to be thought of as finding *her* point of reference for these strewn viscera in *Violator*—where strewn viscera are on offer in abundance (from *Violator* #2; emphases original):

> B-DOOM! Demon brother #1: "*Owww!* My *brain*! Hey *guys*! He shot my *brain* out! *Owww!*" Demon brother #2: "It's *okay*! I got it! I got it! I *think* I got it ... Oops!" *spladdat* ... Brother #1 (later): "Did one of you *step* on it?"
>
> Brothers, various: "I want his *liver*!" "Yeah? Well, I want his *other* liver!" "*What* other liver? He's a *human*! They only *got* one liver!" "You're *sure*? What's that thing they got *two* of?" "Kidneys! You're thinking of *kidneys*!"

Here, then, is a more radical defamiliarization than those considered elsewhere in this essay. To a sheltered Latinist it comes as a shock to see Ovidian epic myth rendered allusively interchangeable with the debased paradigms of comic-book fantasy. *Violator* feels not like myth but like the underbelly (as it were) of myth; Shakar's *Maximum Carnage*, by superimposing the sensibility of a reader of Ovid (as cued by his own book-title), and the sensibility of his ten-year-old narrator, a reader of *Violator*, achieves part of its impact by forcing us to consider the possibility of mutual permeability between high- and low-cultural versions of the mythic imagination.

My own experience in acquiring my 1994 issues of *Violator* suggests a cultural-materialist corollary here—or at least a final vignette of post-Petrarchan book-fetishism. The book-learning of the Classical Tradition has always been in part about book connoisseurship; in the experience of the cultivated reader (as narrativized for posterity by Petrarch), participation in the acquisition and exchange of the physical books containing revered ancient works characteristically adds value to the learning acquired from the contents of those books. The reader of Shakar who seeks a volume of Ovid to read alongside *Maximum Carnage* may or may not find him/herself implicated in that culture of rare-book acquisition (probably not, since texts and translations of the *Metamorphoses* tend to remain, boringly but predictably, in print); but what is certain is that the reader of Shakar who seeks a volume of *Violator* will encounter a distinct echo of that tradition. Out-of-print comic-books are collectors' items; my own fascicles of *Violator*, acquired (through

an intermediary) from a specialist store, arrived with the kind of catalogue-description and appraisal to be expected from one of the antiquarian book-dealers with whom a classicist would more normally come in contact (one fascicle was designated "near mint," the other "very fine"; in both cases the condition of the binding was minutely described). More permeability, then, elicited by Shakarian Alexandrianism, this time between high- and low-brow book connoisseurship.

But this is perhaps special pleading. Let us be honest; discussion of the role of Ovid and of classical book-learning within Shakar's matrix of myth can easily look merely donnish. For the teacher or student of Classics at the turn of the millennium, the exploration of moments of intersection between our ancient set books and modern artistic cultures (or subcultures) often fails to transcend a unexamined sense of self-validation at the mere fact that we have found real artists and consumers of art out there who can relate to our esoteric knowledge. Now, back in 1345, Petrarch was no stranger either to the comforts of self-validation or to the anxieties of cultural anachronism. But Petrarch offers a challenge, not just a kind of precedent; *mutatis mutandis*, are we handling our own issues of inhabiting a cultural space between antiquity and modernity as creatively and productively as Petrarch did his?

When I included a reference to Mary Zimmerman's aquatic staging of the *Metamorphoses* in my 2002 article on Ovidian landscape, I sent her a copy. She wrote me back a charming letter in which she remarked that, while she was very gratified that an academic Ovidian had enjoyed the play, she hadn't created it with people like me in mind. Quite right, too; if we are to move beyond mere self-validation in our readings of reception, we need to do more than just to register our professional approval at the "classical references" in modern plays, poems, novels, and screenplays. An approach that can contemplate works like Shakar's, Iizuka's, and Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses* (and Shakespeare's, too) in *all* their contexts of production and reception (as the best current work now does) will make us better readers of the Classical Tradition; we may even learn something to our advantage about the future of Ovid, Latin, or metamorphic myth.

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