

*The Image of the Poet in Ovid's Metamorphoses.* By BARBARA PAVLOCK. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009. Pp. x + 196. Cloth, \$55.00. ISBN 978-0-299-23140-8.

Pavlock's (P.) monograph examines figures from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* who act as substitutes for the poet and his poetics. Some of the usual suspects (Arachne, Pythagoras and Pygmalion) are not featured or are only touched upon briefly; instead, P. focuses on Narcissus, Medea, Daedalus, Orpheus and Ulysses. The diverse figures chosen show how mutable Ovid's conception of the poet can be, and the variety of literary theories marshaled here (Bakhtin, narratology, generic theory and a healthy helping of intra/intertextuality) demonstrates P.'s interest in novel ways of illuminating this self-conscious poet and his self-conscious creation. The analysis is intriguing throughout and, it seems to me, asks the right questions of Ovid's text. P.'s conclusions may surprise some readers, as the figure of Ulysses emerges as "the strongest surrogate of the poet" (p. 132).

The opening chapter investigates the story of Narcissus and discusses how elegiac poetry and the elegiac voice are both manipulated and shown to be inadequate in the epic world of the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid's inclusion of elegiac elements in the *Metamorphoses* is pervasive and striking, and often has troubling consequences, including metamorphosis itself. One thinks of Apollo's pursuit of Daphne and his ringing "*me miserum*" (1.508), as well as the passion that strikes figures as disparate as Tereus (6.455-74), and Mercury (2.726-9), and it is easy to see the centrality of desire and elegiac language for Ovid's epic. The Narcissus tale allows Ovid to bring to light "an underlying, if suppressed, truth of elegy: the elegist, in rendering the beloved an object and in obsessively gazing on and pursuing the image of his own making, reveals his inherent narcissism" (p. 15). Through an examination of comparable passages from the *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria* and Propertius 1.18, P. connects the Narcissus tale to elegiac predecessors, and shows how the iteration of tropes such as the *dura puella*, *servitium amoris* and elegy's contamination of other genres are implicitly critiqued through this deluded poet-lover/beloved. As Narcissus' song transforms into a lament, and Narcissus himself wastes away until only his eponymous flower remains, P. finds echoes of Theocritus, Cornelius Gallus, Sappho and Horace. These are perceptive readings, especially that of Horace 2.5, and illustrate the variety of intertextual sources at play throughout the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid incorporates these sources to point to a continuity or difference in perspective and significance, whether that be thematic, generic or theoretical. The connections P. discovers make one wonder whether Ovid's language is especially

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meta-poetic and allusive when he composes stories featuring stand-ins for Ovid himself. These may be the moments when one would expect him to be particularly mindful and concerned about the polyvalent resonances of his poetic creation.

In Chapter 2, Medea's apparent self-knowledge of her literary tradition suggests a parallel with Ovid's "ability to transform his inherited material and create a new kind of poem" (p. 41), and she can accordingly be viewed as a surrogate poet. In her description of her love for Jason, Medea's rhetoric continuously reflects and refracts details of her story from Apollonius and Euripides, while her language may recall Vergil and Horace. P. explicates a link with Horace *Odes* 1.1.36 (*sublimi feriam sidera vertice*) when Medea dreams of wedded bliss with Jason (*vertice sidera tangam*, 7.61), claiming that Medea appropriates a position "in the poetic sphere for herself, especially as she begins to project an increasing awareness of her literary counterparts in Euripides and Apollonius" (p. 42). While this is true, Medea's reformulation also displays Ovid's wit. Because of her skill as a sorceress (an aspect downplayed in P.'s study), Medea can seemingly do the impossible (note her question: *quid enim non carmina possunt?*, 7.167), including reach the stars themselves in her dragon-drawn chariot (*sublimis rapitur*, 7.222). Medea can do magic with her *carmina*, just as Ovid can in his epic *carmen*. P. finds in Medea's flight a rich catalogue of myths that foreshadow characters, storylines and transformations yet to come, as well as mimicking the make-up of the *Metamorphoses* as a whole: "the imaginative travelogue that Ovid creates here through his surrogate's flight is a microcosm of his revisionist approach to epic" (p. 59). P. presses the travelogue material and discovers rewarding connections with Medea's character as well as Ovid's own "production of clever plots that subvert traditional mores and undermine conventional notions of order on all levels" (p. 60).

If Medea's allusive rhetoric and plotting define one aspect of Ovid's poetic project, Daedalus' artistry and his creation of the intricate, winding labyrinth may clarify another facet of Ovid's authorial persona. Chapter 3 attempts to delineate Daedalus' problematic status as inventor, especially when set against his sympathetic characterization in the *Aeneid*, as well as to discuss aspects of Book 8 that provide symbolic representations of the *Metamorphoses* as a whole. For P., the labyrinth is the paradigmatic compositional metaphor because it "characterizes the form of the *Metamorphoses*, its sinuous movement from tale to tale with clever, if tenuous, transitions between individual episodes and books" (p. 65). This characterization seems strained

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to me and the unfortunate repetition of the adjective “labyrinthine” (pp. 67, 68, 69, 71, *passim*), and use of the term “labyrinth” (pp. 70, 72) for aspects of narrative construction only exacerbated my unease. But P.’s observations about the characters of Daedalus, Icarus, Theseus, Meleager and Achelous are evocative and hint at the complex shifts of tone and genre throughout the *Metamorphoses*. For example, she argues that Achelous’ bombastic narrative transcends poetic *decorum* in his excessive use of epic allusions. Such an observation hints at the importance of internal narrators for Ovid, and implies that he can criticize the speaking delivery, intertexts and subject matter of such characters. P. concludes that Ovid “has situated the river god’s storytelling in a context from which the reader, unlike the hero Theseus, can take his clues and thus find in the pompous river god’s narratives a source of entertainment and enlightenment” (p. 88).

The implications of such a reading become clear in Chapter 4, which analyzes Orpheus’ rendition of the affair of Venus and Adonis in Book 10, and reveals how the doubling of embedded narrators suggests the self-absorption of both Orpheus and Ovid. P. begins by analyzing Venus’ use of the story of Hippomenes and Atalanta, and shows that the underlying praise of Hippomenes’ *virtus* would not deter Adonis from hunting more dangerous prey, but rather incite his valor and lead to his doom. But this is Orpheus telling the story of Venus telling the story to Adonis, and the narratological frames may indicate Orpheus’ own investment in it: “Orpheus’ narrative of Adonis’ fate implies that the object of desire is irretrievable, that symbolic forms of recovery through metamorphosis and ritual are illusory” (p. 105). In fact, however, this is Ovid telling the story of Orpheus telling the story of Venus telling the story—so how does it reflect upon Ovid himself and his own poetics? Therein lies the rub with narratological readings of this sort: how distinct are the focalized narratives of Venus, Orpheus and Ovid? For P., close attention to the different stories reveals that Venus is ultimately too self-absorbed to care about Adonis, while Orpheus casts Hippomenes in his own likeness and, although he highlights incest in his tale of Myrrha and Cinyras, is “blind to this symbolic level of his tales” (p. 106). But surely Ovid controls Orpheus’ narrative voice? P.’s investigation of the Vergilian intertexts of Book 10 may suggest that he does not, given that “his recollections of the *Aeneid* here seem to be appropriations without engagement, a kind of slippage.... The poet, in effect, takes on some of the character of his surrogate narrator of Book 10, who in his self-absorption conflates his own voice with Venus’ in the story of Atalanta and Hippomenes” (p. 108). It would thus appear that Ovid has become Orpheus-like in his use of Vergil-

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ian material and has grown over fond of wearing his Orpheus mask. (A devil's advocate would wonder if Orpheus has been Ovid-like all along). Such an investigation is worthwhile, and P. has done a fine job of explicating some of the intricacies of a narratological reading. But the process can be dizzying.

In her final chapter, P. turns to the debate between Ajax and Ulysses over the arms of Achilles and finds that Ulysses, through his self-awareness and his clever use of language and the poetic tradition, is a suitable surrogate for the poet. Close examination of Ulysses' claims reveals how often he spices up his divine lineage, his battle prowess and his ties with Achilles in a way that diverges from the Homeric tradition but is made plausible through his rhetorical and poetic flair. His focus on words as opposed to deeds may subvert the heroic ethos of traditional epic, but fits in well with Ovid's fluid *Metamorphoses*. Ulysses' rhetorical strategy, it turns out, is to lie in order to succeed: "The clever Greek has thus implemented an imaginative strategy that his alert audience (and the reader) can grasp: his claim of carrying Achilles' body out of the battle is a *fictional device* rather than hard fact" (p. 126). This section might have benefited from delving further into the differences (and similarities) between poetry and rhetoric, and Ulysses' lies may remind one of Quintilian's injunctions to the orator not to lie unless he has a good memory (*mendacem memorem esse oportere*, *I.O.* 4.20.91). While Ulysses' audience seems not to notice his fictitious touches (they do give him Achilles' arms), Ovid's use of Ulysses' sophistic narrative "simultaneously encourages the reader to probe the instability of values that he as poet so frequently challenges" (p. 131). P. concludes that Ovid's portrayal of Ulysses in the final books of the *Metamorphoses* and his revisionist view of the epic tradition suggest the importance of this figure for Ovid's poetics and for his epic as a whole.

This book will be of interest to all readers of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, especially those exploring meta-poetic figures in the text and the internal dynamics of Ovid's poetic language. P.'s attention to philological matters is rigorous throughout and provides a firm foundation for her more sophisticated theoretical excursions. Her model readings show how the application of intertextual and narratological theories of literary criticism can aid the reader in gaining insight into Ovid's poetics.

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