

## Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: the text before and after\*

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I suggest that at the beginning of the *Metamorphoses* through narrative techniques and the structure of the verses, in particular lines 1.10-14, the poet claims to be a *fabricator mundi* and that his text exists before the creation of the world, becoming the model for its formation. In the epilogue, the poet also declares his certainty that his work will be eternal; it will live, that is, *sine fine* as he states at *Tristia* 2.63-4. This reading of *sine fine* actually alludes to the prophecy of Jupiter in the first book of the *Aeneid* where the phrase meant the eternity of the Roman dominion. The *perpetuum carmen*, as the poet characterised the *Metamorphoses* at 1.4, refers not only to the time-span of the work through to the poet's own time but more importantly to the eternal character of his poetry. It is the poetic genius which cannot be trapped in a specific time frame.

There is a consensus among Ovidian scholars that in writing the *Metamorphoses* Ovid had Virgil and his work firmly in mind. In striving for originality, he also had to emulate almost the entire Greek and Roman literary tradition. In his *perpetuum carmen*, therefore, he was confronted with the task of composing an all-inclusive work with regard to time, subject-matter and literary genre. The purpose of this paper is to show how Ovid exploited certain methods and techniques in order to imply, through the narrative, the omnipotence of the poetic genius through the creation of his text.

### 1. *Fabricator mundi*

In my work on the catalogues of proper names in the Roman epic, I have suggested that in Virgil some epic catalogues tend in a sense through their structure, through the way the various names are placed within the catalogue, to imitate a scene or a situation described in space in an extratextual mirroring.<sup>1</sup> This technique does not originate with Virgil but for our purposes here I shall confine myself to him. In this paper—or in part of it, at least—the recognition of the above technique will help us, I hope, to apprehend some of the intricacies of the Ovidian *Metamorphoses* which may otherwise lie beyond our reach.

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<sup>1</sup> For similar cases in Ovid see Kyriakidis (2007), 55-6; (2010b), 8-10; (2013a), 269-70, 271-2; (2013c), 265-89; cf. (2010a), 584-9. See also below, n.47.

In *Aeneid* 4, when Dido has made up her mind to kill herself, she curses Aeneas roundly. To her aid she summons the gods whose names form a catalogue (4.607-12):<sup>2</sup>

*Sol, qui terrarum flammis opera omnia lustras,  
tuque harum interpres curarum et conscia Juno,  
nocturnisque Hecate triviis ululata per urbes  
et Dirae ultrices et di morientis Elissae,* 610  
*accipite haec, meritumque malis advertite numen  
et nostras audite preces.*

(Sun, you who survey with your flames all the works on earth, and you Juno, witness and party to my agonies, and Hecate greeted in nightly howling at crossroads all over our cities, and you avenging Furies and you the gods of dying Dido, listen to these words, turn your power to my sufferings as I deserve it, and hear my prayers.)

Dido's invocation to the gods follows the cosmic zones<sup>3</sup> downwards, as these were conceived in antiquity. It starts with the Sun (*Sol*) who, according to ancient belief, was placed on the highest cosmic level,<sup>4</sup> the ether, as line 607 (*qui terrarum flammis opera omnia lustras*) implies (*αἰθήρ < αἶθω*, cf. *flammis*).<sup>5</sup> Juno, the Greek goddess Hera, whose name has broadly been associated with *ἀήρ* (air)<sup>6</sup> occupies the level which is immediately below the ether.<sup>7</sup> Then follows Hecate,<sup>8</sup> a goddess with a complex profile, whom Virgil, among others, connects with the Underworld (*Aen.* 6.564-5), but who is also associated with Artemis. Therefore, the overlapping of functions between the two goddesses as well as her worship at the crossroads and her association with the world of ghosts, render her a deity of a kind of twilight zone, between this world and the Underworld. Next come the *Dirae*, the Furies, who are the deities of revenge<sup>9</sup> and, according to Servius (on *Aen.* 4.609), they lived in the Underworld.<sup>10</sup> With these deities and the unnamed gods—whoever they may be—watching Dido leading herself to death the catalogue comes to its close. The order of the names invoked corresponds to the

<sup>2</sup> Here I repeat Kyriakidis (2007), 29-30.

<sup>3</sup> Hardie (1986b), 284-5.

<sup>4</sup> Eur. *Ion* 83-5, fr. 228.5 Kannicht; Plut. *De Iside et Osiride* 384b, referring to Pindar *O.* 1.6. Sometimes Sun and Ether are identical: e.g. sch. vet. on Aristoph. *Nubes* 265α, 285β Holwerda, and sch. rec. *Nubes* 285β Koster.

<sup>5</sup> Ps-Zonaras *Lexicon* 67 Tittmann; Photius *Lexicon* α574 Theodoridis.

<sup>6</sup> Among the many sources, let us confine ourselves to Plato *Crat.* 404c and to sch. on *Il.* 1.399-406. Maltby (1991), s.v. *Iuno*. Hardie (1986b), 30 refers to Heinze's views.

<sup>7</sup> It has to be noted, however, that it is Juno's agent, the Fury *Allecto* from the Underworld (*Aen.* 7.323-6), who stirs the madness of war. In this respect, the role of the goddess in the epic also connects her with the Furies and the Underworld: Hardie (1986a), 94 and (1986b), 93 n.24.

<sup>8</sup> Given the fact that Dido is a kind of 'Virgilian' *Medea*, her invocation to the Sun and Hecate may imply allusive connections between her character and that of the *Medea* in Apollonius' *Argonautica*: see Nelis (2001), 165-6.

<sup>9</sup> Serv. on *Aen.* 8.701.

<sup>10</sup> There are obviously various versions of the myth; for associations of the *Dirae* with areas outside the Underworld in Virgil see e.g. *Aen.* 8.701 and 12.849-50, *hae* [i.e. *Dirae*] *Iovis ad solium saevique in limine regis / apparent* (they [sc. the Furies] hover at the throne of savage Jupiter in the royal palace).

ancient perception of the position of cosmic entities and supernatural beings in this world and in the Underworld: the sun at the apex, and the chthonic deities at the bottom of the catalogue.

The first instance of extratextual mirroring in the *Metamorphoses* is attested as early as the creation of the world from chaos at the very start of the narrative. The reader first learns about the prevailing chaos (*Met.* 1.5-14):

*Ante mare et terras et quod tegit omnia caelum* 5  
*unus erat toto naturae vultus in orbe,*  
*quem dixere Chaos: rudis indigestaque moles*  
*nec quicquam nisi pondus iners congestaque eodem*  
*non bene iunctarum discordia semina rerum.*  
*nullus adhuc mundo praebebat lumina Titan,* 10  
*nec nova crescendo reparabat cornua Phoebae,*  
*nec circumfuso pendebat in aere Tellus*  
*ponderibus librata suis, nec bracchia longo*  
*marginē terrarum porregerat Amphitrite.*

(Before there was the sea and the earth and the sky which covers everything, the whole round nature showed a single face which people called Chaos: a rough and disordered mass, nothing but a dead weight in which the discordant and badly mixed seeds of things heaped together. No Sun cast his rays yet on the world nor did the waxing Moon recover her new horns, nor was the Earth hung in the surrounding air balanced by her weight, and Amphitrite had not yet stretched her arms along the boundary of the land.)

Looking at the catalogue at lines 10-14 we will almost inevitably recall the catalogue from the *Aeneid* (4.607-10) which we saw above, even though the scope of each is totally different. As in Virgil, the order of the names within the Ovidian catalogue also impresses on the text what is the common human perception of the celestial bodies and the natural elements in an extratextual mirroring: the sun is the highest of the heavenly bodies; then comes the moon followed by the earth and the waters on it. In this catalogue of the *Metamorphoses* almost every line contains one single name and all names are placed in the same metrical position, that is, at the end of the hexameter.<sup>11</sup> The catalogue, therefore, emits a sense of balance having the pattern [1-1-1-F-1]<sup>12</sup> (where 'F' is a filler verse with no name).<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, each of the three names (*Titan*, *Phoebae*, *Tellus*) consists of two syllables while the last name of the catalogue (*Amphitrite*) doubles them to four. The first two of the two-syllable names are allocated a single line each, whereas the last two names share between them the remaining three lines (12-14) with the Earth<sup>14</sup> holding the absolute middle position<sup>15</sup> within the catalogue. The

<sup>11</sup> Wheeler (2000), 14-5; Barchiesi (2005), 153, *ad* 1.10; Galasso in Paduano *et al.* (2000), 742.

<sup>12</sup> See Kyriakidis (2007), *Appendix* 183 (internal balance).

<sup>13</sup> 'Filler' is used as a general term for any line within a catalogue which bears no proper name. See Kyriakidis (2005), *Appendix*. However, I would like to draw the reader's attention to Malcolm Heath's observation that "'filler" for *Met.* 1.13 is doing it an injustice: we have come down from sun to moon (two separate layers, each with a separate line of verse) to the level of earth and sea—and these are (in reality and in the text) interlaced'.

<sup>14</sup> For *Tellus* (capitalised) see Tarrant (2004), at 1.12. Barchiesi (2005), *ad* 1.12.

<sup>15</sup> See Wheeler (1995), 111 and n.54.

last name, Amphitrite, augmenting its syllables to four and gaining extra emphasis with its spondaic form in the fifth foot, is described as not having yet stretched her arms: *nec brachia... / ... porrexerat*. It is this phrase which is textually realised by the four syllables of the name *Amphitrite*, as a metonymy for the sea,<sup>16</sup> the *circumfluus umor* (*Met.* 1.30),<sup>17</sup> thus intensifying the extratextual mirroring of the catalogue.

The extratextual mirroring technique is enhanced in one more way. Although in the Virgilian catalogue there is no clear mention of the Earth, Ovid in his catalogue renders to *Tellus* its due importance. Line 12, *nec circumfuso pendebat in aere Tellus* has the verb *pendebat* in its middle.<sup>18</sup> The same verb will be used by Manilius to describe the earth's suspension in space in the centre of the heavens (1.173):<sup>19</sup>

*quod nisi librato penderet pondere tellus*

(for if the earth did not hang because of its balanced weight)

Much earlier, the central position held by the earth was well described by Lucretius, who actually meant the centre of *our* world rather than the whole universe since, according to the Epicurean poet, the universe consists of many *mundi* in the infinite space (*DRN* 1.1001, 1070-1). At 5.534 of his *De rerum natura* the poet writes:

*Terraque ut in media mundi regione quiescat*

(that the earth may rest in the middle region of the world).

Given Lucretius' practice of relating his text or part of it to the natural elements analogically,<sup>20</sup> it is hardly a matter of coincidence that the phrase *media mundi regione* appears in the middle of the verse as the earth was believed to hold the middle position of our world.<sup>21</sup> In that instance, however, the verb *pendeo* is

<sup>16</sup> Barchiesi (2005), on 13-4; Michalopoulos (2009), 222-3, 234; Hardie (forthcoming), on *Met.* 15.739-41 (*circumfluus*).

<sup>17</sup> Barchiesi (2005), on 30: *circumfluus*: 'Al v. 14 l' idea dell' acqua come elemento avvolgente era stata espresso solo implicitamente nel teonimo Greco *Amphitrite*, scelto per il valore del prefisso ἀμφι- «intorno»'.

<sup>18</sup> Unlike Ovid, Virgil never really used the verb *pendere* in order to present the position of the earth. The verb appears 34 times in the Virgilian corpus and it occupies various places within the hexameter. In a few instances the verb holds the middle position of the verse, which however does not seem to bear any interpretative implications (see *Geo.* 2.89, 523, 4.374; *Aen.* 1.106, 7.595, 8.197, 10.586), even though the poet was particularly keen on the relation between structure and content: Thomas (2004), 123-50, esp. 123-4 and 136-8.

<sup>19</sup> Feraboli-Scarcia (1996), *ad loc.* It is also interesting that Manilius, in support of his view that the earth holds the middle position in the universe, employs the same technique as Ovid, by giving to the word *mediam*—which refers to the hollow space in the middle of the air that the earth holds—the medial position of his verse: *Est igitur tellus mediam sortita cavernam / aeris* (the earth then has been given the middle cavity of the air): *Astron.* 1.202-3, with Feraboli-Scarcia (1996), *ad loc.*; see also 1.550, 611, 634, 641 etc. Kyriakidis (2012), 42-3.

<sup>20</sup> Kyriakidis (2004), esp. 37-44.

<sup>21</sup> Ovid follows closely Lucretius in his *Fasti* 6.273: *cumque sit in media rerum regione locata* (sc. *terra*) (and since it [i.e. the earth] is placed in the middle region of the world). See Littlewood (2006), on 273-6. The geocentric theory was already a tenet of ancient philosophy since at least Plato and Aristotle (cf. Aratus, *Phaen.* 22-3) and it will not be discussed here. See e.g. Howard

missing, but Lucretius applies it when he presents the earth with its mythological attributes as mother of gods and of all living beings (*DRN* 2.600-3):

*Hanc veteres Graium docti cecinere poetae  
sedibus in curru biiugos agitare leones,  
aeris in spatio magnam pendere docentes  
tellurem.*

(It is she, the earth, the learned Greek poets of old have sung sitting in her chariot and driving the two lions, thus teaching that the great earth hangs in the space of the air.)

In his catalogue Ovid proceeds to a careful blending of the two Lucretian phrases; for he chooses to present the position of the earth in its mythic version with the verb *pendere* in the middle of the line (12) in a passage contextually similar to that of Lucretius' (*aeris in spatio... pendere*, *DRN* 2.602 ~ *circumfuso pendebat in aere*, *Met.* 1.12), thus implying the geocentric theory the Epicurean poet represents at 5.534.<sup>22</sup>

This absolutely balanced Ovidian catalogue,<sup>23</sup> governed by the preposition *ante* (1.5),<sup>24</sup> belongs to the unit with the description of chaos and refers to the world which *does not yet exist*; it relates what was *not yet there*, for the sun, the moon, the earth and the element of the water found their place in the universe *after* the period of chaos. In other words, the presentation of the earth and the other celestial bodies is made *before* the presentation of their creation. This situation is very clearly depicted as three out of the four hexameters which close with a proper noun (10, 11, 12) emphatically open with a privative (*nullus*, *nec*, *nec*).<sup>25</sup>

Holzberg has pointed out that 'as a rule, [the poet] spends less time on "cosmos" than on "chaos";<sup>26</sup> at the same time—as others have noted—there is something chaotic in the development of the narrative itself in the *Metamorphoses* and the element of time in it.<sup>27</sup> Under such circumstances the text gives the impression that it functions in a way similar or parallel to the content of the work. A strong indication of this is the use of the same adjective *rudis* for the description both of chaos (*Met.* 1.7) and of the poet's text (*Tr.* 1.7.22, 39), as Hinds has

(1961), 155; Furley (1989), 14-26, 187-95. On word placement and meaning see Lateiner (1990), 204, 207-8; for further examples 209-37.

<sup>22</sup> Kyriakidis (2004), 35. On earth's medial position in scientific accounts cf. Varro, *LL* 7.17. Cic. *ND* 1.103, 2.84, 98, with Pease (1955), on 1.103 and (1958), on 2.84 and 2.98.

<sup>23</sup> Wheeler (2000), 14-15 considers that the catalogue at 1.10-14 imitates Lucretius' *DRN* 5.432-5.

<sup>24</sup> Lateiner (1990), 209; Hardie (2004), 164.

<sup>25</sup> Galasso in Paduano *et al.* (2000), 741, on 5-20: 'questo aspetto negativo è al centro dell'interesse ovidiano.'

<sup>26</sup> Holzberg (2002), 121.

<sup>27</sup> Solodow (1988), e.g. 2, 3, 25-34, 37; Wheeler (1995), 105 and n.33, (2000), 23-32; Schiesaro (2002), 67-8; Hardie (2004), 165-8, on the 'repeated pattern of order degenerating into disorder' in the *Metamorphoses*; Barchiesi (2001), 27, cf. (2005), on *Met.* 2.217-26; Williams (2009), 157 refers to 'the chaotic operation of time'; Kyriakidis (2012), 269-70.

argued.<sup>28</sup> For Liveley in her discussion of texts as chaotic systems, the text of the *Metamorphoses* is an exemplary case. She actually states:<sup>29</sup>

Potentially all literary texts may be regarded as chaotic systems susceptible to disturbance by unpredictable readers. Yet Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with its discontinuous and fragmented narrative, its contradictory and varied historical reception, might be seen as an appropriately chaotic text to view from within the interpretative frame offered by chaos theory.

The placement, therefore, of a totally balanced catalogue within the textual unit describing chaos discloses, I would say, the poet's intention to pretend that the text comes from a stage *before* the cosmic creation. Viewed in this way, the catalogue is not a reflection, an image of the world-to-be, but its model. By reversing the relation between the catalogue and extratextual reality as represented in Dido's invocation, the Ovidian text does not imitate the existing external reality but claims to be its model.<sup>30</sup> The text itself thus becomes the canvas of that creation. I would recall here that in ancient Greek the word *ποιητής* signifies both the poet (and the artist)<sup>31</sup> as well as the creator of the world.<sup>32</sup> The poet, therefore, aspires to be the artist, the *fabricator mundi* (1.57) and the *opifex rerum* (1.79),<sup>33</sup> and the text becomes a blueprint for the formation of the external world and the way we perceive it. Strange though this idea may sound, it is, in fact, no more than an extension of the deeply rooted human perception of interpreting things through an anthropocentric approach. According to it in mythology, for instance, the constellations were formed and took the shape of beings that already existed on earth.<sup>34</sup>

The balanced catalogue is the first case of a clear extratextual mirroring in the *Metamorphoses*. Some lines below, the poet shows how god, *quisquis fuit ille deorum* (whoever he was of the gods, 1.32),<sup>35</sup> creates the earth to look the same from everywhere (34-5):

*principio terram, ne non aequalis ab omni  
parte foret, magni speciem glomeravit in orbis.*

(At the beginning he shaped the earth in the form of a great ball, in order to be the same in all sides.)

<sup>28</sup> Hinds (1985), 22-23 = Knox (ed.) (2006), 431; Kyriakidis (2013b), 365.

<sup>29</sup> Liveley (2002), 34; see also Tarrant (2002), 349-51.

<sup>30</sup> Malcolm Heath has come up with an intriguing suggestion: is it possible that behind the poetic claim that the text, with its extratextual mirroring, functions as a model for the creation of the world responds to Plato's satirical reference to making the whole world by means of a mirror (*Resp.* 596c-e)?

<sup>31</sup> See also Barchiesi (2005), 162, on 76-9.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Plato, *Tim.* 28c: τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦ παντὸς (the creator and father of this whole universe).

<sup>33</sup> Wheeler (1995), 106.

<sup>34</sup> *Catasterisms* in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is not a novel idea. Manilius criticises this perverted conception of heaven by previous poets (*Astr.* 2.37-8), yet in part of his work at least he returns to this idea himself, as Volk (2009), 112-3, illustrates in her discussion. I thank the anonymous referee for drawing my attention to this.

<sup>35</sup> Solodow (1988), 214-5.

The earth, therefore, was created as a *species*, a *simulacrum*, an εἶδωλον<sup>36</sup> of a great sphere, a creation which entails the idea of the god as an artist. Ovid 'portrays the creator as if he were a visual artist', as Holzberg notes.<sup>37</sup> Cosmos and earth were created from chaos which was treated, according to Wheeler, as a 'raw material that awaits refinement in the hands of an artist'.<sup>38</sup> This is strongly suggested by the phrase *rudis indigestaque*<sup>39</sup> *moles* (a rough and disordered mass, 7).<sup>40</sup> The earth located in the centre of the world, is described as an artistic form, as a *species* of a big ball. Furthermore the earth is divided into five zones *like the sky*. Wheeler has noted that the relevant passage (45-51) holds the middle position in the Ovidian cosmogony (1.21-75).<sup>41</sup> Indeed it is flanked by twenty four lines at both ends (1.21-44 and 52-75).

*utque duae dextra caelum totidemque sinistra* 45  
*parte secant zonae, quinta est ardentior illis,*  
*sic onus inclusum numero distinxit eodem*  
*cura dei, totidemque plagae tellure premuntur*  
*quarum quae media est, non est habitabilis aestu*  
*nix tegit alta duas: totidem inter utrumque locavit* 50  
*temperiemque dedit mixta cum frigore flamma.*

(As the sky is cut into zones, two on the right and two on the left and the fifth is the hottest of all, in the same fashion the care of god divided the enclosed weight, and an equal number of tracts are pressed upon the earth of which the one in the middle is uninhabited because of the heat. Deep snow covers the two zones and between them he placed two more and gave them temperate climate mixing heat with cold.)

The zones described in the simile are those of the sky; an equal number of zones is described as being *impressed* upon the earth and drawn on it (*tellure premuntur*, 48). The imagery in this section is built around the verb *premuntur*. The verb is also found in Virgil in the passage concerning the five zones (*mundus... /... premitur Libyae devexus in Austros*, the world comes down to Libya in the south,

<sup>36</sup> The word *species* with the meaning of *simulacrum*, or *imago*, was used by Lucretius (*DRN* 1.125, 4.49-53; cf. also the combination of *simulacrum et imago* at 2.112; Schiesaro (1990), 26-27). See Ovid, *Met.* 9.473, 11.677: Wheeler (1999), 123, with further references. Hardie (1988), 72-3 on *simulacrum*; for the word *imago* in the *Metamorphoses*, see Solodow (1988), 205-7, 225-6 and index *s.v.*; and for *simulacrum* *ib.* 204-6.

<sup>37</sup> Holzberg (2002), 120. He pointedly adds that 'the cosmogony presented in the *Metamorphoses* begins to sound like a theoretical treatise on art'. See also Solodow (1988), 214-5.

<sup>38</sup> Wheeler (1995), 105.

<sup>39</sup> See Barchiesi (2005), 152, on 1.7: 'Ovidio sperimenta un lessico nuovo...'. See however, Plato, *Tim.* 30: εἰς τάξιν αὐτὸ ἤγαγεν ἐκ τῆς ἀταξίας, (he brought order out of disorder). Cf. also *Genesis* 1.2: ἡ δὲ γῆ ἦν... ἀκατασκεύαστος (and the earth was... unformed).

<sup>40</sup> See above n.28 (Hinds). Wheeler (1995), 105-6, relates the connection of the artist with the creator through the meaning of the verb *glomero* and its association with the term *glomus*: 'While the term *glomus* may indicate the earth, it commonly refers to a ball of wool.' Cf. also Feeney (1991), 191.

<sup>41</sup> Wheeler (1995), 111-2, rightly thinks that the cosmogony contains lines 21-75 and that lines 5-20 (about chaos) and 76-88 (the creation of man) are not included in this unit. He further suggests that the placement of lines 45-51 in the middle of the cosmogony satisfies the reader's sense of the 'medial position'—cultivated by his/her previous readings—since up to this point of the narrative there is no mention of the geocentric theory.

*Geo.* 1.240-1),<sup>42</sup> but with a meaning similar to *Met.* 2.135 and 139,<sup>43</sup> that is, to 'come down' or 'come lower'. The verb *premo* in our passage, however, strongly recalls the imprinting, the tracing process that is, on a surface;<sup>44</sup> Ovid has employed the verb with the more specific meaning of writing at *Heroides* (10.140) when Ariadne writes to Theseus: *litteraque articulo pressa*<sup>45</sup> *tremente labat* (each letter I trace with my trembling hand wavers). Strictly speaking, the reader is informed about the zones by looking not at the sky, but at the text which is structured in such a way as to reflect the position and the order of the celestial zones on the text in a strict extratextual mirroring. Each pair of zones in the sky (45) in reality corresponds to the opposite position of the one being held in the verse, and the fifth zone (*quinta*) at line 46 is actually the medial zone and holds the middle position of the line.<sup>46</sup> We know full well that, when looking in a mirror, only the lateral axis, left to right, of the reflected object is affected whereas the vertical remains unimpaired. This is what happens here where line 45 is governed by the lateral axis and line 46 by the vertical.<sup>47</sup> The reader, therefore, sees in the text what is happening in the sky before proceeding to the apodosis of the simile (*sic onus...*, 47-51) where the narrative concerns the terrestrial zones. Through the literary devices of the simile and the extratextual mirroring it is as though the text becomes the blueprint for the impression of the terrestrial zones in the likeness of the celestial ones.<sup>48</sup> This time the verb *premuntur* signifies (from the practice of drawing the letters on a writing surface) the idea of pressing or tracing on the surface of the earth the celestial zones. Later on in the *Metamorphoses*, at the beginning of Book 3, we witness the opposite of this situation: whereas here the reader is not asked to look up at the sky for conceiving the structure of the heavenly zones but is guided to his understanding through the text and the textual devices, there, in the Cadmus episode, after the description of the serpent sacred to Mars (*Martius anguis*, 3.32) guarding the water-spring the reader is asked to look up at the celestial serpent in order to grasp the size of the one on earth (3.44-5):<sup>49</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Mynors (1990, *ad loc.*): 'The Romans normally apply words for rising and falling to the curved surface of a sphere.'

<sup>43</sup> *Met.* 2.135: *nec preme nec summum molire per aethera cursum* (don't come down too much or attempt to take the highest course through the heaven); 139: *neve sinisterior pressam rota ducat ad Aram* (nor drive your chariot too much to the left where the Altar comes too low).

<sup>44</sup> e.g. Lucr. *DRN* 2.356; Verg. *Aen.* 10.296; see *OCD* s.v. *premo* 4.

<sup>45</sup> *χαράσσειν* would be the Greek verb. Goldhill (1994), esp. 213 speaks in a similar fashion about the verb *χαράσσω* (= *premo*).

<sup>46</sup> Wheeler (1995), 112 n.57, notes: 'The reader may detect irony in the fact that the position of honor in an ecphrasis—the middle—is here reserved for the uninhabitable torrid zone, a point which seems to undercut the Stoic idea (...) that the universe is designed for man's dominion.'

<sup>47</sup> As later in Cleomedes (*De motu circulari corporum caelestium* 16.19-25) 'things on the right look northwards and the ones on the left look southwards' (Kyriakidis (2010b) 10), here the poet, instead of presenting the celestial zones with their geographical location (northern-southern), prefers to refer to them by the adjectives 'right'/'left'. Here we have an extreme case of extratextual mirroring where the phenomenon of the mirror reversal is embodied in the construction of the verse(s) in question. For another case see Kyriakidis (2010b), 11.

<sup>48</sup> For the universe in the role of a model for earthly matters see Hardie (1986b), 364.

<sup>49</sup> Kyriakidis (2010a), 584-9.

*despicit omne nemus tantoque est corpore quanto  
si totum spectes, geminas qui separat Arctos.*

([The serpent] guards the whole wood and is so great in size, if you see him whole, as is that serpent which separates the twin Bears.)

## 2. *Super alta perennis astra ferar*

At the initial stage of the narrative the poet aspires to be the creator of the world and the text claims its all-importance as its model. After the end of the narrative the poet goes one step further and declares the enduring nature of his text and its renown (*Met.* 15.875-9):

*Parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis  
astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum  
quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris,  
ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,  
siquid habent veri vatum praesagia, vivam.*

(But eternal in my finer part I shall be brought high up above the stars, and my name will never be forgotten; and wherever the Roman might extends over the lands it has conquered I shall be read by the lips of men, and I shall live in everlasting fame, if only the prophecies of the poets hold any truth.)

Within this encomiastic coda, however, lies a contrasting situation. Whereas the *melior pars*<sup>50</sup> of the poet will reach beyond the stars and his name and fame will be for ever acclaimed, Roman power, on which Ovid partly invests his renown, refers only to its spatial horizons (*quaque*) for the dissemination of the poet's work and not the temporal. This incongruity brings to the reader's mind the catalogue of the glorious cities of the past (*Met.* 15.420-35), where again the preeminent future of Rome, the city-to-be, in Pythagoras' prophecy is secured<sup>51</sup> but its eternity remains an open issue.<sup>52</sup> With regard to Augustus it has been noted already that a comparison of the last lines of the narrative and the *sphragis* in the *Metamorphoses* leaves us with the impression that Caesar's fame vis-à-vis that of the poet is undermined; the princeps will ascend to the sky after departing from this world (870)<sup>53</sup> whereas the *melior pars* of the poet, his work, that is, and his fame, will go beyond the stars (*super alta perennis / astra ferar*, 875-6).<sup>54</sup>

These points concerning the end of the *Metamorphoses* have almost become a *locus communis* among scholars. The above thoughts, however, gain in strength when we bring another text into our discussion. I am referring to Ovid's letter to Augustus, *Tristia* 2, where the poet pleads his case for imperial clemency with

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<sup>50</sup> Modifying Horace's *non omnis moriar multaque pars mei / vitabit Libitinam* (I shall not wholly die and a great part of me will escape death), *Odes* 3.30.6-7. For further similarities and differences between the two poets see Solodow (1988), 221.

<sup>51</sup> *nunc quoque Dardaniam fama est consurgere Romam* (even now fame has it that Trojan Rome is rising, 15.431).

<sup>52</sup> Holzberg (2002), 149-50; for a discussion on the catalogue, Barchiesi (1989), 86; Kyriakidis (2007), 59-64 (and for further references 63 nn.47, 49).

<sup>53</sup> See pp.10-11 below.

<sup>54</sup> Barchiesi (1994), 262; also (1997), 194; Hardie (2012), 167: 'between *Fama* and *Fatum*, *Fama* will finally have the upper hand.'

regard to his relegation. It is the Ovid of that work and of the other exile elegies which Hinds has characterised as 'the first extant reader to interpret and reprocess the *Metamorphoses*'.<sup>55</sup> A little after the beginning of the *Tristia* 2 the poet refers to his *Metamorphoses* (2.63-4):

*inspice maius opus, quod adhuc sine fine reliqui*<sup>56</sup>  
*in non credendos corpora versa modos.*

(Look into my more important work about the unbelievable ways bodies are transformed, which till now I have left incomplete.)<sup>57</sup>

This is the received translation of the passage;<sup>58</sup> I wonder, however, whether a closer reading of the couplet can offer another interpretative possibility. Line 63 strongly alludes to an earlier text. It cannot go unnoticed that both the phrases *maius opus*<sup>59</sup> and *sine fine* clearly refer to the *Aeneid*, with the former closing 'il proemio al mezzo' in Book 7 (*Aen.* 7.45),<sup>60</sup> at the beginning that is of the second half of the *Aeneid*, while the latter contains in a nutshell the essence of Jupiter's prophecy from the first half of the epic (*imperium sine fine dedi*, I have given them an empire with no end, 1.279). Surprisingly though, the *sine fine* in the *Tristia* 2 refers tellingly to a poetic work, to the poet's work, and not to the promised empire. The allusiveness of the line to two emblematic passages of the Virgilian epic is a strong reminder of what the poet was fond of doing with the text of his predecessor and also a hint for the reader to recognise the double-meaning of the couplet by recollecting the relevant texts and their function in the Virgilian intertext. As the delayed coming of the proem in *Aeneid* 7—which the *maius opus* recalls—gives the reader an incentive to read the first 36 verses at the beginning of the second half of the *Aeneid* allegorically,<sup>61</sup> in a similar fashion that very phrase from the Virgilian epic drives the reader to look for a latent meaning of the couplet in the *Tristia*. Further to it, the two Ovidian passages, the end of the *Metamorphoses* and the elegiac couplet from *Tristia* 2, present some structural similarities in their contents. In the last three verses of the narrative of the *Metamorphoses* Ovid prays for Augustus' longevity before he ascends to heaven (15.868-70):

<sup>55</sup> Hinds (1999), 48.

<sup>56</sup> For the form *reliqui* instead of *tenetur* see Diggle (1980), 412. Given, however, that Ovid has repeatedly implied the burning of his copy of the *Metamorphoses* (e.g. *Tr.* 1.7.15, 19-20 etc) I do not find his argument convincing in refusing Luck's translation (1967). Ciccarelli (2003), *ad loc.* discusses the point.

<sup>57</sup> Similar references to the incomplete status of the *Metamorphoses* are also to be found elsewhere in the *Tristia* (e.g. 1.7; 2.555-6). See below n.69.

<sup>58</sup> See also the translation of line 63 by Hardie (2004), 163 n.36: 'examine my greater work, which still lacks completion', and Barchiesi and Hardie (2010), 62: 'look at the greater work, which to date I have left unfinished.'

<sup>59</sup> Gibson (1999), n.10 with references. Hardie (2004), 163 n.36, collects all the eight (7, +1 at *Met.* 8.327) occurrences of *maius opus* in the Ovidian oeuvre. The same phrase is used at *Met.* 15.751, where Ovid states that Caesar's greatest work was to become Augustus' father. Kyriakidis (1998), 161, 164, 168, 175.

<sup>60</sup> Conte (1992), 152-3 = (2007), 225; Thomas (1985), 63; (2004), 138-39; Ingleheart (2010) *ad loc.* points to *Met.* 8.328 as alluding to the middle of the *Aeneid*.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas (1985), 61-73 = (1999), 101-13; Kyriakidis (1998), 72-4 and 157-8.

*Tarda sit illa dies et nostro senior aevo,  
qua caput Augustum, quem temperat, orbe relicto  
accedat caelo faveatque precantibus absens!*<sup>62</sup>

(Let there come late that day and much later than our time when Augustus, after leaving the world he rules, will ascend to heaven and though absent will listen favourably to our prayers.)

The *sphragis* of the work follows immediately after. In the *Tristia* the poet repeats the same wish (2.57):

*optavi, peteres caelestia sidera tarde.*

(I prayed you were late in making your course to the heavenly stars.)

A few lines later Ovid moves on to the elegiac couplet which we have related to the *sphragis*. As in the *Metamorphoses* the coda comes after the closural prayer for the safety of Augustus and his future deification, so, too, the passage of *Tristia* 2 presents the same thematic pattern, since the poet's prayer for Caesar is followed by the reference to the poet's major work, the *Metamorphoses*. Given the content and context of the *Tristia*, it is true that a first reading of the couplet gives the reader—above all Augustus himself<sup>63</sup>—to understand that the *maius opus* was left unfinished (*sine fine*)<sup>64</sup> and thus creates the expectation that the poet will add more praise for Caesar when he puts the final touches to his work. This approach is corroborated by the word *adhuc*.<sup>65</sup> However, a closer reading of *Tr.* 2.63 with its charged allusions to the Virgilian intertext leaves the issue open—if indeed it does not argue in favour of the more qualitative version that even the *sphragis* upholds, namely that his poetic work will *suffer no end*. In the *sphragis* of the *Metamorphoses* a challenge for the poet and his work is to be measured over time against the Roman power. What actually is to happen is contrary to what we have seen happening in Jupiter's prophecy in the *Aeneid* at 1.279. In the Virgilian epic the power, spatial and temporal, given to the Roman imperium is absolute. Through the allusion to Jupiter's prophecy the Virgilian intertext contrastingly enhances not the Roman power but the work of the poet. In Ovid, the power of the *Romana potentia* is restricted as it holds only spatial power,<sup>66</sup> her rule, that is, over the subjugated people,<sup>67</sup> while the poet reserves for his own name and work not only this very spatial power but also the temporal aspect of that power, the everlasting duration and the infinite fame,<sup>68</sup> since the work will be read again and

<sup>62</sup> Barchiesi (1997), 194-6; Wheeler (2000), 145-6; Hardie (2002b), 94, 119, 302.

<sup>63</sup> For Augustus as a reader: Barchiesi (1993); Gibson (1999).

<sup>64</sup> Barchiesi (1997) 197; Ciccarelli (2003), *ad loc.*: 'Finis connota la compiutezza di libri e di opera letterarie (cfr. v. 550; *Fast.* 1.724).' Ulysses' phrase *iam labor in fine est* (my task is close to an end, *Met.* 13.373) in the 'armorum iudicium' matches this first reading of the *Tristia*.

<sup>65</sup> Ciccarelli (2003) *ad loc.*: '*adhuc* istituisce un rapporto di continuità tra passato e presente e apre una serie di possibilità riguardo al futuro.'

<sup>66</sup> Hardie (1986b), 199, in discussing Virgil's sense of infinity asserts that 'this infinitude is achieved essentially through enclosure, through the figurative extension of the walls of Rome (*altae moenia Romae*, *Aen.* 1.7) to embrace the whole universe'. Barchiesi (2001), 74.

<sup>67</sup> It is not the poet's choice here to speak of *aeterna Roma* as at *Fasti* 3.72.

<sup>68</sup> This is perhaps Ovid's answer to the Horatian view that poetic fame and eternal Rome go hand in hand: Barchiesi (2001), 74.

again in the future.<sup>69</sup> The *sine fine* no longer refers to the *Romana potentia* but to the *infinitum*,<sup>70</sup> the never-ending life of the poet's work.

In view of all these points, I would like to suggest that the element of time involving the whole work frames the *Metamorphoses* in a ring composition which instead of clearly defining the temporal limits of the work leaves it open at both ends. After the proem, at the beginning of the work Ovid has established the idea that the poet is a *fabricator mundi* and that the text existed before time, from the atemporal chaos, being the model for the creation of the world. At the end of it, in the coda, he also establishes the idea that his work will live *sine fine*, in other words it will be eternal. It is more than certain that the interpretation of the last line of the proem, *ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen* (bring down to my time the continuous song, 1.4), could respond not only to the time-span the work would cover down to the poet's days but also to the future of the *Metamorphoses*. The *perpetuum carmen* (1.4) addresses the duration and life-span of the work and acquires the meaning of everlasting;<sup>71</sup> and the phrase *ad mea tempora* in effect corroborates the same notion, since the *tempora* of the poet,<sup>72</sup> according to the *sphragis*, is an expanding continuum as the future tenses, and especially the one placed at the very end of the work, emphatically connote (*vivam*).<sup>73</sup> It comes as no surprise, therefore, that it is the adjective *perennis*<sup>74</sup> which characterises the poet's *melior pars*, in the *sphragis*. At the beginning of the work it is the creator-artist, *quisquis fuit ille deorum* and *melior natura* (21), who subdue strife and bring order in the universe. At the very end of the *Metamorphoses* the poet-artist will proudly acclaim the endurance of his work in time and will claim for the text, his *pars melior* (875), that it will live for ever (*omnia saecula*, 878). The poet is a *ποιητής*, a creator<sup>75</sup> in his own right and the poetic genius responsible for that creation is not confined in time; it is perhaps the most essential and irreplaceable constituent of everything and all. As the poet himself stated on another occasion

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<sup>69</sup> Gibson (1999) has shown that *Tristia* 2 is a poem about 'the reader's response'. I have tried to show elsewhere that *Tr.* 1.7 serves the same purpose: Kyriakidis (2013b); to borrow one of Gibson's conclusions (1999, 23) which fits *Tr.* 1.7 perfectly, there, too, the poet strives to show that 'the burden of interpretation falls on the reader of the poetry'. At *Tr.* 1.7 the phrase *sine fine* does not appear but the thought that the work will live for ever (i.e. it will be *sine fine*) is there; for that matter the work will remain without completion (*sine fine*) since each new reader will be a potential interpreter. As Gibson (1999), 28, states: 'Ovid declines the absolutism of a consistent approach, thus illustrating the open-endedness of reception.' At *Tr.* 1.7 the poem of the *Metamorphoses* is characterised as *crescens et rude*, but after the work has left the hands of the poet each reader through his interpretive approach will try to render the same work from *crescens et rude* to *opus exactum*: Kyriakidis (2013b), 364. On the issue of Ovid's reception see Wheeler (2002), 341-7, esp. 342-3.

<sup>70</sup> It is to be noted that the phrase *sine fine* also appears in Lucretius 2.92 bearing the meaning of 'infinitum'. Fowler (2002), *ad loc.*

<sup>71</sup> Barchiesi (2005), 142, on *Met.* 1.4 (*perpetuum deducite*).

<sup>72</sup> Wheeler (1999), 24-5, suggests that the phrase *ad mea tempora* is picked up at *Fasti* 1.1.

<sup>73</sup> On the idea of eternity as it is described in the proem and the *sphragis* of the *Metamorphoses* see also Ingleheart (2010), 99, on *sine fine*.

<sup>74</sup> Lucretius uses the adjective for a pun on Ennius' name: *detulit ex Helicone perenni fronde coronam* (he brought down from Helicon the ever-green wreath, 1.118): Harrison (2002), 2-3.

<sup>75</sup> I thank Philip Hardie for drawing my attention to Godo Lieberg's book (1982).

*Di quoque carminibus, si fas est dicere, fiunt* (Even the gods, if I may say so, are created by poetry, *Ex ponto* 4.8.55).

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