The Muses' Playground: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and genre

A) epic before Ovid: an inclusive genre

▪ cf. the *Aeneid* and pastoral (hexameter genre featuring singing shepherds and the countryside: *locus amoenus*): *A*. 7.513-15 ("sing", Allecto's trumpet produces "herdsman's signal"; woods resound cf. Pastoral echo); Silvia, "girl of the woods", has a pastoral pet deer (cf. e.g. fawns of Theocritus *Idyll* 11)

1) "[the transition] can be viewed as a 'generic transposition' from the bucolic – and to some extent from the georgic – to the epic code" (Karakasis 2010: 191, of *Aeneid* 7's move to war)

B) epic?

▪ epic criteria: long (15 books); in hexameters; treats mythological material; grand scope

2) "But the sheer range of other genres which are in some sense included in the *Metamorphoses*, and its occasional stress on this process of inclusion, suggests that generic multiplicity within a formally epic framework is particularly fundamental to the poem." (Harrison 2002: 89)

3) "...we should not think of a primary generic background-e.g., of epic- varied by occasional applications of elegiac, comic, or other elements. Rather, all of the constituent genres represent different "voices" or even "languages" present in a state of constant interaction throughout the poem." (Farrell 1992: 238)

C) Didactic epic

▪ cosmogony (cf. Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things:* changing beliefs): *epos* of didactic hexameter and martial didactic poems and interplay between traditions

4) "So into shape whatever god it was / Reduced the primal matter" (*Met*. 1.20): v Lucr. Where creation random

▪ Myers 1994: grand epic and Callimacheanism are brought together by focus on origins.

5) "lead (*deducite*) my lay / In one continuous song (*perpetuum ... carmen*)" (*Met*. 1.4): cf. Verg. *Ecl*. 6.5 *deductum carmen*; Callimachus opposition (*Aetia)*

D) Epyllion

▪ cf. Ovid's irreverent take on epic matter, irregular narrative and intrusive author

6) "The term 'epyllion' is sometimes applied by modern scholars to poems written in epic hexameters but on a small scale, dealing often with epic themes in novel, witty and surprising ways" (Hopkinson 1988: 200)

7) "The narrative does not progress in an even and straightforward manner; sometimes important events may be dismissed in a few lines, while elsewhere the poet will linger lovingly over the minutest details..." (Hollis 1990: 25, on epyllion's irregular narrative coverage)

E) Love Elegy:

▪ cf. Ovid's career e.g. *Amores*, *Heroides*, *Art of Love* (erotic didactic in elegiac metre, i.e. hexameter and pentameter alternating) then the *Metamorphoses.* Poet finally got his way?

▪ epic v elegy in the *Amores: Amores* 1.1 and 2.1 (gigantomachy)

8) “Arms, and the violent deeds of war, I was making ready to sound forth- in weighty numbers, with matter suited to the measure. The second verse was equal to the first - but Cupid, they say, with a laugh stole away one foot” (*Am*. 1.1.1-4, Ovid; cf. first word of *Aeneid*: *arma*)

9) “That boy yields sure-firing arrows. I am on fire and in my empty breast Amor rules supreme. My work rises in six feet, but falls in five: so long, steely battle narratives with your uniform metre!” (*Am*. 1.1.26-8)

10) “I had dared, I remember, to sing of gigantomachies and hundred-handed Gyas - and the power of my voice sufficed...” (*Am.* 2.1.11-12, claim of attempt to gigantomachy, associated with epic)

▪Apollo and Daphne episode: *Met*. 1.452 “first love”. Metapoetic reading: Cupid/Ovid diverts Apollo from Python-slaying (martial epic) towards love (i.e. elegiac/erotic themes)

11) “Daphne, Peneus’ child, was the first love / Of great Apollo, a love not lit by chance / Unwitting, but by Cupid’s spiteful wrath” (*Met*. 1.452-3)

▪ elegiac elements: e.g. pursuit of uninterested woman; poem designed to win her over; “wretched me”, *me miserum* (*Met*. 1.508); imagines her adorned (*Met*. 1.497–8; cf. elegiac mistress); Daphne > “hard woman”, *dura puella* (wood!). No elegiac game: attempted rape

12) “He [Apollo] sees the loose disorder of her hair / And thinks what if it were neat and elegant!” (*Met*. 1.497-8; cf. *Art of love*)

13) “You run too fast! / Check your swift flight, and I’ll not chase so fast” (*Met*. 1.510-11)

▪ intrusion of violence cf. Tereus-Procne episode where violence intrudes into elegiac atmosphere. Tereus seems to follow advice in the *Art of Love*

14) “An impulse came / To bribe her retinue, suborn her nurse, / Even assail the girl herself with gifts, / Huge gifts, and pay his kingdom for the price” (*Met*. 6.461-3, Tereus hoping to win Philomela)

15) “But take care first to know the handmaid of the woman you would win; she will make your approach easy. See that she be nearest the counsels of her mistress, and one who may be trusted with the secret of your stolen sport. Corrupt her with promises, corrupt her with prayers” (*Art of Love* 1.351-5)

16) “lest someone intrude hateful ears to your words, hide them, so far as you may, in cunning ambiguities” (*Ars* 1.489-90)

17) “he [Tereus] even wept” (*Met*. 6.471)

18) “Tears too are useful; with tears you can move iron” *(Ars* 1.659-60)

19) “Jupiter from on high smiles at the perjuries of lovers, and bids the winds of Aeolus carry them unfulfilled away. Jupiter was wont to swear falsely by the Styx to Juno; now he favours his own example” *(Ars* 1.633-6)

▪ “warfare of love” imagery; intrusion of force as Tereus rapes Philomela

20) “But the lighthearted erotic-elegiac discourse that informs this part of the narrative is soon generically deracinated by horrendous sexual violence.” (Gildenhard-Zissos 2007)

21) “So, when Jove’s bird of prey has caught a hare / And in his talons carries it aloft / To his high nest, the captive has no chance / Of flight, the captor gloats over his prize” (*Met*. 6.516-18, of Tereus: cf. *Il*. 22.306-11, Hector and Achilles)

22) “Like the epic hero on the battlefield, Tereus treats Philomela as an enemy to be overcome.” (Pavlock 1991)

▪ humorous effect of elegiac intertexts. The Io episode (*Met*. 1.588-721): Jupiter = shut-out lover (*exclusus amator*), Io= beloved; Argus =lower-status guardian (cf. doorman); Juno = jealous rival; Mercury = the go-between; beloved = cow.

▪ Narcissus episode: cf. proud unattainable mistress. Narcissus falls in love with his reflection. Elegiac engagement ups pathos and underlines paradox

23) “many a youth / And many a girl desired him, but hard pride / Ruled in that delicate frame, and never a youth / And never a girl could touch his haughty heart” (*Met*. 3.353-5, of Narcissus)

24) “So may he love - and never win his love!” (*Met*. 3.405, scorned lover of Narcissus)

▪ elegiac conceits (e.g. falling in love at first sight (3.416); musing on beloved’s beauty (3.418-24); complaining about beloved’s cruelty (3.442, 477); in woods (cf. Propertius 1.18) perishing through looking at beloved: here literally; secret signals)

25) “Stretched on the grassy shade he gazes down / On the false phantom, staring endlessly, / His eyes his own undoing” (*Met*. 3.438-40, Narcissus perishes by looking at himself)

26) “So, by love wasted, slowly he dissolves / By hidden fire consumed,” (*Met*. 3.489-90, Narcissus)

27) “when I smile / You smile, and when I weep, I’ve often seen / Your tears, and to my nod your nod replies” (*Met*. 3.459-6, Narcissus and his reflection)

28) “His strange passion for his own reflection reflects in his simultaneous assumption of the roles of lover and beloved.” (Keith 255)

29) “Praising is praised, desiring is desired, / And love he kindles while with love he burns” (*Met*. 3.425-6)

F) Pastoral

▪ Io episode. Mercury sent to kill Argus. Joke of wand (used as shepherd's staff); invitation to sing = typical pastoral (but usually to entertain not cause sleep): Mercury tells of Pan's invention of pipe

30) “[Mercury] fastened on his ankle-wings, / Grasped in his fist the wand that charms to sleep, / Put on his magic cap, and thus arrayed / Jove’s son sprang from his father’s citadel / Down to the earth. There he removed his cap, / Laid by his wings; only his wand he kept.” (*Met*. 1.671-5)

31) “A herdsman now, he drove a flock of goats / .../ And played his pipes of reed” (*Met*. 1.676-7)

32) “nowhere is lusher grass / To feed your flock, and see how cool the shade / Extends congenial for a shepherd’s seat” (*Met*. 1.681-82)

33) “[Mercury] quick then with his sword / Struck off the nodding head and from the rock / Threw it all bloody” (*Met*. 1.717-19, Mercury kills Argus when he sleeps: return to epic)

▪ pastoral in poet Orpheus episode. Trees come to add shade to *locus amoenus*. Responsive landscape typical of pastoral. Orpheus singing after death of his wife Eurydice but no consolation in song as in pastoral (Orpheus sings e.g. of Apollo’s love for the boy Cyparissus). Song leads to Orpheus’ death. Lamentation of landscape (*Met*. 11.45-47)

34)“There was a hill, and on the hill a wide / Level of open ground, all green with grass. The place lacked any shade” (*Met*. 10.86-7)> trees come in response to Orpheus' singing

35) “forest trees cast down their leaves, / Tonsured in grief” (*Met*. 11.45-47; trees weep for Orpheus after he is torn to pieces by Thracian women)

▪ pastoral intertext though epic precedent: Cyparissus’ stag (scene looks to Silvia’s deer): affectionate (cf. *Aen*. 7.491-2); adorned (cf. *Aen*. 7.488 garlands) but like Roman woman (e.g. pearls); accidental death

36) “Those antlers gleamed with gold / And from his silky neck a collar hung / Over his shoulders, set with precious stones” (*Met*. 10.115-16; Cyparissus' stag)

37) “there was a giant stag / Whose spreading antlers shed a screen of <u>shade</u> / Upon his head” (*Me*t. 10.110-11)

38) “With his portable 'locus amoenus,' Cyparissus' stag, like Orpheus who summons up a shady grove with his song, can procure himself pastoral shade anywhere.” (Connors 1992-3)

<u>G) Tragedy:</u>

▪ e.g. Theban narrative (Books 3 and 4): city and country and civilization and savagery: cf. Euripides’ *Bacchae*; also Sophocles’ *Oedipus* (exile, prosperity, exile). Generic marker in simile

39) “So, when the curtain at a theatre / Is raised, figures rise up, their faces first,/ Then gradually the rest, until at last, / Drawn slowly, smoothly up, they stand revealed / Complete, their feet placed on the fringe below.” (*Met*. 3.111-14; Sown Men like curtain rising at end of play)

<u>H) multiple genres:</u>

▪ e.g. episode of Polyphemus (before his blinding; Polphemus loves Galatea who loves Acis) (see Farrell 1992): pastoral, elegy, epic

▪ pastoral: Polyphemus tends sheep (cf.821-30 et passim), carries a staff (782), plays a Pan pipe (784)

40) “[he] took his pipe, made of a hundred reeds. / His pastoral whistles rang among the cliffs” (*Met*. 13.784-5)

▪ elegy: burning with love (763, 867-69), concern for appearance (764-67), forgetting usual pursuits (763, 767-69, 781), jealous of rival (859-61)

▪ epic: size and strength (842-44, 863-64, 882- 84); ferocious appearance (765-67, 844-47); savagery (759-61,768-69, 865-66)

42) “Cyclops pursued and hurled a massive rock, / Torn from the hill” (*Met*. 13.882-83; kills Acis in epic fashion)

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