

METAMORPHOSIS AND METAMORPHIC IDENTITY: THE MYTH OF ACTAEON IN WORKS OF OVID, DANTE AND JOHN GOWER

Greta Hawes

To speak of metamorphosis in mythological terms is usually to refer to a feature of the mythic narrative in which a character undergoes a major, and usually irrevocable, change.¹ Yet myths are themselves, over time, subject to metamorphic processes and such changes are, likewise, major and irrevocable. The corpus of classical mythology has provided fertile ground for the imposition of a variety of interpretative and literary aims in the works of both classical and subsequent writers.

The myths which come to establish themselves within interpretative communities are those which are seen to be somehow relevant to the context of their retelling. Such relevance is not necessarily attached to the form of the myth—the organisation of its narrative elements—but tends to depend on the significance deemed inherent in the myth at the point of reception. The significance of a single narrative form can change markedly with its migration through diverse interpretative communities and it is this flexibility of significance which allows the myth to continue to be recognised as ‘true’ in the face of changing social, poetic, moralistic and personal concerns.

The story of the young hunter Actaeon, which retained a relatively stable narrative form through Latin literature and into the medieval period, provides but one example of the way in which evolving cultural and literary traditions can influence the reading of a mythological narrative. The story of the myth of Actaeon might just as well be traced from its earliest mentions in archaic fragments to its latest incarnations in works of Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes, for example. A more manageable set of ‘snapshots’ will be presented here which provide some indication of aspects of the migration of this myth in literary contexts from Ovid to John Gower, a migration characterised by constant changes in the possible significances of the myth which themselves depend upon the wider traditions of contemporary modes of reading.

At heart, the myth of Actaeon is a straightforward tale of offence and punishment which hinges upon a sudden physical metamorphosis. The significance of the tale within literary accounts frequently rests on the relationship between the nature of the offence and the suitability of the resulting punishment. Many of the changes to the myth over the course of the centuries concern the sense of (in)justice felt to be inherent in the episode which in turn derives from the role of the myth within its immediate literary context and the way in which (in)justice is conceived by its audience.

The most well-known version of the myth—in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 3.138-255—tells of a young Theban nobleman, a grandson of Cadmus, who is hunting with his companions. Nearby, the goddess Diana is bathing with her nymphs. Resting in the midday heat, Actaeon stumbles unintentionally into her grotto, she reacts by changing him into a stag, and there follows a long de-

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the AHCCA Postgraduate Conference, Melbourne, 9-10 November, 2006. My thanks go to the organisers of the conference for their hospitality and to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Victoria University of Wellington whose funding made possible my attendance.

scription of the pursuit of this stag and his eventual death, torn apart by his own hunting dogs, with the encouragement of his former companions.

Ovid's account of the fate of Actaeon in his *Metamorphoses* acts in many ways as a fulcrum about which the myth's historical development can be defined. Although by no means representative of the classical tradition of this myth as a whole, it draws together many of the thematic elements evident in earlier sources while providing our earliest surviving detailed treatment of the myth.² Given the importance of the *Metamorphoses* to subsequent literary traditions, Ovid's account of the death of Actaeon also has a vital role as a conduit for the transmission of the myth to the late Middle Ages.

The concept of metamorphosis is built into the very fabric of Ovid's complex, witty and erudite text. Structurally, philosophically and literally the universe of the *Metamorphoses* is in a constant state of flux. At a narrative level, physical metamorphosis often serves to illuminate the incongruity between visible form and invisible substance, illusion and reality. Frequently, metamorphosis provides an opportunity for the revelation of the victim's true identity.³ In his account of the myth of Actaeon, however, Ovid plays with the dramatic potential of identity in another way. In the hands of the poet, Actaeon's identity is more clearly characterised through metamorphosis while being utterly subsumed.

That the former hunter becomes quarry was a core element of the myth from its inception. Ovid adopts this idea of reversal and crafts it into the central poetic feature of his account. The episode is built around the paradoxical elevation of paired oppositions.⁴ When we first encounter Actaeon he is a hunter, a young man leading his companions, who delights in his prowess. It is because of him that 'the mountainside was stained with the slaughter of different wild animals' (*mons erat infectus uariarum caede ferarum*, 143). He is, furthermore, a skilled speaker, whose

2 A large number of variants of the myth are given in Greek literary sources and later mythographic collections. The earliest recorded fragments (P.Mich. inv.1447 verso; P.Oxy 2509; Apollodorus *Library* 3.4.4) attribute to lost works by Hesiod, Stesichorus and Acusilaus the story that Actaeon suffered his punishment after desiring to wed Semele and incurring the wrath of Zeus. The myth was the subject of lost tragedies by Phrynichus, Iophon, Cleophon and Aeschylus. Although five intriguing fragments of Aeschylus' *Toxittides* survive, they do not supply any definitive outline of the plot. Euripides' *Bacchae* (337-41), alone of our literary sources, records a version in which Actaeon is killed after boasting that his skills in the hunt surpass those of Artemis. Apollodorus (3.4.4), Pausanias (9.2.3) and Hyginus (180.1-3) maintain that the most common version of the myth, by the second century CE in any case, centred on Actaeon's intentional or unintentional glimpse of Artemis/Diana as she bathed. The most enduring version, which features Actaeon's unintended glimpse of the naked goddess, is first recorded in Callimachus' *Bath of Pallas* (107-18). Accounts of Actaeon's attempted rape of Artemis, or even a marriage between the two, occur in late literary sources and in mythographic accounts. See especially Diodorus Siculus 4.81.4 and Nonnus *Dionysiaca* 5.432-37, 44.278-45.3. Forbes Irving (1990), 197-201, and Gantz (1993), 478-81, provide good summaries of ancient sources for this myth.

3 Galinsky (1975), 13: 'the passions are represented as they work upon the personality of the character involved until he or she is changed into the bestial or elemental equivalent of that passion: the cruel Lycaon into a wolf, Clytie, who is sick with love for the Sungod, into a sunflower, the lustful Jupiter into a bull, the impetuous Hippomenes and Atalanta into lions, the hard-hearted Anaxarete into a stone, etc.' Similarly, Feldherr (2002), 171, points to the function of metamorphosis as an index to hidden identity and aid to stability in the Ovidian universe.

4 Spencer (1997), 22, offers the most complete summary of these oppositions: 'male/female; mortal/immortal; the known (world of hunting)/the unknown (world of Diana's secret bath); human hunter/the hunter's protective deity; hunter/hunted; human/animal; innocence/guilt; justice/cruelty; divine behavior/human behavior; obvious/overlooked; appearance/reality; speech/speechlessness.'

rhetoric evokes the literary ideals of the mythic-epic world (148-53). The reversal from hunter to hunted turns on Actaeon's encounter with Diana. This encounter is described by Ovid as a 'fault of fortune' (*fortunae crimen*, 141) in which the Fates guide the hunter's wandering steps (175f.). The hunter is described as 'wandering with uncertain steps' (*non certibus passis errans*): the double meaning of this verb comes more sharply into focus when *error* takes on a more personal significance for the poet. In Ovid's account, Actaeon certainly does not intend to spy on the naked goddess, yet nor is he punished simply for his glimpse of her. Diana's wrath focuses on his potential role as an informant; her punishment seeks to control his characteristic eloquence and loquacity.⁵ Before effecting the metamorphosis she cries (192f.):

'nunc tibi me posito uisam uelamine narres,
si poteris narrare, licet.'

'Now you may tell that you saw me here, unclothed: if indeed you are even able to!'⁶

The result of the metamorphosis is illustrated most poignantly by descriptions of Actaeon's repeated, pathetic efforts to communicate (e.g. 201, 229-31).⁷ As Actaeon loses the external signifiers of his character—appearance and speech—his identity paradoxically becomes more evident through its absence. His plight illustrates perfectly the observation that '[t]he product of every metamorphosis is an absent presence'.⁸ Actaeon's loss of human voice corresponds directly to his loss of human identity—as a hunter, a leader and a gifted communicator—and to his inability to control the situation in which he finds himself.⁹

The account is framed by passages which encourage the reader to explore the workings of justice in the episode. Before embarking on the story, the poet comments (141f.):

at bene si quaeras, fortunae crimen in illo,
non scelus inuenies; quod enim scelus error habebat?

But if you investigate you will find no wicked crime but the fault of fortune: for what crime is there in a mistake?

And after Actaeon's death the poet describes the debate that rages over Diana's actions (253-55):

rumor in ambiguo est: aliis uiolentior aequo
uisa dea est, alii laudant dignamque seuera
uirginitate uocant; pars inuenit utraque causas.

5 See Heath (1992), 76-84, for this motif in a series of *indicium* stories which directly precede the Actaeon episode.

6 All translations are the author's own unless otherwise noted.

7 The description of victims of metamorphosis as unable to communicate is traced most fully by Landolfi (2003).

8 Hardie (2002a), 169.

9 See Heath (1992), 68-72, for the importance of speaking and naming in this episode and its implications for the characterisation of Actaeon.

Opinion was divided: to some the goddess seemed excessive in her violence; others praised her, calling her worthy of her strict virginity. Each side found support for its argument.

With these verses Ovid raises the issue of (in)justice but does not seek closure for it. In the epic world of the *Metamorphoses*, in which divine power determines all, there is little purpose in discussing justice in human terms.

The ‘afterlife’ of the *Metamorphoses*, so important to the European literary tradition as a whole, begins directly from Ovid’s exilic works. Indeed, it has been suggested that the *Metamorphoses*’ fragmentary images of failed creativity and artistic immortality find their true closure only in poetry written by Ovid after his relegation.¹⁰ While engaged in writing the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid too was subject to a rapid reversal in fortune. In 8 CE he was banished to the tiny outpost town of Tomis on the Black Sea, a relegation brought about by Augustus for an *error* to which Ovid often alludes but never entirely explains. Among the mythic characters who throughout Ovid’s exilic poetry furnish parallels for the poetic persona, we find Actaeon (*Tr.* 2.103-06):¹¹

cur aliquid uidi? cur noxia lumina feci?
 cur imprudenti cognita culpa mihi?
 inscius Actaeon uidit sine ueste Dianam:
 praeda fuit canibus non minus ille suis.

Why did I see anything? Why did I make my eyes culpable? Why did I inadvertently stumble upon this mischief? Actaeon was equally ignorant when he caught sight of Diana naked, yet nonetheless he became the prey of his own hounds.

Gone are the days when scholars might use this passage to ‘solve’ the mystery of Ovid’s exile.¹² It is more fruitful to examine the thematic similarities between the account of the myth in the *Metamorphoses* and the relegation as presented by the Ovidian persona which suggested its use as a mythic parallel.

¹⁰ Theodorakopoulos (1999).

¹¹ Graf (2002), 114f., catalogues some of the mythic paradigms featured in the exile poetry and concludes that they serve as imperfect parallels to Ovid’s personal suffering. The approach of Claassen (1987), 41f., is similar inasmuch as the author recognises a ‘myth of exile’ (41) in which the victims of exile replace the many mythic victims of the *Metamorphoses*. For the world of the exile as essentially mythopoetic, see Claassen (1988).

¹² The popular nineteenth-century theory that Ovid was relegated after he happened upon Augustus’ wife Livia at her ablutions is discussed, and debunked, by Thibault (1964), 73f. Alexander (1958), 321f., also relies heavily on *Tr.* 2.102-08 in his presentation of a highly imaginative ‘solution’ to the problem of Ovid’s *culpa* by which the poet comes home to his own house to find a party in progress in which the younger Julia, naked, is up to her usual tricks. See Ingleheart (2006), 71 and 72f., for discussion of the problems inherent in determining the extent to which the myth of Actaeon can function a literal parallel for Ovid’s *error*.

Ovid has been described as ‘a poet given more than any other to self-echo’.¹³ Verbal and thematic echoes between the two passages make it clear that in *Tristia* 2 Ovid is not simply referring to the tradition of the myth of Actaeon, but to his own prior retelling of the myth. Ovid’s description of Actaeon’s crime in *Tr.* 2.105 is an echo, although expressed in the active voice, of *Met.* 3.185. The general concern with ideas of contrast and reversal in the *Metamorphoses* episode is tidily summed up by *Tr.* 2.106.¹⁴ Ovid’s account of the myth in the *Metamorphoses*, is one of only two surviving literary versions from antiquity which allow for the possibility of Actaeon’s ostensible innocence.¹⁵ By contrast, the wider Graeco-Roman literary tradition paints Actaeon as either an intentional voyeur, a victim of lust, or a hubristic hunter in the mould of Orion. In the poetic vocabulary of the *Tristia*, then, there is a correlation between the disproportionate nature of Actaeon’s punishment crucial to the sense of the account in the *Metamorphoses* and the result of Ovid’s own *error*.

The importance of Ovid’s identification with Actaeon rests on ideas of reversal, power and judgement which contain similar resonances in both the Actaeon episode from the *Metamorphoses* and Ovid’s mythopoetic construct of his own exile. Like Actaeon’s, Ovid’s punishment derives from unintentionally witnessing a scene forbidden to outsiders. Ovid insists that his *error* was not a crime, but the unintentional and mistaken sight of a *funestum malum* (‘calamitous evil’, *Tr.* 3.6.27) perpetrated by others. He was punished personally by Augustus, whom his act offended, and his relegation to Tomis was perhaps designed to prevent knowledge of the scandal from spreading; its effect was to silence the poet.¹⁶ Ovid’s repeated insistence that, despite the severity of his punishment and the serious nature of the *error*, he has committed no crime (*Pont.* 1.6.25, 2.9.71, etc) reminds us of the poet’s pointed comment in introducing the Actaeon episode in his *Metamorphoses*. The assertion at *Met.* 3.141f. that an *error* is a *fortunae crimen* (‘fault of fortune’) and not a *scelus* (‘wicked crime’) takes on new and poignant meaning for the exiled poet.

In his exilic works, Ovid often presents his offence against Augustus as if against a numinous power; in concrete terms, Augustus is imagined as the wielder of Jupiter’s thunderbolt (*Tr.* 1.1.72, etc).¹⁷ This image of the powerful, even godlike, Augustus bears implicit comparison with Actaeon’s persecutor Diana, both in terms of irate vengeance and unrestrained power.¹⁸ Yet the irony of a man like Augustus acting with the caprice and power of a god is made clear in the *Tristia* and can be seen as a witty inversion of the gods of the *Metamorphoses* whose human qualities belie their divine status.

13 Hinds (1987), 13.

14 Some further verbal echoes are discussed in Ingleheart (2006), 73f.

15 Actaeon’s offence is also unintentional in Callimachus’ *Bath of Pallas*.

16 Thibault (1964), 116-19, offers a considered summary of Ovid’s comments on the cause of his punishment and considers the purpose of his relegation.

17 The implicit equation of Augustus with Jupiter is also present in the *Metamorphoses* (e.g. 1.175f., 199-205, 15.858-60). For a discussion of the analogous relationship of the two figures, see Feeney (1991), 199f. and 219-24.

18 At *Her.* 20.103f. Ovid refers to the myth of Actaeon in a context which again highlights Diana’s penchant for violent vengeance.

Ovid's refusal to bring closure to the idea of justice in the *Metamorphoses* episode by claiming that Diana had both supporters and detractors (3.253-55) has its parallel in the *Tristia* passage. Following on from his self-identification with Actaeon, Ovid notes (2.107f.):

scilicet in superis etiam fortuna luenda est,
nec ueniam laeso numine casus habet.

Clearly, among the gods, even accidents must be punished, and nor is misfortune grounds for pardon when a god has been offended.

The significance of this statement rests on our reading of it. We might see it either as a sincere description of a situation to which Ovid is resigned, or a critical view of its absurdity. Its ambivalence centres on the tone assigned to *scilicet*—either sincere or sarcastic—an ambiguity which encourages the reader to ponder the fairness and legitimacy of divine justice.¹⁹ But a final layer of irony may be encountered. Ovid's comments here involve the right of retaliation *in superis*. Immediately the reader must respond to this incongruity. Should Augustus, the *diui filius*, also be permitted to display such behaviour? By directly raising the issue of the types of arbitrary justice associated with divine and powerful figures, and their effect on mortal victims in both of the passages under review, Ovid expects the reader to investigate his own treatment in light of Actaeon's at the hands of Diana.

Through the agency of metamorphosis Actaeon and Ovid are completely removed from their former lives. Actaeon is thrust into the animal world and can no longer communicate with his former companions. Ovid, meanwhile, is banished from the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Rome and forced to become a Latin poet among barbarians. Like Actaeon's, Ovid's punishment is designed to silence a potential informer. The very fact that we do not now know the precise nature of the scene that Ovid witnessed is testimony to its success. The silencing of Actaeon is complete: he cannot share his knowledge because he cannot communicate with the human world. Ovid's silence with regard to his mistake is self-imposed. The Ovidian persona is, in effect, forced to take on the role of Actaeon as a protective measure. Although he frequently alludes to his *error*, to publicise its exact nature would endanger any chance of clemency. He retains, however, his poetic voice. Ovid often poetically associates his relegation with death; his departure from Rome is a funeral, his residence in Tomis a living death.²⁰ Yet he can conceive of another sort of life in the face of 'divine' punishment. While we leave Actaeon yelping in desperate attempts to communicate, Ovid brashly asserts his poetic immortality (*Tr.* 3.7.51f.):

dumque suis uictrix omnem de montibus orbem
prospiciet domitum Martia Roma, legar.

As long as warlike Rome looks out victorious over the conquered world from her hills, I shall be read.

¹⁹ Williams (1994), 176f.

²⁰ See Nagle (1980), 23-32.

Here and elsewhere Ovid's confidence in his future reputation shines through his works. It was to be the prerogative of later commentators, however, to establish how Ovid was to be read, the privilege of poets to establish the terms of his legacy, and the challenge of scholars to unravel the resulting polysemous tradition.

The *Nachleben* of the *Metamorphoses* as a collection of mythic narratives cannot be separated from the modes of reception which came to engulf the reading of pagan mythology and literature during the Middle Ages. Two such modes—the rationalising and the allegorising—are relevant in this regard. Both approaches have their origins in Greek cultural developments which long pre-date Ovid's own time. Each seeks to preserve elements of the received narrative, and uncover its latent significance, but by very different means in order that the stories themselves remain palatable within changing literary and cultural environments.

Mythological interpretation during the classical era concentrated on rectifying, rather than challenging, myth.²¹ Most interpretative methods assumed that there was some part of the myth worth salvaging.²² As Paul Veyne notes, '[c]riticizing myths did not mean proving they were false but rediscovering their truthful basis'.²³

The rationalising tradition grew out of the desire of certain groups within Greek society to make the fantastic world of myth consistent with empirically-perceived norms of reality. This approach was based on the premise that we inhabit an unchanging world: the stories of the past, if they contain any type of 'truth', must adhere to accepted standards of logic and historicity. The aim was not to promote an aura of disbelief around traditional stories, but to rehabilitate them in such a way as to make them credible to an audience versed in modes of historical and scientific enquiry.²⁴

This tradition is frequently treated as little more than a footnote to the development of the Graeco-Roman mythological tradition. In terms of the metamorphosis of the myth of Actaeon, however, one such rationalising account cannot be overlooked without missing the origins of a reading of the myth whose influence can still be discerned among readers and writers almost two millennia later.

Palaephatus' fourth-century *Peri Apiston* 6 furnishes an early attempt to strip away the metaphorical language surrounding the myth of Actaeon and to re-establish its 'factual' basis.²⁵ Palaephatus restores the myth by reducing it to an economic fable which plays metaphorically on

21 Veyne (1988), 57.

22 Veyne (1988), 57.

23 Veyne (1988), 59.

24 For accounts of the emergence of the rationalising tradition and its development, see Wipprecht (1902-08); Osmun (1956), 131f.; Stern (1996), 10-13.

25 For a discussion and clarification of the issues surrounding the identity and dating of Palaephatus and the transmission of the *Peri Apiston*, see Stern (1996), 1-5. The transmitted text is an abridged amalgamation of numerous rationalised myths, including several obvious Byzantine interpolations. That the rationalisation of the myth of Actaeon was part of the original Palaephatean work, or at least associated with the work from a very early date, can be ascertained from a reference in Theon the Rhetor's *Progymnasmata* 6, which cites Palaephatus as the source for this specific rationalisation.

the theme of personal destruction. The role of Artemis is largely ignored.²⁶ He assigns the original account of the death of Actaeon to a time in the primitive, rustic past in which each household subsisted by its own labour. In his rationalised variant, the Theban prince becomes an avid hunter whose dedication causes him to neglect his duties and brings about his financial ruin, prompting his neighbours to lament his demise as caused by his hunting dogs.

The rationalising impulse continued in late classical and medieval writing largely through euhemeristic interpretations of pagan mythology.²⁷ More dominant, however, was the utilisation of allegorical interpretation developed by Greek, Latin and Hebrew writers and philosophers and adopted by Christian writers to effect a metamorphosis of the corpus of classical myth in which suitable physical, ethical or historical ‘truths’ might be discovered, which in turn helped to legitimise the continued use of classical lore.²⁸ Metamorphosis stories in general provided fertile material for allegorisers on account of their obviously fictitious nature and changing sets of relationships. The metamorphic process itself, however, provided a theological and rational barrier to the treatment of such myths, a barrier which was only overcome when the literal metamorphosis was itself transformed into a metaphorical or allegorical projection.²⁹

The allegorical tradition which came to dominate the reading of the myth of Actaeon among late classical and early medieval interpretative communities relied heavily on the version of the myth popularised by Ovid but did not rely directly on the Ovidian account. The myth was transmitted through popular Latin summaries such as Hyginus’ *Fabulae* and Pseudo-Lactantius Placidus’ *Narrationes Fabularum Ovidianarum*.

An important text in the evolution of classical mythology from eloquent fables to useful *exempla* is Fulgentius’ *Mythologiae*. When treating the myth of Actaeon, Fulgentius’ attempt to furnish an allegorical explanation leads to a rather confusing account in which the hunter is seen to represent simultaneously the dangers of curiosity, fear and wasteful spending. He completes his discussion of the myth with an interpretation which appears to owe much to Palaephatus’ explanation, although it is ascribed to a different author (3.3):

Anaximenes qui de picturis antiquis disseruit libro secundo ait uenationem Actaeonem dilexisse; qui cum ad maturam peruenisset aetatem consideratis uenationum periculis, id est quasi nudam artis suae rationem uidens timidus factus est; inde et cor cerui habens, unde et Homerus ait: [...] ebriose, oculos canis habens et cor cerui. Sed dum periculum uenandi fugiret, affectum tamen canum non dimisit, quos inaniter

26 Unlike his close contemporary Euhemerus and the earlier Prodicus of Ceos, Palaephatus does not appear to be interested in the expansion of theological arguments by disproving the role of gods in human affairs. He generally disregards their presence and explains the origin of the story without recourse to divine intervention. On this topic, see Stern (1996), 9-19, 9 n.24, 50. Cf. the mistaken views of Veyne (1988), 68.

27 See Cooke (1927); Seznec (1953), 12f.; Demats (1973), 40-55; Rollinson (1981), 69f.

28 It is useful to recall the distinction between allegorical interpretation and allegorical composition as discussed by Mazzeo (1978), 1f.; Rollinson (1981), ix; Whitman (1987), 3-6; Damon (1990), 113f. Although the use of personification was widespread in antiquity, large-scale allegorical compositions were not common before the late fourth century CE. By contrast, allegorical interpretations were produced almost continuously from the archaic period.

29 Barkan (1986), 109f.

pascendo pene omnem substantiam perdidit; ob hanc rem a canibus suis deuoratus esse dicitur.

Anaximenes, who discussed ancient painting in his second book, says Actaeon delighted in hunting. But as he grew older, having recognised its dangers, that is, having seen its naked form, he became fearful. He developed the heart of a deer, as Homer says: ‘You sack of wine, with the eyes of a dog and the heart of a deer’. But although he turned his back of the dangers of hunting, he did not forgo his affection for the hounds, and he wasted his wealth by unprofitably caring for them. From this situation he was said to have been devoured by his hounds.

The association between the young hunter and an excessively wasteful lifestyle, established and propagated in the mythographic tradition by the popularity of the Fulgentian text, dominates medieval treatments of the myth. The Second and Third Vatican Mythographers draw directly on the moralising explanations given in the *Mythologiae* for their own summaries of the myth. In the broader encyclopaedic tradition, variations on the character of Actaeon as a profligate hunter occur in texts such as John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* (1.4) and Alexander Neckam’s *De Naturis Rerum* (2.137).

When Ovid’s work returned to general favour in the early twelfth century the styles of reading established by the mythographic tradition were subsumed into the reading of the *Metamorphoses*. Modern scholars often appear uncomfortable with the obvious popularity of this text during the medieval period. Its irreverence and immorality, commonly highlighted as defining features of the work, are felt to exist uneasily in the ostensibly austere environment of the Christian Middle Ages. For the purposes of generations of moralising commentators, however, the attractive element of *Ovidius Maior* was its form. The *Metamorphoses* was valued as a convenient collection of the wealth of Graeco-Roman narratives whose utility to contemporary medieval writers was facilitated through the well-established mode of moralising allegorical interpretation.

Ovidian commentators tended to look toward the earlier mythographic tradition to furnish suitable allegorical interpretations for the myths found in the *Metamorphoses*. The association between the myth of Actaeon and wasteful spending is found in Arnulf of Orleans’ *Allegoriae super Ovidii Metamorphosin* (3.2) and Giovanni del Virgilio’s *Allegorie Librorum Ovidii Metamorphoseos* (3.2). Two later and more ambitious commentaries, the anonymous *Ovide Moralisé* (3.571-669) and Pierre Bersuire’s *Ovidius Moralizatus* (3.5-6), retain a financial imperative to the story of Actaeon within their highly inventive and multifaceted explanations.

The irony apparent in Ovid’s account of the myth, in both the *Metamorphoses* and the *Tristia*, of an unintentional slight resulting in a disproportionate punishment, is lost in the mythographic tradition. In the tradition derived from the Palaephatean account, ‘crime’ leads organically to ‘punishment’ in a manner easily recognisable from the economic conditions of the day. The allegorical tradition strengthens this association as the natural cause and effect narrative relies on the audience’s understanding that the direct result of Actaeon’s actions is also, on a moral level, a form of proportionate punishment for his vice.

In the late medieval and early renaissance periods the mythographic tradition was increasingly subverted and subject to change. The distinction between poet and mythographer and between

poetry and commentary in this highly literate world became increasingly vague.³⁰ During the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the mythographic tradition, derived from the academic culture of the later Middle Ages, came into contact with the vernacular literature of courtly and popular entertainments.³¹ At this time, we find commentaries taking the form of poetry (John of Garland's *Integumenta* and the *Ovide Moralisé*), or taking as their subject other commentaries (John Ridewall's *Fulgentius Metaforalis*), and the insertion of mythographic commonplaces into poetic works. From this heady mix of poetic invention, theological debate and mythological speculation there appeared one of the masterworks of late medieval literature, the *Divina Commedia* of Dante Alighieri.

One of the characteristic qualities of the *Commedia* is its blending of pagan, Christian, historical and contemporary elements. The influence of the *Ovidio Maggiore*, as Dante refers to it in *Convivio* 3.3.7, is one of the more prevalent pagan aspects. However, Dante's medieval conception of the universe, and of Ovid's work, produces a very different epic on the nature of existence in a universe held eternally between flux and stability.

Dante's respect for and imitation of 'la bella scola' (*Inf.* 4.94) of ancient poets is clearly recognisable throughout the *Commedia*. Yet he is at times quick to point to the differences between their misguided fictions and his own role in a more enlightened age.³² The outmoded Ovidian subtext comes to the fore in *Inferno* 25 when, describing a series of elaborate transformations involving those guilty of theft, Dante asserts his poetic superiority over Ovid, whose mythic narratives provided the inspiration for the grotesque scenes (25.97-102):

Taccia di Cadmo e d'Aretusa Ovidio,
ché se quello in serpente e quella in fonte
converte poetando, io non lo 'nvidio,

ché due nature mai a fronte a fronte
non trasmutò sì ch'amendue le forme
a cambiar lor matera fosser pronte.

About Cadmus and Arethusa let Ovid be silent, for if in his
poetry he converts him into a serpent and her into a fountain,
I do not envy him,
for never two natures face to face did he transmute so that both
forms were ready to exchange their matter.³³

30 Chance (1990), 12 and 20f.

31 Chance (1990), 17.

32 Even Vergil, on whom Dante heaps such praise, is frequently shown to be fallible. For examples, see Hollander (2001), 117-19.

33 All translations of the *Inferno* are taken from Durling (1996).

Dante is not only proclaiming his technical mastery over the type of descriptive verse favoured by the Latin writer, but also his theological advantage: what Ovid described was merely fiction, whereas his own metamorphoses reflect reality.³⁴

Dante's Ovid was the product of several centuries of allegorical commentary. Dante's role in relation to this tradition is tantamount to a reversal of the aims of such exegesis; while earlier commentators had translated the Ovidian rhetoric into philosophical abstractions, Dante created a poetic form of Ovidian metamorphosis as vehicle for his moral philosophy.³⁵ Several *Dantisti* have assumed that one read *either* the text of Ovid, and thus perhaps sought to understand Ovid *per se*, or a commentary to the text, and thus received a mediated view of the poet and his work.³⁶ Yet neither the practicalities of reading at this time nor medieval attitudes as to the purpose of reading pagan texts easily allow for such a distinction.

It is rare to find a thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Metamorphoses* which does not incorporate an *accessus*, interlinear notes and glosses. Summaries of the stories and allegorical exercises based upon them are frequently bound together with the text.³⁷ Just as one could not physically separate the text from its mediating explanations, then, the reading of Ovid could not be freed from the medieval desire to find relevant messages within the work. The function of pagan texts in the medieval scholarly tradition was closely linked to their provision of convenient and authoritative *exempla*. The medieval reader, or writer, could not approach a specific pagan myth without recalling the types of moral functions it might contain, and thus these allegorical significances became enmeshed into the literal narrative.³⁸

As Dante and his guide Virgil proceed through the seventh circle, they encounter a macabre hunting scene (13.109-29):

Noi eravamo ancora al tronco attesi,
credendo ch'altro ne volesse dire,
quando noi fummo d'un romor sorpresi:

similmente a colui che venire
sente 'l porco e la caccia a sua posta,
ch'ode le bestie, e le frasche stormire.

Ed ecco due da la sinistra costa,

34 The dual aural resonances of l.99 is captured by Hawkins (1991), 19: “‘io non lo ’nvidio” (v. 99; “I envy him not”) [is] a boast that not only covers a profound imitation of the author of the *Metamorphoses* but also makes a point of negating the connection between them. “Io non lo ’nvidio” claims our poet, or, [...] *Io non Ovidio*—I [am] not Ovid!”

35 Barkan (1986), 14.

36 See, for example, the tacit assumptions underlying Hawkins (1991) and Whitfield (1982).

37 For a description of a range of thirteenth-century manuscripts of the *Metamorphoses* which emphasises their annotated character, see Ghisalberti (1932), 9f.

38 The comments of Whitman (1987), 67, regarding the pervasiveness of typological interpretations of the Scriptures, is equally valid in relation to medieval readings of classical figures: “[o]ver time, one level of the text or of the world deepens into another. Even more importantly, such deeper levels gradually become as literally plain and substantially present as the original ones, so that even the most divergent transfers from literal to allegorical, from material to spiritual, participate in a single continuity.”

nudi e graffati, fuggendo sì forte
che de la selva rompieno ogne rosta.

Quel dinanzi: ‘Or accorri, accorri, morte!’
E l’altro, cui pareva tardar troppo,
gridava: ‘Lano, sì non furo accorte

le gambe tue a le giostre dal Toppo!’
E poi che forse li fallia la lena,
di sé e d’un cespuglio fece un groppo.

Di rietro a loro era la selva piena
di nere cagne, bramose e correnti
come veltri ch’uscisser di catena.

In quel che s’appiattò miser li denti,
e quel dilaceraro a brano a brano;
poi sen portar quelle membra dolenti.

We were still attentive to the broken branch, believing it had
more to say, when we were surprised by a noise:
like one who hears the boar and the hunt approaching his post,
who hears the beasts and the branches breaking.
And behold two on our left, naked and scratched, fleeing so fast
that they were breaking every opposing branch in the forest.
The one in front: ‘Now hurry, hurry, death!’ And the other, who
seemed to himself too slow, ‘Lano, not so nimble were
your legs at the jousts at Toppo!’ And perhaps because his
breath was failing, he made one clump of himself and a bush.
Behind them the wood was full of black bitches, ravenous and
running like greyhounds loosened from the chain.
They set their teeth to the one that had squatted, tearing him
to pieces, bit by bit; then they carried off those suffering
members.

Dante compares his protagonist’s surprise to that of a relay who hears the hunt approaching (115-17). While the reader expects this simile to be borne out by something sharing only a poetic similarity with the figure of comparison, in fact the scene replicates the simile in all but one crucial detail: the quarried beasts are not boars, but men.

This partial subversion of the hunt gives the scene a sinister quality and adds to the grotesque unnaturalness of the seventh circle in general.³⁹ Utilising the myth of Actaeon, Dante has composed a further variation on the 'wild hunt' motif, a common element derived from scriptural and folkloric sources, in which a sinner, sometimes after death, is hunted in a nightmarish pursuit.⁴⁰ The victims in this case have been identified as Arcolano da Squarcia di Riccolfo Maconi and Iacopo da Santo Andrea, notorious Italian spendthrifts of the generation before Dante. Like the suicides, with whom they share a sub-circle, they are punished for violence against themselves; their vice is expressed as a type of 'externalized suicide'.⁴¹ Their squandering of property represents a waste of labour and thus is a form of self-destruction.

The *contrapassi* of this sub-circle emphasise the loss and destruction of the physical body, a fitting punishment for those destroyed by their own actions. Of all the souls in *Inferno*, only the suicides do not retain their earthly human forms, and nor will they regain them at the Last Judgment (13.94-108). The loss of physical identity in this sub-circle is again made apparent by the dogs who tear apart Iacopo and carry him off in pieces.

The connection between this passage and the allegorical tradition surrounding the myth of Actaeon is clear. From the earliest interpretations, Actaeon's offence had been linked to the squandering of money; here, this individual action is magnified to represent the general vice of prodigal spending and the death of the mythic figure now suggests the eternal punishment of those prone to such vices. Actaeon is transformed not only into the individual figure of a notorious historical Padovan, but also into a generalised image of prodigality, and its resulting punishment. Like Palaephatus, Dante ignores the traditional role of Diana in his recasting of the myth. Justice is an all-pervading theme in the *Commedia*. It emanates ultimately from God and is administered by a number of retributory figures throughout *Inferno* whose presence makes Diana's role superfluous in this context.

In the Christian underworld, metamorphosis takes on a new significance. For Ovid, transformation was primarily physical, and death, if involved, generally a secondary occurrence. Dante is interested in the ultimate transformation which engulfs the soul in death, a corporal transformation which is metaphysical and poetic in construction. This metamorphosis reveals physically the nature of the individual hidden in life. Upward metamorphosis is then a process of purification which reveals the almost-divine core of the human experience. Those judged by Minos and hurled into hell, however, become more bestial in appearance and are coupled with increasingly more inhuman forms of punishment.⁴² Death, then, is not the final act of the metamorphosis narrative, but merely its beginning. Thus, while the Ovidian Actaeon attempts to avert death with his cries, Dante's sinner Arcolano da Squarcia calls on death as a rescuer (118) just before his companion suffers the 'seconda morte' (*Inf.* 1.117) of infernal punishment.

39 For a brief treatment of some of the unnatural aspects of the seventh circle which illustrates the unnaturalness of the sins of *malizia con forza*, see Boyde (1981), 4-6.

40 For instances of this motif in Italian and Middle English sources, see Rooney (1993), 34-39.

41 Barkan (1980), 331.

42 The equation between sin and the metamorphosis of man into beast was common in medieval thought. See Barkan (1986), 141.

The punishment of spendthrifts was, however, but one context into which the myth of Actaeon could be inserted by medieval writers following the moralising tradition. In the middle and late fourteenth century Actaeon was sometimes recast as an example for courtly lovers.⁴³ John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* utilises the narrative framework of the confession of Amans to Genius to describe the seven cardinal sins as they relate to love. Each vice is illustrated with a suitable exemplum for the benefit of both Amans and the reader. Like the *Metamorphoses*, the *Confessio* has been plagued by criticism on account of its disunited nature. Indeed, part of its very character stems from the combination of disparate styles, aims and organisational structures. Its framework draws on confessional literature, the vernacular dream vision, and the Gregorian form of the seven sins. Discussed within this framework are the concepts drawn from Anglo-Norman literature on courtly love and from guides to the *ars predicandi*.⁴⁴ It is, as the author admits, a fusion of 'ernest and game' (8.3109). This tension between pleasure and doctrine, idealism and pragmatism lies at the heart of the *Confessio*, encapsulating the underlying incompatibility of Franco-Norman courtly ideals and the 'honeste' principles of decency, respectability, propriety and utility which were entering into the sphere of literature popular among an increasingly bourgeois English readership.⁴⁵

Like Dante, Gower utilises a number of stories drawn from a wide range of sources. However, whereas Dante's allegorical style tends to use narrative details to draw generalisations, Gower, influenced by the homiletic tradition, uses popular stories as *exempla* for individual behaviour.⁴⁶ In this way, abstract concepts may be discussed in more palatable form through the use of concrete illustrations. Of the stories presented in the *Confessio* around a quarter are also found in Ovid.⁴⁷ In his use of them Gower offers not so much a translation of the original narratives as a bold remoulding, taking only what is necessary for the sense of the exemplum.⁴⁸

The story of Actaeon is introduced as a warning of the potential for the senses to allow vice to intrude upon the sinner as a prelude to the discussion of pride. Medieval conceptions of secular love were frequently tied to the effect of physical beauty, and thus the eye as an entrance point for

43 The following may serve as examples. The narrator of Froissart's *Joli Buisson de Jonece* refrains from intruding on a circle of ladies, citing the story of Actaeon as an illustration of the dangers of such presumption (2242-88). Racked by anguish, the lover in the same author's *Espinette Amoureuse* counts Actaeon amongst a catalogue of classical figures who suffered for love (1309-22). In Petrarch's *Canzoniere* the myth is twice evoked as a metaphor describing the poet's relationship with Laura (23.147-60; 52).

44 The labels 'courtly literature' and 'courtly love', brought into the consciousness of Anglophone scholarship largely through Lewis (1936), are highly problematical both as concepts and as appellations. Here 'courtly love' is used as a convenient designation for a recognisable literary ideal of refined and codified relations as found in certain vernacular texts of the late Middle Ages which are linked by certain stylistic and structural commonalities despite also demonstrating a wide range of attitudes and ideals.

45 For the English ideal of 'honeste love' with its emphasis on the practical aspects of typical courtly activities, see Burnley (1998), 202-05 and 209-13. Gower's 'honeste love' is described by Kelly (1978), 201f.; Minnis (1983), 62-64; Bennett (1991).

46 Burrow (1982), 87f., provides a good discussion of the distinction between exemplification and allegory.

47 Kelly (1975), 122.

48 Harbert (1988), 87.

METAMORPHOSIS AND METAMORPHIC IDENTITY

desire was a commonplace in both courtly poetry and the corresponding treatises on love.⁴⁹ In the context of the sins of love, however, Genius' role is to point out the danger—both physical and spiritual—inherent in such voyeurism.

Gower's Actaeon is the very picture of the medieval knight riding through a wooded Kentish landscape (349-55):

So him befell upon a tide
On his hunting as he cam ride,
In a Forest al one he was:
He syh upon the grene gras
The faire freisshe floures springe,
He herde among the leves singe
The Throstle and the nyhtingale:

(It happened one day that as he
Rode out upon his venery,
Alone in the deep woods he was.
And there among the long green grass
He saw the fair fresh flowers spring,
Heard in the leafy branches sing
The throstle and the nightingale,)⁵⁰

Gower has retained Ovid's elaborate descriptions while simultaneously modernising and personalising his source. He has modified both the method of description and the landscape itself to more closely correspond with the expectations of his audience. The image of the wooded landscape as 'a separate and privileged world, governed by its own laws, [...] providing delight and recreation to the court'⁵¹ is here strongly evoked. The reader 'sees' the surroundings through the eyes of the hunter who, unlike his Roman equivalent, is now alone and on horseback. Instead of the scorched, bloodstained hillside of the *Metamorphoses* (3.143), Gower presents an idealised scene of lushness and plenty which seduces the eyes and ears.

Gower's Actaeon takes on the role of the aristocratic knight from popular secular literature of the time. Medieval romances frequently used similar descriptions of ideal landscapes to prefigure the entry of the hero; indeed, Amans himself is first described within a similar setting (1.109-13). In the Franco-Norman tradition hunting was a highly elaborate and stylised activity in which the knight could prove his prowess and display the types of qualities valued by the courtly society. The hunt, especially of 'noble quarry' such as the hart (male red deer), formed the background for extravagant displays of wealth and generosity and provided the opportunity for adventure, romance and encounters with dangerous and alluring, often mystical, women.

49 The important role of the eyes as entranceway to the heart is discussed by Cline (1972) in relation to twelfth-century literature and its ancient and medieval antecedents.

50 All translations of the *Confessio Amantis* are taken from Tiller (1963).

51 Saunders (1993), 10. For the historical context of English forests reserved for royal hunting, see Saunders (1993), 8-10.

Diana's grotto also warrants a description: it is a clearing in a valley surrounded by bushes and taller cedars (357-59). Diana bathes with her nymphs beside a well rather than in a spring (361-65), which evokes a type of goddess entirely removed from the Graeco-Roman patroness of wild animals and the wilderness. The setting, with its mysticism, lushness and birdsong, belongs to romance, and Diana thus becomes the 'Lady of the Fountain'.⁵² Struck by the superlative beauty of the place (362), and the nakedness of the goddess contained within (367), Actaeon cannot remove his gaze (366-78):

Bot he his yhe away ne swerveth
 Fro hire, which was naked al,
 And sche was wonder wroth withal,
 And him, as sche which was godesse,
 Forschop anon, and the liknesse
 Sche made him taken of an Hert,
 Which was tofore hise houndes stert,
 That ronne besiliche aboute
 With many an horn and many a route,
 That maden mochel noise and cry:
 And ate laste unhappely
 This Hert his oghne houndes slowhe
 And him for vengance al todrowhe.

(He could not look away from her
 And from her utter nakedness.
 But she grew angry to excess;
 And, as a goddess, having power,
 She changed his form upon the hour
 Into the likeness of a hart's.
 Up then before his hounds he starts,
 Where they run busily about
 With many a horn-call in the rout;
 And loudly after him they cry.
 So in the end, most wretchedly,
 By his own vengeful hounds this hart
 Was slaughtered and then torn apart.)

Gower has radically shortened the Ovidian account of Actaeon's demise. The metamorphosis itself is reduced to two lines with no hint of the conflict of identity which it might entail. Likewise, the brutality of the scene is downplayed: details which pointed to the bloodiness of the killing and the complicity of other hunters in Ovid's version are largely suppressed.

52 Cresswell (1981), 33.

METAMORPHOSIS AND METAMORPHIC IDENTITY

The narrative attention of the episode rests on issues of sight. Actaeon is the central focaliser of the action: the surroundings are ‘seen’ by the reader through his eyes, and his first glimpse of Diana, (mediated in the *Metamorphoses* by a prior description of the naked goddess [3.163-72]), is also the reader’s first glimpse of her. Actaeon’s death appears as an afterthought: if the reader can comprehend the danger of indecent vision, then the punishment itself has a largely perfunctory role.⁵³ All of the poetic energy of this episode goes into the illustration of Genius’ point; that ‘mislok’ results in destruction, as the final verses pithily remind the reader (379-84):

Lo now, my Sone, what it is
A man to caste his yhe amis,
Which Acteon hath dere aboght;
Be war forthi and do it noght.
For ofte, who that hiede toke,
Betre is to winke than to loke.

(Think now, my son, what it can mean
If men see what should not be seen;
Actaeon learned it to his pain;
Be wary, therefore, and refrain.
For heedful men would oft agree,
To wink is better than to see.)

Subtle changes to the characterisation of the hunter help to clarify his role as architect of his own downfall. The Middle English verses, echoing Ovid, make Actaeon’s wandering an innocent activity (356) and Diana’s actions the result of unrestrained power reacting with ‘wonder wroth’ (368). Yet Actaeon’s arrogant estimation of his hunting prowess (340f.) as well as aiding his characterisation as a knight,⁵⁴ ties to the exposition of the sin of pride throughout Book One. Actaeon is not resting in the midday heat but still actively hunting when he happens across Diana, a minor transformation of Ovid’s story which results in a more predatory role for the hunter.⁵⁵ Further, in Gower’s account, Actaeon’s gaze is much more actively expressed, and is unimpeded by the nymphs who attempt to protect the goddess in the Ovidian version.⁵⁶ Punishment does not stem directly from Actaeon’s glimpse of the naked goddess, however, but rather from his lack of

53 Concluding an insightful discussion of Gower’s treatment of the myth, Wickert (1981), 220f., captures perfectly the anticlimactic ending: ‘[o]ne almost receives the impression that the clamor of the hunt occupied him more than the youth’s death. In any case, the conclusion is strikingly weak, architectonically, stylistically, metrically and syntactically—I almost venture to add psychologically, for psychologically absolutely nothing happens after Acteon fails to do the morally correct thing. Here the weakness of Gower’s narrative technique become apparent. He takes no pleasure in the depiction of a situation and lacks the imagination that develops an image for its own sake. He is the “moral” Gower in the sense that he pushes his heroes and stories with high-principled directness towards a question of moral decision. This point attained, he loses interest and becomes mediocre, curiously inept, and—not infrequently—dull.’

54 Beidler (1982), 8f.

55 Beidler (1982), 9.

56 Beidler (1982), 9.

decency in not averting his gaze from the scene (366f.). The fact of being seen naked is not now what prompts Diana's anger, but Actaeon's indiscretion in the context of the story.⁵⁷

The 'worthi lord' of Gower's account is both the quintessential courtly knight of romance and the archetype of courtly and pragmatic vice. In the Franco-Norman tradition of courtly poetry, '[t]he proficient hunter is always a paragon of knightly virtue and therefore worthy of love'.⁵⁸ Yet excessive dedication to the hunt in such narratives undercuts the positive estimation of the knight by highlighting his immature eschewing of military and social duties and marriage.⁵⁹ More broadly, a life dedicated to the mutable and frivolous atmosphere of courtly life (with hunting its most recognisable aspect) could signify in literature sensitive to moral and religious themes a rejection of spiritual concerns and public duties. The common parodic figure of the cleric who hunts for pleasure and thereby neglects his proper role as a 'hunter of souls' represents the culmination of this opposition of the secular hunt with religious duty.⁶⁰ In practice, these attitudes are seldom found in isolation. The more complex texts, especially those, like the *Confessio*, which straddle genres and styles, draw on and revel in the multiple associations inherent within a single activity.⁶¹ In the ostensibly moralising *Confessio* Gower manages to combine the negative views of his contemporaries toward the excesses of the courtly tradition with the types of vices recognised within the courtly tradition itself, thus correlating the courtly tradition of correct loving and the moralising tradition of correct living.

Gower's account of Actaeon's death furnishes some parallels with the 'love chase' motif frequently encountered in secular medieval literature in which the literal hunt presents a scarcely-veiled metaphor for courtship.⁶² In this environment, in which the lover pursues his beloved and is himself pursued by his own passions, sudden reversals of roles are common and the distinction between hunter and hunted is highly fluid. While the meeting of Actaeon and Diana does not

57 Gower's Latin gloss, which presents a much more conservative estimation of the story, also insists on Actaeon's refusal to avert his gaze from the bathing goddess: 'vidit ibi Dianam cum suis Nymphis nudam in flumine balneantem; quam diligencius intuens oculos suos a muliebri nuditate nullatenus avertere volebat.' ('[Actaeon] saw Diana there bathing naked in the river with her nymphs. Watching most attentively, he refused to avert his gaze from the naked woman.')

58 Rooney (1993), 86.

59 Rooney (1993), 93-96.

60 See Rooney (1993), 122-27.

61 This is particularly well-argued by Rooney (1993), 56: 'Hunting episodes and images [in secular texts] may serve a narrative function, furthering the development of the plot, or may help to define a character's personality and role. The religious motifs, on the other hand, develop a single idea: the hunt brings to the text a series of associations and connotations revolving around the hunt as representative of worldly preoccupation. However, the uses to which writers put the motifs cannot be characterised as simply as this. A more talented writer could combine all three—the "narrative", "definitive" and "associative" functions—in a single episode, and the best writers take their exploration of a motif far beyond its usual limits. The distinction between secular and religious motifs imposes an anachronistic polarity on the texts. Much medieval literature does not fall simply into one category or the other, and no such clear division could have been possible or necessary in the Middle Ages—the medieval reader could happily accommodate the religious and profane side by side without any qualms.'

62 For discussion of the love chase in classical and medieval literature, see Thiébaux (1974). Saunders (1993), 57, compares the bewitched hunter in the love chase to Actaeon. Rooney (1993), esp. 46-49, having reviewed the relevant Middle English sources, notes that although the image of the love chase was seldom utilised by English poets, they were familiar with the theme through translations of Latin and French works, as is evidenced by its infrequent use by Chaucer, among others.

conveniently fit this *topos* in all aspects, its principal elements—a predatory hunter, an alluring victim and a complex set of role reversals—certainly situate it within the narrative type in which courtship and hunting combine. The forest setting provides a touch of the forbidden, as is often encountered in courtly stories of clandestine affairs. Further, it is the ideal location in which to encounter the supernatural. The presence of Diana hints at the ideal of love in secular poetry: as Venus becomes increasingly associated with perverse or unrestrained love, Diana partially replaces her as representative of ‘correct’ love and beauty in the medieval period. The pairing of a mortal lover and an unapproachable woman expresses perfectly the ritualised relationships of the courtly tradition, in which the lover approaches the object of his desire by affecting the courtesy of a worshipful pilgrim.⁶³ The elevation of the lady to the rank of a goddess is but the most extreme form of this ritualised servitude.⁶⁴

However, Actaeon’s uncontrolled, indecent gaze is antithetical to the precepts of courtly love in which each stage of the affair must be conducted in accordance with established patterns of conduct. The lady of this narrative, who in another situation might be expected to become the hero’s mistress, wife or protectress, is instead cast in the role of his destroyer. The courtly hunt, with its potential for the winning of glory and love, is abruptly replaced with a version of the wild hunt familiar from the Dantean example. This bold reversal from a description of the secular hunt to an implicit criticism of its underlying values as the heroic hunter is metamorphosed into the hunted victim of a fiendish divinity underpins the power of the episode.

Unlike the finite physical metamorphoses related in mythic narratives, the metamorphoses which come to engulf a story over time are infinite in their possible variations and are never-ending as part of the processes of cultural evolution. The myth of Actaeon, despite its relatively stable narrative form from the Augustan period onward, is not a homogenous entity but an amalgamation of any number of potential ‘Actaeons’. Actaeon can be in turn a hapless hunter, an exile, a spendthrift, a tortured sinner and an immoderate knight. Stories are always sensitive to the environment in which they are recounted and received. Their relevance within communities of readers determines the final form of their utilisation and the types of meaning that they will be expected to maintain. Changes to the story, often subtle, and to its relationship with surrounding literature reflect the desire of writers and readers to constantly interact with the elements of the story most relevant to their purpose. It is testimony to the inherently flexible nature of classical myth that the same simple narrative of offence and punishment can, in this case, be utilised to illustrate both the pettiness and violence of the pagan gods within a world in which the frames of reference are constantly in flux and the pitiless objectivity at the heart of the medieval conception of universal justice.

University of Bristol

63 See Martin (1972), 2-5, for a survey of definitions of ‘courtly love’ in which the superiority of the lady and the submission of the lover are paramount. This hierarchical arrangement echoes the social bonds between vassal and lord, yet reverses the typical relationship between men and women.

64 Martin (1972), 8.

Bibliography

- Alexander, William H. (1958), 'The *culpa* of Ovid'. *CJ* 53, 319-25.
- Barkan, Leonard (1980), 'Diana and Actaeon: The Myth as Synthesis'. *English Literary Renaissance* 10, 317-59.
- (1986), *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism*. New Haven & London.
- Beidler, Peter G. (1982), 'The Tale of Acteon (CA, i, 333-78)', in *John Gower's Literary Transformations in the Confessio Amantis: Original Articles and Translations*, 7-10. Washington DC.
- Bennett, J.A.W. (1991), 'Gower's "honeste love"', in Peter Nicholson (1991), 49-61
- Bernardo, Aldo S., and Levin, Saul (eds.), *The Classics in the Middle Ages: Papers of the Twentieth Annual Conference of the Centre for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies*. Binghamton NY.
- Boyde, Patrick (1981), 'Inferno XIII', in Foster and Boyde (1981), 1-22.
- Burnley, David (1998), *Courtliness and Literature in Medieval England*. London & New York.
- Burrow, J.A. (1982), *Medieval Writers and their Work: Middle English Literature and its Background 1100-1500*. Oxford.
- Chance, Jane (1990), 'The Medieval "Apology for Poetry": Fabulous Narrative and Stories of the Gods', in *The Mythographic Art: Classical Fable and the Rise of the Vernacular*, 3-44. Gainesville 1990.
- Claassen, Jo-Marie (1987), 'Error and the Imperial Household: An Angry God and the Exiled Ovid's Fate'. *AClass* 30, 31-47.
- (1988), 'Ovid's Poems from Exile: The Creation of a Myth and the Triumph of Poetry'. *A&A* 34, 158-69.
- Cline, Ruth H. (1972), 'Heart and Eyes'. *Romance Philology* 25, 263-97.
- Cooke, John Daniel (1927), 'Euhemerism: A Mediaeval Interpretation of Classical Paganism'. *Speculum* 2, 396-410.
- Cresswell, Julia (1981), 'The Tales of Acteon and Narcissus in the *Confessio Amantis*'. *Reading Medieval Studies* 7, 32-40.
- Damon, Philip (1990), 'Allegory and Invention: Levels of Meaning in Ancient and Medieval Rhetoric', in Bernardo and Levin (1990), 113-27.
- Demats, Paule (1973), *Fabula: trois études de mythographie antique et médiévale*. Geneva.
- Durling, Robert M. (1996) (ed. and tr.), *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri Vol.I: Inferno*. New York & Oxford.
- Feeney, D. C. (1991), *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition*. Oxford.
- Feldherr, Andrew (2002), 'Metamorphosis in the *Metamorphoses*', in Hardie (2002b), 163-79.
- Forbes Irving, P.M.C. (1990), *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths*. Oxford.
- Foster, K. and Boyde, P. (eds.) (1981), *Cambridge Readings in Dante's Comedy*. Cambridge.
- Galinsky, G. Karl (1975), *Ovid's Metamorphoses: An Introduction to the Basic Aspects*. Berkeley & Los Angeles.
- Gantz, Timothy (1993), *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*. Baltimore MD & London.

METAMORPHOSIS AND METAMORPHIC IDENTITY

- Ghisalberti, Fausto (1932), 'Arnolfo d'Orléans: un cultore di Ovidio nel secolo XII'. *Memorie del Reale Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere* 24, 157-234.
- Graf, Fritz (2002) 'Myth in Ovid', in Hardie (2002b), 108-21.
- Harbert, Bruce (1988), 'Lessons from the Great Clerk: Ovid and John Gower', in Martindale (1988), 83-97.
- Hardie, Philip (2002a), *Ovid's Poetics of Illusion*. Cambridge.
- (2002b) (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*. Cambridge.
- , Barchiesi, Alessandro, and Hinds, Stephen (1999) (eds.), *Ovidian Transformations: Essays on the Metamorphoses and its Reception*. Cambridge.
- Hawkins, Peter S (1991), 'The Metamorphosis of Ovid', in Sowell (1991), 17-34.
- Heath, John (1992), *Actaeon, the Unmannerly Intruder: The Myth and its Meaning in Classical Literature*. New York.
- Hinds, Stephen (1987), *The Metamorphosis of Persephone: Ovid and the Self-Conscious Muse*. Cambridge.
- Hollander, Robert (2001), *Dante: A Life in Works*. New Haven & London.
- Ingleheart, Jennifer (2006), 'What the Poet Saw: Ovid, the Error and the Theme of Sight in *Tristitia* 2'. *MD* 56, 63-86.
- Kelly, Douglas (1978), *Medieval Imagination: Rhetoric and the Poetry of Courtly Love*. Madison.
- Kelly, Henry Ansgar (1975). *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*. Ithaca & London.
- Landolfi, Luciano (2003), 'Posse loqui eripitur (Ov. *Met.* 2, 483). Perdita di parola, perdita d'identità nelle *Metamorfosi*', in Landolfi and Monella (2003), 29-58.
- and Monella, Paolo (2003) (eds.), *Ars adeo latet arte sua: riflessioni sul l'intertestualità ovidiana*. Palermo.
- Lewis, C. S. (1936), *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*. London.
- Martin, June Hall (1972), *Love's Fools: Aucassin, Troilus, Calisto and the Parody of the Courtly Lover*. London.
- Martindale, Charles (ed.) (1988), *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge.
- Mazzeo, Joseph A. (1978), 'Allegorical Interpretation and History'. *CompLit* 30, 1-21.
- Minnis, Alastair (1983), '“Moral Gower” and Medieval Literary Theory', in *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, 50-78. Cambridge.
- Nagle, Betty Rose (1980), *The Poetics of Exile: Program and Polemic in the Tristitia and Epistulae ex Ponto of Ovid*. Brussels.
- Nicholson, Peter (ed.) (1991), *Gower's Confessio Amantis: A Critical Anthology*. Cambridge.
- Osmun, George F. (1956), 'Palaephatus—Pragmatic Mythographer'. *CJ* 52, 131-37.
- Rollinson, Philip (1981), *Classical Theories of Allegory and Christian Culture*. Pittsburgh & Brighton.
- Rooney, Anne (1993), *Hunting in Middle English Literature*. Cambridge.
- Saunders, Corinne J. (1993), *The Forest in Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden*. Cambridge.
- Seznec, Jean (1953), *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*, tr. Barbara F. Sessions. New York.
- Sowell, Madison U. (1991) (ed.), *Dante and Ovid: Essays in Intertextuality*. Binghamton.

- Spencer, Richard A. (1997), *Contrast as a Narrative Technique in Ovid's Metamorphoses*. Lewiston NY.
- Stern, Jacob (1996) (tr. and comm.), *Palaephatus: PERI APISTWN/On Unbelievable Tales*. Wauconda.
- Theodorakopoulos, Elena (1999), 'Closure and Transformation in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', in Hardie, Barchiesi and Hinds (1999), 142-61.
- Thibault, John C. (1964), *The Mystery of Ovid's Exile*. Berkeley & Los Angeles.
- Thiébaux, Marcelle (1974), *The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature*. Ithaca & London.
- Tiller, Terence (1963) (tr.), *John Gower: Confessio Amantis [The Lover's Shrift]* Harmondsworth.
- Veyne, Paul (1988), *Did the Greeks Believe in their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, tr. Paula Wissing. Chicago.
- Wipprecht, F. (1902-08), *Zur Entwicklung der rationalistischen Mythendeutung bei den Griechen*, 2 vols. Tübingen.
- Whitfield, J. H. (1982), 'Dante and John of Garland'. *RPL* 5, 247-51.
- Whitman, Jon (1987), *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique*. Oxford.
- Wickert, Maria (1981), *Studies in John Gower*, tr. Robert J. Meindl. Washington DC.
- Williams, Gareth D. (1994), *Banished Voices: Readings in Ovid's Exile Poetry*. Cambridge, New York & Melbourne.