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0521862191 - Ovid's Lovers: Desire, Difference and the Poetic Imagination

Victoria Rimell

Excerpt

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Introduction
Narcissus and Medusa: Desiring subjects
and the dialectics of Ovidian erotics

Ovid's structure is not merely like a Russian doll, one story inside another, it is like a snake-pit, in which a pretty indeterminable number of snakes are devouring and being devoured by each other.¹

All love is combat, a wrestling with ghosts.²

This book explores the gaps in which same and other, male and female can be seen to relate, converse, compete, and co-create in Ovidian poetry. The chapters included span a large portion of Ovid's corpus, starting with the *Medicamina*, his little-read treatise on cosmetics in which women are made up in men's image and vice versa, and ending with the 'double' *Heroides*, where heroes and heroines of ancient myth write to and from (over and across and with) each other. I am interested here in the many (flash-) points in Ovidian poetry where male and female artists/lovers are twinned as vying, mutually threatening subjects, and where a narcissistic impulse to collapse other into same/self is rivalled by a more complex dialectic or exchange which seems itself to fire and propel desire. One of the core aims of this study is to counter some curious imbalances and repressions in recent Ovidian criticism: in particular, I discuss the extent to which the dominant model for the Ovidian artist, the male viewer who spurns woman and/or (re)creates her as artwork and fetish (Narcissus, Orpheus and Pygmalion are key figures) has tended to foreclose investigation of the relationship between gendered creativities in Ovid. For sure, we can all spot competing models of the artist – from Echo, who turns repetition into originality, pronouncing *novissima verba* with typical satiric, Ovidian wit,³

¹ Hofman and Lasdun (1994) xii. ² Paglia (1990) 14.

³ See Knoespel (1985) 8:

'What emerges from Ovid's account of Echo is the power of speech and the ability of Ovid's own written language to control that speech. Even though Echo is handicapped by Juno's punishment, her handicap paradoxically emphasizes the adaptability of speech. Ultimately it is the power of the written language, Ovid's own narrative, that emerges from the description of Echo's language.'

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to spinner Arachne,⁴ tortured embroiderer Philomela,⁵ or the daughters of Minyas, stitching rebellion into *Metamorphoses* 4 – but these are not the characters usually identified with the *poet himself*, and feminist critics have been more concerned with making such figures visible, rather than (in addition) with scrutinizing how gendered readings and writings contend and overlap. Male artists, however, are frequently construed as synonymous with the poet. As Segal writes, for example: ‘Through Orpheus, Ovid provides a metaphorical reflection of the creative and restorative power of his own art’.⁶ For Anderson, Pygmalion ‘is the creative artist par excellence’,⁷ or as Rosati puts it, reaffirmed many times over in Hardie’s recent book: ‘Ovid is the poet Narcissus, the poet bent over in admiration of his own virtuosity, triumphantly mirroring himself in the astonishment of his public’.⁸ For Hardie, narcissistic desires (aligned with a bid to conjure up presences) lie at the psychological heart of Ovid’s poetry, fuelling an obsession with sameness and doubling (not least, between art and nature).⁹ Thus the Narcissus–Echo plot can be seen to ghost-write a string of Ovidian couplings (Ceyx and Alcyone, Leander and Hero, Deucalion and Pyrrha, Pyramus and Thisbe), in which beloveds become mirror images of lovers.¹⁰ Indeed, Narcissus reigns in recent criticism as *the* figure both for the poet (as he flits between credulity and cynicism, primal magic and urbane irony) and for the desiring, seduced, self-conscious reader. His myth offers a neat allegory for the move from naïvety to knowingness, nature to art celebrated by postmodernism, a field of thinking owed much of the credit for Ovid’s flight to stardom at the end of the second millennium.¹¹ We might even say that Narcissus’ psychodrama has come to define Ovidian poetics as obsessed with linguistic surfaces and passing intensities, with visual display, duplicity and (obvious) feigning.¹²

Also see Hinds (1998) 5–8, and Hollander (1981) on Echo as a figure of poetic allusion and as an ironist or satirist (‘Echo’s power is thus one of being able to reveal the implicit’, Hollander writes, 27). Echo’s story is one of several Ovidian myths to be appropriated by feminist thought: see Berger (1996), Spivak (1993).

⁴ For a feminist reading of this tale see Miller (1988).

⁵ See Joplin (1984), and Marder (1992). ⁶ Segal (1989) 491.

⁷ Anderson (1963) 25, cf. Solodow (1988) 215, and Hardie (2002a) 23: ‘Orpheus and Pygmalion in *Metamorphoses* 10 are the Ovidian figures for, respectively, the poet and the artist in their role as primitive magicians.’

⁸ Rosati (1983) 50, Hardie (2002a) 28 *et passim*. Also see discussion of these models in Elsner and Sharrock (1991). Leach (1974) is among the few to view Narcissus and his relatives differently: for her, he is a model of artistic failure.

⁹ Hardie (2002a), (2004). ¹⁰ Hardie (2002a) 258–82.

¹¹ As Hofman and Lasdun put it in their introduction (1994) xi: ‘there are many reasons for Ovid’s renewed appeal. Such qualities as his mischief and cleverness, his deliberate use of shock – not always relished in the past – are contemporary values.’

¹² See especially recent summary of modern reception of Ovid in Hardie (2002b).

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Yet the self-love of Narcissus is only one, limited model for Ovidian desire and Ovidian representation. Ovid stages many different complications, variations or contestations of the Narcissus plot, and writes desire as a fractured, competitive process. The emphasis on Narcissus as Ovidian artist in recent criticism fascinates me especially because of the way in which it grounds Ovidian illusionism and fiction in mimetic male desire. This book offers a rather different (and at the same time often complementary) take on Ovidian art and erotics, suggesting ways in which this experimental poet takes his readers far beyond Narcissus' experience. Much valuable work has been done already on how Ovid writes the decentred self, and blurs or snags what are perceived to be traditional gender categories, especially of masculinity.¹³ What I would like to do here, however, is to draw out discussion of what Miller calls the 'split nature' of elegiac subjectivity by looking closely, in addition, at how Ovid construes *intersubjectivity*.¹⁴ Broadly, I want to rethink power in Ovidian poetry as relational (rather than hierarchical), and to push against the tendency of Ovidian criticism in the last thirty years to fall into polar camps. As Miller puts it in his discussion of the *Amores*:

Depending on whom one reads, elegy is either in league with the Augustan political regime (Kennedy 1993, 35–6; Newman 1997, 6) or implacably hostile to it and the traditional values it sought to promote; either political allegory (Edwards 1996, 24) or an apolitical, ludic discourse that gently mocks social custom (Veyne 1988: 31–2, 104–8; Kennedy 1993: 95–6; Fantham 1996, 108); either exploitative of women (Kennedy 1993: 38, 56, 73) or bent on satirizing Roman misogyny (Greene 1994).¹⁵

Similarly, the inclination of debate on gender in ancient texts has been, almost entirely, towards analysing *either* female *or* male figures, *either* constructions of femininity *or* masculinity.¹⁶ This has much to do with a reluctance, deeply engrained in the Western tradition, to entertain two parallel (same but different) subjects, an aversion magnified by an Anglo-American feminist ideal of a gender-neutral human subject. In this book, I want to sidestep the kinds of questions that have repeatedly been asked of Ovid in the last thirty years, by asking not (simply) about constructs of femininity, or of masculinity, or about whether Ovid can be judged a

¹³ See e.g. Raval (2002), Keith (1999) and (2000), P. A. Miller (2003) or summary in Sharrock (2002a).

¹⁴ P. A. Miller (2003) offers a 'symptomatic' history of Roman erotic elegy, arguing that elegiac poetry arose from a fundamental split in the nature of subjectivity that occurred in the late first century. His book provides a very interesting, more historically focused background to my discussions of Ovid's vision of the self.

¹⁵ Miller (2003) 30. ¹⁶ Recent exceptions include Keith (1999) and Miller (2003). See n. 17.

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anti-, proto- or pseudo-feminist,¹⁷ but instead about relationality, about the desiring subject in Ovidian poetry as a being-in-relation.¹⁸

For although in the *Amores*, Ovid's first published work, erotic relations appear more straightforwardly formulated (at least, in parts) as lover/beloved, and Corinna appears to be little more than elegiac subject-matter, with no voice of her own, in the *Heroides*, *Ars Amatoria*, *Medicamina*, and *Metamorphoses*, we can read varied experiments in juxtaposing canny, rival lovers and in juggling unstable subject/object positions, experiments which postpone any final determination.¹⁹ All these texts, with the exception of *Heroides* 1–15,²⁰ were written between four and eight years of each other, and make up the backbone of Ovid's life's work. The core elegiac texts (*Heroides*, *Ars*, *Medicamina*, as well as the *Remedia Amoris*, which I discuss only briefly) are all concerned with how desiring subjects interact and seduce each other, and it is this idea of imagining the intersection of male and female worlds which perhaps distinguishes the originality of Ovid's contribution to Augustan literature, and takes the concept of the uneven, sexy pairing visualized in the elegiac couplet as far as it can go. While elegy, traditionally, has room 'for one voice only', tending to reduce everything to the persona of the poet-lover,²¹ Ovid's image-conscious poetry is often focused on dialogue over monologue, moving at the borders of known worlds, both real and imaginary.

¹⁷ For criticism which sees Ovid pushing against and reversing traditional gender roles see e.g. Hallett (1990) 193, Jacobson (1974) 7, Curran (1978) 213, Luck (1960) 418, Spentzou (2003), James (2003). For an Ovid who demonstrates the mechanics of male discourses of power and domination over/objectification of women, see e.g. Greene (1998), Leach (1964), Sullivan (1962). For more complex accounts, in which Ovid does the former to a certain extent (or pretends to), while ultimately fulfilling the latter, or vice versa, see e.g. Raval (2002) and Green (1979–80), or Watson (2002). Similarly, in 'resisting' readings of Ovid (e.g. Liveley 1999), there is often a strong sense that the 'feminist' (or almost, here, 'tactical') reading is the one which rejects and resists in order exclusively to privilege another viewpoint, implying that the conventional reading is born of naïve masculinism, rather than offering a way to analyse how attitudes and readings compete in the text. Keith (1999), along with P. A. Miller (2003), is unusual in criticizing the limitations of the above positions, in which the poet is interpreted as *either* promoting gender subversion and sexual liberation *or* as reconfiguring a repressive sexuality.

¹⁸ This is an Irigarayan term (see especially Irigaray 2000): her work calls for the radical reevaluation of the human subject as defined by difference rather than sameness. Many of my thoughts on Ovid in this book have been complicated and enriched by her work, although I am by no means attempting to recuperate Ovid as an utopian French feminist.

¹⁹ Miller (2003) sees the Roman elegists in general as 'augurs of instability', exploring 'the interstitial space between masculine and feminine, active and passive, for which traditional Roman discourse has no terms' (25); elegy thus becomes 'a symptom of crisis in the Roman subject's self-conception' (26).

²⁰ The publication date for these poems is uncertain. Traditionally they have been assigned to the same period as the *Amores*, and dated at around 15 BC; however some scholars have placed them later, between 10 and 3 BC.

²¹ As Barchiesi puts it: (2001) 31–2.

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Thus, while in the *Ars Amatoria* especially, Ovid surely baits the kind of deliberation which has preoccupied feminist critics of his poetry ('whose side is he on, anyway?'),²² this poetry does everything it can to foil our verdict, or to show up its own ingenuousness (which is not to say that men and women ultimately come out quits in the *Ars*, only to stress that the tussle of 'foe against foe' in this text is without resolution). Ovidian desire often works to break down boundaries, and thus to threaten autonomy, identity, and to collapse difference into incestuous sameness, yet at the same time it often resists and dodges Narcissus' fate, recognizing that connectedness is not synonymous with homogeneity, that the dynamic of relationality is also the vim of creative process, both of writing and reading. Ovidian erotics can be read as a constant battle to transcend a compulsive logic of the same in order to sustain desire, or poetry itself.

In this way, Ovid discerns and wrestles with the fundamental problem of what Irigaray calls the 'specularisation' underlying all Western philosophical discourse,²³ confronting head-on the perilous implications of a self-perpetuating mode which creates man's desired object as the reassuring negative of his own reflection. Similarly, even in relationships which appear to be self-contained, Ovidian sex depends on multiplications, triangulations, substitutions, go-betweens, which inevitably render mirroring interactions much more complex than the Narcissus–Echo, subject–object (male–female) prototype would suggest.²⁴ Thus in the *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid's pupils are asked to negotiate a tangle of contrary advice, to perceive parallel scenarios through the eyes of men and women, husbands and lovers, Echoes and Narcissuses, viewers and viewed; with Ovid's lovers, we reach a climax at the end of *Ars* 2 only to realize there is one more book to come – yet the *Remedia Amoris* erases that end, too (and let us not forget the other appendix to *Ars* 3, the *Medicamina*).²⁵ In the double *Heroides*,

²² In her discussion of the women-focused single *Heroides*, Sharrock (2002a) 99, distills this familiar cross-examination as follows:

'a crucial question is the extent to which we may be able to read a 'woman's voice'. What kind of gendered voice is produced by a male author speaking through a female mask, but completely subsuming his masculine authority into the female writing? . . . The same question arises when we try to confront more widely the very high profile of women in the corpus: is it friendly or not? How far is Ovid implicated in the exposure and objectification of women and denigrating violence towards them, perpetrated in and by his texts?'

²³ Irigaray (1985a) explains how logocentrism is incapable of representing femininity/woman other than as the negative of men's own reflection. Philosophical meta-discourse, she argues, is only made possible through a logic of the same, a narcissistic process whereby the speculating subject contemplates himself.

²⁴ Just as, Miller argues (2003) 24, elegiac women 'represent less simple identities than complex nexuses of conflicting symbolic norms'.

²⁵ For more detailed discussion of the relationship between reading, sex and counting games in the *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*, see Henderson (forthcoming).

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similarly, partnerships swell into love triangles and more messy relationship-maps, while in (the aptly numbered) *Amores* 2, Ovidian aspirations and desires stretch and splinter elegiac distichs/diptychs, producing a kaleidoscopic effect: multiple affairs, accomplices, scenarios and readings load the book with epic potential, yet for the oversexed poet-lover, nothing is ever *satis*.²⁶

In this introductory chapter, I use the Medusa myth (which, as we'll see, feeds subtly into Ovid's corpus throughout) as an illustrative way into exploring how a narcissistic logic in Ovidian poetry is contextualized and challenged, first of all by the troubling existence and (not quite visible) vision of the Other (paradigmatically, Woman), and secondly by an ongoing meeting/clash/interaction of desiring subjects and poetic drives, male and female. This opening discussion is more abstract and theoretical than the close readings of individual texts that follow, and it is also more literal in its exploration of the Medusa and Narcissus myths, which often (particularly in the case of Medusa, a figure who, in more ways than one, can rarely be seen head-on) become shadows, reflections and backgrounds to understanding erotic relationships in Ovidian poetry itself. Throughout the book, then, I will be probing the limits of a fixation on the myth of Narcissus in Ovidian criticism: readings of Ovidian desire and poetics as rooted (only) in the paradigm of Narcissus have tended to reject and quell the Other (the female), underemphasize the extent to which the Ovidian poet is identified, often simultaneously, with other artist figures and with other models for individuation, and suppress the horror of self-consciousness, as well as the risk of incredulity (as dramatized in the parallel catoptric myth of Perseus and Medusa told in *Metamorphoses* 4 and 5).

Medusa's presence, insidious but little discussed, gnaws into and rivals the Narcissus archetype, asserting *two* desiring/creative subjects whose intercourse spikes the paradoxes of Ovidian illusionism. Both myths, told in *Met.* 3–5, are fundamental models in Ovid for the birth of poetry and for the individual's path to subjectivity. Crucially, too, they both make the mirror a symbolic tool for (painful, dangerous) self-realization, a idea Ovid also explores in the *Amores*, *Medicamina* and *Ars Amatoria*. Narcissus, petrified with amazement in *Met.* 3, comes of age and becomes a symbol of Ovidian self-consciousness when he understands that he is seeing *himself* in the reflective pool, while those who see Medusa in *Met.* 4 and 5 look (their own) death in the face, and are turned into perfect stone statues

²⁶ *satis*, or rather *non satis*, is an important concept in *Amores* 2, shorthand for the games of excess played throughout this book. See e.g. 2.10.12, 2.10.22, 2.13.28, 2.14.44.

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(unless, like Perseus, they avoid looking at her straight on by using a mirror – in which Medusa, like Narcissus, may also see herself). Medusa is a paradigmatic female viewer and artist, and the myth of her rape, monstrous transformation, and perpetual afterlife as global sculptress is located (alongside Narcissus' transformation) at the core of the *Metamorphoses*. But while Narcissus looks at and is in love with himself, the myth of Medusa always involves encounters *between* spectators. Simply put, this is a myth about looked-at woman becoming ultra-powerful viewer (snake-haired Medusa still turns her audience on, and is compulsive viewing, yet her audience is 'castrated' even as it is permanently fixed in the state of open-mouthed arousal). But it is also, crucially, about the convergence and collision of gazes, for her narrative culminates at the end of *Met.4* in the moment at which Perseus sees (or does not see) her gruesome face in his mirror-shield – itself a giant, surrogate eye.

Indeed, although she gets only passing mention in one chapter of Frederik's recent *The Roman Gaze* (2002), and is barely glimpsed in studies of Ovidian spec(tac)ularity and desire,²⁷ Medusa is everywhere in Ovid, just as she looms large (alongside Narcissus) in twentieth-century philosophy and creative writing, in psychoanalysis and French feminist thought.²⁸ This book attempts to engage with and encompass insights developed in other fields of the humanities that have often tended to be neglected by classicists; just as, in turn, it hopes to show that the classical foundations of mythical archetypes and their treatment in authors such as Ovid cannot be sidestepped or underestimated in the elaboration of critical theory. Medusa's stage presence, I'll argue, ensures that Ovidian desire does not simply revolve around intoxication and restoration, possession, loss and evanescence, but is infused with aggression, revenge, conflict, mystery, suspense, renewal, and above all, fear. And while desire's mission, as Hardie stresses, is usually to embrace and consume the other (this is, above all, Narcissus' fantasy),²⁹ we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that there are numerous places in the Ovidian corpus where we can recognize precisely the opposite conclusion, where the poet is not only hampered in his quest but obsessively concerned with privileging and *revelling* in the journey itself rather than the destination, to the point that the apparent target is rendered

²⁷ E.g. Rosati (1983), Hardie (2002a), Sharrock (1994), (2000a).

²⁸ For an overview of Medusa's impact on Western literature, philosophy and art, see Garber and Vickers (2003).

²⁹ Throughout much of Western philosophical thought, the notion that (male) desire can never be truly fulfilled without the 'possession' of the other, is all-pervasive. See the critique of Levinas, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty in Irigaray (2000) 17–29.

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redundant, cosmetic. The repeated and delusional displacements and substitutions that define Lacan's desiring subject are often self-consciously celebrated (as the *real* point, the *real* victory) in Ovidian erotics.

Perhaps the most flagrant instance of this occurs at the end (which is also a middle and re-beginning) of *Amores* 2, where the poet, disgruntled at a rival's literal and slavish reading of his seduction campaign, blurts out: *si tibi non opus est servata, stulte, puella, / at mihi fac serves, quo magis ipse velim* ('If you're not bothered with guarding the girl for your own sake, cretin, at least guard her for mine, so that I'll want her all the more' 2.19.1–2). One spiteful Medusan look spells out the magic and cracks the fantasy, evoking Narcissus' disillusionment: yet the collapse of Narcissus' deluded lust can *coexist* with Medusa's fatal attraction (especially in a book which sets up 'straight talking' as a painful trap for its readers, exposing possibilities rather than dealing the bottom line).³⁰ In other words, it is not only the case, as Hardie emphasizes, that Ovidian poetry continually yearns to substitute textual ecstasies/fallacies for actual bodily union, resulting in concatenations of absent–presences: Ovid is also concerned, sometimes very obviously, to shun and undermine the drive for possession/unity/symmetry in order to animate dynamic relationships between subjects.

This opening chapter is followed by six close readings which work through the Ovidian corpus, from elegiac didactic to epic to the late 'double' epistles, the last Augustan elegy we have. These texts, or bits of texts, are all in different ways concerned (and I want to stress, *more* concerned than any other of Ovid's poems) with developing dialectical relationships between desiring subjects. Ovid's fascination with communication between lovers, and with doubling, interaction, competition and exchange more generally, might be seen to culminate in *Her.*16–21, when men and women get to write simultaneously and side by side. But I do not so much want to plot a teleology of Ovidian erotics as to suggest that when we review Ovid's poetry in the light of these ideas, accentuating parts of the corpus which have as a whole received less critical attention,³¹ new or forgotten grains and colours emerge. Together, Ovid's experiments in partnering male and female add

³⁰ See especially *Am.*2.7 and 2.8 (with Henderson 1991 and 1992), where we are caught out and lured to re-read, only to pile up our suspicions. Conversely, Ovid points out in *Ars* 1.615–16 that what was once feigned (being in love) can become true before you even realize it yourself. Similarly, Medusa's drop-dead gaze is infuriatingly paradoxical: on one hand she is an anti-Pygmalion, killing off illusionism, while on the other, as *Met.*5 dramatizes, her story is emblematic of tales of wonder, and she punishes a disbelieving audience by turning them into stupefied statues, frozen forever as an object lesson in incredulity.

³¹ With the exception of the *Metamorphoses*. The double *Heroides* and the *Medicamina* in particular remain very understudied.

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up to an intricate and shifting examination of human (inter)subjectivity which is ever concomitant with parading the origins, nature and scope of poetry.

Chapter 1 looks (while trying not to squint) at the *Medicamina*, and considers how the poem relates to Ovid's advice on make-up and mirrors, and also to the catoptric encounter (rivalling that between Narcissus and himself/Echo) between Perseus and Medusa, elsewhere in the corpus – especially the *Ars Amatoria*. I argue that this is a poem about male scopophilic desire to create woman as same: in a straightforward reading of the *Medicamina*, Ovid's cosmos of cosmetics enacts a specular logic in which women are denied the pleasure of self-representation and permitted only the hysteria of mimicry. In holding his own mirror up to women in this poem, Ovid turns their tool for self-formation against them, like Perseus assaulting Medusa, and the narcissus bulb face-pack which leaves faces as bright as a mirror only rubs this in. Yet by stealing cosmetics and their accessories to colour his poetics, Ovid also adopts the worries and ambiguities invested in mirrors and masquerade. Mirrors in the ancient world are highly paradoxical: they give women the power to know and control appearances, but in doing so expose the limits of female individuation – they are her weapon/shield/Achilles' heel, or Narcissus' trap. Ovid also exploits the Platonic idea that mirror images share with semblances of all kinds an ambiguous mixture of being and non-being, challenging the mentality that thinks in terms of here and there, self and not-self. So while the *Medicamina* strives, like Pygmalion, to forge women in man's image, as same, as artwork, what it also does is to turn that scopophilic gaze back on the supreme, imperialist, desiring (male) subject. This is, of course, one of the many instances in Ovidian poetry where the Narcissus tragedy gets replayed, albeit in a typically metaphorical way. But here we have two subjects (and two Narcissuses/Medusas), not one: and those two subjects, man and woman, never totally collapse into unity, as in the Narcissus denouement. The mirror, now women *and* men's tool for self-formation, confuses subject/object, self/other, or rather (at the same time), it fuels a battle for subject position. The (near-)sameness of the narcissistic encounter produces the tense energy of desire, while risking killing that desire, or castrating both desiring subjects – a threat which itself adds sparkle to elegiac sport.

Chapter 2, on *Ars Amatoria*, tries to unscramble the difficult interactions between the three books, and explores how this text revels in anxieties germane to the art of relationships. Ovid's textbook is littered with traces of the two primordial mirror-myths, Medusa/Perseus and Narcissus/Echo, models which are both interwoven and let loose, so that male and female

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lovers/artists trade places or play multiple roles. Neat symmetries and chess-board patterns are arranged only to be confounded or messed up, with the result that neither men nor women (artists nor readers, lovers nor rivals) can keep the upper hand for long, and the sexes are propelled into seemingly endless rounds of competition. While chapter 2 ranges at speed through the *Ars* to trace the energetic criss-crossing between lovers and books, chapter 3 magnifies just one slow-motion episode in the *Metamorphoses*, Orpheus' lethal backward glance at Eurydice on the boundary between upper and lower worlds in Book 10. This chapter dissects the crucial moments of realization and amazement at art and beauty that pepper *Met.*10. I argue that Orpheus' song, and the Ovidian narrative that frames it, continually revisit instances of the uncanny, or mirror-stages, in which hierarchies of subject-object are unbalanced or even non-sensical. Once again, the Medusa myth is important here (both in Eurydice's double death and in Orpheus' murder in Book 11), its theme of threatening confrontation infecting Orpheus' apparent retreat into narcissism and boy love. In parodying the *Ars Amatoria* (Orpheus gives us dangerous, criminal *eros* over Ovid's 'safe sex'³²), *Met.*10 teaches us how metamorphosis, desire and Ovidian poetry itself are inspired by points of suspension and movement between two states, identities and subjects.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 move one step away from ocularcentrism to explore other aspects of Ovid's interest in the relational subject. In chapter 4 in particular, our palette of images will be rather different from that which we have seen so far: in *Her.*15, the relation between self and same/self and other, is dramatized less in the contrast between Narcissus' and Medusa's/Perseus' experiences (although the landscape of Narcissus' myth is still very much in evidence) than in the slippage between homo- and heterosexual desire, within a complex love triangle created by (once-Lesbian) Sappho, Phaon and Ovid. This strange epistle at the end of the single *Heroides* (in most editions, 'between' the single and double *Heroides*), becomes the site for a fascinating performance of Ovid's agonistic affair with female predecessor and 'original' voice of personal amatory poetry, Sappho. Our focus is now on a single, hybrid, artist-lover, whose letter subsumes several layers of dialogue. Sappho-Ovid's often cacophonous duet, I'll argue, takes us one move closer to the lovers' exchange of letters in *Her.*16–21. In assuming the voice of Sappho, Ovid in many ways writes over and through his female rival (and possible partner), aggressively asserting a hierarchy of male over

³² See *Met.*10.152–4, cf. *Ars* 1.31–4. There will be 'no crime' in Ovid's song, whereas Orpheus will give us 'unlawful passions' and the 'deserved punishment' of women, promising also tales of homosexual instead of heterosexual love affairs. This is a point made by Janan (1988b) 116.