RHETORICAL VALUES AND AESTHETIC VALUES IN OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES*

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Abstract:
Among Ovid's writings the catalogue of metamorphoses is a literary convention which is more frequent and more significant than it may be thought. The apparently arid formula of the concepts list acquired rhetorical, philosophical, and none the less aesthetic values under Ovid's pen. The process of acquiring rich and delicately expressed significations enhanced over the time from the lyrical distiches of his youth, such as *Amores* or *Heroides*, over to the poems written during his exile, such as *Tristia*, the climax being the didactic poem in dactylic hexameter *Metamorphoses* (1-8 AD), unfinished or in any case unperfected. The use of a literary text as support across time and space for his polemics with personalities of the Roman cultural or political world is in accordance with the nonconformist spirit of Publius Ovidius Naso.

Key words:
Ovid, literary catalogue, metamorphoses, polemic, ideology, intertextuality.

1. Order and Disorder – Dimensions of a Reference to Reality

Ovid's inclination towards polemic is surely traceable in the times of his educational training. The future poet studied *rhetoric* in Rome, then in Athens (when, after the age of 18, had already thoroughly studied the Greek mythology). After finishing his studies, he even worked for a while in the judicial field. Acting in all those capacities, he had surely made use of listing illustrative "examples", *id est* "catalogue", in order to attain argumentation by rhetorical induction.

Ovid had cultivated the formula of the catalogue since the time when he expressed himself through the elegiac distich, see *Amores* etc. In

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a short time he assembled a whole lyrical *opus* from the catalogues of love. The *Heroïdes*, his collection of 21 imaginary letters composed in elegiac distich and addressed by legendary heroines to *their lovers*, may be considered such a catalogue, which includes other smaller catalogues. For instance, *Letter No. 17*, in which Helen, when talking to Paris, built a catalogue of *exempla* referencing girls abandoned by their lovers. Helen's list even included names of some of the women-authors of the other letters in Ovid's catalogue: Hypsipyle (the author of *Letter 6*); Ariana (*Letter 10*), Medea (*Letter 12*); Hero (the answering *Letter* to Leander – 19, 175). Just as later in his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid progressively integrated in his collection of stories some of the narratives which had previously occurred in the collection, so that they could support a certain idea[1]. Researchers have therefore noticed a type of intertextuality[2] Ovid used by employing the technique of the *catalogue within catalogue*, even in his lyrical writings:

« Une histoire peut se faire ***exemplum*** *de l'histoire suivant: aussi le discours élégiaque s'accroît à force d'exemple*. »[3]

This technique of re-assembling love stories of the mythology shall be later reused, even more widely and complexly, in the *Metamorphoses*, his poetic writing of maturity composed in dactylic hexameters.

Already in *Fastorum libri* (3 AD) Ovid assembled a catalogue of Roman religious celebrations which he organized chronologically, according to the monthly cycle in the Roman calendar. It is probable that the same formula had been used by Greek poet Aratos of Soles in his astronomic poem *Phaenomena*, of which Valerius Probus asserted that it had recorded scientific-mythological data related to the stars

[1] Chr. Nicolas, 2009, p. 119.
[2] For intertextuality in *Heroïdes*, Chr. Nicolas sends to J.-C. Jolivet, 2001.
[3] A. Barchiesi, 1998, p. 66.

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movement in the sky[4]. Anyway, the dactylic hexameter chosen for these writings was appropriate for a catalogue and meant for Ovid his separation from the elegiac distich of his youth and, implicitly, the abandonment of erotic poetry.

The writing which establishes the formula of a catalogue by books is the *Metamorphosis libri XV*, a poem of 12,000 dactylic hexameters. Various Greek and Latin mythological legends - whose common ground is the transformation of the physical state of its divine or human characters: *dicere mutatas formas* - are here reunited in a listing much more coherent that it may seem at first sight.

From a philosophical point of view the poem represents the author's adherence to the astrological doctrine of the Neo-Pythagoreans. Nevertheless, the poem is less philosophical that it is believed to be, since both the Greeks and the Romans had a culture based on immanence rather than transcendence[5].

Some scholars[6] advocated the idea that *Metamorphoses* could *ideologically* fit into the official current of analysing the order and the disorder with a view to enhancing Augustus's merits, who had striven to put in order the chaos of the Roman world.

We do not support this idea; our conviction is that Ovid had rather envisaged the launching of a new literary species using the technique of deconstruction and reconstruction. The Sulmonese poet started practising the epical-didactic genre in his mature years, apparently with the wish of joining his contemporary great poets who had engaged themselves through

[4] A Latin version was adapted by Cicero, unde the title *Aratea*. A Latin version in dactylic hexameter by Ovid is presupposed rather than proven with documentary evidence. In exchange, 932 verses have been preserved from the free adaptation written by general Germanicus (15BC – 19AD), emperor Nero's son. As well documented, as beautifully refined are the classical Hellenistic styled verses of these fragments in the Latin version which the translator also entitled *Phaenomena*.
[5] Florence Dupont, 2017.
[6] Cf. Gilles Sauron, 2001, pp. 91-105.

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their epic-heroic and didactic-moralizing writings in the moral and social reorganization of the Roman society under Augustus. In reality, by using a complex of subversive rhetoric-literary strategies, Ovid continued playing the card of non-conformism on his way towards innovation both in literature and in mentalities. He obviously assumed the inherent risks and paid his freedom of thought and creativity with deprivation of physical liberty.

As previously mentioned, the scholars examined the dialectics „order – disorder" on which Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are structured[7]. With his catalogues, the Latin poet set a new order into the chaos of the old mythology, giving again the impression that he joined the efforts – conducted by Augustus - of imposing a new order within the Roman society. Only that the profound textual layers of the reorganization proposed by the poet represent a resistance against the rigidity of the imperial system[8].

2. The Book within the Catalogue – an Ideological Polemic and a Literary Art

2.1. *The Argument* furor *vs* pietas *or the Dispute with Virgil*

Thus, out of many illustrative examples, the narrative assemble of Orpheus's many loves is a "*book within a catalogue*" with an argumentative value in the dispute across time and space between Virgil and Ovid. The stake of the discussion was the opposition between two concepts essential for the Roman mentality: *furor* and *pietas.*

The official ideology in the Augustus era imposed the cultivation of *pietas* - the respect for gods, ancestors, and homeland – as an element

[7] Sabine Pellaux, 2008.

[8] *Leges Juliae* (18 BC) represents a group of three laws dedicated to the moral redeem of the imperial Rome: *Lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus*; *Lex Julia de adulteriis*; *Lex Julia de pudicita*. Modern scholars consider them as a model for conformism and bigotry, cf. Virginie Girod, 2013.

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of thought for the "new man", capable of resuscitating the old virtues of Roman society. Virgil, in his official capacity of poet of the imperial court, had launched a literary-ideological polemic regarding this concept, which he opposed to *furor*, a concept that encompassed unquietness, bliss, uncontrolled love etc. In his *Bucolics*, but especially in his *Georgics* (29 BC)[9], Virgil rejected the elegiac poetry which in his view was based on this concept, since the topics of pain and amorous lamentations cultivated by this kind of poetry weakened the civil spirit of its readers. He invoked the symbolic character of the legendary Thracian musician Orpheus and made reference to the literary species of Latin elegy, initially cultivated by the poet Cornelius Gallus (69-26 BC)[10]. In fact, all those who used the Alexandrine verse in their writings, and especially those *poetae novi*, have been here criticised. Although Ovid emerged into Latin poetry a decade later, he also felt aimed at, since he was using exactly the type of writing that the author of *Georgics* criticised. The Sulmonese poet therefore developed the idea of *furiosa libido*, which he illustrated with the history of incestuous love instances of Byblis and of Myrrha (Ov., *Ars amatoria*, 1, 281-288).

The invocation here of the two stories acts as *exempla*.[11] In the *Metamorphoses* he expanded the series of examples with numerous others, such as the relations between Ganymede and Jupiter, or the one between Hyacinth and Apollo. Similar stories were subsequently selected from the legends of Cerastes, Pygmalion, Adonis (the last two being in the same family as Myrrha), Atalanta etc, building thus an entire *catalogue*. Modern

[9] Virgilius, *Georgice*, 4, 525-526; 494-495.

[10] G. B. Conte, 1984, „Aristeo, Orfeo e le *Georgiche*: Struttura narrativa e funzione didascalica di un mito", in: *Virgilio, il genere e i suoi confini*, Milano: Garzanti, 1984, pp.43-53; *Ibidem*, „Aristeo, Orfeo e le *Georgiche*. Una seconda volta", in: S.C.O., pp. 103-128.

[11] Jacqueline Fabre-Serris, „Histoires d'inceste et de *furor* dans les *Métamorphoses* 9 et dans le chant en catalogue d'Orphée: une réponse d'Ovide au livre 4 des *Georgiques*", in: *Dictynna*. *Revue de poétique latine*, Université Lille 3, nr. 2, 2005, cf. http://dictynna.revues.org/125

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scholars demonstrated that the examples gathered in this catalogue of forbidden love are so organized that they serve a very definite proving goal. In principle, the narratives are arranged according to normal criteria: geographic, chronologic, and thematic. Each story apparently represents just another example of passionate love, but according to J. Fabre-Serris the mythological stories that Ovid set around the Thracian Orpheus are presented in such a manner that they gradually lead to a conclusion contradicting the point of view supported by Virgil. Each story is linked to the other and all together send a coherent message: *love, even in its extreme form, manifested as furor, energizes the existence of mythological and human beings, providing on the other hand an entire literature of high artistic quality*. Moreover, the characters that Ovid catalogued showed numerous instances of *pietas*, which meant that Virgil made a mistake by asserting that *furor* and *pietas* are two contradictory concepts.

The scenery in which the stories take place within this pleading-catalogue include details which subtly refer to the texts of Gallus and of Virgil: the woods of Grynium; the trees and cliffs which the characters of these stories have been turned into etc. Even the subtle play with auctorial voices is part of this wide *strategy of organizing the catalogue of forbidden love* within the structure of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

As far as the whole composition is concerned, Books X and XI constitute in fact "a catalogue within a catalogue". Florence Dupont sees these amorous metamorphoses as a narrative subcategory, as a catalogue in a box, a kind of a Matryoshka doll ("catalogue par emboîtement"), by which the symbolic feature of the Greek melic poetry is recuperated[12].

Among this type of analyses, one can also notice that there are many possible levels of reception for Ovid's work, as is always the case

[12] F. Dupont, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

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with masterpieces of the world literature. Superficially, Ovid belongs to the official current of the epic poetry, since his *Metamorphoses* can be considered a *heroic poem* enforcing *tradition*, a dear concept for ideologists in the Augustus era. The tradition of Greek and Roman legends, on which the healthy educational training of the youth was based, bestow nobility to the contents of Ovid's writings. On the other hand, the fact that Ovid was being set among the great writers of the Augustus era seems to also be supported by his use of dactylic hexameter - characteristic for long poems - and by further features of the form, such as the typical expression of the sublime style, the book catalogues of academic type, in the modern sense of the word.

By searching into the profound structural layers of the text, one can notice that Ovid projects the image of a nonconformist. He never abandoned in any way his favourite topic – eroticism – and he never supported the moral values that have been ideologically imposed. From a strictly artistic point of view, he enforced at their maximum the rhetorical strategies and the semantic-stylistic subtleties of the text in order to acclaim the freedom of thought and the realism of personal implication.

2.2. The Clash of the Gods

One of the most subversive ideas in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is the fluidity of forms, proving the unity of our world and the unlimited possibilities that matter has, be it living or amorphous, to assume certain qualities.

Firstly, the human mentalities and activities are able in all mythologies to define both gods' world and the world of animals or plants. The typical example is *Métis* – seen by M. Detienne as "a transversal cultural category": she is embodied in the animal world by a fox or an octopus; in gods' world – by Athena; in humans – by a sailor or a chariot

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driver; Ulysses and Socrates are also incarnations of Métis (M. Detienne, 1989, *apud* Fl. Dupont).

Secondly, the humans can possess qualities which are equal, if not superior, to those of gods, exactly as animals can be superior to people as far as their behaviour is concerned. The typical example is Arachnè, the excessive weaver in *Metamorphoses*, Book VI. The young and naïve mortal woman dares to challenge Athena to a weaving contest. She wins by producing a weaving masterpiece. But instead of her win being recognized, she got severely punished because her behaviour towards a god(dess) was inappropriate: Palas-Athena turned her into a spider. Practically, according to Fr. Frontisi-Ducroux, a specialist on the subject, the young and proud woman have preserved all her old qualities, but was pushed down a step on the ladder of formal values in our heterogeneous, sometimes even hybrid (see the „man-horse" etc), universe. This ladder should be represented as follows:

a) Athena = the weaving goddess (intrigues and fates included);
b) The woman = the weaver working woman;
c) The spider = the spinner-weaver.

Returning to Ovid's world, we should remember that one of the most sustainable hypotheses referring to the causes of his banishing to Tomis was the practising of the *divination art*.[13] As an adept of the Pythagorean system, he had probably organized séances for future predicting – even in his own house, as his slaves and some traitor friends later revealed. But, on one hand, the faculty of divination was exclusively granted to the emperor (who took the exclusivity over from Caius Julius

[13] This hypothesis has been supported by the Hellenist scientist Salomon Reinach, 1912, IV, pp. 69-79, on basis of historical facts and of a careful analysis of Ovid's texts: *Met*., 15, 60 *sqq*. și *Trist*., 3, 3, 59-63 – in connection with the adherence to the Pythagorean doctrine; Cf. și *Trist*., 4, 8, 29-31; *Pont*., 3,4,113-114 – in connection with admitting that the poet did practise the art of divination.

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Caesar) and the Roman *juridical catalogues* stipulated the punishment by *relegatio ad tempus* for such a wrongdoing, especially when being illicitly practiced by astrological Pythagorean mathematicians. On the other hand, it is said the respective predictions suggested the emperor's death and a possible victory of Germanicus[14]. One can notice again that Ovid sacrificed his freedom (and "living peacefully when old" as he said in *Trist*., 4, 8, 29-31, where he assumed his guilt for illegal prophecies) in the favour of a personal pleasure that he literary processed in the catalogues of the *Metamorphoses*, cf. the legend of the weaver spider, Ov., *Met*., 6, 1-145. Could it be that Ovid foresaw his future fate by addressing the legend of Arachne?

It is nevertheless certain that more than a half of the Book VI of the *Metamorphoses* includes the catalogue of ***exceptional*** *divine or human beings whose metamorphoses were caused by their courage to confront leading gods*: Niobe, the earthly queen of Thebe, being proud of her richness, but especially of her children, confronted the goddess Leto, Jupiter's lover and Apollo and Diana's mother, exactly as the peasants of Lycia had at their turn a disrespectful attitude towards her. Niobe is consequently turned into a cliff, cf. Ov., *Met*., 6, 146-312, as well as the Lycian peasants became frogs (Ov., *Met*., 6, 313-381); similarly, Marsyas, the satyr who challenged Apollo to a contest of flute playing, has been flayed and then turned into a river (Ov., *Met*., 6, 383-400).

The catalogue bears a clear message: the stronger being severely punishes anyone who wishes to flaunt their qualities more than it is allowed by the written or unwritten laws of the world they live in. "The stronger being" here is Octavian Augustus himself – one can easily infer this piece of information even if the incriminating details are very cleverly masked within the text.

[14] Cf. J. Carcopino, 1963, pp. 155-160.

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The poetic facts that succeeded in building a case against the criticism towards the emperor's house/court are to be found in the second half of Book VI of the *Metamorphoses*, which presents gods involved in bad marriages defying the laws of nature and the partners' dignity, see the unhappy couples Theseus/Procne and Theseus/Philomela (Procne's sister), cf. Ov., *Met*., 6, 412-674, then Boreas/Orithyia and their sons, Calais and Zetes, who left in the search of the Golden Fleece, cf. Ov., *Met*., 6, 675-721. A Latin reader could not fail to think about the successive marriages – with Clodia, Scribonia, and Iulia Major - of Augustus, the very person who assumed the moral restoration in Rome.

2.3. The Argument of Matrimonial Metamorphoses

Myrrha, one of the heroines in the catalogue of dendroid metamorphoses, also served the cause for Ovid's dispute with the royal house, which he again encrypted by using an „innocent" legend. Thematically, she represents the transformation of human beings into trees, whereas modern mythologists classified her story into the category of the legends of aromatic plants[15]. As an etiologic legend, it explains the apparition of the strongly aromatic *myrtle*. Also considered an aphrodisiac, this plant was used in wedding rituals in the ancient societies. When she refused to get married, the legendary Mirrha, an "excessive nymph", triggered Aphrodite's anger. Being coerced to marriage, the young woman is punished twice: firstly, she is the victim of a certain type of *furor*, more exactly, of the seduction of her own father, committing thus the incestuous

[15] M. Detienne, 1989, cap. 1, „Les parfums de l'Arabie". The renowned French researcher proved himself with this savant study as a true successor of Angelo de Gubernatis, belonging to the first generation of representatives of linguistic mythology (cf. Max Müller, Adalbert Kuhn ș.a.); his essential works are: *Zoological Mythology, or the Legends of Animals*, London: Trubner, 2 vol., 1872; cf. și *Mythologie Zoologique, ou Les Légendes animales*. Trad. de l'anglais par Paul Regnaud, Paris: A. Durand et Pedone-Lauriel, 2 vol., 1874; *La Mythologie des Plantes, ou Les Légendes du Règne Végétal*, Paris: C. Reinwald, 2 vol., 1878-1882 (Vol. 1: 1878; Vol. 2: 1882).

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sin; secondly, she is punished by being transformed into a tree (a bush, in fact), yet not any kind of tree, but one that breed aphrodisiac flowers. If we considered the fact that the fruit of this forbidden love was Adonis, the one who shall later become a divinity of non-matrimonial eroticism, we can appreciate how far can the punishments of the mighty gods take someone on the way to perdition. In human terms and by relating it to the Roman society of the time, the story seems to be just an allusion to the many marriages within Augustus's family. The best known victim was Julia Major; she was kept on a tight leash, under house arrest, in Pandataria and later in Rhegium. Still a young girl, she was forced to marry her cousin M. Claudius Marcellus (25-23BC), son of Octavia, Augustus's sister. After Marcellus's death, she married Agrippa Vipsanius, a military general and politician, very close to Augustus, with whom she had five children (21-12 BC)[16]. After Agrippa's death she was forced to marry Tiberius, though she was a 51 year old grandmother and Tiberius at his turn had been forced by Augustus to get divorced from Vipsania, his first wife and Agrippa's daughter from his first marriage. After two years, Augustus being now dead, Tiberius let Julia starve (14AD). Julia Minor at her turn, daughter of Agrippa and Julia Major shall also be forced into marriage etc. Chronologically, Ovid could only include the first two of Julia's marriages in his *Metamorphoses* (whose first version he began writing around the year 1 AD). Still that should have been enough to attract critics, especially because they offered a bad example for the matrimonial arrangements that were so familiar to the high society of the time.

The poet addressed the social-political and moral topics in his own manner: the entire story was placed under the sign of eroticism. By

[16] Approximately 22 years older than Julia, he had previously had two wives: Pomponia, Atticus's daughter (mother of Agrippina Vipsania, who later married Tiberius) and Marcella, Augustus's niece. In other words, the emperor decided that his friend and also associate in running the state, general Agrippa Vipsanius, should divorce his own niece and then marry his daughter.

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refusing to submit to a common matrimonial ritual (the splashing with natural perfume), the heroine is punished by undergoing certain excessive unnatural forms of eroticism and then by being turned into a bush that breeds flowers with an erotic perfume; she was also forced to give birth to a human being who would only continue the cycle of forbidden love. The perfume of myrtle further stimulates passionate love and thus the cycle never ends.

Therefore, from the perspective of literary technique, this *canticum exemplum* can also be classified under the category of *catalogue*, as an open form which gets enhanced by other *exempla*; this technique can develop infinite creative and argumentative valences. From an epistemic point of view, the fable of metamorphosis - caused by resisting attitudes towards the institution of matrimony - may be perceived as a fine allusion to the actual life of the emperor's family.

2.4. Cosmogony or the Dispute with Lucretius

The catalogue is also an instrument for composing a *philosophic register* within Ovid's work, more exactly, an instrument for parodying the philosophical literary writings which aimed at clarifying the great issues of humanity. It is well known that Book I and Book XV of the *Metamorphoses* deal with philosophical topics – cosmogony, respectively the Pythagorean theory for the creation of the universe[17]. As usual, Ovid got into a polemic with his predecessors who had already addressed those topics, especially with the Latin and the most contemporary ones. In the *sui generis* cosmogony in Book I, the central reference is being obviously made to Lucretius and his *De rerum natura*. According to his referential strategies, the author of *Metamorphoses* sent directly to the texts, which he undermined by using images from those texts, discourse and syntactic

[17] Cf. S. K. Myers, 1994.

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structures, or specific terms that unequivocally disclose the respective piece of writing. Marianne Moser inventoried such parallelisms:[18] the use of dactylic hexameter (for the first time in Ovid's poetic career); the invocation to divinity;[19] announcing the topic for the beginning of the poem using the same syntagmatic collocation *ab origine mundi*, (*Lucr*., V, 548; Ov., *Met*., I, 3); the names of primordial elements – *semina rerum* (Lucr., *genitalia corpore*, I, 58-61; *semina rerum* I, 9 ***vs*** Ov., *Met*., *semina rerum*, I, 9, *corpora prima*, XV, 233) etc.

Ovid, nevertheless, overbalanced or at least nuanced Lucretius' ideas in his own manner, using a colourful "pseudo-scientific" language, as it is called by scholars, who did not ignore the polemic, humorous, and ironical features of Ovid's writings[20]. But what are Ovid's counterarguments?

Firstly, he did not consider that legends should be neglected within the discourse about the origins of the universe[21]. Lucretius had

[18] Cf. the demonstration of M. Moser, 2015, pp. 1-12. The author showed how Ovid selected and used in *Met*., I, 10-14 terms and concepts from Lucr., V, 432-435: *neque... nec... nec*; respectively *nullus ... nec... nec...*, in a context referring to the intangible, the primary chaos, and the absence of light. Similarly, terms such as *secrevit ... dispositam*, *secuit sectamque ... membra*, respectively *membraque dividere*; *disponere*…, *secernere ...*, *secreto ...*, are to be found in Ov., *Met.*, I, 23; 32-33, respectively in Lucr., V, 445-448. Here it was dealt with the dividing and the rearranging of the elements.

[19] This time not only Ovid is nonconformist: he addressed all gods, as a whole – *di* (I, 2); Lucretius addressed the goddess Venus only (*De rerum natura*, I, 1). The epic tradition, which both poets wanted to be part of, required the invocation of the Muses. In fact, Lucretius had rather been an atheist all his life and that is the reason why his memory faded in the time of Augustus.

[20] J.-M. Frécaut's study, 1972, as well as other writings should be added to the above-cited study of S. K. Meyers.

[21] Ovid seem here to follow Plato, who following at his turn the Pythagoreans explained the birth of the universe in mythological terms, even if he had used complex mathematical calculations and all scientific data of the time. Cf. F. M. Cornford, 1997; Luc Brisson, 2005 (and the introductive study at Plato's edition, 1995, *Timée. Critias*, 2e éd., Paris: Garnier-Flammarion); P. Gh. Bârlea, „Paradigma cosmogonică în gândirea lui Platon", in: Adina Chirilă (coord.), 2017, *Omul de cuvânt*…, Iași: Editura Universității „Al. I. Cuza", pp. 104-115.

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concentrated as much as possible the mythological allegories about chaos and cosmos, trying to depict the process of creating the organized world with denotative terms coming from rational, materialist Epicurean physics. Ovid, on the contrary, "re-mythologized" the scientific discourse of Lucretius[22] and, in order to do that, he developed an entire catalogue of metamorphoses, thus illustrating the process of universe formation. Smaller catalogues compose the big one and all aim at the same goal: to rehabilitate mythology within scientific discourse.

- Thus, Lucretius rejected the idea of hybrid animals (*Sed neque Centauri fuerunt*, Lucr., V, 878) – considered in mythological legends as characteristic to the phenomena of creation, whereas Ovid rapidly inserted the legend about the birth of Python, the snake, which generated the myth of Apollo and Daphne and so on, cf. Ov., *Met*., I, 78-81.
- Already these topics emphasized another series of oppositions between Lucretius and Ovid: the former was trying to deny the presence of any exterior agent in creating the cosmos, whereas the latter strongly upheld the idea of godly intervention (just as Plato, who advocated the idea of an intelligible force), cf. Ov., *Met*., I, 78-81:

  natus homo est, sive hunc divino semine fecit
  ille opifex rerum, mundi melioris origo,
  sive recens tellus seductaque nuper ab alto
  aethere cognati retinebat semina caeli.

- Lucretius tried to rationalize Greek myths and even rejected them by reducing their references to the minimum:

  Scilicet ut veteres Graium cecinere poetae
  Quod procul a vera nimis est ratione repulsum
  (Lucr., *De rerum natura*, V, 405-406)

[22] The expression belonged to Philip R. Hardie, 1986, p. 178 and was taken over by Sara K. Meyers, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

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Ovid, on the contrary, resumed the series of Greek stories by enhancing them – in almost 400 verses, as M. Moser noticed in the case of the legend of Phaeton – into a *canticum catalogus*, which includes other numerous *exempla*: Midas, Scylla, Lapithes, the Centaur and so on.

- Conversely, when Lucretius advanced six hypotheses to support the theories of Epicurean materialism regarding the creation of man and the movement of stars, Ovid reduced them to only two, according to the above-mentioned citation. The origin of man can be found either in the divine seed conceived by the creator himself, or in the movement of Prometheus, who mixed the divine seed with earth. Scholars noticed that this second hypothesis actually combines the scientific discourse (bodies created from the mixture earth, wind, and fire) with the mythological one (creation carried out by Prometheus).

In fact, this is the characteristic of Ovid's texts in general. His catalogues aim at showing that *logos* and *mythos* are two concepts that combine very well within philosophical and scientific discourse. The didactic perspective underlines the valorisation of the mythical examples reunited into thematic catalogues: the readers are impressed with the beauty of the stories and retain the essence of the miraculous facts (*mirabilia*), but they still end up asking themselves questions such as: how did all happen at the beginning of time? The series of Ovid's examples strikes imagination and thought at the same time. Ovid made largely use of *hypotyposis* as a figure of speech, as M. Moser noticed: instead of methodically demonstrating the process of bodies' formation through transformation, "*the poet staged the show of creation*"[23].

[23] M. Moser, *op. cit.*, p. 9. *La mise en abyme* is a procedure characteristic for Ovid's catalogues: the long description of the deluge and the embracing of the universe by Plato ignited the readers' imagination. When the gates of the Sun Palace opened, Phaeton saw the engravings representing the universe; by describing them, the author offered the readers an illustrated cosmogony.

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Through some very subtle inter-textual plays and allusion marks of all kind, Ovid launched dialogues with authors of different times and cultural spaces: Homer, Hesiod (*Theogony*), the Pre-Socratic philosophers, the stoics, the Alexandrian poets, Virgil, the Epicurean philosophers etc. All these dialogues materialized in the catalogue of catalogues, justifying thus the permanent change of voice, of literary genre, of ideas and of attitudes regarding "the truth of the legends". In fact, by introducing a legend in each dialogue, Ovid proved that the changes within his text follow exactly the fundamental law of the universe:

Omnia mutantur, nihil interit.

(Ov., *Met*., XV, 165)

2.5. Hecuba or the Mysteries of Human Existence

Another type of subliminal message is launched in Book III of *Metamorphoses*. In the catalogue of transformations that occurred after the Trojan defeat when the Greek retired to their homes with their booties and prisoners, there is a relatively large episode describing the awkward transformation of Hecuba. The wise queen of Troy, Priam's legitimate wife, witnessed all the misfortune and distress caused by a war between gods, triggered by her own imprudent son Paris. During the ten-year-war she saw her own sons and sons-in-law dying, she bore the shock of seeing her city stronghold conquered by treacherous stratagem exactly when they thought themselves free from misery, she witnessed her homeland being ruined by fire and plunder, and endured the humiliation of being taken prisoner together with the other members of her family who were still alive[24]. On the way to exile, her pain reached paroxysm. Along the Thracian shores, she witnessed his young daughter Polyxena being

[24] All these previous tragic events are synthetized by Ovid in an unmatched *Synopsis*, a kind of rapidly successive scenes – cinematographic *flashe,* cf. O. Steen Due, 1974, p. 155. Cf. J.-P. Néraudau, 1981, p. 36 și n. 1.

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sacrificed on Achilles's tomb, following an order of Polymestor, the Thracian king who fancied her jewels (Ov., *Met*., XIII, 39-453)[25]. The youngest son Polydor was all that was left. But in a short while, coming ashore to assist to a religious ritual, she discovered his corpse brought exactly where she was by the sea waves. From this moment on, her entire being began regressing irreversibly. She firstly became dumb with pain:

Troades exclamant, obmutuit illa dolore,
et pariter vocem lacrimasque introrsus obortas
devorat ipse dolor, duroque simillima saxo
torpet et adversa figit modo lumina terra…

(Ov., *Met*., XIII, 538-541)

Only her petrified face still expressed an infinite ferocity, hate, and the wish for revenge. Indeed, in a short time she succeeded in tearing out Polymestor's eyes[26], which triggered the anger of Thracian people who fiercely stoned her. Finally, her metamorphosis was fulfilled. With an inhuman cry of pain, revenge, and despair, the former queen turned into... a dog. The scene is strongly allegorical and generated numerous comments and interpretations:

Troada telorum lapidumque incessere iactu
coepit, at haec missum rauco cum murmure saxum
morsibus insequitur rictuque in verba parato
latravit, conata loqui…

(Ov., *Met*., XIII, 566-5570)

Again, the metamorphosis is gradual and in accordance with the theory of the bodies' movements developed by Pythagoras. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book XV, vv. 75-478, Hecuba had firstly received the soul of a dog, then the gestures of the respective animal and, finally, its

[25] Ovid's version does not entirely follow the details from Euripides's tragedy *Hecuba.*
[26] In Euripides's play, Hecuba even succeeded in killing the two children of Polymestor.

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whole body. Everything happened under the power of Fate which decided upon the migration of souls[27]. A poet could artistically represent all this episode better than a playwright[28], was Ovid's perspective. As a demiurge, the poet can manipulate mythological legends so that they can support a certain idea. Jean-Pierre Néraudau's opinion is that Ovid's poetic text is here of a greater rhetorical value than anywhere else – when the whole poem is considered as a pleading for the *ornatus* style. The world is like a body in a continual change and should be permanently decoded. Facing the mysteries of the world, the word and the culture remain powerless. One never knows what to expect. One cannot realize who they are alike or what would they become in a near or distant future.

In this ample and unexpected metamorphosis within the catalogue of transformations that happened after the Trojan War[29], scholars who specialized in Ovid's biography detected some allusions to the dispute Ovid had with Octavian Augustus[30]. The incertitude and the fear for what comes next could produce monsters. This is only the reverse of the "effigies of culture, glory, and civilisation"[31] .

Through Pythagoras's final discourse, one of the longest passages (401 verses) in Book XV and in the whole poem, Ovid suggested that metamorphosis is the only rule of the universe (*omnia mutantur, nihil interit*, XV, 165). Since the creation of the world over to the contemporary world of the poet, the watchword has always been "*movement*". The series of transformations (231 stories) narrated by him in dactylic hexameters prove this fact in a mythological manner, of course. Nevertheless,

[27] J.-P. Néraudau, 1981, p. 47.
[28] Scholars noticed here his distancing primarily from Seneca.
[29] Ajax committed suicide and was turned into a flower (*Met*., XIII, 382-398); Acis was turned into a river (*Met*., XIII, 705-897).
*"The Tomb of the Dog" was a minor place name, designating a shore cliff.
[30] J. Carcopino, 1963, pp. 59 *sqq*.
[31] J.-P. Néraudau (ed.), 1992, *Ovide. Metamorphoses*, Paris: Gallimard, p. 51.

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scholars have noticed that modern science did not offer us other images, or at least did not make us feel more confident in the outer world than Ovid's stories did.[32].

3. On Ovid's Play with Intertextuality

Ovid was clearly a rebel by vocation[33]. Moreover, he was also extremely vain. But the context did not permit him to directly confront his adversaries. He could not adopt a rude attitude towards the great authors of literary, philosophical, or didactic works, because he could expect being excommunicated from literature by even the most enthusiast and close beneficiaries of his poems. On the other hand, the officials were the one to be mostly feared. As it is known, the tragedy over his last nine years of life was eventually caused by them.

But, until that time, Ovid used the indirect way of polemical attitude which he expressed under the mask of argumentative techniques employed in order to support an *apparently neutral catalogue listing* of mythological legends, of characters and events from the Greek and Roman cultural tradition. What could be more innocent than the apparently didactic and poetic capitalization of tradition? Ovid seemed thus to comply with the commandments of the Augustan ideology and we are strongly convinced that he honestly tried to do just that. Yet, his free inventive spirit and his huge cultural background permanently produced subversive texts.

„Intertextuality" as a term occurred more than once in many of the analyses regarding the above-cited episodes. The idea of an arid catalogue is permanently undermined from within Ovid's texts by the use of a vast net of details which accompanied the listed examples.

1. Firstly, *the selection of certain episodes,* operating on the text surface, and their disposition in *a certain order*, as well as *the emphasizing*

[32] J.-P. Néraudau, p. 26.
[33] On the permanent dissidence statute of Octavian, cf. J.-P. Néraudau, 1998.

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of certain aspects from the well-known stories lead to *a certain conclusion*, which the poet does not synthetize *expressis verbis*, but rather waits for his suggestions to impregnate the readers' consciousness.

2. Secondly, the „mise en abyme" technique and even the „*intertextualiy en abyme*" technique[34] operate in the more profound layer of text by means of: a story within a story, a catalogue within a catalogue, Plato's game of shadows or the Chinese ones, the simulacra, the processes that remind of Pythagorean metempsychosis; we are still at the level of the composition.

3. There also is a third textual layer - that of significant details and allusions, operating on the level of the textual contents, but also that of images, actions, characters, names, key words, citations – direct or as periphrases -, and pragmatic-stylistic structures, operating on the level of the textual expression.

The structural parallelism and the mirror effect is characteristic for the internal structure of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[35] Scholars emphasized especially the circular structure of Books I and XV of the *Metamorphoses*, which addressed the topics of cosmogony and of the principle of movement generating order or chaos. As far as the external relations are concerned, the mirror reflection is also found in the dialogue across time with his precedent fellow writers: primarily with Virgil and Lucretius, but also with older ones from Greek and Latin cultures. In addition, Ovid also conducts underground subversive dialogues with his contemporary fellows, especially with the almighty emperor Octavian Augustus.

Experts noticed that when Ovid targeted a predecessor or a contemporary fellow writer or politician, he used in his text images that

[34] The expression belongs to Christian Nicolas, 2009, p. 119.
[35] Sabine Pellaux, „Ordre ou chaos. La Cosmogonie et le Discours de Pythagore dans les *Métamorphose* d'Ovide", cf. și https://www.unine.ch/files/live/sites/alumnine/files/shared/documents/Prix%20d%20Excellence/Prixdexcellence-PellauxSabine.pdf

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were known from their writings, famous scenes, proper names, or even phrases that made them notorious. A description of a natural landscape, a love story, a notorious battle, or a famous jest phrase are integrated as by accident into the weaving of Ovid's versified stories. The rise and fall of fictive characters from thousand years old legends are narrated in such a manner that it immediately made the readers think of the powerful people of their own community.

But must we really believe these experts, who by conducting sophisticated analyses using their unravelling arguments revealed the numerous subterraneous "correspondences" between fiction and reality? Could we start from the premise that the story of legendary queen Hecuba plays the role of supporting Ovid's thesis according to which life is a perpetual enigma that has to be solved? That the awkward behaviour of some rational beings are nonetheless inferior to those of the blind nature? That greatness and decay are certitudes for a humanity who is exposed to an implacable *Fatum*? It may seem so. In Ovid's early writings there are clear signs that the Sulmonese – later Tomitan – poet passionately cultivated games of intellectual enigmas which the scholars immediately detected[36].

The extent of the inter-textual techniques is great. In his early writings (*Amores, Ars amandi, Heroïdes*, ca. 22-15 BC), but also in his works of maturity and senectitude (*Tristia, Epistulae ex Ponto*, 8-17 AD), Ovid resorted to current conventions of the Greek and Latin poetry by including himself as a character into his own poetical text. Anagrams and all kinds of encrypted signatures occur in these texts[37] as a legacy to

[36] See the studies of A. Barchiesi, 1999; C. Calame, 2004, pp. 11-39; Chr. Nicolas, 2009, pp. 109-120 and others.

[37] When sending his texts from Tomis, his name and the receiver's name could appear as such, or they could be turned into various periphrases when the author thought that the respective letter-poem could endanger either one of them: sender or receiver. (Ov., *Pont.*, 1,4, 1-2; 1, 3, 1-2; 3,6, 1-2 ş.a.).

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Theognis's practice known as *σφραγίς* (sphragis), a metaphor for what it is called *a stamp, a seal* (fr. *sceau*). The technique which was called *seuils* "thresholds" by G. Genette materialized at the graphical level by the *sinistroverse writing*, quite common within the *scriptio continua* of the respective Latin era. Practically, there are innumerable verses in *Heroïdes* (5/20, 117; 2/6, 100; 1/1, 54; 4/17, 102; 3/13, 147) where the phonic-graphic sequence OSAN occur as an anagram for NASO, the cognomen that the Latin poet frequently used for himself. Sometimes he added the word *notae*, which in Latin designated cryptographic techniques:

„*postmodo, nescio qua venise volubile malum*
verba furens doctis insidiOSA Notis"

(Ov., *Her*., 20, 211-212)

Other times these meta-poetic games capitalize other identity terms, such as *meos... amores* (*Her*., 15,167); *ab arte mea* (*Her*., 5,150), which insidiously refer to *Amores* or to *Ars amatoria*.

Later, the intertextuality games became more complex. As a reaction to the girls' (*puellae*) catalogue in Propertius's elegies, Ovid composed his own catalogue, which he mentioned in many passages of *Heroïdes*. He took over proper names from Propertius' elegies: *Leucadia*, *Lesbia*, *Cynthia*, added *Delia*, but omitted *Corinna*. In other words, he made reference to the texts of Gallus, Tibullus, Propertius, but he excluded himself from the list: according to Chr. Nicolas, this is "une signature en creux", or "une signature en défaut"[38]. Yet, the "stage" name of his girlfriend Roscia (Roscius' daughter) is here used either allusively by evoking the poetess Sappho, since she was befriended with Corinna from Theba, or by mentioning paronyms such as *Coronam* (*Her.*, 18, 151-152) or the common noun *carina* "hull", used tens of times at the end of verses

[38] Chr. Nicolas, *op. cit*., pp. 115-116.

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etc. in *Heroïdes*, in *Amores*, but also later in *Metamorphoses*[39] as a synecdoche for "ship".

Lastly, philosophical and aesthetic ideas are formulated in the same allusive style with images and linguistic structures which have been signalled at their proper place.

Conclusions

We have consequently all reasons to believe that nothing is accidental in Ovid's texts. Humour and wordplay, tragedy and rich imagery are always linked to the reality which an apparently common catalogue would register as mere examples. In fact, one can easily understand that they are not "just" examples, but illustrative arguments which are mentioned in an obvious manner or in a more subtle one into a rational construction of inductive or deductive type.

Ovid "rewrites mythological histories in order to introduce them into his collection"[40]. Until Ovid, the word *metamorphoses* did not exist as a term to be applied to a literary species. After him, the historian Strabo used related terms for designating the transformations operated by revengeful gods: gr. *egento*/lat. *factus est* – for the ones suffering the transformation and gr. *étheken*/lat. *facit* respectively – for the ones operating it.

The catalogues in Ovid's writings are therefore not mere lists of *exempla*. They always serve an argumentative cause in a kind of poetic rhetoric with a specific goal, be it ideological, aesthetic etc. The sequences here selected as types of rhetoric catalogues, in other words examples of examples, represent Ovid's attitudes towards the ideas advanced by various Greek or Latin writers starting from Homer, Hesiod, Theognis and

[39] Chr. Nicolas inventoried 34 occurrences of this word in the *Metamorphoses*, which means that the poet was very attached to it, *op. cit.*, p. 117, n.12.
[40] Fl. Dupont, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

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others, and continuing with Lucretius, Virgil, or Propertius. On many occasions, the attack included in the respective listings was launched against political rulers of Rome and their camarillas, one of them being Octavian Augustus himself. Yet, this remote dialogue did not take place directly, in open sight, but it was allusively formulated and encrypted, so that fine irony and logical proof were synthetized in verses of high aesthetic value.

Ovid's boldness and audacity echoed into his posterity. One of the most debated example is that of Lucan, who in *De bello civili liber* I reincarnates the image of a *poeta vates* who dared searching for the evil in the world. That was a principle stipulated by Pierides in his dispute with the Muses, evoked by Ovid in the so-called *musomachia*, cf. *Metamorphoses*, V, 250-358; 662-678[41].

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[41] Isabelle Meunier, 2009, pp. 1-45.

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