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What Could She Say? : The Problem of Female Silence in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

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> *"Since you can never be my bride,*
> *My tree at least you shall be! Let the laurel*
> *Adorn, Henceforth, my hair, my lyre, my quiver:*
> *Let Roman victors, in the long procession,*
> *Wear laurel wreaths for triumph and ovation.*
> *Beside Augustus' portals let the laurel*
> *Guard and watch over the oak, and as my head*
> *Is always youthful, let the laurel always*
> *Be green and shining!" He said no more. The laurel,*
> *Stirring, seemed to consent, to be saying* Yes.
> *-Apollo and Daphne (Ovid 20)*[1]

On first glancing at this episode near the beginning of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, readers can easily be distracted by the triumphant tone of the narrative and Apollo's conquest. This of course was the standard reading of these tales until the nineteen seventies. There was nothing to contest in the narrative and Apollo was the conqueror of what was rightfully his, Daphne. On second glance, however, readers might note that, like recent feminist critics[2], Ovid is a violent misogynist who represents the power Roman men had over women in their society. Daphne has been completely overpowered by her assailant Apollo. In fact, he claims her for himself, giving her no agency over what is done with her transformed figure, using phallic symbols and words such as "quiver" and "victors" to describe her fate. Daphne was forced into this transformation by a violent, powerful, and morally corrupt god. Apollo not only claims Daphne for himself but also for the great Caesar Augustus. By gesturing at military as well as sexual conquest, Ovid links Apollo's claim over Daphne to the political and territorial claims of Caesar Augustus. Daphne is left with no choice and can only consent to her captors. These critics call for a reevaluation of the canon and the removal of such violent works. More recently however,

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[1] In this treatment of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, I use Rolfe Humphries translation as my primary text source as noted in the works cited. Because of discrepancies with line numbers I cite page numbers from this translation in-text.
[2] Amy Richlin, feminist scholar, and author of the article "Reading Ovid's Rapes" in *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*

scholars have taken a third glance[3] at Ovid's work offering a different view of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, arguing instead on Ovid's behalf. These scholars claim Ovid sympathized with the plight of these women and through his exposure of the violence found in these tales, he is actually giving them a voice. This essay participates in this recent trend of scholarship in order to capture the nuanced sophistication in Ovid's work and extends the project by including crucial biographical information in relation to his portrayal of women in the text.

Given the range of responses to Apollo's chase of Daphne, the violent acts that are committed against women in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* have been an area of contention between scholars for decades. Although feminist scholars have improved our understanding of the *Metamorphoses* by noting its pattern of male aggression, they often fail to take into consideration the subtleties that are found throughout Ovid's work. Although the majority of his work is written from a male perspective, Ovid devotes a substantial amount of the *Metamorphoses* to the discussion of women, especially women who are the victims of male domination and violence. If Ovid represents and supports a male-centric society, why does he allow these women such a voice? By considering the difficult position that Ovid occupied as a poet living in Augustan Rome (as this thesis later discusses, he was silenced in a similar way as the women he depicts), we see that the gendered, historical, political, and societal constraints imposed on Ovid, though different than those imposed on his female characters, nevertheless function similarly under an oppressive regime. In other words, Ovid's experience as a censored poet in the reign of Augustus partially mirrors the experience of silenced women in a deeply patriarchal Roman culture. Notably, although the women Ovid writes about are silenced by their assailants, their stories are still told. This essay examines this dynamic and how it unfolds in the stories of Daphne, Philomela, Procne, and the ivory maiden. By paying attention to these particular episodes of

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[3] Leo C. Curran, Literary critic and author of "Rape and Rape Victim's in the *Metamorphoses*"

silenced women, we can see how Ovid ironically draws attention to the women's stories, giving them voice in an unexpected way.

The assault and silencing that Daphne encounters is by no means the only act of violence found throughout the *Metamorphoses*; disturbing acts of male aggression occur frequently throughout the work. Equally disturbing is that these scenes are placed within long episodes of male discourse. When scholars encounter episodes of this kind their arguments are usually one of two postures, claiming that Ovid is motivated either by misogyny or sympathy. Though, this is an oversimplification of the text. What these critics fail to note is that Ovid's own silencing, through his banishment and censorship by the governing male figure of Caesar Augustus, has direct bearing on his portrayal of feminine silencing in the text. In short, Ovid's silencing of the women in his own work reflects his own silencing by Augustus. Not only does Ovid portray silenced women, but he also depicts men who do not fulfill the conservative Augustan culture's model of an ideal Roman man. For example, through long sections of male discourse in which his female characters are fetishized, he portrays Apollo as frivolous, Tereus as fundamentally depraved, and Pygmalion as deeply narcissistic. When read within the context that this thesis establishes, we begin to understand that these kinds of deviations from ideal Roman masculinity are more typical in Ovid's society than rulers like Augustus would prefer. Yet Ovid avoids a too easy criticism of masculinity in his work, instead vacillating between scenes that both support and subvert the male order. As already implied, he also relies heavily on irony and subversive language in the text, which ultimately undermines the power of men in the work and gives voice to women who are otherwise victimized and silenced.

When looking at the problematic women characters in Ovid's work it is important to take into consideration his own life and the struggles he met with the Augustan Empire. Having been

born in 43 B.C. Ovid did not have the modern point of view on women's rights that is, in most western countries, commonly accepted today. However, it is likely he related to his fated female characters as he faced some of the same issues they do in the text. In 8 A.D. when Ovid had almost completed the *Metamorphoses* he was banished from the Roman Empire to a completely barren and uncivilized location in what is now Romania, a place Ovid would have had very little in common with due to his aristocratic lifestyle. Why then was Ovid exiled from Rome? This is a question that has been lacking an answer for nearly two centuries. However, there are several scholars including Sarah Mack, author of *Ovid*, who can make an informed hypothesis on Ovid's situation. When Ovid was banished Augustus had been in rule for almost forty years. Rome was a very "cosmopolitan city with luxuries flowing in from all over the empire. Morals were fairly lax, divorce was easy to arrange, adultery was common, and the family seemed to have lost most of its coherence" (Mack 36). According to Mack, Caesar Augustus hoped to revert Rome's values back to the "old Republican virtues including chastity, poverty, fidelity, sobriety, and piety" (Mack 36). Ovid through his often racy and politically charged poetry became an obstacle for the conservative Emperor to overcome.

Ovid commented on the hypocrisy of Augustus's regime through his subversive poetry which contributed to his banishment. In his exile poetry Ovid wrote "that a poem (according to most but not all scholars, the *Ars Amatoria*) and a 'mistake' were responsible" for his banishment (Mack 39). It is not clear what this mistake was; although it is presumed by many scholars, including Mack, that Ovid had an affair with Augustus's granddaughter Julia as she was banished in the same year. How then does this relate to the silenced women in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*? As Ovid's eventual experience demonstrates all too clearly, the threats of censorship and punishment were present throughout his career. During his exile Ovid's works

were banished from the public libraries and censored throughout the empire. Ovid was effectively silenced by the authoritative male figure of Augustus, a man that did not allow many freedoms to those that dared to challenge him. In his article "Rape and Rape Victims in the *Metamorphoses*" Leo C. Curran argues that this epic poem is not a discussion of rape at all but is "a critique of Roman values, traditional and Augustan" (263). Curran also points out that "the act of rape itself, i.e. penetration and the manner of its accomplishment, usually takes very little time to relate," supporting the claim that the actual act of rape is not the ultimate goal of these narratives but instead a means to an end (265). To Ovid it is symbolic of an unfettered power in a masculine society.

Many of the women in these narratives also challenge their assailants through the use of wit and wisdom, just as Ovid challenged Augustus with his poetry. In the story of "Apollo and Daphne" the nymph Daphne is violently pursued by the seemingly playful Apollo because of the beauty she possesses. However, all Daphne seeks is a life where she is free to live as a virgin. In her desperate attempt to avoid Apollo's assault, Daphne pleads to her father, the river god Peneus, to save her from imminent rape. Daphne challenges both her father's wishes of bearing him grandchildren and the wishes of Apollo by denying him her flesh. In challenging the stronger male figures in her life, Daphne is able to remain a virgin, but only through her metamorphosis. Daphne's last moments as a nymph are filled with fear and horror as she is transformed into the Laurel. Apollo wildly gropes at her body, placing "his hand / Where he had hoped and felt the heart still beating / Under the bark; and he embraced the branches / As if they were still limbs, and kissed the wood, / And the wood shrank from his kisses" (Ovid 20). Apollo finally controls Daphne but only after her metamorphosis into the silent laurel. As a symbol of poetry, the laurel tree represents Ovid's own poetry. While his words remain untouched by

Augustus the fate of Ovid's works are still in Augustus's hands. Just as Ovid challenged the authoritative Emperor and was censored for his work, Daphne challenged the fanciful whims of a god and was fated to live as a symbol of his might. Ovid was able to keep his life and continue writing and Daphne was able to keep her virginity, but at what cost? Ultimately they were forced into submission and silenced by an aggressive and dominating male figure.

Ovid ironically plays with the dominating male and submissive female figures throughout his work. In Ancient Rome the common myth was that nymphs, like Daphne, were incredibly sexual creatures, hence the term nymphomaniac. Because of this character trait a nymph would not need to be raped, presumably, as she would be a willing participant. Curran argues that Ovid transforms these female characters into the "paragons of female virtue, the heroines of Roman legendary history, or the daughters of traditional, respectable Roman families" (278). Ovid uses subversive irony in his virginal description of Daphne, and nymphs in general, to subtly undermine the conservativeness of Caesar Augustus. Through his use of ironic reversal Ovid suggests that even if a woman, or nymph, is licentious by nature she can be an unwilling participant in her own rape. This is an excellent example of Ovid's ability to skillfully subvert the authority of Augustus's morally conservative Rome. Ovid highlights the hypocrisy of conservativism by reversing the sexual roles of his nymphs, showing instead that even if one is a traditionalist in a conservative society they are never truly protected by those that are entrusted with their safety. In other words, Apollo, as a god, is charged with protecting Daphne but instead places her in great peril.

Like the tale of "Apollo and Daphne," Ovid's "Tereus, Procne, and Philomela" examines the misuse of power and its horrific consequences. Procne, the loving sister of Philomela, asks her husband Tereus to bring Philomela to their home for a visit. Again, just as Apollo could not

resist Daphne's splendor, Tereus cannot resist Philomela's beauty and he imprisons and rapes her. After her rape Philomela challenges Tereus's actions and is silenced through the violent removal of her tongue. In her article "Disarticulated Voices: Feminism and Philomela," Elissa Marder claims this narrative "thematizes a woman's experience of violation and rhetorically enacts her inability to speak that experience" (157). Ovid also would have felt a sense of violation when his works were stripped from the public libraries of Rome. Philomela is able to communicate to Procne after she is violated through a tapestry weaving. Receiving Philomela's message, Procne, under the cover of darkness, brings her sister to the palace. Here the sisters enact their revenge against Tereus by feeding Itys's, Tereus's only son, to him. Marder suggests that "while Philomela does ultimately find a discourse for her rage, her experience is expressed in disarticulated speech- by a language that has no 'tongue'" (157). Her weavings and her revenge cannot be put into words. This story is problematic and differs from Daphne's in that the women enact revenge. However, like Daphne, Philomela and Procne challenge the authority of their male assailant and are ultimately freed from his tyranny through their transformations.

Philomela is the first to challenge the deviant Tereus after the initial rape has taken place. She immediately calls into question Tereus's virility, claiming that he has committed a crime against nature itself. Philomela cries, "O wicked deed! O cruel monster, / Barbarian, savage! / Were my father's orders / Nothing to you, his tears, my sister's love, My own virginity, the bonds of marriage? / Now it is all confused, mixed up" (146). She challenges Tereus's ability to honor the values that are typical of a Roman man. He is unable to be the proper husband, son, or brother the family expected of him, and Philomela's tongue pierces his masculinity with its words. In her article "Reading Ovid's Rapes" Amy Richlin claims that Tereus becomes so enraged from Philomela's threats that his next assault on her is a parallel of the previous rape

scene. Richlin writes, Tereus "pulls his sword from its sheath and cuts out her tongue" (163). She argues that Ovid uses his craft of the Latin language to create a whole new persona, Philomela's tongue. Tereus could have ended his predicament with Philomela's murder, but because of his lust, "he seized her tongue / With pincers, though it cried against the outrage, / Babbled and made a sound something like *Father*, / Till the sword cut it off" (Ovid 147). Ovid describes the tongue as jerking, twitching, quivering, and even gives it the ability to murmur after it has been cut out of Philomela's head. The image of Philomela's tongue being ripped from her body, although much more obscene, can be likened to Ovid's own voice being torn from the shelves. Philomela's challenge to Tereus's authority caused her to lose the only weapon that she currently had in her possession, the same weapon Ovid once possessed, a voice.

Although Philomela has lost her voice she does not allow herself to be dominated by Tereus. Through weavings to her sister she regains the semblance of the voice she once had. Philomela is bound by Tereus's violence against her and this violation continues through her loss of speech; "the only story she has to tell is that she has lost her voice" (Marder 157). However, by stripping Tereus of his only son Itys, Philomela continues to challenge his power over her. The sisters strike back using the same language Tereus used, the only language they now know, violence. Curran argues that "rape does more than undermine a woman's identity; it can rob her of her humanity" (277). Ovid depicts this loss of humanity in detail throughout this episode. The women are no longer able to react as respected Roman women. They can only answer Tereus's violent acts with equal violence. Because of the heinousness of the crimes they faced, the women are transformed into animals unable to suppress their vengeance. The women obtain revenge against Tereus but can never strip themselves of the horrific crime they committed. Yet, as Curran states, "the process of dehumanization begins long before any subsequent metamorphosis

of the woman's body" (277). If Philomela is read as a stand in for Ovid as a poet, it is likely he is dramatically commenting on the dehumanization of Roman society and the inability to express oneself due to the conformist reign of Augustus. Nevertheless, the only revenge Ovid enacted was his continuation of writing during his exile, along with editing the works he had already published.

While Curran is correct in arguing that these victims are dehumanized, not just through their transformations, but also through the violent acts perpetrated against them, there are other important aspects of these narratives to consider. While there are some limitations to the following reading, a modern feminist lens brings important insight into the interpretation of Ovid's text. Richlin claims, "a text about rape may also be about something else, but it is still a text about rape…stylistic analysis does not replace content analysis and, in fact, leaves us to explain what the style is doing on that content" (159). With this view in mind we must look at Ovid's work through a very different lens. Daphne's escape from Apollo can no longer be seen as a challenge of the dominating male figure, but as the submission of a woman forced to transform by that figure. Curran disagrees, claiming that because the narrator is conscious of the victim's fear Ovid shows the rape victims empathy. However, Richlin maintains that, "surely the narrator stresses how visually attractive the disarray of flight, and fear itself, made the victim;" she suggests that these rapes are lighthearted in nature and have a disturbingly humorous undertone (162). Although these narratives are woven in and out with wit, and can sometimes come across as relaxed and jovial, Richlin's argument would be greatly improved by recognizing Ovid's irony, how his humor does not merely entertain readers but also critiques the politics of Augustan Rome.

Ovid does not attempt to make these characters' hardships a joke, in fact he is doing quite the opposite. In both the Daphne and Philomela narratives, Ovid uses incredibly violent language to demonstrate the importance of these scenes. Both tales use predator and prey imagery to illustrate the women's terror as they are pursued and raped by the controlling men. Apollo is described as a hound hunting a rabbit as he chases after Daphne; Ovid writes, "In an open field, one runs for game, one safety" (19). Similarly Philomela is described as "a dove / With her blood all over her feathers, fearing / The talons that have pierced and left her" (146). Marder agrees that this is a further dehumanization associated with the act of rape, stating, "The rape of Philomela is represented as unspeakable in human terms…The animal comparisons serve to figure the symbolic silencing that is initiated by the rape" (159). These episodes illustrate the devastation and dehumanization that occurs when one is violently attacked. The imagery Ovid uses is pregnant with warning and fear, not that of a lighthearted jest. Curran agrees noting, "Ovid is not making a joke out of rape. For him it is no contradiction to present rape simultaneously as both an outrage committed upon a woman and as a grotesque caricature of masculinity" (267). Ovid depicts these rape scenes with playful language and fantasy as a ploy. It is likely Ovid would not have wanted the parallels between Augustus's regime and his grossly over powered male figures to be easily deciphered. Ovid takes the misappropriation of power very seriously, as can be seen through his depictions of rape.

The women in the *Metamorphoses* are certainly the victims of the dominating male figure; however, the violence committed against them is also Ovid's means to expose the character flaws of Roman men. Ovid silences these women after long sections of interior male discourse, displaying their inadequacies as masculine figures. These violent acts have often been read by feminist critics, such as Richlin and Marder, as an example of how women are put down

through masculine speech and the men are the only characters that have a voice. While there is evidence to support this claim, a consideration of the ironic nuances found in Ovid's work also provides other ways to consider the epic. By placing the assault of these women within long male fantasies of capture and control, Ovid highlights the pompous, dangerous, and often narcissistic characteristics of the men in these narratives. As Curran argues, these rapes are symbolic of more than the physical act of penetration and "Ovid himself may have given some encouragement to obscurantism[4] since his own language is often less than explicit" (264). The idea that Ovid simply writes about rape because he is a misogynist leaves a great deal of important interpretation unexplored. As discussed earlier, even though Ovid uses lighthearted scenes and images to convey these rape narratives, it is likely he did not intend them to be read merely as jokes. When the act of rape is not completed through intercourse as depicted in the story of Daphne, "Ovid, as we shall see, seems to regard failure, in its consequences for the woman, almost as seriously as success" (Curran 265). This distinction is imperative and supports the claim that men are the subjects of Ovid's ridicule. In short, the episodes are not about either the success or failure of the rape, but instead are meant to highlight the gross inadequacies and character flaws of the men.

Ovid's lighthearted treatment of these men is made clear in the story of "Apollo and Daphne." Apollo attempts to woo Daphne before he attempts to rape her through a long speech loaded with flattery and pleading, "Don't run away! I am no enemy, / Only your follower: don't run away!... / I, who follow / am no foe at all. Love makes me follow, / unhappy fellow that I am, and fearful / you may fall down…Make scratches on those lovely legs, unworthy to be hurt so, and I would be the reason" (18). Apollo is unable to contain himself; he is a god and Daphne is a nymph but he is willing to seduce her in this scenario, engaging in the same amatory discourse,

[4] A style (as in literature or art) characterized by deliberate vagueness or abstruseness.

or *Ars Amatoria*, that Ovid modeled in his earlier work. Richlin argues that this is not an attempt at seduction but merely a preface of the rape and dehumanization of Daphne. Curran disagrees, stating, “Apollo’s very long seduction speech to Daphne is so absurd that he makes a fool of himself” (268). Both of these arguments have merit. The god tries to woo Daphne through false flattery and begging, but he is not willing to wait forever and his foolish pleading turns much more ominous as he pursues her in flight. As it becomes clear that Daphne is not going to concede to his wishes, Apollo makes it known to her just how powerful he is, “You don’t know who it is you run away from, / That must be why you run. I am lord of Delphi… I am the revealer / Of present, past, and future…I am called the Healer” (19). Apollo attempts to use his strength and power to control and capture Daphne. He is no longer trying to seduce her; instead he boasts of his supremacy as a ruler, a reflection of Augustus’s power in the Roman Empire.

Daphne’s flight not only shows that she is a victim of Apollo but also shows the ruthlessness and misguided appropriation of women by men. During her attempted escape, Apollo is silenced by Daphne, “He would have said / Much more than this, but Daphne, frightened, left him / With many words unsaid” (19). Here the roles are reversed and Daphne holds the power to silence. However, this is only a temporary ironic reversal of power, one Ovid may have used to illustrate Apollo’s dangerous and relentless nature. Apollo continues his now triumphant speech after Daphne is silenced, and projects his own meaning on to Daphne’s final movements, “The laurel, / Stirring, seemed to consent, to be saying *Yes* (20). She is left with no choice; her only option is to allow Apollo complete control over her transformed figure. Although it may seem, as Ovid suggests, that these are Daphne’s last words, they are merely his interpretation of her stirring leaves. In her book *A Web of Fantasies Gaze, Image, and Gender in Ovid’s Metamorphoses*, Patricia B. Salzman-Mitchell comments on Daphne’s transformation,

noting, "the laurel finally 'consents' to become the tree of Apollo, upon which he exerts control and power and which will always, with its presence, be a symbol of Daphne's absence" (30). Although transformed into the laurel, the symbol of poetry, Daphne has lost her individual female voice and will through this attack, though she escapes with her virginity, be owned forever by Apollo.

Daphne's transformation can be interpreted in many ways and although she has lost her individual voice, she has gained a fuller mode of expression by becoming poetry itself. She is enclosed with bark, which as Salzman-Mitchell points out, may be read as a word play on the term "book." She states, "Daphne transformed into a tree is thus included in the book of *Metamorphoses* and identifies with the *dura/scripta puella* [written woman] of Latin elegy, While Apollo the lover becomes the elegiac *amator* [lover]. So what began with Apollo's act of looking and his visual focalization of Daphne's image is now transformed into text" (31). Ovid not only silences Daphne through her transformation and forced consent to the dominating Apollo, but he also transforms her into poetry itself. When using this metaliterary reading of the narrative it is difficult to read Ovid as the misogynist Richlin claims he is. By transforming Daphne into a work of poetry Ovid ultimately makes sure her voice and story will be heard and reinforces the inherently feminine role of the poet.

Like Daphne, Philomela is also violated and silenced after a long and grotesque interior monologue by her brother in law Tereus. When he cuts out her tongue Tereus not only violates Philomela as a woman but also leaves her with no mode to speak of the crimes she has endured, ultimately silencing her by acting upon his fantasy. Tragically it is Philomela's convincing tongue that persuades her father to let her travel. Philomela is delighted at the idea of visiting her sister and pleads with her father. She "wheedles her father, and fondles him, and coaxes, / And

argues how much good it will do them both, / Her sister and her self (little she knows)" (144). In an ironic twist, so common in Ovid's work, it is Philomela's own, seemingly innocent, words that cause her to be assaulted. Upon seeing this display of affection between father and daughter Tereus perverts the relationship in his own fantasy, imagining that "he would like to be / Her father, at that moment; and if he were / He would be as wicked a father as he is a husband" (144-145). Tereus is much more deviant than Apollo; he not only wishes to dominate Philomela, but because he is related to her, he also destroys their familial bonds.

After her rape Philomela is articulates to Tereus the seriousness of his crimes against her family, questioning his abilities as a man. Tereus, threatened by her words, violently removes her tongue. During her silencing Ovid places intense focus on the tongue, its movements, and the sounds it emits as it drops to the floor. As Marder points out, the removal of Philomela's tongue has a deeper meaning: "the Latin word lingua, even more than its English counterpart 'tongue,' refers both to the physical body part as well as to the totality of language" (160). Philomela is not only mutilated but is also stripped of her ability to communicate through the spoken word. Marder continues to compare the literal and figurative rape of Philomela, noting, "while the first, literal rape produces a linguistic, articulate, and articulated response from Philomela, this second rape-the cutting off of the tongue-violates the possibility of discourse both literally and figuratively. In other words, to be raped is also to be deprived of a language with which to speak the rape" (160). Salzman-Mitchell claims that while Tereus is able to perform these crimes of passion, once Philomela speaks against his actions, his fantasy is broken and the only way he can continue to enjoy raping her is through her silence. She writes, "Philomela is an object of visual desire, a spectacle, a delight for the gaze of the one who wishes to possess her; a sort of ivory maiden who, with her voice, has come to life and destroyed the work of art" (142). (This is an

interesting echo of Ovid's "Pygmalion" narrative and will be discussed later in this thesis.) Philomela is no longer a sister to him but an object that must be possessed. Through her rape and subsequent silencing, Tereus completely dehumanizes Philomela.

Philomela gains a voice, although she will never speak again, through her tapestry weavings. Philomela has "no power of speech / To help her tell her wrongs, her grief has taught her / Sharpness of wit, and cunning comes in trouble. / She had a loom to work with, and with purple / On a white back ground, wove her story in" (Ovid 148). Both Marder and Salzman-Mitchell agree that it is important to note the use of purple and white, when Philomela is retelling her story to her sister. Salzman-Mitchell states, "these marks are a clear symbol of violent sexual intercourse: Philomela sees herself as a white virgin surface (or page) that has been stained by rape…This act of representation implies a previous act of reading and visualization of her own rape, a personal point of view" (143). Salzman-Mitchell agrees with Marder's claim that "the text does not specify whether the weaving describes the rape through pictures or words…The Latin word *notas*, translated as 'signs,' can mean marks of writing on a page, punctuation, perforation, as well as marks on a body, such as brand or tattoo and, by extension, a distinguishing mark of shame and disgrace" (Marder 160). Both critics draw the conclusion that the message Philomela weaves to her sister is in constant conversation with the marks that will forever stain her body and soul from the violence she has experienced. In other words, Ovid is clearly gesturing at a connection between both bodily and textual discourse. Philomela's loss of voice contributes to her dehumanization and ultimate transformation.

Philomela is not the only woman silenced by Tereus's violence in this episode. Once Procne reads Philomela's weavings, she is stunned by her sister's words. Ovid writes, "Procne said nothing- / What could she say? –grief choked her utterance, / Passion her sense of outrage"

(148). Procne is stunned; she cannot believe the man she entrusted with her sister's safety and her own life is capable of committing these horrific crimes against nature and her family. Marder claims that "like Philomela, Procne can no longer speak with the tongue. To refuse the language of the tongue is also to refuse to speak the tongue of the 'name of the father.' Searching for the proper medium of revenge, Procne vents her rage on her husband by violating the terms of paternity" (161). Procne does not wish to take a tongue for a tongue or even a penis for a tongue, but chooses instead to break the familial bond, through filicide, just as Tereus has done.

When Procne decides their only course of action is to destroy the family that Tereus loves, the women descend into darkness, feeding Tereus his only son for dinner. Philomela is no longer the virginal maid when she confronts Tereus: "Philomela, with hair all bloody, / Springs at him and hurls the bloody head of Itys / Full in his father's face. There was no time, ever, / When she would have rather had the use of her tongue, / The power to speak, to express her full rejoicing" (151). Because Philomela has no tongue to speak and Procne is silenced through her grief and anger, both sisters express themselves through the language of their assailant, violence. The sisters use the body of Tereus's son Itys to communicate for them. Marder claims Procne "speaks through her child, forcing the child into her husband's mouth and belly. In the body of the father, the belly becomes the place of a tomb instead of a womb" (161). Tereus is "impregnated" with his son and through this role reversal becomes an effeminized version of himself. Just as Apollo was unable to speak when Daphne fled from him, Tereus is also struck silent; "Now if he could, / If he only could, he would open up his belly, / eject the terrible feast: all he can do / Is weep" (151). Through ironic reversal, Ovid gives the power back to Procne and Philomela, rendering Tereus speechless.

Similar to the narratives of Daphne, Philomela, and Procne, the episode of Pygmalion's ivory maiden also focuses on a silenced female through long periods of male discourse and fantasy. These episodes differ in many ways, however, as the ivory maiden is not violently attacked by her aggressor. Pygmalion is a misogynist who is unwilling to accept the perceived immoral lifestyle of the women surrounding him. He believes that they are shameless and wicked and is "shocked at the vices / Nature has given the female disposition" (241-242). Ovid's portrayal of Pygmalion continues with the tradition of antifeminism. However, Ovid's description of Pygmalion's misogynist and narcissistic behavior is layered with irony and it is clear that his posture towards women is not meant to be taken seriously. As a sculptor, Pygmalion becomes immersed in his art and creates, what he believes is, the perfect woman in his statue of the ivory girl. Some critics such as Allison Sharrock, author of "Gender and Sexuality" in the *Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, maintain that the ivory girl lacks all agency. Sharrock argues that women in the text are meant to be silent, she writes, "Pygmalion's statue… mirrored and reflected in the male text rather than seen face-to-face, encapsulates the representation of women in (Ovidian) poetry generally" (101). Others maintain that there are multiple ways to view this work of art. Salzman-Mitchell claims that in order for the "richness of the episode" to be fully understood, "the reader needs to be prepared to assume various focalizing points and contrasting views simultaneously" (69). Multiple viewpoints are important when analyzing any of Ovid's narratives, but it is especially pertinent to Pygmalion's ivory girl.

The silencing that is featured in this narrative is less violent than the previous episodes, but, it is still just as problematic. The ivory maiden, once brought to life by Pygmalion and Venus, has no agency over herself. She is forced into a marriage with Pygmalion and is expected to be a loving and subservient wife. The story is also challenging because the actual creation of

the ivory statue takes up only a few lines: “he made with marvelous art, and ivory statue, / As white as snow, and gave it greater beauty / Than any girl could have, and fell in love / With his own workmanship” (242). Pygmalion’s affection for his own creation is weighted much more heavily in the narrative, calling attention to his narcissistic tendencies. It is not the act of creating the perfect girl that causes Pygmalion to fall in love with her; on the contrary, the admiration he feels for his creation is the basis for Pygmalion’s joy. In short, Pygmalion falls in love with himself by falling in love with his creation.

Pygmalion’s egotistical behavior continues in the episode as he becomes more and more enthralled by his statue. He desires the perfect woman and the only way she could possibly exist is through the work of his own hands. Salzman-Mitchell claims that Pygmalion “wants a woman that he can marry, and movement is not appropriate in a respectful *matrona* (Roman wife of an honorable man)[5]” (74). His inner desires become even more muddled as Pygmalion fondles his immobile work of art, reminiscent of the way Apollo fondled Daphne’s laurel: “he would often move his hands to test and touch it, / Could this be flesh, or was it ivory only? / No, it could not be ivory. His kisses, / He fancies she returns” (242). This creates a paradox as Salzman-Mitchell points out: “men do not always want an immobile woman, Pygmalion desires a wife who is a fixed image that does not move, yet he wishes that she would actually stop being just a statue” (74). He wishes that this perfect immobile creation could kiss him back. However, this is contradictory to his former assessment of women; Pygmalion detests the sexual nature of women. By desiring a sexual relationship with his creation, he raises her stature above those of mortal women and treats her instead as a god.

[5] Roman wives were expected to do as their husbands commanded. There was no consent required when it came to the sexual duties of a Roman wife.

Even as the ivory maiden transforms into a living being, Ovid describes Pygmalion's own metamorphosis from chastity to desire. In their article "Pygmalion's Doll" authors Paul Barolsky and Eva D'Ambra discuss the historical implications of the ivory maiden. They claim that during Ovid's time, young Roman girls would have little ivory dolls similar to the ivory girl in the episode. These dolls would be presented to the girls at an early age and remain with them until they either died or were given away in marriage. The dolls would be dressed in fine clothing and in many cases given jewelry, similar to the gifts Pygmalion showers upon his ivory maiden. Barolsky and D'Ambra claim that, "Pygmalion is himself childlike as he plays with his statue, which he treats as if it were a doll" (20). It is important to remember Ovid would have known his audience and would expect that they would see parallels between these figures. Because of the similarities between Pygmalion's Ivory maiden and the popular Roman dolls, Barolsky and D'Ambra argue that there is a clear representation of a transformation from innocence to sexual desire. They suggest that "the sculptor, as he turns away from the sexuality of prostitutes, is as innocent as the maiden" (20). Yet, as he becomes more and more attracted to his creation he is transformed from a virtuous man into someone fueled by lust. This is representative of the transformation the Roman girls might have gone through, from innocence, to desire, and finally marriage. It is difficult to read this short narrative through such an innocent lens. Pygmalion does undergo a transformation, however, he can no longer claim innocence when judging the sexual desires of others, as he has now turned to immodest thoughts.

Whether or not Ovid uses the Pygmalion episode to engage Roman norms of spousal behavior or to figure forth the growth from sexual innocence to mature desire, he clearly thinks of Pygmalion as a representative artist. In his article Ovid's Metamorphoses" author Alan H.F. Griffin claims "Pygmalion attempts to transcend or escape from the realities of life" (66). He is

not innocent, as D'Ambra or Barolsky argue, but refuses to accept the life that has presented itself before him. Pygmalion distracts himself from these harsh realities through his creation of art. The statue Pygmalion creates is beautiful, cream skinned, and innocent, a stark contrast to the women he previously gazed upon. His craftsmanship is described with the utmost respect. Ovid describes Pygmalion's statue as "truly, almost living… / The best art, they say, / Is that which conceals art" (242). The lifelike aspects of the ivory maiden are important when considering both Pygmalion and Ovid's positions as artists. Griffin remarks, "In the ancient world the highest praise for any work of art was for its lifelikeness" (66). Pygmalion's work of art is truly exquisite. He rewards his creation with trinkets and jewelry. However, because he is the only one that can appreciate these gifts, through his gaze, he is only rewarding himself. He seeks the perfect woman and in her silent but lifelike form the statue is the perfect woman. Ovid captures the transformation from the non-gendered statue to the feminine by transitioning from gender neutral pronouns and descriptors to female pronouns when describing the ivory maiden. Griffin claims that Ovid "portrays that perfect love which, alas, cannot exist, but which a poet can, at times, capture and imagine" (68). This is an incredibly romantic reading of the narrative; by romanticizing the myth Griffin fails to address the clear power struggle between the masculine and feminine.

While the aforementioned interpretations of the Pygmalion narrative have merit and should be considered, they fail to address in full Pygmalion's misogynistic and narcissistic outlook on the female form. The only conceivable way Pygmalion can have a relationship with a woman is if he actually created the woman with his own hands. The fact that he can only fall in love with his own creation is not the only problem in the episode. Unlike Daphne, Philomela, or Procne, the ivory maiden has no spoken words in the narrative. Not once is she given the

opportunity to either consent to or protest against her creator. Before her metamorphosis she is completely lacking in agency and yet Pygmalion still "takes her to bed, puts a soft pillow under / Her head, as if she felt it, calls her *Darling*, / *My darling love!*" (242). She is the perfect woman because she does not have the ability to fight back. Salzman-Mitchell claims that this is the perfect type of art; it is similar to Tereus's fantasy of Philomela as a perfect doll, a fantasy which can only be broken through the use of her voice. Pygmalion is in love with the immobilized and silent woman, and he continues these themes of immobilization and silence even after she is transformed. He immediately forces himself upon her, and she is unable to utter a single word. Pygmalion may realize he is crossing a line with this unnatural desire for his own creation. Ovid writes, "'If you can give / All things, O god, I pray my wife may be- / (He almost said, *My ivory girl*, but dared not) - / One like my ivory girl'" (243). The capitalization of "My" in the third line is indicative of Pygmalion's narcissistic behavior. He owns the ivory girl and she becomes more dehumanized after her transformation then she was as a statue.

The ivory girl's lack of agency and dramatic silencing continues throughout her metamorphosis. Pygmalion's prayers are answered and the ivory maiden is transformed. He "kissed her, and she seemed to glow, and kissed her, / And stroked her breast, and felt the ivory soften" (243). Finally the immobilized statue is able to express herself through speech. Pygmalion, however, never gives her a chance. The ivory girl has no agency, she is never even given a name, other than the ivory girl or ivory maiden, a further dehumanization of her character by Pygmalion and Ovid alike. The relationship between these two characters is no longer a fantasy but has become a reality and "Pygmalion… / Plays lover again, and over and over touches / The body with his hand. It is a body!" (243). Even though she has been transformed, Pygmalion continues to objectify the ivory maiden. When he exclaims "it is a

body" he does not acknowledge her as a person but as a thing. She is nothing but a doll for him to play with. But this is not the innocent doll of a young Roman girl. Pygmalion immediately takes away her virtue with his sexual desire. He grabs and gropes her, hardly waiting for the transformation to take place. However, there is a paradox within Pygmalion's longing. He will not accept a woman tainted by the ways of men; instead he seeks a work of art, a creation, untouched by any man other than himself. Once she begins her transformation into a woman he immediately begins to treat her as an object of sexual desire and fulfillment. In sculpting the ivory maiden, Pygmalion created not only a work of art but also a desire and longing that he had never experienced. As soon as she is transformed he makes her into one of the licentious women from the beginning of the episode, capable of satisfying all of his erotic fantasies. The ivory maiden has become what Pygmalion has always wanted, "a wife, goddess, and a whore" (Salzman-Mitchell 74). Throughout her transformation the ivory girl never speaks. The closest she comes to giving herself agency is through a blush. Pygmalion realizes "The lips he kisses / are real indeed, the ivory girl can feel them, / And blushes and responds" (243). She was immobilized, made mobile, but never given agency over her body or voice.

Ovid's own historical and biographical background should also be taken into consideration when examining "Pygmalion." As was previously mentioned Ovid's own silencing influenced his work. Pygmalion is a masculine figure that effectively stifles and restrains an incredible piece of art. The ivory maiden, then, rather than the representative artist Pygmalion, can be read as a stand in for Ovid and his poetry, much like the silenced female figures of Philomela and Daphne. Ovid would have likely been making a statement about the overly conservative male figure of Augustus and his censorship of Ovid's work. Augustus was a conservative man hoping to bring back the morals of the previously more conservative Roman

Republic. He would have been as equally disgusted as Pygmalion was at the immoral behavior of the women in the narrative. Augustus would have supported a more virtuous woman, the perfect woman, one who is subservient and willing to do whatever her husband desires. He loathed adultery and hoped to restore chastity to the Roman Empire. However, instead of modeling these virtues, he censored the poet for polluting the masses. Yet, Pygmalion's attraction and lustful behavior towards the ivory maiden is far from virtuous or moral. He ravishes her, pressing against her body, unable to keep his hands to himself, an echo of the pursuit of Daphne by Apollo. Through his perversion of virtuous chastity Ovid illustrates the hypocrisy and unrealistic demands of Augustan Rome.

As I hope this essay has shown, an appreciation for Ovid's own biographical circumstances – particularly the experiences of silencing that he shared with his female victims – can provide useful nuance and complexity when interpreting the problematic violence of the *Metamorphoses*. These tragic and traumatic episodes can be fruitfully examined through a feminist lens, but not at the expense of flattening Ovid's complicated and nuanced text. By dismissing Ovid's subtleties and focusing on his light-hearted approach to the subjects of violence and rape, the irony in his language is overlooked. Ovid challenges this appropriation of male power, and in doing so gives his female characters a voice. Ovid was neither a misogynist nor a sympathizer, and it is clear that he did not write anything without intention. He was a poet capable of subverting the powerful through his sometimes subtle and sometimes blatant irony. Ovid challenges his readers to decipher the underlying social and political issues in his episodes. He does not condone the violence against these women nor does he explicitly speak out against it. Instead Ovid uses a neutral stance when narrating these tales leaving the position of judge and jury in the audience's hands. When read in this way, the reception of Ovid's work relies heavily

on the moralities of the reader and the context of when and where it is read. There is not a right or wrong way to read Ovid, but he should be read, and the *Metamorphoses* should remain in the western canon. Sharrock agrees, stating, “if love in Ovid is painful, it is also creative” (106). Even though the sexual and violent are often woven together in a tight-knit relationship, the beauty that is found within the *Metamorphoses* cannot be dismissed; it is an integral part of reading Ovid’s epic tapestry. The beautiful and troubling relationship between sexuality and violence forces our own generation – much as it did Augustan Rome – to reassess our own commitments and desires.

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