Greek and Latin, is routinely used for a medicine-box (medicines including poisons).[4]
Thus, Iapyx is a name that signifies the healer together with his drugs.

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[4] See, e.g., Philo Mech. 77.28–9, ed. R. Schoene (Berlin, 1891); Cic. *Cael.* 61; Plin. *N.H.* 21.137,
28.245; Juv. 2.140–1, 13.25 (where the contents is not specified but taken for granted).

ETYMOLOGICAL WORDPLAY IN OVID'S 'PYRAMUS AND THISBE'
(*MET.* 4.55–166)*

A wide range of readers and artists has enjoyed Ovid's 'Pyramus and Thisbe',[1] but
the tale has provoked critical attention on two counts: Ovid's source(s) cannot be
identified[2] and the simile applied to Pyramus' death agonies ruptures the sentimental
tone of the narrative (4.121–4).[3] In classical Greek literature, Pyramus is the name of
a Cilician river mentioned by geographical writers and historians in geographical
contexts,[4] while Thisbe is the name of a famous Boeotian city[5] and an obscure
Cilician spring.[6] Late antique Greek mythographers give these names to human
figures, young lovers who die tragically and are metamorphosed into the Cilician
river and spring.[7] No extant Latin versions of the tale are earlier than Ovid, and
all later Latin accounts are clearly derived from *Met.* 4.55–166.[8] Scholars have
suggested that Ovid found the tale in a Hellenistic collection of 'Babyloniaka',[9] but,
given the state of our evidence, that must remain speculative. The second difficulty
critics have had with the episode is different in kind from the first, and is related to
scholarly discomfort with Ovid's general tendency to shift tone in mid-narrative.[10]

* I am grateful to Niklas Holzberg, Jim O'Hara, Stephen Rupp, and the anonymous referee of
CQ for their helpful suggestions.
[1] See P. Perdrizet, 'Légendes babyloniennes dans les Métamorphoses d'Ovide', *RHR* 105
(1932), 221–2; C. Martindale (ed.), *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from
the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1988), index s.v. 'Pyramus and Thisbe'.
[2] On the sources, see Perdrizet (n. 1), 193ff.; T. T. Duke, 'Ovid's Pyramus and Thisbe', *CJ* 66
(1971), 320–7; F. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso Metamorphosen: Kommentar, Buch IV–V* (Heidelberg,
1976), 33–6; P. E. Knox, 'Pyramus and Thisbe in Cyprus', *HSCPh* 92 (1989), 315–28.
[3] C. P. Segal, *Landscape in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Wiesbaden, 1969), 50; O. S. Due, *Changing
Forms: Studies in the Metamorphoses of Ovid* (Copenhagen, 1974), 123; Bömer (n. 2), 56;
C. E. Newlands, 'The simile of the fractured pipe in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 4', *Ramus* 15 (1986),
143–53, with further bibliography.
[4] Xen. *Anab.* 1.4.1; Strabo 1.195, 5.353–5, 6.353; Ael. *Nat. An.* 12.29; Arrian, *An.* 2.5.8.
Cf. Mela 1.70; Pliny, *N.H.* 5.91; Curt. 3.4.8, 3.7.6; and see further, H. Treidler, 'Pyramos 1', *RE* 24
(1963), cols 1–10.
[5] Paus. 9.32.2, and elsewhere: see K. Fiehn, 'Thisbe 2', *RE* 6A 1 (1936), cols. 287–91.
[6] See G. Türk, 'Thisbe 1', *RE* 6A 1 (1936), cols 286–7.
[7] Nonn. *Dion.* 6.344–55, 12.84–5; Himerius, *Or.* 1.11; Nikolaos progymn. *Rhet. Gr.* 1.271 Nr. 9
Walz; Ps.-Clemens, *Recogn.* 10.26.
[8] Hyg. *Fab.* 242; Serv. Auct. *ad* Virg. *Buc.* 6.22; *Anth. Lat.* 61 Shackleton Bailey; *Poetae Latini
Minores* 3.132 Baehrens; *PLM* 4.105–6 Nr. 117.7–8 Baehrens; *PLM* 4.266 Nr. 261 Baehrens.
[9] Perdrizet (n. 1), 193–5; Duke (n. 2); Bömer (n. 2), 33. On the tale's play with the conven-
tions of the ancient novel, see Due (n. 3), 124–7; Newlands (n. 3); and N. Holzberg, 'Ovids
"Babyloniaka" (*Met.* 4.55–166)', *WS* 101 (1988), 265–77.
[10] For recent discussion with examples and bibliography, see I. Gildenhard and A. Zissos,
'"Somatic Economies": tragic bodies and poetic design in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', in P. Hardie,
A. Barchiesi, and S. Hinds (eds), *Ovidian Transformations* (Cambridge, 1999), 162–81.

This note reconsiders these two critical problems in relation to the aetiological form of the tale and Ovid's well-known predilection for etymological wordplay.[11]

The tale is narrated by one of the three daughters of Minyas as they ply their woolwork at home and spurn the rites of the new god Bacchus celebrated by the other Theban women. Having passed in review three obscure narratives out of a Callimachean preference for an unfamiliar story (4.43–51), the Minyad finally selects a fourth, an aetiological tale that explains the dark colour of the fruit of an unnamed tree: *cogitat et dubia est . . . an, quae poma alba ferebat / ut nunc nigra ferat contactu sanguinis arbor* (4.44, 51–2).[12] The unlearned reader who does not recognize the tree must wait for explicit identification of it as the *morus* (4.90), its fruit the *morum* (pl. *mora*, 4.127). The withheld name is a standard feature both of Ovidian aetiological narrative (cf. the name Hermaphroditus in the story told by the third Minyad, 4.276–388, withheld to 383), and also, especially, of Ovidian etymological wordplay.[13] Sara Myers has discussed the aetiological motivation of the Minyads' tales in relation to Alexandrian *doctrina*,[14] and, in the light of recent scholarly discussion of Ovidian wordplay in the service of aetiology,[15] we should consider possible etymological underpinnings of the narrative.

Ovid makes it easy for the reader who is attuned to his etymological ploys to derive the berries, *mora*, from *amor* by the insistent repetition of the word, the keynote of the tale.[16] Anagrammatic paronomasia on *amor* in connection with *mora*, 'delay', and *Roma*, develops in Roman erotic elegy,[17] of which Ovid was a distinguished practitioner, but anagrammatic wordplay generally is characteristic of Ovidian punning.[18] A second paronomastic complex suggests an alternate derivation of *morum* from *mors-morior*.[19] Believing that Thisbe has been killed by a lion, Pyramus kills himself

[11] On etymological wordplay in Ovid, see J. André, 'Ovide helléniste et linguiste', *RPh* 49 (1975), 191–5; F. Ahl, *Metaformations* (Ithaca, 1985); D. Porte, *L'Étiologie religieuse dans les Fastes d'Ovide* (Paris, 1985), 197–264; S. E. Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone* (Cambridge, 1986), index s.v. 'etymological word-play'; J. C. McKeown, *Ovid: Amores* (Leeds, 1987), 1, 45–62; A. M. Keith, *The Play of Fictions: Studies in Ovid's Metamorphoses Book 2* (Ann Arbor, 1992); K. S. Myers, 'The lizard and the owl: an etymological pair in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* Book 5', *AJPh* 113 (1992), 63–8; J. J. O'Hara, 'Vergil's best reader? Ovidian commentary on Vergilian etymological wordplay', *CJ* 91 (1996), 255–76; G. Tissol, *The Face of Nature* (Princeton, 1997), 11–88, 167–77; S. M. Wheeler, 'Changing names: the miracle of Iphis in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9', *Phoenix* 51 (1997), 190–202.

[12] I quote the text of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* from F. J. Miller (ed. and trans.), *Ovid III: Metamorphoses I–VIII*, 3rd edn revised by G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA and London, 1977).

[13] Tissol (n. 11), 175; cf. J. J. O'Hara, *True Names* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 79–82, with O'Hara (n. 11), 261.

[14] K. S. Myers, *Ovid's Causes* (Ann Arbor, 1994), 80.

[15] Porte (n. 11), 256–62; J. F. Miller, 'The *Fasti* and Hellenistic didactic: Ovid's variant aetiologies', *Arethusa* 25 (1992), 11–31; Myers (n. 14), 37–9, 47; Tissol (n. 11), 167–72; M. Robinson, 'Salmacis and Hermaphroditus: when two become one (Ovid, *Met.* 4.285–388)', *CQ* 49 (1999), 212–23. Cf. O'Hara (n. 13), 104–5, 108–9.

[16] 4.60, 68, 96, 137, 148, 150, 156; related forms at 4.68, 73, 77, 108, 128, 139.

[17] P. Pucci, 'Lingering on the threshold', *Glyph* 3 (1978), 52–73. Elegiac diction and motifs are pervasive in the *Metamorphoses*: see H. Tränkle, 'Elegisches in Ovids Metamorphosen', *Hermes* 91 (1963), 459–76. On Ovid's play with the conventions of elegy in 'Pyramus and Thisbe', see L. Perraud, '*Amatores Exclusi*: apostrophe and separation in the Pyramus and Thisbe episode', *CJ* 79 (1983–84), 135–9; P. E. Knox, *Ovid's Metamorphoses and the Traditions of Augustan Poetry* (Cambridge, 1986), 35–7.

[18] Ahl (n. 11); Tissol (n. 11), 11–88 disavows Ahl but discusses many examples of this kind of wordplay in the *Metamorphoses*. Cf. O'Hara (n. 13), 60–3.

[19] On multiple or 'variant' etymologies in Ovidian wordplay, see Porte (n. 11), 220–30; O'Hara

with his sword: *quoque erat accinctus, demisit in ilia ferrum, / nec **mora**, feruenti **moriens** e uulnere traxit. / . . . madefactaque sanguine radix / purpureo tinguit pendentia **mora** colore* (4.119–20, 126–7). The withdrawal of the sword from his vitals causes his blood to shoot from the wound and stain the fruit of the mulberry, which is here explicitly named for the first (and only) time in the narrative. The pun recurs when the dying Pyramus looks on Thisbe for the last time (*ad nomen Thisbes oculos a **morte** grauatos / Pyramus erexit uisaque recondidit illa*, 4.145–6) and again, in conjunction with *amor* (4.156), in Thisbe's speech over his corpse (*persequar **extinctum letique** miserrima dicar / causa comesque tui: quique a me **morte** reuelli / heu sola poteras, poteris nec **morte** reuelli. / . . . / at tu quae ramis arbor miserabile corpus / nunc tegis unius, mox es tectura duorum, / **signa tene caedis**,* 4.151–3, 158–60). Ovid may also pun on *mora*, 'mulberries', and *mora*, 'delay', at the moment of Pyramus' sword-stroke (4.120, quoted above), and again when Thisbe hesitates upon her return to the scene, not recognizing the colour of the tree's fruit (*utque locum et uisa cognoscit in arbore formam, / sic facit **incertam** pomi color: **haeret**, an haec sit*, 4.131–2), until she identifies her lover's corpse beneath the tree (*sed postquam **remorata** suos cognouit amores*, 4.137, where the pun on *amor* recurs; cf. *amatum*, 4.139).

This cluster of anagrammatic and paronomastic puns on *mora–amor–mors–mora* conceals another etymological wordplay of deeper significance on the Greek derivation of the word. The standard Greek term for mulberries was συκάμινα, but Athenaeus reports that the Alexandrian Greeks called them μόρα (*ΣΥΚΑΜΙΝΑ Ὅτι πάντων ἁπλῶς καλούντων αὐτὰ Ἀλεξανδρεῖς μόνοι μόρα ὀνομάζουσι*, Ath. 2.51b). Like the Alexandrians, moreover, the Hellenistic Greek poet Nicander, whose lost *Transformations* was an important model for Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, identifies the tree by the related form of μορέα, rather than by the more common συκάμινος.[20] Etymological discussion of the Latin *morus* and *morum* preserved by Isidore shows that the Romans were aware of the Greek derivation of these words (*morus a Graecis uocata, quam Latini rubum appellant*, Isid. *Orig.* 17.7.19; cf. 17.7.20).[21] Athenaeus also preserves the information that the second-century B.C.E. grammarian Demetrius Ixion derived μόρα from αἱμόροα, 'flowing blood', in his *Etymology* (*Δημήτριος δὲ ὁ Ἰξίων τὰ αὐτὰ συκάμινα καὶ μόρα οἷον αἱμόρροα καὶ σύκων ἀμείνω*, Ath. 2.51f). Virgil clearly alludes to this etymology in the one reference he makes to the mulberry, where he glosses the noun with an etymologically significant adjective (*sanguineis . . . moris*, *Buc.* 6.22).[22]

Ovid follows Virgil by signalling the Greek etymology at the outset and conclusion of his tale (*contactu **sanguinis arbor**, 4.52; at tu . . . arbor . . . / semper habe fetus, gemini **monimenta cruoris***, 4.158, 161), although he suppresses the word he glosses.[23] He

(n. 11), 266–73; in this episode, cf. U. Schmitzer, 'Meeresstille und Wasserrohrbruch', *Gymnasium* 99 (1992), 519–45.

[20] Ath. 2.51d–e = Nicander fr. 75 Gow–Scholfield; cf. Nicander, *Alex.* 69.

[21] Modern scholarship agrees: see T. G. Tucker, *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of Latin* (Halle, 1931), s.v. *morum*; A. Ernout and A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*, 4th edn edited by J. André (Paris, 1994), s.v. *morus*.

[22] On Greek etymological learning in Rome, see R. Maltby, 'Varro's attitude to Latin derivations from Greek', *PLLS* 7 (1993), 47–60; O'Hara (n. 13), *passim*. On Ovidian use of Greek etymological learning, see André (n. 11); Porte (n. 11), 197–264; Tissol (n. 11), 172–6. On the single adjective gloss of a noun in Vergilian etymological wordplay, see O'Hara (n. 13), 64–5, who does not, however, note the etymology in his catalogue.

[23] For the term 'suppression', see Tissol (n. 11), 175, following O'Hara (n. 13), 79–82. On Ovidian commentary on Vergilian etymological wordplay, see O'Hara (n. 11), and O'Hara (n. 13), 95–102.

illustrates the derivation of the mulberry from flowing blood most extensively, however, in the simile he applies to Pyramus' withdrawal of the sword from his side at the centre of the narrative, on the only occasion where he explicitly names the berry:

> ut iacuit resupinus humo, *cruor* emicat alte,
> non aliter quam cum uitiato fistula plumbo
> scinditur et tenui stridente foramine longas
> eiaculatur aquas atque ictibus aera rumpit.
> arborei fetus *adspergine caedis* in atram
> uertuntur faciem, *madefactaque sanguine* radix
> purpureo tinguit pendentia *mora* colore.   (4.121–7)

This spectacular, and spectacularly anachronistic, simile dramatically focuses the reader's attention on the motif of flowing blood, and hence on the nexus of etymologies that he has devised.[24] The etymological wordplay is further bolstered by the pervasive emphasis on blood in the narrative, from the bloody mouth of the lioness (*recenti / caede leaena boum spumantis oblita rictus*, 4.96–7; *ore cruentato*, 4.104), through Thisbe's bloodied cloak (*uestem . . . sanguine tinctam*, 4.107) and Pyramus' despairing invitation to the lions to rend and devour him as he assumes they have Thisbe (*nostrum diuellite corpus / et scelerata fero consumite uiscera morsu*, 4.111–12), to his bloody suicide (*nostri . . . sanguinis haustus*, 4.118) which stains not only the berries but also the tree's roots and the ground beneath it (*cruentum . . . solum*, 4.133–4), and Thisbe's suicide by the sword still warm from her lover's blood (*incubuit ferro quod adhuc a caede tepebat*, 4.163).[25]

Danielle Porte remarks on Ovid's tendency in the *Fasti* to shape his aetiological narrative around wordplay,[26] and his treatment of Pyramus and Thisbe offers a complex example of this compositional technique in the contemporaneous *Metamorphoses*. Love (*amor*), death (*mors*), and delay (*mora*) are important themes in the story, which Ovid underscores in the anagrammatic and paronomastic wordplay that pervades the narrative surface of the episode like so many 'glittering trifles'.[27] It is the Greek etymological wordplay deriving the word for mulberry from flowing blood, however, that structures the plot of this aetiological narrative and is ultimately memorialized in 'Pyramus and Thisbe' (*gemini monimenta cruoris*, 4.161). Ovid employs etymological wordplay in the episode to encapsulate the themes of the narrative and to indicate his allegiance to the Alexandrian literary tradition, which is where he is likely to have found the tale in the first place.[28]

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[24] I am indebted to *CQ*'s anonymous referee for this formulation.

[25] For a different view of the thematics of blood in the episode, see Segal (n. 3), 50–1; C. R. Campbell, 'Red and white in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: the mulberry tree in the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe', *Ramus* 9 (1980), 79–88.

[26] Porte (n. 11), 252–6.

[27] John Dryden, preface to *Fables, Ancient and Modern* (London, 1700), quoted in Tissol (n. 11), 11.

[28] On these twin goals of Virgilian etymologizing, see O'Hara (n. 13), 108; cf. O'Hara (n. 11), 255.