

## Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Violence in a Pastoral Landscape

HUGH PARRY

YORK UNIVERSITY

### I.

Ovid seems in his *Metamorphoses* to betray a fondness for scenes which depict a secluded grove set in a shady wood, where a cool spring offers relaxation from the heat of high-noon. Contemporary Italian landscape-painters are sometimes cited as the source of Ovid's inspiration for these scenes; and it has been suggested, even, that Ovid shares their predilection for irrelevant descriptions of natural scenery.<sup>1</sup> However, even if the recurrent elements in standard Ovidian landscapes patently recalled vogueish practices in the plastic arts, Ovid remains, as Herter insists, a poet not a painter.<sup>2</sup> And a poem always is something more than a transcription from pictorial to literary art. All artists are necessarily subject to a plethora of influences, conscious or unconscious; and while it is no doubt useful to be able to identify as many of these as one can, ultimately such identifications must be regarded as only prolegomena to literary criticism. To have discovered a poet's immediate source is by no means to have explicated his literary adaptations of the material in question.

Indeed, to ascribe Ovid's standard landscapes merely, or even

<sup>1</sup> See P. Grimal, "*Les Metamorphoses et la peinture paysagiste à l'époque d'Auguste*," *REL* (1938) 145-61, and particularly 149 f., for a discussion of the alleged irrelevance of certain scenes in typical Italian landscape-paintings.

<sup>2</sup> H. Herter, "Ovid's Verhältniss zur bildenden Kunst am Beispiel der Sonnenburg illustriert," *Ovidiana*, ed. N. I. Herescu (Paris 1958) 73. Herter suggests (74) that Ovid did not borrow directly from the plastic arts; and his whole article is an informative illustration of how, in one instance at least, Ovid's "pictures" are integral to his theme. See also the observations of H. Bardon, "Ovide et la Baroque," *Ovidiana* 75-100; he asserts (88) that Ovid's landscapes are an essential part of the story, and is right to note (83) the sharp and deliberate contrast between the peaceful vale of Tempe (*Met.* 1.568 ff.), and the violent scenes that precede and follow its description.

principally, to the influence of the plastic arts, or to current rhetorical taste for purple passages (as cited, for example, by the Elder Seneca<sup>3</sup>), is to indict Ovid on a serious charge: namely, that he has refused to enhance his themes by incorporating them into an appropriate landscape, despite the traditional associations of nature and certain forms of metamorphosis. Such a charge, happily, would be without foundation. Frequently in the *Metamorphoses* setting, mood, and theme are demonstrably in perfect harmony: for example, Ovid makes careful use of the *topos* of nocturnal silence to create a mood in which the darkness of incestuous crime meditated in Myrrha's heart (10.368 ff.), or of black magic to be perpetrated by Medea (7.184–88), may be represented with the maximum effect; again, early evening, when the light is being transmuted into an eerie and ghostly twilight, is the unearthly and appropriate hour when the daughters of Minyas are turned into bats (4.399–404). In such instances of poetic synthesis Ovid is being true to his general practice of handling natural description as a poetically essential part of a total episode. Therefore, when the poet who was happy, when he so wished, to incorporate a wealth of natural phenomena into his stories<sup>4</sup> chooses to repeat one particular kind of landscape like a leit-motif, that of the inviting pool at noon set in wooded and umbriferous surroundings, we will do well to examine the particular themes that are enacted against this natural setting. We shall find that for Ovid such landscapes more often than not form the essential backdrop for what may be described as variations upon the erotic connotations of the hunt, whether it be the hunt of the Calydonian boar, Apollo's pursuit of Daphne, or Narcissus' self-pursuit. It is to an analysis of these and like themes, then, that we must first address ourselves.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Seneca *Controv.* 8.1.26 ff.: here are listed some popular descriptions of oceans, tempests, and natural scenery in general. Ovid is cited as offering a suggestion as to how a line of Varro on nocturnal silence could be improved; yet, *topos* though this be, Ovid's own variations on the silent scene are no less relevant than, for example, those of Tacitus (cf. *Hist.* 1.9, 3.84, 4.62). J. H. Higham, "Ovid and Rhetoric," *Ovidiana* 32–48, rightly asserts that the significance of natural landscape in poetry is not exhausted by referring it to rhetorical *descriptions*: it is not enough, however, to assert in defense of a poet that "... scholars ... forget that the eye for significant detail and the flair for a brief descriptive phrase are a gift of nature to poets" (40).

<sup>4</sup> See E. G. Wilkins' list of Ovidian similes in *CW* (1932) 73–78 and 81–86.

## II. FLIGHT AND PURSUIT

In the most striking instances of the erotic hunt, the pursuer is a god indulging a capricious whim, his quarry an innocent mortal virgin. When, as usually is the case, the maid in question is more than reluctant to yield to the blandishments of the divine predator, the lustful god has few scruples about resorting to superior strength to gain his unadmirable ends. We should not be surprised, then, to observe that attempts upon virginity frequently are couched in language more befitting the exploits of a hunter scenting blood in the chase than the tender advances of a young gallant. That violence should be perpetrated in so many pastoral settings in the *Metamorphoses* is no accident; and, however traditional the relationship between sexual and generally violent pursuits may be, there is a pointed thematic unity behind Ovid's treatment of these themes which merits study.

Apollo abandons the pursuit of *ferae . . . hostis* (1.458) in favor of a new victim, the virgin Daphne, and attempts to allay her fears by the hypocritical assurance (1.504): *non insequor hostis*. Thus the literal hunt turns easily into a sexual hunt. Considering the superior endowments of the divine ravishers in the *Metamorphoses*, it is not, perhaps, altogether predictable that threats to virginity should almost always involve a literal chase, with frequent recourse to the verbs *petere* and *fugere*, and other related words of hostility and violence.<sup>5</sup> Occasionally the interchangeability of hunting and sexual terminology is pointedly underlined by the poet; and the effect is, as we shall see later, more than rhetorical virtuosity. Apollo tells Cupid that weapons are for hunting, not for love (1.456 ff.). But Apollo is in error. Weapons, violence, assault are the implements of desire in the world of the *Metamorphoses*. And the god of love further underlines the analogy in his retort (1.463 f.): *figat tuus omnia, Phoebe, te meus arcus . . .*<sup>6</sup> The transference of this kind of vocabulary is not an unnatural one,

<sup>5</sup> Cf. particularly 2.436 ff.; the military language employed here is, of course, typical of Roman descriptions of heterosexual relations (cf. Catullus 62.20-24, and the elegists' frequent equation of war and love, summarized in Ov. *Amor.* 1.9.1).

<sup>6</sup> J. E. Cirlot has argued (*A Dictionary of Symbols* [London 1962] 19) that mythologically Cupid's arrows originally had a phallic significance, but, in literature at least, their associations with hunting are of major significance also. It should be noted that *figere* is the verb used of the Sun, as he fixes his gaze upon a virgin who has caught his attention (4.196), and of the javelin which pierced the stag beloved of Cyparissus (10.131).

once the equation between the hunt and sexual aggression has been established, nor is it peculiar to Ovid. We must note, however, the particular care with which Ovid handles the terminology employed in instances of violence. When Jupiter has cast an amorous eye on the maid Callisto, he chooses to gain his desired ends by disguising himself as the most ambivalent character, Diana, disarming as goddess of virginity, menacing as goddess of the hunt. Appropriately, after the omnipotent father has satisfied his lust, the real Diana enters the scene, immediately depicted as *caede superba ferarum* (2.442): the conditions of both deities are, indeed, parallel. Again, *cupido* is the emotion which the hounds feel toward their prey, Actaeon himself (3.225); it is also the emotion which rouses Glaucus to make overtures to the virgin, Scylla, rejection of which results in the inevitable chase (13.906).

In some instances, the literal hunt is primary, the erotic connotations being implicit. For example, the Calydonian boar initially is protected by Diana herself (8.353 f.). When the beast has taken refuge in the woods, the battle which ensues takes on the character of a test of virility (8.392): *discite, femineis quid tela virilia praestent*—a boast that the masculine assault will succeed, despite the protection of the goddess of virginity (compare Diana's protection of Arethusa from specifically sexual attack in 5.618 ff.). More usually, various attempts at sexual aggression suggest the hunt. And to consolidate the point that venatic and sexual pursuits share the same descriptive language and express similar moods, we have only to consider a number of similes with which Ovid elaborates various attempts at rape. Daphne flees from the unwelcome embrace of Apollo, and the god's pursuit is likened to that of a hound after a hare (1.533 ff.), a deliberately extended simile of violence. When the virginal Hermaphrodite seeks to escape from the threatening clutches of Salmacis, the latter's attack is likened successively to that of an eagle clutching a snake, ivy wrapped round a tree-trunk, and (climactically) a polypus seizing hold of its enemy beneath the sea (4.356 ff.). Polyphemus, who has been firmly rejected by Galatea, finds this nymph's most culpable failing to be her fleetness of foot, which exceeds even that of a stag pursued by baying hounds (13.805 f.).

An interesting analogy is afforded in the case of Scylla's transformation. This nymph has successfully evaded the attentions of Glaucus and has taken refuge in a pool. She cannot, however,

escape the wrath of Circe, a goddess scorned—which is at least one degree worse than that of a mortal woman scorned. Here in the pool she succumbs to Circe's poisons and finds that, although she has eluded Glaucus' attempted rape, she cannot escape the destructive force of sexual jealousy: her very loins become monstrous hounds from which flight is impossible (14.59 ff.).

### III. HUNTER AND VICTIM

The recurring atmosphere of violence in Ovid's pastoral scenes, however frequently it may be assuaged by moments of humor, or even burlesque, reminds one repeatedly of the hunt to the death of bears, stags, and other beasts. The clearly delineated ambivalence between the arrows of Cupid and those of the hunter is reflected on another level in the person of Diana, the archetypal exemplar of that traditional association between hunting and virginity explored so extensively in the *Metamorphoses*. And Diana is a central figure in the stories of Actaeon and Callisto, which exemplify one very important related motif: namely, the frequent transformation of the hunter (or, more usually, the huntress) into the victim—either of lust, or of the hunter's arrows, or both. This is a traditional motif, upon which Ovid rings some most interesting changes.<sup>7</sup>

Actaeon, a hunter, has the misfortune to interrupt Diana in the midst of her bath. For this violation of virginity (for such it is described in 3.254 f.) he is condemned to become the hunted beast. The goddess turns him into a stag, and the reversal of roles is noted (3.228): *ille fugit per quae fuerat loca saepe secutus*. Diana here is portrayed opportunely as the symbol both of outraged virginity, and of the violence inseparable from the hunt itself. Callisto, once a virgin huntress, is violated by Jupiter in the guise of Diana and at Juno's malevolent whim turned into a bear: again, the ironic reversal of roles is underlined (2.491 f.). The exchange between Apollo and Cupid noted above (page 270) is a

<sup>7</sup> H. Fränkel, in *Ovid: A Poet between Two Worlds* (Berkeley 1956) 98 f., alludes briefly to the psychological basis of this reversal in the case of Actaeon: "Once the idea of metamorphosis was accepted, it could be used for new purposes. It is, for instance, the typical nightmare of the hunter that he might become the game and be hunted in turn." Such ironic reversals continue to be a popular convention in erotic poetry (cf. *Twelfth Night* 1.1.16-22; Shelley, *Adonais* xxxi).

variation on such reversals. So, too, is the light-hearted episode involving the Sun, the latter being told by Aphrodite (4.194 f.): *tuis omnes qui terras ignibus uris, lureris igne novo*—the new fire being a sexual passion for the virgin Leucothoe.

In the majority of instances, then, heterosexual relationships in the *Metamorphoses*, particularly when one party is divine, suggest violence, a chase, ultimate rape; and the reader finds himself in the world of the primitive hunting instincts of man. The pattern of natural cycles ensures that the hunter shall become the victim. And so, when the poet informs us at length that there was a nymph, Salmacis, who showed no interest whatever in hunting, despite pressures brought to bear upon her to engage in this activity so becoming of virgins, we should not be surprised that she is to become the aggressor, not the victim! It is the virginal Hermaphrodite who will succumb to *her* ferocious assault (4.302 ff.).

The basic motif involved in the reversal of roles between hunter and victim underscores one episode in particular which at first glance might seem to belong to a different thematic order, namely the story of Echo and Narcissus (3.346 ff.). The boy is a virginal youngster, sought by many, but rejecting all (3.355). The language employed, echoing (perhaps) Sappho's reference to virginity itself (Fr. 105a Page), and (certainly) Catullus' like theme (62.42, 44, 53, 55), enforces the point. A hunter, he is on the point of driving his deer into his nets, when Echo appears, as the threat to his virginity. She pursues him, but in vain. He is fated, however, to be pursued a second time, and on this occasion there will be no escape. Relaxing after the toils of the hunt (as so often the literal hunt is the preamble to a sexual encounter), he falls in love with his image in the pool; desires himself; and the hunter and the hunted become one (3.426): *dumque petit, petitur*. But what he seeks to grasp is a fleeting image (3.432): *credula, quid frustra simulacra fugacia captas?* His mournful reproach is ineffectual (3.455): *quove petitus abis?* He ruffles the water with his tears, his image flees, and the boy is destroyed by self-love, like the frost consumed by the rays of the sun. Ironically, the object that arouses his desire ultimately flees from his attempted embrace: yet it is the pursued one who is transformed by ritual death, since the boy himself is the object of his own pursuit and the victim of his own self-love. The image escapes; the reality cannot.

## IV. THE END OF THE HUNT

The end of the hunt regularly is an actual or ritual death. Again, both literal hunt and sexual chase move toward similar climaxes. Many instances of this ultimate death, consequent upon significant reversals of role, are self-evident: the dragon falls to Cadmus after first being cast in the role of slayer (8.46 ff.); the cattle of Peleus are slaughtered by a wolf, who himself becomes the hunters' victim after his final sanguinary onslaught against a heifer (11.371 ff.);<sup>8</sup> the Calydonian boar wreaks havoc on the hunters before he, too, is cut down (8.399 ff.). An erotic element is often incorporated into the hunt; and to the instances already cited (above, page 272) we might add the scene in which Apollo, smitten by jealousy over Coronis, slays his beloved with his arrows (2.603 ff.); and that in which Cyparissus accidentally pierces with his javelin a stag which was his particular favorite—whereupon he grieves like a lover bereft and dies himself (10.120 ff.).

Transformation is itself a ritual death, since something essentially characteristic of the living creature has been destroyed. Thus it is not surprising that virginity may be preserved only at the expense of the victim's recognizable human life, nor that its loss and death itself should be regarded as virtually equipollent. At the critical moment in the chase of Daphne when Apollo's superior speed seems likely to triumph, the climactic simile of a hound about to fix its sharp fangs in its victim's flesh (1.533 ff.) suggests that death is near. Daphne preserves her virginity only by sacrificing her humanity: she becomes a tree, possessed of a form of life, but bereft forever of vital movement and sensibility. Byblis' case would seem to be a variation on this theme (9.659 ff.). Having pursued her brother to no avail, she sinks exhausted to the ground and buries her face in the fallen leaves. Consumed by her own tears, she is transformed into a fountain. Her virginity is thus preserved, albeit against her will, and something of her reputation is salvaged. The price, however, is high—the loss of her human characteristics, her essential life. Like the stag brought to bay, the human victim of violence, self-inflicted or otherwise, is trapped in a corner, where only death or radical transformation offers any release.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The wolf's is a ritual death here, since he is changed into marble (404), a change which ensures that he is no longer an object of fear (405 f.).

In most of the examples adduced thus far, I have attempted to focus particular attention on those which seem to belong to a pattern wherein scenes of violence are enacted against a specifically pastoral landscape. The rationale behind the poet's synthesis of these seemingly emulsive components is perfectly sound and precisely comprehensible. We shall not arrive at a sympathetic understanding of Ovid's poetic practice here, unless we recognize first the critical significance of the scenes of violence themselves and, secondly, the particular shapes, colors, and moods with which Ovid invests his pastoral landscapes. The former point has been the theme of our foregoing analysis; it is to an examination of some of the principles which inform Ovid's "scenepainting" that we must now turn.

#### V. THE PASTORAL SCENE

There are a number of passages in the *Metamorphoses* where Ovid parodies the bucolic genre directly, and it is informative to observe that here, too, the end result often is actual or presaged violence.<sup>10</sup> These parodies (cf. particularly the Arcadian landscape in 2.405 ff.; the references to Apollo as rustic shepherd in 1.512 ff., and 2.679 ff.; and the familiar parody of Polyphemus in 13.755 ff.) are discernibly of a different order from the conventional pastoral scene under particular scrutiny in this essay. It is interesting to observe, however, that they, too, like their bucolic archetypes from Theocritus on, share some common characteristics with Ovid's more typical sylvan landscapes. This correspondence might suggest that, while the hypostatic pattern common to Ovid's landscapes probably is not a direct derivative of the bucolic genre as such, both of these poetically conventional ways of handling natural description are indebted to the same mythopoeic source for the interactions of nature and human activity which they portray.

In our present analysis, we shall concentrate on the conventional landscape which Ovid uses as a preface to his scenes of violence—

<sup>9</sup> The rape of Persephone is an actual translation to the realms of the underworld; and the violently erotic imagery in which Pluto's descent into Hades is couched deserves attention (5.420–24).

<sup>10</sup> Similar erotic violence attends the episode of Pomona and Vertumnus (14.623 ff.)—where Ovid seems to be parodying rural didactic verse, and primarily Vergil's *Georgics*—in the disquieting exemplum of Iphis and Anaxarete (698 ff.), and Vertumnus' own willingness to resort to violence (770).



the quiet, unruffled pool, sheltered by encircling trees from the heat of the noonday sun, and sometimes including a temple or some other image of sanctity; and the rough, pathless country, where so often the recurrent chase which threatens to end in violence takes place. To see why this particular landscape is not irrelevant to, or merely decoration for, the theme of passion uniformly enacted against it, whether it be literal or sexual pursuit, literal or ritual death, we shall consider a representative example of the poet's craft. Narcissus, virginal hunter, reaches a pool *which is itself clear and virginal* (3.408 ff.):

quem neque pastores neque pastae monte capellae  
contigerant aliudve pecus, quem nulla volucris  
nec fera turbarat nec lapsus ab arbore ramus.

(*Pastor* here suggests, perhaps, the same ironic parody of the traditional eclogue as in 1.512 ff.; *contingere* and associated verbs accommodate highly erotic connotations,<sup>11</sup> recalling directly here 3.355.) Sunlight is excluded from the spot; the pool attracts the boy, reflecting a virginal face in its virginal waters; and when the seductive image vanishes, the boy, wasted by unrequited self-passion, undergoes a ritual death at the pool's edge, being transformed into a flower.

Thus the scene where violence or death is to ensue is itself virginal, so that the setting itself portends and prefigures the deed.<sup>12</sup> In primarily nonsexual pursuits, the attendant scenery suggests virginal terrain, in such phrases as *quam nulla ceciderat aetas* (8.329); *nec equo loca pervia silvas* (8.377); *adituque carentia saxa* (3.226). The forest in which the attendants of Cadmus go in search of a spring never has been *violated* by an axe (3.28—*nulla violata securi*): Ares' serpent slays and is slain in this unsullied landscape. In situations specifically sexual, a similar virginal scene is depicted. Hermaphrodite wanders to a pool which is luxuriant with evergreen grasses (4.301)—a virginal image—before submitting to Salmacis' embrace and the attenuation of his virility (a form of death). Persephone roams in a place of *eternal spring*, before losing both the flowers she has culled and her

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Plaut. *Am.* 2.2.204; Prop. 1.1.2 (*contactum nullis . . . cupidinibus*); Ov. *Met.* 9.484; Liv. 29.8.11; Sen. *Hippol.* 704 f.

<sup>12</sup> For a further example of nature's empathy with human emotion cf. *Met.* 6.326 f.

virginity (5.399 ff.). Arethusa rests from hunting by the side of a stream which flows silently and with a barely perceptible motion; here she is confronted by Alpheus and forced to flee over pathless, wild country (5.612 f.), terrain which seems to reflect the twin aspects of Diana herself.<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, we observe that the pool central to the pastoral setting is normally shaded from the heat and light of the sun, and that the time of day frequently is noon, when the sun is at its height. For practical reasons, the potential victim in his role of hunter understandably seeks shade from the sun's heat; but, more than this, the virgin finds protection in the uterine comfort of the dark forest. The sun frequently is suggestive of danger, a source of violence and destruction.<sup>14</sup> Vertumnus, for example, on the point of offering violence to Pomona, is likened to the sun which has conquered the opposing clouds, and shines forth with nothing left to obstruct him (14.768 ff.). Salmacis' eyes, at the moment the nymph conceives her incontinent passion for Hermaphrodite, burn like the sun's rays reflected from a mirror (4.347 ff.). The sun is, in this aspect of its illimitable power, a masculine symbol of unbridled, primitive energy. The Sun-god himself constitutes a general threat to all lovers, since his telescopic gaze is always likely to expose shameful acts; hence the vengeance exacted upon him by Venus for his having revealed her illicit affair with Mars (4.171 ff.). On another occasion, as Arethusa flees from Alpheus' clutches, the sun at her back projects before her the shadow of her minacious admirer (5.614 f.). The sun is thus frequently represented as the unwelcome obtruder shunned by hunters and virgins.<sup>15</sup>

It is dramatically satisfying that rape and violence should occur at the ultimate place of refuge: in the dark recesses of the woods, where the heat of the sun is excluded, in a virginal setting, in those very woods where Diana herself maintains her realm as the defender of virginity. Rape is violence of an elemental kind, and defloration in this context is an elemental act with potentially

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Sen. *Hippol.* 777 f. for a specific statement of the dangers of pathless regions.

<sup>14</sup> Or even a direct threat to the vernal world (cf. Sen. *Hippol.* 764 ff.).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Iliad* 14.341-45, where Zeus fashions a cloud explicitly to thwart Helios' eagle gaze. There is marked irony in Jupiter's request (*Met.* 1.589 ff.) that he himself will be there to protect her, should she fear the proximity of wild beasts' lairs. Since Io remains unconvinced by this casuistry, Jupiter manufactures his own enveloping cloud behind which to conceal his assault.

violent repercussions, a mystery akin to the ferocity of nature herself. Raw sexual passion is most appositely indulged against a background of virginal wilderness, the harsh untrodden terrain where elemental human appetency and crude nature are in closest conjunction. Divinity itself, as Ovid represents it, is an enigmatic and essentially ugly force, working its will on mortals after the fashion of venatic lust. Virginity invokes demonic passion and invites violation; yet in a sense nature here often is merely exacting requital for the virginal hunter's own sanguinary activities in the past.

For related reasons, sanctity too (one element not present in the Narcissus story) is a mystery of paradoxical implications; the holy precincts in Ovid's pictures frequently become stages for the enactment of violence and death. For example, sanctity, virginity, and death are closely interwoven in the tale of Cadmus and the dragon, in which a sacred spring in a virginal forest is the setting for bloody slaughter (3.28 ff.). And more remarkable still is the story of Erysichthon. This young man, we are told, violated the ancient grove of Ceres, and profaned it with an axe (8.741 f.):

ille etiam Cereale nemus violasse securi  
dicitur et lucos ferro temerasse vetustos.

The erotic connotations of *violare* are a preamble to Erysichthon's boast that he will destroy the sacred oak, whether it be the beloved of the goddess, *or even the goddess herself* (8.755 f.). When the tree is smitten, it grows pale (*palescere* and *pallor* are the words used, suggesting the erotic content of the verb *paleo* in Ovid *AA* 729 and elsewhere). The great oak groans, and in its death throes the nymph pronounces her dying words from the stricken tree. Thus Erysichthon's assault is simultaneously directed against a sacred tree and a feminine creature and culminates in the pitiless death of both.<sup>16</sup>

Lastly, there remains to be considered the significance of the pool as a central geographical element in Ovid's landscapes. This

<sup>16</sup> The carnage which terminates the episode of the Calydonian boar occurs in virginal terrain (8.329); the similar episode of Peleus' cattle takes place near a temple (11.359). Such locales serve like functions in the overall complex of the story. Sanctity and hunting meet in an interesting variation in the Basque tradition cited by Cirlot (above, note 6) 146 f.

is the region where violence usually is planned and often is executed. Whatever Ovid's conscious or unconscious motives may have been, he has committed himself to a structural pattern which forces its significance upon the thematic patterns involved. The connection between water generally as a sacred element and the sanctity of virginity is clear enough from the story of Callisto (cf. 2.464, 527 ff., where Juno in a jealous tantrum begs Tethys and Ocean to shun such constellations as owe their heavenly assumption to *stuprum*). Generally, the sexual connotations of the pool are so strong that it is the element reserved almost always for predominantly sexual rather than nonsexual violence,<sup>17</sup> for water is the last refuge of virginity, and as such is the most appropriate setting for violation in several forms.<sup>18</sup> The pool is the place where the goddess of virginity is most vulnerable. Here she bathes in seclusion from the eyes of men; and here her modesty is, if not literally violated, at least outraged by Actaeon's unwitting intrusion. Diana's immediate reaction to his offense is to fling drops of *avenging water* in his *vultum virilem* (3.189 f.), before consigning him to a barbaric form of execution. Sometimes metamorphosis into water provides asylum for the preservation of virginity—but the point is that this is the critical last resort, as in the cases of Arethusa, Byblis, and Galatea. But elsewhere, water's promise of asylum is not honored. Demeter discovers Persephone's girdle, symbol of lost virginity, floating on the surface of the pool through which Pluto had plunged with the girl down into the underworld (5.469 ff.). And Scylla's case is somewhat ambiguous, since, after she has successfully spurned Glaucus' amorous pursuit, her own loins and belly are transformed into monstrous dogs in the pool where she had so often sheltered (14.51 ff.).

The paradoxical nature of water as a symbol of protection is strikingly illustrated by Narcissus' fate. The mutual character of the pursuer and the pursued ensures that the boy's desire cannot be consummated on the image in the virginal pool; the water indeed is the final barrier to lust, as the boy exclaims (3.450): *exigua prohibemur aqua*. Yet, ironically, the same pool which is

<sup>17</sup> Cf. particularly Sen. *Hippol.* 713–18.

<sup>18</sup> On the ambivalence of water generally as both divine (or apocalyptic) and demonic, see Cirlot (above, note 6) 345–47, and N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton 1957) 146.

represented here as the guardian of his virginity is, by this very token, ultimately responsible for his death.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Ovid's sylvan landscapes, quite apart from his deliberate parodies of formal bucolic poetry, are the backcloths against which scenes of violence, sharing thematic similarities, are enacted. It is demonstrable that Ovid was drawing upon and possibly contributing to (or at least elaborating) a well-established poetic tradition. At first glance, it might even appear that *all* instances of pastoral violence in the *Metamorphoses* can be explained as extended parodies upon the bucolic conventions of unhappy love from Theocritus to Vergil. Yet those scenes in the poem which most conventionally preface erotic violence with pastoral description cannot easily be seen as direct descendants of the pastoral genre. Certain elements are, however, contained in both the Ovidian epyllia and formal bucolic poetry. For example, Theocritus describes his scene as high noon, the time when Pan rests from the hunt (*Id.*1.15). Adonis is a shepherd, and also hunts wild beasts (Theoc. *Id.*1.108 ff.); and Adonis exemplifies in many passages the reversal of roles between hunter and victim (e.g. Bion *Id.*1.7, 18, 60). In the anonymous *The Dead Adonis* from the Bucolic Collection, the boar admits to Aphrodite (25 ff.) that his lethal assault on Adonis was prompted by a mad desire to kiss the youth's naked thigh. Thus the erotic hunt is firmly established in early formal pastoral. The basic pattern involved is eloquently expressed in Vergil's second *Eclogue* (63 ff.). Here the singer tells how all nature is a cyclical pattern of flight and pursuit: just as the lioness pursues the wolf, and the wolf pursues the goat, and the goat pursues the cytissus, so does the lover, Corydon, pursue the object of *his* desire. This extended simile seems to imply that love, too, is a cyclical pattern in which the hunter will inexorably become the victim.

We, must not, however, regard the formal pastoral genre as a self-sufficient model for Ovid's own synthesis of nature and violent love.<sup>19</sup> It is difficult to say when nature was first used *consciously*

<sup>19</sup> On the note of unhappy love sounded in traditional pastoral see B. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind* (New York 1953) 285. The *Metamorphoses* stresses violence rather than unhappiness; and Snell is correct to assert (*op. cit.* 288) that the gentler aspect of nature is more important in Vergil's Arcadia than her harsher side. G.

to reflect and enhance the human condition, but H. E. Barnes is probably right in asserting that the description of virginal nature in Euripides' *Hippolytus* 71 ff. is an implicit picture of Hippolytus' own chaste life.<sup>20</sup> In particular, the description here of the virginal meadow (74 ff.) closely resembles that of Narcissus' pool (*Met.* 3.407 ff.); and the hunter Hippolytus, having successfully evaded Phaedra's threat to his chastity, is ultimately destroyed by a savage bull cast up on the shore by a miraculous wave from the sea (1206 ff.). In the same play, Phaedra's distraught longing for her stepson is embodied in her expressed yearning to "... draw water from some clear stream . . .; to go hunting in the mountains and woods" (208 ff.). The nurse is perplexed by these references and sees Phaedra's plight as energy directed toward insane desires (232 ff.). In fact, more than simply constituting a desire to be with Hippolytus,<sup>21</sup> these lines seem to be an expression of chained sexual energies which can find *no* outlet in hunting, and which must, therefore, destroy the girl from within; the chorus is correct in seeing these words as a death wish promoted by love (276). In the *Bacchae* (1048 ff.) a grassy meadow set in a hollow glen, where pines provide shade beside running water, is the sacred place of refuge where the Maenads slaughter that young voyeur, Pentheus. And in this play, the symbolism of the hunt predominates, with frequent reversals of the roles of hunter and victim.<sup>22</sup>

It has been said of the *Metamorphoses*: "There are a dozen extended descriptions of natural scenery in the poem, and practically all of them centre around water, cool, calm, and shaded."<sup>23</sup> Ovid's addiction to this kind of scene cannot be attributed solely

Highet, in *The Classical Tradition* (New York 1959) 169, refers to Boccaccio's love-story, *Fiammetta*, and other pastoral books, in which the usual gods are the wilder deities, Venus, Pan, and Diana. Whether or not they signify, as Highet suggests, a rejection of Christian otherworldly ideals and an assertion of the values of this world, they recall the harsher side of nature well known to classical authors, including Ovid.

<sup>20</sup> H. E. Barnes, "The Hippolytus of Drama and Myth," *Hippolytus in Drama and Myth* (Lincoln [Nebr.] 1960) 122 f.

<sup>21</sup> This passage is discussed at some length by R. Lattimore in *Arion* 1.3 (1962) 13 f.; but to say that "There is not a line of sex in the scene" (13) is to miss at least part of the point. Cirlot (above, note 6) 146 remarks: "Lao-Tse taught that racing and hunting only serve to madden the heart of man, thus revealing that the enemy is within; that it is desire itself."

<sup>22</sup> See R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus* (Cambridge 1948) 100-134.

<sup>23</sup> L. P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled* (Cambridge 1955) 180.

or even largely to the influence of the plastic arts, or to an excessive fondness for irrelevant purple passages. His integration of a particular kind of landscape with a particular kind of episode is a *poetic* synthesis justified by a long and developing association of the two components in myth and literature. The central elements of his settings are precisely chosen, conforming as they do to the psychological truths behind the tales of metamorphosis expressed rudimentarily in the primitive myths, and developed artistically by the poets.<sup>24</sup> Nature, so often viewed as the archetypal pattern of human existence, suggests in its cycles both the allurements of wilderness and its dangers. Her more tranquil aspect is, perhaps, more the stuff of traditional pastoral, though even here sadness and ultimate death have their place. Her catastrophic side is that which looms largest in Ovid's landscapes and forms the ideal stage for violent love and death. In such landscapes violence and lust oscillate in a vicious cycle of venatic and sexual energy. In terrain which is itself paradoxically both virginal and dangerous, the roles of hunter and victim repeatedly are reversed; the virgin hunter is himself pursued and destroyed; the water of the pool both purifies and menaces; in the holy groves, acts of demonic brutality are perpetrated; in the shady woods, traditionally the haunt of lovers,<sup>25</sup> fearsome violations take place in the name of love, as nature reveals at unexpected moments her claws and bloody fangs. The basic pattern involved is traceable to a literary development that precedes even Theocritean pastoral. In his own variations upon this pattern, in which wit frequently is wedded to brutality, Ovid sometimes stresses the violence of the hunt, sometimes explores the destructive power of misdirected sexual energy, but more often than not fuses the two against a natural background of elemental and mysterious grandeur.

<sup>24</sup> There may have been, as some think, a form of Alexandrian epyllion which served as Ovid's most immediate source for his landscapes; and certainly the salient elements of the recurrent Ovidian pattern occur in unelaborated form in Callim. *Hymn* 5.70 ff.—the hunter (Teiresias), noon, a fountain, holy ground, and the hunter punished for seeing a divine virgin's nakedness. The point is, however, that Ovid is working in a tradition that is wider than the boundaries of a single writer or a single genre (or a group of landscape artists).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Met.* 3.442 f.