

Horro Vinton: Classical Essays for
 John Bramble ed. Whitby
 (Bristol C.P. + Bol-Car, 1988)

THE PALACE OF THE SUN IN OVID'S METAMORPHOSES

Robert Brown

Ovid's elaborate description of the *regia Solis* (*Met.* 2.1-30) has no known precedent, though it is possible that Euripides' *Phaethon* contained some details about Helios' palace.¹ In any case, the hypothesis of a direct source is unnecessary, since epic models, and perhaps the temple of Palatine Apollo, are sufficient to account for the character of the passage. The palace itself (1-4), massive and brightly ornamented with precious metals and ivory, is akin to glittering Homeric palaces such as those of Poseidon (*Il.* 13.21ff.), Menelaus (*Od.* 4.43 ff., 71 ff.), and, especially, Alcinous (*Od.* 7.81 ff.),² and like the palaces in the *Odyssey* it is described in connection with the arrival and entrance of a visitor. (The rash and naive Phaethon bears little resemblance to Odysseus but has in common with Telemachus the search for his father.) The carvings by Vulcan on its doors (5-18), featuring earth, sea, and sky, recall the shield of Achilles made by Hephaestus, which exhibits the same triple division of the cosmos (*Il.* 18.483); Homer's pictures of everyday life are omitted by Ovid, primarily because of their irrelevance to his conception, though he may also have been predisposed by later interpretations of Homer to view the shield description as a cosmic image.³ Finally, the interior scene of the Sun and his retinue (23-30) may owe something to the description of the inhabitants of Alcinous' palace (*Od.* 7.95 ff.), though Ovid has transferred to the narrative what was originally part of a continuous *ekphrasis*.⁴

¹ J. Diggle (ed.), *Euripides: Phaethon* (Cambridge, 1970), 42 n.3; Mimnermus (fr. 11a W) speaks of a golden chamber by the Ocean in which lie the rays of the sun. For previous discussions of Ovid's *ekphrasis*, from which I have benefited greatly, see P. Friedländer, *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentiarius* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1912), 21, A. Rohde, *De Ovidi Arte Epica Capita Duo* (diss. Berlin, 1929), 11-13, H. Bartholomé, *Ovid und die antike Kunst* (diss. Münster, 1935), 17-20, 74-78, H. Fränkel, *Ovid, A Poet between Two Worlds* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1945), 86, H. Heier, 'Ovid's Verhältnis zur bildenden Kunst', in *Ovidiana*, ed. N. I. Herescu (Paris, 1958), 49-74, F. Bömer (ed.), *P. Ovidius Naso: Metamorphosen, Buch I-III* (Heidelberg, 1969), 235 ff., G. Dietz, in G. Dietz and K. Hilbert, *Phaethon und Narziss bei Ovid*, (Heidelberg, 1970), 10-11, E. W. Leach, 'Ekphrasis and the Theme of Artistic Failure in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', *Ramus* 3 (1974), 141 n. 43, R. C. Bass, 'Some Aspects of the Structure of the Phaethon Episode in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', *OJ* n.s. 27 (1977), 404, M. Lausberg, 'Ἀρχέτυπον τῆς ἰδίας ποιήσεως. Zur Bildbeschreibung bei Ovid', *Boreas* 5 (1982), 120-3.

² Rohde, 11, Heier, 54, Bömer, 235. The palaces of Menelaus and Alcinous are compared in brightness to the sun and moon (*Od.* 4.45 f., 7.84 f.), which may have planted a seed in Ovid's mind.

³ Lausberg (n. 1); cf. Ov. *Met.* 13.110, 'clipeus vasti caelatus imagine mundi', 291 ff., Sil. 7.121 f.

⁴ Rohde, 13.

Vergil's main contribution is the motif of the door carvings.⁵ On three memorable occasions he proceeds, like Ovid, from a sketch of a splendid temple (*Georg.* 3.13 ff., *Aen.* 1.446 ff., 6.13, 19) to a detailed description of its artwork: the pictures of Octavian's victories on the doors of his promised temple (*Georg.* 3.26 ff.), the scenes of the Trojan War on the walls of Juno's temple in Carthage (*Aen.* 1.455 ff.), and the tale of the Minotaur wrought by Daedalus on the doors of Apollo's temple in Cumae (*Aen.* 6.20 ff.). Given the novelty of this motif in the tradition of *ekphrasis*, it is possible that Vergil's imagination was prompted by the gleaming temple of Palatine Apollo dedicated by Octavian in 28 B.C., whose doors featured ivory reliefs: one depicting the Galatian attack on Delphi in 279 B.C., the other the slaughter of the Niobids by Apollo and Diana (*Prop.* 2.31.12 ff.).⁶

Ovid's version, from one point of view, could be seen as a *tour de force* incorporating elements from all three great epics. There is a danger here, however, of dismissing the passage as mere embellishment - 'nihil...nisi lumen quoddam orationis epicae' (Rohde). Comparison with Vergil becomes particularly damaging on such an assumption, for the equivalent *ekphraseis* of the *Aeneid* are integrated into the narrative and richly contribute to the characterization of Aeneas through his reaction to the scenes portrayed. By contrast, Phaethon takes no notice of the temple or its carvings and reserves his admiration for the chariot of the Sun (111 f.). But although Ovid - wisely - avoids competition with Vergil in this respect (and, in any case, Phaethon's heedlessness is itself a form of characterization),⁷ his own *ekphrasis* is by no means redundant. In what follows I will, firstly, follow up the insights of Bartholomé and others concerning the narrative function of the passage within the story of Phaethon,⁸ and, secondly, discuss its connections with other parts of the poem, which seem to me indicative of the metaphysical and artistic principles embedded in the *Metamorphoses*.

To begin with an obvious point, the external characteristics of the palace symbolize the nature of the sun, just as the details of the *domus Somni* - within the matching epyllion of Ceyx and Alcyone - evoke the nature of sleep (11.592 ff.). Its brightness and warmth, in particular, already stressed at the end of book one (1.767 ff., 'lumina...iubar...radiis insigne coruscis...lux...ignibus...sidereis'), are conveyed by the enumeration of shiny precious materials⁹ - a traditional feature of such *ekphraseis* which Ovid has taken over and enhanced, not in order to celebrate the ideal of wealth (as it suits Seneca to interpret the passage in *Ep.* 115.12 f.), but for the sake of its symbolic value. Lines 2-4 contain no less than six words implying brightness (*clara, micante, flammis, nitidum, radiabant, lumine*) and four for shiny materials (*auro, pyropo, ebur, argenti*), one of which involves a pun upon the Greek for 'fire' (*flammasque imitante pyropo*); here, and in the references to 'flickering' gold (*micante*) and doors which 'radiate' with light

⁵ Friedländer, 18 f., 21, Bartholomé, 74, Hexter, 56 f.

⁶ On the possible influence of this temple on Ovid's *ekphrasis* see Bartholomé, 17-20, but Hexter (n. 1) is right, I believe, to stress the primacy of literary models and poetic imagination. The motif of carved doors reappears in *Met.* 8.702.

⁷ Hexter, 57.

⁸ Bartholomé, 19, 75-77, J. Braune, *Nonnos und Ovid* (Greifswald, 1935), 11, Fränkel (n. 1), Dietz (n. 1), Leach (n. 1), Bass (n. 1), Lausberg, 121 f.

⁹ Hexter, 53-56.

('radiabant lumine'), the symbolism becomes specific (cf. 1.767, 'lumina solis', 768, 'radiis...coruscis', 2.40 f., 'micantes...radios').

The next section (5-18), in which the carvings on the doors are described, is symbolic in a more oblique fashion. Vulcan's theme is the universe, conceived of as a triple division of earth, sea, and sky (6-7), each with its own inhabitants. In the sea he portrays the sea gods (8-14); on the earth are depicted people, cities, woods, animals, rivers, nymphs, and other rural gods (15-16); above these is a representation of the sky, featuring the twelve signs of the zodiac (17-18). The cosmic theme has a Homeric precedent, of course, but like the motif of precious materials it is especially suited to the Sun and the story of Phaethon, as Bartholomé has observed. Like the pictures on the doors of Vergil's votive temple to Octavian and Apollo's temple on the Palatine, it glorifies the presiding deity; in those cases by reference to his famous victories, here through allusion to the sun's orbit and supreme cosmic role (cf. 1.769 'quod nos auditque videtque', 770 'qui temperat orbem', 2.35 'lux inmensi publica mundi').¹⁰ To highlight the role of the sun, the sky is listed and described last of the three divisions (7, 17-18) and its dominant position is stressed (7 'caelumque, quod imminet orbi', 17 'haec super inposita est'). The sun itself is not mentioned. Perhaps it is imagined as shown at the summit of the 'shining sky' (17 'caeli fulgentis'). At any rate, the twelve 'signs' (18) allude to the zodiacal path of which the Sun warns Phaethon (78 ff.) and which instils such terror in the youth (195 ff.). The picture of the seas encircling the earth - distant and impersonal yet filled with exquisite detail (as Ovid indicates in his digression on the sea gods) - is a panoramic view from above, befitting the deity 'who sees everything' (2.32, cf. 1.769). It is comparable to the Sun's own description of his vertiginous journey (64 ff. '[via] medio est altissima caelo, l' unde mare e terras ipsi mihi saepe videre l' sit timor') and the sight experienced by Phaethon (178 ff. 'ut vero summo despexit ab aethere terras l' infelix Phaethon penitus penitusque iacentes, l' palluit', cf. 227). But alongside the Sun's realistic description and Phaethon's disastrous ride, the scene on the palace doors represents a serene idealization.

The third part of the *ekphrasis* (23-30) complements the description of the exterior. Standing around the Sun, as he sits upon his magnificent throne are Day, Month, Year, the Generations, the Hours, and the four Seasons - in other words, personifications of the chief divisions of time, which are structured chiefly by the sun's diurnal and annual passage. Thus the three sections of the *ekphrasis*, the description of the palace itself (1-4), the door carvings (5-18), and the interior scene (23-30), express different aspects of the sun's nature and role: its dazzling brightness, life-sustaining orbit, an regulation of time.

Common to all three sections is the implication of order and symmetry. The palace is basically a classical temple, the decoration of whose separate parts with a different material - in the tradition of epic palaces - contribute to an effect of harmonious splendour, which is backed up by verbal balance (2 'micante auro ~ flammisque imitante pyropo', 4 'argenti...lumine bifores...valvae', a virtual Golden Line, with the 'solar' verb *radialuxu* at its fulcrum). The representation of the sky overhanging the sea-encircled earth, its signs of the zodiac symmetrically disposed on each door (18), unites the

¹⁰ See Bartholomé and others cited in n. 8. Dietz seems unaware of Bartholomé's contribution but comments well on the reference of the *ekphrasis* to the sun's cosmic role.

three divisions of the universe in a single coherent vision, emphasized, again, by Ovid's poetic arrangement: a general sketch (6-7), in which *aequora* and *terras* are deployed at opposite ends of the first verse (with *medias*, appropriately, in the middle) and *caelum* at the centre of the second; next, detailed descriptions of each part in turn (sea, 8-14, earth, 15-16, sky, 17-18), with seven lines allotted to the sea and two each to the earth and sky (a significant exception to the prevailing symmetry, to which I will return). Inside the palace, the Sun is placed in the centre (24, 31) - recalling the position of a cult statue - with the personifications of time on his right and left (25), amongst them the Hours standing at equidistant intervals (26); each of the four Seasons receives a single line, of which the middle two are linked and balanced by anaphora (28-29 'stabat...stabat'). In sum, the dominant impression is of order and congruity.

It is with signal irony that he whom his palace proclaims to be the guarantor of cosmic order becomes through his rash promise to Phaethon the cause of its disarray. For it is precisely the universe portrayed on the doors which Phaethon almost brings tumbling down.¹¹ What was an innocent spatial description, 'caelum...quod imminet orbi' (7), becomes in retrospect a sinister omen, as he wildly careers each side of the prescribed course and threatens now the stars, now the earth and ocean. The cities (214, cf. 15), woods (216, cf. 15), and rivers (241 ff., cf. 16) depicted on the doors perish in flames. Nymphs (238 ff., cf. 16) and sea deities (268 ff., cf. 8 ff.) suffer from the heat, including Doris and her daughters, (11, 269 'Doridaque et natas'), who are driven from their peaceful play to hide in caves, while the fish they rode upon dive deep (265, cf. 13). The demarcations and balance of the artistic representation experience a total breakdown: the Triones, for example, try to dip themselves in the forbidden sea (171 f.);¹² Serpens, located near the icy pole, grows hot (173 ff.); the moon looks down instead of up at her brother's chariot (208 f.); the earth splits and admits light to the hidden realm of Tartarus (260 f.); the sea becomes land (262 ff.); the waters bury themselves in the earth (273 f.). Sea, earth, and sky, the triple structure shown on the doors, stand upon the brink of destruction, as Tellus emphasizes in her climactic appeal to Jupiter (298 f. 'si freta, si terrae pereunt, si regia caeli, in chaos antiquum confundimur'), in which the three divisions are mentioned in the same order as before and the metaphor *regia caeli* revives the former symbolic equation of palace and cosmos.

The threat to the universe is averted by Jupiter's thunderbolt, and its fate transferred to Phaethon and the Sun's chariot. The description of this chariot in 105 ff. recalls that of the palace.¹³ Once again, there are Homeric precedents (esp. *Il.* 5.722 ff.),¹⁴ and a glance towards the Palatine temple of Apollo, on which stood a sculpture of the solar chariot, is not unlikely.¹⁵ Like the palace, it is the work of Vulcan (106), and the description of its shining parts - gold axle, pole, and wheel rims (107 f.), silver spokes (108),

¹¹ Bartholomé, 75, Bass (n. 1).

¹² A detail probably suggested by the Homeric description of Achilles' shield, in which the Bear is characterized as 'without a share in the bath of Ocean' (*Il.* 18.489, cf. *Met.* 13.293, 'immunemque aequoris Arcton').

¹³ Bass (n. 1).

¹⁴ Rohde, 18 f.

¹⁵ Bartholomé, 17, 19.

and yoke studded with chrysolites and jewels arranged *ex ordine* (109) - echoes the former *ekphrasis* and serves a similar symbolic function; the style, as before, matches the exquisite perfection of the thing described,¹⁶ and the mention of the Hours, who yoke the horses, provides another link (118, cf. 26). A marvellous vehicle indeed, but no more immune to harm than the idealized world system represented by, and on, the palace. Smashed to pieces, its splendid parts lie scattered far and wide (316-18) like the limbs of its driver.

To summarize thus far, I have tried to support and supplement Bartholomé's theory that the palace *ekphrasis* bears a symbolic relation to the ensuing narrative. Its function (and, to a lesser extent, that of the chariot *ekphrasis*) is to provide an image of the sun's benign maintenance of universal order whereby the extent of the disorder caused by Phaethon can be gauged. In this respect the *ekphrasis* may be compared with the idyllic landscapes which often preface tales of rape and transformation in the *Metamorphoses*. Idealized, tranquil, remote, they throw into relief the theme of sexual violence, as the description of the Sun's palace does to the theme of cosmic disaster. I turn now to larger implications of the *ekphrasis* which arise from its relationship to passages outside the story of Phaethon.

With reference to the pictures on the door of the Sun's palace, Galinsky has asserted that '[2.5-18] lacks the purposeful connection with other parts of the poem which is characteristic of the *ekphraseis* in the *Aeneid*'.¹⁷ He seems, however, to have overlooked a clear connection with the beginning of book one.¹⁸ For the world portrayed by Vulcan reflects the world created from chaos by the anonymous god whom Ovid also represents as a kind of artisan (1.57 'mundi fabricator', 79 'opifex rerum'). What marks above all this created world is the orderly disposal of its parts within the whole. Chaos consists of the opposite: a war between the elements and their properties in which no form is manifest (1.5-20). The only signs of order appear, first, in the allusion to a tripartite cosmic system similar to that seen on the doors of the Sun's palace (5 'ante mare et terras et, quod tegit omnia, caelum', 10-11 'Titan...Phoebe [i.e. the sky]', 12 'tellus', 14 'Amphitrite' [i.e. the sea]; 15 'tellus...et pontus et aer', cf. 180, 257); second, in the lines describing the *absence* of sun, moon, earth, and sea (10 ff.), in which 'to emphasise the confusion of Chaos as contrasted with the order and regularity of the created universe, he places five carefully constructed lines in the middle of a series of lines broken up into smaller fragments' (Lee).¹⁹ These hints adumbrate the idea of a unity comprised of discrete but neatly integrated parts which is so prominent in the creation story and the description of the Sun's palace.

The first act of the creator is to separate the confused elements into the four layers of aether, air, earth, and sea (21-31) - a more scientific quadripartite scheme - and next he shapes the world into a globe for the sake of equipoise (34-5). Each of the four elements is then sketched in turn: salt

¹⁶ Note, e.g., the triple anaphora and chiasmic arrangement in 107-08 ('aureus axis...temo aureus, aurea...curvatura rotae, radiorum argenteus ordo'), and the Golden Line in 110.

¹⁷ G. K. Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975), 97.

¹⁸ M. v. Albrecht, 'Ovids Humor und die Einheit der *Metamorphosen*', in *Ovid*, ed. M. v. Albrecht and E. Zinn (Darmstadt, 1968), 433 (originally published in *Die altsprachliche Unterrichts* 6.2 [1963], 47-72), Dietz, 10.

¹⁹ A. G. Lee (ed.), *P. Ovidi Nasonis Metamorphoseon Liber I* (Cambridge, 1953), 71.

and fresh water (36-42); earth, with its plains, valleys, woods, and mountains (43-51, including a digression on the five symmetrical climatic zones); air, the domain of meteorological phenomena (52-66, including a digression on the four cardinal winds); and aether (67-68). Finally, a list of the living inhabitants of each element - stars and gods in the heavens (73), fish in the sea (74), wild animals on the land and birds in the air (75) - capped by the creation of human beings (76-88), whose nature - it should be noted - is to gaze up at the sky and stars. The *ekphrasis* in book two contains some verbal echoes of this account (2.7 'caelumque, quod inminet orbi', cf. 1.52 'inminet his aer', 2.15 'terra viros urbesque gerit silvasque ferasque', cf. 1.75 'terra feras cepit', 2.17 'haec super inposita est', cf. 1.67 'haec super inposuit') and the general similarity between the two conceptions of the universe is obvious. Suffice it to mention three leading ideas which inform each passage: first, the division of the cosmos into distinct parts; second, the harmonious and symmetrical organization of these parts within the whole; third, the occupation of each part by particular phenomena and living beings (to which could be added a fourth - that of divine providence, which is explicit in book one [48 *cura dei*] and implicit in book two). In both passages, too, the impression of order is enhanced by the clear articulation and balance of the poetic treatment.

A parallel thus emerges between books one and two. Both begin with lofty visions of a well-designed, orderly universe; in both the vision dissolves through the effects, respectively, of moral deterioration and folly. Symptomatic of this disintegration is, in both accounts, the crossing of forbidden boundaries. The golden age, in which people respect the physical and moral limits established by the creator, sinks to the iron, in which those boundaries are violated by the invention of sailing, land division, mining, war, and murder.²⁰ The myth of the giants, who attempt to scale heaven (instead of merely contemplating it), and of Lycaon, who threatens the king of the gods, illustrate this breakdown of moral order, which receives a fitting punishment in the form of the physical confusion caused by the flood. Indeed, the disappearance of a distinction between land and sea (291 f.) and the incongruous, paradoxical effects of the flood (293 ff.) recall the original confusion of Chaos²¹ (and anticipate the chaos produced by Phaethon). Phaethon too is a mortal who attempts to scale the heavens - though not, of course, with evil intent - and his ambition throws the world into turmoil, as does the Flood. Like the giants, he is blasted from the sky by Jupiter, but not before almost causing a return to Chaos, as Tellus laments (2.298-99 'si freta, si terrae pereunt, si regia caeli, I in chaos antiquum confundimur'). We also recall that Jupiter chose to destroy humanity by water rather than fire out of fear of a prophecy that the sea, earth, and sky - note the same triple structure and the same suggestive metaphor, *regia caeli* - would one day be set on fire, which is clearly a forward allusion to the story of Phaethon (1.256-58 'esse quoque in fatis reminiscitur adfore tempus, I quo mare, quo tellus correptaque regia caeli I ardeat et mundi moles operosa laboret').

Despite the initial creation from chaos to cosmos, the overall tendency of both books is from cosmos to chaos, or at least disorder. And though a semblance of order is restored after flood and fire, the world has lost its

pristine perfection. Rife with passion, violent, unpredictable - it is now a untidier, more ambiguous place, in which the gods have forfeited their moral claim to supremacy and providential grand design is replaced by the makeshift of metamorphosis. The idealistic conceptions of the universe which open each book thus act as a foil to Ovid's own sense of reality, as reflected in the mythical tales.

Simplistic as it would be to interpret the Pythagorean sermon in book fifteen as a personal credo (Ovid is not a dogmatist, even a Pythagorean one and the passage abounds in parody), it surely stands in deliberate antithesis to the visions of cosmic order at the beginning of the poem and presents a view of things which is more in line with Ovid's own intuitions. According to Pythagoras, no physical form remains constant but is always in the process of changing from one appearance to another (15.177 f.). This dynamic but unstable world, though not by any means a state of chaos, nevertheless constitutes an entirely different sort of reality from the systematic and fixed universe of the first creation. The four elements, for example, all derive from one another (15.237 ff.), visible proof of which is the constant interchange between the land and sea or other waters (262 ff.) - elements so delimited in the original conception (1.32 f., 69). The sun itself, the embodiment of stability in book two, continually changes in appearance, like the moon at the year (15.192 ff.). Galinsky (p. 105) compares the two treatments of the four seasons to the detriment of the 'Pythagorean', which he finds 'rather more prosaic' than the 'visual and graphic depiction' of the personified seasons in book two. There is merit in this as an aesthetic judgment, but at a different level the frozen tableau of seasons in book two, each characterized by an external product (flowers, wheat, grapes, and ice), is insensitive to the continuity of change. Pythagoras speaks instead of four 'aspects' of the year (*species*), which in their waxing and waning vitality are comparable to the four stages of life.

The account of creation in book one betrays no hint of this impermanence, unless it be the digression on the four winds (which are said to be scarcely restrained from tearing the world apart, 1.57 ff.). In book two however, I suggest that such a hint is smuggled into the description of the door carvings via the section about the sea (8-14). As was observed before, the length of this section (7 lines) exceeds that allotted to the earth and sky (2 lines each) and thus disturbs the general symmetry of the *ekphrasis*. Less tangible, but no less significant, is the relaxation of the sublime cosmic theme by the playful theme of sea gods and goddesses.²²

Puzzled by the emphasis on the sea, Knaack argued that Ovid had conflated two palaces: a Euripidean citadel and a sea palace deriving from an alleged Alexandrian version.²³ Bartholomé, more convincingly, has argued that in singling out the sea for special treatment Ovid is filling a gap left by Homer in his description of the shield of Achilles;²⁴ he also refers to the asymmetrical tendency of Hellenistic art and the contemporary fondness for marine deities as a decorative motif. In addition, Ovid was undoubtedly influenced by the poetic topic of marine tableaux which stems from the sea journey of Poseidon in *Il.* 13.27 ff. (following a description of his palace

²² Lausberg, 122.

²⁰ C. C. Rhoter, 'Ideology, Tripartition and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', *Arethusa* 13 (1980), 303.

²¹ Rhoter, 305.

²³ G. Knaack, *Quaestiones Phaethontae* (Berlin, 1886), 28 f.; for criticism see, e.g., Rohd, 12, Hentzer, 59.

²⁴ Bartholomé, 75 f., cf. Hentzer, 60.

and chariot).²⁵ One of the most picturesque examples is the cortège of sea creatures, Nereids, Poseidon, and Tritons in the *Europa* of Moschus (115-24), immediately preceding a description of Europa's sea journey (125-30) which is imitated by Ovid at the end of book two.²⁶ Perhaps, therefore, he has transferred the tableau to the beginning and adapted it to the Sun-palace *ekphrasis*²⁷ (which itself is comparable in position and technique to the description of Europa's basket in Moschus). These points help to explain the attractiveness of the theme to Ovid but not, I think, its role within the *ekphrasis* as a whole. For it seems to me that the effect of the description is subtly to undermine the metaphysical symbolism of the Sun's palace through its allusion to the more disorderly world of the *Metamorphoses*.

The list of sea deities falls into two parts. First, a trio of sea gods: Triton, Proteus, and Aegaeon. The mention of Triton, classically half-man, half-fish, recalls the scene in book one (331 ff.) in which he rises from the deep, encrusted with shellfish, in order to call back the flood waters with a blast on his conch (hence the epithet *canorus*). Proteus, of course, is the very epitome of metamorphosis, as his epithet *ambiguus* attests (cf. 8.730 f. 'sunt, quibus in plures ius est transire figuras, I ut tibi, complexi terram maris incola, Proteu'). Aegaeon, an alternative name of Briareus, one of the hundred-handed giants, clings to the backs of whales - plural! - with his (hundred) arms (*suis...lacertis*); Hesiod and Homer represent Aegaeon-Briareus as an ally of Zeus (*Theog.* 617 ff., *Il.* 1.401 ff.), but according to another tradition, apparently accepted by Vergil, he was a son of Ge and Pontus who fought against Zeus on the side of the Titans (*Titanom.* fr. 2 K, cf. Verg. *Aen.* 10.565-68, 6.287).

So far, then, images of blended, unstable, and monstrous form, with - in Aegaeon - a possible undercurrent of violence. The description continues with a charming vignette of Doris and her daughters, the Nereids, who were last seen marvelling at the underwater sights produced by the flood (1.301-2); one of them, Galatea, is later the subject of a separate tale (13.738 ff.). They are broken down here into three groups, swimming, drying their hair, and riding fish (11-13), and then into individual members, distinguishable from one another but sharing a family resemblance (13-14). The significance of these lines is harder to decipher, but I suggest that Ovid is aiming, first, at a contrast between grotesque male and sensual female sea deities, and, second, through the notions of diversity within similarity and similarity amidst diversity, to create an impression of ambiguity - aims which both run counter to the Olympian ideology of the palace and its artwork as a whole. There is naturally no suggestion that Vulcan - if one may speak so anachronistically - introduced these details for any other purpose than to populate attractively this part of the universe. It is Ovid who, by dwelling on them disproportionately and describing them as he does, has upset the symmetry of the 'original' design, introduced a vein of humour, and unlocked the dormant ideas of incongruousness, change, and ambiguity. This is his way of indirectly challenging what Leach (p. 141) has well described as 'that

same over-exaggerated image of order that characterizes other "official" self-presentations of the gods' (for example, the tapestry of Minerva).

If the description of the sea deities affords a window into the world of the *Metamorphoses*, as I am suggesting, then perhaps the *ekphrasis* should be scrutinized for artistic as well as metaphysical implications. The theme of art and the artist is prominent in the *Metamorphoses*, evincing not only an interest in painting, sculpture, and weaving for their own sake, but a personal preoccupation with the problem of artistic representation. This introspective tendency is seen most clearly in the story of Minerva and Arachne (6.1 ff.). Many have analyzed the contrast between their tapestries: Minerva's illustrations of divine control and Arachne's of divine deception. At narrative level, the subjects reflect the divine and human perspectives of the contestants and anticipate the cruel punishment of Arachne. They also present two views of the world and ways of representing them: a theocentric, orderly world, appropriately expressed by a symmetrical and closed design and an anthropocentric, turbulent world, depicted in a free-flowing associative manner akin to Hellenistic taste.²⁸ The order of treatment and the angry reaction of Minerva point up the merits of Arachne's work and subvert the former's claim to artistic supremacy. But, although Arachne's work is closer than Minerva's to the style and spirit of the *Metamorphoses*, the antithesis is not so much between good and bad as between two extremes which distil the contradictory tendencies of the poem.²⁹

Can an analogous significance be detected in the description of the door carvings of the Sun's palace? These are the work of 'Muciber' - 'the softener of metal' - whose skill is openly praised (5 'materiam superabat opus', c. 111-12) and implied by the comprehensiveness and extreme difficulty of the subject matter: for the supreme artist, the supreme theme (in honour of the supreme celestial body). In this context, the phrase 'materiam superabat opus' means 'the artistry surpassed the raw materials', i.e. the precious metal which are Vulcan's medium, but the phrase has connotations evocative of literary as well as plastic art. Galinsky (p. 51) has observed that the words are applicable to Ovid's treatment of metamorphosis and myth, and it is significant that Ovid applies to himself the same opposition of *materia* and *opus* (*Tr.* 2.336 'materia ne superetur opus'; cf. 1.5.56 'materia vire exsuperante meas'), thereby suggesting that the poet's task is to master, and not be mastered by, his subject - a task which he claims implicitly to have fulfilled in the present immortal *opus* (15.871 ff.). A further similarity between the *Metamorphoses* and Vulcan's work is their cosmic breadth. In literary historical terms, Ovid has combined Vergil's motif of door carving with Homer's description of the shield of Achilles. But, as I have tried to show, Vulcan's universe also recalls Ovid's account of creation in the corresponding part of book one, and therefore contains a self-reference. By attributing to the supreme artist the same cosmic theme which he himself has addressed, Ovid affirms the universal, all-embracing scope of his *carmina perpetuum*.

But before pressing this comparison it must be remembered that the

²⁵ See W. Bühler, *Die Europa des Moschos* (Wiesbaden, 1960), 156 f.

²⁶ Bühler, 24 f.

²⁷ E. J. Kenney in *Ovid: Metamorphoses*, Translated by A. D. Melville. With an Introduction and Notes by E. J. Kenney (Oxford and New York, 1986), 385. With 'Tritona canorum' (8) cf. *Eur.* 123 f.; with 'pisce vehi quaedam' (13) cf. *Eur.* 118 f.

²⁸ See *inter alios* Lausberg, 112 ff., who suggests that Ovid's self-referential use of the tapestry descriptions may have been suggested by Hellenistic interpretations of the robe woven by Helen (*Il.* 3.125 ff.), which, because it contains scenes of the Trojan War, was taken to be a symbol of the *Iliad* itself.

²⁹ Leach, 103 f., 117 f.

palace and its artwork as a whole promote and glorify an orderly, Olympian - not to say authoritarian - view of things which is constantly called into question by the narrative of the poem. For Ovid to hold up Vulcan's art as the ideal would be equivalent to his siding with Minerva against Arachne. I suggest, therefore, in conclusion that the classical, 'Minervan' quality of Vulcan's conception is tempered by Ovid's loaded description of the sea deities, which in its asymmetry, wit, and latently subversive, self-referential detail is closer to the 'counter-classical' freedom of Arachne's work. Through this superimposition of his own taste, Ovid hints that the idealizing, formalistic tendency of art runs up against the Protean nature of reality and intimates the possibility of a universal work which would bring to the forefront the infinite strangeness, particularity, and flux of experience, as embodied in the less exalted figures of mythology. A work, in fact, like the *Metamorphoses*.

Vassar College

ROBERT BROWN

TIME FOR AUGUSTUS: OVID, AUGUSTUS AND THE *FASTI*

Andrew Wallace-Hadrill

Ovid's *Fasti* is not among his best-loved works. Critics have found the theme of a versified almanac uninspiring.² For historians of Roman religion, on the other hand, from J. G. Frazer on, this has been a rich and rewarding piece, and the latest discussion by Mary Beard uses it to offer new insights into the religiosity of Augustan Rome.³ My own reason for turning to the *Fasti* now is that it seems to me an outstandingly good test case of our interpretation of the relationship between poetry and political propaganda. It was examined in this sense by McKeown in the latest Woodman & West collection;⁴ my approach will be different from his, not least because I wish to draw attention to the sort of epigraphic and archaeological material which is more familiar to historians than to critics. This is partly a matter of sheer luck of survival: that by chance we have preserved some of the crucial background material to the poem in the shape of the *Fasti Praenestini*. But it is also because new approaches and new discoveries open up exciting possibilities for both critic and historian in using the monuments of Rome not as a source of documentary 'facts', but to evoke the physical setting of Augustan Rome.

My paper falls into three sections. The first is general and theoretical and asks questions about the nature of political propaganda in poetry. The second looks at the background to the *Fasti*, in the shape of the propaganda and image-making in which Augustus was unquestionably and directly involved, his transformation of republican time by his self-insertion into the Roman year and calendar. The third looks at Ovid's procedures against this background.

1. Poetry and Propaganda

My theoretical section must be brief: the issues are too large and complex for

¹ This is a revised version of a paper given at Edinburgh in May 1987 to a meeting of the Seminar Boreas on the theme 'Ovid and Augustus'. I owe much by way of stimulation and encouragement to the organizers of and participants in the Seminar, particularly to Denis Feeney and Duncan Kennedy.

² E.g. L. P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled* (1955), 268 ff.

³ M. Beard, 'A Complex of Times: No More Sheep on Romulus' Birthday', *PCPhS* (1987) forthcoming. I am indebted to the author for sowing ideas in my own mind by an early draft of this paper.

⁴ J. C. McKeown, 'Ovid's *Fasti* and Augustan Politics', in Woodman & West (edd.), *Poetry and Politics in the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge, 1984), 169 ff.