

## Arachne's Tapestry: Ovid's Mortal Artisan Weaves Her Creativity, Voice, and Agency

1. *Lydas tamen illa per urbes  
quaesierat studio nomen memorabile* (6.11-12)<sup>1</sup> Arachne sought a remarkable name through her pursuit throughout the cities of Lydia<sup>2</sup>
2. *scires a Pallade doctam* (6.23) you would think she was taught by Pallas
3. *Pallas anum simulat falsosque in tempora canos  
addit et infirmos baculo quos sustinet artus.* (6.26-27) Pallas imitates an old woman and adds false grey hair to her temples and ageing her limbs supports them with a stick.
4. *et gracili geminas intendunt stamine telas  
tela iugo iuncta est, stamen secernit harundo,  
inserirur medium radiis subtemen acutis,  
quod digiti expediunt, atque inter stamina ductum  
percusso pavunt insecti pectine dentes.  
Utraque festinant cinctaeque ad pectora vestes  
brachia docta movent, studio fallente laborem.* (6.54-60) They stretch out fine threads for the warp over twin frames. The frame is fastened to the crossbeam, the warp separated by a reed, the weft is inserted between by sharp shuttles which fingers have readied, and between the warp the weft is beaten, with the striking comb of notched teeth. They each hasten and with their clothes gathered to their breasts they move learned arms, their zeal not making it seem like work.



5. Central portion of the reconstruction of the Parthenon's West Pediment; Acropolis Museum, Athens
6. *Circuit extremas oleis pacalibus oras  
(is modus est) operisque sua facit arbore finem.* (6.101-102) She surrounded the outer edges with the peaceful olive (this was the last part) and ended her work with her own tree.

<sup>1</sup> Ovid. 2004. *P. Ovidi Nasonis Metamorphoses* edited by R. J. Tarrant. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Translations adapted from [www.poetryintranslation.com](http://www.poetryintranslation.com) by A. S. Kline

7. *Maeonis elusam designat imagine tauri  
Europen; verum taurum, freta vera putares.  
Ipsa videbatur terras spectare relictas  
et comites clamare suas tactumque vereri  
adsilientis aquae timidisque reducere plantas.  
Fecit et Asterien aquila luctante teneri,  
fecit olorinis Ledam recubare sub alis;  
addidit ut satyri celatus imagine pulchram  
Iuppiter implevit gemino Nyctei da fetu,  
Amphitryon fuerit, cum te, Tirynthia, cepit,  
aureus ut Danaen, Asopida luserit ignis,  
**Mnemosynen pastor**, varius Deo ida serpens.  
Te quoque mutatum torvo, Neptune, iuvenco  
virgine in Aeolia posuit; tu visus Enipeus  
gignis Aloidas, aries Bisaltida fallis,  
et te flava comas frugum mitissima mater  
sensit equum, sensit volucrum crinita colubris  
mater equi volucris, sensit delphina Melantho.  
Omnibus his faciemque suam faciemque locorum  
reddidit. Est illic agrestis imagine Phoebus,  
utque modo accipitris pennas, modo terga leonis  
gesserit, ut pastor Macareida luserit Issen,  
Liber ut Erigonen falsa deceiverit uva,  
ut Saturnus equo geminum Chirona creavit.* (6.103-128)

The Maeonian girl depicts Europa deceived by the form of the bull: you would have thought it a real bull and real waves. She is seen looking back to the shore she has left, and calling to her companions, displaying fear at the touch of the surging water, and drawing up her shrinking feet. Also Arachne showed Asterie, held by the eagle, struggling, and Leda lying beneath the swan's wings. She added Jupiter who, hidden in the form of a satyr, filled Antiope, daughter of Nycteus with twin offspring; who, as Amphitryon, was charmed by you, Alcmena, of Tiryns; by Danaë, as a golden shower; by Aegina, daughter of Asopus, as a flame; by Mnemosyne, as a shepherd; by Proserpine, Ceres's daughter, as a spotted snake. She wove you, Neptune, also, changed to a fierce bull for Canace, Aeolus's daughter. In Enipeus's form you begot the Aloidae, and deceived Theophane as a ram. The golden-haired, gentlest, mother of the cornfields, knew you as a horse. The snake-haired mother of the winged horse, knew you as a winged bird. Melantho knew you as a dolphin. She gave all these their own aspects, and the aspects of the place. Here is Phoebus like a countryman, and she shows him now with the wings of a hawk, and now in a lion's skin, and how as a shepherd he tricked Isse, Macareus's daughter. She showed how Bacchus ensnared Erigone with delusive grapes, and how Saturn as the double of a horse begot Chiron

Lines	God	Form	Victim	Also in <i>Met.</i>
6.103-107	Jupiter	bull	Europa	2.844-875
6.108	Jupiter	eagle	Asterie	
6.109	Jupiter	swan	Leda	
6.110-111	Jupiter	satyr	Antiope	
6.112	Jupiter	Amphitryon (husband)	Alcmena	9.23-26
6.113	Jupiter	shower of gold	Danaë	4.611, 11.116-117
6.113	Jupiter	fire	Aegina	
6.114	Jupiter	shepherd	Mnemosyne	
6.114	Jupiter	snake	Proserpina	[Pluto rapes Proserpina, 5.392-425]
6.115-116	Neptune	bull	Canace	
6.116-117	Neptune	Enipeus (river)	Iphimedia	
6.117	Neptune	ram	Theophane	
6.118-119	Neptune	horse	Ceres	
6.119-120	Neptune	bird	Medusa	
6.120	Neptune	dolphin	Melantho	
6.122	Apollo	farmer	Admetus	
6.123	Apollo	hawk	Unidentified	
6.123-124	Apollo	lion	Unidentified	
6.124	Apollo	shepherd	Isse	
6.125	Bacchus	false grape	Erigone	
6.126	Saturn	horse	Philyra	

8. The content of Arachne's tapestry

9. *non equidem vellem, quoniam nocitura fuerunt,  
Pieridum sacris inposuisse manum,  
sed nunc quid faciam? vis me tenet ipsa sacrorum,  
et carmen demens carmine laesus amo.  
sic nova Dulichio lotos gustata palato  
illo, quo nocuit, grata sapore fuit.  
sentit amans sua damna fere, tamen haeret in illis,  
materiam culpaе persequiturque suae.  
nos quoque delectant, quamvis nocuere, libelli,  
quodque mihi telum vulnera fecit, amo.  
forsitan hoc studium possit furor esse videri,  
sed quiddam furor hic utilitatis habet,  
semper in obtutu mentem vetat esse malorum,  
praesentis casus inmemoremque facit,  
utque suum Bacche non sentit saucia vulnus,  
dum stupet Idaeis exululata modis,  
sic ubi mota calent viridi mea pectora thyrsos,  
altior humano spiritus ille malo est.* (Tr. 4.1.27-44)<sup>3</sup>

10. *Doluit successu flava virago  
et rupit pictas, caelestia crimina, vestes;  
utque Cytoriaco radium de monte tenebat,  
ter quater Idmoniae frontem percussit Arachnes.  
Non tulit infelix laqueoque animosa ligavit  
guttura. Pendentem Pallas miserata levavit  
atque ita "vive quidem, pende tamen, improba" dixit:  
"lexque eadem poenae, ne sis secunda futuri,  
dicta tuo generi serisque nepotibus esto."  
Post ea discedens sucis Hecateidos herbae  
sparsit, et extemplo tristi medicamine tactae  
defluxere comae, cum quis et naris et aures,  
fitque caput minimum, toto quoque corpore parva est:  
in latere exiles digiti pro cruribus haerent,  
cetera venter habet, de quo tamen illa remittit  
stamen et antiquas exercet aranea telas.* (6.130-145)

11. *saepe Cytoriaco deducit pectine crines* (4.311)

Since they were once destined to be dangerous, I might wish I'd never touched the Pierian rites. But what can I do, now? Their very power holds me, and, maddened, I love song, though song wounded me. So the strange lotus-flowers, Odysseus's men tasted, gave pleasure by a flavor that did harm. Often a lover's aware of his own ruin, still he clings, chasing after the substance of his mistake. I too, I delight in books, though they harmed me, and I love the weapon that dealt my wound. Perhaps these studies might seem like madness, but the madness has a certain benefit. It stops the mind from always gazing at its woes, and makes it forget its present circumstance. Like a Bacchante, possessed, feeling no wound, while the wild howling of the Idaean rites numbs her, so, when my mind's inspired, stirred by the leafy thyrsus, the spirit is lifted above mortal suffering.

The golden-haired warrior goddess was grieved by its success, and tore the tapestry, embroidered with the gods' crimes, and as she held her Cytorian shuttle, she struck Idmonian Arachne, three or four times, on the forehead. The unfortunate girl could not bear it, and courageously slipped a noose around her neck: Pallas, in pity, lifted her, as she hung there, and said these words, 'Live on then, and yet hang, condemned one, but, lest you are careless in future, this same condition is declared, in punishment, against your descendants, to the last generation!' Departing after saying this, she sprinkled her with the juice of Hecate's herb, and immediately at the touch of this dark poison, Arachne's hair fell out. With it went her nose and ears, her head shrank to the smallest size, and her whole body became tiny. Her slender fingers stuck to her sides as legs, the rest is belly, from which she still spins a thread, and, as a spider, weaves her ancient web.

often she combs out her hair with a Cytorian comb

<sup>3</sup> Ovid. 1939. *Tristia* edited by A. L. Wheeler. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

## Bibliography

- Anderson, W.S. 1997. *Ovid's Metamorphoses, Books 1-5*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Anderson, W.S. 1972. *Ovid's Metamorphoses, Books 6-10*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Fantham, E. 2004. *Ovid's Metamorphoses*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Feldherr, A. 2010. *Playing Gods: Ovid's Metamorphoses and the Politics of Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Harries, B. 1990. "The Spinner and the Poet, Arachne in Ovid 'Metamorphoses'." *Proceeding of the Cambridge Philological Society* 36, 64-82.
- Heath, J. 2011. "Women's Work: Female Transmission of Mythical Narrative." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 141, 69-104.
- Joplin, P. K. 1991. "The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours." In *Rape and Representation*, edited by L. A. Higgins and B.R. Silver, 35-66. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Knox, P. E. 1986. *Ovid's Metamorphoses and the Traditions of Augustan Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society.
- Kruger, K. S. 2001. *Weaving the Word: The Metaphorics of Weaving and Female Textual Production*. Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press.
- Lateiner, D. 1984. "Mythic and Non-mythic Artists in Ovid's Metamorphoses." *Ramus* 13, 1-30.
- Leach, E. W. 1974. "Ekphrasis and the Theme of Artistic Failure in Ovid's Metamorphoses." *Ramus* 3, 102-142.
- Loven, L. L. 2003. "Wool Work as a Gender Symbol in Ancient Rome." In *Ancient Textiles: Production, Craft, and Society*, edited by C. Gillis and M. L. Nosch, 229-236. Oxford: Oxbow Books.
- Moeller, W. O. 1976. *The Wool Trade of Ancient Pompeii*. Leiden: Brill.
- Oliensis, E. 2004. "The Power of Image-Makers: Representation and Revenge in Ovid Metamorphoses 6 and Tristia 4." *Classical Antiquity* 23, 285.
- Pantelia, M. C. 1993. "Spinning and Weaving: Ideas of Domestic Order in Homer." *The American Journal of Philology* 114, 493-501.
- Richlin, A. 1992. "Reading Ovid's Rapes." In *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, edited by A. Richlin, 158-179. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Scheid, J. and J. Svenbro. 1996. *The Craft of Zeus: Myths of Weaving and Fabric*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Segal, C. 1998. "Ovid's Metamorphic Bodies: Art, Gender, and Violence in the 'Metamorphoses'." *Arion* 5, 9-41.
- Sharrock, A. R. 1991. "Womanufacture." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 81, 36-49.
- Snyder, J. M. 1981. "The Web of Song: Weaving Imagery in Homer and the Lyric Poets." *The Classical Journal* 76, 193-196.
- Thompson, W. 1982. "Weaving: A Man's Work." *The Classical World* 75, 217-222.
- Vostral, M. J. 1995. *Women and Weaving in Classical Greece: Ancient and Modern Perceptions of Women's Work*. Tallahassee: Florida State University Press.