

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

Ovid—be it in his *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria*, *Heroides*, *Medea*, *Medicamina Faciei Femineae*, or *Metamorphoses*—is interested in presenting a feminine point of view, even if it may be an intentionally skewed or misogynistic one. Scholars on the *Metamorphoses* have additionally noted the prevalence of artisans whose artistic processes act as a doublet for those of poets (Janan 1994; Leach 1974; Segal 1998), including perhaps Ovid himself (Ahl 1985; Fantham 2004; Feldherr 2010; Harries 1990; Lateiner 1984; Oliensis 2004). These two sensitivities, the female perspective and the artisan perspective, intersect in the special attention which Ovid affords weavers in the *Metamorphoses*. This paper reexamines Arachne, whose episode has long captivated readers and received much attention in previous scholarship (Ahl 1985; Fantham 2004; Feldherr 2010; Heath 2011; Harries 1990; Janan 1994; Joplin 1991; Kruger 2001; Lateiner 1984; Leach 1974; McAuley 2012; Oliensis 2004; Segal 1971; Segal 1998; Scheid and Svenbro 1996; Vostral 1995), and demonstrates that Arachne not only exhibits great artistic skill, but also establishes her creativity, voice, and agency through her tapestry.

Arachne displays a creative voice in her tapestry which illustrates her agency to produce a work about the rapes committed by gods which is outside of her own personal experience. Minerva, conversely, does not reveal artistic creativity, voice, or agency because her tapestry merely reproduces a past experience, her victory over Neptune. In her frustration about her artistic deficits, Minerva cannot respond in kind through weaving, she can only inflict violence upon Arachne. Additionally, Minerva's refusal to recognize that Arachne's intention could differ from her interpretation of this tapestry as a second act of hubris restricts the true voice and agency which Arachne exercised through her weaving (Joplin 1991; Kruger 2001; Leach 1974;

McAuley 2012; Pantelia 1993) and Minerva's narrow reading subsequently causes a silencing of Arachne's creativity, voice, and agency.

Arachne attempts to reassert her agency when she refuses to submit to Minerva's beating and hangs herself. The silencing of Arachne is fully completed, however, when Minerva laments Arachne's death and transforms her into a spider. This action is often considered one of pity and even kindness, but Minerva's curse on Arachne and her offspring suggests otherwise. The creature Arachne becomes has no artistic creativity, voice, or agency because spiders only mechanically weave webs of basic, known patterns (Leach 1974), just as Minerva relies on a well-rehearsed subject of her own experience. Minerva jealously brings about Arachne's transformation and leaves Arachne to suffer as Minerva does, a weaver without creativity, voice, or agency. Though Arachne is ultimately deprived of these qualities, she, unlike Minerva, at least had them at one time and used them to achieve a *nomen memorabile* and the position as the progenitor of the enduring spidery race.

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