

A Change of Place: Intertextual Remodeling of the Abduction of Proserpina in Ovid's
Metamorphoses

The narrative (*Met.* 5) of Persephone's abduction and forced marriage to her uncle is one of the best-known large-scale Ovidian adaptations of an extant text, the Greek *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. The relevance of the hymnic narrative to Ovid has been noted for a long time, and Hinds' pathbreaking treatment of Ovid's Persephone narratives did a great deal to explore techniques of intertextual engagement as well as to explain the myth in specifically Ovidian terms (see Hinds 1987 and 1998). Like others (e.g., Nappa 2002), I propose to refine such readings further in order to show that the account in *Metamorphoses* comments on the version in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* to resituate the story firmly in a specifically Ovidian and Italo-Roman universe.

While Ovid makes use of many of the associations and specific details of the narrative of the *Hymn to Demeter*, his universe is essentially different. Not only is there an Italian perspective on mythology—with purely Italian myths and figures added to the overarching narrative, building in a Roman outlook from the beginning. Ovid's goals may be different from those of the Augustan regime, and even of other poets, but they are as important as his Greek antecedents.

To take a particular example, Hinds makes much of the way in which *locus est* (*Met.* 5.385) suggests the *locus est* of the *locus amoenus* topos. As he notes, Ovid's *locus amoenus* here suggests the manmade amphitheater of *Ars amatoria* 1.103-08, which serves as the setting for the rape of the Sabine women, just as this *locus amoenus* is a natural amphitheater in which the rape of Persephone will take place.

Hinds, notes, too, that a natural awning of tree boughs (5.388-89) shields the amphitheater-like space from the harsh rays of the sun, *Phoebos ictus* (5.389). Here “the blows

of Phoebus” are the harsh rays of sunlight described as if they are blows struck by Phoebus himself, but in another context the “blows of Phoebus” might equally be those that Phoebus suffers, as in *Metamorphoses* 1 when Cupid reacts to Apollo’s taunting by shooting him with an arrow that fills him with desire. At the same time, Cupid strikes Daphne with an arrow that makes her flee the amorous Apollo (1.452-76).

If we push the associations of the two kinds of blow—Apollo’s and Cupid’s—a bit further, taking into account the story of Apollo and Daphne, we can see another way in which Ovid’s Persephone story is part of a specifically Ovidian universe and specifically Ovidian myth. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, the rape of Persephone is brought about when her father Zeus makes a deal with his brother Hades to provide Persephone as the latter’s bride, an arrangement made without consulting Persephone or her mother Demeter; this all constitutes a stage in the development of Zeus’ emerging order. In the Ovidian account, Venus orders Cupid’s attack (5.362-84) in order to shore up and extend her own and her son’s dominion by mastering the great god Hades, just as in *Metamorphoses* 1 Cupid demonstrates his power over Apollo, and by preventing yet another goddess from choosing a life of virginity as Minerva and Diana had done and as Persephone might have done as well.

Thus, *lacus* becomes *locus*, and one *locus* becomes another each time Ovid plays off one of his own passages to help reorient this myth to Roman concerns. The *locus amoenus* in which the natural amphitheater of Henna reminds us of the specific passage (*locus*) of the *Ars amatoria* in which Ovid sets the rape of the Sabines is also constructed around a reminiscence of Cupid’s power, a reminder of Venus’ own ambitions.

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