

You Think This Is a Game?: Hellenistic Erotic Poetics in Arachne's Tapestry (Ovid *Met.* 6.103-124).

William S. Anderson notes that Ovid presents the main theme of Arachne's tapestry by placing the participle *elusam* (*Met.* 6.103) in the first line of Arachne's *ekphrasis* (Anderson 1972, 166). Within this *ekphrasis* Ovid utilizes the verb *ludo* twice (6.113, 6.124) as the act of "deceiving" rather than its literal meaning, "sporting" or "playing." This paper argues that the use of *ludo* as a verb of deception is craftily contrived by Ovid to imbue Arachne's tapestry with a Hellenistic tone. In the *ekphrasis*, each of the three appearances of *ludo* is surrounded by other words that convey a literal meaning of deceit. For example, the word *imago*, "imitation", describes the appearance of Jupiter (6.103) and Apollo (6.122). Close to the word *imago*, the word *ludo* also describes the two gods' acts of deceit. *Imago* and various other words in close proximity to *ludo* lend a deceptive tone to the meaning of *ludo* and to the entire tapestry itself.

This paper will also illuminate the connection between *ludo*, deception, and love evident in other parts of Ovid's corpus. In his *Epistulae ex Ponto*, Ovid says *ego me fallo nimioque cupidine ludor*, "I deceive myself and I am deceived [am being played] by too much love" (2.8.71). Ovid weaves these three words — *fallo*, *cupido*, and *ludo* — in one single line. I argue that when Ovid employs these three words together, he is evoking a common Hellenistic trope. In the Hellenistic tradition, poets repeatedly link "love" and "play," especially by depicting play as a common activity for both Eros and Aphrodite. Callimachus playfully describes how a Nautilus shell becomes τὸ περίσκεπτον παίγνιον "a well-admired plaything" for Aphrodite (*Epigram* 5.8). Theocritus also mentions χρυσοῦ παίζοις Ἀφροδίτα, "Aphrodite who plays with a golden toy" (*Idyll* 15.101). Apollonius describes how Eros and Ganymede play with golden dice before Aphrodite tasks him to make Medea fall in love with Jason (*Argonautica* 3.115-118).

Hellenistic poets also frequently linked themes of “deceit” with those of “love” and “play.” Theocritus attributes the epithet δολομάχανος “contriver of deceit” to Eros (*Idyll* 30.25). Later in the same passage, Theocritus explains the epithet by indicating that Διὸς ἔσφαλε μέγαν νόον “he [Eros] tricks the great mind of Zeus” (*Idyll* 30.30). In Apollonius’ *Argonautica*, Medea’s love towards Jason is aroused by an Unseen Eros, Ἔρωσ ἄφαντος (*Argonautica* 3.275). Callimachus attests that Αὐτὸς Ἔρωσ ἐδίδαξεν Ἀκόντιον... τέχνην “Eros himself taught Acontius his craft” in order to obtain Cydippe as his wife (*Fr.* 67.1-3).

By showing how deceit, games, and Eros are related in the Hellenistic tradition, I will return to the tapestry and explain how the usage of *ludo* as an act of deceit becomes an important factor in the Hellenistic poetics of Arachne’s tapestry. Claude Calame claims that the “erotic epigram seems to have become a purely literary game” for the Hellenistic poets (Calame 1999, 61). I argue that Ovid makes use of Love as a playful and deceitful character through the usage of the verb *ludo* in order to emphasize the Hellenistic features in his *ekphrasis* of Arachne’s tapestry.

### Bibliography

Anderson, William. 1972. *Ovid’s Metamorphoses Books 6-10: Edited, with Introduction and*

*Commentary*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Calame, Claude. 1999. *The Poetics of Eros in Ancient Greece*. Trans. by Janet Lloyd. Princeton,

Princeton University Press.

Hofmann, Heinz. 1986. “Ovid’s Metmorphoses: *Carmen Perpetuum, Carmen Deductum*,” in

Francis Cairns, ed., *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar, Fifth Volume, 1985*.

Liverpool: Francis Cairns Ltd., 223-242.

van Tres, Heather. 2004. *Poetic Memory: Allusion in the Poetry of Callimachus and the Metamorphoses of Ovid*. Leiden: Brill.