

Ovid's incendiary force in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* has long been recognized (see Ziolkowski 2005, *Ovid and the Moderns*. Ithaca, NY, 173-6). Yet critics have still to acknowledge Ovid's influence in Rushdie's earlier novels as well as the value of Rushdie's Ovid for the interpretation of the *Metamorphoses*. The *ekphrasis* of Rani's shawls in Rushdie's *Shame* (1983) is a case in point. This episode not only takes Ovid's tale of Arachne (*Met.* 6.1-145) as a model, but can also shed light on the crucial role of shame in the weaving competition of *Metamorphoses* 6.

Rani, whose name suggests *aRANea*, weaves eighteen shawls that reveal in lurid details the debaucheries, tortures, and corruption of the dictator Iskander Harappa, and are meant to be seen only by his daughter Arjumand, aka the Virgin Ironpants. Rani exposes the hypocrisy of a virgin who refuses to see that her father was a lustful and ruthless tyrant. This must be based on Ovid's Arachne, who depicts the sexual assaults of Jupiter in an attempt to shock his virgin daughter Minerva. The epithet "Ironpants" recalls Minerva's martial attire (cf. *Met.* 6.78-80), and Rani's shawls, as 'an act of **accusation** on the grandest conceivable scale' (*Shame*, 203), replicate the *caelestia crimina* (*Met.* 6.131) of Arachne's tapestry. Ovid and Rushdie, both known for the magical realism of their art, have Arachne and Rani strike their target audience with the flawless accuracy of their images (cf. *Met.* 6.104,121-2, 129-30; *Shame*, 200, 205). Rushdie even alludes to Ovid at the episode's beginning when the prospect of the imprisoned Rani hanging herself by a noose of embroidery wool (*Shame*, 200) evokes Arachne's suicide attempt in the end of Ovid's tale (*Met.* 6.134-5). Rani's thread is woven into Ovid's intertext.

If we now read the Arachne episode through the lens of Rushdie's novel, we will see that shame is an important aspect of the *Metamorphoses*. After Minerva's epiphany, Arachne blushes (*erubuit*, *Met.* 6.45), but soon gets over her shame and provokes the goddess. Arachne's tapestry succeeds in embarrassing Minerva, who feels shame as goddess defeated by a mortal and as virgin faced with pornographic images. Shame ignites Minerva's pride; she tears the tapestry and repeatedly strikes Arachne with her shuttle (*Met.* 6.130-3). In her attempt to destroy evidence, Minerva repeats the crimes. Her phallic shuttle (*radius*) "weaves" Arachne into the scenes of divine violence and the girl, feeling the shame of a rape victim, hangs herself (*Met.* 6.134-5). Ironically, Minerva calls Arachne *improba* (*Met.* 6.136) at this point. Rushdie and Ovid show how shame generates violence either against others or against oneself.

Rushdie's Rani is an interpretation of Ovid. Rani's loom issues a political indictment and Rushdie reads Ovid's political allegory, based on Augustus' identification with Jupiter (cf. *Ioue...augusta grauitate*, *Met.* 6.72-3). Just as Greek myth is a veiled commentary on Roman politics in Ovid, Rushdie's fabulous characters can be easily identified with the main players in Pakistan's political turmoil. But toying with the politics of religion can be risky and eventually both the Roman poet and the British novelist meet the fate of their characters, and learn that artists can be crushed effortlessly at an old tyrant's whim.