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The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Lucan's Reception of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Recent revisionist readings of post-Augustan epic have focused on the systematic reception of Virgil's *Aeneid* and have consequently taken less notice of the reception of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Stephen Hinds observes, "the Virgiliocentric history of epic construction and reception . . . had already in Flavian times taken firm hold, and had declined to take the Ovidian experiment to the mainstream of the genre" (*Allusion and Intertext* [Cambridge 1998] 143). The one exception to the rule is Statius's *Achilleid*, which, according to Hinds, reproduces the "core subject-matter" of Ovidian epic: metamorphosis, courtship, rape, disguise, deception, and ambiguities of sex, gender, and identity (137). The purpose of this paper is to make the case that Lucan, already in Neronian times, encodes a reading of the *Metamorphoses* into *De Bello Civili* that defines Ovidian epic in a different vein from the *Achilleid*. I also hope to show that Lucan's reading of Ovid raises important questions about a Virgiliocentric history of epic construction and reception.

In the programmatic opening of *De Bello Civili*, Lucan alludes to the beginning and end of the *Metamorphoses*, plotting his epic as a continuation of Ovid's. In particular, he responds to the speech of Pythagoras, which leaves open the question whether Rome, after her rise to preeminence, will fall just as other cities have. Lucan's explicit answer is that Rome cannot support herself and collapse is inevitable. *De Bello Civili* goes on to rewrite the final episode of the *Metamorphoses*, in which Ovid celebrates the deification of Julius Caesar and glosses over the civil war that destroyed the Republic. Lucan's imitation of exemplary passages in Ovid also reveals a distinctive pattern of reception. He is attracted to Ovid's cosmological framework and imagery of cosmic dissolution (chaos, flood, Phaethon, and the speech of Pythagoras). He responds to the "moralizing" episodes at the center of the poem that exemplify virtue and vice. The poverty of Philemon and Baucis is a background for *pauper Amyclas*. The conjugal love of Ceyx and Alcyone informs that of Pompey and Cornelia. Ovidian examples of evil serve Lucan well: Erysichthon is a model for Caesar as a grove-desecrator; Medea's witchcraft is the spur for Erictho. In the realm of *die nicht schöne Kunst*, Lucan emulates Ovid's set-piece battles and his horrific descriptions of wounds and physical suffering. In short, Lucan makes Ovid's text bear witness not to metamorphosis, sexual passion, or ambiguous gender and identity, but to images of chaos and physical violence, to moral exempla of virtue and vice, and to a nightmarish world uncannily like *De Bello Civili*.