

Chapter 9

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Quid vertit Vertumnus? Picasso's Transformation of Ovid's Tale of Pomona and Vertumnus (Met. 14)

1. Picasso's illustrations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

The influence of classical antiquity on Pablo Picasso does not only become apparent in his studies on archaic and classical technique and proportion theory:¹ sculptures, vase paintings, reliefs, and masks likewise find entrance into many of his works as inspiration and motifs, for instance into the heads in profile in the famous painting *Guernica*.² From the 1920s onwards, mythological subjects appear with increasing frequency in Picasso's works, and they do so in close analogy to a contemporary phenomenon in 1920s and 1930s France – one may compare Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus* (1925), Aristide Maillol's illustrations of Vergil's *Eclogues* (1926/27), or Émile Bernard's illustrations of the *Odyssey* (1930).³ Recurring motifs in Picasso's paintings are the minotaur, centaurs, Pan, gods, nymphs, and maenads.⁴ Between 1917 and 1924/25, a classicist period of creation can be observed; Picasso then returned to antiquity and classical styles from the 1930s onwards – it was at that time that he crafted illustrations for two ancient texts: Aristophanes' pacifist comedy *Lysistrata* (1934) and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1931).

Book illustrations play a crucial role in Pablo Picasso's complete oeuvre: he illustrated 156 books,⁵ in which he offered partly graphic interpretations of the text, partly illuminating book ornaments that seem to serve purely decorative means in

1 See Ferguson (1962: 185–186).

2 See Barasch (1992: 15).

3 See Müller (2002: 32).

4 See Ferguson (1962: 190–191), Alcalde Martín (2013: 286)

5 See Müller (2002: 29).

the first place.⁶ The ‘introduction of cubism to the world of books’⁷ can be attributed to Picasso as a milestone which inspired many modern illustrators. From 1905, the then 24-year-old artist created original prints which appeared as frontispieces or illustrations in books; the number of his illustrative works increased proportionally with his growing popularity as more and more publishers commis-

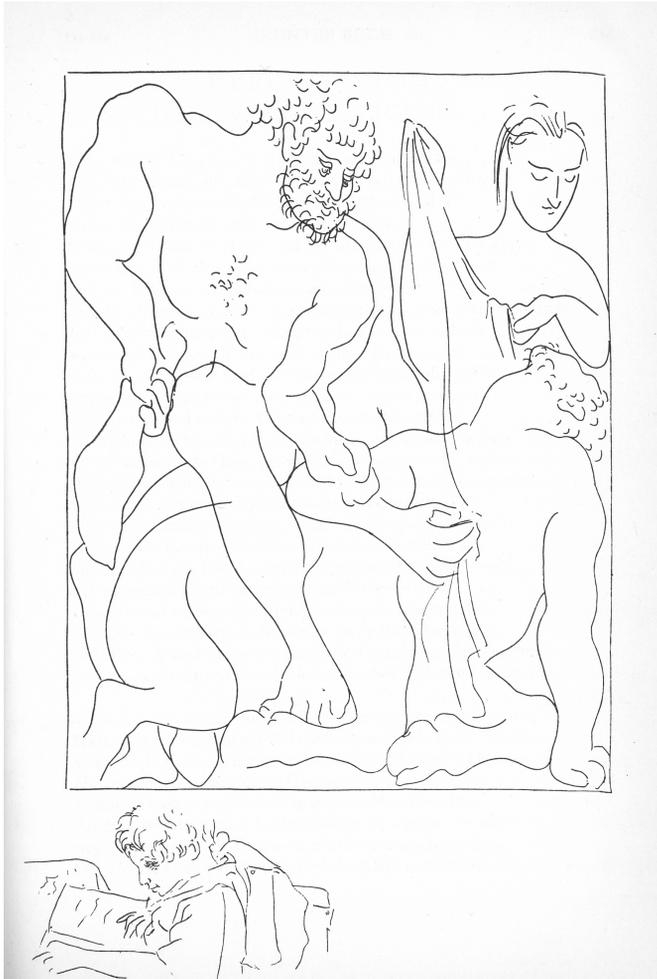


Fig. 9.1: P. Picasso, ‘Hercules, Nessus, and Deianira’ (1931)
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⁶ See Horodisch (1957: 60).

⁷ Horodisch (1957: 62). All translations of German quotations into English are mine.

sioned him with book illustrations.⁸ Picasso's reading habits, however, are difficult to discern: it is not known whether he actually liked reading at all, his interest in texts might have been aroused by close friendships with writers though.⁹

Inspired by the Swiss publisher Albert Skira, Picasso completed a series of etchings on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* between 1930 and 1931. On Picasso's 50th birthday, 25 October 1931, a bibliophilic quarto format edition with George Lafaye's prose translation under the title *Les Métamorphoses d'Ovide* was published in Lausanne.¹⁰ Skira originally proposed that Picasso should illustrate a text about Napoleon, which Picasso rejected categorically. However, he was interested in the *Metamorphoses* that his friend Pierre Matisse, son of the fauvist Henri brought to his attention.¹¹

Picasso made thirty etchings for the *Metamorphoses*. On the one hand, fifteen half-page depictions mark the beginning of each book.¹² The edition of 1931 also emphasizes the beginning of each new book with red initials in the text. Underneath these half-page etchings, there are so-called *remarques*, fine scribbles that partly go beyond the picture frame. At the bottom of the illustration of Hercules, Nessus and Deianira (*Met.* 9), for example, there is the *remarque* of a reading boy (see fig. 9.1). By assigning an artistic function to the marginal zone, Picasso stages a metagame: 'Here, the imaginative power of the illustrated text is displayed in the inner image; in the act of reading, as it were, the thought image of the antique material is created.'¹³

On the other hand, the books are interspersed with fifteen full-page depictions. The drawings are kept in an outline style – there are hardly any shaded areas and no modulation between light and shadow at all, but the contours appear softened throughout.¹⁴ Picasso's stylistic finesse can be traced, for example, in his ability 'to create a full illusion of the sculptural haptic reliefs on the paper, through the reduction of all drawing techniques to the purely graphic, almost immaterial line, as well as the illusion of exposed and shaded sides of the body and value-neutral spaces.'¹⁵ The 'linear reduction of depictions' as well as their 'graphic purism'

8 See Müller (2002: 29).

9 See Müller (2002: 30).

10 See Picasso (1931). For the present chapter I have copied Picasso's illustrations from the edition by Schmidt and Schmidt (1971); for further information see Schmidt (1971: 441).

11 See Newman (2002: 363).

12 See Huber-Rebenich (1999: 43).

13 Müller (2002: 33): 'Innerbildlich wird hier die imaginative Kraft des illustrierten Textes thematisiert, im Akt des Lesens entsteht gleichsam das Gedankenbild des antiken Stoffes.'

14 See Huber-Rebenich (1999: 44); Lichtenstern (1992: 114).

15 Schmidt (1971: 445): Picasso's refined mastery lies in his ability, 'durch die Reduktion aller zeichnerischen Mittel auf den rein graphischen, gleichsam substanzlosen Strich die volle Illusion der plastisch haptischen Reliefs im Blatt zu erzeugen, ebenso wie die Illusion belich-

represent an ‘adequate stylistic idiom’ for ancient texts, insofar as Picasso also seems to ‘paraphrase ancient vase art or Etruscan mirrors’.¹⁶ With his use of discreet lines, stylized profiles, and carefully employed cubist strategies – such as the simultaneous depiction of linear sequences or contradicting perspectives on bodies – Picasso captures vague impressions of his reading of the epic. An example for the graphic simultaneity of different temporal stages is the full-page illustration of *Met.* 9: The picture shows Hercules with his well-known attribute, the club (although, according to Ovid, bow and arrow would be his weapons in this scene).¹⁷ Behind the centaur Nessus’s animalistic lower abdomen, Deianira is ready with the cloth that will accidentally bring death to Hercules (*Met.* 9, 143–272).

The static depiction of diachronic events in the graphic medium seems to contradict a metamorphosis’s logic,¹⁸ which by definition extends itself over time; however, it represents the only possibility of conceptual imitation of a process of change, particularly since Picasso avoids the literal adoption of the narrative motif of transformation and does not show transformation scenes. Picasso’s style can nevertheless be called metamorphic, for instance when one line represents two figures’ contours, and the outlines and borders between individuals blur.¹⁹ Such is the case in the full-page illustration of the Philomela episode (*Met.* 6, 412–674; see fig. 9.2). Picasso shows Tereus lustfully bending over his sister-in-law Philomela, who tries in vain to defend herself. Her head is not visible, which may indicate her later mutilation (Tereus will cut out her tongue to prevent her from revealing his crime). In a dynamic jumble, Philomela’s legs follow the lines, which constitute her rapist Tereus’s body – her contours, symbolically her body, must follow his movements.²⁰ While Tereus’s body marks a diagonal movement from bottom left to top right, Philomela’s contrary diagonal indicates her counter-impulse. Picasso, thus, stages a transformation of the picture or the pictorial elements, a ‘metamorphosis of the line’.²¹

Concerning Picasso’s approach to the text, two positions can be established in research: On the one hand, Picasso’s adherence to the text and his attention to detail while working with Ovid’s epos are emphasized.²² On the other hand, his artistic freedom and abstraction of the illustrations are highlighted, which is only

teter und beschatteter Körperseiten und wertneutraler Räume.’

16 See Müller (2002; 33); cf. also Newman’s very similar observations (2003: 364).

17 See Aldalde Martín (2013: 297).

18 See Schmidt (1971: 444).

19 See Warncke (2002: 19).

20 See Alcalde Martín (2013: 294–295).

21 Warncke (2002: 20): ‘Metamorphose der Linie’.

22 See, for example, Horodisch (1957: 26).



Fig. 9.2: P. Picasso, 'Philomela and Tereus' (1931)
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loosely based on the text and could be labelled as 'archaeological vandalism'.²³ A possible compromise between these diametrically opposed opinions on Picasso's (un)faithfulness to the text can be found by applying Hansen-Löve's concept of a medial, constructive homology: Picasso does not pursue a merely illustrative relation or transposition of narrative motifs, but rather recreates Ovid's metamorphic ductus: the process of transformation, its consistent slippage and continuous change, is translated in the sense of a conceptual 'inter-mediality'.²⁴

Since Picasso worked on his illustrations of the *Metamorphoses* over a long period of time and, in some cases, produced up to six designs per sheet,²⁵ the il-

23 See Müller (2002: 33).

24 The term 'Intermedialität' was coined by Hansen-Löve (1983: 291-292) and has since been adopted into the comparative literature and inter-arts studies.

25 See Lichtenstern (1992: 114).

lustrations hardly show any internal unity; differences in the stroke are to be noticed.²⁶

Some episodes disclose themselves to the audience immediately, such as Phaethon's leap (*Met.* 1, 747–2,398); others, in fact the majority, do not allow for a direct connection with the text source, while instead reproducing the text's epic and lyric moments. In many cases, it is impossible to match the etching to a certain episode: the partial back view of a female nude torso at the beginning of Book 14, for instance, can almost be interpreted as a symbol for all of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.²⁷ It appears striking that Picasso frequently selects scenes from Ovid's work which do not draw upon iconographical predecessors.²⁸ But he does not plainly ignore the established post-antique repertoire, but renounces it deliberately.²⁹ Avoiding depictions of the transitioning process itself, probably the most inspiring plot element for any other creative artistic reception of Ovid's epic, correlates with this, the episode of Pomona and Vertumnus being the only exception.

Regarding the motifs, three categories can be recognized: meta-narrative scenes, the contrast between violence and love, and idyllic scenes and lovers' *loci amoeni*.³⁰ Picasso humanizes the mythological material in an almost atheist manner, constantly demystifying and breaking down the myth's supernatural elements to a rational, supertemporal core.³¹ The focus is on the human body, most commonly naked and stylized. This particular stance connects Picasso to Ovid: an iambic-satirical element inheres in both artists, as well as a playful approach to tragic and religious aspects; both like to frequently fail the audience's expectations and show a preference for the motif of the metamorphosis, the depiction of risqué-erotic scenes as well as crude, naked bodies.³² For both artists, 'metamorphosis is inevitably part of the erotic.'³³ Thus understood, Ovid's epic can be considered

not as a break with the earlier elegies, but as their natural outgrowth. More largely, Picasso's œuvre might help the Classical student to come to better and more commodious terms with the whole realm and dimensions of *eros*, so apparently, private and personal,

26 See Schmidt (1971: 443).

27 See Huber-Rebenich (1999: 45).

28 See Schmidt (1971: 444). Müller (2002: 33), however, states the opposite by referring to the two drawings which do, in stark contrast to the other illustrations, show mythological scenes frequently and prominently depicted: Phaethon's leap, and Meleager's victory over the Calydonian boar. Although his arguments seem cogent and cohesive otherwise, his position concerning Picasso's reference to iconographic tradition does not appear entirely logical, since two examples out of thirty do not suffice to draw generalizations about the whole work.

29 See Warncke (2002: 19).

30 See Alcalde Martín (2013: 289).

31 See Schmidt (1971: 442).

32 See Newman (2002: 368–370).

33 Newman (2002: 370).

especially to moderns, and yet [...] always so determinedly pushing its contours into the public domain.³⁴

One episode of the *Metamorphoses* combines the topics eroticism and transformation in a particularly complex way and orchestrates them poetologically: the story of Pomona and Vertumnus in Book 14.

2. Ovid's tale of Pomona and Vertumnus

The middle of the third pentad,³⁵ the historic part of the *Metamorphoses*, is where Ovid inserts the erotic story about the garden nymph Pomona and the versatile Italic deity Vertumnus. The tale is already rendered noticeable by its mere position within the work: it is the last transformation of mythological figures – only apotheoses of historic rulers and kings are to follow. Moreover, Ovid modifies his scheme of depicting erotic tales of seduction severely.³⁶

Pomona's characterization isolates her from the other men-avoiding nymphs whom readers of the *Metamorphoses* have seen seduced, raped, and transformed in the first fourteen books. Unlike Daphne or Callisto, for instance, Pomona cares nothing for woods and rivers, but only for the fields and branches laden with delicious fruits (*Met.* 14, 626–627). The name Pomona is said to derive from her passion for the cultivation of *poma*, fruit (626), which made her a master of her trade (624–633). By employing the verse 'this is her love and desire, these are her ambitions: she does not feel any lust for Venus' (634: *hic amor, hoc studium; Ueneris quoque nulla cupido est*), Ovid skillfully leads over to Pomona's aversion to love and sexuality – since the care and refinement of her fruit claim all her passion (*amor*) and her ambitions (*studium*) in their entirety, the dedicated gardener does not feel any desire for Venus's areas of competence, although opportunities were provided: in order to avoid her many 'virile' (636) suitors, she carefully encloses her orchard, her *pomarium*. It does not require extra skillful reading techniques to see the sexual innuendos³⁷ and the 'sexualization of agriculture'.³⁸ She fears the peasantry's violence, specifically the satyrs, the Pans, Silvanus, the god of forests, and Priapus, the god of fertility, the epitome of phallic symbolism, 'who warns off evil-doers with his sickle or his genital'³⁹ (640: *quique deus fures uel falce uel inguine terret*). Against her wishes, however, Vertumnus's desire

34 Newman (2002: 370).

35 On structuring the *Metamorphoses* into pentads, see Holzberg (2002 [1998]: 115).

36 See Schmitzer (2001: 134).

37 See Myers (1994: 229), Gentilcore (1995: 111–114).

38 Jones (2001: 368).

39 Latin text quotations follow Tarrant's *OCT* (2004). For longer passages from Ovid, I use (unless otherwise specified) F. J. Miller's prose translation, revised by G. P. Goold (1977), with rare occasional changes.

outdoes Pomona – he does not have any luck with her, but he finds creative solutions to enter her garden. By means of travesty, Vertumnus subverts Pomona’s notion of fixed gender identities – she lets him, a man, enter her garden, and listens to him when he speaks of the necessity for an opening and implicitly of the permeability of gender-related borders; the walls around the *pomarium*, which are so important to Pomona, can allegorically represent her ‘wish for firm and unified gender identities’.⁴⁰ In various guises, he can catch a glimpse of his favored dryad (634–651):

*o quotiens habitu duri messoris aristas
corbe tulit uerique fuit messoris imago!
tempora saepe gerens faeno religata recenti
desectum poterat gramen uersasse uideri;
saepe manu stimulos rigida portabat, ut illum
iurares fessos modo disiunxisse iuuenos.
falce data frondator erat uitisque putator;
induerat scalas: lecturum poma putares;
miles erat gladio, piscator harundine sumpta.*

Oh, how often in the garb of a rough reaper did he bring her a basket of barley-ears! And he was the perfect image of a reaper, too. Often, he would come with his temples wreathed with fresh hay, and could easily seem to have been turning the new-mown grass. Again, he would appear carrying an ox-goad in his clumsy hand, so that you would swear that he had but now unyoked his weary cattle. He would be a leaf-gatherer and vine-pruner with hook in hand; he would come along with a ladder on his shoulder and you would think him about to gather apples.

His ability to change, which is inherent in his name (*uertere* = ‘to change, transform, alter’), permits him to utilize disguises which Pomona apparently accepts.⁴¹ His ‘identity consists of no more than the possibility of infinite, cross-gendered, public re-construction.’⁴² The question whether Vertumnus indeed shapeshifts in a *protean* way or merely dresses up in costumes is left unanswered by Ovid, the emphasis on the artificial-theatrical props, which is reminiscent of Roman comedy, however, suggests the latter.⁴³ His props, an ox goad (647: *stimulus*), a sickle (649: *falcis*), a sword (651: *gladius*), and a fishing rod (651: *harundo*), are weapons with phallic symbolism, in which a momentum of violence, castigation, hunting, and defloration is inherent.⁴⁴ The latter is likewise visible in Vertumnus’s alleged intention to harvest fruit (649: *lecturum poma*), which can easily be conceived as ambiguous.⁴⁵ Pomona nevertheless does not fear any masculine-phallic

40 Lindheim (2010: 177).

41 See Myers (1994: 226), Gentilcore (1995: 113).

42 Lindheim (2010: 181).

43 See Fantham (1993: 34–35).

44 Lindheim (2010: 180).

45 Gentilcore (1995: 111).

offence from his side – which he in fact does not commit, thus differentiating him from all the other deities which fell in love with nymphs and have so far been presented in the *Metamorphoses*; ‘by means of his many disguises, he obtained frequent admission to her presence and had much joy in looking on her beauty’ (652–653: *denique per multas aditum sibi saepe figuras / repperit, ut caperet spectatae gaudia formae*).

Vertumnus has obviously ‘learned from the examples set by his metamorphic predecessors and knows that he cannot court Pomona personally, but requires a match-maker, or conciliatrix, and his skills enable him to provide one.’⁴⁶ It is only through travesty that Vertumnus is enabled to do more than admire Pomona’s beauty from outside – in the guise of an old woman, he enters into a conversation with Pomona at first by praising her horticultural abilities, although, according to him, she herself exceeds her garden’s beauty. Vertumnus uses ‘the apples as a means of gaining access to the unsuspecting Pomona’⁴⁷ (654–659):

*ille etiam picta redimitus tempora mitra,
innitens baculo, positus per tempora canis,
adsimulavit anum: cultosque intrauit in hortos
pomaque mirata est ‘tanto’ que ‘potentior!’ inquit
paucaque laudatae dedit oscula, qualia numquam
uera dedisset anus.*

He also put on a wig of grey hair, bound his temples with a gaudy head-cloth, and, leaning on a staff, came in the disguise of an old woman, entered the well-kept garden and, after admiring the fruit, said: ‘But you are far more beautiful’, and he kissed her several times as no real old woman ever would have done.

While considering an elm entwined with grapevines, Vertumnus quotes an *exemplum* from Pomona’s everyday life and argues for the necessity of the ‘marital’ connection between tree and vine: ‘If this vine were not thus wedded, it would lie languishing, flat upon the ground. But you are not touched by the vine’s example and you shun wedlock and do not desire to be joined to another’ (666–668: *si non nupta foret, terrae acclinata iaceret; / tu tamen exemplo non tangeris arboris huius / concubitusque fugis nec te coniungere curas*). Subsequently, he praises his own assets in third person, applauding himself in the guise of a crone.

To the audience, Vertumnus’s playing around with his alternate identities seems ironic – Pomona, on the contrary, cannot understand why the old woman knows him exactly as well as he knows himself (679–680: *neque enim sibi notior ille est, / quam mihi*). In the same way Pomona had been adorned with specifics which differentiate her from other chaste dryads and nymphs, Vertumnus emphasizes the contrast to Pomona’s other suitors – and simultaneously to his intra-text-

46 Fantham (1993: 32).

47 Gentilcore (1995: 114).

ual predecessors. Ovid recalls the many comparable constellations which have caused a lovelorn god to court a reluctant girl, in most cases not driven by love, but by short-lived physical attraction – the plethora of Jupiter’s love adventures, for instance, indicates the women’s arbitrariness and exchangeability. By calling his affection for Pomona ‘his first and his last love and desire’ (682: *primus et ultimus [...] ardor*), and lifting it above other men’s superficial flirting, Vertumnus explicitly distances himself from these male figures. ‘Jupiter and Sol and Apollo are in lust, Vertumnus is in love [...]. The lustful immortals are not his comrades in lechery, they are his foils: in this context, they are what he is not, he is what they are not.’⁴⁸ As a further quality, he mentions similarities between Pomona and himself – both love fruit, nobody could appreciate her fruit more than him (687–688). In order to avert the possible accusation that he might be after nothing but her *poma*, he adds ‘But neither the fruit of your trees, nor the sweet, succulent herbs which your garden bears, nor anything at all does he desire save you alone’ (689–691: *sed neque iam fetus desiderat arbore demptos / nec, quas hortus alit, cum sucis mitibus herbas / nec quicquam nisi te*). The old woman even reveals herself as being Vertumnus’s mouth-piece ‘Pity him who burns with love, and believe that he himself in very presence through my lips is begging for what he wants’ (691–692: *miserere ardentis et ipsum, / quod petit ore meo, praesentem crede precari*).

Finally, Vertumnus warns Pomona of hard-hearted stubbornness that has often provoked divine anger (693–694), and for this purpose, he tells the story of Anaxarete and Iphis on an intradiegetic level of narration (698–758) – an attempt, perhaps, of persuading Pomona through ‘narrative as seduction’.⁴⁹ Iphis fell in love with Anaxarete and courted her, but she mocked him and rejected him harshly, whereupon he hanged himself from her door. When she learned of his death, she froze to stone, thus impersonating her stony hardness literally. As an internal narrator, Vertumnus proves his familiarity with elegiac standards, as he employs the classical topoi of Roman love in the style of Ovid’s earlier works.⁵⁰ Accordingly, the setting is – in contrast to the narrative frame – again urban and Greek.⁵¹ Iphis resembles an *exclusus amator* who begs for attention at the threshold of his beloved’s door – a situation also featured by the elegiac subgenus of *paraklausithyra* poems, poems sung in front of the closed door.⁵² Iphis would ask Anaxarete’s nurse for help, bring gifts, letters and wreaths all of which she despises. While the elegiac poet-lovers ‘only’ threaten with suicide to be heard,⁵³ Iphis does

48 Johnson (1997: 368–369).

49 Gentilcore (1995: 110).

50 See Jones (2001: 361).

51 See Jones (2001: 369).

52 See Myers (1994: 228), Gentilcore (1995: 116).

53 See Jones (2001: 370), Gentilcore (1995: 117).

indeed hang himself on Anaxarete's doorposts. The typical elegiac characterization of the girl as a *dura puella* is taken literally here.

According to Lindheim, the narrated legend contains several elements hinting at the questioning of allegedly stable gender roles – a gender travesty already staged through the narrative situation itself, as the male god Vertumnus appeared in the guise of an old woman with the aim of winning over a young woman. On the one hand, Vertumnus's Iphis chose a form of death that was perceived in antiquity as stereotypically feminine – hanging was regarded as unmanly.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the very name Iphis, already mentioned in *Met.* 9 (669–797), must catch a thorough reader's attention: A daughter who, for financial reasons and upon paternal order, could only survive as a boy receives the gender-neutral name Iphis from their mother and is raised as a son. Shortly before their wedding with the (second) girl Ianthe, Iphis and their mother – the only ones knowing Iphis's sex – pray for divine help: Iphis is transformed into a man, so that the traditional heterosexual wedding can take place. Apart from the name, the two Iphis-figures from Book 9 and Book 14 have little in common, but the echo alone suffices to evoke the topic of fluid gender identity, the arbitrariness of role attribution, and the relevance of interpretative contexts in the production of truth.⁵⁵ While Iphis in Book 9 stands for the fluidity of gender identities and the changeability of sex that leads to a happy wedding, Vertumnus, the personified changeability (*uertere*), here in feminine garb, seeks to use his Iphis-figure to bring about a wedding.

Neither this intradiegetic narration, nor elegiac tricks nor warnings about the wrath of the gods, and not even elaborate pleas in a juridical manner can convince Pomona to love Vertumnus. Therefore, the versatile god has to return to his original figure – for the first time, the depiction resembles a transformation process instead of a merely attributive costuming.⁵⁶ He appears 'resembling the brightest sun (768: *nitidissima solis imago*), breaking through the clouds and shining unhinderedly' (769: *euicit nubes nullaque obstante reluxit*). Gentilcore notices the comparison's phallic potency: 'the metaphor is one of seizing and wounding, not one of joyous love.'⁵⁷

54 See Lindheim (2010: 189), Gentilcore (1995: 117); both draw on Nicole Loraux's eminent study on 'feminine' modes of dying in Greek tragedy (1987 [1985]).

55 See Lindheim (2010: 186).

56 See Fantham (1993: 35).

57 Gentilcore (1995: 119). The author also interprets the end of the story as the sexist seduction of Pomona, silenced in the text, which can be equated with the passive landscape. I do not agree entirely with this reading, since it ignores the specifics that distinguish the episode from all the other erotic encounters of humans and deities in the *Metamorphoses*, but Gentilcore's alertness towards the fact that Ovidian seduction often serves as a euphemism for rape and non-consensual amorous coupling is definitely legitimate.

Vertumnus, who had been so concerned about refraining from any form of assault, entirely surprisingly prepares to rape Pomona, since his attempts at persuading her seem to be of no avail – far more surprising, however, is Pomona’s reaction: ‘He was all ready to force her will, but force was not necessary; and the nymph, smitten by the beauty of the god, felt mutual wounds of love’ (770–771: *uimque parat: sed vi non est opus, inque figura / capta dei nympha est et mutua uulnera sensit*). ‘Although the old woman’s description of her suitor did not persuade Pomona, and he in turn has so little faith in his charm that he prepares to rape her, violence, like eloquence, proves quite unnecessary.’⁵⁸ Vertumnus apparently succeeds in convincing her thanks to a combination of tricks: by invoking elegiac motives, by disguising as a female – that is, by a practice of cross-dressing and travesty, and finally by revealing his identity and his virility. She abandons her original intention of everlasting virginity and falls in love with him as soon as he reveals his true colors, despite her previous fear and abhorrence of masculinity. In this respect, Pomona can be considered to traverse an inner metamorphosis.⁵⁹

By means of this surprising finale, Ovid thwarts the audience’s expectations in different ways, which is why the episode’s end is discussed so frequently. Positively subversive readings emphasize that Pomona has seen through all of Vertumnus’s attempts to conceal himself from the start and has played along amusedly;⁶⁰ other interpretations, in contrast, discover allusions to sexual assault in the linguistic imagery.⁶¹ The tale’s position in the historic part of the *Metamorphoses* is examined with regard to historiography and the founding myths of Rome: Pomona and Vertumnus being of Italic origin while the Greek examples in the story within the story give rise to contrastive depictions of Greek and genuinely Roman mythology.⁶²

Regardless of how differently the episode’s ending is discussed in research, there is unity concerning the passage’s prominent positioning and its unique structural features. As ‘perhaps the only romantic comedy in the entire poem’⁶³, the narration marks the interface between mythical and historical time, between immanent deities and deified-abstracted humans, between amorous adventures

58 Fantham (1993: 35).

59 This is an optimistic reading that is closer to ‘third wave feminist’ subversion than to post-*MeToo* sentiments. I assume that Picasso and Ovid subscribe to Pomona’s willingness, as do many later commentators of the episode. It would, however, be equally if not more valid to analyze the scene as one of emotional blackmailing, coercive manipulation, and little choice on Pomona’s part.

60 See, e. g., Johnson (1997), Jones (2001).

61 See, e. g., Gentilcore (1995), Myers (1994).

62 See Littlefield (1965), Fantham (1993), Jones (2001), Wheeler (2000).

63 Johnson (1997: 372–373).

and the institution of matrimony, sanctified by Juno. Similarly, the love story symbolizes discontinuity in its narrative technique – in particular, concerning the text's metamorphic poetics, as has been remarked upon on various occasions:

Because the story of Pomona and Vertumnus is the last tale of romantic-sexual love in the *Metamorphoses*, the failure – or final irrelevance – of the modes and strategies of love characteristic of the poem's preceding tales of passion is doubly significant. A rhythm of expectation is broken, an attitude is overthrown. The poem's view of the nature of love is redefined.⁶⁴

Vertumnus' physical changes produce a psychological change in Pomona, inverting the poem's usual process of metamorphosis, in which change begins mentally before physical signs appear. In addition, females who find themselves the objects of unwelcome sexual advances generally undergo physical transformation rather than a change of mind. This new paradigm foreshadows the important role spiritual transformations, particularly the separation of soul from body after death, will play as Ovid's content moves toward the philosophical ideas and contemporary events with which the poem concludes.⁶⁵

At this point in the *Metamorphoses*, a god's transformation is no longer necessary to conquer a virgin nymph or to protect and hide a persecuted, seduced or raped woman – the scheme that characterizes the previous books can be taken *ad absurdum*, with Pomona subverting the expectations of both, Vertumnus and the reading public, by her sudden willingness. Pomona's internal metamorphosis substitutes, therefore, for Vertumnus's external transformation. At the same time, the text also undergoes a transformation⁶⁶ – regarding poetological and semantic characteristics, Ovid's narration passes through the transformation contained in Vertumnus's name.

Likewise, Picasso recognizes the text's metamorphic potential in his illustration, as becomes apparent in the course of closely viewing the image (fig. 9.3).

3. Picasso's illustration of Pomona and Vertumnus

Although little is known concerning Picasso's attitude toward literature, his attitude toward the topic of metamorphosis is indeed established: what fascinates him is what he repeatedly re-enacts in his career as a visual artist,⁶⁷ he juggles with the shapes' sense and lets himself consistently be represented as a transformative artist.⁶⁸ As with many of his works, he uses the Ovid-illustrations to reconstruct the inter-medial metamorphosis of script and word into a picture,⁶⁹ the

64 Littlefield (1965: 470).

65 Jones (2001: 375–376).

66 See Schmitzer (2001: 134).

67 See Newman (2003: 269–270).

68 See Warncke (2002: 20).

69 See Müller (2002: 30–31).

transition from concrete myth to abstract universality,⁷⁰ as well as the shift and development of artistic means of expression.⁷¹

The full-page illustration for the fourteenth book blends into Picasso's *Metamorphoses*-graphics in an apparently harmonic way. The illustration shows three stylized, naked bodies, drawn in a minimalistically reduced way; there is no shading apart from hair and beard. The lines which should confine the figures' contours cannot be determined distinctly, with the result that assigning the extremities, particularly the legs, to the figures is impeded, thus expressing Vertumnus's turnaround brilliantly.⁷²

Here, too, Picasso applies the cubist technique of simultaneously depicting linear-narrative processes – the figures appear dynamic, engaged in the transformation intended by Ovid; different phases are depicted simultaneously and in parallel. Although the non-chronological order of the simultaneous manner of representation disagrees with the concrete text source,⁷³ it corresponds, in fact, with the overall project of the *Metamorphoses*, which question a linear order and let the forward-oriented chronology appear fragile.⁷⁴ Moreover, Vertumnus's characteristic and onomastic versatility is symbolized by means of simultaneity.⁷⁵ Pomona, the middle one of the three figures, can be identified through the fruit in her hands; her body merges partly with Vertumnus's contours. He is depicted to her left and right, respectively – appropriately so, considering the story's linear course of events in two guises. The 'disposition of the woman between two male figures, more precisely the lover who turns to her from the right and the man coming to her from the left'⁷⁶, calls for a comparison with the famous three-figure relief Orpheus and Eurydice with Hermes in Naples, which Picasso probably knew.

The drawing can be ranked among the depictions of idyllic-harmonic scenes, although traces of violence can be found. Depending on the way one looks at the illustration, a different meaning arises. Read from left to right, Pomona seems to flee, the raised leg could be hers; considered from the opposite direction, the leg has to belong to Vertumnus, in whose direction Pomona is leaning willingly.⁷⁷

Compared to the other etchings in the cycle, this illustration's uniqueness is regarded as indisputable. The drawing for Pomona and Vertumnus is the only one

70 See Schmidt (1971: 442).

71 See Warncke (2002: 20).

72 See Lichtenstern (1992: 115).

73 See Huber-Rebenich (1999: 46).

74 See Feichtinger (2008: 289–290).

75 See Huber-Rebenich (1999: 46), Lichtenstern (1992: 114), Schmidt (1971: 444).

76 Lichtenstern (1992: 115): 'die Disposition der Frau zwischen zwei männlichen Figuren, genauer dem Geliebten, der sich ihr von rechts zuwendet, und dem von links kommenden Mann, der sie zu sich zieht'.

77 See Alcalde Martín (2013: 299).

that explicitly depicts a transformation process, whereas, in all the other drawings, Picasso builds on the text's peripheral motifs and does not stage the eponymic transformation process. Vertumnus's transformation is certainly not described as figuratively by Ovid as it is depicted by Picasso – the text hardly reveals whether Vertumnus merely disguises himself or actually changes his form.

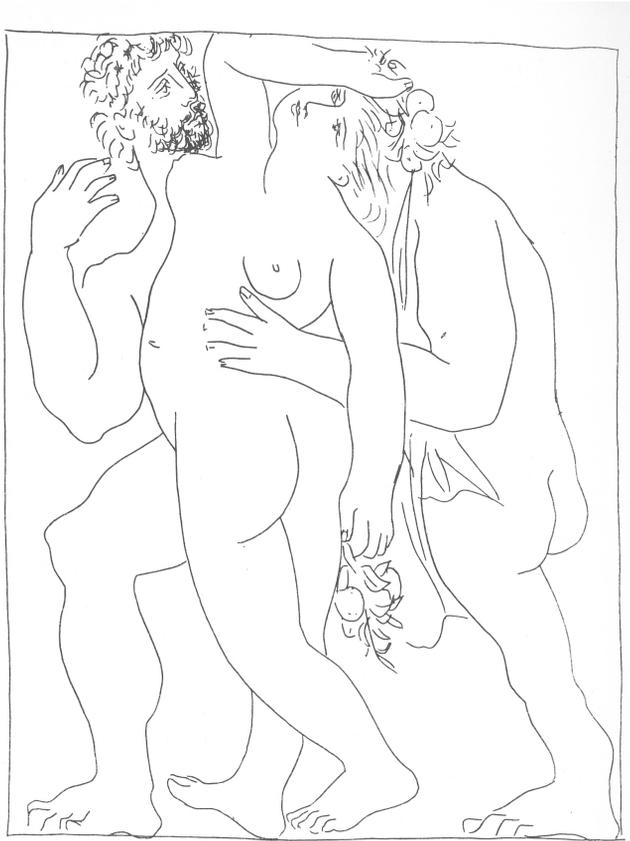


Fig. 9.3: P. Picasso, 'Vertumnus and Pomona' (1931)
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Picasso, however, shows the god in two momentums of his activity, engaged in the transition between the two figures which constitute the left and the right image margin; as their cause, Pomona's figure is in the center of the transition phases. Pomona's long hair, which hangs down next to her left arm, could also represent a scarf or a veil which Vertumnus uses to disguise himself in Ovid's tale; other than that, nothing reminds the viewer of Vertumnus's performance as

an old woman. The fact, however, that only one male head is visible, which could be growing out of both Vertumni, distinctly refers to the scene's metamorphic content. Picasso, therefore, depicts a transformation that does not happen explicitly in Ovid's text.⁷⁸ The illustrator makes Vertumnus undergo the metamorphosis that Ovid's narration, not its hero, experiences. The planned act of violence, which is contained in text and picture, changes into an amorous idyll.⁷⁹ The positive atmosphere of Ovid's final amorous tale seems, hence, to be graspable in Picasso's depiction, however differently the two artists treat the core motif of the metamorphosis.

The proximity is intensified by the fact that both, Ovid and Picasso, deviate from the narrative and graphic ductus that characterizes the preceding work in approaching the myth of Pomona and Vertumnus. Both artists change their work's technical scheme in the same scene – in the moment of Vertumnus's transformation, which causes the narration to convert.

4. Meta-Metamorphosis

The illustration of Book 14 of the *Metamorphoses* shows that Picasso assigns similar functions to the Pomona-Vertumnus episode as does his textual model – when confronting Vertumnus's onomastic *versatility*, Picasso alters his artistic-narrative concept. Unlike Ovid, however, this deviation from the established pattern remains an exception in Picasso's *Metamorphoses*-illustrations and does not lead to programmatic changes in the following proceedings. No other illustration shows a transformation in actu. In his etching for Book 1, for example, which, with the famous transformation tales of Apollo and Daphne, Jupiter and Io, as well as Pan and Syrinx, had entered the visual arts prominently, Picasso chooses to draw a mythological moment without any metamorphosis – he depicts the creation of a new human race by Deucalion and Pyrrha in a manner that it could as well be taken for a simple family idyll. Picasso avoids the 'beaten track' of Ovidian imagery in the fine arts and prefers general, vague scenes instead: crowds engrossed in conversation, bodies, and death scenes which do not end in a metamorphosis. One does not find depictions of the most renowned episodes such as that of Jupiter as a bull in the Europa-episode (*Met.* 2), Narcissus (*Met.* 3), Arachne's weaving (*Met.* 6), or a depiction of the Pygmalion-myth (*Met.* 10), all of which call for inter-medial adaptations and are frequently – some almost ad nauseam – subject to artistic depiction and creative re-interpretation.

As Picasso does not focus on the eponymic metamorphoses, he breaks away from the Ovidian model altogether. But when Ovid himself does not focus on bodily transformation, Picasso does, thus wittily replying to Ovid's narrative gap.

78 See Huber-Rebenich (1999: 46).

79 See Alcalde Martín (2013: 299).

Vertumnus's costumes do not serve the same purpose as transformations generally do in the textual world of the *Metamorphoses*; they do not need to, since the narrative has already changed, and the transformation has happened internally instead – in Pomona's figure and in the text's structure. Picasso emphasizes this momentum of the narrative ductus that is engaged in transformation on several levels: the dimorphous Vertumnus, who at the same time seems to draw Pomona to himself and to receive her as a willing bride in a surprised manner, replaces Ovid's approach to the transformation motif, breaks it down to a graphically depictable and readable form, and simultaneously stages the events which the text expresses in 150 verses. In concrete terms, Picasso shows his illustrations' mutability that encompasses all the facets of simply processing literature, from playfully alluding to and rejecting iconographic predecessors through to a structural analysis of the contents, regardless of medium.

The *uertere* inscribed into the myth's male protagonist seemingly inspired Picasso to change his artistic technique, which, like the god, can take on different aspects (cf. *Met.* 14,685). Thus, boundaries between text and illustration, which are often accompanied by a hierarchical placement of one art form above the other, are blurred, transcended, and undermined in the same way as the walls of Pomona's *pomarium*. Aiming for exploitation (649: *lecturum poma*), the transformative artist intrudes into a demarcated space, acquires the local techniques (disguised, Vertumnus praises Pomona's fruit and speaks to her in horticultural examples), utilizes a different medium (courtship as found in Augustan elegies), before he finally reveals his true, autonomous nature – with great success. In this sense, Picasso does not only re-enact the tale's plot but also reflects on it, within the metonymical relationship of the work and the artist. He enters into a fertile dialogue with Ovid's work, a dialogue, which – noticeably for once – does not feature violent rape or shrewd deception, but mutual respect and playful coquetry. Picasso's and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* draw upon one another like the grapevines and tendrils in Vertumnus's example, leading to mutual cross-fertilization. Thus, both media maintain their autonomy as well as their creative engagement with the same issue: metamorphosis, in every sense of the word.

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