PART I

Theory and Practice

CHAPTER 1

Cinemetamorphosis

With its almost limitless narrative possibilities, the cinema, together with later media, has left all earlier verbal and visual adaptations or imitations of classical literature far behind. Film versions of literary texts may be adaptations, imitations, or the like. The essential change from one medium to another is tantamount to *metamorphosis*. Such metamorphoses follow their own rules and principles. I propose to call them *cinemetamorphoses*.

1 A Working Definition

Parker Tyler, in *Magic and Myth of the Movies*, titled four of his twelve chapters "Magic-Lantern Metamorphoses."[1] Cinemetamorphosis then is a conceptual approach whose purpose is to apply a filmic perspective to Greek and Roman literature and, when appropriate, to ancient static images like paintings, sculptures, or mosaics. Cinemetamorphosis examines the affinities between classical texts and images on the one hand and modern visual narratives on the other.[2] Its chief focus is on the visual qualities in narrative literature and the literary qualities in narrative images. Modern literary critics, with their theoretical agonies over what exactly visual adaptations of literary texts are, have by now produced a veritable jungle of terminologies: "translation, actualization, reading, critique, dialogization, cannibalization, transmutation, transfiguration, incarnation, transmogrification, transcoding, performance, signifying, rewriting, detournement."[3] Or this list, applicable to word, image, and beyond: appropriation, assimilation, creative destruction, disjunction, encapsulation, focalization/obfuscation, hybridization, ignorance, montage/assembly, negation, reconstruction with or without supplementation,

[1] Tyler 1947. The following is partly based on Winkler 2015a.
[2] I have previously termed these and similar relations between ancient literature and the screen "affinities of imagination" (Winkler 2017, especially 1–4).
[3] Quoted from Stam 2005: 4 (in section titled "Beyond 'Fidelity'"). Cf. further MacCabe, Murray, and Warner 2011.

resignation/revaluation, substitution, translation.[4] Or, more succinctly but still rather nebulously: "Borrowing, Intersecting, and Transforming Sources."[5] By contrast, the all-inclusive term *cinemetamorphosis* can provide a kind of Ockham's Razor through the thickets of that jungle – or, to stay within antiquity, a kind of Heracles' sword rapidly slashing through the proliferating necks of the terminological Hydra. Both of the critical lists quoted above include terms synonymous with *metamorphosis*. They support, although unintentionally, what I am proposing here. So it seems sensible to use with caution a term like *translation* in regard to film versions of literature, not least because the change from text to screen is far more intricate than that from one text to another, the basic meaning of *translation*.[6] Equally, *adaptation* may be too vague to be useful, not least since any adaptation runs the risk of being judged inferior to a revered original. What is called for is a neutral term that describes the process of change from text to moving image with greater accuracy and on a larger scale but with less danger of falling victim to prejudice. *Cinemetamorphosis* encompasses analytical and comparative work in two directions, as it were: transformations of classical texts to the screen, as in films based on Greek and Roman epic, tragedy, comedy, or historiography; and, conversely, the discovery and interpretation of classical themes and archetypes in films not ostensibly based on anything ancient at all. As already indicated, a related area is the cinematic analysis of classical visual art works, especially those that express or imply either motion or a narrative. I turn to a famous example below.

Cinemetamorphosis is not an *explication de texte* (or *d'image*) as traditionally practiced since the days of the Alexandrian scholiasts. Rather – and here is a working definition – it is *a retrospective interpretation and appreciation of the complexity of classical texts and images made possible by the invention of the*

[4] The terms are taken from "Index of the Transformation Categories" in Abbamonte and Kallendorf 2018: 161. Baker 2018 gives brief explanations of these terms, summarizing extensive earlier works on "Transformation Theory" listed at 11–12 note 1. His definition of "montage" (20) shows an unacknowledged debt to Eisenstein. On the same page he adds that the list "could be expanded, or perhaps even shortened." (A case of *Anything goes*?)

[5] Quoted from Andrew 1984: 98 (section title in chapter "Adaptation").

[6] Scholarship on the metamorphoses of texts to texts, languages to languages, is immense. Hardwick 2011: 39–44 is a useful introduction, with detailed references. She adduces Michael Longley's sonnet "Spiderwoman" (1994), whose first line is applicable to our context: "Arachne starts with Ovid and finishes with me" (quoted from Hardwick, 52). So is her main title: "Fuzzy Connections." Whether fuzzy or not, all background connections deserve a measure of consideration, either critical or appreciative, here and elsewhere. André Bazin's concept of an "impure cinema" (the adjective is not derogatory) is comparable where literature-to-film metamorphoses are concerned; see on this Bazin 2009a, which is preferable to Bazin 2005a, a better known but abbreviated version (with *mixed* for *impure*). His essay first appeared in 1952. Nagib and Jerslev 2014 apply Bazin's term to film and new media. His image of the river (Bazin 2009a: 136) can serve as an apt parallel to Manilius' words about Homer (*Astronomica* 2.8–11), on which Winkler 2017: 4 and 32.

motion-picture camera and projector and their digital heirs. To put it slightly differently, *cinemetamorphosis* is an *explication filmique des textes et images classiques*. It can also – and here is the other direction mentioned above – be an *explication classique des textes filmiques*. The fact that the narrative medium of film was unknown and technically impossible to the ancients is by no means an obstacle to the approach I am advocating. Much of the storytelling in moving images is by definition a process of metamorphosis, for the individual static images on a filmstrip appear to be moving and changing in sequential order when they are being projected. The same holds for storytelling on film, video, or computer. To tell about changing forms and appearances – in Ovid's words: *In nova . . . mutatas dicere formas . . . corpora* (*Met*. 1.1–2) – is the very essence of cinema. It is Ovidian by nature and should be of interest to classicists for this reason alone.

2 Ovidianism and Cinemetamorphosis

What is simultaneously the attraction, even fascination, inherent in such an approach and also its crux is the question of where to draw the line in pursuing a particular theme or figure from Ovid. There exists a huge variety of works to choose from, even if we restrict ourselves to European and American cinema. Many of these lead inevitably to yet others. To put the matter in Ovidian terms: how far should I follow my thread into the labyrinth of cinema history in this book? Traditional philologists may conclude after perusing my chapters that I have on more than one occasion followed it too far away from Ovid, while film experts may criticize me for not going far enough, given the extremely intertextual essence of narrative cinema. Those who believe that I drew the line at exactly the right place are likely to be few. But this dilemma is in the nature of the matter.

Classicists have become increasingly aware of the postclassical and modern uses of the reception of ancient texts and begun to consider allusions and intertexts as integral parts of modern critical thought about literature.[7] Stephen

[7] I am referring here to the titles of Martindale and Thomas 2006, Hinds 1998. For additional details and numerous references in connection with just one particular approach see Nicholson 2013 (in a journal issue on intertextuality, with bibliography at 133–148). Specifically on Ovid: Barchiesi 2001, Casali 2009, both with additional references. On Roman literature: e.g. von Albrecht 1999; Edmunds 2001, especially 133–163 (chapter titled "Intertextuality: Terms and Theory," with wider implications). Closer to the present context are Meinhof and Smith 2000b; G. Allen 2011, especially 169–175 (chapter section titled "Intertextuality in the Non-literary Arts," including film).

Hinds once made the following observations about the presence, as it were, of Ovid in Seneca's plays:

> I shall be alert not just to strongly signalled allusions but also to a kind of background Ovidianism (if I may so term it) discernible within the seemingly indiscriminate intertextuality of a Senecan *topos*. The aim will be to complement the expected . . . passages with some larger (if less tidy) impressions of the . . . space which Ovid and his poetry occupy in Seneca's tragic imagination.[8]

Hinds's term *background Ovidianism* is a felicitous soubriquet for what a considerable part of the present book will attempt to show in regard to a non-literary medium. Alessandro Barchiesi once summarized what he calls "the Ovidian poetics of allusion" as "a crucial moment in the history of Roman intertextuality" and included other Roman and Greek poets as well: "allusion reanimates previous works of literature, and even . . . the issues of 'voice', 'polysemy', and 'levels of communication'." Appropriately, the first chapter in his book is called "Continuities": "The basic condition for Ovid's poetics is a sense of continuity and co-existence, between stories as between texts."[9] Barchiesi was not thinking of the cinema. But we can easily extend his view of Ovidian poetics to include stories in moving images.

Hinds, Barchiesi, and others, not all of them classical scholars, point in the directions that my subject will take me. The continuities and kinds of co-existence to be demonstrated and examined here will be primarily between stories on the page and stories told in moving images. Obviously all these reanimate previous literary and visual works, from Ovid – really, from Homer – through the entire history of the cinema. Readers will encounter issues of voice, polysemy, and intricate levels of communication in each chapter. To adapt Barchiesi's phrasing: the cinematic poetics of allusion are a crucial phase, not just a moment, in the cultural history of Ovidian intertextuality. Charmingly and wistfully, Ovid himself envisioned the different books of his "Collected Works" as speaking among each other while lying on their shelf (*Tristia* 1.1.105–120). What Barchiesi did in his context, I do in mine: I take Ovid's image of books in their library as an impulse and justification for putting his texts into our modern collection of visual texts, but on a much larger and less tidy (but not untidy) shelf in a nearly endlessly expanding library of narrative.

[8] Hinds 2011: 9. S. A. Brown 1999: 1–22 (chapter titled "Ovid and Ovidianism: Influence, Reception, Transformation") and passim provides a useful orientation.
[9] Barchiesi 2001: 8 and 7 (in "Preface").

The chapters that follow may at first appear to present seemingly indiscriminate intertextualities. But my reason to pursue just these and not others will become clear, I hope, through my combination of foreground Ovidianism – expected themes, characters, plots – and background Ovidianism: larger but not untidy impressions that Ovid has left on the cinematic imagination. What Hinds stated about Ovid's epic shortly after the words quoted above could count as my own justification:

> the whole system of Greco-Roman myth has an important and inescapable post-Ovidian dimension. We are used to the idea that the pretension of the *Metamorphoses* to a kind of mythological comprehensiveness actually does lead to its *becoming* the encyclopedia of myth for the Middle Ages and Renaissance; but I think we have tended to underestimate just how thoroughly the *Metamorphoses* is already being absorbed as the "bible" of myth in the Rome of the first century CE.[10]

What began in that first century came to flourish in later ages and culminates, if only for now, in ours. And it does so in a medium that has become the biggest "Bible" of mythmaking ever: the cinema with its unending and unstoppable *neo-mythologism*.[11]

In sum, Ovidianism is not limited to conscious or intentional adaptations of the poet's oeuvre. I therefore attempt to demonstrate the nature of filmic engagements with ancient texts by turning to different kinds of visual texts: films based on or inspired by Ovid, films connected to his works only loosely, and films that have no direct model in Ovid but exhibit situations, themes, or characters that we encounter in his works.

The ancients already knew that narrative texts are not to be separated from the visual arts.[12] Concerning Ovid and his *Metamorphoses*, we can only assent to the following statement: "In classical culture generally and particularly in Ovid . . . metamorphosis is of crucial importance for thinking about art, in both literary and visual media."[13] I demonstrated the nature of cinema as visual texts in other contexts, in which I examined a number of possible varieties of affinity between classical literature and film.[14] The present book continues and extends that approach. Ovidianism is useful for the establishment of a

[10] Hinds 2011: 9. Compare, if from the opposite chronological perspective and on a larger scale, B. W. Boyd 2017. The Homeric epics in their turn allude to earlier compositions; on this see Currie 2016. Similar arguments could be made, and many have been made, about other Greek and Roman authors.

[11] On this useful term, coined by Italian writer-director Vittorio Cottafavi, see Mourlet and Agde 1961: 24. See further Leprohon 1972: 174–179, Elley 1984: 13–24 (chapter titled "Epic into Film").

[12] Ancient pictorial narration has received increasing attention in recent years. One example is Giuliani 2013. The scholarly literature on text and image is immense; useful starting points are Praz 1970, Squire 2009.

[13] Sharrock 1996: 104. [14] Primarily in Winkler 2009a and 2017.

wider framework in analyses of connections between ancient literature and modern visual arts. Gérard Genette's concepts of *hypotexts*, *hypertexts*, and various related kinds of such *-texts* are useful for a broader understanding of narrative than he himself practiced.[15] This is so because they can readily be linked with the idea of transformation from the verbal to the visual. It is therefore time for a more panoramic view of ancient and modern narrative modes and their interconnections.

My procedure combines two aspects: an *explication de texte ovidien* based on the inherently visual nature of Ovid's poetry and an *explication ovidienne des textes filmiques*, a demonstration of his works' analogies with the cinema. While much recent scholarship applies modern theories to Ovid, I proceed largely but not exclusively in the opposite direction: by applying, as it were, Ovid's texts to a modern medium and, to some extent, *its* theories. Hence my mainly positivist or evidentiary procedure, which makes adherence to specific theories and any immersion in their jargon superfluous.

Before we proceed further with our Ovidian subject, we should briefly glance backward to remind ourselves of the narrative complexity that may be found in ancient visual arts. Here is one example. A Roman copy of a Greek relief sculpture from the fifth century BC shows Orpheus, Eurydice, and Hermes, the divine guide of the shades of the dead to the Underworld. It illustrates a famous tale from Ovid (and Virgil), dealt with in Chapter 7. Marcel Camus's classic film *Black Orpheus* (1959) begins with a close-up of this famous relief, showing Orpheus and Eurydice's heads under its title. (*Plate I*. Black Orpheus. *The film's title card, with Orpheus and Eurydice on a Roman copy of a Greek relief sculpture.*) A medium-long shot showing them with Hermes closes the film. But how can this static image tell a story? Art historian Ernst Gombrich explains:

> First we must recognize the protagonists by what are called their 'attributes', the singer's lyre, or the traveller's hat of Hermes, the guide of the dead. Only then can we identify the episode here represented, the fatal moment when Orpheus has disobeyed the condition imposed on him and has looked back on Eurydice, who is therefore taken back to Hades by the god.

This is straightforward enough, although readers of Virgil or Ovid will immediately have noticed that no Hermes (or Mercury) is present in their ways of telling the myth. The unknown Greek sculptor may be representing a version with which poets, centuries later, have taken some liberties by omitting the divine guide. But how do we know that the moment depicted is

[15] Genette 1997. He mentions the cinema on only a few pages (156–157, 279, 286, 295, 297, 395).

the one identified above? The image itself tells us so. Gombrich is again to the point:

> Hermes is seen to bend back slightly as he gently takes Eurydice by the wrist to return her to the realm of Hades. The two lovers face each other, her hand rests on the shoulders of the guide who had failed her [i.e. Orpheus], her head is slightly lowered as they gaze at each other in a mute farewell.

This interpretation is entirely convincing. As does the work of art it discusses, it presupposes a point that will come up in another context in Chapter 2: the one that Xenophon's Socrates made concerning visual art expressing states of the soul. About our relief Gombrich remarks: "There is no overt expression in their [the figures'] blank features, but nothing contradicts the mood we readily project into this composition, once we have grasped its import." Then comes his most important conclusion. It is worth keeping the art of the moving image in mind when we read what Gombrich says about the interactions between the text or texts that told the myth and the static image based on it:

> Such a subtle evocation must rely on the kind of beholder who would also know how to appreciate the reworking of a familiar myth . . .. The relief, in other words, is not really created to tell the story of Orpheus and Eurydice but to enable those who know the story . . . to re-live it in human terms.

The relief is an example of "that free dramatic evocation that Greek art had evolved."

After antiquity, free dramatic evocation evolved much further and expanded into new technologies, which in turn have changed and expanded the verbal and visual arts of storytelling nearly beyond any limits imaginable before. So it was a fitting choice, presumably on the part of the film's producers, to include images of this ancient relief in *Black Orpheus*, one of the two greatest cinemetamorphoses of this myth alongside Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (1950). What has been said about visual art in the Western tradition since ancient Greece applies just as readily to the primary visual art of the twentieth century and beyond. As Gombrich put it: "the artist should show his mettle by interpreting known texts. It was the 'how' and not the 'what' that the connoisseur admired and pondered."[16]

This last observation could serve as the guiding principle of my book, which is intended to point to the sheer endless possibilities of foreground and

[16] This and the preceding quotations are from Gombrich 1982a: 87–88 and 100.

background Ovidianism as cinemetamorphoses. The argument advanced in this chapter is by no means any kind of ultimate statement. But I hope it will suffice as my book's theoretical foundation, together with some additional observations in later chapters.

Concerning the subject of classical works that have been recast in new forms or, to say it with Ovid, that have been changed into new bodies, I adduce one more quotation. Epic French filmmaker Abel Gance once employed a vivid epic metaphor:

> Writers perpetually begin themselves again, stirring the ocean of words with the same poor oars that have, after all, been worn out since the time of Homer. And the raft of our minds, tossed about across the centuries, in vain searches for its shore or its anchor.[17]

The pages that follow are addressed primarily to readers who are sympathetic to Gance's perspective.

3 Montages of Attractions

Sergei Eisenstein, one of the greatest artists and theorists in the history of film, planned but never completed a book to be called *Pushkin and Cinema*. In the texts he intended to incorporate into it, Eisenstein made an elegant and compelling case for the parallel examination of literary and filmic narratives, as he did elsewhere. He repeatedly pointed to the affinities between literature and film; hence my general debt to him as a model. Two classical scholars have already demonstrated that his views can be applied to Greek and Roman texts.[18] The subtitle of my book takes up Eisenstein's term *montage of attractions*, which denotes a particular aspect of his approach to film editing, perhaps the best-known one.[19] My use of this expression is, however, not intended in a strictly technical or Eisensteinian sense. Rather, it is meant to alert readers to the nature of Ovidianism on screen: a montage – mosaic, matrix – of a varied number of subjects that should, or at least could, attract a sympathetic reader's interest. In addition, my subtitle refers to a particular phenomenon of the cinema's earliest phase, when the attractions presented on the screen tended to be there chiefly for their inherent visual value rather than for the sake of a coherent narrative. Plots in

[17] Gance 1930: 65. Gance's words here quoted are the first paragraph of a section of his book that is titled "Divagations sur un nouveau langage" ("Random Remarks on a New Language").
[18] Newman 2001, Mench 2001.
[19] See especially Eisenstein 1988h (originally 1923) and 1988i (originally 1924). Further essays and fragments on the subject are collected in Eisenstein 1991c. A non-technical introduction to Eisensteinian montage is in Seton (n. d. [1952]): 80–85. Additional references to Eisenstein's theoretical writings appear below in Chapter 2.