

Ovid's urban metamorphosis*

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ABSTRACT

In Book XV of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Pythagoras meditates on the rise and fall of cities and foresees that the survival of Rome requires turning from war to the "arts of peace." Once ancient Rome has fallen, its urban imagery hybridizes with a Biblical counter-imagery in which God wills the ruination of Rome and other centers of wickedness. Through this Ovidian/Pythagorean lens, this essay then examines how Spenser confronts the fall and rise and possible fall again of early modern London, with glances also at Shakespeare and Dryden. This Ovidian model creates challenges of identity, belief, and ethical obligation that result in an "outward turn" of the theme of metamorphosis toward its social boundary.

KEYWORDS: Ovid; Spenser; Shakespeare; Dryden; Metamorphosis; City; Rome; London.

La metamorfosis urbana de Ovidio**

RESUMEN: En el Libro XV de las *Metamorfosis* de Ovidio, Pitágoras medita sobre el ascenso y caída de ciudades, y predice que la supervivencia de Roma requiere un alejamiento de la guerra y un acercamiento a las "artes de la paz". Una vez que la antigua Roma cae, su imaginaria urbana se mezcla con una contra-imaginaria bíblica en la que Dios desea la ruina de Roma y de otros centros de maldad. A través de esta lente ovidiana/pitagórica, este artículo examina cómo Spenser confronta la caída, el ascenso y la posible futura caída del Londres de principios de la era moderna, con miradas a Shakespeare y Dryden. Este modelo ovidiano crea retos de identidad, creencia y obligación

A metamorfose urbana de Ovídio***

RESUMO: No livro XV das *Metamorfoses* de Ovídio, Pitágoras medita sobre a ascensão e queda de cidades e prevê que a sobrevivência de Roma implicará passar da guerra para as "artes da paz". Após a queda da Roma antiga, a sua imagética urbana hibridiza-se com uma contra-imagética bíblica em que Deus determina a ruína de Roma e de outros centros de iniquidade. Através desta lente ovidiana/pitagórica, este ensaio examina de que modo Spenser confronta a queda e ascensão, e possível nova queda, de Londres proto-moderna, com incursões também em Shakespeare e Dryden. Este modelo ovidiano cria desafios de identidade, crença e obrigação ética que resultam

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Hulse

ética que resultan en un “giro al exterior” del tema de la metamorfosis hacia su límite social.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Ovidio, Spenser, Shakespeare, Dryden, Metamorfosis, Ciudad, Roma, Londres

numa “viragem exterior” do tema da metamorfose para a sua fronteira social.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ovídio; Spenser; Shakespeare; Dryden; metamorfose; cidade; Roma; Londres.

Cities, like nations and selves, are works of art. As they grow, they become city-states, then the capitals of nation-states and sometimes empires, and then they fall.¹ Along the way, they invent things: origin stories, self-images, inhabitable identities for their citizens, and visions of their futures, all of which we may call their urban imaginaries. Central to these stories is a debate between the arts of war and the arts of peace. And when city-states decline, they leave these stories as ruins that become the material for the imaginary of the next city-state or city empire. Repeat.

Early modern Europe found twinned classical poets of the urban imaginary in Virgil and Ovid. Virgil focuses on a Rome born out of piety, desire and anger. Ovid, in reaction, imagines Rome through a prism of skepticism, cosmopolitanism, and empathy. In this essay, I trace the Ovidian line of descent in some very broad strokes, focusing on three moments: Ovid as he completed the *Metamorphoses* and was exiled from Rome; Spenser (and briefly, Shakespeare) in the 1590s; and John Dryden in 1666.

The *Metamorphoses* is foremost a vehicle for exploring personal identity, both for Ovid himself and for the Renaissance. As Lynn Enterline puts it in *The Rhetoric of the Body*, “In Elizabethan England, the habit of allegorizing Ovid’s poem gave way to another, transpersonal mode of reading, [...] ‘psychological and metaphorical instead of physical and literal.’ [...] [that] led to an ‘implicit internalizing’ of Ovidian narrative” (2000, 22–23). Complementing this internal zone, this essay re-externalizes metamorphosis within its urban context, in order to frame a less familiar social zone of identity. Internal transformation, no matter how private, still exists

¹ Though we often think of cities as continually expanding, Robert Bruegmann has demonstrated that cities throughout history have grown and shrunk with economic cycles, as well as external events such as wars (2005). In his wake, urbanists have extensively explored the cyclicity of post-industrial cities. See for example, the “Shrinking Cities” project (Burdett, 2006, I, 316–23) and John Gallagher on Detroit (2010).

within societal flux. While this is an exploration of Ovidian literature, at another level it is a thematic reflection on metamorphosis as a broader cultural phenomenon.

We often think of the *Metamorphoses* as a rural poem, filled with rocks, trees, and wild animals. But if we look at its beginning and end, we can see that its framing is urban. The poem begins with the creation of the world out of chaos and moves through the four ages of Gold, Silver, Bronze and Iron. This is a descent from peace and pleasure to violence and pain, from fruits on trees to agriculture and then to walled cities.

When we reach the Age of Iron, the poem takes a sudden turn: Jove is offended when his nostrils twitch with the smoke of human sacrifice rising from the altars of the wolf-man Lycaon. So he summons the gods to a council:

On high there is a road that can be seen
 when heaven is serene: the Milky Way
 is named – and famed – for its bright white array;
 to reach the regal halls of mighty Jove,
 the Thunderer, the gods must take this road.
 On either side there range the homes of those
 who are the noblest of the gods, the most
 illustrious and powerful: their doors
 are open wide; their halls are always thronged
 (the lesser gods have homes in other zones).
 And if this not be too audacious, I
 Should call this site high heaven's Palatine. (*Met.* I.168-76;
 Mandelbaum 1993, 10-11)²

In contrast to an Iron Age city of envy and violence, this evokes a Rome of luxury and pleasure, a city divided into quarters, and marked by exclusion according to wealth and rank. Olympus is no more than a mirror for the gated communities of early Imperial Rome. Humanity has moved in a few hundred lines from the cave and the bower to the world-striding imperial city-state, and is ready

² There is a good argument for using the 1567 Arthur Golding translation of the *Metamorphoses*, since Shakespeare frequently cribbed from it. However, it over-modernizes Ovid's Latin at key moments, and belongs poetically to the era prior to the English "golden" style inaugurated by Spenser and Sidney – and, for that matter, Shakespeare. I have defaulted instead to a translation that emphasizes fidelity to the Latin while providing distant echoes of Ovid's dactylic hexameter verse.

to purge itself of the Lycaons who embody its foundational barbarism.

The equivocal urbanism at the beginning of the poem is balanced by the famous Speech of Pythagoras at the end, which Shakespeare's favorite translator Arthur Golding called "the sum of the whole work." Numa Pompilius, the king of Rome after Romulus, travels to Magna Graecia to sit at the feet of Pythagoras, the first philosopher, who tells Numa about the mutability of all things, including famous city-states:

[...] We see
That eras change: for here some nations gain
and grow in strength, there others lose the day.
So, Troy had might and men and wealth: she could
afford for ten long years to shed her blood;
now, razed, all she can show are ancient ruins –
her only riches are ancestral tombs.
Sparta was famed, and great Mycenae claimed
much might; so did Amphion's citadel
and Cecrops', too [...]. And what is left
to Cecrops' Athens other than her fame?
And now the rumor runs that Rome, the town
that sons of Dardanus had founded, grows;
[...] that city lays
the base of a great state. There, too, is change:
for as she grows, Rome is reshaped; one day
she will hold all the world beneath its sway. (*Met.* XV.420–35;
Mandelbaum 1993, 529–30)

This passage comes toward the end of a long speech in which Pythagoras argues three main philosophic points: *first*, the continuous mutability of all things in the universe; *second*, a belief in the immortality of the soul through transmigration and metempsychosis; and *third*, an ethical injunction to sympathy with other animals, taking the specific form of vegetarianism. Each of these determines the next: Pythagoras has amassed knowledge through multiple re-incarnations, which allow him to observe transformations, which allow him to understand that human souls may reside in animal bodies, which means you shouldn't eat them. These three philosophical elements are a bit at odds with each other. The mutability part sounds a lot like Lucretius and Epicurus. Metempsychosis, or reincarnation, however, is distinctly anti-Lucretian, and no one is quite sure where the vegetarian stuff comes

from, though it fits some of the yarns about the historical Pythagoras.³

Recently, classicists have argued that we should think about this in poetic terms and not worry about philosophical consistency. They argue that Ovid is doing a mash up of Lucretius with Virgil: didactic epic with visionary epic (Hardie 2002; Segal 1969). This makes sense of the complex and allusive *voice* of the passage, but it still doesn't take the *content* seriously. Here, I think it helps if we pay attention to the poem's urban framework. Ovid stages this as a philosophic session between Pythagoras and the Roman king Numa, even though, decades earlier, Livy has completely debunked the possibility of their meeting (1971, 52–53) and Ovid knows this, and knows that his audience knows it, but insists on going there anyway.

By turning the ethical instruction of Pythagoras into a fable about Roman *history*, Ovid insists that this is what *should* have happened. He is more interested in the legend of Pythagoras as the founder of philosophy and guide to an ethical way of life. Numa takes this wisdom back to Rome as the basis for his law-giving. His task is to civilize Rome, a society founded on the murder of Remus by his own brother, perpetuated by the rape of Sabine women, and habituated to the plunder and murder of its neighbors. Numa, a Sabine by ancestry, has the task of making the descendants of Romulus capable of city life and citizenship, by teaching them the arts of peace, grounded in religion:

They say that Numa, when his soul had learned
from these and others' teachings, then returned
to his own city; and when he was urged
to take the reins, he ruled the Latin state.
There, with the nymph Egeria, the wife
he'd wedded happily, and guided by
the Muses, Numa trained in sacred rites
the Latins; and to them he taught the arts
of peace [*artes pacis*]—for until then, they were warlike. (*Met.* XV.
711–20; Mandelbaum 1993, 532)

In this way, the dialogue between Pythagoras and Numa mirrors the council on Olympus that Jove has called at the beginning of the

³ Despite the logical tension, these three ideas are conjoined fairly early in the Pythagorean tradition. Walter Burkert notes their conjunction in the account of Pythagoras by Dicaearchus, as later recorded by Porphyry (1972, 97).

poem: just as Jove called on the council of gods to expel the wolf-like Lycaon from human society, so Numa rises from the councils of Pythagoras to expel the wolves in togas from Rome. His laws are aimed at bringing civility to life in an Age of Iron and putting an end to the warfare and bloodshed that has given rise in the first place to the *imperium* of Rome and its savage social hierarchy.

This urban framework forms the content basis of Ovid's relationship to his epic predecessors: a more clearly defined ethical demand than Lucretius has provided, and a more pacifistic way forward than Virgil. The specific mechanism of government is a female-gendered "sacred song," by which Numa, conspiring with the Muses and the nymph Egeria, institutes cultic religion among the Romans. This has a special resonance in the wake of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, since Ovid's great predecessor has declared that religion is a sham by which elites keep the lower classes in awe. But Ovid reflexively and persistently has a more complex view: while personal religions *may* have subversive tendencies, this state religion is imposed as an implement of control over the hyper-masculinized savagery of the Roman race (*Met.* XV.483). Its power is based on what you *practice*, not on what you *believe* (Galinsky 2007, 73; Davies 2004, 81; Liebeschuetz 1979, 29–39). Indeed, Ovid frequently expresses his own lack of belief in the gods, or his Euhemeristic belief that they are nothing more than fables about powerful or notable people in the past.

However cynical this is at the personal level, Ovid underscores its social benefits, especially for a poet leading a privileged life at the center of Roman society. Ritual practice and a certain pretense of belief in the state religion contain the war of all against all and provide the social order in which his art can flourish. "If those of old did not attest | the tale I tell you now, who would accept | its truth?" he asks rhetorically after one story dealing with obedience to the gods (*Met.* I.400; Mandelbaum 1993, 18). Indeed, Numa carries out his task by claiming, with no verification, that he has visions of the gods, who tell him to establish a calendar of religious observances for Rome. These feigned visions are, essentially, Numa's governmental analogue to Ovid's poetic (that is, feigned and visionary) project in the *Fasti* and the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid's own songs *about* the sacred—whether they are exactly sacred songs or not—are his own contributions to the arts of peace.

Ovid's poems do the work of empire, at least temporarily, by gathering in the stories that underlie the cultic geography of the Mediterranean rim. Ovid foresees the rise of the new city to compensate for the decline of old ones, and sees Rome as the destination for their migratory religions. Especially in the *Fasti*, Ovid's calendaring of the rites of the various gods translates their cults and temples into a map of the landmarks of the city. In the *Metamorphoses*, following the speech of Pythagoras, Ovid tells the legend of the migration of the god Aesculapius from Epidaurus to the new site of his temple and cult on Tiber Island.

Ovid's aspiration here is to gather the known universe into Rome, corresponding to the transformation of Rome from a set of hill forts to city-state to imperial capital city to cosmopolis. Rome within its walls was a breathtakingly compact city, with a million or more inhabitants crammed into an area of about 15 square kilometers. But Rome was unusual among ancient city-states in continually expanding rights of citizenship to include, and coopt, first the Italians in general, and then a wider scope of peoples, including even the British. So beyond the physical city, the "urbs," stretched a vast "civitas," a city of the collective imagination, with which distant people might identify. Tacitus put this bluntly, saying that when the Britons put on togas and took up Roman culture, including the liberal arts, "They called it, in their ignorance, 'civilisation', but it was really part of their enslavement" [*Humanitas vocabatur, cum pars servitutis esset*] (Beard 2015, 494–95).

This process is arguably more complex emotionally and culturally than the one-sided enslavement that Tacitus portrays. By extending citizenship, rather than naked subjection or simple extermination, the colonizers agree to globalize their culture, accepting hybridization, while the colonized agree to advance themselves according to the rules of the game set by the center, all the while covertly practicing re-appropriation. Stephen Dyson points out that military conquest transforms and destabilizes even the lowest levels of an imperial society, given the role of

large-scale military recruitment or conscription [...] in forging more cohesive ties in a scattered rural population. Soldiers not only acquire a larger sense of national identity but also bring back to their isolated communities a range of outside influences from diseases to ideas of political and social change. (Dyson 1992, 53)

Before the empire, in 181 B.C.E., the supposed tomb of Numa Pompilius was discovered, containing both Latin books and Greek texts of Pythagoras. The latter were publicly burned as dangerous and foreign (Livy 40.29; Dyson 2010, 46). A mere century later, a temple of the goddess Isis stood in the Campus Martius, and one remained there despite the antipathy of Augustus to the Egyptian religions associated with his great rival Marc Antony and, more generally, to the many ecstatic cults that filled the emotional void left by the Roman state religion (Zanker 1988, 109).

It's reasonable to think that this process of cross-assimilation, however lop-sided, involved the creation of a proto-civil-society as one of its layers, though without the technological apparatus of communication of the eighteenth or twenty-first centuries. Ovid himself is an example: his own Romanization came through some such bargain by his ancestors. Living in Sulmo to the east of Rome, they would have become citizens early in the second century BCE. And yet we do not question his essential Romanness, nor that of Virgil, born in the north of Italy, or of the Iberian Marcus Aurelius. Cultural identity follows language, law, and cultic practice, opening a spectrum of social identities, from native Roman to fully acculturated, to provincial hybrid to outcast. Indeed, the quintessential Republican Cicero, himself a native of provincial Arpinum, postulated that a Roman carries an intrinsic dual identity, one derived from the *patria* of one's birth, and the other from the *civitas* of Rome (Dyson 1992, 64).

A curiously refracted image of the civil bargain of acculturation appears in a famous passage where Pythagoras imagines the thoughts of a bull as it is led to the sacrificial altar, not comprehending what he is about to suffer at the hands of the farmer-turned-priest beside whom he has labored in the fields. The metempsychotic entry of the narrator into animal consciousness makes the ritual butchery simultaneously vivid and unintelligible, as the bull sees the flash of the knife followed by the first gush of his own blood. The moral that Pythagoras draws from this is *empathy*.⁴ He invokes a trans-species brotherhood of the plow that widens from a

⁴ Empathy is a nineteenth and twentieth-century term, translating the word "Einfühlung," meaning "the aesthetic activity of transferring one's own feelings into the forms and shapes of objects" (Lanzoni 2018, 2, 21–67) and so seems appropriate to Ovid's metempsychotic poetry.

“mere” dietary restriction against the feast of the bull, into a demand for empathy across human borders. Ritual slaughter is *not* demanded by the gods, is *not* a part of the civilizing devotion brought by Numa. It is an invention of man’s blood-lust, falsely justified through religion. Rather than dine on our friends and neighbors (“vos vestros *colonos*,” is the exact phrase), Ovid imagines a broader “civility” that extends beyond one’s narrow, walled city-state.

Hence Ovid has intensely identified his poetic project with the project of Roman civilization, as defined not by Romulus, descendent of Mars, but by its second founder, Numa, as rendered by his poetic avatar, Ovid himself. His yearning for poetic immortality depends, in his own mind, on greater Rome’s survival. The *Metamorphoses* conclude:

And everywhere that Roman power has sway
 In all domains the Latins gain, my lines
 Will be on people’s lips; and through all time –
 If poets’ prophecies are ever right –
 My name and fame are sure: I shall have life. (*Met.* XV.877-90;
 Mandelbaum 1993, 549)

We might in this light reconsider Ovid’s effusive praise of Augustus that concludes the *Metamorphoses* and suffuses the poems of exile. It is Augustus, after all, who has carried out at least half of Ovid’s own cultural program, putting an end to civil war, and further embellishing the Roman cityscape by restoring temples (82 in one year, by his own claim) and crowning the achievement with the Altar of Peace, or *Ara Pacis*, whose name echoes the *artes pacis*, or arts of peace (Zanker 1988, 175-83). Standing on the Capitoline, one could gaze along the Via Flaminia past various temples including the *Ara Pacis* and toward the Masoleum Augustus built for himself (Dyson 1992, 136; Zanker 1988, 72-77). Ovid addresses tyranny by over-voicing his praise and under-voicing his skepticism, in the process finding myths of origin for the ideological spaces of the city through which he walks.

But Augustan peace comes with a conservative cultural program into which Ovid’s poetry ultimately does not fit. Paul Zanker describes an Augustan preference for a “hieratic archaizing style,” in contrast to the Hellenizing baroque of the Antonine opposition – or of the *Metamorphoses* itself:

Up to this time, the various centers of Hellenistic art had each exerted its varied influence on the Romans, but now Rome itself became the home of a uniform culture gradually evolving and emanating outward. ... The fusion of myth and history was realized in the creation of a timeless present. A concept of the future, in the sense of a further development, did not exist in this system. The *saeculum aureum* had dawned, and it was only a question of maintaining and repeating it. After a period of rapid and drastic change, Rome had arrived at a state of equilibrium, a timeless and mythically defined present. Internal harmony and external strength, fertility and prosperity, would all continue unabated, at least so long as the Julii ruled and both princeps and people made sure to worship the gods as was proper and live according to the ways of their forefathers. (Zanker 1988, 215, 355).

Ovid's art is in every way antithetical to this ideology, both aesthetically and morally. He is of Rome, but Rome is no longer of him. Once he is relegated from Rome to Pontus on the Black Sea, the poems of exile make clear that Ovid's need for Rome itself and for Romanity is one-sided. He habitually despises the Pontic peoples as *rustics*—not as the inhabitants of some golden age, but as the barbarian antithesis of *civilized*, or city people. (Ramage 1973; Richter 1979, 58). This is "Ovid among the goats," or "among the Goths," as Touchtone puts it in *As You Like it* (3.3.6). As the Pontic people lie beyond his empathy, so he freezes his imaginary Rome as his object of desire, as he remembered it on the verge of his personal catastrophe.

But Ovid's ultimate dilemma lies in metamorphosis itself. The rise of Rome and the gathering of Mediterranean cultures into a Roman civilization requires the devouring of those prior city states. If Rome has risen, then the obvious implication is that Rome too will fall, whatever the Augustan political myth might proclaim. The thought is not original to Ovid: Cicero built his political career on warnings about the decline of Rome, and Scipio Africanus reportedly wept over the destruction of Carthage, since in it he saw the shadow of the fall of Troy, and the prospect of the fall of Rome. An eternal Rome negates the metamorphosis that is at the core of his philosophy and his art; Rome falling removes the foundation to his poetic immortality. Rebeca Helfer (2012) has powerfully demonstrated how, post-Ovid, Augustine makes use of the ruination of Rome in his *City of God*, casting his long shadow over Spenser, as we shall see. Indeed, Ovid's description of Troy's broken walls is an

early hint at an aesthetic of ruins that evokes the eventual fate of both Rome and Ovid himself.

In the long passage from Augustan Rome to the English Renaissance, Ovid's urban imaginary is assimilated to post-medieval Christian cultures in a process of restoration comparable to the rebuilding of ruined monuments (Hui 2016; Eisendrath 2018). Emblematic of that adaptation is the persistent conflation of Ovid's account of the emergence of the world out of Chaos with the Biblical account of the Creation. The more complex assimilation of the Speech of Pythagoras at the end of Ovid's poem must be examined under our three headings: the mutability of all things, the transmigration of the soul, and the ethical demand for participation in a wider empathy.

Ovidian/Pythagorean metamorphosis is generally assimilated to Christian notions of mutability. The purest Pythagoreanism is probably in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, where Gordon Braden hears the Speech of Pythagoras in every invocation of yellow leaves or time's withering hand. There is little sense of *natural* renewal in the *Sonnets*. Only the artifice of poetry provides immortality in the face of natural decay (Braden 2000, 105–10). Indeed, in Sonnet 55, Shakespeare does the Roman one better: Ovid merely claimed that his *carmen* would last as long as Rome; Shakespeare claims that his "powerful rhyme" will last at least as long, or indeed longer than "marble," "gilded monuments | Of princes," "statues," "the work of masonry," or "unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time,"—indeed, all urbanized civilization itself (55. 1–6).

Likewise, metempsychosis in the Renaissance, when not redeemed as a garbled theology of resurrection, is recast as a trope for poetic imagination. Francis Meres says in his *Palladis Tamia* that "as the soule of [the Trojan warrior] *Euphorbus* was thought to live in *Pythagoras*: so the sweete wittie soule of *Ovid* lives in mellifluous & hony-tongued *Shakespeare*" (1598, 281). Meres layers the Pythagorean rebirth of Ovid's soul in Shakespeare onto the translation of culture from Rome to England, all carried out through the literary faculty of imagination, or "wit."

Shakespeare himself connects metempsychosis to the imagination in *Twelfth Night*, when Feste disguised as Sir Topas the curate, catechizes the imprisoned Malvolio:

Hulse

FESTE What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild fowl?

MALVOLIO That the soul of our grandam might haply inhabit a bird.

FESTE What thinkest thou of his opinion?

MALVOLIO I think nobly of the soul, and no way approve of his opinion.

FESTE Fare thee well. Remain thou still in darkness: Thou shalt hold th'opinion of Pythagoras ere I will allow of thy wits, and fear to kill a woodcock lest thou dispossess the soul of thy grandam. (4.2.44-53)

Malvolio's theology is good, but in "Sir Topas" he is up against a fool masquerading as a fantastical character out of Chaucer, who insists that the Pythagorean notion of reincarnation is the sign of true wit, and anything else, including Christian resurrection of the soul, is clearly crazy.

A more Christian, *and* philosophical rendering of mutability and metempsychosis is of course in Spenser's Garden of Adonis in Book III of the 1590 *Faerie Queene*. There Spenser distinguishes between matter, which is the stuff of chaos, and soul, which is eternal. Between them stands Form, the true medium of mutability, both in God's created universe and in the poet's second world of invention and wit. Form grows and decays, suffering the cycle of life and death, the ceaseless change of Pythagorean-Ovidian-Shakespearean-Spenserian mutability. Here we have in full the vision of a ceaseless change that involves renewal as well as decay, a vision in which order derives from the forms of sacred song.

But this is still a vision of *individual* beings decayed and renewed. Where in this vision is society, as embodied in the city? Pauline Parker remarked many years ago that "no poet has less to say about great cities" than Spenser (1960, 270). Faeryland is a "plaine" dotted by shady hills, grottos, bowers, and occasional castles. The closest thing to a capital city is Cleopolis, always offstage, as an image of a perfected London (Murrin 1990, 169-70). But Parker is, I would argue, looking for the wrong sort of city in all the wrong places.

However scarce the material city may be, an urban undercurrent runs through Spenser's language, even in the Garden of Adonis. Spenser asks how Belpheobe could be raised there and still comprise all perfections:

Sith that in *saluage* forests she did dwell,
 So farre from *court* and royall *Citadell*,
 The great schoolmistresse of all *curtesy*:
 Seemeth that such wild woods should far expel,
 All *ciuill* vsage and *gentility*,
 And gentle sprite *deforme* with rude *rusticity*. (FQ III.vi.i.4–9)

Spenser, like Ovid, is a denizen of the capital, relegated in later life to a “*salvage*” and “*rustic*” zone of the empire that lacks the *form* of culture. Unlike Ovid, he pictures a landscape of courts and citadels rather than compact cities, and sees these courts, in circular fashion, as the source of courtesy. Yet the city as seat of civility resurfaces within the word “citadel” (“little city”), and more openly in the invocation of “*civill usage*” which is threatened to be “*deformed*” by the rustic. So Spenser’s language points to a philological approach for detecting the presence of the late-medieval or proto-modern city in the apparently un-urban landscape of the *Faerie Queene*, whenever we see the cluster of words whose root lies in the Latin *civis*: “city,” “citadel,” “citizen,” “civil,” etc.

The social geography of the poem, with its rural surface and urbanizing substrate, is inflected first of all by the shifting forms of late-medieval cities themselves. London’s trading partners among the Hanseatic and imperial free cities of Germany had created around themselves a new urban imaginary in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, where the city was spatially composed of three urban zones: the cathedral, the citadel, and the merchant zone, often itself focused around a town hall or guild hall. This urban form in turn reflects the tripartite conceptual form by which European societies were divided into those who prayed, those who fought, and those who worked. The great urban historian Wolfgang Braunfels showed long ago how the shifting relationship among those elements in the built environment reflected the relative power of the three estates (Braunfels 1988). In Krakow, for instance, the Polish Royal Castle and Cathedral were grouped together on the hill, where they can defend the river approaches and dominate the town. Below lies the rectilinear merchant quarter, clustered around its guildhall and Marienkirche, with a monastic and university district mediating between the zones. By contrast in Lübeck, the principal city of the Hanseatic League, the cathedral was pushed all the way to the opposite end from the castle, and the entire center was dominated by the merchants.

England remained largely a country of farms, manors and towns. The population of London was perhaps 50,000 when Spenser was born—a mid-sized city by the meager standards of Europe—but soared to perhaps 200,000 by the time of his death, putting London on a par with Venice, Seville, or Paris, but still dwarfed by the non-Christian imperial capitals of Istanbul or Beijing. London shared, in its disjointed way, the tripartite spatial organization, though it was late, compared to Continental cities, in knitting these pieces together. The citadel stood at the east end, in the form of the Tower. The cathedral stood up-river at St. Paul's, surrounded by the guild and merchant quarter of the capital-C City, but a rival center stood to the west at Westminster as the seat of the Court with its Royal Abbey. Spenser's personal London likewise progressed from east to west, from East Smithfield, where he probably grew up, to the Merchant Taylor's School, to Leicester House, which features in *Prothalamium*, to Westminster where he died (Hadfield 2012, especially 22–25, 140–43, 359–60, 390–93).

As London was slow to knit together physically, likewise it was slow to create a distinctive urban imaginary. London under the Tudors and Stuarts, “was not an independent power but a late feudal dependency of the Crown,” as Lawrence Manley pointedly puts it (1995, 168). With Spenser himself playing a key role, an imaginary London emerged to mirror the physical London tightly within a larger Renaissance urban imaginary, whereby Ovid's fallen cities merged with Biblical cities, specifically with the Jerusalem of *Jeremiah* and *Lamentations* and the Rome of *Revelations*.

This Judeo-Christian city is a place of sin, its fall a divine punishment. Jerusalem is where Yahweh looses his anger on his wicked people. Jeremiah in *Lamentations* (1:12) envisions the city as a woman bewailing her loss:

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.

Rome is absorbed into this complaint paradigm. A place of paganism and persecution for Christians, it falls under God's curse, only to rise again as the capital of the western church under the Papacy. So Rome fulfills the Pythagorean paradigm in a way that Ovid dared not imagine. When Martin V returned the papacy from Avignon, he found it “so dilapidated and deserted that it bore hardly any

resemblance to a city. Houses were abandoned and the town was neglected and oppressed by famine and poverty” (Hui, 54). Rome’s ruins became a battleground between conservationists, who tried to preserve the monuments of pagan Rome, and revivalists who raided the Colosseum and other sites to build a newly rising Christian capital (Karmon 2011).

There is a direct line from this conservationist debate to Joachim Du Bellay’s *Les antiquitez de Rome* (1558), translated by Spenser as *The Ruins of Rome* in his *Complaints* volume of 1591. Du Bellay/Spenser laments the impossibility of finding old Rome amidst its present ruins.

Thou stranger, which for *Rome* in *Rome* here seekest,
And nought of *Rome* in *Rome* perceiv’st at all,
These same olde walls, olde arches, which thou seest,
Olde Palaces, is that which *Rome* men call. (Spenser *Rome* 3.1–7)

Why, when “*Rome* was th’whole world, and al the world was *Rome*” (*Rome* 26.9) should Rome have fallen? Du Bellay and Spenser find the cause in Rome’s ethical character: the Romans were a warlike people, their city founded on fratricide. The world became theirs in the Augustan moment, when civil war was ended by the victory of Octavian. But Romans couldn’t live on a diet of peace and pleasure (much less of religion and the arts), and fell again into civil war. With no second Augustus to impose order through a monopoly on violence, they opened the door to the equally warlike Gothic peoples, who finished off what Rome itself had begun.

So Rome became a part of the larger pattern of mutability which has already swallowed the empires of Egypt, Babylon, Persia and Greece, encompassing the whole of Biblical history, at the end of which “The bands of th’elements shall backe reverse | To their first discord, and [...] all things [...] Shall in great Chaos wombe againe be hid” (22.11–14). Du Bellay/Spenser’s vision of the beginning and end of time is really closer to Ovid than to Virgil, much less Genesis. Indeed, within this long cycle of metamorphosis, smaller cycles keep occurring. Rome may rise again, but only alongside other Romes: “By *Nyle*, or *Gange*, or *Tygre*, or *Euphrate*, | [in] *Afrike* [...] [or in] *Spaine*, | [...] [or among] the bolde people by the *Thamis* brinks” (31.3–6). Rebeca Helfer (2012, 61–66) has given us a subtle analysis of how Du Bellay, rooting for the French team, and Spenser, rooting for

England, both ultimately side with the reconstructionists, who pillage the stones of Rome for their new riverside capitals.

Spenser embraces this complex imagery of Rome fallen and renewed on many shores with his own Book of Lamentations, namely, *The Ruines of Time*, which opens the *Complaints* volume. Walking on the banks of the Thames, the poet encounters the spirit of the Brito-Roman city Verulamen, lamenting her destruction. As the “pride” of Roman Britain, Verulam had:

High towers, faire temples, goodly theaters,
Strong walls, rich porches, princelie pallaces,
Large streetes, brave houses, sacred sepulchers,
Sure gates, sweete gardens, stately galleries,
Wrought with faire pillours, and fine imageries [...]. (Spenser *Time*,
ll. 92-96)

With her “elder sister” Troynovaunt (London), Verulam has become one in the series of little Romes that has already fallen. In the *Faerie Queene*, Spenser’s scattered cities, citadels, and ruins becomes the Brito-Roman material for nation-re-building, out of the disintegrated elements of previous city-states. Amongst its monuments and ruins wander the knights of the *Faerie Queene*, members of a “gentle” class with their assorted attendants, born in rusticity but in search of civility. The grail they seek, beyond the slaying of dragons and Saracens, is a new gathering of myths to act as foundation for their imagined citadels.

That myth appears through an urban cycle of rise and fall as articulated in the chronicles of Britain and of Faeryland, preserved in the House of Alma, at the end of Book II of the *Faerie Queene*. What Prince Arthur reads there is a cyclical sequence of state-formation through warfare, city-building, law-giving, and state-dissolution, caused by civil strife, that is repeated three times.

The first cycle begins with the Trojan Brutus, founder of Troynovaunt and of an “imperiall state.” There are hints at a civilizing process when, eight or so generations later, King Bladud travels to Athens and discovers its laws, “From whence he brought them to these saluage parts | And with sweet science mollified their stubborne harts” (II.X.25.8-9). But the disastrous decisions of King Lear then set off generations of civil strife, until the line of Brutus is extinguished.

The second pre-Roman cycle more explicitly recalls Ovid's vision of the rise and fall of civilizations. It begins with the obscure British king Mulmutius Dunwallo, who brings the realm to "ciuill gouernaunce":

Then made he sacred laws, which some men say
 Were vnto him reueald in vision,
 By which he freed the Traueilers high way,
 The Churches part, and Ploughmans portion,
 Restraining stealth, and strong extortion;
 The gracious Numa of great Britainie. (FQ II.x.39.1-6)

Most of this passage comes from Geoffrey of Monmouth (1958, 44-45). But where Geoffrey said that Malmutius was chosen king because he was handsome, Spenser insists that it was because of "wisdom," and throws in the concluding comparison to Numa.

Malmutius Dunwallo is pretty obscure even by Spenserian standards, but he had fans among the Elizabethans. Philip Henslowe loaned the Admiral's Men £3 in 1598 to acquire a blissfully lost play about him by William Rankins (2002, 99). Dunwallo appears in Holinshed and the *Mirror for Magistrates* as the first king of a unified Britain. Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* refuses to pay tribute to Augustus on the grounds that the laws set down by Dunwallo freed Britain from Roman imperium (3.1.52-53). Not least, John Stow in his *Chronicles* (1566, fol. 13v) says that Dunwallo built a great temple, "which some suppose to be S. Paules, some Blackwell Halle, which was called *Templum pacis*." So the Ovidian-Numasian "arts of peace" are again memorialized in the capital city by an "ara pacis."

And so the realm of Britain was civilized, and Dunwallo's successor King Lud re-founded the ruined city of Troynovaunt as Lud's-Town, until fraternal jealousy yielded once again to civil strife, leaving the kingdom open to invasion by Julius Caesar, who starts the third cycle, bringing Roman law, and embellishing London with its Tower. With Uther Pendragon, the chronicle breaks off – leaving it to Prince Arthur to establish a fourth cycle through a Welsh house that will bring in the Tudors and their peerless Queene, a virgin without an heir.

For Prince Arthur, the episode at the House of Alma traces a complex path toward his ultimate destination, the city of Cleopolis. For Arthur, the path is winding, through the countryside toward

Lud's-town, though nowhere can he find the direct way. Spenser's imaginary cities, governed by the arts of peace, are always in the past or in the future—always fallen or yet to rise. Whenever he tries to confront the material city of his birth, he struggles to match it to his ideal. The crisis is faced when Spenser carries his book of the *Faerie Queene* to the Queen herself in 1589, as fictionalized in *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*. The court at Westminster, it turns out, is filled with back-biting, jealous rivalries, and dissemblings worthy of Archimago himself. And so Colin must come back to his second home in “salvage” Ireland, where he is far more comfortable than Ovid ever was in Pontus.

He tries again in *Prothalamium* in 1596, focusing this time on the river as urban backbone and on the area between Court and City, to the west of Ludgate. The poem opens with his disappointment with the princely court. He wanders down to the Thames, as if starting a poem of Lamentation, but the mood switches as he thinks on his native city of “Merry London” with its “bricky towers.” Urban violence has been displaced by the order of law at the Middle Temple, where the over-proud Crusaders have been supplanted by barristers. Nearby stands Leicester House, the well of patronage for Spenser's own early verse. But over this urban idyl hangs an ominous pall: the nymphs dallying at bankside evoke the rapes of Europa, Prosperina and Leda. The Earl of Leicester is dead and his successor, the Earl of Essex, has embarked on warfare, however glorious. The nearby ruins of Verulam foretell the future of the city. Even the refrain: “Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song,” notes the frailty of the ordering power of poetic imagination. What unruly waters will rise when he ends?

Hence Spenser's urban imaginary is complex and divided, even more than Ovid's. That division is expressed as early as the ending of Book I of the *Faerie Queene*, with the challenge to Una's father, emperor of the East (or Eden), from Fidessa, empress of the West (or Rome). Ovid never had to deal with more than one Rome at a time. Spenser is caught within a post-Reformation vision of the City that is doubly divided. Rome is the site of absolute corruption and simultaneously a model for a divine *imperium* foreshadowing the heavenly city of Jerusalem. There are also those multiple new Romes on other shores, some allied with Rome-upon-Tiber, some opposed. Unlike the sterile gods of the Roman state religion, who demanded

only observance without belief and winked at their eastern rivals, the gods of these new Romes will tolerate others neither in public nor in the heart. Spenser is stranded among multiple societies, and fully a part of none. He cannot destroy Rome nor uncorrupt the Court (whether citadel *or* City). He must simultaneously believe in the divinely-blessed translation of empire to Britain, and in the damnation of previous empires. And he must simultaneously *believe* in the reformed British religion and *un-believe* in Rome: hold that the former is based on revelation and the latter is a Lucretian scam engineered by priests. Too often, it is difficult to maintain the dialectic and keep the two terms apart, just as Red Cross Knight cannot at any moment tell Una from Duessa. Even when Spenser invokes the fabled Dunwallo, the British Numa, he must acknowledge that the British king's sacred laws and heavenly visions are merely what "some men say" (FQ II.x.39.1), a wobbly tradition about rules for civilized behavior, invented like those of Numa, and passed off as divine.

The difficulty is simultaneously material and cognitive-emotional. The material difficulty is that Spenser, like du Bellay but unlike Ovid, is dependent on a developing city-state that is not fully cosmopolitan. London was still knitting together its heterogeneous political, artistic, religious and economic powers to create a cultural hegemony and a monopoly of force, and had only fitful forms of civil society to act as the source not only of civility, but also of hybridity, amalgamation, and reconciliation. These are the conditions by which the inhabitants of the city are confronted by strangers and others at continuous close range, creating the possibilities of conflict, but more hopefully, of imaginative identification and empathy. This is urban *negotium*, in dialectic with pastoral *otium*. In short, the socially-reinforced emotions of an aggressively ascendant empire may be even less generous than those of one at its "serene" and "timeless" apogee. The confused emotions of the inhabitants of a declining imperial state may be a third thing entirely.

The cognitive-emotional difficulty is reflected through the need to maintain a multiple or refracted social identity, complicated by the cosmopolitan challenge to empathy. Like Ovid, who defined himself as being from Sulmo and from Rome, Spenser can maintain a double social identity, born of ancient country stock and nursed by London.

Like Ovid in Pontus, and despite his demonstrable understanding of Irish culture, he feels little human empathy with the uncivilized “rustics” of his exile. But unlike Ovid, for whom there is Rome and little else, Spenser sees the dia-dialectic world of multiple Romes. Worse yet, it is the actual Rome that is allied with the “rustic” world that fascinates and repels him. Entranced in his dialectical imagination, Spenser throws in with the new British Rome, and with his civilizing mission, as summarized by his fellow planter Sir Thomas Smith, who recognized the need “to augment our tongue, our laws, and our religion” – that is, Ovid’s “arts of peace” – “which three be the true bands of the commonwealth whereby the Romans conquered and kept long time a great part of the world” (Manley 1995, 169). What seemed to *enrage* Ovid, Augustus, Smith, Spenser and his Faerie knights the most was when the rustic peoples at the margin drew on the force of their own tongues, laws, and religions to resist, rather than join, that civilizing process.

This essay began with broad strokes, so fittingly it should end with three of them. *First*, my Ovidian-urban line of analysis intersects the line of literary research on the formation of British nationhood (Helgerson 1992; Schwyzer 2004; Maley 2003). Scholars on all sides of its debates have focused on Spenser as a Virgilian poet with the nation-state as his goal. In contrast, Syrithe Pugh has critiqued this focus on Virgil as Spenser’s precursor, noting the integral nature of his Ovidianism – and its subversiveness – in exploring the relationship between poetic form and political power (Pugh 2005, 1–9; cf. Hulse 1981, 242–54; Hulse 1988). Set into an urban context, the Ovidian perspective highlights the possibility of social identifications across a broad spectrum, from local to *nearly* global, at times eliding the nation state.

Second, this simultaneously offers a challenge to analyses of the literature of London that draw an arrow through Spenser toward the unremitting rise of the bourgeoisie. Such accounts over-identify the city with one class. The development of cities is more complex, with intervening stages and forms. Once we jump forward to Dryden, the merchant class has indeed risen, and the relationship between city and nation is reversed. Whereas Spenser’s London was a feudal dependency of the British crown, by the time of Dryden’s *Annus Mirabilis* in 1668, Britain has become a subsidiary of London, a fully cosmopolitan city at the core of an imperialist state.

For the clergyman Samuel Rolle (1667), the Great Fire of London in 1666 was a divine judgment falling on the British Jerusalem. For Dryden, the destruction of medieval/renaissance London marked the start of a new historical cycle. He specifically invokes both the beginning and end of the *Metamorphoses* in *Annus Mirabilis*, and then heralds the creation of an Augustan London that nonetheless appropriates and re-presents the ruined memory of the London of the Virgin Queen. Dryden imagines this new city according to Christopher Wren's plan, with straight, wide streets and strategically placed monuments, and with Charles II as its improbable Augustus. This vision of urban order would go belly-up in the helter-skelter rebuilding of the city, but Dryden was more prophetic in imagining a new *imperium* that reaches from the London docklands to the coasts of India:

Thus to the eastern wealth through storms we go,
 But now, the Cape once doubled, fear no more;
 A constant trade-wind will securely blow,
 And gently lay us on the spicy shore. (*Annus* ll. 1213-16; Dryden
 1995, 201)

The constancy, security and gentleness of the last lines evoke a new moment of imagined timelessness at the impending imperial apogee. But *in time* that empire too did fall, as will the one that follows.

Third, jump with me forward to *us*, with our present confusions of social identification. We, and our Western societies, are torn amongst regionalism, nationalism and globalism, between the physical comfort and moral discomfort of hegemonic societies, between semi-belief in our civic and national myths and imperfect empathy for the Others on our doorsteps. Ovid and Spenser do not give us solutions, much less Dryden as he celebrates colonial imperialism. But they test our lines of thought and feeling, as we struggle with an identifiably shared dilemma.

Increasingly I am drawn by Czeslaw Milosz's insistence that each of us has two histories, an individual history, and a collective history as part of a society: city-state, nation or larger human culture (1953, 211). We can't just resolve this by saying, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto myself the things that are mine." If I do that, then I rebel against one of my selves, whichever self that may be.

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Hulse

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