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THE SACRED AND THE POETIC: THE USE OF RELIGIOUS TERMINOLOGY IN OVID'S WORDS

ABSTRACT. Kaczor, Idaliana, The Sacred and the Poetic: The Use of Religious Terminology in Ovid's Words (*Sacrum slowem slawione – terminologia religijna w twórczości Owidiusza*)

The article investigates Ovid's use of religious terminology and imagery, in particular in the *Fasti* and the *Metamorphoses*. As an educated Roman citizen, Ovid was conversant with Roman ritual practices and frequently drew on facets of the Roman religious experience in his writing, exploring topics such as ritual performance, religious nomenclature, festivals, customs and traditions. In the article, I argue that Ovid's treatment of religious material is deliberately uneven. The poet, well-versed in the Roman ritual nomenclature, nevertheless flaunted his technical competence only in the rite-oriented *Fasti*: in his other works, above all in the myth-laden *Metamorphoses*, he abandoned drier technical details for artistic flair and poetic imagery, unconstrained by traditional practices of Roman piety. The mythological setting of the latter poem gave Ovid a chance to comment upon universal truths of human nature, espousing the prevailing Roman belief that maintaining good relations with the gods (*pax deorum*) through collective piety would win Rome divine favour in all her initiatives.

Keywords: Ovid; Latin poetry; Roman religion; Roman divination; Roman religious festivities.

The socially mediated religious practice occupied a crucial role in public and private lives of the ancient Romans: pious ritualists, Romans carefully controlled their ritual performance, prescribing codes to be obeyed by all members of the community. Such fastidious orthopraxy stemmed from the underlying belief that maintaining good relations with the gods (*pax deorum*) through collective piety would win Rome divine favour in all her initiatives.¹ In the Roman world picture, the divine and the human – the sacral and the social – coalesced, as goals of the Romans and their gods were continuously reciprocally realigned towards one another. Despite – or, possibly, due to – such cognitive amalgamation, no comprehensive handbook for Roman religious practice has survived to the modern day, with indirect testimonies mostly drawn from non-religious

¹Warrior 2006: 6.

literary sources, often on mythological or antiquarian themes. In the light of social-ritual entanglement in the Roman culture, however, one can argue that to distinguish between religious and non-religious Roman literature is to introduce a false dichotomy: a scholar of Roman religion need not access a specifically ‘theological’ treatise because ‘theology’ so thoroughly permeated the Roman culture that all its literary works were religion-oriented to some degree. Indeed, both prose and poetry of the Romans contain a wealth of data on the role of the sacred in quotidian Roman lives. The drive towards orthopraxy ensured all citizens, and the elites in particular, had at least a basic familiarity with the cultic habit, religious nomenclature and ritual performance. Three pillars of religious practice in Rome, according to Cicero, were (1) sacral festivities accompanied by appropriate rites, (2) augury, or the art of interpreting omens² (most frequently, by analysing bird behaviour³), and finally, (3) a form of divination practiced by the college of *virorum sacris faciundis*⁴ and haruspices,⁵ the latter famously divining by the entrails of sheep.⁶ These ubiquitous practices unsurprisingly are mentioned in the works of many Roman writers, but the level of detail and accuracy in their depictions varies from text to text.

In the following article, I analyse imagery of rite and religion in the works of Ovid. One of three greatest Roman poets of the Principate era, Ovid displayed unique raw talent and unbridled wit but his career was cut short after he was exiled by Augustus on mysterious grounds to remote Tomis on the Black Sea;⁷ the poet never directly revealed his crime, obliquely referring to “a poem and a mistake” in his later works (*carmen et error*, *Tr.* II 1, 207). Of the greatest significance to this analysis are the pre-exile works of Ovid, teeming with colourful references to rite and religion. I argue that Ovid’s treatment of

²Linderski 1986: 2148; cf. Clifford 2008: 116. Augurs were expected to follow the so-called *disciplina auguralis*, a set of secret divinatory rules recorded in *libri augurales*. Accordingly, the exact method of taking the auspices was not common knowledge in Rome. Ovid’s *Fasti* preserves a traditional account, according to which Romulus was the first to have performed these divinatory rites (*Fast.* IV 813–819: “Nil opus est’ dixit ‘certamine’ Romulus ‘ullo; / magna fides avium est: experiamur aves.’ / res placet: alter init nemorosi saxa Palati; / alter Aventinum mane cacumen init. / sex Remus, hic volucres bis sex videt ordine; pacto / statur, et arbitrium Romulus urbis habet”).

³Augurs could also interpret other signs: thunder and lightning (*ex caelo*), behaviour of quadrupeds (*ex quadripedibus*), the eating patterns of chickens (*ex tripudis*) and various other unfavourable portents such as sneezing or stumbling mid-walk (*ex diris*) (*Fest.* p. 367 L.).

⁴DiLuzio 2016: 240; cf. Février 2009: 136; Turcan 1998: 15–16; Chalupa 2012: 59.

⁵Scullard 1981: 29; cf. Février 2009: 136; Chalupa 2012: 59.

⁶*N. D.* III 5: “Cumque omnis populi Romani religio in sacra et in auspicia divisa sit, tertium adiunctum sit si quid praedictionis causa ex portentis et monstribus Sibyllae interpretes haruspicesve monuerunt, harum ego religionum nullam umquam contemnendam putavi.” Cicero’s *De divinatione* (I 92) states that interpretation of signs classified by him as “praedicationes ex portentis et monstribus” was undertaken by designated ritual specialists, most often a priestly class of haruspices and *virii sacris faciundis*.

⁷Dyjakowska 2001: 55.

religious material is deliberately uneven. The poet, well-versed in Roman ritual nomenclature, nevertheless flaunted his technical competence only in the rite-oriented *Fasti*: in his other works, above all the *Metamorphoses*, he abandoned drier factual details for artistic flair and poetic imagery. In the first part of this article, I discuss Ovid's use of religious nomenclature and imagery in the *Fasti*, with a particular focus on Ovid's description of the *Lemuria*, where he articulates conditions for successful ritual performance. In turn, in the second part of this article I examine Ovid's use of divinatory nomenclature in terms of its coherence and compatibility with Cicero's system. As I will demonstrate, Ovid's use of Roman religious calendar as a framing device in the *Fasti* constrained his literary expression but ensured factual correctness of the depicted ritual milieu. In contrast, when composing the myth-laden *Metamorphoses*, the poet relished greater artistic freedom and thus assigned names to divinatory signs in a somewhat haphazard manner. Ovid's use of divinatory signs in the *Metamorphoses* is primarily story-driven and comments upon the universal truths of human nature: supernatural signs convey either divine warnings not to disrupt the natural order or revelations foreshadowing unavoidable future fortunes of their addressees, either good or ill.

One of the crucial texts for assessing Ovid's knowledge of Roman rituals is his *Fasti*. A Latin common noun in plural, *fasti* denoted chronological or calendar-based lists of official and religiously sanctioned events: Ovid appropriately re-used this term to title his elaborate poem on Roman religious festivities. The author of the *Fasti*, announcing his manifesto in the poem's proem, claims his aim was to "Tempora cum causis Latium digesta per annum / lapsaque sub terras orta que signa canam [...] sacra recognosces annalibus eruta priscis / et quo sit merito quaque notata dies."⁸ Ovid intended to describe Roman religious festivities in twelve books, month by month, but the unfolding events waylaid his plans. Driven into exile after having finished six books, he struggled with his output and never finished the remainder of the poem: the richness and detail of the first half of the text make one deplore its incompleteness. A scholar of Roman religion values the documentary value of the *Fasti* due to three reasons.⁹ First, as a comprehensive and chronologically arranged account of official religious festivities of the Romans, the *Fasti* complement and tally with pieces of fragmentary evidence on Roman religious

⁸*Fast.* I 1–2; 7–8. Scholars of Ovid largely agree that the quoted passage bespeaks Ovid's interest in presenting the sacred rites as depicted in the ancient Roman literary sources (Miller 1991: 10).

⁹Using Ovid as a source on Roman religion has been a source of contention among scholars. The currently prevailing view holds that Ovid's literary output provides valuable evidence on Roman ritual practice, but certain allowances must be made for *licentia poetica* (Gillmeister, Musiał 2012: 15–16; Prescendi 2007: 14; Schilling 1979: 22; Danka 1976: 228); cf. DiLuzio 2016: 16; Rüpke 2016: 6, 86, 90.

holidays derived from iconography and *fasti*, official-ritual calendars.¹⁰ Second, the information derived from the *Fasti* embellishes such calendars with detailed descriptions of festivities and ritual performance.¹¹ Third, the *Fasti* may be considered to constitute a reputable literary source on rite and religion, since Ovid, an educated citizen and a member of the Roman elite, wrote for an audience that regularly participated in the described festivities and would detect any falsehoods or misrepresentations.¹²

At times, the *Fasti* records a course of a religious celebration for which no or very little evidence has survived,¹³ one such case being the May festival of *Lemuria* or *Lemuralia*.¹⁴ This celebration to propitiate restless spirits of the dead was perfunctorily noted in the surviving ritual calendar with a name abbreviation and a date¹⁵: only thanks to the *Fasti* we know more about rites and customs of the *Lemuria*. Ovid highlights the antiquity of this feast (“Ritus erit veteris, nocturna Lemuria, sacri: / inferias tacitis manibus illa dabunt”¹⁶), older even than the purificatory festival of the Parentalia, celebrated in February¹⁷ (“Annus erat brevior, nec adhuc pia februa norant, / nec tu dux mensum, Iane biformis, eras:/

¹⁰The clear overlap between the surviving religious calendars and the *Fasti* allows one to reconstruct the order of Roman holidays and group them into sacral cycles. One such reconstruction may be found in *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, consilio et auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Regiae Borussicae editum, volumen primum, editio altera, Berolini, Apud Georgium Reimerum 1903 (henceforth referred to as CIL).

¹¹While composing the *Fasti*, Ovid used the rhythm of the sacral calendar to frame other kinds of content, writing on astrology, mythology, history, and, most importantly, religion and rite (Stabryła 1989: 162, 165, 171; cf. Cytowska, Szelest 1990: 522, 532, 534).

¹²Describing a religious festivity, Ovid retells the order of events as known to him and his audience. As such, he draws his poetic authority from the ritual order and in turn validates the ritual order with his retelling. Accordingly, any significant distortion would alienate his audience and undermine his message.

¹³If not for Ovid’s *Fasti*, we would know preciously little about many Roman holidays, for a number of which Ovid contributes crucial information on: (1) appropriate rites and sacrifices (for example, on the *Lemuria* (V 419–444), the *Fordicidia* (IV 629–672), the *Robigalia* (IV 901–942) and the *Parilia* (IV 721–782); (2) expected participant behaviour during the ceremony (for example, *sacrum Annae Perennae* (III 523–542; 675–696); and (3) narrative worship formulae and poem-like prayers to be offered up to the worshipped deity (for example, to gods *Pales* (IV 747–776) and *Robigo* (IV 911–932). Significantly, Ovid also records moveable feasts (*feriae conceptivae*), which, for obvious reasons, do not appear in calendars, which list fixed-date festivals (*feriae stativae*) only. *Feriae conceptivae* mentioned by Ovid include *feriae Sementivae* (I 657–704) and the *Fornacalia* (II 513–532).

¹⁴The *Lemuria* are scarcely mentioned in the surviving corpus: few authors referring to them are Nonius Marcellinus (p. 197 L), Varro (*Vit. Pop. Rom.*, fr. 19) and Pomponius Porphyrio, commentator on Horace (*Ep.* II 2, 4).

¹⁵CIL I², p. 318.

¹⁶V 421–422.

¹⁷The *Lemuria* and the *Parentalia* make a complementary pair of Roman festivals for appeasing the dead. I have explored their sacral connotations in my monograph (Kaczor 2012: 235–238).

iam tamen extincto cineri sua dona ferebant,/ compositique nepos busta piabat avi¹⁸). The rites of the Lemuria were held at night, since, according to Ovid, they must be conducted in absolute silence (“Nox ubi iam media est somnoque silentia praebet, / et canis et variae conticuistis aves” [...]¹⁹). Ovid meticulously describes the ceremonies conducted by the *pater familias*. The celebrant had to go barefoot (“ille memor veteris ritus timidusque deorum / surgit (habent gemini vincula nulla pedes²⁰), join his fingers in an apotropaic gesture (“signaque dat digitis medio cum pollice iunctis, / occurrat tacito ne levis umbra sibi²¹), wash his hands in running water (“cumque manus puras fontana perluit unda²²) and throw black beans over his shoulder, a substitutive sacrifice to propitiate the malicious spirits (“vertitur et nigras accipit ante fabas, / aversusque iacit; sed dum iacit, ‘haec ego mitto,/ his’ inquit ‘redimo meque meosque fabis.’²³). Subsequently, the rite performer beseeched the dead nine times to accept his offering (“hoc novies dicit nec respicit: umbra putatur / colligere et nullo terga vidente sequi²⁴), wash his hands again and clash bronze pots (“rursus aquam tangit, Temesaeaque concrepat aera²⁵), nine times banishing the spirits out of the household (“et rogat ut tectis exeat umbra suis./ cum dixit novies ‘manes exite paterni’/ respicit, et pure sacra peracta putat²⁶).

Descriptions of religious rituals found in Ovid’s *Fasti* throng with Roman religious terminology, with the terms of *ritus*, *mos*, *manes*, *lemures*, *februa*, *bustum* and *piare* given particular importance. The first two terms, *ritus* and *mos*, referred to Roman conceptualisations of ritual. *Ritus*, a cognitively loaded concept, denoted a socially codified custom according to which a rite should be performed.²⁷ Ovid employed this term to legitimise the *Lemuria* and highlight its importance to the traditional Roman religious heritage,²⁸ the festival’s link to the Roman tradition further strengthened by the poet’s reference to an ancient Roman god, Janus.²⁹ Another term for ritual employed by Ovid in the analysed

¹⁸ V 423–426.

¹⁹ V 429–430.

²⁰ V 431–432.

²¹ V 433–434.

²² V 435.

²³ V 436–438.

²⁴ V 439–440.

²⁵ V 441.

²⁶ V 442–444.

²⁷ Cic., *Leg.* II 27: “Iam ‘ritus familiae patrumque servare’, id est, quoniam antiquitas proxime accedit ad deos, a dis quasi traditam religionem tueri.” Cf. Fest. p. 389 L.: “Ritus est mos comprobatus in administrandis sacrificiis”.

²⁸ *Lemuria* as a festival to honour one’s ancestors exemplified the traditional Roman virtue of *pietas* – that is, respect towards one’s next of kin and intimates (Newlands 1995: 119).

²⁹ Ovid underlines Janus’ fundamentally Roman character (*Fast.* I 89–90: “Quem tamen esse deum te dicam, Iane biformis? / nam tibi par nullum Graecia numen habet”).

passus of the *Fasti* is *mos*. *Mos*,³⁰ roughly synonymous to *ritus*,³¹ referred to ceremonies and customs inherited from one's ancestors.³² The next two terms, *manes* and *lemures*, described the souls of the dead. *Manes*, "the good ones," euphemistically referred to the spirits of the deceased of uncertain disposition, those who could either help or harm the living – in opposition to more visibly malicious *lemures* of the *Lemuria*:³³ the euphemistic term for *manes* meant to appease these potentially harmful souls and win their favour. The cult of *manes* reflected their ambiguous status: Ovid relays *manes* received a unique type of offering called *inferiae*.³⁴ The last three cultic terms (*februa*, *bustum*, *piare*) employed by Ovid refer to purificatory practices connected to funeral and infernal cults. *Februa*,³⁵ thongs from flayed goat skins, served as instruments of purification during the February festival of the *Lupercalia*, with the passers-by beaten with thongs to banish and exorcise evil spirits:³⁶ these practices were briefly mentioned by the poet in relation to another festival, the *Parentalia*, devoted to the benevolent dead. In turn, *bustum* denoted a place where the grave of a deceased was built upon his or her funerary pyre³⁷ – in direct contrast to

³⁰ *Fast.* V 427–428: "mensis erat Maius, maiorum nomine dictus, / qui partem prisca nunc quoque moris habet." Vide: *Fast.* II 543–547: "hunc morem Aeneas, pietatis idoneus auctor, / attulit in terras, iuste Latine, tuas." *Fast.* II 282: "flamen ad haec prisco more Dialis erat." *Fast.* VI 309: "venit in hos annos aliquid de more vetusto." *Fast.* VI 629–630: "hanc secum Tanaquil, sacris de more peractis, / iussit in ornatum fundere vina focum."

³¹ *Fast.* II 546: "hinc populi ritus edidicere pios." Vide: *Met.* XV 482–483: "[...] qui felix nymphae ducibusque Camenis / sacrificos docuit ritus [...]"

³² *Fest.* p. 273 L.: "Mos est institutum patrium; id est memoria veterum pertinens maxime ad religiones caerimoniasque antiquorum."

³³ *Serv. Aen.* III 63: [...] "manes sunt animae [...] dicuntur κατὰ ἀντίφρασιν: nam manum [...] bonum est." In contrast to *manes*, *lemures* were seen by the Romans as intrinsically harmful. A subset of linguists link *lemures* to analogous ancient Greek terms denoting supernatural demons that tormented humans (Ernout, Meillet 1967: 351); cf. Lennon 2013: 164; Kaczor 2012: 234.

³⁴ *P. Fest.* p. 236 L.: "Inferiae sacrificia, quae dis Manibus inferebant."

³⁵ *Fast.* II 19: "Februa Romani dixerunt piamina patres." *Festus* explains (p. 202 L.) that *februa* were goatskin thongs with which *Luperci* hit encountered women to purify them and make them fertile: "Quaecumque denique purgamenti causa in quibusque sacrificiis adhibentur februa appellantur. Id vero, quod purgatur, dicitur februatum." The *Lupercalia* were held in the same period as the *Parentalia*.

³⁶ Ovid in the *Fasti* enumerates other objects and substances used to ritually lustrate the Roman religious community, such as *suffimen*, used during the shepherd-led celebration of *Pales*. *Suffimen* consisted of (a) ashes of a calf sacrificed to *Tellus* during the *Fordicidia*, (b) blood of a horse sacrificed to Mars during the *Equus october* festivity and (c) stalks of black bean, a plant associated with the underworld deities (*Fast.* IV 731–734: "I, pete virginea, populus, suffimen ab ara; / Vesta dabit, Vestae munere purus eris. / sanguis equi suffimen erit vitulique favilla, / tertia res durae culmen inane fabae").

³⁷ *P. Fest.* p. 132 L.: "Bustum proprie dicitur locus, in quo mortuus est combustus et sepultus, diciturque bustum, quasi bene ustum; ubi vero combustus quis tantummodo, alibi vero est sepultus, is locus ab urendo ustrina vocatur; sed modo busta sepulcra appellamus."

*sepulc(h)rum*³⁸, a burial spot separate and physically removed from a pyre,³⁹ in the analysed passage, Ovid uses *bustum* to denote the graves of spirits venerated during the *Parentalia*.⁴⁰ Finally, ‘*piare*’ (verb) meant to purify the sacral community through propitiating angered deities and averting their wrath. When Jove sends a portent of reddish thunderbolts, *fulmina piabilia*, Ovid recommends appeasing the god with the lustrative rite, *ritus piandi*.⁴¹

Apart from ritual terminology, Ovid’s description of the *Lemuria* articulates conditions for the successful performance of the ritual, providing a valuable detail on the Roman religious thinking. Ritual performance, in general, necessitated the use of running water for *sacrificium*⁴² and silence maintained by all celebrants. During the *Lemuria*, further restrictions applied. Ovid narrates that the household had to hush its fowl and dogs, since unsettled animal behaviour – an ill omen – could disrupt the ritual. The command for the *pater familias* to go barefoot during the performance comments upon the common Roman aversion to perform rites while having parts of one’s body bound in any way, be it with shoes, clothes,⁴³ or rings: for example, the high priest of Jupiter (*flamen Dialis*), expected to continuously serve the deity, might not have a knot in any part of his attire.⁴⁴ The *Lemuria*, like many other festivals, drew from the numerological symbolism. The repeated invocation of a deity appears in other prayer texts and most probably served to increase prayer efficacy. Since odd numbers were considered auspicious among the Romans, their invocations often were repeated odd number of times – most frequently, three or nine.⁴⁵ The *Lemuria* lasted for three days and ended in the *pater familias* addressing the spirits of the deceased nine times: it could be construed that the final extended

³⁸ *Her.* III 103: “Per tamen ossa viri subito male tecta sepulcro [...]”; cf. *Her.* XIV 127–128: “et sepeli lacrimis perfusa fidelibus ossa, / sculptaque sint titulo nostra sepulcra brevi [...]”

³⁹ *Fest.* p. 430 L.: “Sepulchrum est, ut ait Gallus Aelius, locus in quo mortuus sepultus est [...]”

⁴⁰ *Fast.* II 551–554: “[...] bustis exisse feruntur / et tacitae questi tempore noctis avi, / perque vias Urbis latosque ululasse per agros / deformes animas, volgus inane, ferunt.”

⁴¹ *Fast.* III 289–292: “Cui dea ‘ne nimium terrere: piabile fulmen / est’ ait ‘et saevi flectitur ira Iovis. / sed poterunt ritum Picus Faunusque piandi / tradere [...]”

⁴² Streams, rivers and springs were considered sacred in Rome. Vide: *Met.* II 466: “i procul hinc’ dixit ‘nec sacros pollue fontis!”

⁴³ *Met.* I 381–383: “Mota dea est sortemque dedit: ‘discedite templo / et velate caput cinctasque resolvite vestes / ossaque post tergum magnae iactate parentis!”

⁴⁴ *Aul. Gel. Noct. Att.* X 15: “Item anulo uti nisi pervio cassoque fas non est [...] Nodum in apice neque in cinctu neque alia in parte ullum habet. [...] et fabam neque tangere Diali mos est neque nominare”. *Fest.* p. 198 L.: “Sed ne anulum quidem genere ei licebat solidum aut aliquem in se habere nodum.” Compare this with a ritual command for women to loosen down their hair when worshipping Juno *Lucina* (Ovid. *Fast.* III 255–258): “Dicite ‘tu nobis lucem, Lucina, dedisti’: / dicite ‘tu voto parturientis ades.’ / siqua tamen gravida est, resoluta crine precetur / ut solvat partus molliter illa suos.”

⁴⁵ Schilling 1979: 14.

prayer of nine lines focalised and augmented prayers of two earlier days, which possibly featured three repetitions. Also significant is the symbolic ambiguity of many acts and objects connected with the *Lemuria*, such as throwing black beans over the shoulder at night, apotropaic finger gestures and clashing bronze pots. The broad bean (*Vicia faba*) features prominently in Roman lustration rites and festivities devoted to deities with ambiguous and unsettling powers.⁴⁶ One such deity was *Carna*, the guardian goddess of the heart and the vital parts of the human body.⁴⁷ Her festivity, celebrated in June, was known as the *Kalendae fabariae* (the Bean-Kalends) or *ludi fabarici* and marked the time of the first bean harvest, with mashed beans and lard offered in sacrifice.⁴⁸ Ovid builds upon the parallels between the *Lemuria* and healing rites invoking *Carna*. In both performances, the celebrants turn away from the offerings in order not to disturb numinous presences partaking of the *sacrificium*.⁴⁹ To avert the danger of these unwholesome beings, *pater familias* joined his fingers in an apotropaic gesture⁵⁰ and clashed the bronze pots, the latter gesture was commonly used in Roman rites.⁵¹

Having examined Ovid's use of religious terminology and symbolism in the *Fasti*, I now turn to Ovid's use of divinatory terminology in the *Metamorphoses*. At the beginning of this article, I referred to Cicero's definition of Roman religion,

⁴⁶ Relevantly, the high priest of Jupiter (*flamen Dialis*) might not touch broad beans (“[...] et fabam neque tangere Diali mos est neque nominare,” Aul. Gel. *Noct. Att.* X 15) or reside in places like *bustum*, where the dead were burned and buried (“Locum, in quo bustum est, numquam ingreditur, mortuum numquam attingit,” Aul. Gel. *Noct. Att.* X 15). These restrictions most probably stemmed from the heavenly, uranic character of Jupiter, the god of day sky and a wielder of lightning and kingship. As the god conceptually opposed death and darkness, so the high priest of this god refrained and removed himself from all actions and objects associated with night and the underworld.

⁴⁷ Macr. *Sat.* I 12. *Carna* and *Cardea* in Ovid's *Fasti*; cf. Kaczor 2012: 215.

⁴⁸ Ovid. *Fast.* VI 169–170: “Pinguia cur illis gustentur larda Kalendis / mixtaque cum calido sit faba farre rogas?” Cf. Macr. *Sat.* I 12.

⁴⁹ *Fast.* VI 164: “quique adsint sacris respicere illa vetat.”

⁵⁰ Pliny the Elder (*Hist. nat.* XXVIII 25) holds that joining one's fingers brought luck to one's endeavours: “Pollices, cum faveamus, premere etiam proverbio iubemur.”

⁵¹ Bronze containers were also used in *praefericulum* (Fest. p. 354: “Praefericulum vas aeneum sacris sine ansa patens summum, velut pelvis, quo ad sacrificia utebantur in sacrario Opis Consiuae”). The symbolic significance of bronze pots, legitimised by custom and religious tradition, is highlighted by Maurus Servius Honoratus (*Aen.* I 449): “Aerea vel quod aes magis veteres in usu habebant, vel quod religioni apta est haec materies, denique flamen Dialis aereis cultris tondebatur.” Ovid mentions other objects required for sacrifices: *patera* ‘a wine cup’ (*Fast.* IV 934: “cumque meri patera turis acerra fuit”; *Met.* IX 160: “vinaque marmoreas patera fundebat in arras”; *Met.* XV 575: “vinaque dat pateris [...]”); *patella* ‘a container for plant offerings’ (*Fast.* II 633–634: “et libate dapes, ut, grati pignus honoris, / nutriat incinctos missa patella Lares”; *Fast.* VI 309–310: “venit in hos annos aliquid de more vetusto: / fert missos Vestae pura patella cibos”); *acerra* ‘a container for incense’ (*Fast.* IV 934: “cumque meri patera turis acerra fuit,” *Met.* XIII 704: “dantque sacerdoti [...] turis acerram”).

which included arts of divination and interpreting signs deemed supernatural in origin. As a community, the Romans believed they could glean knowledge of the things to come from these portents and thus plan for the uncertain future.⁵² Ritual specialists in Rome warily watched for any signs of divine displeasure at Roman actions, warning against initiatives that could disturb the reciprocal relationship between Rome and her divinities, *pax deorum*.⁵³ In the interest of the collective wellbeing, a class of specialist priests chosen by the Senate watched for signs and worked to appease divine anger,⁵⁴ the particulars of their ritual knowledge known to very few Roman citizens. Cicero in the *De Divinatione* enumerates four types of supernatural signs: *ostenta*, *portenta*, *monstra*, *prodigia*,⁵⁵ respectively derived from the following verbs: *ostendĕre* ‘expose to view, exhibit’, *portendĕre* ‘foretell, portend’, *monstrare* ‘point out, indicate’, *praedicĕre* ‘foretell, predict’. Another type of sign was an *omen*:⁵⁶ typically, an unexpected auditory phenomenon.⁵⁷ Significantly, divinatory signs were actual occurrences that changed the course of Rome’s history and found their way into historical accounts by Roman authors.⁵⁸ One may wonder, however, whether Cicero’s detailed classification of signs and portents was common or expert knowledge and whether there were any alternative systems;⁵⁹ furthermore, one

⁵²Santangelo 2013:10.

⁵³Rey 2017: 27; Orlin 2002: 4; Beard, North, and Price 1998: 37; Scheid 1998: 99; Schilling 1979: 75.

⁵⁴Cicero claims that signs classified as *prodigia* and *portenta* by the Senate were mainly interpreted by *haruspices* (*Leg. II* 21: “*Prodigia portenta ad Etruscos [et] haruspices, si senatus iussit, deferunt [...]*.” Similar procedure was adopted for signs classified as *monstra* (*Cic. Div. I* 3).

⁵⁵*Cic. Div. I* 93: “*Quia enim ostendunt, portendunt, monstrant, praedicunt, ostenta, portenta, monstra, prodigia dicuntur.*”

⁵⁶*Var. L. L. VI* 76: “[...] *omen [...]* quod ex ore primum elatum est, osmen dictum.” Cf. *Cic. Div. II* 149: “[...] *sive tu omen audieris [...]*.”

⁵⁷Cicero speaks of omens as human or divine voices (*Div. I* 102).

⁵⁸To give a number of examples, Cicero classifies supernatural happenings in diverse ways. An appearance of dew on shields in Lanuvium is described as a *portentum* (*Div. II* 59), crowing of hens as an *ostentum* (*Div. II* 56), a birth of an intersex child as a *monstrum* (*Div. I* 98), and a lunar eclipse as a *prodigium* (*Rep. I* 23); moreover, Cicero narrates that Lucius Aemilius Paullus Macedonicus interpreted the death of his daughter’s puppy Perseus as an *omen* presaging his victory over Perseus of Macedon in the battle of Pydna (168 BCE) (*Div. I* 103). Similarly, Livy in his account of Rome’s history (*Ab Urbe condita*) classifies many events as supernatural signs, including varieties such as an *omen* (I 55: inauspicious bird behaviour interpreted as the gods refusing their consent to remove the shrine of Terminus from the Capitol hill), a *portentum* (I 56: a snake’s appearance), and a *prodigium* (VII 28: rain of rocks). *Prodigia* are the largest class of divinatory signs in Livy’s work: for this author, the most dangerous *prodigium* occurred when vestal virgins broke their vows of celibacy, which, in his opinion, brought about Rome’s ignominious defeat against Hannibal’s army (XXII 57). Vide: Levene 1993: 49.

⁵⁹Another author writing on divinatory signs and their possible interpretations was Marcus Verrius Flaccus (c. 55 BCE – 20 CE), a Roman grammarian and teacher who flourished under Augustus and Tiberius. His most important work, *De verborum significatu*, was the first major

may question the technical competence of Roman authors who wrote about divinatory signs. Building on and extrapolating from Cicero's typology, in the second part of this article I examine Ovid's use of divinatory nomenclature in terms of its coherence and compatibility with Cicero's system.

Ovid's interest in the future and signs that presage events to come does surface in the *Fasti*, in which work divination is depicted as a central part of Roman religious piety; however, Ovid's use of divinatory terminology manifests most cogently in the poet's another work, the *Metamorphoses*. The use of the Roman religious calendar as a framing device in the *Fasti*, however ingenious, in my opinion constrained Ovid's literary expression to some degree: when composing the *Metamorphoses*, the poet relished greater artistic freedom and could show his imaginative flair, also in matters concerned with foreshadowing events yet to come. As in the *Fasti*, so in the *Metamorphoses* the poet announces his artistic programme in the poem's proem: "In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas / corpora; di, coeptis (nam vos mutastis et illas) / adspirate meis primaque ab origine mundi / ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen!"⁶⁰ In other words, the *Metamorphoses*, written for an erudite reader, were intended to narrate stories of shapeshifting and transformation, the source material coming from the richness that is Greek mythological literature.⁶¹ Such tales, taking place everywhere and nowhere, gave Ovid a chance to comment upon the universal truths of human nature: the Greek myth, particularly renowned for its inherent plasticity and polyphony, inclined Ovid towards artistic experimentation, since it was not constrained by restrictions of Roman piety.⁶² The *Metamorphoses* frequently explain incidents of shapeshifting as divine punishments for acts frowned upon

alphabetical dictionary, explaining archaic and rare words to Verrius' contemporaries. The work survives partially in much changed form, an extract of an extract: its contents served as the basis for Sextus Pompeius Festus's (2nd c. CE) 20-volume epitome, also called *De verborum significatu*, which work was in turn abridged centuries later by Paul the Deacon, to survive to this day. Verrius, Ovid's contemporary, was interested in religious matters, worked in Rome and might have used Ovid's works as an inspiration. Whether contents of *De verborum significatu* influenced Ovid's writing in any manner remains controversial. A subset of scholars hypothesises that Verrius and Ovid, members of Rome's cultural elite, could have known each other and possibly discussed their literary interests in private (Porte 1985: 42; cf. Herbert-Brown 1994: 26); however, it is fairly certain that *De verborum significatu* was published only after Ovid's exile to Tomis (Stabryła 1989: 194). Ludwika Rychlewska speculates that Ovid might have used Verrius' nascent lexicon in some shape or form (2005: 146). Tangentially, Verrius' lost works possibly inspired the creation of *Origo gentis Romanae*, a short historiographic literary compilation of uncertain authorship depicting the mythical origins of Rome (Lewandowski 2007: 377).

⁶⁰ *Met.* I 1–4.

⁶¹ Ovid was chiefly inspired by works of the Alexandrian school; other possible inspirations for the *Metamorphoses* include Latin literature influenced by Greek prototypes (Cytowska, Szelesta 1990: 486–488; Steen 1974: 24–29).

⁶² Another work of Ovid based on Greek myths, the *Heroides*, exhibits a similar preoccupation with artistic freedom and testing the boundaries of the genre.

by the gods: such punishment is usually preceded by warning divinatory signs, described by Ovid as belonging to the following types: *monstrum*, *prodigium*, *ostentum*, *portentum*, the use of which I will discuss below.

Out of four terms, *monstrum*⁶³ or *monstra*⁶⁴ appear most frequently in both the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*. Semantically close to other divinatory signs, *monstrum* represents a divine reaction to improper human behaviour and a warning not to repeat it in the future. Shaping the moral judgement, *monstrum* teaches the worshippers not to go against the gods' will, flout divine laws or disrespect deities in any other manner. Technically, *monstrum* denotes either the disfigurement of a single human body or an unnatural fusion of different bodies, both animal and human. Spectacular and awe-inspiring violations of the natural order, *monstra* effectively struck fear of gods into the human hearts. Ovid employs this term chiefly to write about (a) divine punishment of disrespectful humans, (b) births of terrible beings whose existence could endanger both deities and humans, (c) flagrant violations of the natural order that confuse the boundaries of the human and the divine and thus undermine the divine authority.

The first group of Ovidian narratives on *monstra* concerns transformations of hubristic humans who offended the gods.⁶⁵ In his retelling of the story of Persephone's abduction by Hades, Ovid narrates the travails of Demeter who roamed the earth in search of her daughter. Tired and thirsty, the goddess asked an old woman for water, drank greedily and attracted scorn of a local boy, who derided her for greed. His irreverence angered the goddess: she threw the drink in the boy's face and turned him into a spotted lizard: "mirantem flentemque et tangere monstra parantem / fugit anum latebramque petit aptumque pudori / nomen habet variis stellatus⁶⁶ corpora guttis."⁶⁷ Comparable impudence was the reason behind Atalanta and Hippomenes' transformation into lions, a tale told by Venus in the *Metamorphoses*. The goddess opens her story with the following words: "'dicam,' ait 'et veteris monstrum mirabere culpae.'"⁶⁸ In this passage, the *monstrum* signifies the protagonists turning into wild animals; *culpa vetus*, an old transgression, refers to Atalanta ignoring the divine warning not to marry⁶⁹

⁶³ Fest. p. 260 L.: "Monstrum, ut Aelius Stilo interpretatur, a monendo dictum est, velut monestrum. Item Sinius Capito, quod monstret futurum, et moneat voluntatem deorum [...]."

⁶⁴ Festus explains (p. 274L.) that *monstra* were phenomena foreign to the natural order: snakes that grew limbs, birds that had an extra pair of wings, two-headed humans, and, perhaps incongruously, a liver of a sacrificial animal that falls apart after being cooked.

⁶⁵ For comparison, consider Dionysus, who was imprisoned by sailors and in retaliation turned them into *monstra* (*Fast.* III 725), or Circe, who was accosted by Picus' companions and transfigured them into pigs (*Met.* XIV 414).

⁶⁶ Latin *stellatus* 'spotted'. Cf. *stellio* (*stelio*) 'a spotted lizard' (Plezia 1999: 212).

⁶⁷ *Met.* V 459–461.

⁶⁸ *Met.* X 553.

⁶⁹ *Met.* X 555–556: "nil opus est, Atalanta, tibi: fuge coniugis usum. / nec tamen effugies teque ipsa viva carebis."

and to Hippomenes, who disrespected Venus by not thanking her for her earlier favour.⁷⁰ Slighted, Venus induced the pair to have intercourse in Kybele's temple and thus incur Kybele's wrath: the mother of the gods turned the pair into the lions that drove her chariot.⁷¹

Another group of Ovidian narratives in the *Fasti* defines *monstra* as births of terrible beings whose existence could endanger both deities and humans. For example, Ovid's *mirabile monstrum* was an ophiotaurus, a bull with the rear of a serpent, born by the Earth.⁷² The ophiotaurus played a crucial part in the war between the gods and the titans, since the goddesses of fate pronounced that whoever burned the innards of the beast would win the power to defeat the gods. Saturn intended to use the bull's power against Jupiter and commanded one of the titans, Briareus, to kill the animal and sacrifice its entrails; Saturn's plan was foiled at the very last moment, when Jupiter-sent birds stole the innards from fire.⁷³ Comparably, Ovid's *immania monstra* (terrifying monsters⁷⁴) are sons of the Earth – giants of thousand arms and serpentine legs, whom Olympian gods had to fight for power over the universe.

Finally, the last group of Ovid's *monstra*, as depicted in the *Metamorphoses*, refer to the consequences of flagrant violations of the natural order that confused the boundaries between the divine, the human and the animal. Such a term is used to describe the wondrous works of enchantress Medea, who contravened the laws of time and mortality and used magic to rejuvenate her father-in-law, Aeson⁷⁵: “viderat ex alto tanti miracula⁷⁶ monstri.”⁷⁷ Furthermore, Ovid uses the term (*biformis monstrum*) to refer to Minotaur, a flesh-eating half-man, half-bull, born out of the illicit affair between goddess Pasiphae and a bull: “creverat obprobrium generis, foedumque patebat / matris adulterium monstri novitate biformis.”⁷⁸ To Ovid, however, every occurrence of a *monstrum* implies in its

⁷⁰ *Met.* X 681–685: “Dignane, cui grates ageret, cui turis honorem / ferret, Adoni, fui? nec grates inmemor egit, / nec mihi tura dedit. subitam convertor in iram, / contemptuque/ dolens, ne sim spernenda futuris, / exemplo caveo meque ipsa exhortor in ambos.”

⁷¹ *Met.* X 686–704.

⁷² *Fast.* III 799–800: “matre satus Terra, monstrum mirabile, taurus / parte sui serpens posteriore fuit.”

⁷³ *Fast.* III 801–808.

⁷⁴ *Fast.* V 35–38: “Terra feros partus, immania monstra, Gigantas / edidit ausuros in Iovis ire domum. / mille manus illis dedit et pro cruribus angues, / atque ait “in magnos arma movete deos.”

⁷⁵ *Met.* VII 287–293.

⁷⁶ The unnatural shame and humiliation of such a union is well expressed with *adiectivum* ‘*miraculum*’, a relic of ancient ritual nomenclature that once employed it to speak of ‘a wicked, vile deed’ (P. Fest. p. 250 L.: “Miracula, quae nunc digna admiratione dicimus, antiqui in rebus turpibus utebantur”).

⁷⁷ *Met.* VII 294.

⁷⁸ *Met.* VIII 155–156: “creverat obprobrium generis, foedumque patebat / matris adulterium monstri novitate biformis.” Cf. *Met.* VIII 169–170: “Quo postquam geminam tauri iuvenisque figuram / clausit, et Actaeo bis pastum sanguine monstrum.”

specificity how to best appease the offended gods: a universal remedy, it seems, would be to live a pious, humble life.

Other types of divinatory signs – *prodigium*, *ostentum* and *portentum* – appear rarely in Ovid’s works, perhaps due to their inherent polysemy. Excerpted from ritual nomenclature, these terms were semantically precise yet inexact in terms of actual usage. Nominalisations of common verbs (*praedicere*, *ostendere*, *portendere*), *prodigium*, *ostentum* and *portentum* drew their meaning from their linguistic roots; at the same time, they elaborated upon that meaning, since they cognitively evolved into expansive, catch-all classes for a wide variety of signs. In general, it can be argued that literary sources on divination occasionally equate an *ostentum* with a *portentum*, whereas *prodigia* (in plural) were a general class of signs that encompassed *ostenta*, *portenta* and *monstra*. Despite their confusing polysemy, *prodigia*, *ostenta* and *portenta* were interpreted as revelatory in nature, foreshadowing future fates of their addressees, either explicitly or in a guarded, provisional manner.

Ovid often employed *prodigia* to speak of divine pronouncements that cannot be altered.⁷⁹ One such instance is the story of Peleus’ stay at Ceyx’ household in Thrace, told in the *Metamorphoses*. Peleus’ father Aeacus raped a Nereid Psamathe, who bore him a son, Phocos. Peleus, born of Aeacus and Endeïs, envied Phocos’ athletic prowess and murdered his half-brother: in retaliation, Aeacus exiled him from his home. Making his way northward, Peleus drove numerous herds of animals ahead and brought them to Ceyx, where he found shelter. Nonetheless, Psamathe’s grief at her son’s murder abided: the Nereid sent a dire wolf that killed herds and shepherds. Baffled and terrified, Ceyx decided to consult Apollo’s oracle to learn which deity plagued his country: “Interea fratrisque sui fratremque secutis / anxia prodigiis turbatus pectora Ceyx, / consulat ut sacras, hominum oblectamina, sortes, / ad Clarium parat ire deum [...]”⁸⁰ Ignoring impassioned pleas of his beloved wife, who wanted to keep him close, Ceyx sailed towards the oracle and drowned during a devastating storm. In my view, Ovid’s aim was to convince his audience that Ceyx could not avoid the vicious circle of divine anger that drew him in as he sheltered Peleus: this anger would eventually lead Ceyx to his death, one way or another – either in the jaw of the dire wolf or in the barren swell of the sea.

In a similar vein, Ovid suggests that events prophesied by *prodigia* can still come to pass despite great efforts taken to avert them. A case in point may be found in the story of Glaucus and Scylla, found in the *Metamorphoses*. Once a simple fisherman, Glaucus discovered by accident a magical herb which could bring dead fish back to life: when he tasted of it, the herb made him immortal

⁷⁹ Fest. p. 334 L.: “Prodigia quod praedicunt futura [...]”

⁸⁰ *Met.* XI 410–413.

and induced him to throw himself into the sea. Marine deities accepted Glaucus into their midst and transfigured him into a green-bearded merman. Now a sea god, Glaucus fell in love with the beautiful nymph Scylla and revealed his feelings to her with the following words: “non ego prodigium nec sum fera belua, virgo, / sed deus’ inquit ‘aquae’ [...]”⁸¹ The maiden, however, refused to wed Glaucus and the lovelorn god became, quite against his will, a portent of unfortunate fate that befell Scylla. Glaucus asked his acquaintance Circe to help him win Scylla’s affection; Circe, wanting Glaucus for herself, decided to get rid of her rival and poisoned the bay in which Scylla used to bathe. After immersion, the tainted waters disfigured Scylla: her lower half multiplied into a pack of baying dogs.⁸² Despite Glaucus’ best intentions, he did turn out to be a cautionary *prodigium* for Scylla, his words linking them in a perverse twist of fate: both he and she became sea creatures with animal lower halves; both he and she brought doom upon those they came in contact with.

The second type of these divinatory signs, *ostentum*, is employed by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* to narrate the tragic story of the house of Cadmus:⁸³ “[...] Agenorides [...] / luctu serieque malorum / victus et ostentis, quae plurima viderat, exit / conditor urbe sua [...]”⁸⁴ Miseries suffered by Cadmus and his descendants stemmed from Juno’s abiding anger, directed at Cadmus and his sister Europa, Jupiter’s paramour. Taken by Jupiter, Europa disappeared from the face of the earth: Cadmus’ father sent him to search for his sister and forbade him to return without her. Unable to locate Europa, Cadmus received an oracle from Apollo directing him to a dragon-infested spot where he was meant to found Thebes: the hero slew the beast and settled the city, but not before losing his companions to the dragon. Favoured by the majority of gods, Cadmus married goddess Harmony, the daughter of Mars and Venus, and sired multiple demigod children, among them Semele and Ino. Nevertheless, misfortunes continued to befall the growing family. Jupiter fell in love with Semele and repeatedly visited her secretly, siring Dionysus. Juno, angered by her husband’s infidelity, planted seeds of doubt in Semele’s mind about her lover’s identity and suggested Semele should demand that Jupiter reveal himself in all his divine splendour as proof of his divinity. Semele’s body could not withstand the divine power and perished in flames, with unborn Dionysus barely surviving the ordeal. Semele’s sister, Ino, took care of Dionysus, the living proof of Jupiter’s affair; in vengeance, Juno struck Ino’s husband Athamas with insanity. Escaping her husband’s attempts to take her life, Ino threw herself into the sea with her son Melicertes and was transformed into a

⁸¹ *Met.* XIII 917–918.

⁸² *Met.* XIV 59–67.

⁸³ *Fest.* p. 307 L.: “Ostentum non solum pro portento poni solere [...]”

⁸⁴ *Met.* IV 563–566.

sea divinity. The familial misfortune passed down to the second generation: grandsons of Cadmus, Actaeon and Pentheus, died torn apart limb from limb, the former by his hunting dogs, the latter by his own mother. Broken by a string of bad luck, Cadmus and Harmony decided to leave Thebes: wondering about the root of his misfortune, Cadmus remembered the dragon he had slain and the words of prophecy he heard: “[...] ‘quid, Agenore nate, peremptum / serpentem spectas? et tu spectabere serpens.’”⁸⁵. And indeed, not so long after, Cadmus and Harmony were transformed into dragons and burrowed into the earth. From the human vantage point, *ostenta* plaguing Cadmus and his family began when he killed the dragon; nevertheless, the root of all evils was in fact planted much earlier, when Juno began to take revenge on Jupiter’s lover Europa and her next of kin. In this narrative, Ovid uses *ostentum* to express abiding ancestral fault and relentless divine anger that plagues a family across generations.

Yet another variety of divinatory sign, *portentum* (derived from *portendĕre*⁸⁶) presages future events; Ovid employs this term very sparingly, perhaps conflating it with the similar term *ostentum*, since he and his contemporaries no longer made finer semantic distinctions while discussing divinatory nomenclature.⁸⁷ One of very few narratives in the *Metamorphoses* connected to a *portentum* is the story of a legendary Roman military leader, Cipus, told in Book 15. Returning from a successful raid, Cipus encamped with his army next to Rome’s walls. The praetor noticed that he had grown horns on his head and asked the gods whether this was an omen of his future power: “‘quicquid,’ ait ‘superi, monstro portenditur isto, / seu laetum est, patriae laetum populoque Quirini, / sive minax, mihi sit.’ [...]”⁸⁸. Afterwards, he consulted with haruspices this unusual occurrence: the seers prophesied that a horned man would enter Rome and be chosen its king. Unwilling to accept this fate, Cipus hides his horns with a garland of laurel; he enters the city, gathers the plebs and the senate and warns them about the prophecy. When asked to reveal the identity of the man in questions, Cipus eventually reveals his horns, leaving all awestruck by this sign. In this narrative, *portentum* appears to have referred to the prophesied fate that would come true in some manner, even if measures were to be taken against it.

⁸⁵ *Met.* III 97–98.

⁸⁶ Fest. p. 349 L.: “Portenta existimarunt quidam gravia esse, ostenta bona: alii portenta quaedam bona, ostenta quaedam tristia appellari. portenta, quae quid porro tendatur indicent: ostenta quae tantummodo ostendant; monstra, quae praecipiant quoque remedia”. Cf. Fest. p. 350 L.: “Portenta rerum fieri dicuntur, cum insolita corpora aut quae raro se ostendunt, apparent, ut cometae, turbines, barathra tonitrua sereno caelo facta.”

⁸⁷ Ovid employs *portenta* in its metaphorical meaning in *Amores* (II 16, 23), where they denote dangers.

⁸⁸ *Met.* XV 571–573. Cf. Val. Max. *Fac. et dic. mem.* V 6, 3. Valerius Maximus classified this sign as a ‘*prodigium*’. Ovid and Valerius differ in how they conclude Cipus’ story: Ovid’ Cipus was rewarded with land, whereas Valerius’ Cipus was exiled.

Finally, the divinatory class of *omina* appears quite frequently in Ovid's text, an ambiguous signifier that can foretell good or bad happenings.⁸⁹ As such, it must always be interpreted in its textual context: when implying whether a particular *omen* foretells good or bad fortune, Ovid shapes the audience's expectations by alluding to well-known stories and employing specific register.⁹⁰ In the case of omens foreshadowing Julius Caesar's murder, the sign is described as 'unfortunate' (*tristis*): "tristia mille locis Stygius dedit omina bubo"⁹¹; furthermore, Ovid augments the negative overtone by asserting that the gods reaffirm the initial inauspicious sign through the rumble of distant thunder. When Ovid narrates the founding of Rome by Romulus, he expresses the divine acceptance of the founding by mentioning the following signs: "Ille precabatur, tonitru dedit omina laevo / Iuppiter, et laevo fulmina missa polo"⁹² – relevantly, divinatory signs appearing on the left side of the observer were deemed propitious.⁹³

Keeping with its inherent ambiguity, an *omen* can denote good or ill wishes, or a curse put on another. What is significant is the verbal, auditory aspect of such an utterance: *omina* were commonly understood to refer to voices and words, either human or divine. Appropriately, in Ovid's retelling of the tragic parting of Aeneas and Dido, the queen of Carthage sees the departing Trojan fleet and, seething with anger, curses Aeneas. However, being still in love, Dido cannot truly mean to wish him harm and her curse loses its potency:⁹⁴ "finge, age, te rapido – nullum sit in omine pondus! – / turbine deprendi; quid tibi mentis erit?"⁹⁵ Both Cicero and Varro confirm that *omen* in its essence was an auditory divinatory sign.⁹⁶ The Romans believed some *omina*, such as the call of eagle-owl (Lat. *bubo*), were inherently unfavourable.⁹⁷ Ovid spins an aetiological tale to explain this association, linking eagle-owl's call to the abduction of Persephone. When Persephone was granted permission to return to the world of the living,

⁸⁹P. Fes. p. 306 L.: "Omen, velut 'ore-men', quod fit ore augurium quod non avibus aliove modo fit."

⁹⁰Ovid also imagines *omen* as a human misstep that foreshadows the foiling of one's plans (*Met.* X 452–453). Livy describes a situation in which an actual misstep was interpreted as an *omen* prophesying Camillus' exile (*Ab Urb. con.* V 21).

⁹¹*Met.* XV 791.

⁹²*Fast.* IV 833–834.

⁹³Cic. *Div.* II 82.

⁹⁴Nonetheless, Dido's wish comes true after a fashion, since Juno ensures Aeneas has a very long way to go before he settles in Italy (Ovid. *Met.* XIV 78–101).

⁹⁵*Her.* VII 65–66.

⁹⁶Cf. Cic. *Div.* I 120; II 149; Var. *L.L.* VI 76.

⁹⁷Cf. *Met.* VI 432; X 453; XV 791. Varro derived *bubo*'s name from its call (Var. *L.L.* V 76: "[...] pleraeque ab suis vocibus ut haec [...] bubo." In fact, *bubo* comes from Latin *buteo*, 'an unknown kind of a bird of prey' (Ernout and Meillet 1967: 79), classified as a divinatory species and used for auspices (Fest. p. 308 L.; p. 132 L.).

Ascalaphus,⁹⁸ the guardian of Hades' orchard, revealed that Persephone had eaten seven pomegranate seeds in the Underworld and thus was obliged to return there every year. Demeter, angry at Ascalaphus for revealing Persephone's deed, transformed him into an eagle-own, a universally hated portent of misfortune: "Ille sibi ablatus fulvis amicitur in alis / inque caput crescit longosque reflectitur unguis / vixque movet natas per inertia brachia pennas / foedaque volucris, venturi nuntia luctus, / ignavus bubo, dirum mortalibus omen. / Hic tamen indicio poenam linguaque videri / commeruisse potest [...]."⁹⁹ The category of *omina*, it appears, owes its coherence to its anchoring in the auditory phenomena, a unifying feature which other divinatory signs appear to lack.

In the paragraphs above, I demonstrated Ovid's facility in engaging with religious terminology and imagery at varying levels of technical detail and precision. Ovid's literary output frequently draws on the facets of the Roman religious experience: ritual performance, religious nomenclature, festivals, customs and traditions. In the *Fasti*, the poet describes and explains ancient and occasionally misunderstood religious rites and festivals, frequently comprising our sole surviving source on these celebrations. In the *Metamorphoses*, the poet seeks to impart traditional wisdom on universal truths of human existence, stressing the importance of reciprocity between humans and divinities. Writing for an educated audience, he abandons technical detail of the *Fasti* in favour of greater artistic freedom. Religious references in the *Metamorphoses* are meant to be taken not as a precise compendium of traditional forms of piety and cultic performance but rather as an enchanting, awe-inspiring milieu against which Ovid's poetic perfection may bloom more profusely, educating (*docere*) and charming (*delectare*) his audiences.

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⁹⁸Ovid was most probably following Nicander of Colophon's version of this myth (Steen 1974: 16).

⁹⁹*Met.* V 546–552. Other versions of this myth (Apol. Ath. *Bibl.* I 33) have Demeter bury Ascalaphus beneath a heavy rock (Poliziano 1991: 366). The myth of abduction of Persephone and Demeter's search of her daughter appears also in the *Fasti* (IV 417–618).

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SACRUM ET POESIS – NOMINA RELIGIOSA IN OVIDII POEMATIS

Summariu m

In suo opere *De natura deorum* (III 5) Cicero de religione Romana ita scripsit: "[...] omnis populi Romani religio in sacra et in auspicia divisa sit, tertium adiunctum sit si quid praedictionis causa ex portentis et monstris Sibyllae interpretes haruspicesve monuerunt [...]". In poematis Ovidi multa verba, quae ad religionem divinationemque pertinent, inveniuntur. Hoc opusculum de Lemuriis, sacris hominibus nocentium mortuorum, qui lemures a Romanis nominabantur et signis diris, quae iram deorum populo Romano monstrabant, tractat.