

Ovid on the Liffey: An Eighteenth-Century Pastiche of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

George Ogle, a member of the English gentry that ruled Ireland in the eighteenth century, was a contemporary of Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift who published imitations of Horace, Ovid, Sappho and Anacreon, as well as some erotica. His 1726 epyllion, "The Liffy: A Fable in Imitation of the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid," written in English, depicts Dublin's river Liffey as a nymph, Livia, fleeing from an enamored mountain deity. Livia's father, Neptune, transforms her into water so that she cannot be raped. The "fable" of the nymph's flight and transformation is meant to show Ogle's unnamed, female addressee the consequences of not giving in to her admirer's advances. The poem is accompanied by an introductory epistle that seeks to convince the reader of Ovid's eloquence and wit. But this example of the eighteenth-century reception of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a pastiche composed during the great age of English translation, has been overlooked by scholars, despite Ogle's influence on both his contemporaries and on later Irish authors, including James Joyce.

"The Liffy" combines portions of three different narratives from the *Metamorphoses*: Apollo's pursuit of Daphne (*Met.* 1.452-467), the rape of Proserpina (*Met.* 5.341-408), and the rape of Arethusa (*Met.* 5.572-641). In this paper I will dissect Ogle's pastiche, comparing it to the relevant passages in Ovid and examining what it reveals about repetition and character in the *Metamorphoses*. Ogle is able to weld segments from three different rape narratives together because of their structural and thematic similitude. What varies in these narratives is the shape and geography of the pursuit, its result and the novelty of the transformation. Until the moment of metamorphosis, however, Daphne is hardly distinguishable from Arethusa or Proserpina. Ogle's Livia is simply an Anglo-Irish iteration of an Ovidian stock figure: the reluctant female object of desire.

I will then discuss Ogle's reading of the rape motif in the *Metamorphoses*. The conclusion of "The Liffy" indicates both how we should interpret the poem and how Ogle interprets his source material: he reads the rape narratives in the *Metamorphoses* as didactic fables that, sympathizing with the pursuers, teach young women "from dire scorn what sad disasters flow" (243). This interpretation runs quite contrary to one critic's assertion that Ovid sympathizes with women and "portrays their terror with compelling authenticity" (Curran, 279), demonstrating the variety of responses elicited by Ovid's work and the extent to which historical and political contexts shape our readings.

Finally, I will explore the political undertones of Ogle's poem, which may illuminate similar undertones in the *Metamorphoses*. Ogle's request that Dublin's inhabitants "attend to th'allusive tale" (241) asks not only that women acquiesce to their pursuers, but also, implicitly, that the Irish people acquiesce to their English masters. In portraying the Liffey as a nymph punished for fleeing from love, Ogle suggests that Ireland ought to let the English have their way with her— that Ireland's incorporation into the British Empire is as inevitable as Daphne's transformation into the laurel that is worn by both her pursuer, Apollo, and by triumphant Roman generals.

Selected Bibliography

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