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“Ovid and Chaucer: Metamorphoses and Metapoetry in Translation”

While Chaucer was notoriously resistant to the process of allegoresis which led to so many medieval reinterpretations of Ovid’s works, I will argue in this paper that his interest in the Roman poet lay most pointedly in the metapoetic aspect of Ovid’s writings, that is to say Ovid’s way of writing poetry about writing poetry. Chaucer was particularly tickled when Ovid reflected through the poetic form on the instability of the *auctor* and *auctoritas* constructs as well as the problem of art to transmit meaning accurately.

I will posit that Chaucer recognised in Ovid’s works the use of metamorphosis to reflect on the process of poetic *inventio* as a transformation of reality, but also of his sources, into a new literary product. In Chaucer, the metapoetic metamorphosis is perfected and goes underground, on a textual rather than a physical level, being deployed by the vernacular author to reflect on poetic *inventio*, but also, and most importantly, to think about the process of transmission through translation.

After a short discussion of Ovid's own metapoetic reflection through metamorphosis, I shall discuss two of Chaucer’s Ovidian passages in which I feel the translation process is influenced by his predecessor's engagement with metapoetics: The ekphrastic representation of the Dido and Aeneas story at the beginning of the *House of Fame*, and the Ceys and Alcyone episode that introduces the *Book of the Duchess*.