# The Metamorphosis as a Figure of the Boundary Between Life and Death

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The metamorphic myth handed down to occidental culture by the great poem of *Metamorphoses* by Ovid is concerned, beyond the transformational variety of its figurations, with the fundamental structure of subjectivity. More precisely, it represents the paradigmatic figure of a Subject who lies on the limit or tries to cross it in order to get possession of an object in fact inaccessible, that object through which nearly all the heroes of metamorphosis are pushed toward or they are attracted from. The metamorphosis may represent, in fact, the possible outcome of a destiny that, unlike the tragic one devoted to a beautiful death, is rather marked by that *entre-deux*, from that *limen* between life and death, from that extreme area, that last refuge that a fallen being can still live in. The metamorphic hero is in fact punished by a change but at the same time he is saved from death or suffering which has become intolerable as evidenced, among the numerous suggestions scattered not only in the poem of *Metamorphoses*, but in general in literature and art of all times, by the metamorphic adventure of Daphne, the nymph who turns into a tree under the pressure of a desire which she can no longer escape from.

According to the traditional Ovidian typology, metamorphosis are divided into: animal, vegetable, liquid, mineral; and their process can be descending or, but very rarely, ascending. Metamorphosis usually involves a decreasing process, if compared to humanity. Man can indeed be transformed into an animal, plant, water, stone and, in

the case of *katastèrismoi*, in a celestial body. Much rarer the opposite transformation, for example the transition from ivory or stone to the human condition, like the birth of men and women from the stones thrown behind them by Deucalion and Pyrrha after the flood (*Met*., I, vv. 313-415) or the statue carved from ivory by Pygmalion and transformed, through the intercession of Venus, into a flesh and bone woman (*ibid*.: vv. 243-297). Some miraculous metamorphosis-prizes and not just punitive can therefore exist. Metamorphosis is also, with very few exceptions[1], irreversible and, last but not least, it obeys an etiological logic, that is used to explain the cause itself (origin) of the new body or the object resulting from mutation.

In a famous motet by Eugenio Montale a pervading phantasy takes shape, who is both that one of a separation and an unbreakable bond, that is a very classic experience in the adventure of a lifetime:

> La speranza di pure rivederti
> m'abbandonava;
>
> e mi chiesi se questo che mi chiude
> ogni senso di te, schermo d'immagini,
> ha i segni della morte o dal passato
> è in esso, ma distorto e fatto labile,
> un *tuo* barbaglio:
>
> (a Modena, tra i portici,
> un servo gallonato trascinava
> due sciacalli al guinzaglio).
> (Montale 1980: 32.)
>
> [The hope of merely seeing you again
> Was abandoning me;

[1] Like, for example, the metamorphosis of the nymph "Io" who, after the transformation in heifer, takes her human figure again (*Met*., I, **vv**. 583-750).

and I asked myself if what was taking away
all sense of you, this shield of imagery,
rehearsed a death, or if from the past,
but distorte and made pathetic, it is in essence
a *you* dazzle of what might be

(at Modena, in the arcade
a fancy dress lackey dragging
two jackals on a leash.)][2].

An equally famous analysis of this motet identified in the word «sciacalli» of the last verse an anagram of Clizia – female phantasy of the poet – fixed in the double image of Clizia-jackal (dog of death) and Clizia-Sun's dog (*canis aureus* and heliotrope)[3]. It is, in fact, a very unusual interpretation, original and faithful at the same time, of the authentic amphibological status of Clizia's metamorphosis, because the poet draws from the source not only the *topos* but, more radically, its structural arrangement. In fact, in Montale's motet, metamorphosis does not appear at the level of the utterance, but it is revealed by the anagram of «sciacalli», a true metaphorical meaning of the division. The metamorphosis would thus be a figure and *the* figure of the phantasy if we consider the latter as the unconscious, monstrous and sacrificial metamorphic bond linking each Subject to its Other[4].

Metamorphosis can thus be regarded as a rhetorically and historically specified *analogon* of the phantasy, as a form of subjective structure − its sacrificial form, in particular − which is crystallized in the subjection to the Other. It becomes, in contrast to an ancient tradition that insists on seeing it as a figure of the movement, the figure

[2] For the English translation of Alan Tucker see: http://www.flashpoitmag.com/montin.htm.

[3] On this subject, see: Agosti 1982: 88-102.

[4] On the relationship between metamorphosis and phantasy, see Galvagno 1995.

of petrification *par excellence*, as emerges in Freud's and Lacan's interpretations, though in different ways.

Sigmund Freud precisely evokes a metamorphosis in the case of the Wolf Man, whose recollection of the famous «cut finger» has remained, in the psychoanalytic literature, as the paradigm of some relationship with castration. It is here important to recall a «small correction» of this episode «made» by the patient and reached at a specific time of the cure:

> I don't believe I was cutting the tree. That was a confusion with another recollection, which must also have been hallucinatorily falsified, of having made a cut in a tree with my knife, and of *blood* having come out of the tree. (Freud 1955: 85)

The detail of the carved tree, from which the drops of blood flow, affects the analyst, who relates this image to the tree inhabited by the spirit of Clorinda, the heroine sung by Tasso in *Gerusalemme Liberata*. This literary metamorphosis will clarify and confirm to Freud the deep *enjeu* of the figure of castration which his patient was debating with:

> We may therefore assume that this hallucination belongs to the period in which he brought himself to recognize the reality of castration and it is perhaps to be regarded as actually marking this step. Even the small correction [see footnote] made by the patient is not without interest. If he had a hallucination of the same dreadful experience which Tasso, in his *Gerusalemme Liberata*, tells of his hero Tancredi[5], we shall perhaps be justified in reaching the interpretation that the tree meant a woman to my little patient as well. Here, then, he was playing the part of his father, and was

[5] The soul of Tancred's beloved Clorinda, was imprisoned in a tree; and when, in ignorance of this, he slashed at it with his sword, blood flowed from the cut. This story is told by Freud at greater length in connection with the 'compulsion to repeat' in Chapter III of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920*g*), *Standard Ed*., 18, 22.]. (Freud 1955: 86, note 1).

> connecting his mother's familiar haemorrhages with the castration of women, which he now recognized, — with the 'wound'. (Freud 1955: 86)

The question aroused by this fragment of cure really leads on a very sensitive issue: the relationship of a man with the wounded body of the mother, and therefore of the woman. Which value should be given to the poetic quotation evoked by Freud concerning, not surprisingly, one of the most pathetic figures of metamorphosis: the living body under the tree, wounded and bleeding?

It will be useful to briefly recall the fatal meeting between Tancredi and Clorinda, these two lovers who do not recognize each other and get into a fighting to the death immortalized by Monteverdi's magnificent madrigal[6]. Tancredi, involved with the Franks in the first crusade against the Saracens to liberate Jerusalem, fights in the battlefield of Christians, while Clorinda joins the pagan army. But in spite of this religious and military opposition, Tancredi, struck by the «bella sembianza» («beautiful semblance») of the «donzella armata» («armed damsel») glimpsed for the first time at «un fonte vivo» («a sprightly source») (Tasso 1890: 46,-47, I) falls madly in love with her.

The events of the heroic poem offers three more meetings to this couple with a tragic doom: two in the form of fighting, where the first one is interrupted, the second one ending with the stabbing to death of the heroine by Tancredi, who had mistaken her for a warrior, and a third one where the simulacrum of Clorinda appears in the form of a cypress animated like a living body. The tragic adventure of these two enemies that appears, at first, leading to a sort of catharsis - an apparent pacification made by the conversion and baptism of Clorinda just before her death − is revealed, after the hallucination of Tancredi in the enchanted forest of Saronno, much more complex and enigmatic.

In fact, during the crossing of the forest, the young warrior reaches, without taking too much risk and without any fear, to a desert

[6] Monteverdi 1638.

amphitheatre at the centre of which a cypress rises high, like a pyramid, its bark engraved with mysterious signs among which Tancredi can read a short text in Syriac characters, like a prayer addressed to him:

> "O tu che dentro a i chiostri de la morte
> Osasti por, guerriero audace, il piede,
> deh! Se non sei crudel quanto sei forte,
> deh! Non turbar questa secreta sede.
> Perdona a l'alme omai di luce prive:
> non dée guerra co' morti aver chi vive"
> (Tasso 1961: XIII, 39, 3-8)
>
> ("Oh hardy knight, who through these woods hast passed:
> where Death his palace and his court doth hold!
> Oh trouble not these souls in quiet placed,
> oh be not cruel as thy hearth is bold,
> pardon these ghosts deprived of heavenly light,
> with spirits dead why should men living fight?")
> (Tasso 1890)

But the hero, though affected by this shocking message and by the murmur of the wind that inspires him with feelings of pity, fear and grief, with the sword violently hits the tree from which immediately drops of blood spring out. He repeats, in spite of the miracle that is unfolding under his eyes, the cruel act until he hears the wailing of the defeated cypress, unaware that the tree was in fact Clorinda, the woman he had once loved and erroneously killed for a first time.

This wailing tells of the repeated persistence of a violence perpetrated against an already dead being - against an inscription, if we literally follow the text − but its new form, together metonymy of his body and his tomb, continues to be animated and sensible to suffering.

Some heroines, such as Daphne, Syrinx, Niobe, as well as the detailed reading of Ovid's work, have nourished the reflection of

Jacques Lacan, so that the «thought of metamorphosis» has become, in its psychoanalytic elaboration, a real theoretical post in game. If Freud finds the metamorphosis as a figure of female castration, Lacan sees this as the paradigmatic figure of a subjectivity that lies on a boundary:

> The boundary we are located in here is the same one in which the possibility of metamorphosis lies, as conveyed through the centuries hidden in the works by Ovid, takes all its force, its virulence in that turning point in European sensibility that is the Renaissance, to explode in the Shakespeare's theatre. (Lacan 1986: 308)[7]

The notion of limit is also articulated in a dialectical relationship with the notion of *Das Ding* (The Thing). Each libidinal and, consequently, ethical stake of the Freudian subject so would be situated on each side of the limit that separates two fields: on this side, the field of access gates invested by the *libido* and regulated by the pleasure principle; beyond, the object and/or Thing field that remains inaccessible. This dialectic is founded on a paradox: it is impossible to reach what is the cause and the very end of pleasure because the law proper to the pleasure principle determines, at the same time, its limit. The Freudian ethics works as a reversal of the Aristotelian moral of happiness - where pleasure is not intended to exceed the limits imposed by nature and reason - because it finds, on the contrary, in the pleasure principle an irresistible and dangerous trend as off-limits to an object and to a place fundamentally inaccessible. Now, this object or this Thing - simultaneously place of drives and of the outbreak of signifiers - are the ones which trouble the heroes of metamorphosis, which becomes the imaginary figure of a subjectivity suspended to a limit that is insurmountable or daring to be surmounted.

[7] The translation is mine.

It is in the range of a broader discussion about the homology of relationship of metamorphosis with the pain and with the driving reaction that Lacan mentions the myth of Daphne:

> [...] Then I will simply suggest that perhaps we should imagine the pain as a field that, in the order of existence, opens precisely from the boundary that there is no possibility for the being to move. Is not there perhaps something that opens up, through a kind of intuition of poets, in the myth of Daphne who becomes a tree under the pressure of a pain that she can't no longer escape? Is it not true that the living being who is not able to move suggests, in his shape itself, the presence of what might be called a petrified pain? (*Ibid*.: 74)

The assimilation of the vegetal metamorphosis of Daphne to a petrification is not without a reason: every metamorphosis, in fact, is nothing else but the fixation to the fundamental phantasy, to the attraction/repulsion as regard to *Das Ding* that can push a Subject is to an escape is, paradoxically, to paralysis. The pain digs his home on the edge of these two contradictory tendencies.

It is known how Daphne herself begs her father, the river Peneo, to change its appearance to help her repress the desire that shocks her and to which the choice of eternal virginity can't allow «change and loose this beauty that has kindled an excessive love» («Qua nimium placui, mutando perde figuram», *Met*., I, 547). Daphne prefers to pay with a metamorphosis the rejection of Phoebus' desire, and chooses to sacrifice her being for another enjoyment, her divine ideal's: Diana.

Another metamorphosis, Sirinx's metamorphosis, is instead evoked in a central chapter of *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* entitled *Courtly love as anamorphosis*.

*Das Ding* is investigated here from the poetic courtly artifice and, in particular, from what it has developed around the figure of the Dame:

> The idealized woman, the Dame, who is in the position of the Other and of the object, is suddenly, brutally, in the place expertly built with fine signifiers, to put in its rawness the void of a thing that is revealed in its nakedness to be the thing, that one that is at the heart of herself in her cruel void. This Thing [...] is somehow revealed with a persistent and cruel power. (*Ibid*. 193)

And to give an example of how this void can be figured out, Lacan refers to the metamorphosis of Syrinx in Longo Sophist's *Pastoral adventures of Daphnis and Chloe*:

> Pan chases the nymph Syrinx that escapes from him and disappears into the rushes. In his fury, he cut the reeds, and from here, says Longo, the unequal pipes flute comes out. Pan wishing well, [...], to express his love that had no equal. Sirinx is transformed into the reed of the Pan's flute. The register of derision where the singular poem I have given communication here can be registered in, is located in the same structure, in the same schema of a central void around which what desire is after all sublimated through is articulated. (*Ibid*.)[8]

The adventure of Syrinx is also dealt with by Ovid, but in a more pathetic register than Longo's narration:

> Panaque, cum prensam sibi iam Syringa putaret,
> corpore pro nymphae calamos tenuisse palustres;
> dunque ibi suspirat, motos in harundine ventos
> effecisse sonum tenuem similemque querenti;
> arte nova vocisque deum dulcedine captum
> «Hoc mihi conloquium tecum» dixisse «manebit»,
> atque ita disparibus calamis conpagine cerae
> inter se iunctis nomen tenuisse puellae.

[8] See also for the reference to Longo Sofista's novel: Sofista 1958: 570-571, and on Greek novel compare the following essay as well: Fusillo 1989.

(*Met*., I, 705-712)

> (and how Pan, when now he thought he had caught Syrinx, instead of her held naught but marsh reeds in his armes; and while he sighed in disappointement, the soft air stirring in the reeds gave forth a low and complaining sound. Touched by this wonder and charmed by the sweet tones, the god exclamed: "This converse, at least, shall I have with thee". And so the pipes, made of unequal reeds fitted together by a joining of wax, took and kept the name of the maiden.)

In place of the body of the nymph, who became elusive, the god Pan invents an object, the flute, which bears the name of Syrinx. He won't therefore have any other access to the signifier (*nomen*) of the desired Thing.

The Lacanian reflection on the thought of metamorphosis culminates in the final chapters of the seminar, dedicated to a comment of the tragedy of Antigone. What strikes in his interpretation of Sophocles' tragedy is that Lacan has highlighted the metamorphic statute without manifest metamorphosis of the destiny of Antigone, statute that he extends to the mythical thought in its entirety and to the tragic thought in particular.

The metamorphic interpretation of Sophocles' heroine has been suggested, in particular, from the passage of the tragedy in which Antigone:

> reappears near the body [of her brother Polynices], emitting, as reported in the text, the groans of the bird whose children have been carried off[9].

[9] «[…], the maiden is seen in view, and she is wailing forth the bitter note of the plaintive bird, like when it beholds the bed of its empty nest deprived of its young. Thus also she, when she beholds the dead body bare, burst forth into strains of grief, […]». Sophocles, "Antigone", 1859: 176, vv. 423-425.

> An extraordinary image. More unique for having been taken up and repeated by the authors. I extracted from Euripides' *The Phoenician* the four verses in which, even there, she is compared to the abandoned mother of a brood dispersed, casting pathetic screams[10]. This shows very well what the evocation of the bird always symbolizes in ancient poetry. Do not forget how the pagan myths are close to the thought of metamorphosis - think of the transformation of Philemon and Baucis. Here is the nightingale looming in Euripides, like the image in which the human being seems to mutate to the level of this complaint. (Lacan 1986: 307-308)

Lacan adds another emblematic metamorphic image of the limit to this comment, that one of Niobe, «It is on Antigone's mouth the image of Niobe who, trapped in the grip of the rock, will eternally remain exposed to the ravages of rain and time. Here is a picture-limit which the axis of the drama rotates on» (*ibid*.: 311). The metamorphosis fixes in fact the oxymoronic body (marble and tears) and the liminal being (between life and death) of Niobe:

> Orba resedit
> exanimes inter natos natasque virumque
> deriguitque malis: nullos movet aura capillos,
> in vultu color est sine sanguine, lumina maestis
> stant immota genis; nihil est in imagine vivum.
> Ipsa quoque interius cum duro lingua palato
> congelat, et venae desistunt posse moveri;
> nec flecti cervix nec bracchia reddere motus
> nec pes ire potest; intra quoque viscera saxum est.
> Flet tamen et validi circumdata turbine venti
> in patriam rapta est; ibi fixa cacumine montis
> liquitur, et lacrimas etiam nunc marmora manant.

[10] «Unhappy me, how lament sounds − / what bird in oak's / or fir's top branches / with its laments in lone motherhood / will join in my bewailing?» (Euripides, "Phoenician Women", 1988: 857, vv. 1514-1518).

(*Met*., VI, 301-312)

> (Now does the childless mother sit down amid the lifeless bodies of her sons, her daughters, and her eyes are fixed and staring in her sad face. There is nothing alive in the picture. Her very tongue is silent, frozen to her mouth's roof, and her veins can move no longer; her neck cannot bend nor her armes move nor her feet go. Within also her vitals are stone. But still she weeps; and, caught up in a strong, whirling wind, she is rapt away to her own native land. There, set on a mountain's peak, she weeps; and even to this day tears trickle from the marble.)

It is not a coincidence that Lacan's reflections on metamorphosis are part of the framework of a question that concerns the very problematic relationship of psychoanalysis with ethics, a relationship which he examines in the light of the three pillars of psychoanalysis: the Thing, the sublimation, the enjoyment, which he adds to the tragic dimension of the analytic experience, surveyed through the comment of *Antigone*. These benchmarks also affect the metamorphosis that can be considered, in this ethical perspective, like the possible and singular outcome of a destiny. It can hardly be fully assimilated to the essence of tragedy - the specificity of the tragic lot being death with all its splendor – and, even less, to a catharsis because it rather indicates the boundary between life and death.

Metamorphosis has, in fact, a specifically sacrificial dimension that never exceeds the threshold of death, and represents a paradoxical state of being that gives body and image to the *Spaltung* itself.

Daphnis and Niobe are two examples, that Lacan respectively evokes at the beginning and at the end of his lecture: they represent the price to be paid - a petrification – the first, for the refusal of Phoebus' desire, thus remaining fixed in her vow of virginity, the latter, for the assertion, in front of Latona, of the supremacy of her beauty and her fertility. As for Antigone, she breaks the law of the city to assert her absolute love to her brother that cannot be given up. In these three destinies it is nothing but preserving an illusion of completeness in

front of the risk of loss (castration), that the three heroines must undergo, however, but in a sacrificial form.

We mentioned the nymph Daphne, who in Ovid's great poem appears as the first metamorphic heroine identified as a paradigmatic figure of the limit between life and death, which the metamorphosis represents. Now, this limit - this *entre-deux* - is nothing but the mutation of the (anthropomorphic) form of the nymph into a laurel tree, which fixes her in the new vegetable body saving her from death, but at the price of a painful petrification. This transformation is required by Daphne herself, in order to escape from Apollo's desire, and in order to stop a flight that is destroying her. Daphne will be owned by the god only as a laurel tree, that is the proper object of Phoebus' vocation, the highly symbolic object for his poetic triumph.

The metamorphosis takes place in the final sequence of the long extract of Apollo and Daphne in the first book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. More precisely, it is the tale of the metamorphosis process that takes up the first part of the last sequence, while the second part is dedicated to Apollo's Peana, that is to the celebration of the completed transformation, of the metamorphic object finally embodied by the god:

> vix prece finita torpor gravis occupat artus:
> mollia cinguntur tenui præcordia libro,
> in frondem crines, in ramos bracchia crescunt;
> pes modo tam velox pigris radicibus hæret,
> ora cacumen habet: remanet nitor unus in illa.
> Hanc quoque Phœbus amat, positaque in stipite dextra
> sentit adhuc trepidare novo sub cortice pectus
> complexusque suis ramos, ut membra, lacertis
> oscula dat ligno: refugit tamen oscula lignum.
> (*Met*., I, 548-556)

> (Scarce had she does prayed when a down-dragging numbness seized her limbs, and her soft sides were begirt with thin bark. Her hair was changed to lives, her arms to branches. Her feet, but

> now so swift, grew fast in sluggish roots, and her head was now but a tree's top. Her gleaming beauty alone remained.
>
> But even now in this new form Apollo loved her; and placing his hand upon the trunk, he felt the heart still fluttering beneath the bark. He embraced the branches as if human limbs, and pressed his lips upon the wood.)

Now, in these verses, the nymph's body is figured by the *entre-deux* of the mutation in progress, by the kinetic transformation that takes place under our eyes and that will flow into the new body shape of the virgin, a vegetable appearance when necessary, which is peculiar to her own being a laurel tree. We should remember, indeed, the etiologic structure of the fable that begins with «laurus» («laurel-tree») (*ibid*.: v. 450), and ends with «laurea» (*ibid*.: v. 566), with the explanation, in the diegetic pause, of this name and its symbolic meaning.

But let us return, finally, to the hybrid (liminal) body which is presented us in the verses of the mutation, isolating first the lexical parallels that define the parts of the human body and the parts of the vegetable the nymph is changing into: chest → cortex (*præcordia* → *book*); hair → leaves (*crines* → *frondem*); arms → branches (*bracchia* → *ramos);* feet→ root (*pes* → *radicibus*); face → top (*ora* → *cacumen*); chest→ trunk (*pectus* → *cortice* ); limbs→ branches or wood (*membra* → *ramos-ligno/ lignum*)[11].

And these lexemes could not better connote, and even create, the hybrid boundary of the mutation in place of the *figure* («mutando perde figuram», *ibid*.: v. 546), without the verbs that specify them, and that are used to produce the metamorphic process itself: «seized» (*cinguntur*), «was changed» (*crescunt*), «grew» (*hæret*), «was not but»

[11] Everybody knows the genial way chosen by some great painters and sculptors in order to depict this metamorphosis: Antonio Pollaiolo, *Apollo e Dafne*, Sandro Botticelli, *La Primavera*, Lorenzo Bernini, *Apollo e Dafne* and perhaps even the Ghirlandaio's female figure who appears in the fresco *La nascita di San Giovanni Battista* in Santa Maria Novella's church in Florence.

(*habet*), «fluttering» (*trepidare*), «embraced» (*complexus*), «pressed his lips» (*oscula dat*), «shrank from» (*refugit*), as well as the two attributes «soft» and «thin» (*mollia* and *tenui*) which qualify «limbs» (*præcordia*) and «bark» (*libro*)[12], and the synesthetic adjective «sluggish» (*pigris*) that qualifies «roots» (*radicibus*), and that forms an oxymoron with the adjective «fast» (*velox*) preceding it.

So it is Apollo, already owned by the nymph, who finally gets possession of its object, and who can now replace his request for love to the fugitive Daphne, with the paean: the song of triumph.

And it is really on a hybrid gesture that the text of Apollo and Daphne more subtly ends. It is the approving movement of the tree-top in which the nymph has just transformed. The *laurea* finally seems to answer the words of the Paean, if we are allowed to play with the letters between Paean and Peneus (the god-river father of Daphne), because the tree, the result of metamorphosis, is embodied by the god as a symbol with the specifically paternal and divine ideal traits. As suggested by Philip Hardie[13], this tree becomes the fetish of the god: «Paean was done. The laurel waved her new made branches, and seemed to move her head-like top in full consent». («Finierat Paean: factis modo laurea ramis / adnuit utque caput visa est agitasse cacumen» *Met*., I, 566-567).

The graceful wagging of Daphne, now become *laurus* / *laurea*, might well temper the petrification which normally constitutes the heritage of metamorphic subjects, but we must not forget that the metamorphosis is required by the nymph at the end of a race that had sunk her in anguish and that is generated by the propagation of a

[12] Not by chanche, he identifies in the *liber* the metamorphosis of Daphne's body (Hardie 2002: 46). The reader is suggested to read entirely this very penetrating paper.

[13] «As a consequence of the pressure of Apollo's desire, Daphne now exists for her lover only in substitutions for and displacements of herself. The symbolism of her arboreal form as a phallic fetish is parhaps too obvious to point out» (Hardie 2000).

*torpor gravis* which will set forever her being in a new body: the laurel that, properly, is no longer Daphne, but Apollo:

> [...] The gods are part of the real [...].
>
> I spoke about Apollo. Apollo is not castrated, neither before nor afterwards. Later, something else happens. We are told that it is Daphne who turns into a tree. Here you are not told something. It is hidden to you - it is very surprising – because it is not hidden to you. The laurel, after the metamorphosis, is not Daphne, it is Apollo. The specific of God is that, once satisfied, he becomes the object of his desire, though, in this case, he must be petrified. In other words, a god, if he is real, gives the impression of his power in his relationship with the object of his desire. His power is there where he is. (Lacan 2004)[14]

[14] The translation is mine.

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