Talking Trees: Philemon and Baucis Revisited

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TALKING TREES: PHILEMON AND BAUCIS REVISITED[1]

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Two trunks like bodies, bodies like twined trunks
Supported by their wooden hug. Leaves shine
In tender habit at the extremities.
Truly each other's, they have embraced so long
Their barks have met and wedded in one flow
Blanketing both. Time lights the handsome bulk . . .
Thom Gunn, "Philemon and Baucis"

Tucked away in the inmost fold of the *Metamorphoses* is an episode that offers little to today's Ovidian student in the way of torturing desires, violent rapes, and mangled bodies.[2] This is the "good-natur'd" story of Philemon and Baucis, an old Phrygian couple who unwittingly but warmly entertain Jupiter and Mercury in their tiny hut and are rewarded for their kindness by being made guardians of the temple into which the gods transform their house after submerging the local Sodom and Gomorrah.[3] At the end of their lives, they undergo a further metamorphosis into trees. The couple have had

1 All quotations from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are from *P. Ovidi Nasonis Metamorphoses*, ed. R. J. Tarrant, Oxford 2004. Translations are my own. I would like to thank *Arethusa*'s anonymous reader for many helpful suggestions (not all of which I have implemented) and for pointing me to Thom Gunn. Thanks also to audiences at the University of Washington at Seattle and the Institute of Classical Studies, London, who heard earlier versions of this paper.

2 See, e.g., Richlin 1992, Murray 1998, Segal 1998, Gildenhard and Zissos 1999. For the *Metamorphoses* as many folded, see Mart. 14.192: "haec tibi multiplici quae structa est massa tabella, / carmina Nasonis quinque decemque gerit."

3 "Good-natur'd" is Dryden's adjective in the Preface to *Fables Ancient and Modern* in Kinsley 1958.4.1450.

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a fruitful afterlife: painted by Rembrandt, set to music by Haydn and Gounod, translated by Dryden and Swift.[4]

Though comparatively neglected in recent scholarship,[5] the episode is still much loved, and has been chipped away at in various ways over the last few decades. There are noticeable trends in the criticism. Above all, there is an interest in the couple's idealized poverty and mutual regard (and, incidentally, in their relationship to contemporary marriages of convenience).[6] Attention has been drawn to the self-consciously Callimachean detail and humility of the story, together with its descent from domesticated Hellenistic epic and epyllion (from Eumaeus to Hecale, Molorchus, Erigone, and Evander).[7] Other scholars have explored Near Eastern or biblical elements in the story (sacred-tree cult, Noah's Ark, Lot, and Abraham), as well as ancient concepts of the topography of Phrygia (most recently in Christopher Jones's [1994] revival of Louis Robert's theory that the mountain in the story is Mt Sipylus).[8] The episode is framed by a discussion between a credulous narrator and a skeptical listener that offers the Ovidian reader a choice of two responses to divine miracles, and thus to the deceits of fictional marvels, at this central point in the whole book (an aspect discussed

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4 See Beller 1967 for a delightful survey of this afterlife, the source of many of the later translations cited here. Another modern version is "Baucis and Philemon" by Michael Longley in Hofmann and Lasdun 1994.194–97. For a more offbeat transformation, see Derek Mahon's "A Garage in Co. Cork" in Mahon 1991.153: "A god who spent the night here once rewarded / Natural courtesy with eternal life— / Changing to petrol pumps, that they be spared / For ever there, an old man and his wife" (thanks to Rory Rapple for this).

5 The episode is almost completely ignored in many studies of the *Metamorphoses* as a whole, such as Solodow 1988, Myers 1994, Tissol 1997, Wheeler 1999. Galinsky 1975 discusses it at 197–203, while Otis 1966.384–86 treats it mainly as a central panel corresponding to the opening story of Deucalion and Pyrrha (1.313–415).

6 See Gamel 1984, Bömer 1969–86.194. For an old couple as legend, cf. Ter. *Hec*. 620–21: "postremo nos iam fabulae sumu', Pamphile, 'senex atque anus'" ("One day we'll be folklore, Pamphilus, 'The Old Woman and the Old Man'").

7 See Bömer 1969–86.190–96, Beller 1967.13–36, Hollis 1983.104 on *Hecale*: "Ovid's debt to this poem here is obvious even from the meagre fragments remaining." See also Hollis's comprehensive discussion (1990.341–54) of literary theoxeny in relation to both Hecale and Philemon and Baucis. Griffin 1991.63 counters Anderson's arguments (1972.390) that Ovid did not borrow directly from *Hecale*, though he himself argues for powerful biblical parallels for the religious aspects of the story—theoxeny, tree cult, and flood. E. J. Kenney (Kenney and Melville 1986.xxviii) reads intertextual significance into Theseus's satisfied response at *Metamorphoses* 8.725–26: "cunctosque et res et mouerat auctor, / Thesea praecipue" ("Both story and teller moved them all, especially Theseus"—because he had been Hecale's grateful guest).

8 See also Calder 1910. Bushell 1916, Fontenrose 1945, and Griffin 1991 give biblical parallels.

by Denis Feeney in *The Gods in Epic*[9]). The most recent analysis of the episode, by Judith Hallett (2000), suggests that Ovid is preoccupied with the harmony between Baucis and Philemon and their environment: they emerge as a primitive version of the modern eco-friendly couple.

Yet despite these inroads, a very important aspect of the episode has consistently gone unnoticed: the underlying presence of certain motivating factors that determine the narrative. My approach here differs from previous ones in that it concentrates primarily on the formal structure of the story. But by uncovering the dynamics behind its composition, I hope to allow the episode to reveal more of its creative energy in the process. Some of the greatest pleasure in reading Ovid's *Metamorphoses* comes from being able to see the germs of a metamorphosis in the pre-metamorphosed state. This kind of critical approach to Ovid is not a new one—it goes back at least as far as William Anderson's first article on the *Metamorphoses* (1963.4–5) and has been subsequently developed by Leonard Barkan in particular (1986.20–23)—but it has never been applied to this straightforward-seeming story. Reading the episode backwards, as it were, can bring to light several unnoticed patterns that repeat in the course of the narrative and also explain a number of details that scholars have previously found puzzling. It is almost as though the warm glow shed by the story has worked to obscure its tight economy.

Ovid himself used and reused the basic outline of the narrative: a poor rustic giving hospitality to a god or gods in a tiny hut (which appears three times in the *Fasti*[10])—so much of a cliché by this time that Ovid can refer in one of his accounts to "the usual old host's cottage," "hospitis antiqui solitas . . . aedes," *Fasti* 4.687. Lucan revives it in his story of the mysterious encounter between two lonely men in *Bellum Ciuile* 5, Caesar and the marsh-dweller Amyclas, who lives like Dickens's Ham Peggotty in an upturned boat. Silius Italicus imitates it in his aetiology of Falernian wine (7.166–211). These stories suggest a persistent preoccupation in Roman culture: that is, the sporadic points of contact between a civilized Roman and the primeval remains of his or her society's origins—commemorated in

9 Feeney 1991.229–32; see also Myers 1994.91–93 and now Green 2003. Gamel 1984 argues that it is crucial to remember that the narrator is the sophisticated Lelex and that the story is filtered through his misplaced urban values. Green 2003 presses for a strong difference between moralizing narrator (and internal audience) and cynical Ovidian reader in assessing the gods' motives in the story.

10 *Fasti* 4.507–60 (Celeus), 4.685–712 (Pelignian couple), 5.495–544 (Hyrieus).

the archaizing festivals of the Roman year, with their temporary return to simple food and makeshift huts, and in the explanations that accompany them in Ovid's *Fasti* in particular, often narrated by old people, symbolic survivors from the past.[11] Many of the ingredients common to these stories overlap with those found in Philemon and Baucis: the Phrygian couple set out an implausibly Roman primitive meal on their table, and we witness a snap transformation of rustic hut into gold and marble temple, "described for all the world," Hollis (1983 ad 699) says, "as if it were Augustus' new temple of Palatine Apollo." Contained in the story are an implied history of eating and a speeded-up history of architecture. But these I will return to later.

The story has links with many old traditions, then, but something is lost in merely isolating what it shares with all the others. Showing how its scheme draws on and reinforces common cultural concepts—the simple hut, the simple meal, the ideal marriage—is to sacrifice the transformative power of Ovidian language, which "cooks" everything together for one unique moment. We do not serve Ovid well by simply extracting the raw ingredients. An alternative approach would be to ask: what makes this story singular? How does it differ from all the other stories about humble hosts? What idiosyncratic elements give it its own internal logic? Chief among these elements is the fact that the couple are metamorphosed into trees. Old age is another vital thread; so are building materials and also "two-in-oneness" (the devoted pair are transformed at the end into an oak tree and a linden tree, side by side and possibly even connected by the same roots).[12] I will look at each of these aspects in turn in order to show how strongly they motivate Ovid's choice of words and material. While the story concludes with two drastic acts of metamorphosis—hut into temple and people into trees—the magic has started long before that.

First, trees. Robin Nisbet, in the first paragraph of his well-known essay on tree imagery in Senecan drama, makes a bold and poetic statement that deserves to be quoted in full (1987.243 = 1995.202):

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11 See, e.g., Beard 1987.

12 Anderson 1972 and Kenney forthcoming assume that the oak was Philemon (cf. *Fasti* 4.400: *dura quercus*) and the linden Baucis (cf. *Met.* 10.92: *tiliae molles*). For sex differences among individual types of tree, see, e.g., Plin. *NH* 16.19.47, 16.24.65, 16.42.105. Forbes Irving 1990.271 regards the tree-cult aspect as what separates this myth from all other tree-metamorphosis stories.

> Trees are like people. They have a head (*uertex*), a trunk (*truncus*), arms (*bracchia*). They stand tall like a soldier, or look as slender as a bridegroom (Sappho, 115 L-P). Their life moves in human rhythms, which in their case may be repeated: sap rises and falls, hair (*coma*) luxuriates, withers, drops off. Sometimes they are superior and aloof, sometimes they go in pairs, whether as comrades-in-arms (Hom. *Il.* 12.132ff., Virg. *Aen*. 9.679ff.) or husband and wife (Ov. *Met.* 8.720). They whisper like lovers (Ar. *Nub*. 1008), embrace, support, cling, and the stricken elm grieves for the vine more than himself (Stat. *Theb*. 8.544ff.). When the storm bears down, they suffer, heave, bend, as on Soracte or Wenlock Edge, but though they may take a battering (Hor. *Carm*. 1.28.27: "plectantur silvae"), they remain robust ("oaken") and tenacious. Even under the axe they are resilient, like the Romans in the Punic War, and put out new growth (Hor. *Carm*. 4.5.5: "duris ut ilex tunsa bipennibus . . .").

Centuries ago, point-by-point comparison of a more literal kind was made by the Roman natural historians. Take the following passage from Pliny (*NH* 16.72.181):

> umor et corpori arborum est. qui sanguis earum intellegi debet, non idem omnibus: ficis lacteus—huic ad caseos figurandos coaguli uis—cerasis cumminosus, ulmis saliuosus, lentus ac pinguis, malis, uitibus, piris aquosus . . . atque in toto corpore arborum ut reliquorum animalium cutis, sanguis, caro, nerui, uenae, ossa, medullae.

> Trees have juice in their bodies, too. One should think of it as their blood, not the same in all of them: figs' sap is milky—it is efficacious as a coagulant for making cheese—cherries' sap is gummy, that of elms is like spit, thick and slimy, that of apples, vines, and pears is watery . . . and in their bodies in general, trees, like other living things, have skin, blood, flesh, nerves, veins, bones, and marrow.

Trees, like humans, are prone to "arthritis" (*NH* 17.37.224):

> uerum ut homini neruorum cruciatus sic et arbori, ac duobus aeque modis: aut enim in pedes, hoc est radices, inrumpit uis morbi, aut in articulos, hoc est cacuminum digitos, qui longissime a toto corpore exeunt.
>
> Just as a man gets pain in his sinews, so does a tree, and it happens similarly in two ways: either the disease breaks out in its feet, that is to say, its roots, or in its finger joints, that is, the tips of the top branches that grow furthest from the main body.

They even need barbers and manicurists (*NH* 17.37.248): "plurimae autem amputari sibi uolunt onerosa ac superuacuae, sicut nos ungues et capillum," "Many trees want their burdensome and superfluous growth cut away, just as we cut our nails and hair." Columella's analogy between human and tree bodies (he is, to be accurate, talking here about vines) is even more systematic (*de Agr*. 3.10.11):

> quibus eadem ipsa mater ac parens primum radices uelut quaedam fundamenta iecit, ut iis quasi pedibus insisterent. truncum deinde superposuit uelut quondam staturam corporis et habitus; mox ramis diffudit quasi bracchiis; tum caules et pampinos elicuit uelut palmas, eorumque alios fructu donauit, alios fronde sola uestiuit ad protegendos tutandosque partus.
>
> . . . on whom the same mother and parent [Nature] first bestowed roots as foundations, so that they might stand as if on feet. Then she put a trunk on top, to correspond to the carriage and bearing of a body; then she made it spread out with branches, like arms; then she drew out sprouts and stems like hands, and endowed some with fruit and clothed others in leaves only, for the protection and safekeeping of their offspring.

It is this legend, "trees are like people," that should be carved above the Baucis and Philemon episode.[13] Ovid himself, in his accounts of the tree metamorphoses of other mythical figures (Daphne, Dryope, Myrrha, and the Heliades are among the twenty or so examples in *Metamorphoses*), is used to taking us in slow motion through the similarities, showing us how feet become roots, arms branches, hair leaves, and so on.[14] The description of Daphne is typical (1.549–62):

> mollia cinguntur tenui praecordia libro;
> in frondem crines, in ramos bracchia crescunt;
> pes modo tam uelox pigris radicibus haeret;
> ora cacumen habet; remanet nitor unus in illa.
>
> Her soft flesh is surrounded by thin bark; her hair grows into leaves, her arms into branches; her feet, once swift, stick by clinging roots; a treetop encloses her face; her sheen alone remains a part of her.

Where the changing figure is a woman, the metamorphosis often stands in for a feminine rite of passage: Daphne avoids losing her virginity; the Heliades are no longer marriageable; while Dryope, the mother whose breasts harden and lose their milk, undergoes a pseudo-menopausal "change of life." *Metamorphoses* 8 is particularly dense with trees. A primeval forest forms the backdrop to the Calydonian boar-hunt—a rather active backdrop where awkward spoilsport trees delight in thwarting the hunters by tripping them up with their roots (379: "pronus ab arborea cecidit radice retentus") or blocking their spears with their trunks (346: "truncoque dedit leue uulnus acerno").[15] A partridge peers out from a thick oak; Meleager's life depends on a smoldering brand; and Erysichthon is cursed for cutting down a sacred tree. The book might almost be called Ovid's *Siluae*. Indeed, there is so

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13 See Perutelli 1985 for a subtle discussion of how one aspect of the human-tree analogy, the word *bracchia* used of branches and originally found in Roman technical writing, was transferred to the imaginative sphere, especially in Virgil and Ovid.

14 Barkan 1986.9 compares Philost. *Imag*. 1.11 (the Heliades becoming trees): "The painter recognizes the story, for it puts roots at the extremities of their toes, while some, over here, are trees to the waist, and branches have supplanted the arms of others. Behold the hair, it is nothing but poplar leaves! Behold the tears, they are golden!" Lucretius lists tree metamorphosis among a number of scientific impossibilities (2.702).

15 See Horsfall 1979.

much intertwining among all the various branches that this analysis of Philemon and Baucis will necessarily be somewhat tangled.

The first tree in the story nods its head at the entrance to the tiny cottage at the moment when Jupiter and Mercury, in disguise, lower their heads to get through the door. The expression *submisso . . . uertice* (638: "with head bent down") doubles as a kind of parody of divine *numen*. As many commentators have noticed, the gods' gesture is also a nod towards self-consciously humble Callimachean decorum: Ovid the changeable narrator enters a humble doorway (638: *humiles . . . postes*) and adapts his style accordingly.[16] But it is worth noting that it also conjures up the shape of a bending treetop (the *uertex* Nisbet puts first on his list). Daphne the laurel tree similarly dips her head to Apollo at 1.567: "adnuit utque caput uisa est agitasse cacumen" ("She nodded and seemed to shake her top as if she were nodding her head"). A treetop to start the story, then; but trunks, roots, and branches will play their part, too, and long before the end.

Trees feature next in the description of the laying of a fire: dried bark (642: *cortice sicco*) and dried branches (644: *ramalia . . . arida*). It would be hard to claim that this is in itself significant, but Ovid does take care to use words for kindling that are peculiar to the parts of a tree. Much of the furniture is wooden, too, and the types of wood are named: a beechwood bathtub (652–53: *alueus . . . / fagineus*), beechwood cups (669–70: *fabricataque fago / pocula*), a couch with willow feet (656a: *pedibus . . . salignis*). "Willow feet" here looks not just like descriptive detail but a device to foreshadow the final metamorphosis into trees, in which human feet are conventionally among the first parts to disappear—for example, Daphne's at 1.551: "pes modo tam uelox pigris radicibus haeret" ("Her feet, once swift, stick by clinging roots").[17] As Dryden puts it in his translation of the Baucis and Philemon episode: "New roots their fasten'd feet began to

16 E.g., Gamel 1984.119; at 120, she suggests that *multifidas . . . faces* ("much-divided brands," 644) refers to Ovid's Callimachean technique of miniaturizing epic elements; cf. Papanghelis 1996, who links the tiny slice of bacon (649–50: *de tergore partem / exiguam*), as opposed to a whole carcass, to a programmatic move in this episode away from *perpetuum carmen* into fragmented epyllion (cf. Hom. *Il.* 7.321: νώτοισιν . . . διηνεκέεσσι, Virg. *Aen.* 8.183: *perpetui tergo bouis*). At Virg. *Aen.* 8.366–67, Aeneas stoops to enter Evander's hut: "angusti subter fastigia tecti / ingentem Aenean duxit" ("He led huge Aeneas under the rafters of the cramped cottage").

17 Cf. 2.347–48: "[Phaëthusa] questa est / deriguisse pedes" ("Phaëthusa complained that her feet had gone hard").

bind."[18] Besides, several household objects give advance warning of the couple's final fate, to be turned into sacred trees draped with hanging garlands (722–23: *pendentia . . . / serta super ramos*): the couch *draped* in garments (657–58: "uestibus hunc uelant quas non nisi tempore festo / sternere consuerant"), a cloth *covering* a chair (639–40: "sedili, / cui superiniecit textum rude sedula Baucis"), bacon *hanging* on a wooden beam (648: "sordida terga suis nigro pendentia tigno"), and a key *hanging* from a hook (653: "dura clauo suspensus ab ansa").

The simple meal laid out on the table (664–78) is unabashedly Roman and rustic in style. It is one of the best preserved of all ancient menus, and could be slotted in with any number of similar simple meals found in Martial, Ovid's *Fasti*, the *Moretum*, or other "homely" poems.[19] Hors d'oeuvres of olives, preserved cornel cherries, endive, radish, cheese, and eggs are followed by a main course of boiled cabbage and bacon. Then comes dessert: nuts, figs, dates, plums, apples, grapes, and honey. The simplicity is deceptive. For a start, Roman simple meals vary considerably. This is not, for example, the acorn-belching primitivism of Celeus in the *Fasti* (4.502: acorns and brambles), nor is it like the bloodless vegetarian meal served by Falernus in the middle of Silius Italicus's catalogues of carnage (7.179–84). The dinner seems to come from some pre-cereal era (there is no bread) and possibly a pre-sacrificial one (the gods stop the couple from slaughtering their household goose), but still it requires preparation, domesticating, laying down; a kind of civilizing process is involved and positively stressed (compare the gods' final decree: *qui coluere coluntur*, "Those who have cherished are cherished themselves," 724).[20]

It is complicated in other ways, too. When dealing with literary food, half the fun and all the uniqueness is lost when the bare substances are extracted and the verbs and adjectives that give each dish its special, context-determined flavor are thrown away. As Judith Hallett points out, the treatment of the meal is part and parcel of the hosts' attitude to their guests:

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18 "Baucis and Philemon, Out of the Eighth Book of Ovid's Metamorphoses," in Kinsley 1958.4.1566.

19 See Malten 1939.182–84, Galinsky 1975.201–02.

20 Nathaniel Hawthorne, in his rewriting of Philemon and Baucis as "The Miraculous Pitcher" in *The Wonder Book*, replaces Ovid's archaic cabbage and bacon with an American Primitive version rich in butter, cheese, and cream (see Beller 1967.142–45, Fantham 2004).

cherishing, harmonizing, nurturing.[21] But we need to look to the end to see the real key, though this is something remarked on by none of the commentators. In a nutshell, every single thing on this table, if—and often only if—one takes account of all the surrounding decoration with which Ovid transforms it, has to do with trees.

This can, of course, be achieved effortlessly in the case of fruit, nuts, and berries. But other dishes, whose primary reason for being there is that they would typically adorn a Roman peasant's table, are harder to deal with. What about cabbage and bacon, for example? When Baucis goes into the garden to cut a cabbage, she is said to cut its "trunk" from its "leaves" (647: *truncat holus foliis*). Mary-Kay Gamel remarks on the "odd" phrasing here; not so odd if, as I suspect, there is an arboreal rationale behind the narrative.[22] Because of the advance preparation involved in the hot main course, the cabbage's decapitation is the first action recorded; it sets our sights on the end result of the narrative (720: *truncos*, "trunks," incidentally, is the last word of the story). The same joke is staged, but more obviously, in the next episode of the book, when Erysichthon, after chopping down a sacred tree, turns his axe on a protesting bystander (Ovid expresses this change of object in a phrase that suggests a kind of pseudo-metamorphosis in itself: "inque uirum conuertit ab arbore ferrum"; literally: "He turned his axe from a man into a tree," 768), and, as if to emphasize the similarity between man and tree, chops his head off from his trunk: *detruncatque caput,* 769. So here it is as though Baucis commits a kind of sacrilegious act in advance of becoming a sacred tree herself.

Bacon is harder to fit in, but Ovid manages it by having Baucis lift it down from a blackened wooden beam (648: *nigro . . . tigno*) on the ceiling with a two-pronged fork (647: *furca leuat . . . bicorni*) like the fork of a tree, and proceed to chop off (649: *resecat*) slices from it.[23] The bacon, it is worth mentioning, is described in terms that make it very close to the original pig (648: *sordida terga suis*). Might it even be the preserved remains of the

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21 Hallett 2000. Anderson and Frederick 1988 prefer to see the frequent use of personification (650: *domat*, 659: *non indignanda*, 663: *tersere*) as breaking down the normal boundaries between humans and inanimate objects.

22 Gamel 1984.120. Griffin 1991.68 sees in it rather an allusion to Nicander *Georgica* frags. 70–72, 80 (Gow and Scholfield), which describes lopping off the outer leaves of a date palm.

23 *Furca bicorni* combines an allusion to Virg. *Georg*. 1.264 with a possible symbolic doubling of the word οἰόκερως used of the bull at *Hecale* frag. 69 (Hollis); cf. 664: *bicolor . . . baca*. For forked branches, cf. *Met.* 12.442: *ramum . . . bifurcum*.

Calydonian boar, laid down (649: *seruato . . . diu*) from an earlier mock-epic episode in Book 8? Still ferocious, the bacon needs "taming" (650: *domat*) before its life-spirit passes into the heroically bubbling waters (*feruentibus undis*) of the saucepan.

Within the hors-d'oeuvres there is more scope. Olives are berries, appropriately "twin-colored" (664: *bicolor . . . baca*).[24] Radish (666: *radix*) is there because it is the same word as "root." But where does the endive (666: *intiba*) fit in? This is admittedly an obstreperous little root for my purposes, and an explanation escapes me here. What about the cheese, described unappealingly as "a lump of coagulated milk," *lactis massa coacti,* 666?[25] This, too, is harder to explain, but *lac* can sometimes be used of the succulent juice or sap of plants, as in the *lacteus umor* ("milky sap") of figs among the different types of juices listed by Pliny in the extract quoted above. Indeed, Pliny tells us there that fig's milk could act as a substitute for rennet. Perhaps there is hidden play on this in Ovid's account of the metamorphosis of Dryope into a lotus tree at *Metamorphoses* 9.351–93. The mother feels her breasts go hard and lose one kind of milky sap (357–58: "materna rigescere sentit / ubera, nec sequitur ducentem lacteus umor"), only to gain another.[26]

Next come eggs. These standard ingredients of the simple meal would also be difficult to fit in, if they were not turned in wood ash (667: *uersata fauilla*). Even the beechwood cups, smeared with beeswax to cover the cracks, mimic the honey-filled hollow of a tree (670: "pocula, qua caua sunt, flauentibus inlita ceris"), an image reproduced by the culminating honeycomb (677: *candidus in medio fauus*) in the middle of the table.[27] The *secundae mensae*, dessert, hardly needs to be tampered with: nuts, figs, dates, plums, apples, grapes. The apples are served in *patulis . . . canistris* ("spreading baskets," 675), where *patulus* is an adjective often used of a tree's hospitality.[28] Finally, above this cornucopia of the products of trees—fruit, nuts, berries, leaves, trunk, and roots, honey at the center—glow the

24 Cf. Callim. *Hecale* frag. 36 (Hollis). Kenney forthcoming agrees with Bömer's suggestion ad loc. that *bicolor* may not just refer to fresh and pickled olives but be transferred from the variegated leaves of the olive tree.

25 Cf. 13.796, Virg. *Ecl*. 1.18. Var. *LL* 5.108 derives the word *caseus*, "cheese," from *coacto lacte*, "curdled milk."

26 Lotus milk is the name now given to the drinkable sap of the lotus plant.

27 Cf. 655a: "in medio torus est de mollibus uluis"; 651: *medias . . . horas*. Is Ovid self-conscious here about being at the midpoint of the *Metamorphoses*?

28 Most famously at Virg. *Ecl*. 1.1: *patulae sub tegmine fagi*.

benign faces, we are told, of the hosts (677–78: "super omnia uultus / accessere boni"). The head is the last part to disappear, as so often in Ovidian tree metamorphoses[29] (see figure 1). In Dryope's metamorphosis into a lotus tree in Book 9, the change is similarly bottom-up: *subcrescit ab imo,* 352. So, too, is that of the hapless Heliades (2.353–55):

> complectitur inguina cortex
> perque gradus uterum pectusque umerosque manusque
> ambit et exstabant tantum ora uocantia matrem.

Figure 1. From *Hypnerotomachia Polifili: The Strife of Love in a Dream* by Francesco Colonna, translated by Joscelyn Godwin (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999). By permission of the publisher.

29 Barkan 1986.388 (fig. 38) reproduces a page from Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Polifili* (Venice 1499) showing a slow motion metamorphosis of nymphs into trees, with the head still preserved in the last stages. See figure 1.

The tradition continues. A recent U.S. advertisement for Curél dry skin lotion depicts a gnarled trunk with arm-like branches from which a woman's smooth head and shoulders emerge. The caption runs: "Curél. Just the fix you need for those dry, rough parts." A counterexample appeared on the cover of the *New Yorker* for November 19, 2001 (artist, Harry Bliss), called simply "Exposed": a sinuous female trunk in Central Park covers herself modestly with her hands, while her head and hair still take the form of a miniature deciduous tree (thanks to Joshua Katz for this). See figure 2.

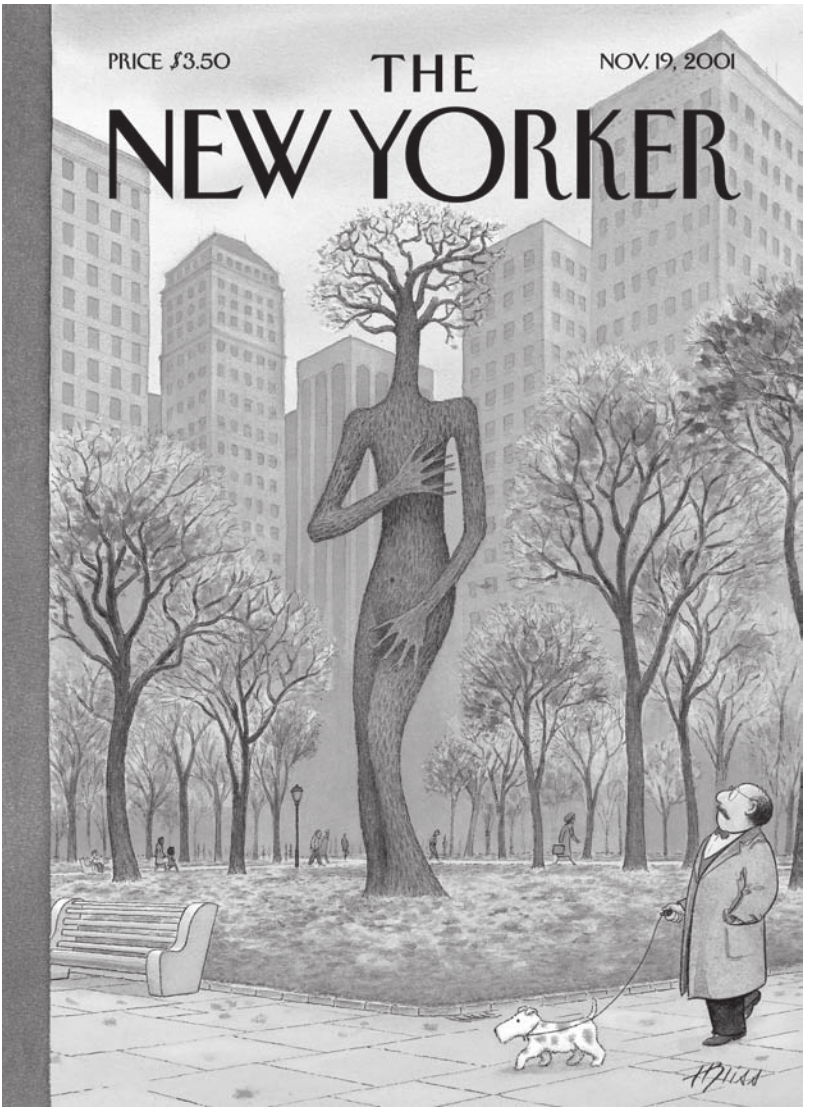

Figure 2. Cover art (*Exposed* by Harry Bliss) from *The New Yorker*, 21 November 2001. With kind permission of the artist.

> Bark enclosed their legs and scaled their bellies, breasts, and shoulders by degrees, and all remained was their mouths calling, "Mother."

Exactly the same image of human heads protruding above tree bodies can be seen again in Baucis and Philemon's transformation at 716: *uultus* sticks out in the same position at the end of the line, as the couple's mouths utter their last human words before they, too, are submerged, along with the rest, in bushy foliage (8.716–19):

> iamque super geminos crescente cacumine uultus
> mutua, dum licuit, reddebant dicta "uale"que
> "o coniunx" dixere simul, simul abdita texit
> ora frutex.
>
> And now, with the treetop growing over their two faces, they answered each other, while they could, and as they said "farewell o spouse" at the same moment, at the same moment, bushy growth covered and hid their mouths.[30]

The bent head (638: *submisso . . . uertice*) with which the episode opened is replaced by a growing treetop (716: *crescente cacumine*) at the end.

Not everything, however, is motivated simply by the final tree metamorphosis. Another important strand is the theme of old age, which entwines with that of trees in almost inextricable ways. Not only are the central couple elderly, so is the aging narrator Lelex (568: "raris iam sparsus tempora canis," "his forehead already sprinkled with sparse white hairs"; 617: *animo maturus et aeuo*, "mature in mind and years"), and so are his sources, Phrygian old men (721–22: "haec mihi non uani (neque erat cur fallere uellent) / narrauere senes," "This tale was told to me by reliable old men—there was no reason for them to lie").[31] Let us go back to the first gesture of the gods: *submisso . . . uertice*. Along with the possibilities

30 Galinsky 1975.201: "For once, Ovid's procedure of attaching *–que* to one of the spoken words rather than to the verb of speaking may have the ulterior purpose of mirroring how the bark is interposing itself between the words."

31 Nikolopoulos 2003.57 assumes that these words must be spoken ironically, given the traditional reputation of old people as idle gossips and confused witnesses. For other old narrators in *Met.,* see Nikolopoulos 2003.57 n. 38.

mentioned earlier—divine nodding, generic humility, foreshadowed treetop—this is also reminiscent of the characteristic posture of an old person: stooping.[32] The gods are bringing themselves down to their hosts' level in several ways at once. Levels, incidentally, as Judith Hallett has noticed, are important throughout. Baucis and Philemon's persistent attitude is one of cheerful endurance: equal in age (631: *parili . . . aetate*), they bear their poverty with equanimity (634: *nec iniqua mente*) and make light of it (633–34: *paupertatem fatendo / effecere leuem*). Equalizing and lightening become a model for the details of the story (Hallett 2000.559–60). Philemon's first gesture is to bid his guests "relieve" their sore limbs by sitting (639: "membra senex posito iussit releuare sedili"); here the juxtaposition of *membra* ("limbs") with *senex* ("old man") is a reminder of old people's bodies. Baucis goes on to "lift" bacon from the ceiling (647: *leuat*), and "lightly" cook eggs in "unbitter" ashes (667: "non acri leuiter uersata fauilla"). Even the willow couch "mustn't grumble" at the cheap old cloth thrown over it (659: "uestis erat, lecto non indignanda saligno").

Hallett cites (2000.553, 559) this repeated leveling motif to support her argument that objects in the house are in harmony with Baucis and Philemon's mellow attitude to their modest condition. But I think what is being remarked on here is specifically an attitude towards old age. Take lines 661–63, usually marveled at simply for their redundant detail.[33] Baucis levels a rickety table with a wobbly leg, and Ovid tells us no fewer than three times that she did this:

> mensae sed erat pes tertius impar;
> testa parem fecit, quae postquam subdita cliuum
> sustulit, aequatam mentae tersere uirentes.
>
> But the third leg was unequal; she made it level with a tile,
> and after wedging it in to even out the slant, she scoured
> the leveled table with fresh mint.

Why such emphasis? Not, surely, just for Hellenistic or Netherlandish precision but to make an important point of comparison between the main

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32 Together with *humiles intrarunt . . . postes*, the gesture perhaps enacts the old metaphor of the "threshold of old age" (e.g., Hom. *Od.* 15.246: γήραος οὐδόν).

33 E.g., Hollis 1983 ad loc. (and ad 643).

characters and their possessions. It turns out that there are various significant verbal echoes between these lines and the account of Baucis and Philemon's progress up the hill to their new home at the end of the episode: "parent ambo baculisque leuati / nituntur longo uestigia ponere cliuo, "They both obey and, propped on sticks, they struggle to climb the steep hill," 693–94. A slope is climbed (*cliuo*, "slope," picks up *cliuum* [662]), and the old couple lighten their load with walking sticks (693: *baculis . . . leuati*).[34] This all looks very much like a repeated allegory of old age. An unequal third leg, whether a table leg or a walking stick, above all suggests the riddle of the Sphinx: old age walking on one extra unequal leg in the evening. That is, perhaps, why we are reminded just before that the old lady herself is *tremens* (660: "doddery") and why *impar* (661: "unequal") gets replaced by the insistent *parem* (662: "level") and *aequatam* (663: "leveled"). *Sustulit* ("raised up") repeats the idea of making old age light again.

A (downhill) slope was a common metaphor for the declining years, used by Ovid himself at *Metamorphoses* 15.221–27, where Pythagoras plays Oedipus and tells the story of man from the tottering *quadripes* ("crawler") of infancy through the *spatium iuuentae* ("the prime of life") to old age: "labitur occiduae per iter decliue senectae" ("It slides down the declining road of fading old age," 227).[35] At the end of the poem, Baucis and Philemon enact the reverse movement: they give up on their goose chase (the nimble bird wears out the old couple: *tardos aetate fatigat,* 686), then gather strength to climb up a slope, not downhill to death but up to eternal greenness, lightening their load by leaning on sticks (that extra foot again): "tardique senilibus annis] / nituntur longo uestigia ponere cliuo" ("Hindered by old age, they struggle to climb the steep slope," 693b–94).[36] As they trudge up the hill, their movements suggest an arduous third age, leveling miraculously out towards an easy end. So it is no wonder that in the miniature, domestic version of this, after she has made the table steady, Baucis gives it a lick and a polish with some fresh mint (663: *aequatam mentae tersere uirentes*). This harks back to an old paradox of divine old age, that it is perpetually green; compare Virgil's Charon at *Aeneid* 6.304: "sed cruda deo uiridisque senectus" ("but the god's old age was fresh and evergreen").

34 Hallett 2000.550 also notes these similarities, but does not pursue them.
35 For the shaky gait of old age, cf. 3.273–74, 15.212.
36 Cf. 6.27.

Old age also plays its part in the smoky atmosphere of the hut: an old garment covers the couch (658: *uilisque uetusque*), the hut itself is old (699: *uetus . . . casa*). The dry kindling used to lay the fire is the kind of wood that might belong to an *old* tree: *cortice sicco,* 642, and *ramalia . . . arida,* 644. The cornel cherries are "autumnal" (665: *autumnalia*) and "buried" (*condita*) in brine (*faece*); both autumn and brine are possible metaphors for old age.[37] And in the meal's last course, old trees and old human beings intertwine in the description of the dates: *rugosis . . . palmis,* 674—*wrinkled* dates, or the wrinkled tree they come from, or the wrinkled outstretched palms of supplicating old people, which is exactly the gesture Baucis and Philemon offer to the gods at 681: *manibus . . . supinis*.[38] These wizened palms, already half-tree, half-human, are the counterpart to the ambiguous *pedibus salignis*, "willow feet," of line 656.[39] And just as "willow feet" corresponded earlier in Ovid's narrative to the first stage of tree metamorphosis, so old age can be seen as a condition that already, with its gnarled skin and its halting feet—together with the added bonus here of upstretched arms—takes the human body halfway toward the bark, roots, and branches of a tree.[40]

How old are Baucis and Philemon? It may be that we are meant to think that they have only just reached old age. A clue to this is that they serve cheap wine "not of great age" to the gods (672: *nec longae . . . senectae*), by contrast with Hyrieus, the old host at Ovid *Fasti* 5.501 (a story filtered through the key factors of poverty and old age), who serves wine as old as himself (517: "quaeque puer quondam primis diffuderat annis, / promit

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37 *Autumnalia*: cf. 15.209–11: "excipit autumnus, posito feruore iuuentae / maturus mitisque inter iuuenemque senemque / temperie medius, sparsus quoque tempora canis" ("Autumn succeeds, the heat of youth left behind, mellow and half-way between youth and old age, a sprinkling of grey on his temples"). *Faece*: cf. Sen. *Ep*. 58.33: "pars summa uitae utrum faex sit an liquidissimum ac purissimum quiddam" ("whether the final stage of life is the dregs or some clear and pure elixir").

38 Cf. Plin. *NH* 16.55.126 (on the bark of various trees): *omnibus in senecta rugosior* ("It is always more wrinkled in old age"). On the physical signs of old age in classical literature, see Byl 1996.262–64, Nikolopoulos 2003.50. For Ovidian wrinkles, cf. *Met.* 14.96, 15.232.

39 Griffin 1991.65 notes that *carica* ("Carian figs," 674) are the only specifically "local" product served here.

40 Nikolopoulos 2003.50 n. 10 quotes Roberts 1989.20: "Interestingly, in early Greek literature, it is the foot that acts as the first, and later most intense, harbinger that old age has made its appearance . . . In Euripides' *Hecuba* the old woman soliloquizes to her tired feet."

fumoso condita uina cado") and whose words of welcome to the gods, "longa uia est, nec tempora longa supersunt" ("The road is long, but the time left is not long"), sound like an old-age metaphor too.[41] Incidentally, we could possibly read our meal here as a life metaphor: eggs at the beginning, fruit at the end, and *mediae . . . horae* (651) the interval in the middle.[42] Sprightly as they are, however, Baucis and Philemon are already looking to the end, and their greatest fear is inequality in the length of their lives. After consulting his wife, Philemon presents their joint decision (706: *iudicium . . . aperit commune*) that they should die simultaneously and he should not see her funeral pyre nor she his tomb (708–10):

> quoniam concordes egimus annos,
> auferat hora duos eadem, nec coniugis umquam
> busta meae uideam neu sim tumulandus ab illa.
>
> Since we have spent our lives in harmony, may the same hour take the two of us together, and may I never see my wife's tomb nor may I be buried by her.

Sadly for them, both these endings are perfectly visible earlier in the episode. Philemon's burial is prefigured in the description of the briny preserved fruit (665: *condita*, a word that can mean both "pickled" and "buried"), and thoughts of his wife's funeral pyre are sparked when she lights the fire in a strange conflation of last rites and resuscitation. Baucis clears away warm ash (641: *tepidum cinerem*), as if from her own ashes, stirs up *yesterday's* fire (641–42: *ignes / suscitat hesternos*), and puffs it up (643:

41 Gamel 1984.121–22, by contrast, reads 672: *non longae . . . senectae* and 649: *seruatum diu* as Lelex's sarcastic comments on the hosts' stinginess. Hollis 1983 ad loc. compares the couple's well-preserved dried pork with Petr. *Sat*. 136, where Oenothea's pig's head (*sinciput*) is as old as she is (*coaequale natalium suorum*).

42 Cf. Gowers 1993.17. See Cic. *Sen*. 62 for the metaphor of fruit used for the lasting pleasures of old age: "non cani nec rugae repente auctoritatem adripere possunt, sed honeste acta superior aetas fructus capit auctoritatis extremos" ("Neither white hair nor wrinkles can suddenly steal away one's authority; as long as anyone lives with propriety, one can enjoy the last fruit of authority in advanced old age"); cf. ibid. 70, 71: "fructus autem senectutis est, ut saepe dixi, ante partorum bonorum memoria et copia" ("The fruit of old age, as I have often said, consists in having abundant memories of blessings that arose long ago").

anima producit anili) as if breathing out an old woman's last gasp at the moment of reviving a long-dead flame.[43]

A few years ago, there was a witty email correspondence on the question: "how many children had Philemon and Baucis?" (The conclusion, none—on the grounds that otherwise they would, of course, want their children to bury them.)[44] A favorite old woman's role, that of nurse, falls to Baucis as she *nurtures* the flames (643: *nutrit*—brought out in Dryden's translation, "With Leaves and Barks she feeds her Infant-fire"[45]). *Producit* (643: "draws out") can be used of rearing a child, while *suscitat* (642: "kindles") can also mean "to restore to health."[46] The cheese (666: *lactis massa coacti*) might be explained alternatively along these lines as a lump of dried-up mother's milk. A nurse is not, however, just a traditional "old" figure, she can also be the fosterer of new life. Is there something extra to be read into the verb *concipiunt* ("compose," "utter," also "conceive") at 682? The parallel story in the *Fasti* of Hyrieus, who was widowed young, ends with his impossible wish for a child granted by three gods urinating on an ox hide; the similar biblical story of the theoxeny of Abraham and Sarah ends with the birth of a post-menopausal child (Griffin 1991.70–71). Are Philemon and Baucis rekindling a kind of substitute new life? At the end of the meal, vines, once harvested (676: *collectae . . . uuae*), burst into spontaneous growth (680: "sponte sua per seque . . . succrescere uina"), which foreshadows the old couple's own reburgeoning: "frondere Philemona Baucis, / Baucida conspexit senior frondere Philemon" ("Baucis saw Philemon sprout leaves, and old Philemon saw Baucis sprout them too," 714–15—where *senior*, "old," and *frondere*, "sprout leaves," juxtaposed, mark the paradox).[47] The growing head at the end (716: *crescente cacumine*) that replaces the stooping head at the beginning (*submisso . . . uertice*) can be read not just as the changing posture of a tree but as a geriatric miracle.[48]

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43 Cf. Ovid *Fasti* 5.506 (Hyrieus): "ignis in hesterno stipite paruus erat." Baucis's actions could also be seen as fanning the dormant embers of Meleager's burnt-out log (8.515–25).

44 http://omega.cohums.ohio-state.edu/mailing_lists/CLA-L/2000/11/0288.php

45 Kinsley 1958.4.1566 (line 51).

46 Cf. Hallett 2000.557–58. Hesychius defines βαυκαλάω and βαυκαλίζειν as "to nurse," "to sing a child a lullaby." Jones 1994.217, however, is convinced by etymological links between Baucis and Gk βαυκός, "sweet, soft, mannered, affected, effeminate," often used in connection with the soft life of Ionia. See also Beller 1967.17, Bömer 1969–86.193.

47 Cf. 10.137 (Cyparissus turns green): "in uiridem uerti coeperunt membra colorem."

48 Cf. 7.288–92 on the rejuvenation of Aeson.

We have arrived at the metamorphosis itself. When Daphne turns into a laurel in Book 1, Apollo says regretfully: "If you cannot be my wife, at least you can be my tree" (1.557: "cui deus 'at quoniam coniunx mea non potes esse, / arbor eris certe' dixit 'mea'"). In this story, both outcomes are possible: Philemon and Baucis's tree-like state perpetuates their married state, or rather what it does is translate the metaphors of perfect marriage into solid terms.[49] Beautifully arranged polyptoton and chiasmus emphasize the mutual and symmetrical qualities that the metamorphosis crystallizes: "Philemona Baucis, / Baucida . . . Philemon / . . . super geminos . . . uultus / mutua . . . reddebant dicta . . . / . . . simul, simul" ("Philemon Baucis, Baucis Philemon . . . above their twin faces, replied to each other . . . at the same time, at the same time," 714–17). The couple's antiphonal or simultaneous response commemorates with two-way apostrophe their shared life. At 718, *o coniunx* ("o spouse") is very nearly replaced with similar-sounding foliage in the same position in the next line 719: *ora frutex* (as bushy leaves grow over the speaking mouth and *texit* sprouts into *frutex*). Ovid similarly enjoys the moment when Dryope's mouth ceases to speak—*and* ceases to be a mouth: "desierant simul ora loqui, simul esse," 9.392.[50] And in his 1706 translation, "The Story of Baucis and Philemon," Jonathan Swift gets comic effects out of imagining what it is like to change while watching one's other half change too:[51]

> When Baucis hastily cry'd out;
> My Dear, I see your Forehead sprout:
> Sprout, quoth the Man, what's this you tell us!
> I hope you don't Believe me Jealous:
> But yet, methinks I feel it true;
> And re'ly, Yours is budding too——
> Nay—— now I cannot stir my Foot:
> It feels as if 'twere taking Root.

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49 See Barkan 1986.20–23 on Ovidian metamorphosis in general as translating metaphors into flesh. At Sen. *Oed.* 532–37 is a description of two trees, one an evergreen cypress and the other a rotting oak, eaten away by age, that leans on the other for support. Mastronarde 1970.314 suggests that the trees represent Tiresias and Manto; cf. Nisbet 1987.246 n. 16 = 1995.205 n. 16.

50 Cf. Dryden's emotional Daphne: "The Tree still panted in th'unfinished part, / Not wholly vegetive, and heav'd her heart" ("The First Book of Ovid's Metamorphoses: The Transformation of Daphne into a Lawrel," in Kinsley 1958.2.819, lines 750–51).

51 In Williams 1937.1.116 (lines 155–62).

At the start of the episode, the trees were described as "coterminous" (620: *contermina*). Is it possible that the finished shape is envisaged as a freak: two different trunks, an oak and a linden, growing out of one?[52] The phrase in question, "de gemino uicinos corpore truncos" ("nearby trunks growing from a double body," 720), is full of interlocking words. Are these "neighboring trunks," or "neighborly trunks," or "truncated neighbors" (Philemon and Baucis the good neighbors, as opposed to the bad ones, *uicinia . . . impia*, condemned to destruction at 689–90), emerging from "a twin body"? The concentration of x-signs—four times with *coniunx*, *dixere*, *texit*, *frutex*—suggests on the page the trunks' forked shape. Baucis's two-pronged fork (647: *furca . . . bicorni*) and the primitive struts of the house (700: *furcas*) would be harbingers of this final forking. A shared lower half would solidify the couple's metaphorical childhood union (632: *annis iuncti iuuenalibus*, "joined since their youth"), while the male/female word *coniunx* has an element of joinedness "spouse" does not have in English. Philemon speaks of *concordes . . . annos* (708, literally, "same-hearted years") spent together: now vital organs, inner rings of age, would be shared by virtual Siamese twins.[53] From the start, there has been play on an ambiguity of numbers, singulars and plurals: *tota domus duo sunt* ("those two made up the whole household," 636), *bicolor . . . baca* ("two-colored berries," 664), *unicus anser* ("a single goose," 684), and here *geminos . . . uultus* ("twin faces," 716) and *gemino . . . corpore* ("double body," 720).[54] Leonard Barkan compares the metamorphosis of Baucis and Philemon into trees to that of Cadmus and Harmonia into two entwined serpents, noting that, in the *Metamorphoses,* "the occasional happy loves are also tangles." He also cites the oracle that tells Atalanta that, when she marries, *teque ipsa uiua carebis* ("though living, you will lose yourself," 10.566), which, in the first instance,

52 Plin. *NH* 17.22.19 mentions the phenomenon of accidental grafting by seed: "unde uidimus cerasum in salice, platanum in lauru, laurum in ceraso et bacas simul discolores" ("As a result, we have seen a cherry tree growing on a willow, a plane on a laurel, a laurel on a cherry, and different colored berries on the same tree").

53 See Bömer 1969–86 ad 707 for examples of funerary inscriptions using the sentimental word *concors*. Ovid at *Met.* 4.375–78 uses a tree-grafting simile to describe Salmacis's hermaphroditic union: "uelut, si quis conducat cortice ramos, / crescendo iungi pariterque adolescere cernit, / sic, ubi complexu coierunt membra tenaci, / nec duo sunt sed forma duplex" ("Just as when a twig is grafted onto another tree's bark, the two are seen to merge and mature together, so when they joined their bodies in a clinging embrace, they were no longer two people, but a double form").

54 Cf. Ovid *Fasti* 4.544: "tres illi tota fuere domus."

refers to her transformation into a lion, but also characterizes marriage as a liminal state, resulting in loss of identity (Barkan 1986.191). Here the entwined and mutually dependent trees are a visual image of what is lost and simultaneously gained through marriage.

I have suggested how the metamorphosis works to revitalize the wrinkled couple. It is also worth considering what makes this different from other Ovidian tree metamorphoses, several of which, those of Daphne and Dryope among them, are much more specific about the bottom-to-top process of becoming a tree. Dryden designs his version along traditional lines:[55]

> Old *Baucis* is by old *Philemon* seen
> Sprouting with sudden Leaves of sprightly Green:
> Old *Baucis* looked where old *Philemon* stood,
> And saw his lengthen'd Arms a sprouting Wood:
> New Roots their fasten'd Feet began to bind,
> Their Bodies stiffen in a rising Rind:
> Then, ere the Bark above their Shoulders grew,
> They give and take at once their last Adieu;
> At once, Farewell, O faithful Spouse, they said;
> At once th'incroaching Rinds their closing Lips invade.

In the original Latin, Ovid is actually much more selective. He names leaves (714, 715: *frondere*), bushy growth (719: *frutex*), and the growing summit of the tree (716: *crescente cacumine*); but, somewhat surprisingly, there is no mention of bark, branches, or roots. This cannot simply be because he is placing an emphasis on the old couple's reburgeoning (and, of course, the greatest emphasis of all is on their mutual farewells), but because of all those other tree words that have already been placed strategically throughout the episode: dried branches, dried bark, a root, willow feet, wrinkled palms, and so on. Ovid first set us thinking about trees with *submisso uertice* and *truncat*. He ends with a backwards glance to these words with *cacumen* and the final word *truncos*. But to repeat any more would make the earlier hidden jokes too obvious.

In his closing words, the old narrator Lelex records his own gesture to religious ritual on his visit to the sanctuary: he pinned a fresh garland on

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55 Kinsley 1958.4.1565.

these venerable trees (723: "serta super ramos ponensque recentia"). This could be seen as a way of keeping fresh or recent the memory of the metamorphosis, rather as Ovid finishes Dryope's transformation into a lotus tree by telling us that, for a long time after her body changed, her branches remained newly warm: "diuque / corpore mutato rami caluere recentes," 9.392–93. Baucis's move of wiping a rickety table with fresh mint is replayed, and the evergreen continuity of a tradition suggested. The metamorphosis from short-lived human to long-lasting tree (trees planted to span the human generations) has brought Baucis and Philemon at the end of their life's span (712: *annis aeuoque soluti*) closer to the timelessness and endlessness of the gods that the story was intended to illustrate: "inmensa est finemque potentia caeli / non habet" ("The power of heaven is measureless and has no end," 618).

The other main metamorphosis of the story is architectural: the transformation of the old couple's rustic hut into a temple. Forked props become stone columns, straw roof turns into gold. Ovid has, as usual, brought about the same kind of material change through verbal sleight-of-hand earlier in his narrative. This is at the point where he describes a clay drinking cup as made of the same kind of "silver" (668–69: *eodem* / . . . *argento*) as the earthenware crocks he has just described: an urban joke about poor rustic materials, but also his own earth to silver transformation in the twinkling of an eye.[56] In Ovid's snap metamorphosis of hut into temple, we can see another kind of civilizing process parallel to the preparation of the meal: in short, a genealogy of architecture.

Philemon and Baucis are mentioned in passing by Joseph Rykwert in *On Adam's House in Paradise*, a study of interpretations of the primitive hut in later architectural history. For his purposes, there are two interesting elements in the story: one is the metamorphosis of human beings into trees and the other is the transformation of a hut into a stone temple (Rykwert 1981.141). Although he does not expand on this, I take it that what he means is that the two changes work as a kind of continuum, mythologizing two different theories of architectural evolution in the ancient world: first, that buildings were modeled on the human body, and, secondly, that they were modeled on trees. Both these theories are set out in the writings of Ovid's contemporary Vitruvius. The first comes in the famous passage at 4.1.6–8 on

56 See Hölscher 1992 for parallels with the crocks-to-gold makeover of Chremylus's cottage in Ar. *Plut*.

the gendering of the different architectural orders (Doric masculine, Ionic feminine, Corinthian maidenly); the second in a passage recommending that columns should taper in the same way as trees: "non minus quod etiam nascentium oportet imitari naturam, ut in arboribus teretibus, abiete, cupresso, pinu, e quibus nulla non crassior est ab radicibus, dein decrescendo proceditur in altitudinem naturali contractura peraequata nascens ad cacumen" ("Not less ought one imitate the nature of growing things, as in tapering trees—firs, cypresses, pines—all of which are thicker at the roots then, dwindling, rise upwards and smooth off to a point," 5.1.3). Rykwert goes on to compare Pausanias's account (10.5.5) of the different architectural versions of the temple of Apollo at Delphi: the first one was said to have been built of laurel wood, with boughs brought from Tempe (with subsequent temples of wax and feathers, bronze, and stone). And Ovid, of course, writes the earliest stage of this myth in his story of Daphne, the nymph whose human body was solidified into a laurel tree.

Vitruvius's account of the origins of architecture provides the archetype for all later discussions of primitive buildings, and Rykwert is chiefly interested in his influence on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century architectural theory (Rykwert 1981.105–40). What is immediately noticeable is how eclectic Vitruvius's evolutionary history is. It offers a wide range of different possibilities for the original hut—structures made of green leaves, or hollowed out of caves, or mud and stick buildings based on swallows' nests, or buildings of mud, reed, *and* leaves together (2.1.2–3):

> coeperunt in eo coetu alii de fronde facere tecta, alii speluncas fodere sub montibus, nonnulli hirundinum nidos et aedificationes earum imitantes de luto et uirgulis facere loca quae subirent . . . primum furcis erectis et uirgulis interpositis luto parietes texerunt. alii luteas glaebas arefacientes struebant parietes, materia eos iugumentantes, uitandos imbres et aestus tegebant harundinibus et fronde.
>
> After coming together, they began to build, some making houses out of leaves, some hollowing out caves under mountains, some making places to shelter in out of mud and brushwood, imitating the nests of swallows and their methods of building. And first, they wove walls by erecting forked props and putting twigs in between. Others made walls, drying clods of mud that they bound with

> wood and covered with reeds and leaves, so as to escape rain and heat.

All these methods are eventually superseded by a stone, brick, and solid timber stage (2.1.7):

> tum autem instruentes animo se eprospicientes maioribus cogitationibus ex uarietate atrium natis, non casas sed etiam domos fundatas et latericiis parietibus aut e lapide structas materiaque et tegula tecta perficere coeperunt.
>
> Then, however, they grew in confidence, and, extending their horizons with grander ideas arising from their different skills, they started to build not huts but houses with foundations and with brick walls, or built of stone, and with roofs of timber or tiles.

Vitruvius also derives his theories from a number of survivals of primitive building methods in the world around him. Among them, interestingly for us, are the crude huts said to survive in Phrygia, a region connected for various other reasons with the notion of "antiquity": compare the story of King Psammetichus and the flawed language experiment in Herodotus (2.2) that determined so unscientifically that Phrygian was the oldest language. In Phrygia, according to Vitruvius, the people choose natural hillocks, burrow them out, and build pyramid-shaped structures on top by tying together sticks and binding them with reeds and earth; others build huts from marsh reeds.[57] Significantly for Ovid, Vitruvius says these building styles arose in Phrygia as the result of a dearth of trees: "Phryges uero, qui campestribus locis sunt habitantes, propter inopiam siluarum egentes materiae" ("The

57 Vitr. 2.1.4: "[Phryges] eligunt tumulos naturales eosque medios fossura detinentes et itinera perfodientes dilatant spatia, quantum natura loci patitur. insuper autem stipitis inter se religantes metas efficient, quas harundinibus et sarmentis tegentes exaggerabant supra habitationis e terra maximos grumos" ("They [the Phrygians] choose natural mounds, and, dividing them in the middle with a ditch and digging paths through them, open up spaces as far as the nature of the place allows. They tie logs together at the upper end, making pyramids. They cover these with reeds and brushwood and pile up very large hillocks from the earth above their dwellings").

Phrygians, indeed, who inhabit the plains, lack timber because of the shortage of forests," 2.1.5).

Pliny has a similar account of the treeless Chauci, who live in the flooded part of the modern Low Countries (*NH* 16.1.2). Without timber or bushes, they are forced to live on platforms above the water, looking like sailors when the land is flooded, like victims of a shipwreck when the tide recedes. Without cattle, milk, or game, they eat fish caught in nets made of sedge or rush rope: "ulua et palustri iunco funis nectunt ad praetexenda piscibus retia." Rather than romanticizing them, Pliny pours scorn on these miserable people, who have the arrogance to boast that they have not yet been conquered by Rome.

Next to these, as it were, "horizontal" comparisons with the civilized state of modern Rome, one could put Ovid's "vertical" ones, the festivals in the *Fasti* that commemorate the past of Rome and its primitive origins: simple food combined with temporary building structures. A prime example is the festival of Anna Perenna where, again, significantly, there are a variety of interpretations of the first human dwelling place: open air, tents of branches and leaves (as in the Jewish Succoth), or structures with reeds for rigid columns and togas spread on top (*Fasti* 3.527–30):

> sub Ioue pars durat, pauci tentoria ponunt,
> sunt quibus e ramis frondea facta casa est,
> pars, ubi pro rigidis calamos statuere columnis,
> desuper extentas imposuere togas.
>
> Some sit it out under the open sky, a few pitch tents, some
> build leafy huts from branches, some plant reeds instead
> of stone columns and stretch their togas out on top.

Incidentally, Ovid seems also to be saying that this festival is one where old people in particular let their hair down, and he mentions the bizarre sight of a drunken old woman dragging along a drunken old man (3.542: "senem potum pota trahebat anus"). One of his ancient Annas is an old woman from Bovillae, poor but industrious (3.668: "pauper, sed multae sedulitatis anus"), who let the seceding plebs eat cake after their bread supply dried up.

All these investigations of alternative ways of building and living need, it is clear, to be read in the light of a Rome itself in a state of metamorphosis. Hollis may be right to compare the Phrygian temple to

Apollo's new temple on the Palatine.[58] Brick into marble is just the final stage of a long chain of building styles brought into sharper focus by Augustus's progressive and retrospective building program. The primitive buildings still cherished in the heart of Rome, like the hut of Romulus with its "straw roof" (*Fasti* 3.183–84), remained as moralizing reminders of the remotest past: "item in Capitolio commonefacere potest et significare mores uetustatis Romuli casa et in arce sacrorum stramentis tecta. ita his signis de antiquis inuentionibus aedificiorum, sic ea ratiocinantes, possumus indicare" ("Also the hut of Romulus in the Capitolium and shrines covered with straw in the citadel can serve as memorials and symbolize the customs of antiquity. Thus by these examples, we can make deductions as to the building methods of the ancients, reasoning that they were similar," Vitr. 2.1.5–6). Buildings like the Temple of Vesta, now bronze, once made of straw and wicker, contained, as Ovid reminds us, their original embryo inside the luxurious modern shell: "quae nunc aere uides, stipula tum tecta uideres, / et paries lento uimine textus erat" ("The hut you now see made of bronze, you would then have seen roofed with straw and its walls built from brittle withies," *Fasti* 6.251–52).[59] Perrault 1694.33 offers a reconstruction (see figure 3).

What is the relevance of all this to Philemon and Baucis? First, the old couple are clearly another version of the old narrators and celebrants of the *Fasti*, links to *uetustas* of a more general kind. In other words, they are ideal guardians, both as Phrygians and as old people, of a tradition linking past and present.

Secondly, it is possible that there is a significant inconsistency in the description of Baucis and Philemon's primeval hut. When it is first introduced, Ovid states only that the hut is "roofed with reeds and straw" (630: "stipulis et canna tecta palustri") and gives no details about the rest of

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58 Though Edmund Thomas suggests to me that a more accurate candidate might be the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline, dedicated by Q. Lutatius Catulus in 69 B.C. with tiles of gilded bronze (Plin *NH* 33.18.57) and restored by Augustus in 26 B.C. (*Res Gestae* 4.9). Balland 1984 argues that the primitive thatched hut of Romulus in the area Capitolina (Vitr. 2.1.5) was a bogus construction of the Augustan period, which might thus make a more topical contrast with the gilded temple of Jupiter than the contrast the older hut of Romulus on the Palatine made with the Palatine temple of Apollo.

59 Cf. Ov. *Am*. 2.9.17–18; *Fasti* 5.93–94: "hic ubi nunc Roma est, orbis caput, arbor et herbae / et paucae pecudes et casa rara fuit" ("Here, where Rome, the world's capital, stands now, there were trees and grass and a few sheep, and here and there a cottage").

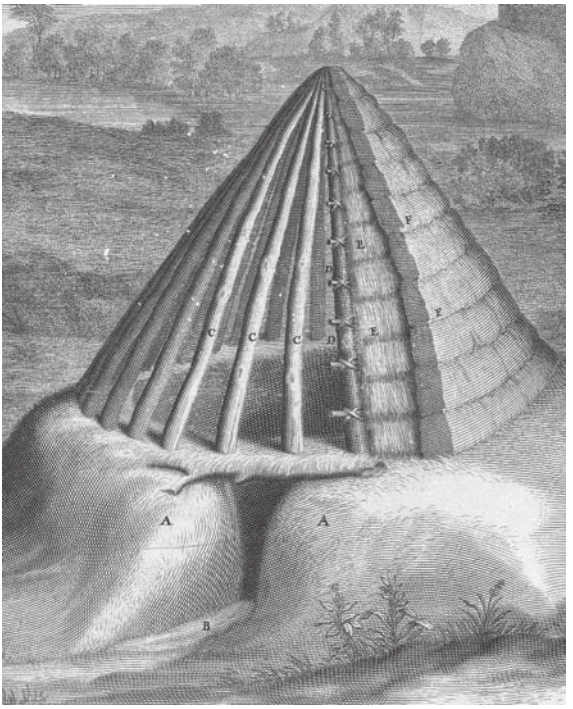

Figure 3. Perrault's reconstruction of a Phrygian hut from his *Dix Livres d'Architecture de Vitruve* (Paris, 1694). By permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

the building. Judging from Pliny on the Chauci and Vitruvius and Ovid on the hut of Romulus and the Temple of Vesta, it would seem that the reed stage is normally conceived of as being prior to the wood stage of construction. Indeed, Lucan's description of the marsh-dweller Amyclas's house works as a kind of gloss on Philemon and Baucis: "haud procul inde domus, non ullo robore fulta, / sed sterili iunco cannaque intexta palustri / et latus inuersa nudum munita phaselo" ("a house not built up of timber but woven out of sterile reeds and marsh canes," 5.516–18).[60] The two types of proto-environment are opposed earlier in *Metamorphoses* 8 in the landscape of the

60 Cf. Sil. 17.88: "castra leui calamo cannaque intecta palustri" ("an encampment roofed with thin reeds and marsh canes").

Calydonian boar hunt: first an ancient, untouched forest, thick with trees (8.329); then the boar's habitat of marsh reeds and sedge (8.334–37).

Once we get inside Philemon and Baucis's hut, there are plenty of marshland products in evidence: cane baskets for fruit (675: *canistris* is from *canna*) and a willow couch strewn with soft sedge. But this is clearly not a woodless landscape, witness the humble doorposts, the wooden beams, beechwood cups, and wooden furniture. So what is Ovid playing at? At the moment of metamorphosis from hut into temple, wooden gable supports are suddenly revealed with columns springing up below them: *furcas subiere columnae,* 700 (a bottom-up description again). In other words, instead of the reed materials at the beginning, both wooden and tree-shaped elements are increasingly stressed (an invisible line, as I suggested earlier, goes from Baucis's pronged fork—*furca . . . bicorni*—through these disappearing struts—*furcas*—to the forking tree trunks at the end). Baucis and Philemon themselves are transported from their indefinite landscape onto dry land and into a stone temple, leaving behind a countryside vengefully submerged in swamp.

Is Ovid just being imprecise? Or could we say instead that he is mythologizing the entire evolution of architecture in the course of the description: reeds into wood, wood into stone, straw into gold, mud into marble, old into new? The final landscape of a gold and marble temple looking down onto swamp below offers a speeded-up history of Roman architecture and topography. As an old woman puts it at *Fasti* 6.401, "hoc ubi nunc fora sunt, udae tenuere paludes" ("Where the forums are now, was once wet marshland"); or at 405–06, "qua Velabra solent in Circo ducere pompas, / nil praeter salices cassaque canna fuit" ("Where processions wind their way from Velabrum to Circus was once nothing but willows and hollow canes").[61] Here is another way in which this story of the antique ties modern Rome to its past. A painting by Bramantino of Baucis and Philemon entertaining the gods similarly includes every stage of the metamorphosis simultaneously: the feast takes place against the background of a straw-roofed hut with a marble entablature rising below it; in front of these stands a proleptic

61 Gamel 1984.131 n. 13 cites Virg. *Aen.* 8.347–48: "Capitolia . . . aurea nunc, olim siluestribus horrida dumis" ("the Capitoline, golden now, then bristling with woody thickets"). *Aen.* 8 is, of course, the book where Evander tells Aeneas how men in Latium were born from trees: "haec nemora indigenae Fauni Nymphaeque tenebant / gensque uirum truncis et duro robore nata" ("Native Fauns and Nymphs once inhabited these woods, and a race of men born from tree trunks and rugged timber," 314–15).

tree, whose splayed-out branches "accidentally" supply the hut with a kind of proto-half-timbering.[62]

So far, I have discussed how humans and inanimate objects are transformed in this episode. The gods themselves have not yet played a part, but I will end with them. Jupiter and Mercury come in human disguise at the beginning and reveal themselves at the end: "Iuppiter huc specie mortali cumque parente / uenit Atlantiades positis caducifer alis" ("Jupiter came here in mortal guise and with him his son Mercury carrying a staff and taking off his wings," 626–27). Galinsky (1975.199) draws attention to the way in which Mercury's epithet *caducifer* nestles between *positis* and *alis*: "Inside the human form, there is still a god, who will later reveal himself." The gods do duly reveal themselves. But, once again, a pseudo-theophany anticipates the official version, and the gods' salient characteristics appear in tilted form, with Ovid at his most playful. Take line 681. After the miracle of the endless wine, Philemon and Baucis are said to be *attoniti nouitate*, "thunderstruck by newness." This is particularly ironic when they are destined to be the only people around not thunderstruck by Jupiter's anger and are, in fact, greeted by his cloudless expression (703: *placido . . . ore*) a few lines later. Immediately afterwards, the household goose that leads the old couple such a merry dance is described as "swift-winged" (686: *celer penna*) and elusive (687: *eludit . . . diu*), both characteristics of Mercury.[63] So, *pace* Galinsky, it is not so much *caducifer* as *positis . . . alis* that is the important stage direction at the beginning: Mercury takes off one set of wings in order to put on another. The two sets of attributes are neatly summed up in Matthew Prior's burlesque of 1704, *The Ladle*:[64]

> You have to Night beneath your Roof
> A Pair of Gods: (nay never wonder)
> This Youth can Fly and I can Thunder.
> I'm JUPITER, and He MERCURIUS,
> My Page, my Son indeed, but spurious.

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62 The painting, now in the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Cologne, is discussed by Stechow 1940–41.105. See figure 4.

63 *Celer penna*: cf. Hor. *Od*. 2.7.13: *Mercurius celer* ("swift Mercury"), Ovid *Fasti* 5.88: "aetherium uolucri qui pede carpit iter" ("the god who makes his way through the air on winged foot"). *Eludit*: cf. Pl. *Am*. 124 (Mercury): "ego serui sumpsi Sosiae mi imaginem" ("I have assumed the appearance of the slave Sosia"), 997–98: "nunc Amphitruonem uolt deludi meus pater: faxo probe / iam hic deludetur" ("Now my father wants to fool Amphitryo: so I'll make sure he's well and truly fooled").

64 Wright and Spears 1959.1.206 (lines 124–28).

Fig. 4. *Jupiter und Merkur bei Philemon und Baucis* ("Jupiter and Mercury in the House of Philemon and Baucis"), Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne, by permission of the Rheinisches Bild-Archiv.

The Philemon and Baucis story, this central but self-effacing episode of the *Metamorphoses*, is framed by a discussion of divine miracles at one end and a description of the infinitely changeable god Proteus at the other (see Feeney 1991.229–32). It seems appropriate that the gods involved here should be engaged in some low-key conjuring, revealing themselves unobtrusively in metaphors and epithets along the way. Jupiter and Mercury as a pair had, after all, already played masters of disguise on their earthly visit to Plautus's Amphitryo.[65] But, of course, the conjuror here is really Ovid himself, demonstrating his own poetic powers of transformation. Metamorphoses of a verbal kind long anticipate the final changes, and nothing in this hut—a cabbage, a fork, a flapping goose, a wobbly table—is quite what it seemed at first glance.

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65 E.g., Pl. *Am*. 53 (Mercury): *deus sum: commutauero* ("I'm a god: I'll do a metamorphosis"), 123 (of Jupiter): "ita uersipellem se facit quando lubet" ("He can change his skin whenever he likes").

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