(UN)CIVILIZED BODIES: MUSIC AND *ANIMALIA* IN OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES*

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Abstract: The following paper deals with the use of music for embodiment and disembodiment in *Book XI* of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, during the war between the worshipers of Bacchus and the poet Orpheus. We will show that both the poet and the Bacchae make use of sound in order to manipulate physical realities and use the animated world in their favour. While the Bacchae use sound to disintegrate bodies, Orpheus uses music to create articulated entities and promote a precious harmony between all the world's creatures. Orpheus also uses music to generate new *animalia* and to protect his own physical body while under attack. In the end, although dead at the hands of Bacchae, the poet wins the war: after his death, nature preserves Orpheus' remains while Bacchus himself mutes the murderous Bacchae, who are consequently transformed into trees and lose their bodies and voices.

Keywords: music, Orpheus, Bacchae, *animalia*, bodies.

This paper is an extension of my treatment of Orpheus' episode in "*Ta Klea Andron*: (Dis)embodiment and Heroic Peregrination in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*", which was published in a volume dedicated to the University of Bucharest's 2017 conference, held for the bimillennial commemoration of Ovid's death[1]. This paper deals with the manipulation of animal bodies in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (*Book XI*), during the war between the Bacchae and the poet Orpheus. The paper strives to understand the animating role of Orpheus, both in restoring *anima* to the dead and in offering life to the inanimate elements of the world, thus creating more *animalia*, in the etymological sense of 'souled entities'.

In my previous paper, I specified that Orpheus appears as a maestro of embodiment through his musical art which has surprisingly resuscitating qualities. He attempted to use those qualities to revitalize his beloved Eurydice, but he ended up offering temporary animation to many other spirits of the Underworld. It is striking that fleeting sound which possesses neither body nor weight has such a strong corporeal impact, restoring to immaterial souls their previously beating hearts, their expressive eyes, and their tears. Even creatures who were not expected to have any kind of empathy, such as Cerberus, the ferocious eagle of Zeus, or even the Eumenides could finally feel and sense the poet's pain (X.40–6)[2]. Music proves to be the true link between *animae* and *animalia*, providing both prosthetic bodies and prosthetic souls to those who lack them. While the monsters of the

[1] "*Ta Klea Andron*, (Disembodiment) and Heroic Peregrinations at Ovid", in *Aproape, departe, pretutindeni, nicăieri – Glose perpetue la tema exilului*, Theodor Georgescu and Alexandru M. Călin (eds), University of Bucharest, 2021, pp. 115–146.

[2] Which is highly unusual given that the Eumenides are the enemies of 'sound harmony' or *logos*, according to Silvia MONTIGLIO, *Silence in the Land of Logos*, Princeton University, N.J., Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 38–46, 82–101.

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underground are humanized by Orpheus' song, in the upper world, a plethora of creatures, from trees to forest beasts, follow him everywhere – like an embodied articulation of a higher poetic harmony (X.88–90, XI.20–21). The poet also offers the gift of life to inanimate entities such as rocks and pebbles.

In a strange way, Orpheus revisits the beginnings of the universe, as he works with his magical *logos* over the body of nature itself, reconstructing the precious links between the original elements of this Cosmos (I.72–75). Andrew Feldherr points out that the demiurge of Ovid's *Book I* acted as an artist[3]. Art itself is a divine attribute in *Metamorphoses*. As a musician, Orpheus too behaves like a god, creating in isolation his own universe, where creatures mingle and articulate. His art is of a much subtler nature. While the demiurge of *Book I* was closer to a craftsman or a mud sculptor, Orpheus works with the much finer material of word and sound. He does do not even need the physical touch of clay and stone, in order to animate his creations[4]. Music alone provides the breath of life.

Initially, Orpheus appears to simply mimic the first action of the demiurge, by offering the gift of life to deserted places (X.88–90 ***umbra loco deerat****; qua postquam parte resedit/ dis genitus uates et fila sonantia mouit,/ umbra loco uenit*), in the same way the original god-creator covered the barren earth with beasts, the sea with fish and the air with birds, in order that they not be empty anymore (I.72, 74–75: *neu regio foret ulla suis* ***animalibus orba****… cesserunt nitidis habitandae piscibus undae,/ terra feras cepit, uolucres agitabilis aer*). Soon it becomes manifest that Orpheus offers these new creations more than mere life. He gives them sentience, emulating the gifts the original creator gave to humans alone.

The divine demiurge wanted to bring ontological separation between creatures and confine them to various geographical areas of Earth, by creating specialized bodies that would perfectly fit in these confines: fish swim in the seas, birds populate the skies, terrestrial creatures live only on dry land (I.74–75). He also made one exception to this rule when he offered humans the ability to grasp higher areas, through the gift of upward bodies. Thus, men are not prone to the ground like simple beasts, but are able to raise their gaze to the sky in contemplation:

> *pronaque cum spectent animalia cetera terram,*
> *os homini sublime dedit caelumque uidere*
> *iussit et erectos ad sidera tollere uultus (I.84–86)*[5].

In a more generous gesture, Orpheus allow all his creatures to pass over the physical and ontological barriers originally meant to maintain their segregation. When congregating around his entrancing song, animals and trees experience a sense of communion far beyond the limits of their individual species. Under the power of his magic tune, there are no longer inferior beings and privileged creatures – but a fraternity of men and beasts. Thus, Ovid's Orpheus repeats the most important message of the *Metamorphoses*. According to Pythagoras at the end of the poem (XV.456–459), it is our common subtle nature which unites us all, while the boundaries of our bodies – our limited confines, the designed 'houses' of flesh – are

[3] Andrew FELDHERR, *Playing Gods: Ovid's* Metamorphoses *and the Politics of Fiction*, Kindle Edition, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 313.

[4] Much like the hero Perseus, when he creates statues with Medusa' gaze, in FELDHERR (2010, 313).

[5] For the quoted Latin text, I used both the *Loeb* Classical Library and *Perseus* Digital Library.

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the only elements which separate the human from the animal[6]. Such 'democratization' of sentience is common to both Pythagoras and Orpheus. Even when Ovid admits that humans are uniquely equipped to be superior in body and mind, he still insists that our bodies should remind us of the kinship between us and our animal 'brethren:

> *nos quoque, pars mundi, quoniam non corpora solum,*
> *uerum etiam* ***uolucres animae*** *sumus, inque* ***ferinas***
> *possumus ire* ***domos*** *pecudumque in pectora condi,*
> *corpora...* (X.456–459).

According to these verses, our souls are avian in nature, *uolucres* – as if birds themselves, flying from one place into another, from one temporary home to the next. Orpheus' own soul, exiting his body, imitates a bird in flight, as it disperses away in the wind (XI.41–43). If our souls have avian qualities, Ovid suggests that the reciprocal is also true: the sounds produced by animals to communicate their pain have human qualities. Thus, the lambs' screams remind us of the cries of our babies (XV.466). While the bodies are mere receptacles tricking us into segregation from one another, our voices are the only true messengers of our underlining fraternity. It is through sound that Ovid's *Pythagoras* strengthens the link between human and animal. He believes that through voice men and animals comes together as relatives: in his view, humans no longer need to be deaf to animal pleas nor destroy other creatures' bodies in order to grow full at the expense of their 'brothers'. This only leads to an act of cannibalism of which humans are horribly ignorant:

> *quam male consuescit, quem se parat ille cruori*
> *inpius humano, uituli qui guttura ferro*
> *rumpit et* ***inmotas*** *praebet* ***mugitibus aures****,*
> *aut qui* ***uagitus similes puerilibus*** *haedum*
> *edentem iugulare potest* (XV. 463–467).

While the bodily limitations between species are unavoidable, Ovid's *Pythagoras* suggested that humans should strengthen spiritual and verbal communication to ensure a peaceful connection between species. Sound is what unites us with our spiritual brothers – those trapped into animal bodies.

Whereas the gods created artificial boundaries in both nature and physical form, Orpheus improves the original creation, by liberating creatures from the bonds of their species. He strengthens the connection between human and animal which under normal circumstances is visible only to those aware of the truth behind metempsychosis. Only through the passage from one body to another through reincarnation, can the spirit truly experience kinship with the animal realm, the way Pythagoras teaches us. Nevertheless, Orpheus is not a mere copycat, but an innovator, a true demiurge in his own right: just like the first god, he rearranges the elements of cosmos, but he does so in a more inclusive way. It is through sounds that Orpheus succeeds in emancipating the animal 'others' and turning them into sensitive receptacles of his song. Previously, humans were the only ones privileged to partake in the divine wonder and had access to that level through sight. Now, animals are

[6] See also the paper of Olaf ALMQVIST, University College Dublin, "The Orphic Life: Animals, Sacrifice, and Ontology in Early Orphism" (in this volume), regarding the complex relationships between Orphism and the animal world.

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welcomed into that realm as well, through hearing. Orpheus takes the disenfranchised creatures of the earth and helps them ascend to human heights, enhancing the original creation. They all now partake in divine *logos,* thus accomplishing Pythagoras' dream in *Book XV,* without the need for bodily metamorphosis or metempsychosis. With the melodic sound as conduit, the bodies soon follow Orpheus, in one sentient throng of amazed and harmonized creatures. If Pythagoras' speech named the bodies *ferinas domos,* while the souls were *uolucres*, in Orpheus' world, both *ferae* and *uolucres* follow him in a state of stupor, defying the divine laws of division between species, between bodies and souls, between hardened flesh and volatile spirit.

If Orpheus never changed the bodies of creatures, allowing them to remain intact, but only united their souls in musical trance, the Bacchae use nothing but bodies in soulless articulation of corpses, brought together for nefarious purposes. The Bacchae kill and dismember: bodies are reduced to their prime material, void of any spark of sentience or free will. This imagery is not unusual. Traditionally, the Bacchae specialize in reassignment of ripped body parts to adorn and even expand their own bodies (see Euripides' *Bacchae*); these grotesque accessories are gruesome reminders of their fatal pursuits. They wear upon their breast flayed animal skins and upon their arms bracelets of coiled snakes.

This violent gathering of animals stands in sharp contrast to the peaceful way Orpheus convocated them through soothing music. (XI.20–21: *ac primum attonitas etiamnum uoce canentis/ innumeras uolucres anguesque agmenque ferarum*). Thus, serpents once entranced by Orpheus' words are now twisted to adorn the Maenads' bodies. After the Bacchae destroy Orpheus' charmed audience of snakes, birds, and other creatures, they chase away harmless peasants, kill gentle oxen, and snatch away any agricultural tools left behind: hoes, ploughs, and blades are converted from their peaceful vocation of growth to destruction and dismemberment. Souls are forcibly disconnected from their bodily abodes. Then, the Bacchae turn again their attention to the poet whose only fault was to retreat into his own cosmos, away from the female kind. Orpheus is ultimately attacked with pieces of soil, tools, and torn body parts diverted from their innocent purposes (XI.29–30: *hae glaebas, illae direptos arbore ramos,/ pars torquent silices; neu desint tela furor*i; XI.36: *sarculaque rastrique graues longique ligones*; XI.37–38: *rapuere ferae cornuque minaces/ diuulsere boues*).

The landscape itself becomes a victim of the Bacchae Frankenstein-like bodily reassignment. The civilized Earth turns into the most primitive and spasmodic version of itself – the very fabric of the world is torn apart, reverting to the primeval Chaos one can see in *Book I* (1–20), the very opposite of Orpheus' microcosmic creation. In this carefully balanced universe, the Bacchae conjure the return of the primordial desorder. They emphasize the physical and ontological differences between themselves and the poet, confirming their divorce from the realm of humankind by adding torn animal appendages to their bodies. While the poet tried to humanize animals, the Bacchae strive to embrace their feral side, void of any higher sentience. It is through perversion of bodily harmony, that these women disconnect themselves from nature and from Orpheus altogether. They too use trance, but only to train their bodies into executing impossible dances. These devolve into mindless contortions, as if trying to shake themselves loose from any possible connection to harmony.

An indication of this deadly divorce from the universe is their refusal to listen to his music. J. Luchte states that in Orphic-Pythagorean teachings music, *logos,* and numerical 'harmony' (translated in musical terms) permeate the universe and the

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creatures inhabiting it[7]. Moreover, music and *logos* were deemed to have somatic impact over beings[8]. It is part of the Orphic belief to assume that our affiliation to cosmic balance is done through musical harmony. In this vein, we can read the Bacchae refusal as a form of rebellious disjunction from the cosmic connection. The Bacchae become completely deaf to Orpheus's soul-reaching voice. If he uses music to charm spirits and bodies, the Maenads use torn bodies devoid of souls to break the musical conduit. They create instruments from ripped skin and turn them into drums, from horns and convert them into Berecynthian flutes. The sounds suffer through this mutilation and devolves from music to mere noise. Through *sparagmos*, animal bodies become acoustic weapons, uncivilized tools, whose natural sounds are perverted for violence[9]. When they were civilized, the animals and creatures formed a quiet audience of bodies articulated into sentience – peaceful, enraptured, harmonious – creating sounds in the middle on the musical scale. Once they lose their bodily integrity, they become weaponized extensions of the Bacchae's brutality. The animal sound, which in *Book XV* (in Pythagoras' speech) successfully bridged the distance between humans and beasts, is now void of communication once more.

The Bacchae utilize the lower register of sounds, which cannot harmonize. They also convert melodious sounds into uncivilized growls. Even the rhythm in verses XI.15–18 expresses this cacophony through repetition of 'u' and 'r', albeit in a poetic way. The sounds of the Bacchae's instruments carry the dying wails of the animals they killed: the moans and screams of creatures in agony. The clash and fracture of bones and horns used to create these grotesque instruments are still audible in the Ovidian verses. They survive in the alliteration describing the noise of the Bacchae (*infracto*, *ululatus*, *obstrepuere*):

> *cunctaque tela forent cantu mollita, sed ingens*
> *clamor et* ***infracto*** *Berecyntia tibia cornu*
> *tympanaque et plausus et Bacchei* ***ululatus***
> ***obstrepuere*** *sono citharae* (XI.15–8).

Everything is a weapon in the Bacchae's hands including fleeting sound. This war is a battle of musical styles. The Bacchae use drums, horns, and flutes – wind and percussion in a primitive mix. In contrast to Orpheus who uses the power of strings, the Bacchae turn themselves into living drums. Their own bodies appear as instruments. They beat their breasts and force their throat to ululate to mask the voice of Orpheus (XI.17–18). His song performs once more the functions of animation which were his signature in the underworld. Earlier in the poem, the Eumenides gathered tears, the dead souls grew hearts, and the fierce eagle of Zeus became sentient and spared Prometheus; now the stones thrown by the Maenads receive souls and life. Orpheus responds to the Maenads' murderous attempts with further creation of *animalia* out of the unanimated:

[7] J. LUCHTE, *Pythagoras and the Doctrine of the Transmigration of the Soul*, Bloomsbury Publications, 2012, Chapter "The Pythagorean Bios and the Doctrine of Transmigration", p.107: "The doctrine of transmigration contains, if we contemplate the implications of the narrative (and what we must already know in order to understand the story even at a simple level) an account of the poetic opening of the divine to the soul amidst body, an account encompassed to a great extent through the exoteric study of the physical, mathematical, and musical nature of the universe. It also contains an account and practice of attunement effectuated by a recollection of this opening, but a remembrance which begins, not from the position of the divine, but from the phenomenal regions of the soul and body, of the finite self".

[8] LUCHTE (2012, 125).

[9] See POPESCU (2021, 144–146).

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sticks and stones become sentient bodies, obedient to his music. His voice defies the laws of physics, able to mollify solid materials. Javelins stop in mid-air, as if thunderstruck. The stones thrown by the Bacchae stop in mid-flight. Missiles are softened and bow before Orpheus as supplicants before a throne. They are unable to hurt him:

> *quae foliis praesuta notam* ***sine uulnere*** *fecit;*
> *alterius telum* ***lapis*** *est, qui missus in ipso*
> *aere concentu uictus uocisque lyraeque est*
> *ac ueluti* ***supplex*** *pro tam furialibus ausis*
> ***ante pedes iacuit*** (XI, 10–13).

Orpheus fights their attack by bestowing upon their weapons the sentience they never had. The power of sound gives soul to the soulless. It is through embodiment that music's civilizing force operate. Orpheus converted bodies before into resonance chambers or cooperative amplifiers of his music: for example, his lyre is in truth a recycled body part, the shell of a tortoise carved into an acoustic device. Through such transformation, the shell no longer serves the mute and slow tortoise, but gains a splendid voice and thus, partially reanimates the deceased tortoise. The Bacchae too recycle nature around them, but they do so for nefarious purposes. Though the Bacchae's trance and revelry was, at its core, a form of natural celebration of life, it is here fully perverted from its original intention. Even their *thyrsus* is easily converted from dancing staff or rattle capable of some primitive rhythm, into a formidable weapon. It is particularly surprising that this instrument bears remnants of life – leaves of green – in the exact moment that it is used to cause harm and provoke death (XI.27–28). Ovid notices the disjunction and underlines that the thyrsus' green branch was meant to serve a living tree rather than the hands of a murderess.

In a fascinating cycle, bodies act as music amplifiers and sound acts as bodily extension. As a language system, musical harmony follows Jacque Lacan statement regarding *logos*: it "is not immaterial. It is a subtle body, but body it is"[10]. In this war, music behaves as exoskeleton, ligament, and sinews, a protective shell for Orpheus' vulnerable body[11]. As long as he continues to play his lyre, he survives under its protection. Once he falls silent, he is torn to pieces (XI.19–20). Aware of this unusual form of vulnerability, the Bacchae seek to reduce the poet from divine voice to muted body. If Orpheus gave a common language to men and animals, the Maenads remove his ability to communicate, demoting him from the human to the animal realm. Ovid compares him to a stag about to become prey to dogs in an arena. If the imagery of animals was initially used to represent bucolic harmony under the spell of music, now it is meant to represent the helplessness of life in the face of violence. The fight devolves from epic duel to wild beast hunt, to a degrading execution. Orpheus is introduced to the vulnerability of the flesh when his lyre is muted and he rapidly morphs from revered *uates* to trampled victim (XI.25–26: *structoque utrimque theatro/ ceu matutina ceruus periturus harena*). Orpheus is now nothing more than a hunted creature, an animal stranded outside of the divine and protective *logos* (XI.39–41: *in illo tempore primum/ inrita dicentem nec quicquam uoce mouentem/ sacrilegae perimunt*).

[10] J. LACAN, *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, tr. Bruce Fink, New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1966, p. 6.

[11] See the previous note.

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The *theatrum* also devolves from musical stage to circus (XI.25–26), where the spectacle is intensely visual and visceral, a show of body and gore[12]. Before Orpheus becomes a mere body, subject to carnage in the arena, his *titulus triumphi* (his 'title', the very symbol of *logos*) is removed. This signifies the failure of his musical 'language' to communicate and foster support – a reference to Roman triumph, where communication is between the victorious general, his troops, and those who gather to welcome them home. The general must clearly announce and present his victorious message, in addition to a spectacle of visually appealing goods, songs, and written messages. In contrast, there is no communication between the convicted criminal and the spectators in a theatre. The Roman amphitheatre is 'the place to be seen' only, and not to be heard, the place where one's *corpus* loses its integrity and turns to shreds. The convict is stripped of his humanity and his voice, disconnected from the spectators, and left to die. Similarly to prisoners in the arena ready for execution, Orpheus becomes a body whose soul is irrelevant: human or not, he is now no better than an animal condemned to a show of flesh and blood.

As Lynn Enterline and Alden Smith specified, the gaze does objectify. In a context where music is the only available armor, being soundless equates victimhood[13]. When the chaotic noise of the Bacchae is so loud that the confused stone cannot 'hear' the ethereal music anymore, a splash of red indicates in brutal chromatic tones the end of the dominion of sound and the return to the barrier of flesh and pain. In a world previously dominated by auditory harmony, flowing red announces a deadly disjunction.

Surprisingly, even the avian metaphor, previously used in *Book XV* to show universal brotherhood, is now associated with predation. In a cruel metaphor, the Bacchae act like wild birds with Orpheus – a frightened owl – caught out of his lair in the middle of the day, fully disconnected from the animal realm of harmony, and ferociously treated like an outsider (XI.21–6). While Ovid represents Orpheus as an owl, Charles Segal and Barbara Pavlock associate him to a nightingale, all beauty and fragility, and admit that in the bird simile, he becomes both victim of human intervention into nature and a 'nature-centered' voice[14]. Orpheus is indeed a center for the entire natural world. The land claims his scattered members and engulfs morsels of his body while the Earth swallows up his spirit (XI.61), as he descends underground. There is corporeal fusion everywhere, and his opened flesh seems to ooze his magic song, permeating the intricate systems of the cosmos. Nature responds by multiplying Orpheus' bodily parts in a gesture of desperate conservation[15]. Nature is anthropomorphized, as if capable of dirges, eulogies, and funerary self-mutilation. The river cries with tears rather than waves. Birds, trees, rivers, stones, and *naiades* – all are devastated by Orpheus' death. As Orpheus bridged the human and animal realms, now all of nature reacts with human grief to his passing:

> *Te maestae uolucres, Orpheu, te turba ferarum,*
> *te rigidi silices, te carmina saepe secutae*
> *fleuerunt siluae…*(XI.44–49).

[12] See Donald KYLE, *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World*, Chichester, West Sussex, Wiley and So. 2015, pp. 7, 15, in particular, the chapter on spectacular executions in Rome, pp. 312–315.

[13] See Lynn ENTERLINE, *The Rhetoric of the Body form Ovid to Shakespeare*, Vanderbilt University, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 112–3 and R. Alden SMITH, *Poetic Allusion and Poetic Embrace in Ovid and Virgil*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1997, pp. 151–153.

[14] Charles SEGAL, "Sophocles' Tragic World: Divinity, Nature, Society", Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1987, pp. 45–46 and Barbara PAVLOCK, *The Image of the Poet in Ovid's Metamorphoses*, Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 2009, pp. 165, n. 1.

[15] See also Philip HARDIE, *Ovid's Poetics of Illusion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 62. For larger quotations of the authors of the notes 9–11, see also POPESCU, pp. 144–146.

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While Orpheus' body is scattered, nature extends its own body to compensate for his loss. As Connerton specifies in *The Spirit of Mourning*, memory requires bodily inscription[16]. To complete the picture, new bodies will later join this unusual fusion. The punished Maenads are turned into trees, their motion restrained by roots, branches, and nooses of wood. In a strange mirroring of Orpheus' destiny, they become a sedentary, vegetal addition to the land (XI.72: *traxit et in solidam detrusit acumina terram*). While Orpheus' anatomy is preserved through peculiar fossilization, the Bacchae lose theirs to the living shapes of trees. Bacchus himself punishes them for the destruction of the poet, by taking away their ability to dance. He erases their human bodies, in what could only be perceived as a form of *damnatio memoriae*[17]. They descend, alive, into their premature tomb of silence:

> *pectus quoque robora fiunt,*
> *robora sunt umeri; nodosaque bracchia ueros*
> *esse putes ramos, et non fallare putando* (XI.82–84).

This punishment contains an acoustic component. While Orpheus' voice endures in the sounds of nature (XI.51–53), the shouts of the Maenads are muted under bark. Their chests no longer resound to ritualistic blows. Their bodies are no longer the musical instruments of emotionality – for the percussion of un-hollowed wood is dull (XI.81–82: *et conata femur maerenti* ***plangere dextra/ robora percussit***). For their uncivilized behaviour, the Bacchae are locked permanently in an antiphonal chamber. By becoming part of the nature which mourns for Orpheus, the Bacchae are also forced to take part in this act of commemoration. Thus, they are forced to integrate themselves into the universe they tried to reject before. Their punishment fits their crime: disembodiment for disembodiment, silence for silence.

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[16] See Paul CONNERTON, *The Spirit of Mourning: History, Memory, and the Body*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, Chapter "Tradition as Conversation and Tradition as Bodily Reenactment", pp. 104–123.

[17] Regarding the cultural function of memory, see Astrid ERLL, *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2008.

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