Translation of Ovid *Metamorphoses*, I.539-59

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Abstract: *My introduction to Ovid was through this tale of Daphne and Apollo. I was fascinated by the language swirling around Daphne's metamorphosis into a tree while simultaneously horrified by the descriptions of Apollo's advance. However, reading English translations, I was surprised by the glossing over of the terror Ovid's transformed characters feel. One example is the translation of figura in line 547. Cassell's lists possible translations as form, shape, figure, and size. But it is often translated as beauty. Why is this, of all possible definitions, chosen? As we learn later, it is not Daphne's beauty that is destroyed, but her body and her humanity; she becomes a splendid tree.*

References and Lexical Acknowledgments:

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*. Trans. Charles Martin. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*. Trans. Frank Justus Miller and Jeffrey Henderson. Loeb Classical Library, v. 42-42. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Simpson, D. P. *Cassell's Latin Dictionary: Latin-English, English-Latin*. 5th ed. USA: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1968.

…sic deus et virgo est hic spe celer, illa timore.
qui tamen insequitur pennis adiutus Amoris,
ocior est requiemque negat tergoque fugacis
inminet et crinem sparsum cervicibus adflat.
viribus adsumptis expalluit illa citaeque
victa labore fugae spectans Peneidas undas
"fer, pater," inquit "opem! si flumina numen habetis,
qua nimium placui, mutando perde figuram!"
vix prece finita torpor gravis occupat artus,
mollia cinguntur tenui praecordia libro,
in frondem crines, in ramos bracchia crescunt,
pes modo tam velox pigris radicibus haeret,
ora cacumen habet: remanet nitor unus in illa.
Hanc quoque Phoebus amat positaque in stipite dextra
sentit adhuc trepidare novo sub cortice pectus
conplexusque suis ramos ut membra lacertis
oscula dat ligno; refugit tamen oscula lignum.
cui deus "at, quoniam coniunx mea non potes esse,
arbor eris certe" dixit "mea! semper habebunt
te coma, te citharae, te nostrae, laure, pharetrae…"

Thus the god pursues the virgin, he sped by hope, she by fear.
But the hunter, buoyed by the wings of love,
is swifter and refuses rest and presses closely over the back of the fugitive
and breathes on the wisps of hair at the nape of her neck.

Her strength devoured, she blanches and, defeated
by the toil of her frantic escape, implores the river,
"Father, help me! If your waters hold any power,
change that which has pleased too well: *blot out my body!*

Her prayer scarcely finished, a densely oppressive stillness closes in on her,
her soft breasts are encased in a thin bark,
her hair grows into leaves, her arms into branches,
her foot, so recently swift, clings to the ground with slow roots.
The tree has her face: her splendor alone remains.

But Apollo loves even this and, with his hand placed on the trunk,
still feels her heart trembling under its new skin
and embracing the branches with his own arms as though they were limbs,
he kisses the wood; yet even the wood flees his kisses.

The god says, "You cannot be my wife,
but you will always be my tree! I will forever have
you in my hair, you in my lyre, you, Laurel, in my quiver."