



“ARIADNE AND THE REST”:

**METAMORPHOSES AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN A.E. STALLINGS’
EARLY POETRY**



ENG-3992

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Master’s Thesis in English Literature

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Fall 2013

Department of Culture and Literature

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Stephen Wolfe, for his helpful advices, his patience and his constructive criticism which undoubtedly has improved this thesis.

Furthermore I also would like to thank my family and friends for giving me lots of support and guidance, especially Eivind Vonen, for helping me finding structural plan for writing efficiently, moreover endure a sometimes stressed out girlfriend. In addition, I would thank Arnfinn Muruvik Vonen for all the good discussions and corrections – and for helping me finding the perfect title for this thesis. Lastly, I would like to thank my mother and father for all the support and encouragement.

Abstract

The main focus in this thesis is metamorphoses and transformations in A.E. Stallings' early poetry, where I explicate poems from her two volumes of poetry, *Archaic Smile* (1999) and *Hapax* (2006). The volumes share similarities, such as thematic use, however, the volumes are different on many terms as well. I argue that a shift has happened from volume one and volume two, and argue my case that Stallings herself has gone through a change due to various reasons which this thesis will try to unravel.

In the introduction I will present A.E. Stallings and some of her background, possible influences and writing style, moreover introduce my thesis statement. In chapter I, New Formalism will undergo a critical discussion, as the movement is often linked to A.E. Stallings, which she strongly dislikes. In this chapter I also draw in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and argue that A.E. Stallings, due to many reasons, must be influenced by the work. In chapter II, the poems from *Archaic Smile* with metamorphosis or transformation are going through explications, and the same happens in chapter III, although now the poems from *Hapax* with metamorphosis and transformation are the target. The last chapter, IV, contains conclusions of my findings, in addition to some comparisons between the volumes of poetry. In this chapter I will answer the questions from my thesis statement. At the end of the thesis is an appendix with an e-mail from A.E. Stallings, where she replies back from questions I have asked her in a previous e-mail. She is aware that I write a master's thesis about her poetry, and she says she is honored that I write about this.

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Introduction

In my Master's thesis I will write about A.E. Stallings (Alicia Elsbeth), an American contemporary poet who has resided in Greece with her husband since 1999. She has written three volumes of poetry so far, *Archaic Smile*, published in 1999, *Hapax* which was published in 2006, and the latest volume, *Olives* published in 2012. I will only include her two first volumes, as *Olives* was unpublished when I started writing the thesis. In that respect I will focus on her early poetry writing, from the late nineties up to her publication of *Hapax*.

First of all, before the Master's thesis, I had never worked with Stallings'¹ poetry. I went through a period when I did not know what to write about. However, after a seminar about thesis writing and finding a topic with other MA students I finally decided poetry was something I would like to write about. From there I continued to look around for possible poets to write about. My search for an interesting, and to me unknown, poet ended when I found X.J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia's book *An Introduction to Poetry*. The book included Stallings in a chapter dealing with poetry written in rhymes and patterns. In this chapter one of her sonnets, *Sine Qua Non*, appeared, alongside with an excerpt of her essay *Crooked Roads Without Improvement: Some Thoughts on Formal Verse*. These works of literature made me want to find out more about Stallings' poetry. I continued to learn about Stallings through reading a long and informative interview by Ginger Murchison from the online literary magazine *The Cortland Review*, which helped me to identify the poetic voice of Stallings. Further, I ordered her two first poetry collections, and after reading the collections I settled on wanting to write about A.E. Stallings.

As Stallings is unknown to many readers, an introduction to her background and each collection of poetry is necessary. It is important to note that her two first volumes of poetry

¹ I will for the most part only use her last name in my thesis.

which are the subject of my thesis are dedicated to her family, and she has written about her childhood in both these volumes. *Archaic Smile* is dedicated to her parents and her sister, Jocelyn, and her second volume *Hapax* is dedicated to her husband John (*Archaic Smile* and *Hapax*).

Alicia Elsbeth Stallings was born in 1968 and grew up in Decatur, Georgia. Her father was a professor at Georgia State University and her mother was a school librarian. Stallings has a sister named Jocelyn, as the dedication of *Archaic Smile* illustrated. Both her father and her sister have got poems written about them, in bigger or smaller contexts, for example *Fishing* and *The Poet's Sister*. Her mother, on the contrary, has seldom been included as a reference in Stallings' poetry. I will not speculate on why her mother has such a minor part in this context, nevertheless, what is certain is that Stallings looked up to her smart and down-to-earth father and admired her sister for being independent and strong. However, her mother got a dedication, alongside with her father and sister, which made her included in some way. In addition, she was mentioned in the poem *The Dollhouse*, although only as a minor character. Furthermore, Stallings' husband and her first reader, John Psaropoulos, is a journalist, and they live in Greece with their two children, Jason and Atalanta. She has received several prizes, for example the *Richard Wilbur Award* in 1999, and the *MacArthur Fellowship* in 2011. The latter prize has made her capable of focusing more on her poetry writing, as she can afford more babysitting and rent an office where she can write her poetry in peace without going to places like cafés to write (Gyls: *An Interview with A.E. Stallings*).

As for education, Stallings studied classics at the University in Georgia, and then continued her education receiving a Master's degree in Classics from Oxford University. Her classical education has made her able to excel in her composition of poetry, having been taught classical works and Latin, which is easily noticeable in her poetry. She met her husband while working as a tea girl in England, and they eventually moved to the United

States of America. After a while, they married and moved further to Greece, where they now have lived for fourteen years (Murchison: *The Interview with A.E. Stallings*).

Before moving to Greece Stallings started to develop her writing style. She writes poetry using formal devices, such as meter and rhymes, however, she does not follow the patterns strictly, but molds them for the poem's benefit without feeling obliged to follow rules. Writing in meter is something Stallings applies, because she feels more at home writing in this manner. Stallings highlights her purpose of writing formally, saying "[e]ventually [after writing free verse] I gave up, wrote what I really wanted to write, which rhymed and scanned, and oddly, *then* I had some success in publishing." (Stallings: *Crooked Roads Without Improvement: Some Thoughts on Formal Verse*). Because of her formal poetry writing, she is sometimes linked to the American poetic movement New Formalism, which I will discuss in the next chapter. Another important aspect of Stallings' poetry is the themes, which mostly concern about the same issues.

One of the themes Stallings focuses on is Greek mythology, which this thesis addresses, particularly in the mythological sections of the poetry collections. Greek mythology is not the only theme I will focus on, since her poems about non-mythological transformations match well with her mythological poems that concern metamorphoses, for example her poems about childhood. Nevertheless, there is a wide range of myths that she writes poems about and she is not afraid to alter the myths for purposes such as making the myth more interesting, or to shed light on important topics. Other themes she is occupied in are for instance culture, as she writes much about museums or exhibitions she visits, moreover a great deal about nature and the aspect of growing up and memories from her childhood. In an interview she was asked "[w]hat inspires you to write?" The follow-up question was what she was passionate about. Her answers made good illustrations of what kind of poems she writes: "[m]any of my poems deal with Greek mythology. But also

everyday life. Motherhood and childhood are sources I return to.” (The Red & Black: *Three Minute Interview*). In my thesis I will focus on her poetry in light of metamorphoses and transformations, where poems without this feature are omitted. However, as Stallings points out herself, Greek mythology and childhood are themes she frequently uses.

Stallings’ use of themes is a good example of her talent, so is her technical skills. This technical skill is visible in her poetry, for example in *Sine Qua Non*. The poem is a sonnet written to her father, with whom she had a good relationship, and the sonnet captures the loss someone feels when loved ones die. I will include the whole poem, and comment briefly on the content, to introduce her poetry slightly before the explications of the other poems begins in chapter two. The reason for including the sonnet is to paint a picture of Stallings and what she focuses on in her poetry. The sonnet captures both the Greek aspect, and adds the importance of family in her life, the two core themes in her poetry I have mentioned. *Sine Qua Non* is like a mirror of Stallings' poetry, both in its portrayal of her excellence in poetic technique and in her use of themes. Lastly, the vast use of Greek references, may it be mythological characters or other Greek features.

Sine Qua Non

Your absence, father, is nothing. It is nought –

The factor by which nothing will multiply,

The gap of a dropped stitch, the needle's eye

Weeping its black thread. It is the spot

Blindly spreading behind the looking glass.

It is the startled silences that come

When the refrigerator stops its hum,

And crickets pause to let the winter pass.

Your absence, father, is nothing – for it is

Omega's long last O, memory's elision

The fraction of impossible division,

The element I move through, emptiness

The void stars hang in, the interstice of lace,

The zero that still holds the sum in place.

(2002)

The sonnet addresses a serious matter as the daughter laments her father who is absent. The absence is not temporary, however, the fact that her father died in 2000, and the sonnet was first published in 2002, suggests that the sonnet is addressed to her deceased father. The sonnet underlines the eternal absence, moreover praises her beloved father by expressing her grief. Stallings' choices of words contribute to paint a picture of how she grieves the loss of her father. Phrases such as "interstice of lace" and "the gap of dropped stitch" symbolize that there is a space between her father and herself, for which death is responsible. Another interesting feature of the sonnet is her use of formal tropes with mathematical vocabulary with words such as "multiply", "division" and "Omega". Interestingly, "Omega's long last O" is also a symbol of her father's death. John Talbot, in the review *Poetry in Review*, says that

[s]he [Stallings] thinks Greekly, and when in an elegy ("Sine Qua Non") she laments that "[y]our absence, father, is nothing – for it is / Omega's long last O", you're nearly persuaded that only in Greek can she find an alphabet so sympathetic and comprehending that it ends with the sound of mourning.

This matches well with the fact that Omega is the last letter in the Greek alphabet, and that the sound is a long open-mid O, which easily can resemble a sound of sadness. Moreover, it matches Stallings' dedication of things Greek, and the fact she is married to a Greek man and lives in Greece. However, this interest in Greek literature and culture was present long before she ever met her husband. Like for instance, *Apollo Takes Charge of His Muses* was published in *Beloit Poetry Journal* in 1992/1993 (Winter 1992-1993 Vol. 43 No.2) and many other poems about Greek mythology followed after that.

Nevertheless, the sonnet laments the death of her father. In an interview with Ginger Murchison, this is what she says about her childhood and her father: "I think it was an unusual childhood. My father, who was a professor at Georgia State, was both intellectual and outdoorsy; so he could discuss Proust or skinning deer..." (*The Interview with A.E. Stallings*) Her relationship with her father is also described in an independent student newspaper in

Georgia, where Stallings explains that “[i]f an important person was coming through town at one of the universities, like Agnes Scott or Georgia State or Emory, and it was happening during the school day, he’d take me out of school to go see them.” (Carpenter: *Genius grant takes ‘pressure’ off the poet*). These quotes are strong indicators that Stallings had a loving and caring father, who was interested in his daughter, moreover that they had a good father-and-daughter relationship.

Therefore, it is evident that Stallings poetry is an intelligent, sincere and has a strong family connection. She is also influenced by Greek references, which the sonnet *Sine Qua Non* illustrated, moreover her use of sonnet was good as one of the characteristics of a sonnet concerns praise. She masters the formal devices, she is able to write about serious matters, but often uses irony or humor in her poetry to play off the seriousness of her subject matter. When myths are regarded, twists or alterations are often applied, often with humor and irony as powerful tools, although *Sine Qua Non* is a non-mythological poem.

Like other poets, Stallings’ work of poetry have been analyzed and dwelled on. However, Stallings’ poetry has mostly faced one variant of reviewing or scrutinizing. A lot of the critics seem to focus on her technical way of writing, forgetting the strong themes she uses in her poetry. How she employs the sonnet and the rhyming quatrains, and so on, have been more scrutinized than her use of themes. For example, from a review in *Poetry*, the reviewer Peter Champion comments on unnatural phrases in two of her poems in *Hapax*, saying the it “...exists merely for the rhyme.”, and when “[t]he meter and rhyme unfold elegantly...” in her poem *Clean Break*, it is “...at the expense of idiom.” Furthermore he makes comments about “...the so-called New Formalists...” who will only be read and rewarded if the poet uses meter and rhymes. Champion says Stallings “...is too good to be lumped with these muggles.” Not only is this highly critical of the movement, per se, it focuses on the formal

elements of her poetry writing. In a review by A.M. Juster, he too focuses more on her technical skills, where he, for example, writes:

Stallings' more formal poems exhibit considerable metrical inventiveness. Although most of her base rhythms are iambic, she uses anapestic and trochaic substitutions freely. In fact, she is one of the few poets who can shift into anapestic lines without letting them careen out of control... (Juster: *Archaic Smile by A.E. Stallings*).

The lack of detail on her use of themes is strange, as she has much to offer in this area. The technical focus of the reception Stallings' poetry inspires me to look more at the thematic issues in her poetry instead, as it would benefit the understanding of her poetry to highlight these issues in this manner. Her poetry is more than how she formally writes it, be it rhyming quatrains – or a sonnet-like poem with twelve or sixteen lines. She explains the latter form in the interview from *The Cortland Review*, saying “[m]ost of my sonnets are either 12 or 16-line poems that I decided were actually pretty sonnet-like, and I just reinforced that form by taking out lines or seeing where I could fill it out (Murchison: *The Interview with A.E. Stallings*). The sonnet-like poems of Stallings illustrates that she, in general, do not hesitate to change or alter aspects, such as formal rules.

Stallings writes much about Greek mythology, as mentioned, and there seem to be some works in particular that have colored her poetry. One of these works may be Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a narrative poem. It is not only Stallings who has been influenced by Ovid, poets such as Shakespeare and Dante have also been inspired by the classical poet. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a major influential work in Western history, and it is no surprise that the poem has influenced many poets. Because of Stallings' education and interest in classics, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* must have influenced Stallings at some level. First off, many of the myths used by Stallings are found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and this underlines a connection between Ovid's work and Stallings' work. Secondly, Thomas Bulfinch's collection *Bulfinch's*

Mythology has clearly been a great influence to Stallings too. She has mentioned this work in at least one interview with Ginger Murchison and the myths she used in *Archaic Smile* are all used by Bulfinch as well, and she often uses them in the same manner as Bulfinch. The collection by Bulfinch was very popular and is still in print, and it is not unlikely she grew up with the collection, as Stallings was very interested in stories and fairytales as a child.

Further on, Stallings is a unique poet in many ways. She is engaged in blogging and social media, and has lots of interviews on the internet and some videos online. She writes much for the *Poetry Foundation*, like prose and comments. This contributes to her public exposure, as she is easily reachable and she is very active online in general. The reasons for this may be today's use of internet and the immense development that has happened online, however, Stallings' engagement and massive use of the internet is rather unique. For instance, I was able to reach her through Facebook, and further got her e-mail address so I could ask her some questions, which illustrates that she is very accessible online.

Now, after an introduction of A.E. Stallings, I will continue to show what will follow in the rest of the chapters, moreover introduce my thesis statement. In chapter two I will take a look at New Formalism, a movement which is linked to Stallings, moreover focus on metamorphoses in her poetry. In this thesis, I will reserve the term *metamorphosis* to refer to profound changes in mythological contexts, whereas *transformation* is used as a more general term for profound changes. My investigation aims to see how Stallings employ metamorphoses and transformations in her poetry, moreover see how the use has molded Stallings herself – and her poetry. My reading of her poetry is that there is a shift from volume one to volume two. This may be because of the poet's inner development, which might follow her outer development between the two volumes.

My thesis statement is as follows:

How does A.E. Stallings employ transformations and metamorphoses in her early poetry collections, *Archaic Smile* and *Hapax*? How has her development of change been in her poetry from her debut to her second volume? Has the issue of becoming a wife and mother contributed to this development? Lastly, may other circumstances be influential to Stallings and her development? To answer these questions, the volumes *Archaic Smile* and *Hapax* will undergo an investigation in which metamorphoses and transformations are themes that need exploration. The investigation will happen in chapters two and three. Lastly, I will compare and contrast the volumes of poetry after what I find in my explications and other interesting aspects concerning her poetic world, and try to find evidence to answer my questions in order to draw conclusions.

Chapter I: New Formalism and Metamorphoses

Stallings and New Formalism are by many linked together, however she rejects the label quite vehemently. She has written about it in essays and a blog entry at *Harriet*², moreover in interviews, trying to illustrate her distaste for the label. Nevertheless, it is still interesting to look at the link as it has provoked her greatly to be labeled a new formalist. This makes me want to look into the movement, however, despite my exploration of the movement I will not attempt to label Stallings a new formalist. There is no need to define if she is a new formalist or not, as the premises are vague and often problematic to defend.

The movement of New Formalism will be discussed in this chapter, where I will refer to essays which concern New Formalism and investigate the traits of the movement. Furthermore, I will look into Stallings' strong dislike of being labeled a new formalist. However, first it is necessary to define the movement. According to *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* New Formalism was “[a] reaction in late 20th-c. Am. Poetry, against free verse (q.v.) and a return to metrical verse and fixed stanza forms.” (834). The features of New Formalism, as the name suggests, are the use of poetic form, such as writing in rhyme, meter and formal verse, like writing sonnets and villanelles.

However, it is not only Stallings who has strong feelings about New Formalism. The movement of New Formalism had from the start in the late seventies evoked strong reactions from poets and critics. After the wave of free verse and confessional poetry from young poets, formal verse was put on the agenda again, influenced mostly by three universities – Harvard, Stanford and Brandeis (McPhillips 77). Young poets were central in the revival of formal poetry writing, and universities were major contributors of this revival, especially the three mentioned. One reason for this was the growth of creative writing programs in the US at the

² *Harriet* is for blogging about poetry, and relating news, from the website *Poetry Foundation*.

time. At Harvard the classicist and poet Robert Fitzgerald was said to be "... the most influential figure among aspiring poets in the 1970s..." (McPhillips 77), and some of his students are names linked to New Formalism, such as Brad Leithauser and Dana Gioia. At Stanford and Brandeis poet-critics Yvor Winters and J.V. Cunningham were inspiring poets to write with "... tight metric control..." (77), where Timothy Steele was the best-known from these universities. The shift made some poets start using rhyme and meter again, thus starting a new movement. This was called New Formalism due to the revival of formal verse, poetic forms such as sonnets, Sapphics and rhyming quatrains.

However, the reception of the movement was received either with praise or dislike. The opposing groups, like the free verse poets, had strong meanings about the movement. There were loud protests on the arrival and revival of forms, which created much attention to New Formalism. In this chapter I will look at what New Formalism is and what traits it have, moreover some of its history. What is certain is that New Formalism has not had an easy journey, which I will investigate in search of why the movement has faced difficulties, and all the issues, supports and attacks that have come along the way. Moreover, I will focus on the connection between A. E. Stallings and New Formalism, to dwell on the link between these two entities, as Stallings has rejected to be classified as a new formalist in a number of interviews and in a blog entry. Lastly the theme of metamorphoses in Stallings' mythological poetry will be discussed, in order to draw in themes as an important part in her poetry.

When did New Formalism begin? It first emerged, according to Dana Gioia, "... at the tail end of the seventies..." (395), and throughout the eighties New Formalism continuously grew, although poetry written in free verse was still preferred by a large number of poets. In the late seventies some collections of formal poetry were published, and magazines started to publish sonnets and other formal verse, something that had not been done in decades. Writing formal poetry in the eighties became vogue and popular, found in "... almost any national

journal or magazine...” (Shapiro 200). After a twenty-year dominance of free verse a shift took place, making rhyme and meter superior – at least to some. Robert Richman, for example, described this revival “... as a return to the high seriousness, eloquence, and technical fluency that characterized the best achievements of American poetry forty years ago.” (qtd. in Shapiro 201). On the opposing ground Ariel Dawson argued that “the reemergence of formalism is perfectly harmonious with the yuppie knack for resurrecting elitist traditions.” (McPhillips 75). The two statements match each other with two quite deviating views on New Formalism, and support the image of New Formalism as a movement that creates strong reactions by the people involved. They either praised the movement or disliked it, or fail to acknowledge it altogether.

One of the most prominent spokespersons of New Formalism was the poet Dana Gioia. His essay on New Formalism, – *Notes on the New Formalism*, was published in *The Hudson Review* in 1987. In this essay he explained how New Formalism came to be a movement, as some poets started using rhyme and meter again, furthermore a look on quasi-form like the pseudo-formal³ poem – and the importance of meter. Gioia illustrated this in the very beginning of the essay; “[t]wenty years ago it was a truth universally acknowledged that a young poet in possession of a good ear would want to write free verse” (396), nevertheless he thought that the tables are turned. As he wrote: “[f]ree verse, the creation of an older literary revolution, is now the long-established, ruling orthodoxy; formal poetry the unexpected challenge.” Dana Gioia wrote about the attacks made on New Formalism and that often these attacks have led to “... odd misconceptions...” (396), like for instance that it is “... artificial, elitist, retrogressive, right-wing and ... un-American.” These are characteristics that some people attach to traditional forms in poetry, thus these negative statements about New Formalism does not “... withstand critical scrutiny...” (396), at least according to Dana

³ Pseudo-formal verse only resembles formal verse.

Gioia. He claimed “[t]here will always be groups advocating new types of poetry, some of it genuine, just as there will always be conservative opposing forces trying to maintain the conventional models” (395), just like the conservatives in the sixties struggled to keep up the formal dominance in poetry instead of free verse.

Robert McPhillips wrote about New Formalism, in 1989, in *The Sewanee Review*. The essay’s title was *Reading the New Formalists*, and he focused on the movement and poets who wrote in this manner – and other poets writing free verse. Regardless of the shift in poetry aesthetic, he claimed that “... much confusion still exists about the nature of the New Formalism. Part of this confusion remains ideological.” (74). These aspects were brought up by poets writing in free verse, and McPhillips believed that “... these poets have been more interested in denouncing than in defining the new movement.” (75). Diane Wakoski and Ariel Dawson had strong and lucid feelings about New Formalism. Dawson harshly argued, as mentioned, that New Formalism was elitist, whereas Wakoski’s attack was more roughly delivered: She claimed that John Hollander, a critic of free verse, was “...the devil himself...”, and “... that to write in traditional forms was un-American.” (75). Dana Gioia proposed that “... American poetry is whatever poetry happens to be written by Americans.”(McPhillips 76). There are voices that strongly believed that New Formalism is reserved for Americans, since the poets that are labeled new formalists almost exclusively have been American. Nevertheless, it is dangerous to judge all by the same rule, moreover is it evident that to some extent it could be true. What is obvious is that most new formalists are American, and perhaps because of the majority of Americans in this movement some critics, and poets too, have attached the “rule” that only Americans can join. This is among the many controversies that New Formalism hold.

It is not only free verse poets and critics that have had strong reactions against New Formalism. Even poets, whether they like it or not, are labeled new formalists, and some

choose to stand up for themselves to try avoid the stigma of the movement. New Formalism is a label that has been used for at least the last thirty years. In this period of time the label New Formalism has decreased in popularity, especially among younger 21st century poets who write in formal verse. One of these is A.E. Stallings. The interesting is that she is labeled a new formalist by many, and she does not agree on this label. In Stallings' *Why No One Wants to be a New Formalist*, written as a blog entry at *Poetry Foundation's* section for blogging, *Harriet*, this view is particularly clear. The blog captures her distaste for this particular label. She has multiple reasons for this, for example her notion that "anybody can join – you just have to write a sonnet or three...", however, no one, Stallings insists, would want to join this movement. She further remarks that "[n]o one says the sonnet has to be good." These quotes reveal some of the reasons why she refuses to embrace the label. It seems like one of the main issues of refusing this label is that the poetry of New Formalism tends to be weak and that Stallings refuses to be labeled together with bad formal verse poets. In addition to the fact that British poets that write in form and meter are excluded from this label, something which is inequitable, it seems, in Stallings' mind. She seems envious of the British poets who can compose poetry in form and meter without getting the New Formalism label stuck behind their names.

Stallings compares the label New Formalism as the "kiss of death", a statement which captures her rejection of the movement. She questions what New Formalism is, and claims that for some reason all new formalists were American – and more importantly tries to reveal how this label get attached to American poets writing in rhyme and meter. Is it because they have studied with Yvor Winters or simply published in a formal journal or attended a conference at West Chester in Pennsylvania? Because of the labeling she has come up with a plan that may decrease the worst labeling. This involves distancing yourself. By that she implies that you can more easily avoid the label as much as possible – or perhaps even attack

it, like she does in her blog entry. She suggests that formal writing poets may "...write a review of a book in form and use it as a springboard to discuss the problems of New Formalism generally." (Stallings: *Why No One Wants to be a New Formalist*). Or she wants to distance herself by doing translation. It seems like she wants to fight the fight and find out the best solution for New Formalism and its labels. Timothy Steele, who also may be looked upon as a new formalist, is not satisfied with the label either, where the main issue is that there is disagreement about the label and that the movement is not backed up by "its" poets. Steele says the movement of New Formalism

...suggests, among other things, an interest in style rather than substance, whereas I believe that the two are mutually vital in any successful poem. I employ the traditional instruments of verse simply because I love the symmetries and surprises that they produce and because meter especially allows me to render feelings and ideas more flexibly and precisely than I otherwise could." (Poetry Foundation: Timothy Steele biography).

The question is then why. Is it because New Formalism is based upon the wrong elements? One of the pitfalls might have been that New Formalism and its poets, at least in the eighties, did not undergo close critical reading from critics and others, however the movement received either praise or dismiss. Very little scrutiny has been employed, which may have caused New Formalism to be a divided movement. McPhillips touched this theme in his essay, when he reacted to the notion that "... critics of New Formalism have failed to evaluate the quality of the poetry... without carefully examining individual poets." (78) Marjorie Levinson is also critical to the approach of New Formalism in *What is New Formalism?* She claimed "[n]ew formalism does not advocate for any particular theory, method, or scholarly practice." (562). She suggested that New Formalism was "... a kind of aesthetic or formal commitment.", and concluded that the movement of "[n]ew formalism is a very mixed bag." (562) It is fair to question the birth of the movement New Formalism, since it has experienced turbulence and harsh criticism, however, not satisfactory scrutiny, only

blindly aimed criticism or praise. Nevertheless, what is evident is that New Formalism has raised controversies from the start until today. The term New Formalism is still holding strong, although it seems like poets labeled new formalists want to wriggle out of it. Stallings is at least certain in her case: “[n]o one will admit being one. No one will come forward to tell us.” New Formalism is a movement where its history has not been quiet, rather the opposite, and the quality of the product has not been under the necessary scrutiny.

Hitherto, I have dealt with the movement of New Formalism and the formal traits that belong to the movement. It is interesting to look at the formal traits of her poetry, however, Stallings sees working in form and meter as a tool, for example she says that “[f]orm is just a tool, another way to get where you're going, and you should be able to use it any way you want to.” (Murchison: *The Interview with A.E. Stallings*). In that respect it makes it more fascinating to look at what themes she employs in her poetry, as her poetry is much more than merely form and formal devices, and since she does not want to be labeled. The reason can be simply that Stallings believes it is irrelevant how she technically writes the poem, and that the most interesting aspect is what kind of themes she uses. Critics often focus on how poems technically are written. It can be argued that Stallings has formal style of writing is because she masters it, as she says in *The Cortland Review* “I tried for a while to write free verse, and I went through this long, dry spell where I didn't publish anything.” This quote illustrates how her formal way of writing poetry works best for her. Furthermore, in her essay *Crooked Roads Without Improvement: Some Thoughts on Formal Verse* she points out “despite some noises from the neo-formalist⁴ camp, formal verse does not possess any innate superiority either; it is only a tool.” Arguably, the thematically picture of her poetry is something which needs to be addressed, especially since her poetry has been scrutinized at lengths about formal aspects – and the issue of the thematically picture is even more interesting to explore than how she

⁴ Another used term for “New Formalism”, however, not as much used as “New Formalism”.

writes her poems technically. Therefore, I will continue this chapter by including themes as an important counterpart to New Formalism.

Firstly, there is no question that a huge number of Stallings' poems are about Greek mythology. Myths involving characters such as Persephone, Hades, Penelope and Odysseus are some of the examples of the use of Greek mythology in her poems. Ovid (43 BC – AD 18), one of the greatest Roman poets alongside with Virgil, has written a work called *Metamorphoses*, which focuses on metamorphoses. *Metamorphoses* is written in Latin, which includes the Roman names of the characters. Nevertheless, Greek mythology has other names for the same characters, e.g. Artemis is the Greek name of the goddess and Diana is the Roman name for the same goddess, which makes the myth the same, although some of the names are different. As Stallings uses the Greek names, it is necessary to point out these name diversities, so no confusion occurs. Nevertheless, Ovid's work was most likely completed in the year 8 AD and was written in dactylic hexameter. There are many myths in this work, which often concern around the same theme, namely metamorphoses. The work consists of fifteen books and around 250 myths. There is no secret that many of Greek myths do indeed speak about changes, and it is interesting to investigate how Stallings employs this theme in her poetry, as she has a big collection of poems dealing with Greek mythology. Furthermore, her education and interest also point to the classics, and it is fair to assume that Stallings is, and has been, influenced by Ovid.

However, Stallings writes poetry without Greek mythology too, and in that context transformation is a good, descriptive word for poems dealing with non-mythological changes. As for the definitions of important key words, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines the word *transformation* as "a complete change in [somebody/something]", and the verb *transform* "to change the form of [something]", or "to completely change the appearance or character of [something], especially so that it is better". According to Merriam-Webster

Online: Dictionary and Thesaurus the word *transformation* is “an act, process, or instance of transforming or being transformed”. The word *transform* is “to change the outward form or appearance”, or “to change in character or condition”. Furthermore, metamorphosis is an important word in this context, as Ovid’s work has this as the title. The word *metamorphosis* refers to either a “change of physical form, structure, or substance especially by supernatural means”, or “a striking alteration in appearance, character, or circumstances” (Merriam-Webster’s Online: Dictionary and Thesaurus). As for the word *metamorphose*, it refers “to change into a different physical form especially by supernatural means”. Therefore, since the word *metamorphosis* is loaded with supernatural content, it will be used with the mythological poems in this thesis, whereas *transformation* is reserved to non-mythological poems.

Chapter II: *Archaic Smile*

A.E. Stallings writes poetry with ancient roots, especially Greek mythology, as mentioned in previous chapters. This is a subject that she dwells on passionately, and she is most likely influenced by Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Thomas Bulfinch's collection *Bulfinch's Mythology*. During a reading in Bill Moore Student Success Center in Atlanta, she explains in an oral presentation that "I write quite a lot, I guess, about Greek mythology, which happened before I moved to Greece, so, studying classics and met my husband who is Greek. There is Greek mythology and greekness, I guess it's sort of is my destiny." (Poetry@Tech: A.E. Stallings: 07:21-07:35). Besides Greek mythology subjects such as nature, animals, humanity and culture stands strong in her poetry. Nevertheless, I will concentrate on investigating how Stallings employs metamorphoses and transformations in her early poetry writing. In search of these answers I will explicate poems from the two first volumes of poetry, *Archaic Smile* and *Hapax*.

Metamorphoses in *Archaic Smile*

In this part I will introduce, and explicate, a number of poems in the search of different kinds of metamorphoses, with an intention to explore how Stallings employs the use of metamorphoses in her mythological poetry. There is quite a selection of mythical characters that can be said to undergo a change, examples of such metamorphoses are seen in Daphne and Arachne, although on different terms: Daphne wants to undergo the change, Arachne does not. Nevertheless, these metamorphoses often regard visual change, however quite frequently also inner change, as seen in characters such as Eurydice and Ariadne. I will analyze the ways

Stallings uses metamorphoses in her mythological poems, furthermore connect the myths with multiple versions.

The Archaic Smile poems I

The first poem I address is *Eurydice Reveals Her Strength*, where the reader is aware that Eurydice undergoes a change. The metamorphosis can be seen in two levels, one is from being a living creature to being dead in Hades' domain, which is a bodily change. The other metamorphosis happens mentally, when she embraces death and seems to utterly enjoy the state of being dead. This is illustrated by these words, in Eurydice's perspective, featured in the very beginning of the poem:

Dying is the easy part.

As you still live, my dear, why did you come?

You should learn an easing of the heart

As I have, now, for truly some

Prefer this clarity of mind, this death...

(1-5)

These lines illustrate the change in Eurydice, where she underlines that she “[p]refer[s] this clarity of mind, this death...” and furthermore questions why her mortal husband even showed up. Eurydice wants him to understand that death is good and that she prefers to be dead. In some way she might even try to convince her husband Orpheus of the same, saying “[y]ou should learn an easing of the heart...” (line 3).

In the poem Eurydice and Orpheus "...strained to be one strange new beast enmeshed,..."(line 21), and after her death she has withdrawn from the idea of them as a union, as partners in life, to be more careless and independent in the new state of "living". They both feared death while living, and Orpheus still does, as he tries to get his wife back to life with "...his plaintive music..." (Graves 112). Eurydice struggles to listen to his music, because her change has been so great that she has forgotten how hearing is done properly. She can only recall a technical description of what hearing is "... [a] quiver in the membrane of the ear,..." (line 15). Hearing is a masterful tool, however, it is not necessary to employ this ability in order to live a good life. Hearing symbolizes input and information as it is one of five senses, although there are many other ways of getting these inputs. A different approach or a new angle may be all that is needed, and obviously hearing is not necessary in the underworld. However, what is striking is Eurydice's willingness to return back with her husband, regardless of the actual outcome. Even though the metamorphosis has taken place, she must have had a voice within her, or at least a profound reason, as she follows her husband, despite her strong desire of being dead. Her desire of being dead is because she is tired of "...the body's imperious demands:...", (line 6) and furthermore from the following lines "...[t]hat constant interruption of the breath, // That fever-greed of eyes and hands." (lines 7-8). Nevertheless, her death is final when Orpheus breaks the promise he made to Hades to not look back and see whether or not Eurydice follows. The change after his crucial error is now complete, and Eurydice can continue to be strong and independent, hence the title *Eurydice Reveals Her Strength*. However, it is crucial to pinpoint that Stallings uses some of her mythical characters in persona, and because of this the myth has received a freer interpretation. Stallings' shares this in *The Cortland Review*:

Sometimes when I want to write something personal, I'll write through a persona; then it's neither personal nor mythical, and it sort of becomes a combination of the two things, and if I'm trying to write about the myth, I'll deliberately search for a wholly different point of view because the traditional one doesn't make for a very interesting poem (Murchison: *The Interview with A.E. Stallings*).

The quote supports the idea that Stallings may use personas in her poetry, and the fact that she may change the myth or story in order to make it better or more interesting to the reader.

The following poem, *Eurydice's Footnote* is a comment on the aspect of changing a piece of literature, or even art, to enhance the story. In the poem the persona Eurydice dwells on the fact that the myth is sometimes told differently than the traditional version. Underneath the title of the poem is a quote that illustrates this fact, which says that "... a single Hellenistic poem, on which Virgil and Ovid drew freely ... made a vitally important change by turning the recovery of Eurydice, whether complete or temporary, into a tragic loss." The reference to C.M. Bowra's quote from *The Classical Quarterly* supports the idea that the story of Eurydice's destiny has been told differently than other versions, making changes in how the myth is told. In that case, the myth has gone through a metamorphosis, just like the many of the characters from Greek mythology have. Nevertheless, it often seems to be important to change how the story is told in order to make it, presumably, more interesting, or to unravel a new essence or flavor to the story. To twist the myth can have its benefits, something that can be looked upon as evidence of metamorphosing a myth or a story. Like Stallings says in the latter quote, searching for a new point of view will make the myth or story a more interesting poem than if the myth was written plainly without newness attached to it. As Eurydice concludes in the end of the poem, "[d]isappointment in the end was more aesthetic // Than any merely felicitous resolution." (lines 20-21). The aesthetic aspect seems to underline that sadness and misery may inhabit a beauty, and that the reader would prefer the sad ending

versus a good. Therefore, the myth needs to change from the felicitous ending in order to make the myth desirable, or filled with renewed vigor. The persona of Eurydice shares this notion:

Love, then, always was a matter of revision

As reality, to poet or to politician

Is but the first rough draft of history or legend.

So your artist's eye, a sharp and perfect prism,

Refracts discreet components of a beauty

To fix them in some still more perfect order...

(1-6)

Like Stallings has changed Eurydice in *Eurydice Reveals Her Strength* into a character who gains strength, or at least finally shows her true self, other versions have made it clear that Eurydice gladly would follow her husband to the upper world, moreover, that Orpheus did not fear death as he would stay in the Underworld unless Eurydice was granted the permission of returning to the living world with him. According to *Bulfinch's Mythology*, Orpheus sang, accompanied by his lyre, to Hades and Persephone, ending his song with "[b]ut till then grant her to me, I beseech you. If you deny me, I cannot return alone; you shall triumph in the death of us both." (Chapter XXIV.) This refers to Orpheus' wish of returning back to the living world with his wife Eurydice, and refusing to leave without her. Nevertheless, metamorphosis is not merely something that happens to the characters itself, furthermore it complicates the view of the myth. Facing multiple versions of the myth can make it difficult to decipher what version is most likely of being closest to the traditional story. This kind of change alters the story, not only the characters involved. However, the various versions that exist supports the

high usage of interpretation, which for better or worse are our window to the mythological world, in which the reader is fully able to use the version of desire.

On the other hand, the change would perhaps lead into another kind of alteration, if Eurydice did return to the world of the living. Would she still possess the strength she shows in the poems? Or perhaps Eurydice's strength is in fact Stallings' personal interpretation. In *The Cortland Review* Stallings says:

One thing about studying the classics is that you realize there is no one version of a myth. Bullfinch's **Mythology** [sic] tells us there is a myth, but that just isn't true. Homer may have one version, Ovid another version; Virgil still another version, and the classical authors clearly felt free to change the myths to suit their own purposes. They didn't consider them cast in stone or untouchable, so you get the impression you can be free, too, to do with the characters what you want to (Murchison: *The Interview with A.E. Stallings*).

What this quote tells is that Stallings takes liberties, and with good reason, as there already are many versions of the same story. To take a myth and change it without wrecking the story, can give a refreshing feeling and a new view on the myth, an aspect Stallings has embraced and employed in her poetry.

From my e-mail correspondence with Stallings she writes:

I do often change or alter myths from their traditional versions, sometimes for purposes of irony. But myths aren't set in stone--as you point out, even classical myths have different versions depending on the ancient source. So I do not worry too much about being "faithful" to these stories. I do think it useful for readers to know the standard versions so that they can see where there are "twists," ... (Appendix)

The two Eurydice poems both engage in changes, although it is employed differently. In *Eurydice Reveals Her Strength* it is the character itself, Eurydice, who went through a metamorphosis, from living to dead, from being frightened to embracing death. She has changed from who she was when she was living, sees things differently than before, moreover feeling at ease in the Underworld without a desire to return back to the living world. On the

other hand, *Eurydice's Footnote* it was not the character that has undergone a change, rather the myth itself has changed into a new version, with a quite different ending than what was used before the findings of the Hellenistic poem.

Metamorphoses are relevant to Greek mythology, which is easily seen in the poem *How the Demons were Assimilated & Became Productive Citizens*. The poem has no personal characters, although the demons are represented as a group. The poem builds upon the metamorphosis from active evil to passive evil. By being active evil it involves acting on it, on the other hand, passive evil is merely to see evil be done without executing it personally. The poem focuses on demons and how they behave, which is seen in this quote:

... As for Evil, it became too much trouble:

The demons started to shirk the menial jobs

Which like good deeds, took one among the poor,

And bruised the manicure of rose-petal nails.

They preferred to stand by & watch Evil happen,

Or offended by odors & noise, even turned away.

(14-18)

The quote pictures the metamorphosis and how the demons act, for instance by doing nothing, and that they enter the sphere of doing what is pleasant, avoiding “menial jobs” (line 15). The demons convert themselves, or rather disguise themselves and their true agenda. As time went by the demons were left to do whatever they wanted, the angels “...dropping all charges // On the spoiled creatures.” (lines 24-25). Perhaps the angels did not care too much, just like the demons seem to do in the poem, or that they lacked the strength and possibility to act on these facts. The angels in the poem are “[a]fraid to be called vain...” (line 22) which

illustrates they lack determination and strength, and by that fail to do anything with the demons. Like the poem ends, “[t]hey were that good.” (line 25). The demons are powerful creatures, whereas the angels are portrayed rather weak, which makes a crucial difference as the demons have control over the situation.

As demons are the main characters in the poem, the word and its origin are necessary to include. According to Merriam-Webster Online: Dictionary and Thesaurus, demon derives from the Greek word *daimon*, “... a divine or semidivine power that determined a person's fate”. Originally the word referred to a spirit or a divine power with evil connotations. In the Free Dictionary *daimon* refers to either “[a]n inferior deity, such as a deified hero.”, or “[a]n attendant spirit; a genius.” In Christianity demons are often referred to as the devil, the angels are the counterpart, which makes the word *daimon* and *demon* different in respects to religious aspects. The difference between the original Greek word and the English word can be connected in this poem as both perspectives have a place in the poem. There are aspects that draw today's society into the picture with the metamorphosis that takes place in the demons, who originally were performing evil themselves, however, now leave the “dirty” job to someone else.

The aspect of drawing today's society is seen in the poem's references to United States of America, and some of their holidays. In the poem Labor Day is addressed, which is a celebrated day on the first Monday every September. Easter is mentioned as well in this connection, and these two holidays have approximately half a year between them. This aspect illustrates that there is a link between an underworld and the world people live in today. The demons are linked to the underworld, whereas the holidays mentioned are from recent time, like how we live in 21st century. Today's world, for example in United States of America, suggests that the demons portrayed in the poem and some people are alike and do not always have a good agenda, and therefore the demons in the poem in fact picture today's people. The

demons' way of dressing may symbolize that even on the inside, the demons want to hide who they really are, as earlier mentioned, they try to masquerade their true agenda. The black color refers to something mysterious and hidden – the clothes "...didn't show dirt..." (line 3), which again proves the point that the demons want their motives to be unseen. Why do not the demons want to be seen? Perhaps they want to avoid being found guilty of crimes and that is why they want to influence from the shadows so they have slimmer chances of getting caught. In that case they are indirectly guilty of the crime, but they still enjoy watching evil happen. However, what does "...Innocence,..." (line 4) refer to? The title has the phrase "productive citizen", which gives a strong indication that the place where the demons now are "assimilated" is in the living world, in this context perhaps even in a city, as the quote "[i]n the city like Innocence,..." (line 4) supports. The capitalized letter "I" supports the city reference. The term "innocence" may illustrate that there is no legal justice functioning properly in the city of Innocence, in that case the reference to innocence is irony, as guilt is the counterpart. The image of the angels "...dropping all charges..." (line 24) supports the idea the term innocence may involve the aspect of legality, as the phrase "dropping all charges" is a judicial term and fits with the possibility of Innocence as a city.

Stallings depicts a view on how demons, angels and life in the underworld are, something she mentions in *The Cortland Review*:

I think I find the pagan concept of the underworld and afterlife almost more believable—more human—than the Christian heaven and hell thing, which seems like an immense abstraction very difficult to picture, but the pagan underworld is really *under the world*; it's a physical place with physical rivers and geography (Ginger

Murchison: *The Interview with A.E. Stallings*).

Stallings takes liberties in portraying demons and telling stories about how they change, while trying to hide their true intention, regardless of how they act. In this poem she is clearly colored by her childhood memories of fairytales – and a visit to Mammoth Cave

(Murchison: *The Interview with A.E. Stallings*). Because of her memories, Stallings is able to picture how the Underworld may have looked like, as she brings this feeling forward in light of how the demons act and think. As mentioned, there can easily be drawn a link between demons and humans in the poem, as many human beings can resemble how these demons in the poem are portrayed. Some people hide their agenda and do not want to contribute to the society because they either do not care or they want the easiest way of living. This can cause involuntary or passive evil aspects, such as ignoring people in trouble – or perhaps only being interested in shallow things like money and appearance. The poem comments on the shallow way some people live, urging plastic surgery to enhance their appearance or dressing in expensive cashmere clothing. The aspect of being careless is also portrayed in the poem e.g. when the demons “...offended by odors & noise, even turned away.” (line 19), however, they were much occupied with egotistical aspects, like turning their hisses to lisps to make them more pleasurable. The demons’ change, and metamorphosis, happened to make them more attractive on the outside. They altered their look with plastic surgery to make them more beautiful, they changed their clothing and learned to sound more pleasant - the demons even “...became Episcopalian,” (line 12), referring to a Christian denomination. Therefore, the metamorphosis which has taken place in the poem is highly voluntarily and executed to enhance and strengthen the demons’ credibility. The metamorphosis is, arguably, on the wrong terms since everything is based on phoniness and the lack of sincerity.

Stallings has through the use of metaphors and symbolism illustrated how the demons live and compose themselves. There is obviously a strong parallel between an underworld and today’s society, which is illustrated by her use of language and poetic devices, such as metaphors. There is also a reference to William Blake’s *The Songs of Innocence and Experience*, where the innocent and the tainted, like the angels and demons, meet.

The poem *Ariadne and the Rest* is some kind of fairytale with a sad ending. Stallings uses an allusion to fairytales in the poem, with references to Disney princesses, where happy endings are heavily used. Like for instance the fairytale *The Little Mermaid* by H. C. Andersen, which originally had a sad ending, was changed by Disney, and turned into a happy ending. When looking at the first stanza and its references to princesses, and Stallings interests of fairytales, there is no doubt she has been influenced by them. However, the poem is not a normal fairytale, rather a Greek mythology poem with droplets of fairytale references.

The poem depicts the story of an unkind destiny when Ariadne was abandoned by her “prince”, Theseus, on a desolate island. Ariadne eventually got married to Dionysus, who “...pitied her and took her for his own,...” (line 61). Furthermore, she was rescued when she was old by sailors. In the beginning of the poem, she is portrayed as naïve and dreamy, she had “... [l]earned by rote the happy-ever-after,...” (line 17) “and she ”... [k]ept one eye peeled for princes,...” (line 18), however, after she was left alone on the island she started to lose her mind – and this continued forever:

Her memory was like a broken toy.

She mumbled recipes, old rhymes, the song

Pasiphaë had sung while at the loom.⁵

(72-74)

Ariadne has undergone a metamorphosis, as her existence on the island has made her mad. In advance of this unfortunate destiny, Ariadne was taught that “...all the small Minoan girls...” (line 8) needed to be feminine. In order to “educate” them, the grown-ups had “[t]o keep them⁶ out of fights, discourage // Curiosity in swords...” (lines 4- 5), to prevent them from behaving differently than the norm of the community. There were rules that needed to be

⁵ Pasiphaë was Ariadne’s mother.

⁶ The girls in the community.

followed. Despite the notion that Ariadne was naïve and dreamy, she certainly was taught to be this way, which crystalized into a tragic myth as she was not equipped to think rational thoughts or at least, see beyond things that are too good to be true. Ariadne was not suited to endure massive difficulties as her childhood was quite protective and, as it seems, included minimal teaching of how to manage when the storm comes to catch you. As the stay on the island Naxos made Ariadne mad and forgetful, it makes a great contrast from how she used to be at home, when she was full of high hopes for the future, thus illustrating the change she has gone through. This is partially because of her upbringing. Luckily, the wine god, Dionysus, came and made her days more bearable, as she was not entirely alone, however, she still hoped to be rescued from the island altogether, as she continually looked at the sea. This may symbolize that she still had hopes of being rescued, or the fact that the sea was something familiar and something that despite all the hardship was comforting to her.

However, the myths do not return Ariadne back home. In one version she is granted immortality, or in another version Artemis killed her (theoi.com: *Ariadne*). Again Stallings employs a construction which creates a new angle on the story. The biggest issue is that Ariadne indeed did not get rescued by sailors with the possibility of going home, which in fact would be impossible after her betrayal of her father when she helped Theseus in the first place.⁷ Stallings has changed the ending, just like others have done to other myths. The paradox is that the ending of the poem, “[t]hat’s not it. The ending is wrong.” (line 77), illustrates two issues. Firstly, it makes a reference to a fairytale gone wrong, with the notion that fairytales should end well. However, in this poem the “prince” leaves the “princess, and the “princess” ends up mad because of his cowardly betrayal. Secondly, the reference is to Stallings herself with the alternative angle on the ending, regarding the rescue and homecoming of Ariadne in the poem.

⁷ She helped Theseus to escape being sacrificed to the Minotaur.

Another reason for this new angle could be Stallings' interest in fairytales. In *The Cortland Review*, Stallings says that “[a] huge number of fairy tales and nursery rhymes have dark sides, and we do a disservice to Disneyfy everything for kids.”, moreover in the same interview she says that “I always liked the fairy tales—the original, uncut versions, the ones with violent, horrible endings. I think the unexpurgated fairy tales are actually comforting to children.” (Murchison: *The Interview with A.E. Stallings*). Maybe the ending on *Ariadne and the Rest* is a comment on that everything does not need to be turned into a sunshine story by all means, and the bad endings in fact serve a grander purpose than to sugarcoat it.

The poem *Daphne* has metamorphoses, both in character and new angle on the myth, as an important cue. Daphne, “...the mountain nymph, a priestess of Mother Earth, daughter of the river Peneius in Thessaly...” (Graves 78), was pursued by Apollo. She desperately cried out for help – and Mother Earth, according to Graves, “... spirited her away to Crete... [and] Mother Earth left a laurel-tree in her place...” (78). There are multiple versions of the myth of Daphne, and the one Graves uses argues that Daphne herself was not metamorphosed into a laurel, but got a new name, Pasiphaë (78). However, in Stallings' poem *Daphne* she is metamorphosed into a laurel tree:

Do what you will.

What blood you've set to music I

Can change to chlorophyll,

And root myself, and with my toes

Wind to subterranean streams

Through solid rock my strength now grows.

(4-9)

In *Bulfinch's Mythology*, for instance, she is metamorphosed by the river god into a laurel tree, without being spirited away to Crete. Nevertheless, one thing is certain, no matter what version of the story is used, a metamorphosis has taken place. Moreover, Apollo is eagerly seeking her love – and the issue of the laurel tree is of great importance in the story, a fact that stays the same in every myth. The metamorphosis of Daphne is a transition from being helpless to becoming powerful, no matter what myths that are used.

Nevertheless, the myth starts with Apollo, who has a dispute with Cupid, and suffers from Cupid's arrow – and this makes him pursue Daphne as he gets madly in love with her. According to *Bulfinch's Mythology* Cupid said "[y]our arrows may strike all things else, Apollo, but mine shall strike you." (Chapter III: *Apollo and Daphne*) after which Apollo got infused with a strong love for Daphne. However, according to Graves, his version of the myth do not share this angle, although Apollo "...brought about the death of his rival... who disguised himself as a girl and joined Daphne's mountain revels."(78). Therefore, Apollo's love for Daphne is strong, regardless of what versions of the myth are used. On the contrary, Daphne wants to remain unmarried all her life, like Artemis. However, in the last stanza of the poem a shift occurs:

I may give in: I do not lose.

Your hot stare cannot stop my shivering,

With delight, if I so choose.

(16-18)

According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Daphne is still uninterested in Apollo, as she after the metamorphosis "...shrank from his kisses..." (Book I: 553-567), yet Apollo says, "[s]ince you cannot be my bride, you must be my tree!" (Book I: 553-567). In the poem it seems like Daphne is more willing to let Apollo admire her, contrary to Ovid's version. Bulfinch has the same version as Ovid, where Daphne reacts the same way, and Apollo's reaction is the same too. Therefore this myth is slightly different too from other myths told by Daphne, which supports the point that Stallings uses persona within the poem, and uses it give a twist to the myth.

Two kinds of metamorphoses happen in the poem. Firstly, Daphne is metamorphosed into a laurel because she wants to escape from Apollo, moreover be eternally unmarried. Secondly, Stallings' Daphne seems more willing to be admired by Apollo than the other myths I have discussed in this section.

Another poem relating to myths and metamorphoses is *Arachne Gives Thanks to Athena* where Athena loses a weaving competition to the mortal Arachne, a very skillful weaver with a bold heart. The myth reveals when in great fury Athena destroys Arachne's tapestry, which triggers Arachne to commit suicide. Athena feels pity for her and metamorphoses her into a spider. Arachne, however, seems pleased with the metamorphosis stating that "[i]t is no punishment..." (line 1). The metamorphosis makes her immortal, and with the destiny of weaving day in and day out for eternity, moreover, "...the pattern, // ... will endure, even though webs be broken." (lines 6-7).

With the metamorphosis Arachne loses her human appearance, however, she seems not to care about it, saying that “I, if not beautiful, am beauty’s maker // Old age cannot rob me, nor cowardly lovers.” (lines 8-9). She gains freedom, something she is very grateful for. The title of the poem expresses that gratitude, although the intention from Athena was meant as a punishment, “Athena turns her into a spider – the insect she hates most...” (Graves 98), which illustrates Athena’s wrath, moreover describes how gods and goddess inflict harm on others out of moodiness. This is particularly seen in the mythological poems in *Hapax*, which illustrates this behavior. Nevertheless, as mentioned, Arachne is grateful for the metamorphosis.

Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* describes the metamorphosis like this:

Arachne’s hair fell out. With it went her nose and ears, her head shrank to the smallest size, and her whole body became tiny. Her slender fingers stuck to her sides as legs, the rest is belly, from which she still spins a thread, and, as a spider, weaves her ancient web (Book VI: 129-145).

This quote illustrates that massive bodily metamorphosis that happens to Arachne. Despite the cruelty intended by Athena, the metamorphosis is more like a blessing for Arachne. However, her “... brothers, the father...” (line 2) seem to feel differently, although she underlines that she possesses a stronger beauty now, when she can make, “...lines... from my own belly // Hang them with rainbows, ice, dewdrops, darkness.” (lines 11-12). This illustrates that she has come a step closer to nature as she now can make the threads herself and her canvas is in fact nature. The metamorphosis brings Arachne one step closer to being, or at least, feeling divine.

The next poem depicts a metamorphosis that did not go entirely as planned. *Tithonus* is a poem about Tithonus and how the metamorphosis from mortal to immortal turns out to be quite different than expected. Tithonus was the lover of Eos, who granted him immortality

with the help of Zeus, however, the twist was that his body would grow older as time went by. Yet, he was destined to live forever. (Bulfinch's Mythology: Chapter XXVI.) The mistake was the lack of specifying that the immortality would include eternal youth, which eventually takes a toll on the body of Tithonus. In the poem he says:

Do not look at me, and let me turn away
 When you set me by the window in my chair,
 Cover me with blankets, give me breakfast on a tray ...

(1-3)

Even though Tithonus was granted immortality, it does not mean that living for eternity is the outcome. Regardless of the immortality, it can be argued that he will not live forever. Destruction, death or other kinds of metamorphosis are possible, at least if you include what gods and goddesses are capable of.

Nevertheless, in the poem he gives the impression that although his bodily decay has been massive, his sanity and wits are still there.

And I will convince us both that I am gone.
 I will mutter nursery rhymes and drool,
 Stare blankly as my bath is being drawn...

(5-7)

At least in Stallings' poem she makes Tithonus act stealthily, perhaps out of boredom from his perspective, or perhaps because his body is withering and he wants to slow down his mind to match his bodily decay. However, there is no question that Tithonus has the capability to keep attention on what is happening around him. He may not express that he does, and that is why he seems deceptive on his true condition. "I watch you as you tread..."

(line 17) and “[t]he landscape is anonymous...” (line 19), are quotes that make examples of his internal capacity. From these quotes it is likely he is capable of keeping attention on what is happening and how nature looks around him, nevertheless, he does not acknowledge that he is able to do so. It seems like he wants to be looked upon as blunt and senile, for his own pleasure.

However, one version of the myth, told by Bulfinch, says that in the end Eos metamorphosed him into a grasshopper (Chapter XXVI). Graves’ version is similar, as he writes “...when Eos tired of nursing him, she locked him in her bedroom, where he turned into a cicada.” (150). In that case Tithonus has gone through a double-metamorphosis, first from mortal to immortal, further from an immortal to a cicada.

Nevertheless, in the poem Tithonus still has an old body, making him immobile, furthermore his location could just as well be in a bedroom, as he is weak and requires help from the second person in the poem. However, the images from the poem, such as Tithonus sitting in a chair by the window, may resemble how it is in an old people’s home, where they are fed and cared for when they are incapable of performing necessities of living by themselves. Nevertheless, the poem does not portray what happens to Tithonus in the end, or, it may involve eternal days in that room, in which to mark the ending of his miserable life inside a room for eternity.

These poems are the mythological poems which have metamorphoses and changes as themes in *Archaic Smile*. All poems, with the exception of one, have at least one Greek mythological character. Let us sum them up briefly. There are two Eurydice poems, and each portrays metamorphoses and changes on different terms. The first poem, *Eurydice Reveals Her Strength*, has two kinds of metamorphosis. One metamorphosis is from being alive to being dead, the other metamorphosis is mentally where Eurydice learns to embrace death. The

second poem, *Eurydice's Footnote* comments on metamorphosing literature and art into a different story, as it focuses on the myth of Eurydice which undergoes a change. This phenomenon is supported by Bowra, as he underlines the change the myth has gone through. The following poem, *How the Demons were Assimilated & Became Productive Citizens*, is different in many perspectives. The poem illustrates how the demons act and behave and these characteristics may easily be linked to people in today's world where many are egoistical and only occupied in shallow existence. The myth of Ariadne in *Ariadne and the Rest* depicts a cruel destiny of the main character. Her upbringing has been too protective and naïve, in an environment where girls and women are only supposed to be feminine. All the references to fairytale princesses, such as the Disney princesses that are mentioned, support the look of how these girls should be brought up. This seals Ariadne's destiny, although in Stallings' version she is rescued in the end. The metamorphoses include Ariadne's change on the island, moreover Stallings' version where Ariadne is rescued. As for the poem *Daphne*, the metamorphoses happen on two levels. Firstly, the nymph Daphne is metamorphosed to a tree, and secondly, Stallings has altered the myth quite significantly, where Daphne is more willing to let Apollo admire her in the end. In the poem *Arachne Gives Thanks to Athena* the metamorphosis from mortal to a spider is like a gift from Athena, however Athena's attention was to punish Arachne. Fortunately, Arachne looks upon this metamorphosis with gratefulness as she now can continue to do what she loves forever. Tithonus from the poem *Tithonus* is not as fortunate as Arachne, as his received gift of eternal immortality backfires and he is left with a decaying body, yet living forever. The first change in this poem is naturally from mortal to immortal, moreover, Tithonus is later metamorphosed to an insect, although his final destiny is unknown. The myth suggests he was double-metamorphosed.

Transformations in *Archaic Smile*

There are not only metamorphoses in *Archaic Smile*. I will in this part of the chapter look at other changes, which I call transformations, such as the transition from being a child to growing up, or as the next poem depicts, a geographical transformation.

The *Archaic Smile* poems II

Listening to the Monkeys of the Nearby Yerkes Regional Primate Research Center is a good example of Stallings' use of non-mythical transformation in her poetry. The monkeys described in the poem have undergone a journey to a new environment, to Atlanta in the United States, that is, they have been moved from one geographical location to another. The monkeys at this research center suffer, and the poet sympathizes with them and wishes that she could join in their calling. The atmosphere is sad, which is set even from the first stanza

Humidity has made them homesick,

This thick cicada-d Georgia June.

The heat is ancient and nostalgic,

Familiar is the doubling moon.

(1-4)

The monkeys are homesick. The poem does not tell where they come from, however, we learn from the first line that the monkeys were used to humidity. From the last line in the first stanza the moon is a dual object, which may imply to that the monkeys' home may be located on the other side of the world, thus making it possible that the monkeys were living in

the wilderness earlier on. From the perspective of the poem, the monkeys undoubtedly must adapt to the new environment, as they are feeling bad with homesickness and fright of what comes next, “[t]he night is hollowed-out with fear -” (line 17). Their sounds and their language illustrate this fear, which is obvious in this quote:

Their long, lugubrious ululations,

In languages, rising, falling,

Of a thousand monkey nations.

(6-8)

The poem also draws a line between humans and monkeys, as the first person wants “[t]o bridge our two captivities,” (line 22) and object to what is going on, however, no answer to the monkeys is produced by the first person. Yet, the ending illustrates that it has become quiet, “[t]he silence of opposing thumbs, // Superior and sober brains.” (lines 31-32), moreover that the “...somewhere-past-the-second-beer...” (line 19) first person is smaller in genius than the monkeys. At least the poet wants to underline the importance of monkeys and perhaps that they should live better lives than inside a research center. The close comparison between humans and monkeys illustrates the “family” connection to this species. The poem is perhaps a voice to awaken people to see this paradox, possibly with an intention to make life better for monkeys. The change of environment helps to illustrate this intention, underlining that the monkeys do not belong in captivity.

There is a geographical transformation in the poem. The move from a different part of the world and to a new location, possibly from being in the wilderness to being in captivity, is central in the poem.

From captivity to dead pets, the poem *A Lament for the Dead Pets of Our Childhood* portrays how the world changes when the plural persons, being Stallings' herself and her sister⁸ suddenly realize what death is, moreover the morbidity this kind of death holds.

That's how we found out death: the strangled bird

Undone by a toy hung in his cage,

The foundlings that would never last the night

Be it pigeon, crippled snake, the kitten

Whose very fleas forsook it in the morning

While we nursed a hangover of hope.

(9-14)

This is certainly not a happy ending or even a hopeful one, as the plural person in the poem "...learned death:..." and that it was "...a cold thing in the image of a warm thing, // Limp as sleep without the twitch of dreams" (18-19). The interviewer from the *The Cortland Review*, Ginger Murchison, commented on this poem, saying

...[i]n "A Lament for the Dead Pets of Our Childhood," death is a "cold thing in the image of a warm thing,/ Limp as sleep without the twitch of dreams." Death and the underworld seem more euphemistic, then, than morbid, more about change than loss, with a definite fairy tale aspect—that's a warm-hearted way of looking at it.

After knowing the truth of how animals die, strangled or murdered, the sisters were colored by the reality, "[a]fter the death of pets, dolls lay too still // And wooden cradle, sister, after // We learned death:..." (lines 15-17). Naturally, it marked the sisters profoundly, and the poet even opens the poem by telling "[e]ven now I dream of rabbits murdered..." (line 1), therefore it is beyond doubt the truth gave them a great shock. However, Stallings likes

⁸ E-mail from A.E. Stallings confirming that it is autobiographical. (Appendix)

fairytale and stories and is not scared off by sad endings – perhaps this incident of the dead pets helped her embrace the reality that life is sometimes horrible. Moreover, that everything does not need to end happily.

It is possible to draw a line between a childhood and naivety, as in the belief that children are surrounded by cute animals and sunshine all day long. However, this perception does not continue forever, making way for a transformation internally that begins. Like some other poems by Stallings, this has an allusion to fairytales, which suddenly starts an awakening where aspects get unraveled. After discovering what death is, childhood gets a little more serious, and the innocence that once was possessed is tainted since the knowledge of the cruelty in life has started to emerge. At some point this happens to most people, which is a natural and necessary change, moreover it strengthens the character. However, there is no doubt that to experience such things may be traumatic and shatter your view on certain aspects. For instance, you can dream about it many years after it happened, and still feel bad about it. Regardless of that, it is crucial to see the world as it is, not sugarcoat it, like it was done to Ariadne in the poem *Ariadne and the Rest*.

The poem illustrates a transformation which happens in the childhood, where former ideas of the world are shattered. This is part of growing up, as life has unpleasant and difficult realities that must be faced. Further on, the focus on the small things in life is important and this is a transformation too.

The following theme plays on storm and language, where the poem *Watching the News After the Tornadoes* is a comment on language, with the belief that metaphors are more useful than similes.

“It’s like,” decides the telecaster,

“A movie set of ... some disaster,”

Lacking, in the wake of these

Tornados, useful similes.

But metaphor’s the thing that carries...

(1-5)

The poem deals with a transformation which destructs and ruins everything the “... green with power,...” (line 9), the tornado, decides to destroy. The moving tornado transforms and destructs the landscape or cityscape it meets, thereby altering the geographical picture. Destruction symbolizes that something loses its original intention or original state. For instance the tornado destroys and wrecks everything in its path. Yet destruction can have a cleansing aspect to it, getting rid of things that perhaps are better gone when you think about it. Nevertheless, according to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, a tornado is “a violent storm with very strong winds which move in a circle.” The storm “...buries // Metal in a man’s deep chest, // Uncorks an oak tree with a twist.” (lines 6-8) which illustrates some of the immense power the tornado possesses. Moreover, the tornado is a metaphor, because it carries the storm further, just like it carries the story or conversation. The metaphor transforms the language into a descriptive unity, with expressions like “my love is a red, red rose” or “feeling blue” and “green with envy”. These expressions color the language and make it playful and effective. Nevertheless, why is the tornado used and likewise, why are metaphors and similes used in the same context? Tornados are impossible to control, however in language they can be controlled by means of different kinds of tools, such as metaphors and

similes. The poem seems to favor the use of metaphors, and I will look at why metaphors may be regarded as better than similes.

The definition of metaphor is, according to Merriam-Webster Online: Dictionary and Thesaurus, “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them...” When it comes to similes, the definition is “a phrase that uses the words *like* or *as* to describe someone or something by comparing it with someone or something else that is similar” (Merriam-Webster Online: Dictionary and Thesaurus). The argument why the metaphor carries better than similes may be that it is more direct, instead of just a comparison, metaphors create a strong picture of what is portrayed. For example a good metaphor draws in the reader as it depicts what it conveys quickly, where similes often can raise more questions. However, they are similar to each other, and will therefore be quite effective if used with care. From the experiment titled *Why do metaphors seem deeper than similes?* the researchers Sergey S. Zharikov and Dedre Gentner explore the psychological aspect of using metaphors and similes. The results made it clear the tested people preferred metaphors over similes. The researchers argue that “[f]igurative expressions in metaphor feel more profound and express stronger claims than expressions in simile form.” (1). “They believe it is because of “conventionalization” and “relationality” (1), which underlines simply that people tend to use it regularly and that they therefore accept these expressions more easily.

Furthermore, the trouble portrayed in the poem is lack of good language. The title of the poem reflects that someone is watching television and gets the information of where the storm is and how bad the damages are. The poem is a comment on not only the geographical transformation that happens somewhere, moreover, a picture of how news reporters are talking. The only problem is that, at least in this broadcast, they are not employing a good use

of language, where the telecaster seems lost for “useful similes”. The poet, however, believes that metaphors are the best way of handling the news. Either how, the telecaster is incapable of both, which leads the language to suffer.

Therefore, there are two kinds of transformation in the poem. Firstly, the tornado tears apart everything it encounters, and secondly, the language used in the broadcast is in need of a transformation. The most recommended alternative, according to the speaker in the poem, is by using metaphors.

Fishing is a sonnet which captures the transformation that takes place when a child grows into adolescence, and the bond between father and daughter can have its challenges. This shines through the poem clearly, as the poet shares:

The sun slow at his zenith, sweating gold,
Once, in some sullen summer of father and daughter.
Maybe he regretted he had brought her –
She'd rather have been elsewhere, her look told –
Perhaps a year ago, but now too old.

(3-7)

The atmosphere in the poem is gloomily silent, there is something that is not quite right. This may be because the daughter now is growing into adolescence and is not interested in fishing with her father the same way she used to be. There has been a transformation within her – and she has other more important interests than earlier. Nevertheless, she “[s]till remembered lessons he had taught her: //” (line 8), which in the end is a positive aspect yet. The sonnet portrays the good aspect of fishing as well as the downsides, “...how all else pales // Besides the bright-dark struggle, the rainbow wroth, // Life and death weighed in the

shining scales,...”(lines 11-13), which illustrates the joy and the excitement of getting a fish on the hook. In addition it makes reference to “[l]ife and death...” (line 13), a profound question of existence or not and how important this distinction is. The fish is struggling to keep alive, however, the fishing family wants to catch the fish, ultimately bringing death to the fish.

Nevertheless, the transformation of the daughter has not destroyed their connection. Fishing will still be linked to an activity that brings father and daughter together, regardless of her age, “[t]he invisible line pulled taut that links them both.” (line 14). Even though the transformation has occurred, they still can connect and reminisce about the past. For instance, Stallings could gut a fish by the age of four (Murchison: *The Interview with A.E. Stallings*). This poem may seem autobiographical, however, in an e-mail correspondence with Stallings she points out “...some of the more autobiographical-sounding poems are sometimes fictions.” (Appendix). Regardless of the quote, I argue that this poem must have a level of truth in it, since her father was an outdoorsy man, and that Stallings knows how to fish. Furthermore, the poem *A Lament for the Dead Pets of Our Childhood*, is a poem with autobiographical sound. Stallings has confirmed, as I have illustrated earlier, that this is “...written out of personal experience...” (Appendix). Nevertheless, the teenager in the poem has become rich in experiences with her father, and acknowledges the great feeling when you catch a fish, and that connection she has with fishing and her father will always be something special, regardless of how you transform as a human being. Some core elements will still be important, may it be out of nostalgia or other reasons. Another interesting aspect is the word “rainbow wroth” which may serve as an allusion for an intensely angry rainbow trout that refuses to be caught. Maybe the fish helps to trigger the passion for fishing in the daughter, as there finally is action in the air.

The poem illustrates the transformation from being a child to becoming an adolescent. This transformation has its difficulties and ways of reactions, e.g. beginning to lose interest in fishing and other family based activities and rules.

As the volume is neatly catalogued, the next following poem, *The Poet's Dream of Herself as a Young Girl*, is from the father's perspective. The poem shows that the father's little girl is changing and becoming a young girl. The poem talks about love – and how easy it is to end up with a broken heart.

They told you you were clever,

But the heart is not an egg

That breaks once and forever;

It's a dog that learns to beg

For bones dropped on the floor,...

(5-9)

It does not help how talented or clever the daughter is at school or in arts, when love is the aspect addressed. The father says that the brain is like "...the steel trap and the fox // Gnawing its foot to escape..." (lines 16-17). The picture tells the dramatic situation of desperate escape, however, the father conveys that all hopes are not lost, since the heart is not as fragile as an egg, although it can be healed. The father makes a comparison of the heart as a "...dog that learns to beg..." (line 8), moreover that this dog takes things that end up on the floor, like bones or spilt milk. What does the father mean by that? Is he commenting on the love life she has, and that he dislikes these boys, thinking they are not good enough for his daughter? Or is it love itself that can be like that, and after the heart gets broken you will

settle for anything that helps the pain to go away? Nevertheless, the change will eventually occur and create growth and enlightenment, and the broken heart is mended. Nevertheless, the father feels with his daughter in her pain:

For your sake, I still loathe

The way he made you trip

On the sleeve of your love...

...How you died, then got older,

How you buried your heart in my chest.

(21-23, 27-28)

The quote illustrates the father's support of his daughter, moreover underlines that transformation happens. The poem deals also with loss, on two levels. Firstly, the daughter has a broken heart and naturally feels that she misses someone or something in particular. Secondly, the father realizes that his daughter is starting to grow up and transform into a young girl and that he gradually loses the child that only needed comfort and care when things were rough, however now things are more complicated. Even now, when things are different, the father still possesses some of this, as the daughter "...buried your heart in my chest." (line 28).

A personal transformation happens on two levels. Firstly, the father's little girl is now growing up and is becoming a young girl, with everything that includes for instance of being in love. Secondly, after the daughter has moved on after the hardship, she has perhaps gnawed off her foot, however, survives the pain and gains a new strength because of the transformation that has happened *Archaic Smile*.

These transformations are non-mythological. The topics discussed are animals, language and childhood. In the poem *Listening to the Monkeys of the Nearby Yerkes Regional Primate Research Center* a geographical change has happened and the monkeys face a new location. Stallings seems to link humans and monkeys, underlining the likenesses between the species. The animal theme continues in *A Lament for the Dead Pets of Our Childhood* where the Stallings sisters learn the truth of death. A transformation happens mentally, as they experience the dead pets and they understand more of the world they are living in. This poem is a reference to her childhood, which it shares with many other poems by Stallings. Another kind of transformation is portrayed in *Watching the News After the Tornados*. There is a destructive transformation in the poem where the tornado plays the head role. The tornado wrecks and destroys everything in its path. The poem is also a comment on language use and in particular the difference between metaphors and similes. It seems like the poet wishes that the telecaster should use the language in a better way. As for the poem *Fishing* it portrays the transformation from a girl to a teenager, where the teenager maybe has different interests than when she was younger. Yet, she can still enjoy the good aspects of fishing. The following poem *The Poet's Dream of Herself as a Young Girl* has the same transformations as *Fishing* where the girl transforms to a teenager. Nevertheless, the topic here concerns with a broken heart, moreover that the father "loses" his little girl as she grows up to one day become a woman.

Chapter III: *Hapax*

A.E. Stallings' second volume of poetry, *Hapax*, focuses like *Archaic Smile* on Greek mythology, moreover nature, childhood and culture. The definition of *hapax legomenon*, found in the volume itself, is "...a word or form evidenced by a single citation: a word or form occurring once and only once in a document or corpus". This collection of poetry was published seven years after her debut with *Archaic Smile* in 1999, and in an interview from *Valaparaíso Poetry Review* Stallings says that

The poems of *Hapax* were written after I married and moved to Greece, and most of the poems were written after my father's death in 2000. So they were written while I was struggling with a lot of changes and challenges and events in my life. I was in a different place metaphorically and literally (Byrne: *A.E. Stallings Interviewed*).

Apparently, the two volumes are different on some levels, which I will investigate by explicating the poems in light of metamorphoses and transformations. It will be interesting to see what the differences are, or if they, despite strong assumptions, are in fact more similar than unlike each other. How Stallings employs metamorphoses and transformations will be focused on in this volume as well. As for different versions of myths, this is not a frequent feature in *Hapax*, as the myths are more unknown than the myths used in *Archaic Smile*.

Metamorphoses in *Hapax*

In this chapter I focus on metamorphoses that happen in *Hapax*. I will firstly concentrate on the Greek mythology, and these kinds of poems include only three characters, who are Actaeon, Menthe and Cassandra. There are arguably similarities between these metamorphoses, mostly because the changes happen to inflict punishment or harm to "lower"

creatures, since the gods and goddesses are quite moody and like to show off their powerful skills.

The *Hapax* poems I

The first poem I will explicate is *Actaeon*. The title of the poem refers to the myth where Artemis metamorphosed Actaeon into a stag, and his dogs kill him, unable to recognize their owner. Actaeon's metamorphosis is performed after he accidentally happened to see Artemis naked when she bathed, and she furiously metamorphosed him to prevent him from bragging about it. The poem refers to his nature, "[t]here was a time when you would brag // How they would bay and rend apart // The hopeless belling from a stag." (13-15). In that case the poem suggests that Artemis could be right in her assumptions of Actaeon, and that she at least had some justification for acting on these premises, which makes the act of metamorphosing him more acceptable.

The myth, according to *Bulfinch's Mythology*, says Actaeon was in the same location "[w]here he had often chased the stag and cheered on his pack, his pack now chased him, cheered on by his huntsmen. He longed to cry out, "I am Actaeon; recognize your master!" but the words came not at his will." (Chapter IV.) Graves also uses this version, as he writes that "[l]est he should afterwards dare boast to his companions that she had displayed naked in his presence, she changed him into a stag and, with his own pack of fifty hounds, tore him to pieces." (84-85). Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has the same version as Bulfinch's contribution, which makes this myth more or less the same.

The ending of the poem illustrates the journey from young puppies and how Actaeon cares for them, through the big contrast to how the myth ends when they tear him apart. The

ending line of the poem pictures the upsetting situation, with the bitter question “[d]id you know then why you bred them –“ (line 18). There is no question that this myth has a tragic element to it, however, the Greek gods and goddesses were moody creatures and often did as they pleased. This is an example of their moodiness, just like other transformations, such as Athena and Persephone and how their metamorphoses inflict harm for the counterpart, moreover a golden opportunity to show their power. The metamorphosis of Actaeon is of the same nature.

The poem illustrates the aftermath of the metamorphosis, which offers glimpses of the past. Actaeon’s hounds are central in this piece, although no word or reference is made to Artemis directly. The focus is on the tragedy that Actaeon is killed by his beloved dogs, the fact that Artemis is the reason is not important in the poem. The dogs of Actaeon and his relationship to them is the most important aspect of the poem. The poem pictures Actaeon’s dedication and love for his dogs, he “know[s] them all by name.” (line 1). Furthermore, he even hears the “...music in their yelps –“ (line 4). Tragedy is the outcome, and the saddest part is that he is killed by his precious dogs, not the transformation itself. This makes the explication focus on what the poem says, instead of dwelling on deeper causes, like why and how. In the following mythological poems, the same method will be used, as the poem’s alone stand for something important and highly relevant.

Another metamorphosis in *Hapax* is presented in the poem *Mint*. The poem refers to the myth where Menthe, sometimes referred to as Minthe, is transformed by Persephone, when Hades tries to seduce her. It all goes well until his wife Persephone sees it and metamorphoses Menthe into a mint. According to Graves, Hades

...dazzled the Nymph Minthe with the splendor of his golden chariot and its four black horses, and would have seduced her without difficulty had not Queen Persephone made a timely appearance and metamorphosed Minthe into a sweet-smelling mint. (121).

The poem is written from the perspective of Menthe, who tells that she “...was at a loss,...” (line 1) until Hades suddenly appears. This was not appreciated by his wife, and she sought to make Menthe’s existence as sad and shameful as possible. This quote illustrates this

When pale Jealousy yanked

My heart out by the roots,

She trod it into the ground...

(9-11)

Like we see in the quote, Jealousy is central in the metamorphosis of Menthe. The capitalized “J” in Jealousy in the poem pinpoints that this is a character, moreover the strong indication that this in fact is Persephone herself. This is because she is Hades’ wife and the myth itself tells that she did metamorphose Menthe. It matches well, too, as Hades is on the brink of being unfaithful. However, even though Persephone trampled on her, Menthe’s smell is pleasant and sweet. Ultimately, Menthe has at least this attribute to linger on, which softens the metamorphosis to some extent.

Love and lust are also key words in this context. In the poem Menthe is being desired by Hades, as “...he smiled -//” when he came, where Menthe and the King of Death “...met... at the cross-//Roads of love and lust.” (lines 7-8). Persephone, or Jealousy as she is called in the poem, sees this and metamorphose Menthe into a mint. However, the poem seems to disagree on one point. The disagreement lies on that it was not Persephone who added the sweet scent to the mint, however, as other versions claim it was Hades who added this attribute. Nevertheless, none of the sources are of a reliable manner, e.g. neither Ovid nor Graves. Strangely enough, the ones that say Hades created the fragrance, is from websites dealing with how to use different kinds of herbs, e.g. mint. According to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* it was added by Persephone, where Orpheus sings “Persephone, you were

allowed to alter a woman's body, Menthe's, to fragrant mint:..." (Book X:708-739).

Therefore the most reliable versions put Persephone as the contributor of the pleasant smell of the herbal plant mint. This makes it more bearable for Menthe, seen in the example:

But trampled into earth

I did not quit the place,

I shed my heart's blood

As a kind of grace.

(13-16)

One of the reasons why Persephone metamorphosed Menthe into a mint was that she should be trampled on by people passing by. However, Menthe continues to add "[t]he juice that I bleed!" (line 18), as an honoring to the King of Death, as Menthe after the metamorphosis "...mask and flavor // Decay beneath the breath," (lines 21-22). This is done because the scent hides the foul smell of death, it was even used in ancient Greece in funeral rituals. The feel of praise to Hades from Menthe in the poem is strong, as she seems to take the metamorphosis as a way of honoring the King of Death, as she calls him in the poem.

Another kind of metamorphosis happens in the myth about Cassandra. The poem *Cassandra* portrays the myth where Cassandra is cursed by Apollo, after she rejects him. After the rejection, he made her clairvoyant, however, with the twist that her predictions would never be believed by anyone. This makes the metamorphosis happen mentally, as this merely involves changes in your head and not visual change. Nevertheless, in the poem the persona of Cassandra gives a harsh critic of Apollo

If I may have failed to follow
 Your instruction, Lord Apollo,
 So all my harping lies unstrung,
 I blame it on the human tongue.

(1-4)

It is definite that her attitude toward Apollo is of a brave character, she even ironically calls him for Lord. She points out that “[o]ur speech...” (line 5) is different from the way gods talk, and perhaps Cassandra feels he misunderstood her, or even did as he pleased regardless of what she did or did not say. According to Graves, “... Cassandra failed to pay him for the gift of prophecy...” (307), This he claims because Apollo had

“promised to teach her the art of prophecy if she would lie with him. Cassandra, after accepting his gift, went back on the bargain; but Apollo begged her to give him one kiss, as she did so, spat into her mouth, thus ensuring that none would ever believe what she prophesied.” (625-626)

This quote gives the myth a slightly different angle. Graves’ wordings are critical of Cassandra, almost saying that she deserves the treatment from Apollo. However, Stallings’ Cassandra seems to tell the reader that she was not responsible for this curse. She draws a line between mortals and gods, questions whether or not “...mortals should rejoice // To conjugate in passive voice -...”(line 9-10). The persona of Cassandra confronts Apollo with this belief, moreover try to illustrate by linguistic words and meanings. She tries to cast a light upon the behavior of gods, and ironically suggests that mortals only shall bow and do anything the gods wish and desire. Furthermore, the poem refers to “[t]enses have no paradigm...” (line 7), “[t]o conjugate in passive voice -” (line 10) and moreover:

For you there is no second person,

“I want” the same verb as “must be”

“Love”, construed as “yield to me,”

The homonym of “curse” and “give”,

No mood but the infinitive.

(14-18)

Language is important in this poem. The distinction between free will and force is used, as Cassandra uses it as a tool to describe Apollo as a dominant creature who must have his way. He may misinterpret, or fail to acknowledge what the words actually mean. It seems like he has his own “dictionary” of words, e.g. “love” means “yield to me”, and “give” is the same as “curse”. This illustrates the poem’s, in Cassandra’s eyes, strong criticism of Apollo, who does as he pleases. Like other poems, this illustrates the bad attitude of Greek gods, as they do not hesitate to bring destruction or difficulties to their selected target, preferably beautiful nymphs or mortals. In the myth of Menthe something similar is happening, although there was jealousy and not merely egoistical reasons for the metamorphosis. Further, in the myth of Daphne the god Apollo plays a central part, although Daphne herself contributes to the metamorphosis. Yet, it shows the nature of Apollo, and his high thoughts of himself and mood swings.

There are three myths in *Hapax* which have metamorphoses as themes. In the poem *Actaeon* the main character, Actaeon, is metamorphosed by the goddess Artemis into a stag. He is killed by his beloved dogs, perhaps only because Artemis was moody and wanted to punish him. The same reference to punishment is seen in the two other poems. For example, Menthe is metamorphosed by Persephone into a mint because Menthe and Persephone’s

husband were flirting. Again, the aspect of moodiness applies. Furthermore, the myth of Cassandra in the same-titled poem *Cassandra* shows the god Apollo's bad mood, when he makes her clairvoyant with a terrible twist: no one will ever believe her. In that case, she undergoes a mental metamorphosis, which destroys her life in the end. In the poem there are also references to language, in which Apollo's "dictionary" is displayed.

Transformations in *Hapax*

Like *Archaic Smile*, there are non-mythological changes as well. I will in this part focus on these kinds of transformations, which yet again deal with being a child and growing up, moreover other changes such as the next poem that deals with moving across the world and marriage.

The *Hapax* poems II

The first poem in *Hapax*, the sonnet *Aftershock*, portrays the aftermath of an earthquake in Greece. The aftershock happens after an earthquake, and may be just as strong as the actual earthquake, however, the duration of an aftershock is shorter. In "Poetry@Tech", Stallings explains this incident – and reveals that the move from the United States of America to Greece proved to include things she was not used to, such as earthquakes. One of the issues was naturally the cataclysms, like for instance earthquakes were not an Atlanta feature, or English. The beginning of the poem illustrates this cataclysm that occurred in Greece one day:

We are not in the same place after all.

The only evidence of the disaster,

Mapping out across the bedroom wall,

Tiny cracks still fissuring the plaster –

A new cartography for us to master,

(1-5)

The poem starts with stating that the plural “we” are standing on different sides. The only visible mark is the tiny cracks, which illustrates that they have “[a] new cartography...” (line 5), which is challenging and fresh. Furthermore it seems to not solely be the new location that is difficult.

Terra infirma, a stranger land, and vaster.

Or have we always stood on shaky ground?

.....

We fall mute, as when two lovers come

To the brink of the apology, and halt,

Each standing on the wrong side of the fault.

(7-8, 12-14)

Naturally, the nature catastrophe serves visible transformation, yet it seems like there are some personal issues between the two of them. There is a sexual pun in the end of line 12, however, the next line ties it together to mean something different. This makes it even more relevant that there in fact is a look at the couple’s relationship, and marriage, as well. Moreover, there is a transformation between being in a relationship and being married. When

this poem was published in *The Yale Review* in 2001 (Volume 89: October 2001. No.4), Stallings and her husband had been married for a while and already lived in Greece for two years. There is a possibility that the aftershock is not only dealing with natural disasters, nevertheless has a dual meaning with the transition between a romantically live-in relationship and being married. On some level it is quite different to be a girlfriend rather than a wife, at least the difference contributes that some thoughts make it to the surface. The question whether the couple “have... always stood on shaky ground?” (line 8) is perhaps because of old, unsolved business, or simply the seriousness of being husband and wife. Another issue is that the move has caused a stress factor, making the poet focus on negative aspects – and in the heat of a discussion asks if they have always been unstable. What is certain, regardless of the true intention, is the duality the poem possesses.

There are two kinds of transformations going on. Firstly the earthquake and its aftershock, that wrecks and destroys. Secondly, the transition between being in a relationship and being married, is another transformation that plays a part in the poem.

On the ending note, this poem seems to be influenced by Elizabeth Bishop’s villanelle *One Art*, as the end rhymes of “master”, “disaster” and “vaster”, were end rhymes in Bishop’s poem. One critic points this out in a review of Stallings and it is obviously been of some influence as the exact rhymes apply. The poem *One Art* concerns loss, and how the poet survives them, for example after losing her parents when she was only a child. In *Aftershocks* the theme of loss may be attached to the poet’s new marriage, as marriage is definite and some of the innocence and freedom of being unmarried is lost. Moreover, the move from United States of America to Greece may have this connotation as well. The poet may feel that she loses something when she moves across the world, and through the use of Bishop’s end rhymes, illustrates the feeling. Another factor of loss is the fact that most of the poems for

Hapax were written after her father's death, which marked Stallings. This is, for instance, captured in her sonnet *Sine Qua Non* which I explicated in the introduction.

In the following poem *The Dollhouse* the story depicts how it is to find an old toy and how a journey on memory lane brings back old feelings and experiences. The dollhouse has been through many changes, as it was handed down from mother and aunt to the new pair of sisters, maybe even Stallings and her sister Jocelyn. The poem begins with the reunion of the beloved dollhouse

There in the attic of forgotten shapes

(Old coats in plastic, hatboxes, fur capes

Amongst the smells of mothballs and cigars),

I saw the dollhouse of our early years,...

(1-4)

This quote illustrates that among many forgotten things, the dollhouse is found. It seems like it is a very good childhood memory. The main aspect, however, is the ending of the poem, which illustrates the transformation that happens from being a child to becoming an adult. The difference between being a child and an adult is great, as they see the world differently. When the sisters played with the dollhouse, they made up exciting stories with burglars that would kidnap the baby, and so on, to really get action in the daily life. However, as an adult, Stallings concludes that the most important aspect of living is not whether or not something exciting happens, like when playing with the dollhouse and making up exciting stories. She highlights that the best things in life are small things, which is seen in the ending of the poem:

...it was the game we knew to play,

Not realizing then how lives accrue,

With interest, the smallest things we do.

(28-30)

Some of the transformation that happens mentally, as the most important aspect of life lies in the smallest and tiniest things, like a smile or if you drop something and a kind soul gives it back to you. However, children are children, and they are not supposed to think this way. This is something that gradually changes, just like the brain grows and people mature. Cognitively, children are often not capable of thinking these thoughts, unless something profound happens to make them grow up more quickly than they should.

Nevertheless, there has been a transformation from being a child to growing up into an adult. There is no question that big changes occur in this transformation, however, old memories trigger a positive reunion with childhood.

However, there are not only people who go through a transformation. In the next poem I will explicate, a village is central to a transformation, in addition to the river that ends up flooding it. The poem *The Village in the Lake* refers to an area in Lake Lanier in the state of Georgia. The lake "...is not a natural lake, // It was made for pleasure's sake:..." (line 1-2). The lake undergoes a transformation, as it after Buford Dam's completion in 1956 has been lake that is filled up. What is special about this particular lake, besides that it is not natural, is exactly the point that it was filled up. Rumors tell that underneath the water something mysterious is hidden, and Stallings dwells on this

There are those who tell me down

At the bottom is a town,

Flooded years and years ago:

Houses, and a Texaco.

Somewhere a cemetery lies

How could it be otherwise?

(15-20)

Stallings points out that there are rumors of the possibility that things are hidden in the depths of Lake Lanier. The mystery of what is underneath the water has driven some students to investigate if it is true that houses, gas stations, church etc. are covered in water. The rumors have triggered Stallings to write a poem about this matter, however, the myth seems not to be entirely true, as houses made of wood and other non-water resistant objects were demolished and removed before the water was released. Regardless of this, it is possible that something from a village, or even villages, is still underneath the lake. A story tells that “[f]ifty-six thousand acres were bought and 700 families throughout Hall and Forsyth county [sic] were displaced when the Army Corps of Engineers dammed the Chattahoochee River and built Lake Sidney Lanier.” (MacGee: *Students Map Out Lake Lanier*). This underlines the issue that this was a huge project that resulted in many homes and lands being sold, something destroyed, and something left behind.

Moreover, the poem is like a ghost story, as the people that die in the lake end underneath the water. “Can ghosts swim? Or are they drowned, //” (line 24). The thought of the people who have drowned and later “inhabited” the village in the lake is both morbid, yet the possibility for the deceased people to “live” a new life is a nice twist, which gives them some sort of underwater immortality.

Finally, the poem has two kinds of transformation. Firstly, Lake Lanier has faced many changes by being filled up. Secondly, the people who accidentally drown in the lake, may it be a scuba diver or drunk teenagers, end up as ghosts in the ghost village of Lake Lanier. The ending, “[a]nd through the murky havens floats // The shadow of the pleasure boats?” (lines 27-28), suggests that there will always be other people who drown in the lake, maybe because they are careless and encounter dangerous situations, or that someone has just plain bad luck.

The next poem, *Alice, Grown-up, at the Cocktail Party*, plays further on Lewis Carroll’s tale of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, however, Alice is a grown-up and back in the normal world again. The setting is at a cocktail party and the atmosphere is not desirable, as Alice feels a physical discomfort of being at the party and wishes to slip away from the situation. At a party, drinking is something that usually is done, which makes it natural that a bottle has a central part in the poem. The bottle is important in the tale of Alice and belongs to a cocktail party as well. In the poem

The bottle still says, “Drink me.” I still feel

All knees and elbows in a room, half hope

To shut up tidy as a telescope.

The nonsense people talk! Oh to walk out

Through a little door, into the crepusculum

Of a private garden, the only person there

Save for the nodding idiocy of flowers.

(1-7)

An example of Alice uncomfortable situation is when she comments that "...the golden key sits out of reach." (line 9), which illustrates that the golden key could have been her escape from the cocktail party. She could have walked through the door and into another world; be it Wonderland or some other hiding place. However, it seems, she is stuck at the cocktail party.

Curiously, how is Alice in Wonderland's personality in the book? To make it short, she is adventurous, hence the title, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and quite a curious girl who likes to discover new things. Moreover she is polite, however she has a temper. Another aspect in the book is Alice's discomfort of being different sizes in Wonderland, but never the one desired. This can be seen as transition between being a child losing this innocence and growing up, ultimately reaching adulthood, something this poem seems to refer to. Nevertheless, in the book she behaves quite logically and grown-up-like, e.g., that she checks whether or not the bottle with "Drink me" is marked "poison" before drinking it. She also acts precociously, as she moralizes over herself when she cries, thinking to herself, "[y]ou ought to be ashamed of yourself... a great girl like you... to go on crying in this way. Stop this moment, I tell you!" (Carroll 17). Therefore, in the book, she is a girl that tries to be more grown-up than she truly is. However, in the poem, she seems to lament the time when she was a child and fell down the rabbit-hole, far away from the adult existence.

The transformation that has happened in the poem is that Alice is not a child anymore, furthermore is in an adult context, hence the cocktail party. The grown-up Alice seems to lament, at least when being at the party, when she was belittled when she drinks from the enchanting bottle that had written on it "Drink me". The poem dwells on the good sides of being a girl, and even being in a fairytale. Now the reality is different, and life is more difficult to master than when you were a little girl. When being a grown-up you have to behave in a certain way, and there are a lot of codes that must be followed or else you might

be frowned upon. Nevertheless, there is a dual issue of the phrase “Drink me”. It refers to the bottle in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, yet, it conveys the adult sphere where drinking in parties is very common, sometimes because of pressure, sometimes because of the desire to numb yourself (as grown-up Alice seems to do).

Therefore, the poem focuses on Alice and her transformation from being a little girl to becoming a woman who engages in a cocktail party. It captures the difference between these two stages of life, yet it conveys what kind of personality this Alice has. She seems uncomfortable, perhaps shy, however, there are people who would have loved to be in this situation. This underlines that people are different from each other, regardless of age. Furthermore it is a lament to childhood and its good sides.

Further on, the poem *Exile: Picture Postcards* describes Athens and Greece through three picture postcards – and a close rewriting of C.P. Cavafy’s *The City*. The three picture postcards illustrate three various images from Athens or different issues like cultural phenomena in Greece. The first picture postcard is from an August day in Athens, named *Athens, August*

Even the days of the week have fled for the islands.

In the broken shadow of ruins, tourists huddle.

The citizens have vanished, melted away

In August’s neutron bomb, its blinding silence.

(1-4)

The atmosphere in the first picture postcard portrays how Athens is in reality; a place that may be crowded, yet at the same time feel desolate. It seems like the citizens try to avoid the tourists, at least most of the citizens are gone, with the exception of “[a] remnant of the

faithful at the bus stop...” (line 5). The lines “[t]he citizens have vanished, melted away // In August’s neutron bomb, its blinding silence.” (lines 3-4) marks the atmosphere. The comparison of a neutron bomb is quite strong use of language, but it describes the tension between the citizens and the tourists. The definition of *neutron bomb*, taken from Merriam-Webster Online: Dictionary and Thesaurus, is that it “...releases very large amounts of radiation”, moreover that it is designed to inflict “...less blast and fire damage...”, in comparison to other nuclear bombs which are worse. In that case, the neutron bomb usually leaves the infrastructure, nevertheless kills its target.

However, it is difficult to envision the use of words other than the silence and the separation between Athens’ citizens and tourists. It seems like the citizens avoid them, and that “[e]ven the days of the week have fled for islands.” (line 1), which underlines that they simply are on vacation, or, disappear in order to escape the big crowds of tourists. Nevertheless, regardless of why, the streets are empty, and it looks abandoned, with the stray dogs and “[a] tree lets drop a single yellow leaf // To the pavement like a used bus ticket.” (lines 13-14). The first picture postcard makes the atmosphere quite sad in the ending, as the bus ticket which may be linked to humans, is now replaced with the natural occurrence of a fallen leaf. The bus ticket is only like a vague memory of other times.

The following picture postcard, *Mornings, I Walk Past the First Cemetery of Athens*, depicts how mourners come to the cemetery every day to tend to the graves. This aspect is very unusual in many cultures, especially considering where Stallings is from. A picture of this can be seen when

Four diggers play a hand of cards to kill

A little time; two withered florists fill

The old foam wreaths with new chrysanthemums.

(26-28)

The second picture postcard is another glimpse, like the first picture postcard, of what kind of culture Athens has. The location is at a cemetery, where it contemplates the difference between the cultures in Greece and the American tradition. For instance, it is not common to visit the grave every day, and the diggers engage in card games during work are even more peculiar when being at a cemetery. Furthermore, the priest is portrayed reading his newspaper quite slowly, possibly getting delayed on his schedule, which underlines that things take time and that there is no need to rush. In an interview Stallings was asked what a typical day in Greece looked like, where she said "...in Greece, everything takes time—grocery shopping, paying bills—there's more bureaucracy..." (Murchison: *The Interview with A.E. Stallings*). That is quite different routine than can be said to belong to the Americans, who stress around. Nevertheless, the cemetery routine is observed by the poet who recognizes the differences between two cultures.

Moreover, in another interview Stallings was asked what her favorite part of Athens, both in Georgia and Greece, was. When answering the Greece part, she pointed out that

I like the First Cemetery of Athens — the modern cemetery — which also serves as something of a park and is full of trees and lovely statuary. Many famous people are buried there — Seferis, Schleimann, T.H. White.

(Carpenter: *A.E. Stallings Genius Poet*).

The other Athens has its favorite parts as well, e.g. going out to a particular grill for hamburgers and cherry cokes. However, what ties these Athens' together is that Stallings is much occupied with culture, as she mentions the positive aspect of debating – and then going

out afterwards with the same people, which she did in Athens, Georgia. She laments that this is not done more these days. In Athens, Greece, she highlights going to an outdoor cinema watching old Hollywood movies while drinking beer, and with the ancient Parthenon in the background making the atmosphere very special. Regardless of the differences it seems like Stallings is fully capable of managing in both places – and enjoying it.

The last of the picture postcards, *Bouzouki*, deals with cultural differences as well. Stallings, who has lived in Athens for several years, points out that

After five years here, I understand

Most of the sung words, recognize the tune,

But there's an element I'll never get,

That isn't born in me...

(29-32)

There are some Greek aspects that are impossible to learn, and one of them seems to be the strong emotions involving passionate love. This statement is triggered by the ending of this part, “[t]he hands of lovers always rhyme with knives.”, which implicates a brutal and passionate kind of amour/romance. Likewise, the passion displayed when the musician plays his instrument, perhaps a bouzouki, and

How something changes: a woman starts to sway

Around an absent center – ancient wrongs

Cherished...

(36-38)

The quote illustrates how music and passions play a major part in the Greek culture, and how powerful this can be.

The third, and last picture postcard, illustrates the fact that has been lurking in the shadow, namely that there are big cultural differences, and Stallings acknowledges and contemplates these differences. She even speculates that these things cannot be learned, rather this is something that is born in people. Therefore an American cannot be Greek and vice versa. The gap is too big to completely make it. In that respect the transformation which has happened to Stallings has not included the cultural aspects of Greece, however, she recognizes them and contemplates them.

Lastly, the rewriting of C.P. Cavafy's *The City* ends the poem. I will not compare and contrast too much between this and Cavafy's version, as they are highly similar. However, the crucial aspect of this rewriting is why it is included, and furthermore what the reason is. *The City* portrays someone who wants to go somewhere far away:

You said, "I'll go to another land, I'll go to another sea.

I'll find another city. One that is better than this.

I turn my eyes here, whatever I look upon,

I see the black wreckage of my life, all the gone

Years I frittered away, destroyed, wasted utterly."

(45-46, 50-52)

This part of the poem, and the rewriting, depicts the notion that there is no point running away. You will never manage to escape the feeling you are trying to leave behind somewhere. It does not need to imply that Stallings herself ran away from something,

however, it underlines the difficulties that occur when moving to a new land, and a new city. You will still be you regardless of what cultures are in the place, which Stallings depicts in the three picture postcards of Greece and Athens. There are aspects which cannot be learned, which underlines the aspect that the culture you are born in is the one you will be most influenced by.

There is an unknown character who answers this question and that person points out that

...you will find no other lands, no other seas discover.

This city will pursue you...

.....

For as you've wrecked your life in this small corner, so too

You have wrecked your life the whole world over.

(53-54, 58-60)

The words used by the unknown character is quite strong, although it underlines that you will be the same, whether or not you are in one land or another. Furthermore, its gloomy and dark atmosphere illustrates that there are no hope for you, which is a very sad state of existence, futile and meaningless. Therefore, the silver lining is that even though there are cultural differences and hardships, you are still you, for better or worse.

To compare, these picture postcards concern with the cultural differences that are a part of coming to a new place. In this case, it is the old city of Athens, where they behave and think quite differently than both the Americans and the English. Moreover, Athens, Atlanta, is important as well, as the differences between the Athens' in Stallings life illustrates cultural difference. In addition Stallings appreciates them both, for different reasons. The picture

postcards are glimpses of these differences, although the differences are not frowned upon. Instead, the differences are looked at with acknowledgement and with a belief that such things cannot be taught. It is born in you, as Stallings writes in her third picture postcard.

Ultrasound is a small poem that concerns with the unborn child that is inside the mother. The poem tries to picture how the little one is like inside the womb.

What butterfly –

Brain, soul, or both –

Unfurls here, pallid

As a moth?

(1-4)

Stallings depicts the unborn child as a butterfly, yet at the same time as a moth. This creates a dual feeling, as light and dark thoughts are present at the same time. The definition of moth, according to Merriam-Webster Online: Dictionary and Thesaurus, is “a kind of insect that is similar to a butterfly but that flies mostly at night and is usually less colorful”. Stallings’ opinion of the poem, which the definition capture the essences of, is that the poem

... is a dark, scary poem, especially the last image. I think of a lot of my mother/child poems as rather dark or scary, they confront some primal fears for me, but it seems that a lot of them come across to others as light or whimsical. (Five Points: Volume 14, No. 03)

The contrast between butterfly and moth in this context is a dark parallel. Butterflies in adult state do not survive for long, nevertheless, the stages before the final transformation may continue for a long time. The moth is related to the butterfly, like their “...scales that cover their bodies and wings.” (Everyday Mysteries: *How can you tell the difference between a butterfly and a moth?*).

Furthermore, in the poem she also depicts the womb as a cave, moreover adds that

I am the room
 The future owns,
 The darkness where
 It grows its bones.

(21-24)

The transformation captures mixed feelings, as everything is new and unfamiliar. There is darkness in the poem, although it is not a bad darkness, rather an indescribable kind of darkness. Or, darkness filled with motherly love, yet combined with a terrifying feeling as well.

There is a bodily and a mental transformation going on. Firstly, the body changes – the stomach gets bigger, legs may be swollen etc. Secondly, new thoughts occur in your mind when you are pregnant. Ultrasound is also the first time you get to see your child, which may be a special feeling, and create good, although uncomfortable feelings. Especially if this is the firstborn, where every experience is new, overwhelming thoughts can take over. Therefore, this poem depicts a change that occurs on different levels. It is the actual pregnancy, moreover illustrates it by depicting the unborn baby as small insects in a cave or similar, where “[i]t grows its bones.” (line 24).

In *Hapax* the non-mythological poems dealing with transformations outnumber the mythological poems and their metamorphoses. The first poem of the collection is *Aftershocks* where transformations happen on two different levels. Firstly the earthquake, and its aftershock, is destructive, making cracks in the walls and other damages. Secondly the transformations that happen in the transition from girlfriend to wife are relevant. In the

following poem, *The Dollhouse*, a transformation from being a child and thinking as a child to how you think when you are an adult applies. Furthermore, *The Village in the Lake* captures the mystery of a transformation that made one, or more villages, flooded with water. The river itself has also gone through a transformation. In *Alice, Grown-up, at the Cocktail Party* the reader meets Alice as an adult and it seems like she misses being a child. Naturally the focus has been of the transition between childhood and adulthood. As for cultural differences and transformations the poem *Exile: Picture Postcards* illustrates how it is to be a foreigner in a new place. Stallings claims that there are cultural differences which cannot be learned, so regardless of how adaptable you are, there are elements which are a mystery to everyone else. The rewriting of *The City* underlines the fact that you will be you, regardless of where you are. It is where you come from which is important in this context. In the last poem of the collection, *Ultrasound*, there are two transformations going on. Firstly, a transformation from a moth to an unborn child is seen. Secondly, the bodily transformations which happens in pregnancy is the other kind of transformation, which also includes the mother getting mixed feelings as this is a very new state and emotion.

Chapter IV: Conclusion with comparisons

After explicating poems from both collections, there is no doubt the volumes are very similar, yet quite different from each other. In *Archaic Smile* the mythological poems with metamorphoses outnumber the non-mythological poems with transformations. On the other hand, in *Hapax*, the non-mythological poems with transformations are in majority against the mythological ones. This indicates there is a different frame for discussing various topics, moreover diverse poetic strategies that are used to create the development, voluntarily or not. In that case the collections are different from each other, although the theme of changes, may it be metamorphoses or transformations, is present in both collections. It is clear that the reader is witness to a development between volume one and volume two.

The development is mostly relevant in the context of mythological versus non-mythological poems. It seems like Stallings has gone through a change in her poetry, where the focus shifts, from employing mythological metamorphosis in great extent to using the non-mythological transformation more frequently. The question is why this change occurs. One way of looking at it is the fact that Stallings became a wife and mother before publishing *Hapax*, whereas she was a girlfriend and without children before publishing *Archaic Smile*. As the shift involves a more realistic view and more maturity, it may be the case of the two poetry collections as well. Moreover, her beloved father passed away before she had written most of the poems in *Hapax*, and his death may have influenced Stallings in her poetry. Many years before *Hapax* was published she moved to Greece, something that changed Stallings' life on many accounts. That concerns, for instance, a cultural change. My argument is that because a minority of the poems in *Hapax* has mythological metamorphoses, the possibility is that Stallings' interests have taken a new turn; the real life is more important than myths, and especially when non-mythological transformations are the theme. For instance, her use of

childhood and growing up are often seen in her non-mythological poems concerning transformation.

The conclusion is that Stallings' use of metamorphoses and transformations in her early poetry collection, *Archaic Smile* and *Hapax*, are applied in both volumes. However, mythological metamorphoses are more dominant in *Archaic Smile*, and non-mythological transformations are more common in *Hapax*. She has undoubtedly been influenced by the classical Roman poet Ovid, and the American writer Thomas Bulfinch. This has contributed to her vast use of both metamorphosis and transformation, and a shift has occurred between the two volumes of poetry. It can be argued that Stallings has been colored and has changed direction slightly after she became a wife and mother, although the shift may be just coincidental or from other reasons, such as her father's death. Another reason may be moving from the United States of America to Greece, where the cultural aspects are different from each other. More experience in general could also have contributed to this shift, however, what is clear is that a development has happened. The results are that the look at real life and transformations in *Hapax* has increased in number compared to the focus of mythological metamorphoses in *Archaic Smile*. She seems to be more interested what happens in real life, although she has not let go of her destiny: writing about Greek mythology.

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Appendix

E-mail from A.E. Stallings, 11.09.13:

Dear Elise (if I may),

Most of my poems are written out of personal experience (as the dead pets poem), though I do take liberties. I would say that some of the myth poems are quite personal, even though spoken by personae, while some of the more autobiographical-sounding poems are sometimes fictions.

I do often change or alter myths from their traditional versions, sometimes for purposes of irony. But myths aren't set in stone--as you point out, even classical myths have different versions depending on the ancient source. So I do not worry too much about being "faithful" to these stories. I do think it useful for readers to know the standard versions so that they can see where there are "twists," as you point out.

I hope this helps somewhat. If you have further questions, I will be happy to try to tackle them.

all best,

Alicia Stallings