Immortality and the Legend of Alcyone: Metamorphosis as a Pathway to Eternal Life

Giovanni Meledandri

1. Human Science Department - Guglielmo Marconi University, 00193, Rome, (RM), (Italy)

Abstract: This article examines the myth of Alcyone and Ceyx in Ovid's Metamorphoses (Book 11) as a narrative of transformation driven by divine pity, contrasting with Apollodorus' punitive version in *Bibliotheca* (1.7.4). Through a comparative analysis with Plutarch's esoteric-naturalistic account in *De Sollertia Animalium* (35–36) and earlier sources such as Alcman's Fragment 26, the study posits that Ovid's redemptive metamorphosis symbolizes eternal union and spiritual immortality, potentially echoing proto-monotheistic or Christian concepts of grace, resurrection, and divine intervention. Etymological explorations (from ἅλς + κύω, "sea-conception") and ornithological critiques challenge the halcyon's identification with the common kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), emphasizing its mythical role over biological reality. Later receptions in Dante (*Divina Commedia, Convivio, Vita Nova*) and Carducci (*Cèrilo* in *Odi Barbare*) illuminate enduring themes of fidelity, rebirth, and transcendence. By bridging pagan esotericism with monotheistic sensibilities, the myth offers insights into identity fluidity and eternal life in ancient culture.

Keywords: Ovid, metamorphosis, immortality, ancient culture, myth, legend, religion, poetry, pity, birds, Alcyone, kingfisher, identity fluidity, Plutarch, Alcman, Dante, Carducci.

SHORT SUMMARY

This article examines Ovid's account of Alcyone and Ceyx (Metamorphoses 11) as a pity-driven metamorphosis symbolizing eternal union and spiritual immortality, contrasting Apollodorus' punitive version (Bibliotheca 1.7.4). Comparative analysis with Plutarch's esoteric-naturalistic treatment (*De Sollertia Animalium* 35–36) and Alcman's Fragment 26 explores themes of divine favor and rebirth. Etymological and ornithological critiques question the halcyon's identification with the common kingfisher, while receptions in Dante and Carducci highlight fidelity and transcendence, bridging pagan esotericism with proto-monotheistic sensibilities.

INTRODUCTION

In the first century CE the Roman poet Ovid compiled a comprehensive collection of Classical myths involving shape changing. The universe he describes in his book *Metamorphoses* [1-3] is fluid, nothing is what it seems. Notable examples from his narrative include the tale of Arachne[i], a woman who dared to challenge the goddess Minerva in a weaving contest and was consequently transformed into a spider, her name enduring in the scientific term "*Arachnida*". Other stories illustrate similarly striking changes: *Salmacis* and *Hermaphroditus* merge into a single, hybrid being[ii], *Atalanta* is turned into a lion[iii]. Ovid's Metamorphoses frequently incorporate avian transformations, a motif that holds particular significance. The

Latin term *auspicium*, meaning "augury", is derived from *auis* ("*avis*", bird), highlighting the role of birds in divination within ancient religious practices. In polytheistic Roman paganism, birds were highly revered as immortal messengers of the gods[iv][4]. In Metamorphoses 14, lines 580+, the narrative describes the destruction of the city of *Ardea* by fire; the event is memorialized through the image of the grey heron - a slender bird with gray, white, and black plumage - that symbolically evokes ashes. Furthermore, Metamorphoses, Book 14, lines 386-396, recounts the unrequited love between the goddess *Circe*, renowned for her power to transform humans into animals, including birds, and the young king *Picus*. Following persistent pursuit, *Circe*, daughter of the Sun, ultimately transforms *Picus* into a woodpecker (Latin: *Picus*; Order: *Piciformes*; Family: *Picidae*). *Alcyone* and her beloved husband, *Ceyx*, are also metamorphosed into birds[v], variously a seagull, a tern, or a kingfisher.

The Hypothesis and Focus

Publius Ovidius Naso (43 BCE–17 CE) stands prominently among Roman poets, renowned for his extraordinary literary skill and enduring impact on both Christian and secular poetry throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. His *Metamorphoses* has long served as the authoritative compendium of Greek and Roman mythology and legend, a role it continues to fulfill. This work became a crucial resource for artists, writers, and theologians, with the *Heroides* and *Fasti* further enriching this legacy.

As Kenney observes in his introduction to Metamorphoses [2], "Nothing is ever quite what it seems; nobody's identity is ever wholly secure". The fluidity of identity looks like a thematic focus of Ovid's Metamorphoses and Ovid's storytelling is set against a backdrop of intricate philosophical, religious, and ethnic influences that characterized the cultural climate of his *era*.

The central focus of this article is the diverse interpretive possibilities and cues found in Metamorphoses. While Ovid was influenced by the intellectual milieu of his time, evidence suggests he incorporated his own perspectives into his poetry. This prompts significant questions: Are there concealed meanings within Ovid's narrative? Did Ovid subtly embed interpretations that, within the limitations of the Augustan era, aligned both with traditional Pagan views and emerging ideas from Judaism, Christianity, or other monotheistic traditions? The account of *Ceyx* and *Alcyone* serves to illustrate these underlying currents within Ovid's mythological framework.

THE MYTH

The Metamorphoses by Ovid: Overview and Historical Context

The Metamorphoses (Latin: *Metamorphosis*, tonic Greek: μεταμορφώσεις, meaning "Transformations") stands as a *magnum opus* by the Roman poet Ovid. Composed between 5 and 8 CE, during the reign of Octavian Augustus, this epic poem presents a sweeping narrative of the world's history, beginning with its creation and culminating in the deification of Julius Caesar. Dating the Metamorphoses from 5 to 8 CE aligns with scholarly consensus[vi], though some argue it began earlier (c. 2 CE)[vii]. The work is notable for its mythical-historical framework, encompassing more than 250 myths across 15 books and totaling 11,995 lines.

The Core Narrative of the Alcyone and Ceyx Myth

The myth is presented in alignment with Ovid's version and the cited sources. Ovid draws upon a variety of Greek and Roman traditions to construct the story of *Alcyone* and *Ceyx* in Book 11 of the *Metamorphoses*. He incorporates elements from earlier Hellenistic and archaic works, as well as motifs such as the concept of "halcyon days", a period of sea calm during winter. The composition is shaped by both the narrative structure of previous authors and the thematic concerns identified in the sources. In synthesizing traditions, Ovid's narrative is attentive to both the moral lessons inherent in the myth and the emotional resonance of the characters' experiences, particularly the themes of divine intervention, human suffering, and transformation. Ovid's method is further set apart by his employment of literary motifs, known as *topoi*[viii], meaning recurring themes or stereotypes, which serve as a structural lens through which the development of the myth can be interpreted. By focusing on the development and interplay of the *topoi,* the analysis provides a coherent framework for tracing and interpreting the evolution of the myth through different traditions. The narrative of the myth is summarized integrating key mythological sources alongside Gresseth's comparative analysis[ix][5]. The predominant themes - namely *impiety, mourning, and transformation into birds* - are emphasized as essential for interpreting the myth's historical development.

The core narrative of the *Alcyone* and *Ceyx* myth, may be summarized as follows:

- *Alcyone* married *Ceyx*, son of the Morning Star. Because of their impiety- they dared to name themselves *Zeus* and *Hera- Ceyx* was drowned at sea.

- *Alcyone* mourned for him so piteously that the gods released her, and they and both were reborn jointly into a new form: they were changed into birds, she into a halcyon, he into another seafowl called *keyx*[x].

- The motivation for metamorphosis is, considerably, depicted as guilt, in Apollodorus' narrative [6], whereas Ovid presents it as an act of virtue.

Structured Analysis of the Alcyone and Ceyx Myth. The *Topoi*

Topoi Group A: Love, Happiness, Hubris

Alcyone was formerly recognized as the cherished daughter of *Aeolus,* the Greek god of the wind, and her mother is identified as either *Aenarete* (Ἐναρέτη) or *Aegiale*[xi]. She was the devoted wife of *Ceyx,* King of *Trachis*. Both were admired for their beauty and deep mutual love, and *Ceyx* ruled his kingdom justly and peacefully. Their joyful marriage inspired them to play pranks and address to each other *Zeus* and *Hera*, angering the chief god with their arrogance. *Zeus* minded punishing them for comparing themselves to deities. *Ceyx*, mourning the loss of his brother, considered seeking guidance from the oracle of *Apollo* at *Carlos* in *Ionia* (Western Anatolia). *Alcyone*, however, attempted to dissuade her husband from undertaking the perilous sea voyage required to visit the oracle. She highlighted the unpredictable nature of the winds and sea, elements that even his father, *Aeolus*, could not always govern, and requested that she accompany him if he insisted on proceeding. Despite her concerns, *Ceyx* chose not to subject his wife to unnecessary risk. Consequently, *Alcyone* observed the ship's departure with a sense of foreboding, unable to alter the course of events as her husband set sail.

Topos B: Punishment

Zeus decided it was time to punish the sacrilege. He caused a storm, raising waves that sank the ship. *Ceyx*, recognizing that his demise is imminent, implores the gods to ensure his body is granted proper funeral rites. Ultimately, *Ceyx* perishes by drowning beneath the indifferent gaze of his father, *Esophorous*, the morning star.

Topoi Group C: Vision, Dreams, Enlightenment

Alcyone, deeply concerned for her husband's safety and longing for his return, persistently appeals to the gods, with devotion to *Hera*. Moved by *Alcyone's* heartfelt prayers, *Hera* intervenes by instructing *Iris*, the goddess of the rainbow, to act on her behalf. *Iris* is sent to *Hypnos*, the god of sleep, the twin brother of *Thanatos* (the god of the Death), and tasked with delivering a message that will reveal *Ceyx's* fate to *Alcyone* through a dream. *Hypnos*, honoring *Hera's* command, delegates this responsibility to his son *Morpheus*, who is renowned for his ability to take on any form within dreams. *Morpheus* appears to *Alcyone* in a vision, assuming the likeness of *Ceyx*. Through this dream, he unveils the tragic circumstances of the shipwreck and *Ceyx's* demise, providing *Alcyone* with the painful truth she sought.

Topoi D: Grief, Conjugal Love

Alcyone, overcome by grief, proceeded towards the shore, her distress evident in her actions. Upon reaching the coast and contending with the waves, she discovered the body of a man who, upon closer examination, was identified as her husband *Ceyx*, now deceased and bearing the same appearance as in her earlier vision. *Alcyone* completed the necessary burial rites; however, unable to envision life without her spouse, she resolved to join him in death, ultimately casting herself into the sea from a nearby cliff.

Topoi E: Pity, Eternal Love, Resurgence and Immortality

The gods of Olympus, moved by Ceyx and Alcyone's enduring love, urge Zeus to reconsider his harsh punishment. Zeus relents, freeing the couple from Hades and transforming them into Halcyon birds.

OVID *VERSUS* OTHERS

Irrespective of the specific narrative, the myth can be allocated in a toponomy, and its most known sources are Ovid and Apollodorus[xii]. Ovid likely relied on a range of ancient Greek sources when composing the story of *Alcyone* and *Ceyx*. These sources encompass Hellenistic and archaic works that explore instability, transformations, mythical marriages, beliefs and motifs such as the "halcyon days".

Scholarly analysis suggests that Nicander of Colophon[xiii] [7] may have provided a direct model for the narrative structure of the transformation, while Hesiod[xiv] [8,9] contributed older genealogical and matrimonial elements to the myth. Additionally, fragmentary references or allusions to the tale appear in the works of Aristophanes[xv] [10]

and Virgil[xvi] [11]. Alternative versions of the myth also exist. For example, Theodorus, cited in *scholia*[xvii], may have influenced the tradition. Later sources, including Apollodorus[xviii][6] and Hyginus[xix][12], reflect similar variations of the story. Ovid employed myth to offer moral lessons, and his choice of format was also influenced by Alexandrian poetry, especially Callimachus. He structured his work using Callimachus' *Aetia* as a model.

A comparative analysis reveals interpretative differences between Ovid's and Apollodorus' accounts of the transformation[xx].

a) Apollodorus states in the *Bibliotheca* that they were "changed into birds" (ἐς ὄρνιθας μεταβαλεῖν), without specifying the species, whereas in Ovid's account, both are transformed into halcyon birds, highlighting their eternal union.

b) Apollodorus portrays the metamorphosis as a punishment for impiety while Ovid[xxi] presents it as an act of mercy and compassion, motivated by pity. According to Gresseth[xxii], "*the sources, however, are not exactly alike. Besides the considerable elaboration of the story in Ovid, which has little to do with the essential myth, in Apollodorus we find the couple changed into different birds, of which transformation there is no hint in Ovid. The aetiologias of the transformation, are different: jealousy in Apollodorus, pity in Ovid.*"[xxiii]

c) The texts (*Met*. 11, 410-748) "*Both Alcyone and Ceyx were transformed into halcyon birds, symbolizing their eternal union*", (*Met*. 11. 742-743) "*nomine in harum / aves mutata volat*", implie Ovid's account may reflect a universal spiritual theme and underscores divine favor and eternal love, possibly hinting at early proto-monotheistic ideas.

d) As Gresseth observes, the reference to "halcyon days" occurs only in Ovid: "The most striking difference between the two accounts, though, is the pendant to the Ovidian story, completely ignored by Apollodorus: this is the tradition that during the winter solstice the hen halcyon builds her nest on the sea and that her father *Aeolus* then stills the wind and sea for his grandsons (*... praestat nepotibus aequor*, *Met*. 11, 748)."

The bird identification. Gresseth's assertion that *Alcyone* becomes a halcyon and *Ceyx* another seafowl called "keyx" diverges from Ovid's Metamorphoses, (11, l410-748), where both are transformed into alcyones (halcyon birds). The term "keyx" appears to be a misinterpretation or a variant not supported by Ovid's text, possibly arising from later traditions or Gresseth's analysis. It is worth addressing this discrepancy, as Ovid's narrative emphasizes their shared transformation into identical birds, symbolizing their eternal union.

Impiety and Punishment. The motif of *Alcyone* and *Ceyx* calling each other *Zeus* and *Hera*- an act of hubris that provokes divine wrath- appears explicitly in Apollodorus[xxiv]: "*Alcyone was married by Ceyx, son of Lucifer [Eosphorus]. These perished by reason of their pride; for he said that his wife was Hera, and she said that her husband was Zeus. But Zeus turned them into birds; her he made a kingfisher* (alcyon) *and him a gannet* (ceyx)." (Author, Trans.). Original Greek: "Ἀλκυόνη δὲ Κήυκι τῷ Φωσφόρου γαμεῖται. οὗτοι δὲ δι᾽ ὑπερηφανίαν ἀπώλοντο· ὁ μὲν γὰρ τὴν γυναῖκα Ἥραν ἔλεγε, ἡ δὲ τὸν ἄνδρα Δία. Ζεὺς δὲ αὐτοὺς ἐποίησεν ὄρνιθας, ἐκείνην μὲν ἀλκυόνα, ἐκεῖνον δὲ κήυκα."

This version frames the metamorphosis as punishment (contrasting Ovid's pity- driven one), aligning with classical themes of hubris. In fact, both Ovid (*Met*. 11, 410-748) and

Hyginus (*Fabulae,* 65) provide detailed accounts of the myth, yet they entirely omit any reference to this instance of hubris. In Ovid, the storm arises from tragedy and divine pity, leading to merciful transformation; no mention of calling themselves *Zeus/Hera*. Some modern retellings or summaries loosely attribute the hubris to "the myth" generally, but the explicit detail traces directly to Apollodorus (often echoed in later *scholia* or *compendia*). Then, Ovid omits the element of punishment for hubris, instead focusing on tragedy and compassion and this reinforces Gresseth's point about differing *aetiologies*.

Guilt becomes virtue: the shift from guilt (Apollodorus) to virtue (Ovid) might reflect Ovid's intent to encode a redemptive narrative. Ovid's emphasis on pity over punishment suggests a deliberate reimagining of the myth, potentially aligning with monotheistic notions of divine grace.

All these divergences broader hypothesis that Ovid may have woven hidden meanings into his narrative that could resonate with a variety of religious traditions.

PLUTARCH

In *Moralia*[xxv][13], Plutarch presents the Alcyone myth with a distinctive perspective. His account emphasizes the halcyon's association with procreation, birth, and its special favor from Poseidon: "τίνος δὲ γενέσεις καὶ τόκους καὶ ὠδῖνας ὁ θεὸς οὕτως ἐτίμησε;"[xxvi] "Which creature has the god so highly honored in terms of procreation and birth?", (Author, Trans.). Plutarch describes the halcyon, highlighting its intelligence, nest-building, loyalty to its mate, and the mythic "halcyon days" of calm seas during breeding. He references, but does not fully recount, the myth of Alcyone and Ceyx, instead blending natural history with themes of fidelity, transformation, and sea-calming from the legend. This version emphasizes the bird's virtues rather than the romantic tragedy, likely influenced by earlier naturalists and poets who focused on the ornithological and meteorological aspects.

Procreation, Birth, and Divine Favor

Plutarch compares the Alcyone's reproduction to Leto's mythological birth, highlighting the importance of place, timing, and divine intervention. Plutarch states: "*As for the birth of Leto, according to tradition, an island was secured in the sea to receive her; similarly, when the Alcyone lays its eggs around the winter solstice, the deity calms the entire sea so that not a single wave appears. Thus, there is no animal more esteemed by humans. Owing to the female alcyon's actions, people can navigate the sea without fear during the heart of winter for seven days and nights, making the sea voyage safer than travel by land for that period.*"[xxvii] (Author, Trans.). This passage underscores the divine favor and protection surrounding birth, as illustrated by *Poseidon's* role in ensuring safe passage during the halcyon days.

Devotion and Spousal Loyalty

Plutarch highlights the halcyon's consistent dedication and fidelity to its partner, which is characterized by continuous supportive behaviour throughout their lives. As detailed in the text: "*The Alcyone remains committed to its mate not only for a single season but for the entire year. It does not seek other partners; rather, its actions reflect genuine affection*

and commitment, akin to a lawful spouse. When the male ages and becomes feeble, the female supports him, transports and nourishes him, demonstrating steadfast companionship until his passing."[xxviii] (Aithor, Trans.).

Humility and Care in Offspring Rearing

Plutarch highlights the humility and self-restraint of the Alcyone when caring for her offspring. Upon discovering she is pregnant; the female exhibits diligence and ingenuity in nest building: *"As soon as the female perceives that she is pregnant, she devotes herself to the construction of the nest... She means with only one simple tool, only one utensil, only one implement, namely her bill."*[xxix] (Author, Trans.).

Religious Context and Interpretative Questions

Plutarch concludes his account by referencing teachings associated with the cults of Apollo and Poseidon, along with the precepts of Poseidon's priests in Leptis, drawing parallels with the Eleusinian mysteries. This approach implies a wider spiritual relevance for the myth.

The narrative prompts consideration of whether Plutarch's interpretation may, perhaps metaphorically, reference contemporary religious doctrines, including the emerging Christian concept of the divine birth or sacred procreation. Plutarch's portrayal of the alcyone's protected birth may prefigure notions of divine intervention, though rooted in pagan esoteric traditions. Plutarch's connections with Eleusinian and Poseidon traditions reflect mystery cults' themes of rebirth and immortality, linking pagan and monotheistic views as discussed in the context of personal eschatological hopes in Eleusinian and related mysteries[xxx] [14]. As both a pagan and initiate, Plutarch offers his readers a culturally familiar yet politically appropriate narrative for the Roman Empire.

Ovid's narrative of the myth further enriches this motif by locating the cave of *Somnus* (*Hypnos*, god of sleep) in a realm of profound stillness, where his son *Morpheus* shapes dreams in human form[xxxi]. In classical mythology, *Hypnos* and *Thanatos* (Death) are twin brothers, sons of *Nyx* (Night), symbolizing the intimate link between sleep as temporary repose and death as eternal rest[xxxii] [8,15]. This familial bond underscores themes of transition and renewal, resonating with Plutarch's emphasis on divine protection during vulnerable moments of birth and fidelity. These ancient interconnections persist in modern interpretations, such as Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* series (1989–1996)[xxxiii][16], where Dream (*Morpheus*) and Death are siblings among the Endless, echoing the classical twinship of *Hypnos* and *Thanatos*.

Sources Underpinning Plutarch's Account

Scholarly studies, such as those by Wellmann and Schuster[xxxiv] [17-20], reveal that Plutarch's animal psychology in *De Sollertia Animalium* draws significantly from Aristotle[xxxv] [21] and Hellenistic intermediaries. Unlike Ovid, Plutarch favors naturalistic observation over mythological embellishment. Although later sources, like Apollodorus [6] and Hyginus [12] reflect similar traditions, they are not primary influences on Plutarch's scientific perspective. Notably, both Plutarch and Aelian are recognized for their reliance on shared,

now-lost Hellenistic texts, providing a naturalistic counterpoint to the mythological interpretations found in Ovid and his contemporaries. To analyze Plutarch's narration in detail, it is worth considering sources that he likely drew upon, as well as those that provide parallel accounts blending mythology with observations of animal behavior. These references serve to supplement the Ovid-centric sources, such as Nicander, Hesiod, Aristophanes, and Virgil, by incorporating scientific and zoological perspectives rooted in Greek natural history traditions.

Greek Natural History and Poetic Contexts

- Aristotle[xxxvi] [21] is a primary source for information on the halcyon days and the nesting habits of the halcyon/kingfisher. His detailed accounts form the foundation of the scientific tradition that influenced later authors.

- Alcman[xxxvii] [22] offers poetic allusions to the fidelity of the halcyon, providing an early literary context for the bird's association with loyalty and devotion.

Roman and Hellenistic Parallels

- Pliny the Elder[xxxviii] [23] provides a near-contemporary Roman perspective on natural history, echoing Aristotle's observations and offering additional detail on meteorological phenomena and bird behaviors.

- Aelian[xxxix] [24] shares many common sources with Plutarch, particularly in the context of animal intelligence and behavior. Both authors frequently reference lost Hellenistic works, contributing to their similar thematic focus.

- Antigonus of Carystus[xl] [25] presents wondrous animal lore and marvels (*mirabilia*), further enriching the narrative with stories of the halcyon's ingenuity and remarkable qualities.

A **comparative analysis** of the myth in Ovid, Apollodorus, Plutarch, and Gresseth's research reveals different origins- jealousy in Apollodorus, pity in Ovid- and notes that Ovid's "halcyon days" tradition adds narrative complexity. Plutarch introduces themes like procreation and humility, possibly referencing Christian ideas.

Ovid *vs*. Apollodorus: Gresseth correctly observes that Ovid diverges from the core myth. The claim that Apollodorus mentions specific birds is unsupported by Library 1.7.4, which only refers to their transformation.

Plutarch's focus on birth and sea-calming through the alcyone, related to *Poseidon* and *Apollo*, expands Ovid's account and supports the idea of deeper spiritual meanings.

ALCYONE: ETYMOLOGY AND ORNITHOLOGY

In the analyzed mythological and genealogical traditions, Alcyone is recognized as the daughter of Aeolus and the wife of Ceyx, the king of Thessaly. According to the myth, after their deaths, Alcyone was transformed into a kingfisher, a detail frequently cited in classical references. This section explores the origin and myth of "alcyone," distinguishing it from today's kingfisher. Etymological and ornithological analysis, referencing Pianigiani (2004-

2008) in Bonomi (2008) [26], challenges the connection between the mythical halcyon and *Alcedo atthis*, as illustrated in Fig. 1.
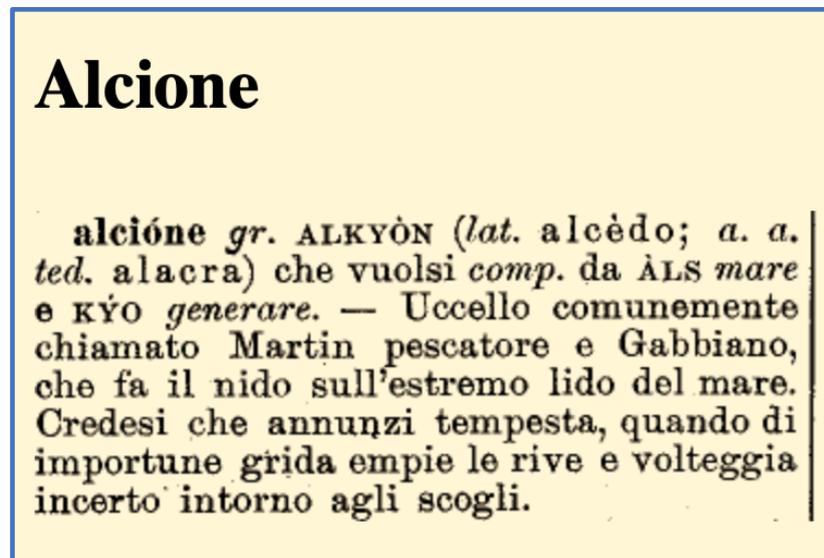

Fig. 1: "*Alcióne*" (alcyon) in Bonomi *Vocabolario Etimologico della Lingua Italiana*. Entry highlighting also folk etymology linking 'a*lcione*' to sea conception, with ornithological and mythological associations.

Fig. 1 confirms that "alcyone" comes from the roots "*als*" and "*kyo*," indicating a link to the sea and storm mythology. An Italian etymological dictionary[xli] defines *Alcióne* as "ALKÝÓN" (lat. *Alcèdo*; Germ. *Alacra*), formed from ALS and KYO to mean "to give birth," highlighting and connecting its mythological and linguistic relevance. The entry further identifies Alcyone as a *"bird commonly referred to as either a kingfisher or a gull, renowned for nesting on remote seashores. It was believed to predict storms by emitting loud calls, clearing coastal areas, and flying around rocks."* (Author, Trans.). This strengthens its mythological link to the sea and seasonal changes, but the account does not represent kingfishers' usual traits.

The term "alcyon" originates from the Latin *alcyon* (*alcyon -ŏnis*, feminine), which in turn derives from the Greek ἀλκυών (alkyōn -ónos, feminine). Historically, this name refers to a sea bird closely associated with the winter season, noted for its storm-braving character and distinctive vocalizations. Over time, the alcyon has often been equated with the kingfisher (*Alcedo attis*), but the label has also been used for other sea birds, such as gulls, petrels, and terns. Although this connection has long been accepted, ornithological research, which offers detailed accounts of the kingfisher's habits, has challenged the notion that the alcyon is indeed the kingfisher. The differences in nesting habits, behaviors, preferred environments, and calls between kingfishers and the mythological descriptions of the alcyon suggest that the association may be inaccurate[xlii] [27-30].

Table 1 provides a summary of the key information about the Halcyon, combining its etymology and mythology, while also previewing later literary references—such as Carducci[xliii] [31], to better illustrate the ongoing debate regarding the identity of the mythical bird.

Table 1: **Summary of the key information about the Halcyon, combining its etymology, mythology and later literary references (See text).**

Aspect	Description	Source
Genealogy	Daughter of Aeolus, wife of Ceyx, king of Thessaly.	Ovid Met. XI
Transformation	After death, transformed into a sea bird.	The Alcyon
Etymology	From Latin alcyon (*alcyon -ŏnis*, feminine), from Greek ἀλκυών (alkyōn -ónos, feminine). Name given to a sea bird associated with winter, known for its song and resilience to storms. Often linked to the kingfisher (*Alcedo attis*), but also used for gulls, petrels, terns.	Pianigiani (2004-2008)[Chantraine (1968-1980) [32]
Ornithological Doubt	Ornithological studies cast doubt on the identification of the alcyon with the kingfisher, citing differences in nesting, behavior, environment, and calls.	Arnot, *Birds in the Ancient world*, (2007) [27]
Etymological Definition	"Halcyon, Greek ΑΛΚΥΌΝ (Latin: *Alcèdo*; Old High German: *Alacra*), formed from ALS (see entry) and KYO 'to give birth'. – Bird commonly known as the kingfisher or gull, nests on remote coasts. It was believed to predict storms with its song, clearing the coasts and flying among the rocks."	Pianigiani (2004-2008) in Bonomi (2025) [26]
Literature	Carducci: "It flies with the halcyons [...] among the foaming waves in the storm."	*Cèrilo*, XXVI *Odi Barbare* (1883) [31]

Etymology. The derivation of "alcyone" from *als* (sea) and *kyo* (to give birth) is plausible but not universally accepted. Some scholars[xliv] [32] suggest a pre-Greek origin, without a definite Indo-European etymology, which could be noted as an alternative.

Bird identification. The critique of the kingfisher's habits (freshwater nesting, no coastal behavior) is well-supported by the dictionary entry. The Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), illustrated in Fig. 2, which has long been associated with the mythical halcyon, is found in freshwater habitats. It typically perches on a branch just above the water and dives straight down from its perch- or sometimes hovers briefly- to catch its prey. It does not nest on sea cliffs[xlv].

Fig. 2: The Common Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis), traditionally identified with the mythical halcyon, in its real habitat: perched (left) and catching (right) freshwater steams or ponds, far from open sea nesting. (File: Alcedo atthis.jpg. (2025, July 20). Wikimedia Commons. Retrieved December 29, 2025, from https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Alcedo_atthis.jpg&oldid=1059641199).

Several coastal and marine birds have been proposed as possible alternatives to the mythical halcyon, as shown in Fig. 3. These include the European Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*), the Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*), and the Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*). The Common Tern is known for gliding and diving into the sea, while the Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) also exhibits typical coastal behaviours. All these species display habits and vocalizations that are consistent with the mythological description.

Fig. 3: Birds with coastal or marine habitats, they glide and regularly dive into the sea, emitting their characteristic calls. From left: European Storm Petrel, Common Tern, and Black-headed Gull.

However, it is worth clarifying that the mythical halcyon may be purely literary construct, rather than a real species. The halcyon, as a mythical seabird, differs from the kingfisher, reflecting its symbolic rather than zoological role in Ovid's narrative.

Transformation. The myth of Alcyone has influenced many artists over time, especially in painting and sculpture. Fig. 4 shows R. Wilson's painting "Ceyx and Alcyone", which draws from this myth.

Fig. 4: "Ceyx and Alcyone" by Richard Wilson (1768). This oil painting depicts the tragic lovers transformed into birds, showcasing the moment before of their metamorphosis.

RECEPTION: CHRISTIAN, DANTE AND CARDUCCI

Ovid's works, particularly Metamorphoses, have been read by both pagan and Christian audiences since their publication. For Christian readers, however, engaging with pagan literature presented distinct challenges; it required discernment to identify underlying wisdom and truth within narratives often characterized by fantastical elements and moral ambiguity - a task likened by the 6th-century Christian mythographer Fulgentius[xlvi] [33] to separating *triticum a paleis* (wheat from chaff). In the 8th or 9th century, Theodulf, Bishop of Orléans, notably defended his incorporation of Ovid's erotic poetry into his own verse, stating that, "*In his words, although there are many frivolous things, very many true things lie hidden under a false cover.*"[xlvii] [34].

Ovid's concept of metamorphosis is entirely abstract, allowing for a virtually limitless succession of forms and, subsequently, transformations that ensure its persistence. Unlike Virgil's more explicitly devout approach, Ovid's influence extends even into the Dante's works. Dante references Ovid in the *Vita Nova* [35] as a poet of love, and the *Commedia* [36] contains numerous echoes of Ovid's amorous texts. He also cites Ovid in both the *Convivio* [37] and the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* [38], particularly recognizing him as the poet of the Metamorphoses, the book of transformations. As Cornelli[xlviii] [39] states "*The transformations of bodies serve as a means for the transformation of the soul*": a Dantean perspective that employs pagan myth as a path towards religious and Christian elevation. "*The transformation into cerilos and alciones, as a response to pity and weakness, may prefigure Christian notions of resurrection or divine support, bridging pagan and monotheistic sensibilities.*"

In the Commedia, Dante meets Virgil in *Limbo* (*Inferno*, IV 90) and later asserts his poetic superiority over Ovid in depicting transformations, directly referencing Ovid with, "Let Ovid be silent about *Cadmus* and *Arethusa*" (*Inferno*, XXV 97). Dante alludes to Ovid's influence earlier in the *Canto* by touching Virgil's nose - 'Naso' being both Latin for 'nose' and Ovid's surname -momentarily sidelining Virgil's model in favour of highlighting Ovid's impact.

In literature, the imagery of the halcyon (*Alcyone*) and kingfisher (*cèrilo*)[xlix] as symbols of fidelity, divine protection amid storms, and renewal finds a modern Italian echo in Giosuè Carducci's *Ode Cèrilo* (XXVI in *Odi barbare*): "*Voglio con voi, fanciulle, volare, volare a la danza, come il cèrilo vola tratto da le alcïoni: vola con le alcioni tra l'onde schiumanti in tempesta, cèrilo purpureo nunzio di primavera.*"[l]: "I wish, maidens, to fly with you, to fly to the dance, / as the kingfisher flies drawn by the halcyons: / it flies with the halcyons amid the foaming waves in storm, / purple kingfisher, herald of spring." (Author, Trans.).

The epithet "*nunzio di primavera*" (herald of spring) reflects Carducci's creative interpretation of Alcman fr. 26 PMGF, where the bird is described as ἀλιπόρφυρος ἰαρὸς ὄρνις ("sea-purple sacred bird") which refers to several earlier sources. These include Sappho's fragment (fr. 58, line 15: γόνα δ᾽ [ο]ὐ φέροισι), Aristophanes' *Birds* (lines 250 onward: ὧν τ᾽ἐπὶ πόντιον οἶδμα θαλάσσην φῦλα μετ᾽ἀλκυόνεσσι ποτῆται – "(you) tribes who fly over the sea's swelling waves together with the halcyons"), Apollonius Rhodius (IV 363: λυγρῇσιν κατὰ πόντον ἅμ᾽ἀλκυόνεσσι φορεῦμαι - " together with the mournful halcyons I am borne over the sea" [of *Medea*]", where the word *φορεῦμαι* may allow for an interpretation similar to Antigonus), and finally Carducci himself (*Cèrilo*, verses 13 onward).

Greek original text (Alcm. fr. 26 P.)

"… οὔ μ᾽ ἔτι, παρσενικαὶ μελιγάρυες ἰαρόφωνοι,

γυῖα φέρην δύναται· βάλε δὴ βάλε κηρύλος εἴην,

ὅς τ᾽ ἐπὶ κύματος ἄνθος ἅμ᾽ ἀλκυόνεσσι ποτήται

νηλεὲς ἦτορ ἔχων, ἀλιπόρφυρος ἰαρὸς ὄρνις."

"I long, with you, young maidens, to soar to the dance,

as the cèrilo flies, drawn on by the halcyons:

he flies with the halcyons amid the foaming waves in the storm,

the purple cèrilo, herald of spring." (Author, Trans.).

Italian text, by Carducci.

"Voglio con voi, fanciulle, volare alla danza,

come il cèrilo vola tratto da le alcioni:

vola con le alcĭoni tra l'onde schiumanti in tempesta,

cèrilo purpureo nunzio di primavera[li]."

Carducci appears to evoke the transmitted variant εἴαρος (spring) or a phonetic/semantic association with it, transforming the sacred/prophetic bird into an explicit harbinger of seasonal and vital renewal- resonating with Plutarch's themes of devotion and divine favor calming the seas[lii] [40]. The *cèrilo* is also the commonly used title for a quatrain in hexameters by Alcman, cited as an example of natural marvels by Antigonus of Carystus [25].

"… No longer, O sweet-voiced, melodious-chanting maidens,

can my limbs carry me; oh, may I indeed be a cèrilo,

who with the halcyons flies over the blossom of the wave,

with a relentless heart, a sea-purple sacred bird."

The source cites the fragment to illustrate the ancient belief that aging male halcyons (*cèrili*) are carried by females when they can no longer fly. In Alcman's fragment, aged chorus leaders, unable to dance, wish to be carried by the young, echoing a desire for support in old age. This mirrors the article's immortality theme: the elder's wish to become a *cèrilo*, lifted by alciones, parallels Ovid's use of metamorphosis as transcendence, potentially aligning with monotheistic concepts of spiritual elevation.

DISCUSSION

Pagan Love and Christian Love

During the Augustan Age - 27 BCE–14 CE - *Princeps* Octavian initiated a comprehensive reorganization of the Roman Empire, placing great emphasis on the *mos maiorum*, an

adherence to traditional Roman values, religion, and cults. According to Canfora (2016) [41], his cultural realignment was enforced through stringent legislative measures, aiming to solidify these ideals within state policy[liii]. At the same time, the rise of Eastern monotheistic cults and the nascent Christian movement was met with suspicion and caution, as they were perceived to challenge the established norms[liv] [42]. These new religious movements introduced both secular and transcendental perspectives that diverged from prevailing Roman ideology. Notably, they gained followers among the poor and humble by offering the promise of an afterlife, an immortality not even assured to those in positions of power within Roman society. While attempts were made to deify the Princeps or Imperator, these efforts did not effectively guarantee universal access to immortality and often excluded pagan adherents. The absence of a doctrinal framework for eternal life in the state religion posed a significant challenge, prompting cultural and political elites to search for solutions within their respective domains. Augustine's observation in *Confessions* (3.1) [43] "I was not yet in love, but in love with loving" (*nondum amabam sed amare amabam*), articulates a sophisticated understanding of "love," a theme that Ovid had previously explored within its literary context. Whereas earlier classical literature often regarded love as irrational or even pathological (described as *furor, uesania, morbus*), Ovid reimagined love as a mutual relationship. His narratives, including the story of *Ceyx* and *Halcyone*, have become enduring elements of Latin literary tradition. Saunders notes that both Dante in the opening of the Paradise and Ovid at the conclusion of the Metamorphoses suggest, "what will live is not the body or corpus"[lv][44].

Parallels Between Classical and Christian Themes: Pity, Immortality and Literary Symbolism

This analysis delineates thematic correspondences regarding pity, divine intervention, and immortality within classical pagan and monotheistic traditions. Ovid's depiction of pity as an expression of divine mercy parallels Plutarch's concept of protected birth, where divine favor plays an active role. These associations are further elucidated by recurring references to immortality, evoking images reminiscent of resurrection.

Metamorphosis as Transcendence

The concept of metamorphosis as a form of transcendence is exemplified in Alcman's fragment, where the speaker expresses a longing to become a *cérilo* carried by alcyones. This motif parallels Ovid's account of the transformation of *Alcyone* and *Ceyx* into halcyon birds, with metamorphosis functioning to surpass the limitations of aging and death. The shared narrative structure supports the interpretation of immortality as a central theme and suggests the presence of a proto-monotheistic motif, one in which the soul seeks elevation beyond mortal constraints, a concept later echoed in Christian resurrection doctrine and Neoplatonic ideas of spiritual ascent.

Pity and Divine Intervention

A further thematic parallel is found in the treatment of pity and divine intervention. In Alcman's poetry, the *corifore*'s expression of pity resonates with Ovid's depiction of divine

compassion, particularly in the scene where the gods transform Alcyone and Ceyx. This convergence reflects monotheistic notions of divine mercy, with the imagery of being carried by alciones symbolizing the help provided by a higher power. Such imagery suggests analogs in representations of angelic aid or the bestowal of grace.

Literary Use of Alcyone and Cèrilo: Content and Thematic Analysis

Drawing from a broad range of primary and secondary literary sources, the motif of the alcyone is a recurring image emerging in works by Giosuè Carducci, Alcman, Sappho, Aristophanes, and Apollonius Rhodius. The introduction of the *cèrilo* (Greek κηρύλος), identified as the male alcyone, further enriches the narrative by adding a gendered dimension to the mythological tradition. This poetic lineage, stretching from ancient Greek fragments to Carducci's nineteenth-century Italian verse, underscores the enduring association of the alcyone with the sea, storms, and a melancholic yet transformative symbolism.

Implications and Comparative Literary Perspectives

The scope of this analysis encompasses both pre-Ovidian and post-classical perspectives on the alcyone and *cèrilo*, deepening the exploration of the immortality theme. Alcman's fragment, referenced as a naturalistic mirabile by Antigonus of Carystus, introduces motifs of aging, weakness, and the longing for transcendence. These elements converge with Ovid's portrayal of metamorphosis driven by pity, collectively supporting the idea that a concealed spiritual narrative is embedded within these myths.

A comparative analysis of Greek and Italian literary traditions reveals the sustained symbolic importance of the alcyone and *cèrilo*, affirming their mythological relevance beyond Ovid's Metamorphoses. In Alcman's fragment, the expression of pity and the desire to be carried by the "*alciones*" mirrors the transformation of *Alcyone* and *Ceyx* in Ovid, where divine compassion catalyzes their metamorphosis. This parallel reinforces the premise of a universal spiritual motif.

CONCLUSION

Eternal Unity

The gendered pairing of *cèrilo* and Alcyone, prominent in Greek tradition and echoed in Carducci's poetry, underscores Ovid's theme of eternal love. This motif appears to anticipate Christian concepts of marital fidelity and everlasting unity, as found in scriptural passages such as Matthew 22:30. Piero Boitani's commentary[lvi] [45] observes that the love between Alcyone and Ceyx "endures even after death" moves the gods to compassion, and "calms even the waves of the sea"[lvii]. Alcyone, in the act of casting herself into the sea, is transformed and takes flight in her new form. As we read in Melville "On this she leapt—most wonderful—and then she flew and through the air on newfound wings sped skimming o'er the waves, a hapless bird"[lviii]. Ovid does not merely challenge the foundations of pagan myth and belief; he portrays Alcyone reviving and transforming Ceyx, who, even as his body succumbs to death, still senses her kisses: "He felt them, and at last, for pity's sake, the

gods changed both to birds; the same strange fate they shared, and still their love endured, the bonds of wedlock bound them still, though they were birds. They mate and rear their young and in the winter for seven days of calm Alcyone broods on her nest, borne cradled on the waves".

The etymological and gender-based distinction between alcyone (female) and *cèrilo* (male) adds further depth, hinting at a sophisticated mythological structure reflective of unity and the enduring power of love. The lasting connection between *cèrilo* and alcyone accentuates the theme of an unbreakable, transcendent bond, bridging mythological tradition and subsequent spiritual interpretations. Divine compassion is the catalyst for their metamorphosis, reinforcing the concept of a universal spiritual motif. Through his poetry, Ovid expresses faith in the possibility of redemption, made visible by the transformative power of love, an emotion capable of invoking the transcendent and enabling every transformation.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ Metamorphoses, Book 6, lines 1-145.

ⁱⁱ Ibid. Book 4, lines 317-388.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. Book 10, lines 689+

^{iv} Michel Pastoureau, *Animali celebri: Mito e realtà* (Giunti Editore, 2010), 55.

^v Metamorphoses, Book 11, lines 410-795, key parts around lines 710-748.

^{vi} E. J. Kenney, "Introduction," in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (A. D. Melville, Trans.; pp. ix–xxxviii) (Oxford University Press, 2008), X-XI (original work published ca. 8 CE).

^{vii} According to E. Fanham from 2 to 8: Elaine Fanham, *Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 4.

^{viii} Singular: *tòpos*, from the tonic Greek τόπος-οι.

^{ix} G. K. Gresseth, "The Myth of Alcyone," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 95 (1964): 88–98.

^x Ibid.

^{xi} Both *Aenarete* and *Aegiale* are Greek mythological figures who were jointly designated as mothers of the children of *Aeolus*, the god of the winds. The choice of which of the two would be correct relies upon the specific mythological text being referred to Apollodorus.

^{xii} Apollodorus, *Lib*. 1.7.4.

^{xiii} *Heteroeumena* (Metamorphoses), by Nicander of Colophon, a lost Hellenistic work from the 2nd century BCE is considered the primary source for Ovid's version of the metamorphosis and the couple's transformation into birds, as noted by ancient scholiasts like Pseudo-Probus. Fragments and summaries are preserved in later compilations.

^{xiv} The Wedding of Ceyx (*Epithalamium* of *Ceyx*), an archaic Greek poem attributed to Hesiod from the 8th-7th century BCE, likely provided early mythological context for *Ceyx's* marriage and associations, though fragmentary and possibly about a variant Ceyx figure; Hesiod Catalogue of Women (*Ehoiai*), Fragment 15, an archaic epyllion from the 8th-7th century BCE includes genealogical details about *Alcyone* as daughter of *Aeolus*, influencing the familial and Thessalian aspects in Ovid's tale.

^{xv} Aristophanes, *The Birds*, line 1594: a 5th-century BCE comedy that first attests the term "halcyon days" linked to the bird transformation, providing cultural context for the calm seas motif in Ovid.

^{xvi} Virgil, *Georgics*, Book 1, line 399: a near-contemporary Roman work from 29 BCE alluding to halcyons as birds dear to *Thetis*, without the full narrative but possibly influencing Ovid's poetic treatment of the sea and birds.

xvii Theodorus, in *scholia* (commentaries), likely refers to Hellenistic sources, particularly Nicander of Colophon's *Heteroioumena* (see note 16), quoted, alongside the work of Callimachus, with Ovid adapting these Alexandrian/Pergamene traditions into a longer, historical framework.
The *Mythographus Homericus* and *Ovidian Narrationes* are also key commentators/sources for Ovidian myths found in later commentaries, providing a foundation for understanding Ovid's mythological content.

xviii *Bibliotheca,* 1.7.4.

xix *Fabulae,* 65.

xx Gresseth, "The Myth of Alcyone," 88–98.

xxi *Met,* 11. 746+.

xxii Gresseth, "The Myth of Alcyone," 88–98.

xxiii Ibid. 97.

xxiv *Lib*. 1.7.4.

xxv Plut. *De Sollertia Animalium*, 35-36.

xxvi Ibid. 35, 982F, p. 1900.

xxvii Ibid. 35.

xxviii Ibid. 35.

xxix Ibid. 35.

xxx W. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 18-27.

xxxi *Met*. 11. 592- 649.

xxxii Hesiod, *Theogony* 211- 212, 756- 766; Homer, *Iliad* 14. 231- 232, 16. 672- 683.

xxxiii N. Gaiman, *Sandman* series (1989-1996): *Preludi e notturni & Casa di bambola* (Panini Comics, 2024), (original work published 1989–1990).

xxxiv M. Wellmann, "Alexander von Myndos," *Hermes* 26, no. 4 (1891): 481–506; Wellmann, "Leonidas von Byzanz und Demostratos," *Hermes* 27, no. 3 (1892): 391–405; Wellmann, "Die Schrift des Leonidas von Byzanz Περὶ ἁλιείας," *Hermes* 51, no. 1 (1916): 1–24; M. Schuster, *Untersuchungen zu Plutarchs De sollertia animalium* [Doctoral dissertation, Universität Wien] (1917).

xxxv Aristotle (Aristotle, *Historia Animalium* (Book 5, chapter 8 [542b6 ff.]; Book 9, chapter 3 [616a19 ff.]) is a primary source for information on the halcyon days and the nesting habits of the halcyon/kingfisher. His detailed accounts form the foundation of the scientific tradition that influenced later authors.

xxxvi Aristotle's foundational 4th-century BCE treatise on animal biology details the halcyon's winter nesting, the phenomenon of calm seas for seven days before and after the solstice, and the bird's protective behaviors. This work serves as a major natural history source underpinning Plutarch's account. (Aristotle, *Historia Animalium* (Book 5, chapter 8 [542b6 ff.]; Book 9, chapter 3 [616a19 ff.]).

xxxvii The, 7th-century BCE lyric poet Alcman provides an early poetic context for the halcyon's fidelity, with a fragment alluding to the bird's devotion to its mate. This theme resonates in Plutarch's depiction of the alcyone's loyalty. Alcman, *Fragment 26*. Edmonds numbering.

xxxviii Pliny's *Natural History* echoes Aristotle on the halcyon days and bird behaviors, providing a Roman parallel to Plutarch's sources. Pliny emphasizes meteorological calm and nesting and may have drawn from or influenced similar traditions. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, Book 10, chapter 47 [sections 89-91]; Book 18, chapter 231.

xxxix Aelian's 2nd–3rd-century CE compilation of animal lore closely parallels Plutarch's descriptions of the halcyon's nest and behaviors. Drawing from shared Hellenistic sources such as Aristotle and possibly lost naturalist works, Aelian's text reinforces the scientific traditions present in Plutarch. Aelian, *De Natura Animalium* (On the Characteristics of Animals), Book 1, chapter 36; Book 7, chapter 17.

xl Antigonus of Carystus (Ἀντίγονος ὁ Καρύστιος) (Carystus, 290 BCE –?) was a writer and sculptor, author, among other works, of a *Ἱστοριῶν παραδόξων συναγωγὴ* (*Historiae Mirabiles*: Collection of Marvelous Tales), which consists mostly of excerpts from the *Auscultationes* attributed to Aristotle and from similar works by Callimachus, Timaeus, and other lost authors. *Historia Mirabilium*, gathers marvels of the natural world, including accounts of the halcyon's fidelity and ingenious nesting habits.

xli F. Bonomi, *Vocabolario Etimologico della Lingua Italiana* (2004-2008), https://www.etimo.it/?term=alcione (accessed January 3, 2026).

xlii W. G. Arnott, *Birds in the Ancient World from A to Z* (Routledge, 2007), 14-16; A. E. Brehm, *Vita degli animali* (Armando Curcio Editore, 1964), 2. 1949-1952; H. W. Smolik, *Enciclopedia illustrata degli animali* (Feltrinelli, 1983), 653; L. Figuier, *La vita e i costumi degli animali*. (E. Treves Editore 1873), 2. 139-140.

xliii Giosuè Carducci, *Cèrilo*, XXVI, Odi Barbare, (1883), (G. A. Papini, Ed.). (Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori, 1988).

xliv Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: Histoire des mots* (new ed., with supplement by A. Blanc et al.) (Klincksieck, 2009) (original work published 1968–1980).

xlv See note xlii (N. 42).

xlvi F. P. Fulgentius, *Fulgentius the Mythographer* (L. G. Whitbread, Trans.) (Ohio State University Press, 1970) (original work ca. 500 CE).

xlvii "In the standard MGH edition (lines referring to Ovid: something like "*levia multa... vera latent sub falso tegmine multa*". *Carmen* (poem) 25, *De libris quos legere solebam* ("On the books I used to read"). T. M. Andersson (Trans.), *The Verse of Theodulf of Orléans* (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2014).

xlviii I. Cornelli, "Introduzione alla conferenza di Bianca Venturini: Ovidio nella Divina Commedia," Società Dante Alighieri di Parma, May 2, 2024, https://www.parmaperdante.it/ovidio-nella-divina-commedia/. Accessed on Feb. 16, 2026.

xlix The *cèrilo*, a masculine Italian noun, comes from the Greek κηρύλος and refers to a mythical sea bird, considered the male halcyon: "as the *cèrilo* flies, drawn by the halcyons," as Carducci says. See text.

l See Note 48, Carducci, 1887/1935, vv. 13–16.

li "*nunzio di primavera*", ("herald of spring"), because Carducci interpreted line 4 as εἴαρος, not ἰαρός, shown in bold.

lii F. Conca, "Carducci e Alcmane: Un frammento lirico rivisitato" *Eikasmós* 28 (2017): 361–370.

liii L. Canfora, *Augusto Figlio di Dio*, pp. 324- 327. Ovid *Met.* 15, lines 832- 836.

liv P. Brown, *Agostino d'Ippona*.

lv T. Saunders, "Ovid the Christian," *Nordlit* 18 (2005): 153–163.

lvi P. Boitani, *Ovidio: Storie di metamorfosi*, 12, 83-88.

lvii p. 87, Author, Trans.

lviii A. D. Melville (Trans.), Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book 11, p. 271, lines 732-734.