V

Preliminary Remarks

In chapters II and III we have tried to take some steps towards a definition of the place occupied by the *Metamorphoses* in relation to Graeco-Roman literature in general and to Ovid's production in particular. The present writer does not harbour any illusions that the final word has now been said; owing to the extreme complexity of these problems and to the fact that the *Metamorphoses* are still, at least to classical scholars, living literature and therefore continue to transform themselves there may probably never be any final word. I shall be content if some contours have emerged. The theoretical basis of these attempts is the conviction that all literary works and particularly works like the *Metamorphoses,* while remaining individual and, in a sense, unique entities, changing as long as they live but without losing their identity, are at the same time integral elements of larger systems of a different nature and order which have contributed to form their actual appearance and still do so; the nucleus of Ovidian works is such a system, itself part of Roman literature which is again part of the Graeco-Roman literary tradition. But there is a great number of systems of a different nature, overlapping and subordinated to each other in different ways, like philosophy, religion, history, social life and institutions, *etc.,* into which the *Metamorphoses* are not only historically but also structurally integrated. Language embraces them all and everything depends upon the meaning and value of words and their combinations. And words without context have little or no meaning. The broader and more comprehensive the general context is, the easier it is for us to establish what a word means to us or meant to other people in its particular context. It is not possible to know Latin without knowing Roman categories of thinking and without Roman knowledge. It is a rather paradoxical fact that it is on the one hand very difficult to make oneself think and feel like the Romans and on the other completely impossible to escape from getting a Roman mind when reading Latin. Language commands our thought as well as *vice versa.* In dealing with the interrela-

tion and interdependence between the *Metamorphoses* and their broader and narrower literary context, I have attempted to ascertain the place of the *Metamorphoses* in that extremely complicated political and moral, ideological and economical, religious and secular, literary and cultural system which is Augustanism. In this preface to the second part of the book I may properly assert once again that the aim has not been to explain the *Metamorphoses* in terms of causal antecedents but to move towards a clearer apprehension of the background against which Ovid's readers must have seen the poem. This background, which is not "before" but "contemporary" with the *Metamorphoses,* does not explain their genesis but influences—and in part determines—the experience of them; it is an element of their structure. A full outline of the background would imply an encyclopaedia of everything we know about classical antiquity, viewed in relation with the *Metamorphoses.* Yet I hope that the preceding chapters will prove to be a sufficient illustration how the *Metamorphoses* are constantly influenced by their literary and cultural context.

In the following chapters I shall work on the text of the *Metamorphoses* and analyze the balance of unity and diversity, harmony and dissonance which makes up this multiplex *carmen perpetuum.* I have some doubts on the possibility of separating extrinsic and intrinsic approaches to literary works; the distinction is probably always an intellectual abstraction which severs elements that are complementary to each other. The division into extrinsic and intrinsic approaches, or in other words into context and text may prove as profitable and as unprofitable as that into form and content, which in the present stage of literary studies is universally condemned as wrong and useless in spite of its glorious past as a means of description in literature. The same fate may in due course be reserved for the new dichotomy. As for the *Metamorphoses* the degree of integration between the work itself and its context or changing contexts is so high that it precludes any attempt of completely splitting them up again. Accordingly, in this second part of my work I shall not try to exclude what might be said to be outside the work itself, as *e. g.* its relations to other literary works, nor shall I follow the more doctrinary adherents of the new critical theory of autonomy and try to forget what readers may reasonably be supposed to have known and felt. As I see it, the dissensions about what is relevant for literary interpretation of a certain work and what is not depends upon what is meant by understanding its language. And as the specific language of a work derives its peculiar character and value from its relation to the normal or conventional language of its genre, of the period to which it belongs, and of the people, who have it, among other

works, as part of their literary legacy, we cannot separate the work from its linguistic environment and treat it as if it were an isolated monument; isolation will maim or kill it. And as the study of language ultimately involves the study of the whole culture and civilization of which it is the means of communication—and *vice versa,* it might be added—nothing within that culture can be ruled out *prima facie* as irrelevant. The degree of relevance may vary from almost nothing to almost everything but the more we know about people the better can we understand the language they speak or spoke. The background is never only background but always an essential part of the picture. There is no such thing as a literary work in itself.

The analysis will start from the beginning of the poem, with Book I. After that two different sequences will be analyzed, one which has the formal unity of a narrative frame, and another which is tied together by the story of Troy. In the Conclusion I shall consider whether the *Metamorphoses* were meant just to entertain their readers—as they certainly do—or were designed to have some kind of deeper significance and communicate certain attitudes to problems of human life. We have seen how Ovid in the *Ars* explicitly accepted the principle that poetry should be useful but did so with his tongue in his cheek; and yet, in the disguise of a cynical professor of love, he teaches the importance of being honest in love. This morale, based as it is not upon social convention but upon some kind of ethical conviction, is far from the usual utilitarian Augustan double morality mainly because it implies an ideal of equality between the two sexes. Only Ovid attaches importance to the equal enjoyment and satisfaction of both parties in a free love relationship. This fact may very well have surprised ancient more than modern readers, who normally—at least intellectually—adhere to the idea of the equality of the sexes. This being so we should not exclude in advance the possibility that the *Metamorphoses* may prove to be designed in a way which makes them something more than mere entertainment, just like the *Ars* is more than an elegant and amusing *tour de force.* There may after all be a certain amount of *utile* in this poem beneath the sweet surface.

CHANGING FORMS

STUDIES IN THE METAMORPHOSES OF OVID

BY

OTTO STEEN DUE