CHAPTER VI

THE PATHOS OF LOVE: I

WE now reach the very heart of the *Metamorphoses*: the third section (VI, 401–XI end) is not only the longest but, obviously, the most complete and finished of the poem. Here Ovid was engaged on his preferred theme, amatory *pathos*, and here at last metamorphosis became an intrinsic part of his plot. It is no more with the incongruities of divine behaviour but with the anguish of human passion that he is concerned. His human beings no longer stand against comic or vengeful gods but against the far more impersonal and enigmatic forces of nature. He is no longer dealing with the conventional mythology of divine comedy or divine vengeance but with the modernized and 'humanized' mythology of neoteric and Alexandrian poetry, with types and situations whose origin can in most cases be traced to Euripides.

This is at least true of the dominant element of the section: the five long episodes of amatory catastrophe (the *Tereus–Philomela*, *Scylla*, *Byblis*, *Myrrha* and *Ceyx–Alcyone*). But these, like the major episodes of the previous section, are arranged around a massive central panel of quite different style (VIII, 260–IX, 272), and are contrasted with equally different subsidiary episodes (miracles of death and resurrection, miracles of reward for piety and punishment for sacrilege and folly). The passion depicted in the major episodes is (with one crucial exception) degrading or catastrophic: metamorphosis comes to it as sheer release from the pain of human existence. But the deification of Hercules that climactically concludes the epic central panel shows human passion converted into divine happiness. Hercules does not become an animal but a god. The subsidiary episodes (Myrmidons, Iphis, Pygmalion) also reverse the trend of the dominant amatory tales:

here ants become men, a statue becomes a living woman, a girl becomes a virile husband. Metamorphosis is human, not animal; up, not down. The way is prepared for the triumphant apotheoses of the last part—Aeneas, Romulus, and Caesar.

But here also lies the problem or mystery of this section of the poem. Ovid's imagination was not primarily on the side of Hercules or the great Romans to come. It is in the neoteric episodes far more than in his epic panel or in his preparations for an Augustan finale that he is most himself and most successful. There is in fact a decided incongruity between his obvious plan (the designed shape of his *carmen perpetuum*) and his actual execution of it. He took pleasure in telling the stories of Iphis and Pygmalion—even the pious idyll of Philemon and Baucis—but he certainly did not enjoy the heroics of his *Meleager* and *Hercules*. It is the climactic *Ceyx–Alcyone* that really shows what he could do. There can be little doubt that if he had been left to himself, if by some miracle he had been relieved of his Augustan responsibilities, he would have given a very different course to his perpetual song. Nevertheless, this section in its entirety (its symmetries and contrasts, its restless progression of motifs) is an exceedingly complicated work of art that well repays careful study. We can hardly embrace all its subtleties in a diagram but we can at least show something of its formal structure (plan on p. 168).

There are here five stories of amatory *pathos* (*Tereus–Philomela*, *Scylla*, *Byblis*, *Myrrha*, *Ceyx–Alcyone*) varying from 151 lines (*Scylla*) to 339 (*Ceyx–Alcyone*) with a median length of about 240 (*Byblis*, 219; *Myrrha*, 205; *Tereus–Philomela*, 273). The only other episodes of equivalent length are those of Cephalus and Procris (208 lines) and the epic *Meleager* (287 lines) and *Hercules* (272 lines). The two latter are prolonged by their martial not their amatory content, and obviously fit the generally *epic* category of the central panel: they thus correspond to the Perseus–Phineus panel of Books IV–V. The *Cephalus–Procris*, though certainly a story of erotic misadventure, is quite different from the type represented by *Philomela*, *Byblis*, *Myrrha*, etc. There is no metamorphosis

	Episodes of Amatory Pathos	*Contrast Episodes* / *Miracles in an Amatory Frame*	*Central Panel*
Bk. VI			
401–674	*Philomela–Procne–Tereus*		
	(Introductory 401–23)		
675–721	(Transition to Argonauts: Pandion, Cephalus, Procris, Orithyia–Boreas)		
Bk. VII			
1–158	Medea frame	Medea (love, winning the fleece)	
159–296		Human miracles: Aeson (the successful miracle of rejuvenation)	
297–349		Daughters of Pelias (the false and treacherous rejuvenation)	
350–403		Medea (wanderings)	
404–504	Cephalus frame	Theseus–Aegeus–Minos–Aeacus–Cephalus (Aegina)	
505–613		Divine miracles: Pestilentia (men destroyed by plague)	
614–660		Myrmidons (men created out of ants)	
661–868		Cephalus and Procris (Amatory *Pathos* without metamorphosis)	
Bk. VIII			
1–151	*Scylla*		
152–182	(Cretan interlude: Minotaur, Ariadne)		
183–235		Daedalus–Icarus (Paternal Grief)	
236–259		(Perdix)	
260–546			MELEAGER–ALTHAEA
547–615			(Interlude: Achelous, etc.)
616–724			Theodicy I (Philemon–Baucis)
725–878		Central Panel	Theodicy II (Erysichthon)
878–883			(Interlude: Achelous, etc.)
Bk. IX			
1–272			HERCULES–DEIANIRA–DEIFICATION
273–323		(Galanthis)	
324–446		Dryope (Maternal Grief) (Iolaus, Callirhoes filii 394–446)	
447–665	*Byblis*		
666–797	Miracles of Piety	Iphis	
Bk. X			
1–77		Amatory insets (Homosexual): Orpheus–Eurydice (Separation from wife: rejection of women)	
78–105		Arbores, etc.	
106–154		Cyparissus — GODS AND BOYS	
155–161		Ganymede	
162–242		Hyacinthus (Cerastae–Propoetides, 220–42)	
243–297		Pygmalion	
298–502	*Myrrha*		
503–559	Miracles of Impiety	Amatory insets (Heterosexual): Adonis — GODDESS AND BOY	
560–707		Atalanta	
708–738		Death of Adonis — GODDESS AND BOY	
Bk. XI			
1–84		Death of Orpheus (reunion with wife)	
85–193		Midas	
194–409		Peleus–Thetis (End pieces for *Ceyx–Alcyone*)	
410–748	*Ceyx–Alcyone*		
749–795		Aesacus (End pieces for *Ceyx–Alcyone*)	

of the major characters (there is only the inserted metamorphosis of the dog and his prey) and the catastrophe is survived and described by the lover, Cephalus.

In contrast, the five tales just mentioned are obviously similar in content and mood: all describe extreme instances of erotic passion; all terminate in catastrophe and metamorphosis; all represent the metamorphosis as the solution and natural sequel of the catastrophe. But there is also much overlap of motif (as the *Cephalus–Procris* illustrates): each of the subsidiary or contrast episodes either possesses amatory-pathetic characteristics of its own or is framed within another tale that possesses them. In the first half of the section, Medea dominates one series of tales; Cephalus another. In the second half (after the central panel), Orpheus and Venus perform a similar function: they not only engage themselves in amatory misadventures; they introduce other amatory episodes (the paederastic series; the love-affair of Atalanta and Hippomenes). Nevertheless all these subsidiary tales of love are clearly distinct from both the dominant five and the central epic panel: they are not only shorter but quite different in amatory content. Neither Medea nor Cephalus–Procris undergoes metamorphosis (Medea's love-story is also elliptically curtailed); the loves of the gods and of Venus in the latter half of the section have little in common with the human passions of Philomela, Scylla, Alcyone, etc., while Atalanta's amour is quite devoid of *pathos* (the metamorphosis is simply punishment for her sacrilege). The difference is also one of style and tone. Ovid always distinguishes between *major* and *minor*, between dominant and subsidiary episodes. The main motif of the section is tragic or catastrophic *pathos* (though, as we shall see, the final effect is not pathetic). The minor tales are much less serious or, conversely, much more moral and pious: without them, the pathological and criminal *amores* of the big scenes would only oppress, if not overwhelm, the rapid reader for whom Ovid designed his *carmen perpetuum*. We must now study each group of episodes (the minor, the major and the central panel) by itself. But we must also bear in mind that it is the whole

(the symmetrical whole) that finally counts and puts everything in proper proportion.

I (THE MINOR, CONTRAST EPISODES)

It is perhaps advisable to discuss the minor or 'contrast' stories before embarking on the major elements—the central panel and the five principal amatory episodes. Here the obvious line of demarcation is fixed by the panel:

Part I { (*a*) Medea frame (Aeson, Daughters of Pelias)
(*b*) Cephalus–Aeacus frame (Pestilence, Myrmidons)
(Daedalus–Icarus)
CENTRAL PANEL
(Dryope)
Part II { (*c*) Orpheus frame with loves of boys and gods
(Miracles in reward of Piety: Iphis, Pygmalion)
(*d*) Venus–Adonis frame, love of boy by goddess
(Miracles of Punishment: Atalanta, Midas)

Parts I and II are roughly equal in length though the *entire* second half of the whole section (IX, 273–XI end) exceeds the first (VI, 401–VIII, 259). Also the separate parts of both I and II (*a*, *b*, *c*, *d*) are approximately equal (a = 450 lines; b = 465 lines; c = 429 lines; d = 429 lines). More important, I, II and *a*, *b*, *c*, *d* obviously correspond in a contrapuntal way. The magical *rejuvenation* and treacherous *pseudo-rejuvenation* of *a* (Aeson, Pelias) chiastically correspond to the divinely motivated *destruction* and *resurrection* of *b* (Pestilence, Myrmidons). The beneficent Miracles of *c* (Iphis, Pygmalion) correspond to the punitive Miracles of *d* (Atalanta, Midas). And so also with the amatory motifs: the fierce and baleful Medea (*a*) is opposed to the devoted and pathetic Procris (*b*); the boy-love of the *gods* in *c* to the boy-love (Adonis) of the *goddess* (Venus) in *d*. Finally there is an obvious correspondence of I and II: each describes a miraculous reversal or a disastrous contretemps of the metamorphosis process at work in the five major amatory episodes. The Aegina pestilence and the deceitful murder of Pelias are as much interruptions of the usual man-to-animal

sequence as are the rejuvenation of Aeson and the humanization of the ants. The same is true of the miracles of Pygmalion and Iphis (good) or of Atalanta and Midas (bad). They have nothing to do with that pathetic collapse of humanity which in the great amatory tales makes metamorphosis the only alternative to catastrophe.

But there is much more here than counterpoint or symmetry. Ovid's *carmen perpetuum* is also proceeding on its evolutionary way. The ambivalent magic of Medea is succeeded by the divine events that happened to Aeacus at Aegina where the wrath of Juno's pestilence is countered by the beneficence of Jupiter's re-population of the country out of ants. This prepares us for the explicit theodicy and piety of the central panel where the sceptic Pirithous (he refuses to believe that the gods can produce meta-morphoses) is refuted by the pious Lelex: the tales of Philemon–Baucis and Erysichthon are deliberately introduced as instances of divine might and justice; they show us that the gods have power to reward piety and punish impious arrogance. These two theo-dicies then reinforce (as we shall see) the mood of the epic episodes (Meleager, Hercules) between which they are inserted: Meleager died for his own sin as well as by Althaea's fury, but the good Hercules will be deified despite the destructive jealousy of Deianira. We are thus put in a mood to appreciate the miraculous responses of Isis, Venus and Apollo to the piety of Iphis and Pygmalion or to the folly of Atalanta and Midas. What we may call the pious or moralistic theme thus grows in prominence through these episodes and presents an obvious contrast to the ambivalent theology of the great amatory tales.

But, as we have just seen, the moral theme is also mixed with an amatory one. Thus there is a further counterpoint at work. Medea and Procris or Orpheus and Venus (and the *amores* associ-ated with them) are contrasted with both the five central amatory tales and the subsidiary miracles and theodicies. Nor must we think of contrast only: all phases of the *carmen perpetuum* in fact interfuse as one motif suggests, reinforces or counters another. The

contrapuntal symmetry of the whole makes a brilliant tapestry of moods in transition.

Medea is introduced *via* the Argonauts. Two of these, the winged Zetes and Calais, are children of the North Wind Boreas by Orithyia, daughter of Erechtheus, successor of Pandion as king of Athens. It had been Pandion's daughters, Procne and Philomela, whom Thracian Tereus had so mistreated. Hence the genealogical transition from the Tereus–Philomela episode to the Argonauts (end of Book VI) and Medea. Ovid is here paying some lip-service to history: his *carmen perpetuum* is getting well into the Heroic Age. But it is also plain that this transition is a transparently specious method of introducing Medea at the exact point where Ovid needs her. He assuredly does not want to retell her tragedy (the child-killing motif of the *Tereus–Philomela* would hardly bear immediate repetition) but he wants to reproduce both the classical love monologue with which she was associated (Apollonius and Euripides had established her undisputed right to it) and the magic by which she could rejuvenate as well as kill. She was brought in, in other words, to play the double role of inaugurating the primary theme of amatory passion (original virtue overcome by erotic impulse) and the subsidiary theme of counter-metamorphosis (the usual course of nature turned back so that the old can become young; the animal, human; the image, the reality it reflects).

Medea's soliloquy in VII, 11–71 strikes a quite new note in the poem. We have already witnessed the *amores* of such women as Thisbe, Salmacis and Leucothoe and such gods as Apollo, Jupiter and Pluto. The terrible passion of Tereus has just preceded. But, as yet, we have had no true account of the genesis of love and certainly not any of woman's love. Thisbe had succumbed to love before her story had really begun, and Leucothoe, Salmacis and Echo had no need to mark the beginning of the passion that overmastered them. Daphne, Io, Proserpina and Philomela were, of course, only reluctant victims of a male *eros* that hardly required psychological description. It is with Medea that the famous duel of

amor and *pudor* enters the *Metamorphoses* (the *pudor–amor* conflict of Jupiter had been only by-play) and points the way for Scylla, Byblis, Myrrha and Atalanta. Ovid obviously wanted to present the classic or standard amatory *suasoria* (the soliloquy in which the girl analyses her *eros* and persuades herself to yield to it) before introducing the individual *variations* of it that were to come later on. Since he had no intention of retelling Medea's whole story, he was all the freer to isolate her *suasoria*. Nor did he wish, at just this juncture, to over-emphasize the pathetic or tragic note (the *Tereus–Philomela* had just preceded); hence the rather facile ingenuity of the monologue and the unmistakable humour of its Virgilian parody (see pp. 59–62 above).

We need not dwell on the Aeson and Pelias episodes (the first set of 'miracles' or 'counter-metamorphoses'). The fact that even Medea is moved by Jason's *pietas* toward his father (VII, 169–70)—improbable as this may seem—gives Aeson's rejuvenation a moral colour that is obviously laid on for contrast with the impious pseudo-rejuvenation and murder of Pelias. The rather lengthy account of Medea's wanderings (VII, 350–403) that closes the sub-section (I. *a*) is quite uninspired. It at least finishes off this part of the poem and by its elliptical allusions to the Euripidean Medea (VII, 396–7),

> Sanguine natorum perfunditur inpius ensis,
> ultaque se male mater Iasonis effugit arma
>
> *and when the life*
> *Of her own sons had stained her lawless knife,*
> *Unchilded but avenged, in wholesome dread*
> *Of Jason's sword, the inhuman mother fled,*

suggests (once more) the major motif of the whole section—the *libido* that can so quickly and easily overcome all ethical restraint.

The Aeacus–Cephalus sub-section that begins at VII, 404 (I. *b*) is dominated by a very different kind of love and by a new type of 'miracle' or counter-metamorphosis. Reversing the plan of the Medea sub-section, it presents the *Miracles* first, in a thoroughly

heroic and moral setting (the noble old Aeacus, the beneficent Theseus, the loyalty of Aegina to Athens) and the love story only at the end.

The emphasis is now not on an evil woman and her witchcraft, but on heroes (Theseus, Aeacus, Cephalus) of both piety and true nobility of feeling. Amatory jealousy is no longer an unnatural and amoral perversion (as in Medea) but the tragic affliction of a love that even in death retains its power and purity. Furthermore, the love itself is not a present passion but a sad and beautiful memory. It increases the human interest without diminishing the heroic status of the lover.

This is why Ovid deals so cavalierly with the usual order of his myths. In Apollodorus (III, 193–9) the story of Procne and Philomela (Pandion's daughters) is immediately followed by stories of the next generation, the grandchildren of Pandion or children of Erechtheus (Procris and Orithyia). But Ovid only mentions Orithyia at the end of Book VI (right after the Tereus–Philomela story) and puts the story of Procris at the end of Book VII after both the Medea section and Aeacus' stories of the Pestilence and the Myrmidons. His arrangement, as Alfred Rohde has seen,[1] is an aesthetic one, designed to set the Medea episodes against the Cephalus–Aeacus tales and to use the Cephalus–Procris story as the climax of Book VII. But it is also much more than this: it is part of the elaborate symmetry and counterpoint of his whole poem.

The Athenian theme had been introduced with Pandion (VI, 421). Then after telling the story of Pandion's daughters, Procne and Philomela, Ovid had momentarily reverted to Athens so as to mention Pandion's successor, Erechtheus, and Erechtheus' children (the daughters Orithyia and Procris and their respective husbands, Boreas and Cephalus). But Athens was immediately swept out of sight by Medea. Then Medea herself takes Ovid back to Athens (VII, 402 ff.) when she finds an asylum there with a king of another generation, Aegeus. Her plot against Aegeus' son

[1] Rohde, pp. 30–3. It is surely obvious that Ovid is not here *primarily* concerned with *Athens* any more than he was with *Thebes* in Section II. See p. 128 above.

(Theseus) not only introduces that hero but provides a natural transition to the Athenian alliance with Aegina. Theseus is only a transitional figure: he is brought in merely to suggest the type of beneficent hero that is later to be more fully depicted by Hercules and his Roman successors. His eulogy (VII, 433–50) is a bare catalogue of his great deeds, but it still sounds the note of beneficent heroism: the contrast with Medea, whose malice and passion he has just escaped, is made very evident. Ovid then uses the device (almost certainly his own invention) of Cephalus' embassy to Aegina in order to unite Cephalus' love story with the Aeginetan 'miracles' (Pestilence, Myrmidons) that Aeacus (the king of Aegina) tells. He thus invests both narratives with the *ethos* of their heroic narrators. The moment is historically placed: Athens needs Aegina as an ally against Minos; Minos, in fact, is represented as leaving Aegina in bitter disillusion (since his own proposal for an alliance against Athens has been rejected) just before the Athenian legation of Cephalus can arrive (VII, 490–3):

> Classis ab Oenopiis etiamnum Lyctia muris
> spectari poterat, cum pleno concita velo
> Attica puppis adest in portusque intrat amicos,
> quae Cephalum patriaeque simul mandata ferebat.
>
> *Aegina's walls still held his fleet in view,*
> *When into port with sails full set there flew*
> *An Attic ship, with Cephalus, who bore*
> *His country's greetings to the friendly shore.*

Aeacus and Cephalus are aged heroes who have each undergone a great sorrow. But these sorrows are mitigated by their distance in time and their sequels: the terrible Aegina pestilence was overcome by the metamorphosis of the ant-men; the tragedy of Procris' death by her final awareness of Cephalus' fidelity. In both the metamorphosis and the fidelity we see the very reverse of Medea's witchery and passion, i.e. the miracle that comes to true piety and the love that only noble character can feel.

Though Aeacus attributes the Aegina pestilence (VII, 503–613) to

Juno, he actually minimizes its divine origin and tells his tale in a manner that recalls the didactic plague passages of Virgil, Lucretius or Thucydides. But the total effect is not really didactic and scientific or, as in Virgil, pathetic and sombre. Ovid emphasizes only the paradoxical suddenness and topsy-turviness of the plague: the animals forget their old enemies; the suppliant father dies with the incense still in his hand. It is really a miracle that prepares us for the succeeding miracle of the ant-men. The population of Aegina is lost almost as miraculously as it is recovered. Aeacus himself is the unexpected victim as well as the unexpected beneficiary of divine attention. He lives in a world that has been paradoxically destroyed and re-created.

The stage is thus set for the much more pathetic paradox of loss and recovery in the Cephalus–Procris story.[1] What distinguishes this story, however, from the five major stories of amatory *pathos* is its dignity and restraint. Cephalus the narrator is a true gentleman who tries to glorify and excuse his dead wife by taking on himself the major share of blame. The impression that his story conveys is not so much one of violent emotion and pathos as of respect and continuing affection. The love of which he tells was strong enough to overcome a terrible misunderstanding and to outlast even death. But Cephalus is bereaved, not prostrated: his grief is really a romantic halo that gives him colour and piquancy without in any way diminishing his heroic status. He is both a lover and a gentleman.

Viktor Pöschl[2] is surely correct when he says that what distinguishes Ovid from his sources for this episode is his emphasis on the mutual love of Cephalus and Procris. All the mishaps of the pair come from this single fact. The versions of Hyginus, Pherecydes, Nicander and Apollodorus, as well as Ovid's prior elegiac version of part of the story (the error and death of Procris), do not do this at all. Probably Ovid had a source something like the Hyginus fable (189) or, save for the ending, like Nicander. We find a similar treatment of the same theme in Ariosto's *Orlando*.

[1] See Appendix, pp. 410–13. [2] See Appendix, p. 410.

In Hyginus and Nicander, the parallelism between Procris and Cephalus is almost exact and there is no question about the guilt of either. Cephalus was seduced by the dawn goddess, Aurora; whether he actually submitted to (Nicander) or resisted (Hyginus) her advances, he was at any rate prepared by them to suspect the virtue of his Procris. If *he* could fall or at least be tempted, what about her? He thus conceived the idea of testing her fidelity by arousing her cupidity. He disguised himself (or was disguised by Aurora) and deliberately bribed her to be unfaithful to her supposedly distant husband. He then 'threw off the mask' or resumed his natural form, thus earning a costly triumph over his 'unfaithful' Procris. She thereupon left him and her own country to pass the time with either Minos (Nicander, Apollodorus) or Diana (Hyginus). At length, however, she returned bringing with her the marvellous dog and spear. She could now turn the tables on Cephalus. Disguised as a young hunter, she joined him in the chase and of course easily excelled him. Nothing could beat the dog and spear. They now naturally aroused his own cupidity: in order to possess them he consented to be seduced (homosexually) by the apparently male Procris. But this time discovery led to reunion. Each spouse was now, so to speak, 'even' with the other. Yet jealousy was once again to prove the couple's undoing: Procris heard of Cephalus' addresses to a *Nephele* (cloud) or breeze (Aura) and foolishly supposed the 'Cloud' or 'Breeze' to be a woman. She tracked him to the woods and watched him from the bushes. When they moved, he mistook her for a deer and so killed her with her own gift, the unerring spear.

What Ovid did to his sources is thus clear enough[1] even though we cannot establish all the differences of detail. Ovid's Cephalus greatly tones down the guilt of Procris: she merely wavers at his reiterated bribes; she does not actually submit (VII, 740–1):

> Muneraque augendo tandem dubitare coegi.
> Exclamo, male fictor, 'adest, male fictus adulter!'

[1] See Appendix, pp. 410–13.

By adding gift to gift, I made her hesitate. Then, poor dissembler, I exclaim: 'He's here, your unfeigned-lover's here!'

On the other hand, his repentance and desire to recover his lost bride are wholly animated by love (VII, 747–50):

Tum mihi deserto violentior ignis ad ossa
pervenit: orabam veniam et peccasse fatebar
et potuisse datis simili succumbere culpae
me quoque muneribus, si munera tanta darentur.

Left thus, I felt my love with fiercer flame
Burn to the bone, and soon repentance came.
I owned my fault, confessed I might have made
Like trespass, if by like temptations swayed.

Later on in the story Procris' shameful proposal is deliberately obscured and glossed over. Their renewed love is said to be as strong and beautiful as ever (VII, 800):

Mutua cura duos et amor socialis habebat.

It is, indeed, this mutual love that makes Procris, as Cephalus before her, so susceptible to the promptings of jealousy. Yet she is not the impetuous, uncontrolled Procris of the *Ars Amatoria*. She hesitates to believe the report of his infidelity and defers all action to the following day. The episode ends in a death-scene that shows once again the recovered confidence of each in the faithfulness of the other (VII, 860–2):

Dumque aliquid spectare potest, me spectat et in me
infelicem animam nostroque exhalat in ore;
sed vultu meliore mori secura videtur.

yet looked at me while sight remained;
Then on my lips her luckless life was spent,
But yet she smiled, and seemed to die content.

Thus Pöschl is quite right[1] when he says that Ovid has trans-

[1] See Appendix, p. 410.

formed a *novella*, a game of masks and transformations and magical devices, into a true love story. The sheer cupidity of Nicander's characters as well as their overt eroticism (the heterosexual and homosexual adulteries) are eliminated or greatly toned down. In Ovid their jealousy is a form of love; it is the passion that tries to destroy, even though it does not succeed in destroying, the mutuality on which it insists. He has, in short, wholly changed the motivation. He shows us how Aurora instils the fatal doubt in Cephalus by playing on the very source of his confidence (VII, 716–19):

facies aetasque iubebat
credere adulterium, prohibebant credere mores;
sed tamen afueram, sed et haec erat, unde redibam,
criminis exemplum, sed cuncta timemus amantes!

My wife, whose youth and beauty gave some cause
For question—was she false to wedlock's laws?
And though her virtue gave this thought the lie,
An absent lover, full of fears, was I;
And she from whom I took my homeward way
Herself was instance how a wife could stray.

He shows the fatal urge that pushes Cephalus toward his own ruin, making him redouble the temptation (VII, 738–9):

non sum contentus et in mea pugno
vulnera!

To wound myself, I pressed the fight anew.

He shows the repentance of Cephalus (*et peccasse fatebar*, etc.) and he finally shows the same insidious suspicion at work upon Procris (826 ff.). Here each tries to wound 'the thing it loves'; indeed the 'poetic justice' of Procris' death from her own gift symbolizes the self-destructiveness of love: it destroys its own object and wounds its very self.

But Pöschl has not correctly appreciated the point of view of the narrating Cephalus. What Cephalus tells is not really the true

or full story but an edited version of it, a version chastened and corrected by his respect for Procris' memory and by his continuing devotion. For Ovid knew, and knew that Cephalus knew, the actual vengeance of Procris that we find in Hyginus and Nicander. His story starts with the natural curiosity of Aeacus' son, Phocus. Phocus asks about the origin of Cephalus' wonderful spear (*quis tanti muneris auctor?*). His curiosity cannot, however, be satisfied, as Ovid immediately indicates (VII, 687–8):

> Quae patitur pudor, ille [i.e. Cephalus] refert et cetera narrat;
> qua tulerit mercede, silet.[1]
>
> *And Cephalus answered truly all the rest,*
> *But what the weapon cost him, shame suppressed.*

Cephalus is ashamed to tell the true price for which he got or thought to get the spear; i.e. his compliance with the disguised Procris' homosexual request. In the ensuing narrative he suggests but does not explicitly say the same thing (VII, 751–2):

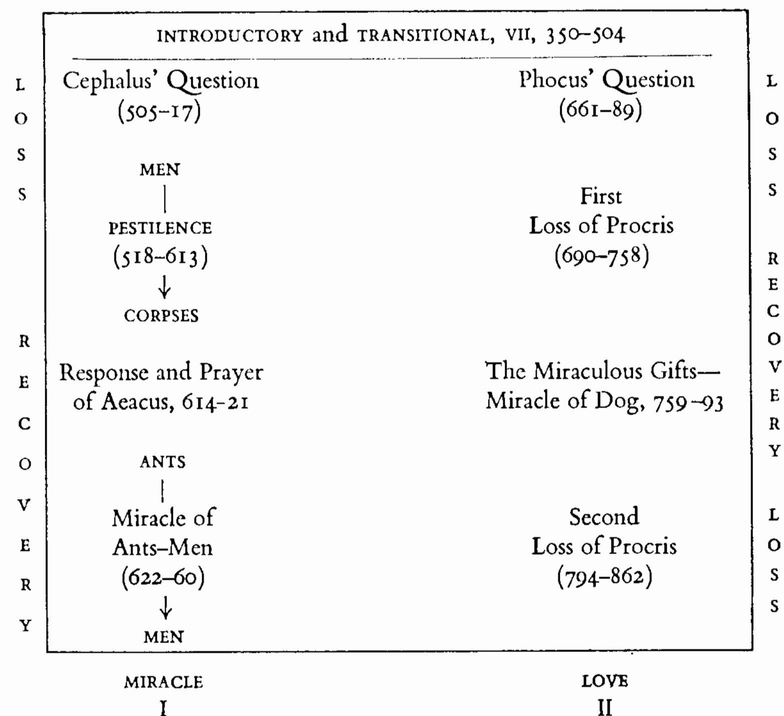
> Hoc mihi confesso [i.e. after Cephalus has confessed his own fault] laesum prius ulta [i.e. Procris] pudorem,
> redditur et dulces concorditer exigit annos.
>
> *She first avenged the wound her honour bore;*
> *Then, sweetly reconciled, was mine once more.*

The phrase *laesum prius ulta pudorem* can (as the narrating Cephalus intends) be taken as a reference to Cephalus' pathetic apology for his past mistrust: this was sufficient 'vengeance' for Procris. But in fact the terms 'vengeance' and 'price' (*merces*) can only refer to the indecent proposal we actually find in Hyginus and Nicander. Cephalus lightly passes over both Procris' and his own shame. So too Procris' 'hesitation' (when first pressed by the disguised Cephalus) is only the generous meiosis of the narrating Cephalus who is above all concerned to defend Procris' memory

[1] Here I follow the reading of the MSS. Ne[2] and the Heinsius MSS. (cf. Magnus, *ad loc.*) but it was also known to the scribes of the MSS. M and F (see Magnus' apparatus) at least in part.

and the dignity of his own grief. The harsh cupidity and indecency of Ovid's sources are softened not so much by Ovid speaking *in propria persona* as by his narrator, Cephalus.[1]

The plan of the whole Aeacus–Cephalus sequence (VII, 404–868) should now be clear. Its symmetry can be indicated in a diagram:



each of the two parts of the episode has a similar structure.[2] Each, first of all, is introduced by a question: Cephalus misses and so asks about the old faces he had once known on his former visit to Aegina (515–16); Phocus (Aeacus' son) wants to know the

[1] On the significance of the *Procris–Cephalus* for Ovid's whole conception of love, see ch. VII below (pp. 268–73).

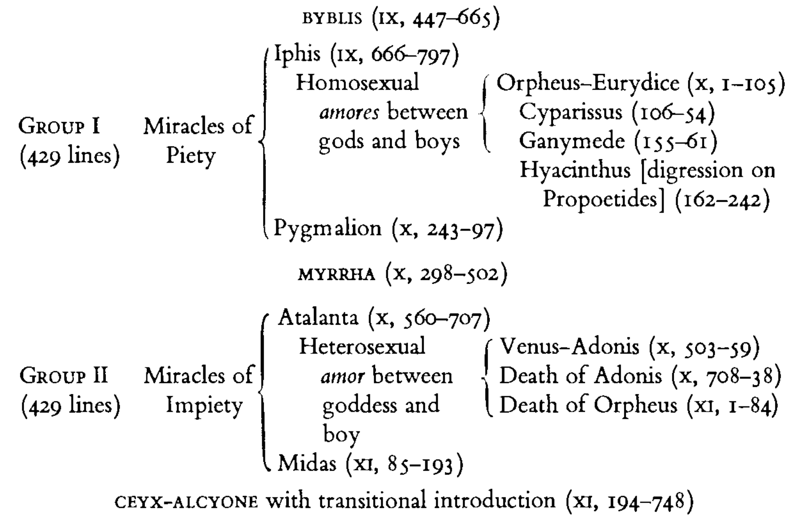
[2] Note also that *this* structure (Aeacus, Cephalus–Procris) corresponds chiastically to the similarly balanced structure of VI, 675–VII, 349 (Medea, Aeson, Pelias) with the sequence *Love* (Medea, VII, 1–158) + *Miracle* (Aeson, Peliades, VII, 159–349).

story of Cephalus' wonderful spear (685–6). Each subject of course arouses a bitter recollection (*Aeacus ingemuit*, 517; *lacrimis fatur* [Cephalus] *obortis*, 689). In each case the thing observed (the spear, the replacement of the population of Aegina) has been gained at the cost of a terrible loss. In each part two complete episodes (the Pestilence and the Miracle of the Ant-Men; the two separations of the lovers, by Cephalus' folly and Procris' death) are joined by an intervening section (the grief and prayer of Aeacus; the miraculous spear and dog) that prepares the final dénouement (the new population of Aegina; Procris' death by the magic spear). But the balance is one of difference as well as of similarity: the metamorphosis is integral to the Myrmidon episode; it is really quite extraneous to the love story. Ovid, however, altered his source (Nicander) to centre the metamorphosis (petrifaction of the dog and his prey) between the two sections of the love story, and thus to establish the symmetry just noticed.[1] The effect of the whole plan is to relate Aeacus and Cephalus (each is a hero with a terrible past: each has a present tangible reminder of this past), to co-ordinate the love story with the rather impersonal *Pestilence–Myrmidons*, and to merge, as it were, two quite different topics and atmospheres in one ensemble.

The contrast-episodes that come after the central panel (see diagram, p. 170) are dissimilar in both structure and tone to the Medea–Cephalus sequence (the whole of Book VII) just considered. The most obvious difference is that they are not concentrated in one book but are instead spread over three books (IX–XI) and are inserted between three major *pathos*-episodes (Byblis, Myrrha, Ceyx–Alcyone). But just like the contrast-episodes of Book VII, they fall into two groups or ensembles, each of exactly the same length (429 lines). It is useful at this point to reproduce (in somewhat greater detail) the plan of their arrangement.

Here, just as in Book VII, there are two sets of miracles (favourable and unfavourable) which belong to two quite different frames (Orpheus and Venus) that contain two different kinds of

[1] See Appendix, p. 413.



episodes: homosexual *v.* heterosexual love. But the arrangements are rather different. In Book VII the Medea and Aeacus–Cephalus frames are tight and inclusive; in Books IX–XI the miracles (Iphis, Pygmalion, Atalanta, Midas) stand quite outside the inserted boy-god or boy-goddess affairs and are in an altogether different mood. Furthermore, the links between the tales are of no special significance to the ensembles: the story of Myrrha is obviously quite different from either the Pygmalion or the Venus–Adonis episodes, but all three are put in the mouth of Orpheus. Again Orpheus is also a link between each of the two large groups, since his love story is introduced at X, 1 and his death is not related until XI, 1. But the separation of his love and death scenes is really quite appropriate since, as a result of his parting with Eurydice (related in X, 1 ff.), he eschews women and turns to men (X, 79–80) while, as a result of his death, he rejoins his Eurydice again. Thus each part of his career fits the proper amatory group (homosexual and heterosexual loves). In fact, therefore, the long Myrrha episode effectively separates these contrast-episodes (i.e. all those after the central panel) into two distinct groups.

The general design of both groups really goes back to the

'theodicies' of the central panel (which we shall discuss later). Here Ovid had introduced clear-cut instances of crime or virtue each accompanied by an equally clear-cut reward from the gods. This was a very different thing from the moral ambiguity of his major amatory episodes or his contrast-episodes in Book VII. (There is certainly no moral simplicity in the Cephalus–Procris story.) But this kind of moral simplicity, once it had been established in the central panel, was continued in the two groups with which we are now concerned. Iphis and Pygmalion are pious and innocent and get their reward; Atalanta and Midas are ungrateful and impious and get their punishment. In each case the divine action is just and the miracle is clear-cut. Furthermore, in each case, the violent and pathological note—the sheer passion—of the *Byblis*, *Myrrha*, *Ceyx*, etc. is quite absent: neither Atalanta nor Midas is a tragic figure. The boy-god episodes and the *Venus–Adonis* are, of course, quite different from the four 'miracle' stories. Here we have a series of pretty tales in which the emotion is all one way and not particularly intense: the gods are never involved in passion to anything like the degree of the human characters. And the Orpheus story is obviously not a serious composition.

We need not, in fact, linger over these minor love tales. Ovid's imitation of Virgil's *Orpheus* (*Georgics* IV) is clearly meant to amuse.[1] He had no intention of rivalling Virgil's *ethos* or *pathos*. What he wrote was parody and comedy, not tragedy. Orpheus' long speech to Pluto and Proserpina (x, 17–39) is the kind of amusing *suasoria* that Ovid thoroughly enjoyed. Orpheus explains that he has not come on a sight-seeing tour (*non huc ut opaca viderem | Tartara descendi*) and that he wants Eurydice only as a 'temporary loan' (*pro munere poscimus usum*). The effect of his speech is of course comically exaggerated (the vultures stop eating Tityus' liver, the Danaids stop filling their urns, etc.). Eurydice comes with a limp, for her wound is quite recent. Ovid even corrects

[1] Compare this with Ovid's imitation of Virgil's *Achaemenides*; discussion on pp. 73–4, 290.

Virgil and denies that she made any complaint about her lover's fatal glance (*quid enim nisi se quereretur amatam?*). Finally Orpheus' numbed sensibility after the tragedy is likened to the petrifaction of three persons whom Ovid cannot resist mentioning at this point.

All this is an appropriately frivolous introduction to the story of the trees that followed Orpheus, among which of course were Attis and Cyparissus. The latter's story is thus told by Ovid *in propria persona*, but Ganymede's (since he was not a tree) is put in the mouth of Orpheus. The paederastic theme (the love of boys and gods) is then continued through the pretty but jejune Hyacinthus episode. But the corresponding heterosexual, or Venus–Adonis, sub-episode in Group II (see plan, p. 183) has much more merit than the homosexual tales just mentioned. Venus' solicitude for the pretty Adonis is very amusing (*non movet aetas | nec facies nec quae Venerem movere, leones*). We have already mentioned in passing the extremely clever (but deliberately comic) death of Orpheus: Ovid's expansion of Virgil's rather unfortunate account of Orpheus' dissevered head is amusingly grotesque, though his most masterful touch is the description of the reunion in Hades where he tells of how Orpheus deliberately indulged in any number of the glances that had once been so disastrous (XI, 65–6):

> Nunc praecedentem sequitur, nunc praevius anteit
> Eurydicenque suam iam tutus respicit Orpheus.

> *And sometimes Orpheus follows, sometimes leads;*
> *And when he leads, looks backward, forfeit-free,*
> *Upon his quite regained Eurydice.*

The fact is that these minor love tales (Orpheus, paederastic amours) are for the most part light relief to the sombre content of the *Byblis* and *Myrrha* as well as to the longer Midas and Atalanta narratives and the far more serious *Iphis* and *Pygmalion*.

In these last two tales Ovid achieved something quite unique. Here human passion receives the sanction of the gods; the harsh world of sin and vengeance recedes and makes way for quite

another one; metamorphosis is now very different from the destructive reduction of man to beast, tree or fountain. Here, in short, we have a complete contrast to the crime and pathological passion of Tereus, Scylla, Byblis or Myrrha. Here, in fact, Ovid comes closest to true religious feeling, or at least shows some appreciation of simple piety and innocent credulity.

The story of Iphis was probably taken from the Galateia–Leukippos episode of the second book of Nicander's *Heteroioumena*.[1] At any rate, Nicander's version can give us some idea of what Ovid added to his source. In Nicander, the miraculous change of sex (girl to boy) is not connected with an earlier divine revelation. The girl's mother had reared her against the father's express veto: he was very poor and would bring up a boy but not a girl. The mother had relied on some vague dreams and oracles, but had no direct revelation or explicit divine sanction for her act. It was only when the false girl (she had been passed off as a boy to deceive the father) grew old enough and pretty enough to make further concealment of her sex impossible, that the mother turned for help to the goddess Leto: the sex change was necessary to keep the father from realizing that he had been deceived. This is Nicander's version: Ovid changed the motivation completely. In his version, the goddess Isis, in her full splendour, appears to the pregnant mother (Telethusa) and charges her to preserve and bring up the expected child. The father is represented sympathetically (he regrets the necessity for exposing a girl) but is not told of the vision. He is, in fact, deceived by the mother according to Isis' express direction. Telethusa calls the child Iphis (an ambiguous name applicable to either sex) and disguises her as a boy. But it is not, primarily, fear of the father that forces the crisis when the girl grows up. In Ovid, Iphis' coming of age entails her betrothal (the deceived father of course arranges it), and this arrangement is much more than formal: Iphis and her fiancée Ianthe are violently in love with each other. And it is just this romantic and apparently hopeless passion that the miracle fulfils. Isis, by changing Iphis'

[1] See Appendix, pp. 417–18.

sex, both rewards the mother's piety and consummates the girl's love.

The really interesting thing in Ovid's version is the contrast between the rather sophisticated scepticism of the daughter, Iphis, and the simple piety of the mother, Telethusa. Ovid is quite aware that the love of Iphis and Ianthe has decided overtones of sexual abnormality. Iphis herself is fully conscious of the unnatural character of her passion. In her monologue (IX, 726–63) she puts her situation clearly (726–8):

> 'quis me manet exitus,' inquit
> 'cognita quam nulli, quam prodigiosa novaeque
> cura tenet Veneris?'
>
> *'What end awaits me? Oh, what form unknown*
> *Of monstrous passion claims me for its own?'*

If the gods really wanted to spare her, they should have at least given her a *natural* passion (730):

> Naturale malum saltem et de more dedissent!
>
> *At least some known disease, some natural ill.*

Homosexuality violates the laws of nature. Even Pasiphae's strange love for the bull was not abnormal in this sense. But Iphis absolutely dismisses the possibility of consummating such a love. She wants what no man and no god, even, can give, for she wants something unnatural (756–9):

> Dique mihi faciles, quidquid valuere, dederunt;
> quodque ego, vult genitor, vult ipsa socerque futurus;
> at non vult natura, potentior omnibus istis,
> quae mihi sola nocet!
>
> *All that they could, indulgent gods have given.*
> *What though my father's wishes, joined with mine,*
> *And with her sire's Ianthe's, all combine,*
> *If nature, stronger far than these, says no,*
> *And does me wrong, my solitary foe?*

But what makes this episode so different from the pathological stories of Byblis, Myrrha, Scylla or Procne is precisely its religious setting, the fact that it is, in origin and genre, a simple miracle tale. The mother, Telethusa, remains, all through, the trusting believer who expects Isis to resolve the dilemma for which the goddess was responsible. To be sure, she tries for a while to gain time and defer the wedding (766 ff.) but in the end she reverts to her original piety (IX, 776–81):

> Te, dea, te quondam tuaque haec insignia vidi
> cunctaque cognovi, sonitum comitesque facesque...
> sistrorum memorique animo tua iussa notavi.
> Quod videt haec lucem, quod non ego punior, ecce
> consilium munusque tuum est: miserere duarum
> auxilioque iuva!

> *Give aid, and cure my fear, thee, thee, erewhile,*
> *Goddess, I saw, as now, with every sign*
> *Of godhead clad, and knew them all for thine:*
> *The brands, the timbrels, and the attendant train;*
> *And fixed thy precepts firmly in my brain.*
> *That Iphis lives, that I unpunished go,*
> *This did thy counsel and thy gift bestow.*
> *Now grant thy aid, and pity me and mine.*

Finally, therefore, nature is subordinated to the divine will: Iphis actually becomes a man; supernatural power gives legitimacy to unnatural desire by wholly removing its unnatural basis. This metamorphosis, therefore, is utterly different from those of Myrrha, Byblis, Scylla, etc., where the human merely reverts to the animal and finds its quietus in a loss of human consciousness that is the partial equivalent of death. Of course the miracle is extremely hard to believe, but Ovid's attitude toward it is quite sympathetic. He shows us the dilemma of Iphis, as Iphis herself understood it, in order to show us also the necessity and rightness of the divine action. Isis is, in a sense, confronting the cruelty of a society that practises infanticide; in assuming final responsibility

for her initial humanity (her advice to let the girl live) she shows that justice and benevolence can after all be expected from the divine powers. She thus prevents the kind of catastrophe that ruined Byblis and Myrrha and performs an act of both individual and social justice. Ovid, in other words, altered his sources to establish a point-for-point contrast between the *Iphis* and the *Byblis*.[1]

The story which balances and corresponds to the *Iphis* is, of course, that of Pygmalion, though Pygmalion is also balanced by or contrasted with Midas, as we shall presently see. Here Ovid reversed the procedure of the *Iphis*. He did not introduce an amatory motif into a simple miracle story but, instead, added a miracle (very much along the lines of the Iphis miracle and almost certainly suggested by it) to a purely erotic legend. The original story of Pygmalion was told in the *Kypriaka* of Philostephanus, a work known to us from the Christian authors Clement of Alexandria and Arnobius. It is one of a number of tales of sexual intercourse between men and statues (in this case, it is the statue of Aphrodite) or of erotic objects used for sexual stimulation. Clement and Arnobius cite also Posidippus' story of the young man and the Cnidian Aphrodite; Aristaenetus tells of an artist in love with the picture he painted. All these, like the original Pygmalion, are instances of sexual perversion and are avowedly pathological.[2]

It is all but certain that it was Ovid himself who altered the original legend recorded by Philostephanus. He introduces the story immediately after that of the infamous Propoetides. It seems clear that Ovid wanted to use these particular Cypriot stories (Propoetides, Cerastae, Pygmalion) for his transition from Hyacinthus (and the series of god-boy amours) to Myrrha. Myrrha was not really a Cypriot but an Asiatic figure and, although Ovid connects her with Cyprus (she is said to be Pygmalion's descendant), he indicates in several places (e.g. ll. 307 ff., 316, 478, 480) that he is thinking of Asia as her proper milieu. On

[1] See the further discussion of the Iphis episode in ch. VII (pp. 268–73) below.
[2] See Appendix, p. 418.

the other hand, the transition from Hyacinthus to the Propoetides is specious and artificial in the manner of other liaisons where Ovid had to resort to a *tour de force* in order to place his legends where his schema demanded. Sparta, he tells us, was not ashamed to celebrate Hyacinthus as its native son (*nec genuisse pudet Sparten Hyacinthon*, x, 217) but (l. 220) Cyprus would have preferred to do without the Propoetides or Cerastae. Here the unnatural or evil character of the amatory passion is absolutely undeniable. Whatever we may think of Hyacinth, we can have but one opinion of the Cyprian monstrosities.

But Ovid is not particularly concerned with the Cerastae and Propoetides as such (both take up but eighteen lines, x, 220–37). They are just a means of introducing or re-introducing (for Procne, Philomela and Scylla had already preceded) the theme of the wicked or unnatural woman. Orpheus, to whom all this section of the poem is nominally attributed, had already stated his general theme (x, 152–4):

> puerosque canamus
> dilectos superis, inconcessisque puellas
> ignibus attonitas meruisse libidine poenam.

> *Of boys beloved by gods it falls to sing;*
> *To tell how maidens, crazed with lawless fires,*
> *Suffered for uninhibited desires.*

In other words, he proposed to relate a series of homosexual amours followed by tales of illegitimate or unnatural female passion. But in fact this latter section (which obviously begins at line 220 with the Propoetides) is interrupted by the quite different Pygmalion episode which actually separates the *Propoetides* from the Myrrha episode. Their only bond of unity is their Cypriot origin (Philostephanus). It seems therefore obvious that Philostephanus (or his source) had grouped together in one place a number of indecent Cypriot legends from which Ovid selected the *Cerastae*, *Propoetides* and *Pygmalion*. Thus Ovid changed the original plot of the *Pygmalion* in order to establish a strong

contrast with *Myrrha*. The Cerastae and Propoetides were simply his point of departure for Pygmalion (x, 243–6):

> Quas [i.e. the Propoetides] quia Pygmalion aevum per crimen agentis
> viderat, offensus vitiis, quae plurima menti
> femineae natura dedit, sine coniuge caelebs
> vivebat.

> *And thanks to them Pygmalion, who beheld*
> *Their life of sin, by female faults repelled*
> *(Nature's too numerous gifts to woman's mind),*
> *Lived without wife, to single state resigned.*

And the Pygmalion story itself, as Hermann Fränkel points out,[1] is a point-by-point contrast to the *Propoetides*. They were the first prostitutes—the first women to vulgarize their bodies. And their loss of shame, the bloodlessness of their unblushing faces, was the appropriate prelude to their actual metamorphosis into bloodless stone: *in rigidum parvo silicem discrimine versae*. In short, Pygmalion is their complete moral antithesis: it is his acute sense of shame, his moral revulsion from the Propoetides, that makes him withdraw from actual women and devise his own ideal woman (the ivory statue). And when he falls in love with the ivory statue, he still retains his piety and modest timidity. He hardly dares to utter his wish (x, 274–6):

> Constitit et timide 'si, di, dare cuncta potestis,
> sit coniunx, opto' (non ausus 'eburnea virgo'
> dicere) Pygmalion 'similis mea' dixit 'eburnae.'

> *Pygmalion thus with timid utterance prayed:*
> *'O gods, if gods have power unlimited,*
> *This only is my prayer, that I may wed'—*
> *To say: 'my ivory maid', he did not dare;*
> *But turned it thus: 'my maiden ivory-fair'.*

The miracle is thus the direct opposite of the metamorphosis of

[1] See Appendix, pp. 418 f.

the Propoetides: modesty and shame are rewarded, not punished. The transformation of the statue is not only the triumph of art over nature but also of piety over moral failure and crime. The parallelism with Iphis is clear. What moves the two goddesses (Isis, Venus) in each case is a respect for virtuous love. Both Iphis and Pygmalion oppose an evil reality; so the divine powers reward them with the ideal, the miracle.

We need not linger over the obviously contrapuntal Atalanta and Midas episodes. Each is an instance of righteous punishment for an evident crime or folly (the ingratitude and sacrilege of Hippomenes and Atalanta; the stupidity and folly of Midas). In each the metamorphosis is deliberate punishment, not, as in the major episodes of amatory passion, the 'natural' consequence of a prior catastrophe or impasse. But the moral is not really the major concern of either story. Atalanta is a naive virgin whose love story is only amusing; her neglect of Venus and act of sacrilege (the crimes that justify the metamorphosis into lions) have no necessary relation to the rest of the tale. Midas is represented as a thick-witted oaf whose misfortunes are in no sense fatal and arise from stupidity rather than positive wrong-doing. Formally considered, both tales are theodicies (punishment metamorphoses) that are obviously meant to stand in contrast to the Iphis and Pygmalion miracles. In fact, they are very different in tone: the story of Atalanta is piquant and sentimental; what amuses us is the contrast between her beauty and her athleticism. Ovid made the most of the golden apples and their devastating effect on the girl who was already half divided between her desire to win the race and her reluctance to lose her lover. The sad fate of her other lover-victims is brought out only to enhance the cleverness of Hippomenes and her own amorous emotions. The Midas story is obviously a prime example of Ovidian humour: he delights in the grotesque details of Midas' golden cuisine, the vivid contrast of Pan and Apollo and the terrible secret of the ass's ears.

But there is one feature of the Midas episode that lifts it above the level of mere wit or humour. It is the story not just of folly

but of aesthetic insensitivity; its metamorphosis is thus the exact reverse of that in the corresponding *Pygmalion*. Pygmalion is the artist rewarded; Midas is the philistine punished or stigmatized. The stupidity that prompted his wish for the golden touch had not been overcome by his bitter experience: *pingue...ingenium mansit* (XI, 148). He cannot distinguish between the song of Pan and the song of Apollo. When the arbiter of the singing contest, the mountain Tmolus, awards the victory to Apollo, only Midas objects to the decision (XI, 172–5):

> Iudicium sanctique placet sententia montis
> omnibus; arguitur tamen atque iniusta vocatur
> unius sermone Midae. Nec Delius aures
> *humanam* stolidas *patitur retinere figuram.*
>
> *And with the sacred mountain all agree,*
> *Save Midas; he contests the verdict, he*
> *Disputes the justice of the court's decree.*
> *Then Phoebus bade from those dull ears be gone*
> *The* human shape *they cast discredit on.*

So Midas is made to lose the perfect *humana figura* which Pygmalion's art (*ars adeo latet arte sua*, X, 252) and piety had gained for his ivory image. The true artist has true *ingenium* and does not want to turn his world into gold: on the contrary, his imitation of nature is a humanizing process; he has the ear of Apollo or Venus because his art is inspired by an ideal of human perfection. This is the aesthetic miracle: its converse is the miracle of greed and stupidity.

Taken together, the little miracles reveal a poetic intention. Ovid, at this point in his poem, did not need sombre theodicies of crime and justice so much as delicately modulated tales that would relieve the darker tones of the preceding *Myrrha* and the succeeding *Ceyx–Alcyone*. This partly explains the difference in tone between the little miracles and the large *pathos* episodes. But there is also more than simple contrast or search for variety. The *Iphis*, *Pygmalion*, *Atalanta* and *Midas* are his protests against the grim abnormalities and crimes he elsewhere describes at such length.

They express his hankering for divinities that are neither comic nor cruel, for love that is neither pathological nor perverse, and (in the *Pygmalion* at least) for the ideal, for the coming of perfection to an imperfect and rather frightening world.

II (THE CENTRAL PANEL)

The central panel of this section (III: The Pathos of Love) is not a single episode (like that of Section I: The Phaethon Story) or a double episode (as that of Section II: *Perseus–Andromeda* and *Perseus–Phineus*) but a much more complex arrangement of two contrasted episodes in heroic or epic vein that together enclose two shorter episodes in another vein. The arrangement is as follows:

First Epic Part of Central Panel: MELEAGER–ALTHAEA (VIII, 260–546)
Interlude: Theseus in cave of Achelous (VIII, 547–615)
Philemon–Baucis (616–724)
Erysichthon (725–78)
Interlude: VIII, 878–83; IX, 1–3
Second Epic Part of Central Panel: HERCULES (IX, 4–272)

The whole thus occupies the exact centre of the section and stretches across the two middle books, VIII and IX. There are 1448 lines before, 2058 after it, but the greater length of the second half of the section (some 600 lines longer than the first) does not disturb the over-all symmetry. Ovid certainly intended the Byblis, Myrrha and Ceyx–Alcyone episodes (763 lines) to outweigh the Procne–Tereus and Scylla episodes (425 lines); the subsidiary contrast episodes of Iphis, Pygmalion, etc. to outweigh the preceding contrast episodes of Medea and Cephalus. But there is enough of both types of episodes in each half to maintain the general equilibrium of the whole section.

The major episodes of the panel (*Meleager* and *Hercules*) are of very similar construction. Though the general style and content is epic, each is also based on a combination of epic and tragic sources: the *Meleager* on some sort of Hellenistic *epos* and the Euripidean play of that name (first latinized by Accius); and the *Hercules* on

some epic account of his labours and battles (the episode in question is his battle with the stream-god Achelous) and on Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. There is no reason to suppose that it was not Ovid himself who united the epic and tragic sources.

The versions of the Meleager story in Homer (*Iliad* IX, 529–99), Bacchylides (*Epinikoi* 5), Nicander[1] and Apollodorus,[2] all stress the heroic or epic aspect of the legend. In Homer, Bacchylides, Nicander[1] and an alternative version given by Apollodorus,[2] the killing of the sons of Thestios (brothers of Althaea, Meleager's mother) is part of a general battle between the Calydonians and Curetes. Apollodorus,[2] in his main version, closely resembles Ovid (there is no warfare or siege; simply Meleager's homicidal attack on the sons of Thestios) but obviously reproduces an epic original: he gives, for example, an epic catalogue of the heroes engaged in the hunt. On the other hand, the romantic attachment of Meleager to Atalanta and the passionate monologue of Althaea (as she alternates between sisterly and maternal feelings) seem to go back to Euripides and Accius. Ovid's transitions between the epic and the tragic (or romantic) portions of the episode are quite well marked. Thus he adds after his brief account of the first meeting of Atalanta with Meleager (VIII, 327–8):

nec plura sinit tempusque pudorque
dicere: *maius opus* magni certaminis urget.

Nor time nor conscience lets him further speak: a 'mightier task'—the great contest—presses upon him.

The phrase *maius opus* seems a clear allusion to the seventh book of the *Aeneid* (45) and Virgil's transition to the greater and more strictly epic theme of war and battle in *Aeneid* VII to XII. Ovid, like Virgil, is engaged on a greater task than the narrating of a love story. Clearly also the account of Althaea's terrible revenge in lines 445 ff.,

Dona deum templis nato victore ferebat,
cum videt extinctos fratres Althaea referri, etc.

[1] Antoninus Liberalis II (Μελεαγρίδες = Martini, ed., pp. 68–70). [2] *Bibl.* I, 8. 1–4.

Now while Althaea thanked the gods for aid,
And offerings for her son's achievement made,
She saw the sad procession pass the fane,
Her brothers brought back lifeless home again,

marks a new portion of the story. Not only does the scene shift from the embattled heroes to Althaea, but the style shifts also. The long and obviously tragic soliloquy of the mother-sister (481–511) is preceded by a vividly empathetic description of her feelings (445–80) that is in marked contrast to the relatively objective hunt and quarrel that occupied the first part of the episode (260–444).

The division of the *Hercules* is unmistakable: indeed its epic and tragic portions fall into two quite distinct sections: (1) the struggle with the stream-god, Achelous (IX, 4–88); (2) the death and apotheosis (101–272). The former is told by Achelous himself in the first person; the latter is told by Ovid in the third person after the conclusion of the whole Achelous episode (which had started at VIII, 547 and had been the frame of the ensuing Philemon-Baucis and Erysichthon stories). Achelous had been Hercules' rival for Deianira's hand. His consequent battle with Hercules had left him short of one horn. But this was better than the fate of another lover of Deianira, the centaur Nessus! The transition thus comes in the lines (IX, 101–2):

At te, Nesse ferox, eiusdem virginis ardor
perdiderat volucri traiectum terga sagitta.

Less well, wild Nessus, did it fare with you,
Whom passion for the selfsame damsel slew,
When through your spine Alcides' arrow flew.

But Nessus is only a preliminary to the tragedy proper which starts at IX, 134:

Longa fuit medii mora temporis, actaque magni
Herculis implerant terras odiumque novercae.
Victor ab Oechalia Cenaeo sacra parabat
vota Iovi, cum fama loquax praecessit ad aures,
Deianira, tuas.

Years passed: the hero's deeds had won renown
World-wide, and worn his stepdame's malice down;
And at Cenaeum, for Oechalia won,
Thanksgivings, vowed to Jove, had now begun.
Rumour reached Deianira.

We are then, so to speak, *in mediis rebus*, in the dramatic present of Deianira and her soliloquy, and the style is appropriately dramatic and empathetic, exactly like the Althaea portion of the Meleager episode.

But the parallelism of the arrangement is only an index of the parallelism of ideas. Each hero is ruined by the grief or resentment of a woman. The tale of his heroic exploits is followed by that of his terrible doom; the epic career by the tragic dénouement. Yet there is also a difference: Meleager's fate is in some sense deserved; his attachment to Atalanta belied his obvious obligation to his kindred; his anger was recklessly homicidal. Hercules is, on the other hand (quite unlike the hero of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*), represented as the victim of a false rumour. Gossip had exaggerated the matter of Iole, and Deianira had believed the gossip (Fama) (IX, 138–9):

quae veris addere falsa
gaudet et e minimo sua per mendacia crescit

that talks, and, mixing truth with lies,
From nothing grows, self-fed with falsities.

Hercules' sufferings are thus represented as a gratuitous calamity which the gods have to avert or change if there is to be any theodicy left in the world. No wonder that Hercules verges on cynical disbelief (203–4):

At valet Eurystheus! Et sunt, qui credere possint
esse deos!

Eurystheus prospers well; yet those there be,
Who think the gods are more than fantasy.

His deification is thus represented as an act of justice, a rewarding

of services which had long been recognized as divine. No one can truly object (256–8):

> si quis tamen Hercule, si quis
> forte deo doliturus erit, data praemia nolet,
> sed meruisse dari sciet invitusque probabit.
>
> *And if there be, who grudge the gift, aggrieved*
> *To see the hero as a god received,*
> *Yet shall they own it for a just award,*
> *And even although they like it not, applaud.*

The relation of the episodes to each other is thus carefully designed. It is quite possible that it was suggested to Ovid by the wonderful ode of Bacchylides (*Epinikoi* 5) in which Hercules meets the shade of Meleager in the underworld. Here Hercules is so much impressed by Meleager's beauty that he longs for a bride who looks like him: this is, of course, Meleager's sister, the fatal Deianira. But whereas Bacchylides but suggests, with delicate ellipsis, the terrible calamity of Hercules' marriage and the basic similarity of each hero's fate, Ovid stresses the difference. Meleager is, so to speak, a hero whose nobility is flawed and rightly given over to tragedy. Hercules can survive tragedy because he is more than a hero: he is also a divine man—one of the very few whose destiny is with the gods. He is, in the end, invulnerable to the fatal fury that destroys Meleager.

The two episodes thus form a unity and together bridge the gap between destructive passion—the passion that leads to death or loss of humanity—and triumphant achievement, the achievement that leads to immortality and divinity. Thus they are both like and unlike the terrible *pathē* that surround them: the passions and degenerative transformations of Medea, Byblis, Scylla and Myrrha. The kinship between these women and Althaea or Deianira is unmistakable. Deianira cries, in recollection of Meleager and Althaea (IX, 149–51):

> Quid *si me, Meleagre, tuam memor esse sororem*
> forte paro facinus, quantumque iniuria possit
> femineusque dolor, iugulata paelice testor?

> *What if, remembering that I am your sister, Meleager, I attempt bold crime and kill the trollop and thus give proof of what a man's unfaithfulness and* female rage *can do?*

But the accent is not on the *femineus dolor* but on the dying hero. If he be enough of a hero, if his hands be sufficiently clean, he can overcome the catastrophe of such passion and leave only what is mortal to be burned away at the end: as Jupiter declares (IX, 250): *omnia qui vicit, vincet, quos cernitis, ignis.*

The combination of epic and tragic elements in the *Meleager* and *Hercules* is thus justified by Ovid's purpose: to relate these heroic episodes to his major theme of erotic passion and to show their difference from it—their epic quality, the transcendence of erotic passion and catastrophe by heroic merit and deserved apotheosis. Hercules here, as in the eighth book of the *Aeneid*, prefigures and anticipates the later apotheoses of Aeneas, Romulus and Augustus and paves the way for the Roman dénouement of the whole poem. Furthermore, Ovid here, as in the preceding Perseus panel, wanted to fortify the centre of the longest section of his poem by the weight and grandeur of epic material.

But here also, just as in the *Perseus*, the epic material does not suit Ovid's style or temperament. The boar-hunt is not designed to enhance the romantic charms of Atalanta (Ovid thus curtly disposes of her in order to deal with his *maius opus*, VIII, 328). Its heroic incidents are both tedious and grotesque. Ovid seems, so far as we can tell, to have introduced Nestor into the usual gallery of hunters, only to show the old man's escape from the boar by a sort of 'spear-vault' into a tree (VIII, 365 ff.). This is just the kind of misplaced grotesquerie that set our teeth on edge in the *Perseus*. That Telamon should have tripped on a root (379) and Atalanta have nicked the animal's ear (382) are incidents scarcely worthy of epic narration even if the 'ear-nicking' gives Meleager a chance to glorify his beloved (VIII, 386–7):

> Et primus sociis visum ostendisse cruorem
> et 'meritum' dixisse 'feres virtutis honorem!'

It seems that he first saw the blood—that he
First made it seen by all the company.
'*The prize for manly valour*' (*thus he speaks*)
'*Is yours, fair maid.*'

This is, perhaps, an apt illustration of Meleager's infatuation, but it belies the epic tone and gravity that Ovid seems so intent upon.

The curious duel of Hercules and the stream-god Achelous is even less edifying. Instead of one of Hercules' authentic labours, Ovid only tells us of how Achelous lost one of his horns. When Achelous gives up the attempt to fight *in propria persona* and transforms himself into a snake, Hercules regales him with a speech (IX, 67 ff.) on his own prowess as snake-killer: *Cunarum labor est angues superare mearum*. 'That's baby-stuff for me', we might, perhaps not so inappropriately, translate. One cannot resist such truly Ovidian humour, but it is surely fatal to the epic pretensions of the episode.

But it is the tragic parts of the two episodes which most signally fail to convince. The meditations and soliloquies of Althaea and Deianira are skilful enough (Ovid tactfully shortens those of Deianira since he had already devoted a good deal of space to the similar sentiments of Althaea) but very incongruous with their setting. Althaea's version of the 'soliloquy of conflicting impulses' (it goes back to the Medea soliloquies of Apollonius and Euripides which Ovid had partially reproduced at the beginning of Book VII), even though it is changed from a struggle between *pudor* and *amor* to one between maternal and sisterly love, is not sufficiently prepared for by the preceding narrative: we cannot really sympathize with her as either mother or sister. More disastrous is Ovid's version of the *Trachiniae*. The long speech of Hercules (IX, 176–204) that precedes his apotheosis is altogether too rhetorical for its agonized setting. Above all, the shift from a tragic to a happy ending (especially the joy and self-congratulation of Jupiter when he sees that the gods are actually alarmed at Hercules' misery, 242 ff.) is utterly unconvincing.[1]

[1] Cf. pp. 349 f. below.

Ovid's alterations of Sophocles are necessary for his purpose (he wants to end on an auspicious and Augustan note: the apotheosis of merit) but fatal to the emotional unity of his episode. This is a tragedy that altogether misfires.

Why did Ovid break the continuity of the main panels (Meleager, Hercules) by the two theodicies (Philemon–Baucis, Erysichthon)? It is clear, first of all, that he needed to separate the two panels by some intervening material: otherwise the total effect would have been repetitious and monotonous. The parallelism of the two episodes required a similarity of design (e.g. the union of epic and tragic, or erotic and heroic motifs) that would have cloyed and satiated the reader if the material had not been properly spaced. But of course Ovid planned it this way only because he also wanted the space for another purpose. The panel as a whole (including the theodicies) is a deliberate contrast to the eroticism and passion that surround it. In it, the merely pathological metamorphoses of Tereus, Scylla, Byblis, etc. are countered by their opposites: apotheosis, reward of piety, clear-cut punishment. Not only the pious miracles of Iphis and Pygmalion in the second half of the section but, far more important, the Roman apotheoses of the last section of the poem (IV) are here adumbrated and sketched. In another sense, we revert to the initial theodicies of the Creation time (Book I): the pious Deucalion and Pyrrha, the impious Lycaon. In other words, this is the true centre of the whole poem, the place in which the beginning is recalled, the end anticipated and the major theme of the entire epic—the power and justice of the gods—explicitly emphasized.

This is made clear at the introduction of the first theodicy, the *Philemon and Baucis*. Achelous (VIII, 575 ff.) points out to the visiting Theseus some islands (the Echinades) that were once nymphs or naiads. This *factum mirabile* excites the interest of the other guests of the stream-god. One of them, the wicked son of Ixion (*deorum spretor*), scoffs at such credulity (VIII, 614–15):

'Ficta refers nimiumque putas, Acheloe, potentes
esse deos,' dixit 'si dant adimuntque figuras.'

'Tales, Acheloüs! Gods that make and mar,
Shape and reshape—you stretch their powers too far.'

The ensuing consternation of Achelous' guests (VIII, 616),

Obstipuere omnes nec talia dicta probarunt

All present listened with affronted ears,

recalls that of the gods in council when Jupiter related the crime of Lycaon (I, 199–201):

Confremuere omnes studiisque ardentibus ausum
talia deposcunt: sic, cum manus impia saevit
sanguine Caesareo Romanum extinguere nomen...

His hearers shuddered and the council room
Rang loud with clamour for the sinner's doom.
So, when a lawless hand took frenzied aim
To drown in Caesar's blood the Roman name,
The race of men was struck with quick alarm.

It is now the pious Lelex (*animo maturus et aevo*) who undertakes to answer the son of Ixion. The gods' power, he asserts, is boundless and irresistible (VIII, 618–19):

immensa est finemque potentia caeli
non habet et, quidquid superi voluere, peractum est.

To power celestial end or bound is none,
And whatsoe'er the gods have willed, is done.

And, to illustrate it, he tells the story of Philemon and Baucis, whose moral is carefully pointed at its end. Lelex himself sums it all up in the words (VIII, 724): *Cura deum di sint, et qui coluere, colantur* or *piety maketh gods.*

But the *Philemon and Baucis* is capped by the stream-god, who tries to satisfy the pious desire of Theseus to hear more such edifying tales: *facta audire volentem* | *mira deum* (726). The *Erysichthon* is thus introduced as the proper pendant to its pious predecessor. Appropriately of course, the tale of wickedness punished (Erysichthon is almost an incarnation of impiety) follows the tale of piety rewarded. At the end, the gods' power and morality seem impressively re-established. The way has been fully prepared for the apotheosis of Hercules.

The inspiration of the two tales seems to be in large part Callimachean.[1] The account of the reception of the gods (Jupiter and Hermes) by the poor couple in their humble cottage is obviously indebted in some degree to Callimachus' *Hecale*. Nor is it at all likely that Ovid could have used this famous bit of Callimachus in his *Philemon and Baucis* and failed to recall the story of Callimachus' Demeter Hymn in the immediately following *Erysichthon*. He also, of course, had other sources for both stories. There is, for example, no mention of a daughter of Erysichthon in Callimachus and there was obviously some sort of Phrygian legend behind the *Philemon–Baucis*: it is to one striking incident, not the main plot of the *Hecale*, that Ovid refers, but he was surely aware that it was Callimachus, not some relatively obscure legend, that his readers would think of first. This perhaps explains the strange fact that the style and mood of the two stories are so un-Callimachean. Ovid was diverging from Callimachus precisely because he had Callimachus so definitely in mind. He was showing how he could raise the Callimachean material to epic dimensions.

We have already seen how very unlike Callimachus the deliberately epic and rhetorical *Erysichthon* of Ovid is.[2] Ovid's Erysichthon is no child or juvenile, the impact of whose catastrophe falls primarily on his prestige-conscious parents and rural-bourgeois household. Ovid wholly avoided the kind of modernization, above all the piquant detail, that we find in Callimachus. He gives us only a picture of Impiety personified, an elaborate piece of divine machinery, a detailed allegory—in short, a bravura epic utterly denuded of concrete substance and environment.

In the *Philemon–Baucis* he certainly dwells upon the humble details of the couch, the unsteady table, the vegetables and meat, the

[1] See Appendix, pp. 413 f.
[2] See above, pp. 65 f. and below, p. 416.

earthenware dishes, etc. But these details do not set us in a live environment, do not bring real characters into a true social relation as do the details of Callimachus. Indeed, they illustrate only the piety of the old couple, who are really just another Deucalion and Pyrrha. They are the opposite of the inhospitable people who reject the visiting gods (VIII, 628–30):

> Mille domos adiere locum requiemque petentes,
> mille domos clausere serae; tamen una recepit,
> parva quidem stipulis et canna tecta palustri.
>
> *At doors a thousand rest and room they crave:*
> *A thousand doors refused; one only gave,*
> *A reed- and straw-thatched cottage, small but dear.*

The *canna tecta palustri*, etc.—in short, all the specific aspects of poverty—are but rhetorical contrast to the generality of evil (*mille... mille*, etc.). The episode of the goose (it is *unicus*, their one watchman, yet they try to catch and kill even it in their unexampled hospitality) does not produce an effect of humour or realism so much as of laborious exaggeration. Ovid heaps on the detail in order to force the antithesis—divine wealth *v.* poverty—to a climax that will permit the obvious moral or theodicy to be articulated (VIII, 689–91):

> 'Di' que 'sumus, meritasque luet vicinia poenas
> impia' dixerunt; 'vobis immunibus huius
> esse mali dabitur!'
>
> '*High gods are we, and by our just command,*
> *Stern punishment shall strike this impious land.*
> *Yourselves alone shall scape the destined end.*'

The marble temple into which the cottage is finally transformed (caelataeque *fores adopertaque* marmore *tellus*) illustrates Ovid's subordination of realism to formal theodicy. The cottage has no value in itself: it is only a device for producing an effect. The subsequent obliteration of the cottage and its whole environment does not bother Ovid because he has not been interested in them at all.

The main value of the final metamorphosis of the aged couple (into trees) is that it establishes the tree-shrine on which Lelex finally pins his offering and pronounces his moral epigram.

But it would be a gross error, as we have already seen, to condemn Ovid by stressing his inferiority to Callimachus in these two episodes. He did not want Callimachean realism (the piquant modernization of myth) for his reciprocal theodicies, set, so carefully, between the reciprocal epics of Meleager and Hercules. The whole central panel is both an offset to the major erotic episodes of the section, and a carefully planned precursor of the Roman apotheoses to come in the next section. The interset theodicies or 'pious legends' add exactly the note of pious credulity and divine justice that Ovid here wanted.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that Ovid was not 'at home' with moralism and theodicy in anything like the sense that he was at home with the erotic passions and Euripidean motifs of his episodes of *pathos*. This central section has a coldness and formality that belie its message. But because Ovid was always, to at least some degree, himself, it contains many Ovidian touches: the clever paradoxes, the humour of the Mestra episode in the *Erysichthon*; the vividness of the meal in the *Philemon-Baucis*; the skilful rhetoric of Althaea's monologue; even (taken by itself) the amusing 'spear-vault' of Nestor. But it is not what Ovid would have written had he not felt it necessary to make some obeisance to Augustan morality and Virgilian seriousness. There is ingenuity in his plan of concentrating theodicies and epic *aristeiai* at the pivot or centre of his poem. What was lacking was the conviction that could bring the plan to life. Ovid was neither a moralist nor an Augustan at heart.

III (THE MAJOR PATHOS EPISODES)

The five major episodes of amatory *pathos* (*Tereus–Procne*, *Scylla*, *Byblis*, *Myrrha* and *Ceyx–Alcyone*) have, obviously, a number of points in common that distinguish them from the episodes of either the central panel or the contrast sections considered in

Part I of this chapter. Each of the five stories (with the exception noted at (2)) has four major characteristics:

(1) It is an essentially tragic story.

(2) The love involved (with the crucial exception of the *Ceyx–Alcyone*) is pathological or unnatural.

(3) The metamorphosis is the solution of an otherwise unendurable anguish, the only possible alternative being death by suicide or external violence.

(4) The metamorphosis itself involves a loss of human consciousness and is a true reversion to animal existence. It is not (as in, e.g., the Actaeon and Io episodes) a mere preservation of human identity in an animal exterior.

These are the salient points: but there are also a number of other common features. All these episodes (save for the *Scylla*) are longer than any others of the section excepting of course the epic pieces of the central panel (Meleager, Hercules). They are all subjects specially preferred by the writers of neoteric short epics or *epyllia*. Myrrha was the subject of the most famous of such poems, Cinna's *Zmyrna*. The *Scylla* and *Tereus–Procne* are specifically mentioned in Virgil's neoteric list in Eclogue 6. *Byblis* is one of the subjects that Parthenius suggested to Gallus, the 'neoteric' friend of Virgil. Cicero had written a short epic on the Alcyone theme, presumably under the influence of the very *neoterici* whom he so slightingly labelled. More generally, the subjects show a Euripidean ancestry common to many Greek poets of the late Hellenistic era: Euripides' Medea and Phaedra are certainly the ultimate ancestresses of Ovid's Scylla, Byblis, Myrrha and Procne. In short, Ovid was here dealing with a central topic of Hellenistic and neoteric poetry—a topic that he had already treated at length in his *Heroides*.

But, though the general provenience of these episodes is evident, there can be no doubt of the individuality of Ovid's treatment of them. In the first place, as we have seen in our analysis of his *Scylla*, he maintains a narrative continuity that is quite lacking in the *Ciris* or in such a typically neoteric *epyllion* as Catullus'

Peleus and Thetis. The narrative is not stopped by the heroines' monologues, or by a Euripidean debate (as in the *Ciris* and *Zmyrna*), and is not asymmetrically restricted to moments of *pathos*. Ovid does emphasize the fatal decision of Scylla, the struggle of Byblis and Myrrha with their terrible *libidines*, the anguish of Procne and Alcyone, but he carefully preserves at least the illusion of movement and narrative progression. Everything proceeds toward the final metamorphosis which is intimately connected with the foregoing action and is indeed its almost inevitable dénouement. Furthermore, Ovid's narrative quite lacks the obscurity and Hellenistic learning or preciosity of the *Zmyrna*, the *Peleus and Thetis* or, almost certainly, of Parthenius' and Euphorion's little epics.[1] These stories, in short, are part of his *carmen perpetuum* and preserve the movement, symmetry and continuity of his general epic style.

They are also related to his whole scheme, and by their similarities and dissimilarities maintain the emphasis as well as the variety, the progression of motif and tone, that he wanted in this section of his poem. The development is from positive crime (the cruel rape of Philomela by Tereus, the child-murder of Procne, the parricide of Scylla) to unnatural or pathological passion (Byblis, Myrrha) and, finally, to a kind of resolution in the metamorphosis of the concluding *Ceyx–Alcyone*. This is paralleled by the shift of plot-structure: the *Tereus–Procne* obviously reproduces, at least in part, a tragedy that brings husband and wife into fatally destructive conflict. The succeeding *Scylla*, *Byblis* and *Myrrha* are each concentrated on one female character; she affects the other characters (and is in turn affected by them), but does not really enter into dramatic conflict with them. Finally the *Ceyx–Alcyone* wholly transcends the neoteric framework of its three predecessors and rises, in both its style and its content, to an epic plane that almost permits the two main characters to impose their love—the mutuality of their affection—upon nature itself. It is an answer to the tragic conflict of Tereus and Procne and to the pathological

[1] See above, pp. 62–73 and below, pp. 221–5. See also my *Virgil*, pp. 27 f.

isolation of Scylla, Byblis and Myrrha. We can represent the progression somewhat as follows:

Criminal	Tereus–Procne:		a *Tragedy* of criminal conflict
Pathological	Neoteric Epylliac in type	Scylla:	Pathological Eros with criminal sequel
			CENTRAL PANEL
		Byblis:	Pathological Eros with pathetic sequel
		Myrrha:	Byblis theme heightened and sharpened
Cosmic	Ceyx–Alcyone:		an *Epic* of catastrophic separation resolved in metamorphosis

In each case the metamorphosis is a solution or resolution of a catastrophic situation. This is why it is also a reduction of the human being to an animal level. This kind of metamorphosis was, as we have seen, prefigured in the Arachne and Niobe episodes, but it is now wholly divorced from any suggestion of divine vengeance. What destroys these characters (the *Ceyx–Alcyone* is the great exception) is the perversion of their own *eros* or the destruction and loss of the erotic object. The gods play no role at all or at best a role of belated pity that does not truly motivate the metamorphosis. The passion and the catastrophe are fully human: this is what clearly distinguishes these episodes from the preceding vengeance episodes of Section II (the Avenging Gods).

But we cannot, of course, take the five episodes in isolation from the context of the whole section. As we have already seen, both the subsidiary or contrast episodes (the Medea–Cephalus sequence of Book VII; the four miracles and god–boy or goddess–boy *amores* of Books IX–XI) and the central panel (Althaea, Deianira) contain erotic elements that either carry on the amatory theme or form an intricate counterpoint with it. We must bear in mind that the ordinary reader could hardly visualize the schema that we, for purposes of critical analysis, have set forth at the head of this chapter. Furthermore, Ovid would have been quite false to his concept of *carmen perpetuum* if he had separated the three basic elements of the scheme (major *pathos* episodes, contrast episodes, central panel) by watertight divisions that excluded mutual penetration and influence. This does not mean, however,

that the scheme did not actually exist in Ovid's mind. Like all good artists, he kept his plot or plan discreetly hidden; carefully concealing the breaks by artful liaison; cleverly covering his real sequence by various artificial ones. Yet he did not really mean to deceive; he only wanted to maintain a superficial appearance of unity. And he certainly produced the intended effects: the contrast or variation of tone and motif that keeps the reader alert and interested and the constant repetition that allows impressions to sink in. Above all, the perpetual movement—the development of one motif out of another, the law of symmetrical progression to which we have already referred—produces the sense of climax, of accomplished progress that justifies and gives meaning to the *carmen perpetuum.*

The *Tereus–Procne* clearly marks the emergence of the theme of human amatory *pathos* from the previous divine-vengeance theme of Section II. Niobe's fate had produced much discussion and concern in the surrounding towns (VI, 401 ff.). All the neighbouring states sent their rulers to Thebes on missions of consolation and sympathy (*ad solacia*). Only Athens did not send a representative (*solae cessastis Athenae*, 421) because Athens was engaged in a desperate war. It was then that Thracian Tereus came to her aid, dispelled her enemies, and rightfully gained the Athenian princess, Procne, for his wife. Yet this apparently auspicious event is the cause of terrible woe; to this marriage (VI, 429–31)

> Non Hymenaeus adest, non illi Gratia lecto:
> Eumenides tenuere faces de funere raptas,
> Eumenides stravere torum.

> *No Grace, no Hymen, stood beside the bed.*
> *For nuptial flares the furies robbed the pyres,*
> *And lit the wedding feast with funeral fires;*
> *The furies spread the couch.*

But this is only the formal introduction of a *human* tragedy. The cause of the trouble is not divine spite or vengeance but Tereus'

innate *libido*: even Philomela's beauty is but the agent that provokes it (VI, 458–60):

> Digna quidem facies, sed et hunc *innata libido*
> exstimulat, pronumque genus regionibus illis
> in Venerem est: flagrat *vitio gentisque suoque*.
>
> *Well might that face inflame him, and beside*
> *Inherent lust a secret spur applied;*
> *For Thracian blood runs hot, to passion prone,*
> *And racial fires were added to his own.*

Tereus' terrible *libido* is what uses and perverts the strong sisterly affection of Procne and Philomela as well as the goodwill of their father, King Pandion. In consequence Procne and Philomela are transformed and degraded into mere incarnations of vengeance. All they can do is to express their inhuman hostility to Tereus. The internecine conflict is thus appropriately perpetuated in an animal form (VI, 666–73):

> Nunc sequitur [i.e. Tereus] nudo genitas Pandione ferro.
> *Corpora Cecropidum pennis pendere putares:*
> *Pendebant pennis.* Quarum petit altera silvas,
> altera tecta subit; *neque adhuc de pectore caedis*
> *excessere notae, signataque sanguine pluma est.*
> Ille *dolore suo poenaeque cupidine velox*
> *vertitur in volucrem*, cui stant in vertice cristae,
> prominet immodicum pro longa cuspide rostrum.
>
> *Last, on the sisters with a sword he sprang:*
> *Their forms in air on pinions seemed to hang;*
> *And hang they did: one seeks the woodland leaves,*
> *The other makes her mansion in the eaves.*
> *The plumage of their breasts, which still retain*
> *The marks of murder, shows a crimson stain.*
> *Tereus, by grief and lust of vengeance spurred,*
> *In mid-pursuit became a crested bird,*
> *Hoopoe by name, that, with his freakish bill,*
> *So long and slender, looks the swordsman still.*

It is difficult to reconstruct exactly what Ovid did to the original tragedy he used for this episode: it is certainly Sophocles' *Tereus* or some later version of it.[1] But Sophocles himself was, in all probability, influenced by Euripides' *Medea* (the *Tereus* is almost surely posterior to 431 B.C.). In any event, the Euripidean inspiration of Ovid is clear (especially in the child-killing scene). Ignazio Cazzaniga has ably discussed the source problem and has reached the conclusion that Ovid's *Tereus* reveals two styles: that of the *novella* or Hellenistic *epyllion* in VI, 424–586; and that of tragedy in the final portion (587–674). But this is to measure a highly wrought and unified work of art by a quite external standard which takes no account of Ovid's artistic purpose. In the first part of the *Tereus* (424–586) Procne appears only for a moment at the beginning; it is almost wholly the story of Tereus' *libido* and Philomela's agony. In the second part, Procne dominates the scene: it is she who frees Philomela, plots the revenge, murders the little Itys, and prepares the terrible meal. But the reason for the shift of emphasis as well as of scene is perfectly clear: the transformation of Procne's character (the turning of her love into implacable hate; the souring of her maternal feelings) is solely due to the fatal *libido* of Tereus. It is this that destroys her humanity. The final tragedy would be both unintelligible and grotesque without an explanation of its cause. It is the love of the two sisters, the horror of Tereus' *libido*, the callous brutality of the rape, that explain the murder of Itys and the terrible banquet.

The story starts (424 ff.) with the self-deception of all the major characters. Tereus and Procne are happy in their marriage and in their new son, Itys. To such a degree is reality hidden by appearance: *usque adeo latet utilitas* (438). What sets the tragedy in motion is Procne's affection for her sister, Philomela. She cozens her husband (*blandita viro*) to let Philomela pay her a visit. This will be his great gift to her (VI, 443–4):

> magni mihi muneris instar
> germanam vidisse dabis.

[1] See Appendix, pp. 406 f.

Husband, I want no gift, but grant instead
My fondest wish, to see my sister dear.

Tereus complies at once: everything indicates the perfect confidence of husband and wife in each other. But the first sight of Philomela (*ecce venit...Philomela*, 451) awakens his innate *libido*. This is represented as a fatal and overmastering force that breaks out at once and can only with great difficulty be concealed. It takes at first the ironical form of husbandly consideration: Tereus piously pretends to abet his wife's affection for her sister (473–4):

ipso sceleris molimine Tereus
creditur esse pius laudemque a crimine sumit.

Tereus draws credit from his guilt, and seems
True husband, while he lays his treacherous schemes.

Ovid is here both empathetic (he reads Tereus' feelings and thoughts) and disapproving: he implicitly condemns the cruel *libido* in almost every turn of phrase; and he condemns it also in the most explicit language. Tereus even envisages Philomela's pleading endearments to her aged father as lustfully transferred to himself (481–2):

et quotiens amplectitur illa parentem
esse parens vellet; *neque enim minus impius esset.*

and every time she embraces her father, the father would he be!
And had he been her father, he would have been no less persistent in his impious design.

He would have felt no differently if he had been her father! Such is the shamelessness of his passion. The moving plea of the father himself (496 ff.) heightens the irony.

The actual rape—its delay, its secrecy, its union of brutal violence with defenceless innocence (the lamb and the dog, the dove and the eagle, 527 ff.)—is told in such a way as to emphasize the difference between Tereus' complete destruction of everybody's security (*omnia turbasti* is what the ravaged Philomela tells him,

536) and his futile attempt to hide the fact. The *glossotomia* or tongue-cutting (Tereus severs Philomela's tongue with forceps and sword) is in itself grotesque, but it is necessary for the future tragedy: Procne must learn the truth while Tereus still thinks that his cruel stratagem has kept it hidden. Philomela's web is the symbol, as it were, of dumb innocence made articulate.

The action now (587) mounts rapidly to the tragic dénouement. The bacchic revel by which Procne finds and frees the imprisoned Philomela recalls the Pentheus-motif, but it echoes even more directly the Ino-motif: a counterfeit bacchic madness with a child-murder. But here all the characters are human and the vengeance is both human and conscious: Procne kills the little Itys in cold blood. The motivation of the murder is brilliantly conceived and seems, so far as we can tell, an invention of Ovid himself. Procne's feelings, just like those of Medea (Ovid certainly had Euripides in mind), are divided between desire for revenge and maternal love for the child. But it is not Tereus' unfaithfulness; it is his cruelly libidinous nature, so horribly and suddenly revealed, that disgusts Procne with the very thought of their former relations and thus completely sours her feelings for her and *his* child. Itys resembles his father!

Ad matrem veniebat Itys. Quid possit, ab illo
admonita est oculisque tuens immitibus '*a, quam*
es similis patri!' dixit (620–2).

Hard on her speech came Itys, and she drew
Suggestion from the child, what she might do.
She looked with eyes unsoftened. 'Ah,' said she,
'How well the father in the son I see.'

It is the fact that Itys can speak and the tongueless Philomela cannot which finally decides Procne (632 ff.). Everything in Itys reminds her of his father's lust and brutality. Her pity is thus stopped at its source. Here the importance of the first part of the episode is manifest: had we not been apprised of Tereus' *libido*, the extent to which it had abused every human obligation and feeling

and severed every emotional tie with the past, we could scarcely account for Procne's action at all. The cogency of this child-murder seems far superior to that of Euripides' *Medea*.

But Procne has now herself descended to a sub-human level. Her vengeance shows deterioration of character to a far greater degree than that of Euripides' Hecuba. She no longer cares for Itys' cry of 'mater, mater'; she even strikes him as he tries to embrace her and does not hide her face from the blow (641–2):

> Ense ferit Procne, lateri qua pectus adhaeret,
> nec vultum vertit.
> *The sword she coldly eyed,*
> *And struck 'twixt rib and breastbone, through his side.*

In the end she becomes a virtual fiend like Tereus himself. Just as he could hardly contain his *libido* (467, *iamque moras male fert*, etc.), so she cannot dissimulate her savage exultation at the horrible meal (653–4):

> Dissimulare nequit crudelia gaudia Procne:
> iamque suae cupiens existere nuntia cladis...

Procne cannot contain her cruel joy—hot now to burst forth with the announcement of her crime.

Philomela is much the same (658–60):

> Prosiluit Ityosque caput Philomela cruentum
> misit in ora patris nec tempore maluit ullo
> posse loqui et mentis testari gaudia dictis.
>
> *Philomela sprang, and sped*
> *Full in his face the infant's bleeding head.*
> *If e'er she craved the common speech of men*
> *To put her joy in words, she craved it then.*

There could be but one ending for this dehumanized trio: the metamorphosis that in effect ratified the animality to which they had already descended. It is a solution of their catastrophe as well as a perpetuation of it. The eternal enmity of Tereus to Procne and

Philomela is transferred to the eternal enmity of the birds they became.

Ovid had now fully launched the motif of erotic *pathos*. This motif had been anticipated in the previous sections, but the emphasis there had been on the *gods*' amours or vengeances. The more or less human stories put in by way of contrast were but premonitions of the true *pathos* to come. Pyramus and Thisbe were only youthful victims of an accident; Salmacis a somewhat unusual nymph; Echo and Narcissus a little beneath or above the level of ordinary humanity; Niobe had undergone a metamorphosis that resembled those of this episode, but the story of Niobe as a whole is of divine, not human, vengeance. The *Tereus–Procne*, however, combines *eros*, *pathos* and metamorphosis in one unified *human* action. This is the true amatory-*pathos* that we have defined above (p. 206). Ovid's problem now was to vary and develop it: to transfer the *libido* from the man to the woman; to change the tragic-dramatic form into neoteric-epylliac and epic forms; to give a quite different nuance to the *libido* itself. It is most instructive to see how he did this.

The *Tereus–Procne* is the last important episode of Book VI. The brief forty-seven lines that remain in the book take us from Pandion's Athens to the Argonauts. Book VII almost immediately (9 ff.) introduces Medea. But, as we have seen, Ovid had no intention of retelling the tragedy of Medea (the child-murder, etc.). He had told it before (elliptically in the *Heroides*, fully in his own dramatic version) and, in any event, had no intention of immediately repeating a motif (the child-murder) almost identical with that of the preceding *Tereus–Procne*. Nevertheless, he surely counted on his readers' perceiving the identity. Indeed, he refers to the child-murder in a brief sentence later on (396–7). This enabled him to make a transition from the male to the female *libido* and from one type of tragic motivation to another. It is by emphasizing the *difference in similarity* (here the *different* motives of the *similar* child-murders) that he effected a major variation of his dominant theme.

Procne was once the loving wife of Tereus as we are explicitly told. But Ovid's emphasis is wholly on the cruel, disruptive *libido* of Tereus and on Procne's affection for her sister. It is not sexual jealousy but resentment of Tereus' brutal assault on Philomela that makes Procne avenge herself by the child-murder. In the Medea story the motivation is the other way around: she is the 'woman scorned'; her great passion has been flouted; her devotion callously ignored. It is not what Jason had done to another woman, but what he has done to her which motivates her vengeance. This is why the love itself—especially its inception and conquest of all countervailing forces—is so essential to the story. With Medea, in other words, the *libido* shifts from the man to the woman, and the vengeance is a direct outgrowth of the *libido*, not an external reaction to it as with Procne. By repeating the Euripidean soliloquy in which Medea persuades herself to yield her *pudor* to her *amor*, her better part to her worse, Ovid prepares the reader for later instances of female *libido* triumphant over all ordinary morality and custom. But, as we have seen above, he only prepares or *suggests*. He cuts off the tragedy before it has really begun and he diminishes the tragic note by introducing an element of parody and humour. Medea directly introduces not another erotic episode but a series of magical rejuvenations which are meant to stand in contrast with the major amatory-pathetic theme.

But the amatory theme recurs with the Cephalus–Procris episode at the end of Book VII. Here the major emphasis is again on the woman (Procris), though the man (Cephalus) is also prominent. The *pathos* is, of course, muted (Procris dies but only after being reassured of Cephalus' constancy) and the metamorphosis is omitted. Cephalus, who survives, can speak of the sad event as something in the past: he still has his own heroic role to play. The episode is thus not at all comparable to the five major stories of *pathos*. But it still carries on the amatory motif (in its muted way) and introduces a new variation of it: the theme of *frustrated mutual love*. This was not present in the *Tereus–Procne*: it will only emerge fully in the concluding *Ceyx–Alcyone*.

With the beginning of Book VIII, however, we are introduced to Scylla.[1] This episode is very close to the form of a neoteric *epyllion*, though greatly abbreviated (151 lines). Ovid clearly wished to defer a complete or rounded example of the genre until the later *Byblis* and *Myrrha*. He knew he could not repeat his effects too often and that Scylla was too commonplace, too familiar, for lengthy treatment. But her story, nevertheless, marked an intermediate stage of the motif-transformation which his *Medea* had begun. The Euripidean monologue (an 'auto-*suasoria*' much like that of his *Heroides*) is now completed by a criminal act: the act in turn necessitates the metamorphosis. Both Scylla and her ruined father, Nisus, perpetuate their hostility in animal form. Furthermore a new motif (merely hinted at with Medea)—that of the frustrated female *libido*—is now introduced.

The pathetic and amatory themes are kept alive in the *Althaea* and *Deianira* portions of the central panel which almost immediately follows the Scylla episode (after the brief interlude of Daedalus and Icarus) and takes up the second half of Book VIII and the first half of Book IX. But the amatory theme is muted, since Ovid was still saving it for the major episodes to come. He wanted an epic, not an amatory, subject-matter at this point in the poem. Althaea is Meleager's mother and she is not torn between erotic *amor* and *pudor* but between maternal and fraternal love, while the description of Deianira's sexual jealousy (so directly akin to that of Medea) is greatly abbreviated.

It is only after the central panel (the long description of Hercules' apotheosis and the brief Dryope episode which in some sense corresponds to the Icarus story of the first half of the section) that Ovid finally relates *at full length* (219 lines) an amatory *pathos* in which a frustrated female *libido* dominates the narrative. But the *Byblis* is also an extremely subtle variation of the theme. The principal change that Ovid seems to have made in his sources is the omission of Byblis' suicide or attempted suicide.[2]

[1] See the discussion of this episode (Scylla) on pp. 62f. above.

[2] See Appendix, p. 415.

The metamorphosis is represented as the *direct* consequence of her sexual frustration. This in turn is related to the Euripidean–Apollonian *pudor–amor* motif in a thoroughly novel manner that is certainly Ovid's own invention.

Byblis is represented at the beginning as prey to an emotion (her *libido* toward her brother Caunus) that she does not consciously realize (IX, 464–5):

> Sed nondum manifesta sibi est nullumque sub illo
> igne facit votum: verum tamen aestuat intus.
>
> *Yet, ignorant of herself, repressed her fires,*
> *And let no prayers express her real desires.*

The truth is not very deeply hidden: she shows it when she urges her brother to call her *Byblis* rather than *soror* (497). But as long as she is awake (*vigilans*), her conscious mind refuses to entertain the *spes obscenas*. Sleep, however, lets down her guard: she emerges from a vivid sexual dream into full awareness of her condition.

Ovid now gives us her thoughts in a very significant variation of the usual Euripidean 'auto-*suasoria*'. What weight should Byblis attach to her dream?

> Quid mihi significant ergo mea visa? Quod autem
> somnia pondus habent? An habent et somnia pondus?
> (495–6)
>
> *Yet, if so,*
> *What mean my dreams? Are dreams of weight, or no?*

The obvious moral answer, of course, is to deny any veracity to such incestuous images: *Di melius!* But the word 'gods' (*Di*) at once suggests that gods were not subject to such scruples with their own sisters: *di nempe suas habuere sorores.* But the proper answer again is that gods have their own laws which are quite different from those of mortals. The only right choice for Byblis is between self-denial and suicide. But she immediately proceeds to the reflection that this is really a matter for the two of them (herself and her brother) to decide. Yet this is a faint hope: she knows

that her brother will probably look on her desire as a crime (*scelus*). But then, examples of other sisters who loved their brothers come immediately to mind. This thought, however, makes her once more turn back on herself: where did she get it? (*unde sed hos novi?*). Where are her desires actually taking her? A slight renewal of moral resistance at this point is nevertheless once more dissipated by the thought of her brother: would she *resist* his advances if *he* were shaken by love as she is? She knows she would not. Why then should she not actively seek what she would passively grant? It is only at this moment that the familiar duel of *pudor* with *amor* is mentioned. She now knows what she wants; she wants to bend her brother's will to hers. But can she actually dare broach the subject to him? She communes with herself (IX, 514–16):

> poterisne loqui? Poterisne fateri?
> Coget *amor*: potero. Vel, si *pudor* ora tenebit,
> littera celatos arcana fatebitur ignis.
>
> *But can you make confession? Dare you speak?—*
> *Love will compel: if shame my lips repress,*
> *A letter shall my secret fires confess.*

Her *pudor*, in other words, is to be satisfied by a procedure that will soften the shock of its violation. A question of morality has quickly become only a question of strategy. The fluid sophistry of this monologue—it is one of the cleverest in Ovid—contains, however, ominous elements: the ease with which Byblis has persuaded herself, her actual blindness to reality. She has concealed from herself the true meaning of her letter: it is not *pudor* at all but only a fatal facsimile of it.

The letter itself is, in fact, the second step in her downfall. The *pudor* is now strangely mixed with audacity: *in vultu est audacia mixta pudori* (527). And what she writes is not (like her monologue) a mixture of *libido* and moral reluctance but an artful piece of special pleading. She dwells on her scruples and her terrible struggle with her feelings (which is, of course, the exact opposite of the truth). She mentions once more the example of the gods,

but now without any moral qualification. She advocates enticingly the recklessness appropriate to youth even though she quite inconsistently dwells on the *safety* of the proposed *liaison* (after all they are brother and sister and have so many opportunities to get together!). She leaves her strongest argument, a very commonplace one, for the close: she must die if he refuses! The sophistry of all this is equalled only by its folly: Byblis has blinded herself to the true character of both her brother and her action. Her precipitancy and cleverness have made her flippant as well as immoral.

The actual transmission of the letter, however, is a difficult moment. She can hardly bring herself to tell the slave that it must be carried to her—brother. But her *pudor* is now rapidly ebbing. Even the evil omen of the tablet's fall (it slips from her hands as she gives it to the slave) does not deter her: *misit tamen.*

Ovid does not describe the brother's character, but he is obviously meant to be a kind of Hippolytus, the very last person to sympathize with Byblis' desires or arguments. The ferocity of his reaction to the letter stuns her and finally forces her to recognize her folly (moralizing of 585 ff.). But it also provides her with one more excuse. She recognizes that she should not have begun, only to draw the corollary that she cannot turn back (IX, 618–19):

> Nam primum, si facta mihi revocare liceret,
> non coepisse fuit: coepta expugnare secundum est.
>
> *Best not begin, could I the past undo;*
> *But once begun, best see the contest through.*

Thus she sets in motion the last act of her tragedy: *cum pigeat temptasse, libet temptare.* She gradually abandons all restraint and finally makes herself such a nuisance that her brother, in self-defence, has to flee his own home and country (633, *mox ubi finis abest, patriam fugit ille nefasque*). This brings on the dénouement. In her madness she publicly admits her love and shamelessly tries to track her brother down, howling and shrieking like a wild bacchante. Finally exhausted by her fruitless pursuit, she comes,

at the autumn leaf-fall, to a strange country: there she collapses in tears on the ground and refuses to move, to listen to the words by which the kindly local nymphs try to keep her alive. She literally dissolves—like ice in the spring sun—and instead of a weeping woman becomes the fountain that still retains her name.

Ovid has thus depicted the relentless process of self-deception in a rather weak, if clever, woman. The sophistries, in effect, grow with their lack of success: each failure is an argument for another attempt. Finally there is nothing left but physical pursuit and its necessary end. It has all the aspects of a true drama. One step leads fatally to the next. But the materials of which the drama is made are quite commonplace and rather trite: the Euripidean monologue, the seduction letter (a *suasoria* like many of the *Heroides*), the Hippolytus motif, the very ordinary metamorphosis. Yet Ovid has used them in a quite original way. His effective separation of the two initial *suasoriae* (Byblis' monologue and the letter) and his employment of the *amor–pudor* motif as the means of introducing the letter, his treatment of the effect of failure on Byblis' *libido* (especially in her second monologue) and his transformation of a quite ordinary suicide–metamorphosis sequence into a metamorphosis that grows with some inevitability out of Byblis' plight and condition—all compose a smoothly continuous narrative of great psychological cogency and finesse. Furthermore, Ovid has made the three *suasoriae* (Byblis' two soliloquies and the letter) actually contribute to the action of the story: for it is here Byblis, not Ovid himself, who is too clever. The ingenuity with which she convinces herself is the very means by which she brings about the tragedy. In the *Heroides*, the *suasoriae* are static and cloying: here they are integral to a constantly moving drama.

No other episode of the *Metamorphoses* indicates so clearly the long way that Ovid had come from elegiac and neoteric narrative: most of the *Byblis*' components are to be found in his amatory poems, but the thing that makes it move, makes it a true narrative and drama, is precisely its non-elegiac or epic continuity, the fitting of the neoteric motifs into an 'empathetic continuum' that is

essentially dramatic. The *suasoriae* and the stock motifs are not isolated but are related to each other within the ongoing consciousness of Byblis herself. The narrative proper reveals exactly the same subjectivity as the soliloquies. In the lines that intervene between the soliloquy (in which she finally decides to approach Caunus by letter) and the letter itself (IX, 517–34),

> Hoc placet, *haec dubiam vicit sententia mentem.*
> In latus erigitur, cubitoque innixa sinistro
> 'viderit: insanos' inquit 'fateamur amores.
> Ei mihi! Quo labor? Quem mens mea concipit ignem?'
> Et meditata manu componit verba trementi.
> Dextra tenet ferrum, vacuam tenet altera ceram.
> *Incipit, et dubitat*: scribit, damnatque tabellas:
> et notat, et delet: mutat *culpatque probatque*:
> inque vicem sumptas ponit positasque resumit.
> *Quid velit, ignorat; quicquid factura videtur,*
> *displicet*: in vultu est *audacia mixta pudori.*
> Scripta 'soror' fuerat: *visum est delere sororem*
> verbaque correctis incidere talia ceris:
> 'Quam, nisi tu dederis, non est habitura salutem,
> hanc tibi mittit amans: pudet, a! pudet edere nomen.
> Et si, quid cupiam, quaeris, sine nomine vellem
> posset agi mea causa meo, nec cognita Byblis
> ante forem, quam spes votorum certa fuisset', etc.

> *There came decision: there her waverings fled;*
> *And, rising on one elbow, thus she said:*
> *'Yes, he shall judge: let this my love be writ—*
> *This madness rather. Woe is me, what pit*
> *Is at my feet, what fire is in my brain!'*
> *With this resolve she sinks in thought again;*
> *Puts word to word, with hands that shake the while*
> *(Her left the wax, her right hand holds the style);*
> *Begins, and pauses; writes, and then rejects;*
> *Marks, and erases; likes, dislikes, corrects;*
> *Lays down her tablets, takes them up anew;*

> *What's in her mind can scarce herself construe;*
> *About to act, abandons her intent;*
> *Shame in her face appears with boldness blent.*
> *She writes: 'Your sister'; then scores out the words,*
> *And on the amended wax these lines records:*
> *'One sends you health, who loves you—health that she,*
> *Save by your gift, herself shall never see.*
> *To tell you who I am, is shame on shame:*
> *Ah, could my suit be heard without my name!*
> *A stranger still, not Byblis, would I be,*
> *Till prayers have proof, and hopes are certainty',*

there is no break between what Ovid says about Byblis' feelings and the feelings themselves. We see exactly how the troubled mind of her previous soliloquy is brought to the point of composing the difficult message. The same thing is true of the transition between the dream and the soliloquy (IX, 468–75):

> Spes tamen obscenas animo demittere non est
> ausa suo vigilans: placida resoluta quiete
> *saepe videt, quod amat.* Visa est quoque iungere fratri
> corpus; et erubuit, quamvis sopita iacebat.
> Somnus abit. Silet illa diu repetitque quietis
> ipsa suae speciem *dubiaque ita mente profatur*:
> 'Me miseram! Tacitae quid vult sibi noctis imago?
> Quam nolim rata sit! Cur haec ego somnia vidi?'

> *She watched her waking thoughts, and did not dare*
> *To let unlawful hopes have entrance there;*
> *But, when relaxed in sleep's passivity,*
> *The object of her love would often see,*
> *And dream she clasped him too, and, as she lay*
> *In sleep, she blushed; then, waking, long would stay*
> *In silent thought, conning her dream; then sighed,*
> *Perplexed in mind, and, 'Woe is me!' she cried;*
> *'What means this dream? Why was it given to me,*
> *Who ne'er would wish it true, this dream to see?'*

Again, just as in the *Scylla*, the action continues through the soliloquies into the third-personal narrative: there is no real difference between the poet's empathetic penetration of Byblis' mind and his direct reproduction of it in her own words. From the dream to the soliloquy and the soliloquy to the letter, from the letter to the dispatch of the letter, etc. there runs an empathetic continuum which is not broken. It is only at the end that we see Byblis, as it were, from without, but this is because there is now no distinction between her internal emotions and her external acts: she has reached a stage of passion in which she does not care who knows what she is or what she does (IX, 635–44):

> Tum vero maestam tota Miletida mente
> *defecisse* ferunt, tum vero a pectore vestem
> diripuit planxitque suos furibunda lacertos.
> *Iamque palam est demens inconcessamque fatetur*
> *spem Veneris*; sine qua patriam invisosque Penates
> deserit et profugi sequitur vestigia fratris;
> utque tuo motae, proles Semeleia, thyrso
> Ismariae celebrant repetita triennia bacchae:
> Byblida non aliter latos *ululasse* per agros
> Bubasides *videre* nurus.[1]

> *Ah, then did Byblis, wholly dispossessed*
> *Of reason, tear her clothes and beat her breast;*
> *And raving now with madness unconcealed*
> *To all the world her lawless love revealed.*
> *From native land and hateful home she fled,*
> *And followed where her brother's footsteps led.*
> *Like bacchants whom the mystic wand excites,*
> *When each third year brings round the Thracian rites,*
> *Shrieking she ran, and where Bubassus lies*
> *Amid broad fields, amazed the women's eyes.*

She is now to be seen and judged by the whole countryside as is

[1] *Sine qua* in l. 639 is the reading of all the MSS. (including the originals of N and possibly M) and is clearly correct: without the prospect of love, her home is hateful.

shown by the indirect discourse (*maestam...defecisse* ferunt) and the reference to external observers (*Bubasides* videre *nurus*). The difference of all this from the 'jerky' discontinuity of elegy or the immobilized *pathos* of the neoteric *epyllion* (*Ciris*, *Peleus–Thetis*) is striking indeed.

But the *Byblis* must also be seen in the context of the whole section. It is clearly a step in Ovid's transition from *Scylla* to *Myrrha*. Unlike the *Scylla*, there is no overt crime: her incestuous desire is fatal to herself, but she neither commits an act like Scylla's parricide nor actually consummates her incestuous *libido*. The darkest shades, the worst horrors, of incest are reserved for the *Myrrha* episode to come.

The interval between the *Byblis* and the *Myrrha* is occupied by the two miracles, *Iphis* and *Pygmalion*, and the homosexual amours of Cyparissus, Ganymede and Hyacinth, along with the framing and introductory *Orpheus–Eurydice*. We can set down the succession of motifs somewhat as follows:

(1) *Iphis* (direct contrast to Byblis: Iphis expressly rejects an unnatural *amor*).

(2) *Orpheus and Eurydice* (the theme of *thwarted mutual love* is reintroduced: this of course recalls the *Procris and Cephalus* and anticipates the coming *Ceyx–Alcyone*).

(3) *The Homosexual Amores* (Cyparissus, etc.) revert to the theme of unnatural love but in a quite beneficent or neutral context (for the gods are different: neither human passion nor morality is involved). This is an obvious 'contrast' to the sombre *Byblis*, *Myrrha*, etc.

(4) *Pygmalion*. He, as we have seen, is deliberately contrasted with the impure Propoetides (just as was Iphis with Byblis). We are thus ready for the much greater and more explicit contrast with *Myrrha*.

The diagram on p. 226 illustrates the whole sequence.

Thus, though these intervening stories are mainly put in for contrast with the major theme, they also suggest and anticipate its development. We are now ready for a climactic expression of the

general motif (unnatural female *libido*) of the *Medea*, *Scylla* and *Byblis* and for a final and extreme statement of the particular *Byblis* motif (incest).

(1) Byblis (guilty and incestuous love leading to destructive metamorphosis)
(2) *Contrast:* Iphis (innocent but unnatural love miraculously justified by metamorphosis)
(3) Orpheus, Cyparissus, Ganymede, Hyacinthus (unnatural love justified by the special privilege of the gods and saved by metamorphosis)
(4) Propoetides (guilty unnatural love punished by metamorphosis)
(5) *Contrast:* Pygmalion (innocent but unnatural love miraculously justified by metamorphosis)
(6) *Myrrha* (guilty and incestuous love leading to destructive metamorphosis)

We can to some extent reconstruct the sources Ovid used for his *Myrrha*.[1] The tale is related by Antoninus Liberalis (34) and may go back to Nicander, though Antoninus does not explicitly attribute it to him. But Ovid certainly had Cinna's famous *Zmyrna* in mind. The plan of the *Zmyrna* (as we can see most especially from the *Ciris* which in part recalls the *Zmyrna*) also included a dialogue between Myrrha and her nurse. It is ultimately, of course, a reminiscence of the similar dialogue in the *Hippolytus* of Euripides. But Ovid's style was assuredly very different from that of Cinna: furthermore, the one thing he would not do was copy Cinna in a literal or slavish fashion. Thus it is certain that Ovid greatly reduced the extensive dialogue of the *Zmyrna*. Cinna, like the author of the *Ciris*, had built his *epyllion* around a single *pathos*-scene (Myrrha's long conversation with the nurse following her attempted suicide) that must have taken up a very large part of his poem. Ovid confines the scene to a relatively brief episode of his strictly continuous narrative. His emphasis is on the *horror* of Myrrha's *act* (after all Myrrha consummated her incestuous desire as Byblis did not) and on the special nuance which this gave to her metamorphosis. The episode as a whole is meant to complete and lend climax to the female *libido* and incest motifs. The *libido*,

[1] See Appendix, p. 420.

the consummation of the *libido* and the metamorphosis-solution, all reach their most extreme and, in this sense, definitive form.

Ovid strikes, at once, the proper note of horror, of sacrilege (x, 300–3):

> Dira canam: procul hinc natae, procul este parentes!
> aut, mea si vestras mulcebunt carmina mentes,
> desit in hac mihi parte fides, nec credite factum:
> vel, si credetis, facti quoque credite poenam.
> *A dreadful theme is mine: ye daughters, fly;*
> *Fathers, avert your gaze, and come not nigh.*
> *Or, if my art beguiles, let credence fail;*
> *And think that here I tell a truthless tale;*
> *Or, if you take the tale of guilt for true,*
> *Believe the tale of retribution too.*

He protests, perhaps, too much. Obviously he finds in such a topic a quite fair field for his poetical skill. But the difference between Byblis and Myrrha is carefully underlined. Myrrha's soliloquy (x, 320–55) does not end in the easy victory of her *libido*. She finally sees through her own self-deception (345 f.) and, though she still longs for a similar *furor* in her pious father, she knows that the longing is futile (351–5). After the usual hesitation she actually puts the rope to her neck. It is the nurse who stops the attempted suicide and then, in a scene heavily indebted to Euripides' *Hippolytus* (where the nurse is likewise the chief culprit), discovers and undertakes to abet her charge's incestuous desire. The clandestine amour between Myrrha and her unwitting father is, of course, invested with all the stock accompaniments of fatality and horror (452–4):

> Ter pedis offensi signo est revocata, ter omen
> funereus bubo letali carmine fecit:
> it tamen.
> *Three times did Myrrha stumble: thrice, in vain,*
> *That adverse omen bade her turn again;*
> *And graveyard owls gave forth their boding strain.*
> *Yet on she went.*

The discovery of Myrrha's identity by her father leaves Myrrha no alternative but flight: she instinctively escapes her enraged father's sword. And she finally sees that her death would, in fact, pollute another realm with her accursed presence. She must abandon both the dead and the living (x, 485–7):

> sed ne violem vivosque superstes
> mortuaque exstinctos, ambobus pellite regnis,
> mutataeque mihi vitamque necemque negate.
>
> *But lest, if living still, a curse I shed*
> *On living men, or dying, on the dead,*
> *Ban me from both the worlds, and bidding fly*
> *My human shape, both life and death deny.*

This prayer appears also in Antoninus Liberalis and may go back to Nicander, but Ovid changed the sequence of events in Liberalis (there the father discovers the identity of his secret paramour only after the birth of her child) to show the gradual development of Myrrha's despair and *taedium vitae*. She wanders, after her discovery and escape, through the Arabian fields; it is only toward the end of her term of pregnancy that she has recourse to the desperate prayer (x, 481–3):

> tum nescia voti
> atque inter mortisque metus et taedia vitae
> est tales complexa preces.
>
> *in blind appeal did cry*
> *(Being tired of life, and yet afraid to die).*

Furthermore, the metamorphosis is explicitly declared to be a kind of death, a real loss of human consciousness and identity (x, 498–500):

> subsedit mersitque suos in cortice vultus.
> Quae quamquam *amisit veteres cum corpore sensus,*
> flet tamen.
>
> *Then in she sank, drowning her face within the bark. Though human consciousness and human body both were lost, yet still she weeps.*

Myrrha, in short, is the extreme instance of human degradation to a sub-human form. The fact that Ovid insists on her loss of consciousness, of all her self except its grief, is especially significant. He had now reached the lowest point in his narrative of unnatural *libido* and perverted desire.

But so far we have seen but one side of human passion. Tereus, Procne, Scylla, Byblis and Myrrha had been contrasted with the sad but hardly tragic Procris and Cephalus (that for this very reason lacked a metamorphosis) or with the pious Iphis and Pygmalion. But these latter stories were short 'miracles' or theodicies that hardly impinged on the real world of love and passion. The following episodes of Venus and Adonis, Atalanta and Midas were, as we have already seen, set in quite another key. In order to right the balance, to end his series of *pathē* on a more benevolent note, Ovid needed a more benevolent *amor*, one that would not separate the lovers but actually unite them in the final metamorphosis. So far, the husbands and wives of this section (Tereus–Procne, Cephalus–Procris, Orpheus–Eurydice, Atalanta–Hippomenes) had met tragic or disagreeable fates; the amorous heroines of the *libido* episodes had been unable to gain, still less to marry, the lovers they coveted. Metamorphosis simply removed their degraded humanity from an impossible existence. In short, the horrible finale of the *Myrrha*, and indeed the whole *libido* section that it brings to a climax, required a corrective or antidote: both love and metamorphosis had a deeper and greater meaning for Ovid than could be expressed by the quite negative episodes of Tereus, Scylla, Byblis and Myrrha.

Furthermore, the arrangement of the second half of the section (after the central panel) indicates clearly the necessity of a quite considerable erotic episode at its end. Here we have:

Central Panel

Byblis

Iphis–Homosexual Amores–Pygmalion Sequence

Myrrha

Atalanta–Venus–Adonis–Midas Sequence

The two sequences, each of exactly the same length (429 lines), are obviously designed as contrast to the central panel and the two *pathos* episodes of Byblis and Myrrha. But Ovid would hardly have *ended* with a contrast section. Just as the Avenging Gods section began with the Actaeon story and ended with Niobe and the Lycian Peasants, so here also the initial episode of *pathos* (Tereus–Procne) required a comparable ending in the same style. Furthermore, the relative length of the two contrast-sequences (858 lines) demanded that the final *pathos* episode be of considerable size and prominence: the balance of the whole section had to be maintained.

Nor could Ovid end the section on a feeble or uncertain note. The *Europa* episode of the first and the *Niobe* of the second sections had set, as it were, their seal on all that had gone before: they occupied the final or climactic positions because they were in fact the climaxes of their sections. Hence the obvious importance of the episode that was designed to conclude the longest and most pivotal of all the sections. The *Ceyx–Alcyone* is, in fact, so significant that we must devote a whole chapter to its elucidation.

CHAPTER VII

THE PATHOS OF LOVE: II

THE *Ceyx and Alcyone* comes at the very end of Book XI almost as part of the transition to Troy and to the 'historical' events of the last four books. But neither the story of Peleus that immediately precedes it nor the story of Aesacus that immediately follows it (and ends the book) is in the least heroic or historical. They concern primarily the love of Peleus for Thetis; the love of Aesacus for the nymph Hesperie. Each nicely balances the other: the violent courtship of Peleus is successful; that of Aesacus is catastrophic. They constitute, in short, a pair of end-pieces that are meant to set off the mighty epic that lies between them. Their brief reversion to the themes of the *Divine Comedy* (the love of gods and mortals, the pursuit of a timorous nymph) provides the appropriate contrast to the *Ceyx–Alcyone*. The ensemble (the *Ceyx–Alcyone* with the framing *Peleus and Thetis* and *Aesacus*) immediately follows the long Atalanta–Venus–Adonis–Midas sequence. It thus in effect 'corresponds' to the *Myrrha* episode that had in its turn followed the exactly parallel Iphis–Orpheus–Pygmalion sequence. Both the position (at the end of the section) and the elaborate framing of the *Ceyx–Alcyone* indicate its relative importance. This is also shown by its mere length (338 lines), for it is, after the *Phaethon*, the longest single episode of the poem.

Ovid really gives us the major clue to its meaning in the preliminary liaison that connects it with the brief *Peleus–Thetis* episode. Peleus, an exile polluted by the murder of his brother Phocus, comes to Trachis, Ceyx's kingdom, for asylum. There Ceyx receives him with great politeness but also explains that he cannot entertain him as he would like. For a great sorrow has come to the land of Trachis: the sad fate of Ceyx's niece, Chione,

OVID

AS AN EPIC POET

BY

BROOKS OTIS

Professor of Latin
University of North Carolina

SECOND EDITION

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS