THE WORLD OF OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES*

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As I have often felt my own views shaped and confirmed by what others have shown me about the readings which later literary and visual artists have given of the *Metamorphoses*, so I should like this study to be accessible not only to specialists but to nonclassicists also, for instance, to students of Chaucer and Ariosto and Titian. For this reason translations are supplied for all the Latin, in the text at least, and places, events, and figures from the ancient world are identified more fully than would otherwise be appropriate. The translations are all my own. When, as happens, the same verse is translated differently at various points, this is not neglect but a desire to bring out now this, now another, quality of the Latin. I quote the original text a good deal on purpose. Paraphrase does less justice to the *Metamorphoses*, I dare say, than even to the *Aeneid*, and my argument is often based on close examination of stylistic features. A reader soaked in the text will be in a better position to weigh the claims made about it.

In the matter of the text I have not followed any one edition, but have consulted several, in particular Ehwald's edition with commentary, Anderson's Teubner text, Lee's edition of Book One and Hollis's of Book Eight. Pending the appearance of Tarrant's Oxford Classical Text, the best available is the revision of the Loeb edition carried out by Goold.[6] At every place where the textual reading might affect my argument I have noted this.

CHAPTER ONE

STRUCTURES

The Search for Structure

Since the mid-1940s Ovidian scholarship has paid great attention to the structure of the *Metamorphoses*. Sometimes at book length, sometimes in essays, critics have sought to identify the elements which articulate and unify the poem. Our age is perhaps characteristically interested in such questions. But there is also a special quality about the poem which provokes the interest. It is so extraordinarily varied, so ample, so free from obvious schemes of arrangement, that critics have repeatedly searched for designs which will be able to show the sense and purpose of the whole. I agree with this enterprise, though not with the particular results most have arrived at. We may begin our study of the poem by considering its structure as we work our way from large, external features in towards the heart of things.

Good clues about the arrangement of a work may be given by the beginning and the end. Stephens found that two philosophical passages, set at the extremities of the poem, suggested the significance of the whole.[1] According to him, Ovid's account of how the world was created out of the primeval chaos (1.5–88) is Stoic but also includes much that derives from Empedocles. The corresponding passage just before the end is the long speech of Pythagoras (15.75–478). Both of these are linked with Orphism, which celebrates Eros as the supreme deity. On the basis of this, and of other arguments as well, Stephens concludes that Love is the principal subject of the poem. We do not need to assess this idea here. I shall simply say in passing that, though the prominence of love in Ovid's stories is undeniable, the series of equations involved in this view seems to me weak, and too much of the poem is omitted. What we want to notice is how structure is a tool of interpretation.

The opening and close of the poem have been used to construct a different interpretation. In a valuable essay Buchheit has pointed out matching references to Augustus as Jupiter at the beginning (in the assembly of gods held about Lycaon, 1.200–205) and the end (in connection with Caesar's apotheosis, 15.858–60, 869–70).[2] He uses this, together with other evidence, to demonstrate that in the *Metamorphoses* the meaning of the universe is to be viewed in relation to Rome and her history. In comparison to Stephens's, Buchheit's observations on the two key passages are more firmly made, but the interpretation fits the remainder of the poem less well: the vast bulk of the work has almost nothing to do with Rome.

We may take this pair of essays as a first indication of the difficulties which beset attempts to determine the poem's structure. Both critics find in the first and last books what might be called framing elements and from them draw conclusions about the poem's subject. But the two choose to focus on different passages. What are we to do in this situation? Decide which of the two views is superior? This is not easy, since there is something to be said in favor of each. Then accept them both? But they are at odds with one another. Better than either of these courses, it seems to me, is to recognize that still other framing structures could probably be found and, moreover, that the poem calls out for such schemes and at the same time suggests so many of them as to baffle the reader.

The structures described by Stephens and Buchheit are simple, and proposed rather than demonstrated, in that they each involve but two passages. Far more extensive and detailed are the analyses of Ludwig and Otis, which bring us closer to the problem of the poem's entire structure. Ludwig finds the poem articulated in twelve sections, the first one belonging to prehistory (1.5–451), the next seven to mythical time (1.452–11.193), the last four to historical time (11.194–15.870).[3] For Otis the poem falls into four principal sections, which he calls The Divine Comedy (1.5–2.875), The Avenging Gods (3.1–6.400), The Pathos of Love (6.401–11.795), and Rome and the Deified Ruler (12.1–15.870).[4] Both, while insisting on these divisions, also recognize the continuities from one to the next. To see clearly the differences between the two let us take as a fair sample their analyses of Books Three and Four.

Ludwig analyzes the passage from 3.1 to 4.606 as a series of frames (see Figure 1). The outermost frame consists of Cadmus and his wife Harmonia. To one part that deals with Cadmus' arrival in Boeotia, slaying of a dragon, and founding of Thebes (3.1–137) corresponds another that tells of the couple's departure from Thebes and their metamorphosis into snakes (4.563–606). Inside this is set a second frame: 3.138–255 concerns Actaeon, son of Autonoe, one of Cadmus' daughters; 4.416–562 concerns another daughter, Ino, together with her husband, Athamas, and their sons, Learchus and Melicertus. These frames surround four parts devoted to Bacchus, who emerges therefore as the central subject of the passage: (1) 3.256–315, Jupiter's love for Semele and the birth of Bacchus; (2) 3.316–512, Tiresias and the intertwined stories of Echo and Narcissus; (3) 3.513–733, Bacchus' opponent Pentheus, with a long inset on those other unbelievers, the Tyrrhenian pirates; (4) 4.1–415, the daughters of Minyas, who chose to spend their time in weaving rather than in worshipping Bacchus—this last part consisting chiefly of the tales told by the sisters, which are disposed, says Ludwig, in a symmetrical set of three.[5]

Ludwig's full analysis includes observations regarding the section's tone and rhythm: love in the Tiresias and the Minyades episodes contrasts with the tragic and hymnic Bacchus theme; the section rises to a climax in Bacchus' double triumph, over the pirates and Pentheus, and his epiphany to the Minyades. He also cites details which further support the proposed structure, pointing out that Cadmus, as he leaves Thebes, is represented as thinking of the dragon, which strengthens the link between the opening and closing parts of the section; similarly, among the stories of Minyas' daughters the first and third groups begin with a *praeteritio*. Several objections can be raised against this structure, among them that whereas Actaeon is a grandson of Cadmus and Harmonia, Ino and Athamas, the principal actors in their episode, are daughter and son-in-law, so the parallel between the two stories making up the inner frame is not very close; also that Bacchus is out of sight and out of mind in much of the section.

But let us be aware of the questions such an analysis raises. To what extent does the frame shape or govern or determine or even represent its contents? Can an inset by its size take precedence over the material in which it is embedded? In other words, if we find one story set within another, as happens very often in the *Metamorphoses*, does this arrangement imply that the outer one is more important in some way? Perhaps "border" would sometimes be an apter word than "frame." Or, again, between successive stories, which kinds of links or other articulating features ought we to pay attention to? Identity of characters or place? Parallelism or other similarity of subject? General theme? What do we include in analysis, what exclude? (And in those cases, how do we decide what the subject or theme

FIGURE 1. Ludwig's analysis of *Metamorphoses* 3.1–4.606

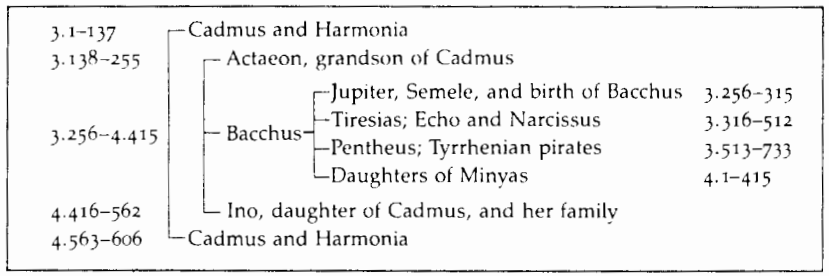
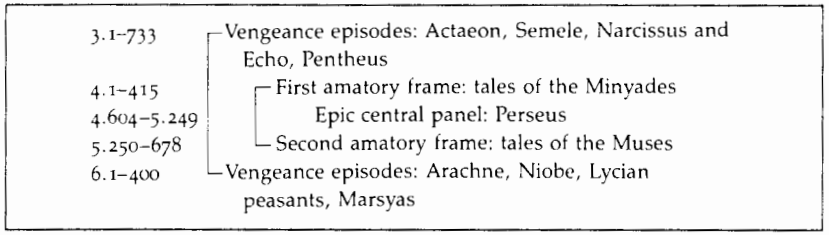


FIGURE 2. Otis's analysis of *Metamorphoses* 3.1–6.400



is?) Rhetoric of presentation—for example, beginning two sections with the same figure of speech? Comparable size in balancing units? These are quite different matters and may conflict with one another.

These questions are sharpened if we compare Otis's analysis of the same passage. His is more consistent in that it relies almost exclusively on theme. In tracing out the variations in the theme it is also more intricate and subtle, hence more difficult to summarize accurately. It too is grounded in symmetry (see Figure 2). What Otis perceives to be the fundamental unit of structure is much larger, stretching from Book Three through the middle of Book Six. Ludwig's third section of the poem, comprising the stories from the foundation of Thebes through Cadmus' and Harmonia's metamorphosis (3.1–4.603), is here seen as matching another one, comprising the tales of Minerva and the Muses, Arachne, Niobe, the Lycian peasants, and Marsyas (5.250–6.400); these two sections surround Ovid's account of Perseus (4.604–5.249). According to Otis, Perseus constitutes the epic central panel (both the preceding and the following large divisions of the poem also have epic central panels). Flanking this are two frames in which the subject is love: the tales of the Minyades, and those which the Muses recount to Minerva. Flanking these in

turn are stories of divine vengeance. Jupiter, not Bacchus, dominates this quarter of the poem, and its overall theme is vengeance.[6] Structure provides meaning.

Again the analysis contains elements that are persuasive. Otis points out parallels between the Song of the Minyades and the Song of the Muses, and between Actaeon and Pentheus, who open and close the first group of vengeance stories; he also notes the heightening of Juno's vengeance from Tiresias to Pentheus to Ino. Yet, again, his analysis has lapses and omissions: for instance, the second erotic frame directly follows the central panel, whereas between that panel and the first frame intervenes an unexplained section on Ino and the metamorphoses of Cadmus and Harmonia (416–603); moreover, the tales of the Muses which center on the rape of Proserpina are not all erotic.

The point here, however, is not to praise or criticize in detail these or other particular schemes that have been proposed for the poem, but rather to allow them to draw our attention to several important features. The number and earnestness of the analyses attest the size and the incredible variety of the poem, which tend to baffle interpretation. The remarkable lack of agreement among the analyses points to the poem's extraordinary productiveness of structures. It abounds in parallels and contrasts, symmetries and variations, with links of every sort, thematic as well as formal. If critics fail to agree (and on this poem critical agreement is minimal), it is not solely because criticism is a subjective enterprise, each critic holding his own view and there being no way of deciding among them, but rather because the poem is continually throwing out hints of structure which are neither all consistent with one another nor, if taken severally, adequate: something is always overlooked or given special emphasis. It is not that the critic was altogether mistaken; in each case he was responding to something he found in the book. None of these schemes is based on nothing; rather, hints of structure were picked up and exaggerated. The poem at the same time invites and repels attempts to interpret it through its structure.[7]

We can see these two sides in a pair of further observations. On the one hand, the "shapelessness" of the poem is reflected in the relation between its material and its book divisions. Occasionally the end of a book coincides with the completion of a story; ordinarily, however, the story spills over from one book to the next, and the division comes to seem arbitrary as a result. The opportunity for structure is neglected. Ovid sometimes seems to flaunt this too. Book Two ends with the disguised Jupiter carrying off Europa, but

the poet saves for the start of Book Three Jupiter's laying aside of the bull disguise and revealing himself; as if almost to deny any break, the new book begins with the word *iamque* (3.1, "and already").[8] Though the story of Cephalus has come to an end with the close of Book Seven, his departure is postponed to the opening verses of Book Eight—and the following story is tacked on with a casual *interea* (8.6, "meanwhile"). Ovid also introduces a new character or situation right before the end of a book. Phaethon appears at the end of Book One, anticipating his visit to his father. At the end of Book Eight the river god Achelous groans over his missing horn; he is questioned about it only in the following book. And though the council of Greek heroes is summoned at the very end of Book Twelve to hear the debate over Achilles' armor, Ajax and Ulysses do not deliver their speeches until Book Thirteen. The practice of Virgil is very different: he gives to all books of the *Aeneid* a thematic compositional unity, marks them off clearly from one another, and structures his poem around their distinct groupings (the easiest example is the beginning in Book Seven of the second half, set in Italy now and comprised of war rather than travel).[9]

On the other hand, a curious instance shows us just how endemic schematizing is to critical reading of the *Metamorphoses*. In a distinguished essay on the poem's humor von Albrecht discerns patterns in the presence or absence of humor and also in the different types of humor: thus he finds a long crescendo and swift decrescendo in the humor of Book One; Book Nine contrasts with Book Eight by beginning in a humorous vein; and so forth.[10] So rampant is the desire to find principles of structure. My claim is not that these patterns are fictions of scholars' imaginations, but that they lead to nothing beyond an appreciation of Ovid's feeling for rhythm, variation, counterpoint, and the like. The soundest analysis of large sections of the poem is by Guthmüller, who in fact offers no interpretation and therefore distorts less than others.[11]

Organizations

METAMORPHOSIS

Structural analyses like those of Ludwig and Otis, which rely of course on abstraction, run aground on the uncapturable exuberance and variety of the poem. Several more concrete, recurring features give greater promise of indicating where the poem's unity lies and

are more likely to point us towards the book's central concerns. Let us start with the most obvious, which gives the book its title: the diverse stories are linked by the fact that each includes a metamorphosis.[12] Ovid announces his subject in the very first words of the poem: *in nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas / corpora* (1.1–2, "my mind is moved to sing of forms changed into new bodies"), and carries it out everywhere. In Book Three, for instance, we read of the transformation of the dragon's teeth into the first men of Thebes, of Actaeon into a deer, of Tiresias into a woman, of the girl Echo into the natural phenomenon, of Narcissus into a flower, and of the Tyrrhenian pirates into dolphins. All told, about two hundred fifty metamorphoses are narrated or mentioned. This strikes me as not only the most obvious but also the most important unifying feature of the poem. Astonishingly, some critics have urged us to ignore this as trivial.[13] This flies in the face of common sense. Moreover, a self-conscious remark carefully placed by Ovid should banish any lingering doubts. In Book Eight, the very midpoint of the whole, Pirithous, after hearing of how a girl was changed into an island, declares to the assembled company that he refuses to believe in the possibility of metamorphosis (8.612–15). Of course he is wrong, as his companion Lelex undertakes to prove with another story. To describe what metamorphosis is ought to be a crucial move in interpreting the poem.

NARRATIVE LINKS

A second regular feature is that every story is joined to the one before it through some narrative link. Ovid never just says, "Now let me tell another tale." Some character or action or place always ties successive stories together, making of the whole an unbroken series. This is one of the meanings of the phrase with which the poet describes his enterprise at the start: *perpetuum . . . carmen* (1.4, "a continuous poem").[14] The series of tales beginning with Io offers a good example of this connected form of narrative. Io's son Epaphus has a playmate Phaethon, who, challenged by Epaphus about his lineage, goes to make inquiry of his father, the Sun. Thus do we move from Io to Phaethon. Phaethon's driving of his father's chariot sets the world on fire and precipitates his own death. Thereupon his sisters, weeping over his death, are changed into trees, while because of the same grief his cousin Cygnus is changed into a swan. Jupiter, when making a tour of inspection through the damaged world, catches sight of the nymph Callisto, subject of the next tale. And so it continues, one story leading to the next in unbroken succession. The only

exceptions to this rule are the numerous stories which characters within the poem relate to one another, either singly (as when Vertumnus tells Pomona about Iphis and Anaxarete, 14.698–771) or in numbers (nearly all of Book Ten is sung by Orpheus), either in contest (the Muses compete with Pierus' daughters, 5.307–661) or in the course of ordinary conversation (as when Theseus and his companions stop off at the cave of the river god Achelous and spend an evening exchanging stories, 8.577–9.88). These exceptions are only apparent, however. Their narration is well motivated within the poem, where story-telling, significantly, is a popular activity. It remains true that all the parts are linked in narrative. This gives to the whole an impression of linear connectedness and coherence. The reader is made to feel that he is launched not on a series of discrete tales but a solid, continuous whole. The narrative advances with the logic of time itself.

THEMATIC LINKS

Many of the stories are joined to one another by thematic links. Successive or neighboring tales contain similar situations, characters, props, and other features. The sculptor Pygmalion, who out of stone creates a living woman, is juxtaposed with the Propoetides, women who become stone (10.238–97): one is the inversion of the other. In Book One Daphne and Io suffer nearly identical experiences. Each one's beauty attracts the immediate love of a god (Apollo and Jupiter, respectively); each flees and is pursued; each hears the divine lover boasting, almost comically, of his status (512–24, 595–97); both undergo metamorphosis, after which only their whiteness remains from their former selves (552, 743).[15] The parallel seems too strong to be accidental. Book Eight presents the tale of the aged couple, Baucis and Philemon. They are the only people to offer hospitality to Jupiter and Mercury, who have come to earth in human disguise. Though very poor, they serve the gods an appetizing banquet. Later, at the end of their lives, they are rewarded by being changed into sacred trees. The following story is that of Erysichthon, who for having dared to cut down a grove of sacred trees is punished with insatiable desire for food. The themes of food, hunger, and sacred trees, strangely combined, run between the two stories. In Ovid's rehandling of the Erysichthon legend there is some evidence of his attempt to emphasize the thematic connection with the preceding one. Callimachus, whose version of that story in his *Hymn to Demeter* served as Ovid's model,[16] had Erysichthon cut down the sacred grove because

he wanted the timber in order to construct a banqueting hall. This human, practical motive has been removed by Ovid, who makes him act without any stated motive at all.[17] Consequently his Erysichthon is more purely impious, and so the tie (contrast, not parallel) to Baucis and Philemon is strengthened. We catch the poet, as it were, in the act of forging the link.

Similarly, between Books Thirteen and Fourteen he builds a kind of bridge by the parallelism of two stories. Polyphemus, who wants to be Galatea's lover, kills Acis, whom she prefers (13.750–897). Then Circe, who wants to be Glaucus' lover, transforms the woman he loves, Scylla (14.1–67). Set still further apart, the stories of Orpheus and Eurydice (10.1–77) and of Aesacus and Hesperia (11.751–95) also appear to recall one another and, because of their position, to enframe two books of the poem. In each case, at the moment of union (Eurydice's marriage, the rape of Hesperia) the woman is bitten by a snake and dies; the man renounces the world; and the gods take pity on the bereaved lover (10.40–48, 11.784–85). Moreover, a verse from the latter tale echoes one from the tale of Daphne and Apollo, all the way back at the beginning of the poem (11.774, 1.539). This is provocative. Such thematic links, which are a staple of literary composition, invite the reader to compare the stories. The similarities urge him to note the differences. He expects that the stories will shed light on one another and he will gain insight into the human problem which is being thus examined from two points of view. What are we supposed to make, he wonders, of the parallels between Daphne and Io or the contrasts between Erysichthon and Baucis and Philemon? Do not Orpheus and Aesacus define the borders of a section dealing with the theme of sorrowful love? Though not affecting all stories, these thematic links are numerous; critics have been much occupied in pointing them out.[18] Taken together, they hint that the poem can be ordered as a mosaic of developed themes.

COMPREHENSIVENESS

The last regular feature of the *Metamorphoses* is its several forms of comprehensiveness, which, singly and combined, are so strong as to be deliberate. The poem is comprehensive in chronology, in subject matter, and in literary genres. In time the book goes from the creation of the world to the recent past, from the metamorphosis of cosmic chaos into order at the beginning of time all the way down to the metamorphosis of Julius Caesar into a god, which took place a year before the poet's birth. No era falls outside the boundaries of the

poem. Ludwig has rightly compared the work to the universal histories which became especially important in the first century B.C.: on the Greek side, Timagenes and Nicolaus of Damascus may be mentioned; Varro with his *De Gente Populi Romani*, on the Latin.[19]

In subject matter too the poem embraces virtually everything. It touches upon all the major stories of ancient mythology, the two large groups (the Theban cycle and the Trojan war, together with the episodes that lead up to and follow each) as well as stories of the early heroic age, of Athens and its royal family, of Rome's founding (somewhat skimpy, to be sure), and many others. It is so complete that it might serve as a mythological handbook. (That in fact it came to do so is ironic.)

Less often observed is the poem's comprehensiveness of literary genres. Lafaye draws up a list of all the poetic genres found,[20] but the poem includes much more. At one place or another it handles the themes and employs the tone of virtually every species of literature. This deserves study in some detail, since not only the number of genres but also the way they are introduced helps us to understand Ovid's intention. Epic naturally predominates. The hexameter verse and the primarily narrative character of the material alone would suffice to suggest this.[21] But the poem abounds in those small features distinctive of epic: similes (such as Apollo's pursuit of Daphne: "as when in an empty field a Gallic hound sees a hare . . . ," 1.533–39), catalogues (Actaeon's hounds, 3.206–25; hunters of the Calydonian boar, 8.301–23; and others), ecphrases, or descriptions of works of art (the tapestries of Minerva and Arachne, 6.70–128; the mixing bowl which Anius gives to Aeneas, 13.681–701). And it includes familiar heroic scenes such as a storm (11.480–572) and, of course, battle (the battle of Perseus against Phineus and his allies, 5.1–235; of the Lapiths and Centaurs, 12.219–535).

The poem also includes the epyllion, a Hellenistic substitute for epic. The epyllion was short, usually no more than several hundred verses, and complete in itself; by Ovid's day it tended to treat erotic themes, often a woman's strange or problematic love. The *Metamorphoses* has, of course, many self-contained stories; in the narrower sense we may cite as an epyllion the story of Scylla, the girl who betrayed her father and country to their enemy Minos in the hope of winning his love, but who was then rejected by him anyway (8.1–151). The subject was also treated in an independent, nearly contemporary epyllion, the *Ciris*.

Second only to epic comes tragedy, and among tragedies none were closer to Ovid than those of Euripides.[22] His account of Hecuba

(13.399–575) closely follows, up to a certain point, the Attic original, even translating some of its verses. The confrontation between Bacchus and Pentheus (3.511–733) and the career of Medea (7.1–403) are obviously indebted to Euripides as well. Many other stories in the *Metamorphoses* may have been treated on the stage in tragedies which are now lost to us. Aeschylus, for example, wrote an *Oreithyia* (cf. *Met.* 6.675–721); Sophocles, a *Tereus* (cf. 6.411–674) and a *Niobe* (cf. 6.146–312); Euripides, a *Phaethon* (cf. 1.748–2.400); both Accius and Pacuvius, early Roman writers of tragedy, an *Armorum Iudicium*, on the dispute between Ajax and Ulysses for the arms of Achilles (cf. 13.1–398). The nurse who panders to Myrrha's passion for her father (10.298–502) is a figure that can be traced back to Phaedra's nurse in the *Hippolytus* of Euripides. Elsewhere a cowherd rushes in to announce to Peleus that a monstrous wolf is ravaging his cattle by the shore (11.349–78). His language is very high-flown, and although, as he himself declares, there is no time to lose, he spends more than twenty verses elaborating the scenery. As a result "the whole speech reads like a parody of the traditional messenger-speech of tragedy."[23] As for the familiar literary elements of a tragedy, no trace is found of chorus or dialogue, but examples abound of dramatic monologues, especially those of women in distress. On the model of Euripides, who was famous for them, Ovid composed such monologues for Myrrha (10.320–355), Scylla (8.44–80), Althaea (8.478–511), and others.

These remind us that rhetoric is not excluded from tragedy, and indeed it is present in the poem in all its forms. The speeches of the women are all of the deliberative variety: Scylla, for instance, debates with herself whether to remain loyal to Megara, the city over which her father rules, or by betraying it to ingratiate herself with Minos, the captain of the besieging forces, with whom she has fallen in love. The speech of Pythagoras, on the theme of universal change, is an instance of the demonstrative type (15.75–478). The contest between Ajax and Ulysses at the beginning of Book Thirteen, in which each delivers a full speech before the assembled Greeks, provides a brilliant example of forensic oratory. Mere mention must suffice for the ingenious and varied arguments heaped up by each side and for the epigrams and other figures of speech employed in presenting them. The precepts of the orators are illustrated in more subtle matters also: each speech is perfectly suited to the character of the man delivering it, Ajax blunt and soldierly, Ulysses wily and deceptive; and at one point the latter resorts to an effective gesture—he wipes away a feigned tear (132–33). At the end Ovid announces Ulysses' success

thus: *quid facundia posset, / re patuit* (382–83, "the power of eloquence was made perfectly plain"). He tells us that the subject of this oratorical contest has been oratory itself, that Ulysses has not only gained the arms of Achilles but also shown the superiority of rhetorical power.[24] A pregnant remark is found in an earlier episode of the Trojan War, when the heroes are relaxing and exchanging stories. Ovid says: *virtusque loquendi / materia est* (12.159–60). In its context this should mean "heroism is the topic of conversation." But perhaps, if *loquendi* is taken with *virtus*, it might also suggest "rhetorical ability is the topic"—which would be a very Ovidian thought.

The *Metamorphoses* also includes a pair of hymns. In the singing contest between the daughters of Pierus and the Muses, the representative of the latter begins her entry like this:

> *Prima Ceres unco glaebam dimovit aratro,*
> *prima dedit fruges alimentaque mitia terris,*
> *prima dedit leges: Cereris sunt omnia munus.*
> *illa canenda mihi est; utinam modo dicere possim*
> *carmina digna dea! certe dea carmine digna est.* (5.341–45)
>
> Ceres was the first to cleave the soil with curving plow, the first to give the earth ripe fruits and grains, the first to give men laws: all these are the gift of Ceres. Her must I sing. May I only be able to sing songs worthy of the goddess! For surely the goddess is worthy of song.

The list of the goddess's benefactions and the statement of her worthiness as a subject of song immediately imply the form of a hymn, and so too does the language with its anaphora and other repetitions. And, as one expects, this is followed by a story about the divinity, here the rape of Ceres' daughter Proserpina (346–661). These prefatory verses turn the whole of the Muse's song into a hymn to Ceres.

The other hymnic passage is remarkable for the ingenuity with which it is worked into the poem. Instead of giving it to a character to deliver, the poet sings it himself, creating a brilliant transition into it from the narrative. He describes the worship of Bacchus by the women of Thebes, who "lay aside their weaving, offer frankincense, and call the god Bacchus and Bromius and Lyaeus . . ." (4.10–11). Ovid then dedicates several verses to a catalogue of ten more names and appellations; this is a regular feature of the hymnic style. The list concludes, as usual, with an open-ended clause that is designed to safeguard the worshiper from any accidental omission: "and the other many names which you, Liber, hold amongst the Greeks" (16–17). The apostrophe becomes a pivot on which the discourse turns in a new direction. Now follows a series of anaphoric clauses all including the word *tu*, another distinctive mark of the hymn: "your youth is unconsumed, you are the eternal lad, in the height of heaven you appear most lovely . . ." (18–20). Ovid then starts to move back to his narrative by picturing Bacchus' train: "wherever you go, the cries of women echo" (28–29). This brings him smoothly to the Theban women again, with whom he contrasts the impious daughters of Minyas. Now the narrative can proceed once more. This is an extraordinary tour de force, a bravura performance. Ovid has woven the hymn into the rest of his text without a seam showing.

The lesser, or lighter, genres are also represented. Among the many passages dealing with love a certain number unmistakably call to mind Roman erotic elegy because of the situation and the language. Apollo pursuing Daphne closely resembles the lover familiar to us from the elegiacs of Propertius, Tibullus, and, of course, Ovid himself. Though the god pleads his case movingly, he is spurned by the maiden. He admires her fingers, hands, and arms. Ovid adds the shrewd observation: *si qua latent, meliora putat* (1.502, "whatever is concealed, he thinks better"), which echoes what he had said earlier in one of his elegies:

> *suspicor ex istis et cetera posse placere,*
> *quae bene sub tenui condita veste latent.* (*Am.* 3.2.35–36)
>
> From these [the exposed parts of her limbs] I suspect that the rest, well concealed under her thin garment, are also lovely.

In Apollo's speech the adjectives *miser* in the phrase *me miserum!* (508, "unhappy me!") and *vacuus* in *vacuo . . . pectore* (520, "an unattached heart") are both standard, almost technical, terms used of the elegiac lover.[25] The story of Iphis and Anaxarete is drawn from the same world (14.698–761). Nearly the whole of this tale of unrequited love consists of a paraclausithyron, the familiar set piece of elegy in which the lover camps outside the door of his hard mistress, entreating, in vain, to be admitted.[26] Among many other passages of a similar nature we might single out the letter which Byblis writes to her brother Caunus, with whom she is in love (9.530–63). This represents an extension of the elegiac genre in a new direction, and the pioneer had been none other than Ovid himself, who earlier, in his *Heroides*, had created a series of epistles addressed by unhappy, love-struck women to the objects of their passion.

Pastoral too finds its place within the poem. In Book One Mercury disguises himself as a shepherd, steals[27] some she-goats to enhance

his performance, and equips himself with a panpipe—all in order to fool the monster Argus and so liberate Jupiter's paramour Io, whom Argus is guarding (1.676–84). In its setting, characters, situations, and activities the passage is bucolic, and as if to underline this the poet echoes a verse from Virgil's *Eclogues*.[28] More extensive and more impressive for its pastoral quality is the plaint which Polyphemus makes to Galatea (13.789–869). Polyphemus of course is the one-eyed giant who traditionally (since the *Odyssey*) had appeared in poetry as a kind of monstrous shepherd. In portraying him as a love-sick swain Ovid is following the lead not so much of Virgil as of *his* master Theocritus, who established the pastoral genre. Elements found in the eleventh idyll of Theocritus, where Polyphemus sings of his love for Galatea, Ovid takes up and reemploys, exaggerating them greatly. Theocritus' four pastoral comparisons for the girl are now multiplied to fifteen; the series begins: "Galatea, whiter than the leaf of the snowy privet, more blooming than the meadows, taller than the lofty alder . . ." (13.789–90). In a typically Ovidian fashion, the shepherd follows this immediately with an equally long list of rustic comparisons expressing his displeasure with the maid's rejection of his suit: "Galatea, also harsher than unbroken bullocks, harder than aged oak, more treacherous than the wave . . ." (798–99). Similarly Ovid amplifies the Cyclops' description of his own wealth. In Greek he had claimed to pasture a thousand sheep; in Latin, after remarking that his sheep abound in vale, glade, and cave, he adds wittily:

> *nec, si forte roges, possim tibi dicere, quot sint.*
> *pauperis est numerare pecus!* (823–24)
>
> Should you ask, I couldn't tell you how many there are. Only the poor man counts his flock!

With these exaggerations and other references Ovid both re-creates and plays with pastoral.[29]

Another genre of literary composition that Ovid weaves into the poem is the epigram. Poets were called upon to write verses that would be engraved on monuments or other objects open to public view; in Hellenistic times the occasion seems often to have been feigned, and the epigram, losing its connection to a real object, became purely literary. Two of the commonest kinds of epigram are the sepulchral and the votive, and both are found in the *Metamorphoses*. Phaethon's sisters inscribe upon his tomb an epitaph beginning with the formulaic words "Here lies Phaethon . . ." (2.327–28). Aeneas' nurse also receives a commemorative epigram:

> HIC · ME · CAIETAM · NOTAE · PIETATIS · ALVMNVS
> EREPTAM · ARGOLICO · QVO · DEBVIT · IGNE ·
> CREMAVIT
> (14.442–43)
>
> Here am I, Caieta, nurse of the man famed for his piety. Having rescued me from the fire of the Greeks, he cremated me with the fire of dutifulness.

(At the corresponding point in his narrative, *Aen.* 7.1–4, Virgil refers to an epitaph for Caieta but does not report it.) A votive inscription is recorded in the story of Iphis. Having been transformed, as she wished, from a maiden into a lad, she dedicates thank-offerings to the goddess Isis with these words:

> DONA · PVER · SOLVIT · QVAE · FEMINA · VOVERAT ·
> IPHIS
> (9.794)
>
> The vow of gifts which Iphis had made as a woman Iphis discharges as a man.

This kind of inscription we also meet in the *Aeneid*, when the hero dedicates a Greek shield during his travels:

> AENEAS · HAEC · DE · DANAIS · VICTORIBUS · ARMA
> (3.288)
>
> Aeneas dedicates these arms taken from the victorious Danaans.

Ovid is more prone to include epigrams, and he also gives them a different quality, as we can see by comparing the last two. His are epigrams not only in the sense of "inscribed verses," but also in the other, developed sense of "witty sayings." The play on the word "fire" in Caieta's epitaph and the antithesis of "man" and "woman" in Iphis' dedication—contrast the pedestrian dedication in Virgil—make the epigrams stand out in greater relief.[30]

Several other forms of writing, held to be nonliterary today, were literary genres in antiquity, and so also make their appearance in Ovid's pages. History would have been represented, at least to Ovid's contemporaries, by the string of stories about Rome, from Aeneas down to Julius Caesar. The last two books of the poem comprehend a number of more or less historical episodes: the founding of the nation, the Alban kings who ruled it after Aeneas, the apotheosis of Romulus and his wife Hersilia, the tales of Numa and Egeria, the

arrival at Rome of the god Aesculapius (which includes, recounted in detail, his itinerary through the southern half of Italy, 15.701–28), and finally the triumphs and deification of Augustus' adoptive father. As the geographical survey belongs to historical writing, so too does an ethnographic observation such as Ovid makes in regard to the Thracians: *pronumque genus regionibus illis / in Venerem est* (6.459–60, "in those parts the people are prone to sexual desire")[31]—note the characteristic subject of the observation. At the beginning of Book Fifteen Pythagoras delivers a lengthy speech urging vegetarianism (15.75–478). Insofar as it purports to give instruction on the proper conduct of life, it is didactic and philosophic, very much like Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, the language of which, not coincidentally, it often echoes. At the same time, because most proofs of the basic propositions are drawn from the physical world, the speech is a piece of natural philosophy also. It takes up in turn the celestial bodies, the seasons, human physiology, the elements of the universe, geology, and zoology (187–417). Similarly, the brilliant depiction at the beginning of the poem of how the world was changed from chaos to its present form (1.5–150) falls under the heading of science. It is not surprising then that in Book Three of his *Naturales Quaestiones* Seneca often quotes from Pythagoras' speech in the *Metamorphoses* (four times in chapters 20–26) and from the description of the great flood (three times in chapter 27).

It is necessary to remind ourselves that these literary genres sometimes appear in Ovid combined, or at least not easily separable from one another; the poem is a kind of medley. To some extent, epic *is* history. Oratory and rhetoric play a part in almost everything. The erotic is not confined to elegy but extends to many other genres: Polyphemus is a shepherd *and* a lover. Moreover, the mixing of genres did not originate with Ovid; it was first a phenomenon in the Hellenistic era. Theocritus had inserted into a collection of pastoral poems an encomium (*Idyll* 17), an epithalamium, or marriage song (18), a hymn (22), and a pair of epyllia (13, 24),[32] and Callimachus made epigram prominent in his narrative of aetiological tales. To be sure, in the former the poems are discrete, and it is the collection which embraces different genres. Of the latter's four books of *Aetia* the first two (now lost) were unified, we know, through the format of a dialogue conducted between the poet and the Muses, whereas in the last two this format is given up and the individual stories simply follow one another without any attempt at linkage. Under such conditions, where the overall unity was questionable or dim and the parts more distinct than the whole, what mingling of genres there was must have been less remarkable. And the epic, except insofar as it had been replaced by the epyllion through the taste of some writers, remained untouched by this movement: however different from the Homeric poems, the *Argonautica* of Apollonius is still thoroughly epic. The mixing of genres at Rome is more evident, and perhaps more extensive. Ennius' epic of Roman history, the *Annals*, includes features that suggest lyric poetry.[33] Satire is present in Lucretius' poem (for example, 3.894–930). In the *Aeneid* too one may recognize genres other than epic: the description of Evander's Rome smacks occasionally of pastoral poetry (8.175–78, 359–61); philosophy is found in Anchises' exposition of the soul's fate after death (6.724–51); a hymn to Hercules appears amid the celebration of the Ara Maxima (8.293–302); and the story of Dido, it has often been remarked, much resembles a tragedy.

Nonetheless, the mixing of genres goes much further in the *Metamorphoses* than in any earlier literary work known to us.[34] The intrusions of non-epic passages are, first of all, longer, therefore more noticeable. The hymn to Ceres, the exchange of speeches between Ajax and Ulysses, and the teaching of Pythagoras—each fills nearly half a book. More important is the number of genres which are included. We hear clear strains of epic, epyllion, tragedy, oratory, hymn, love elegy, epistle, pastoral, epigram, history, philosophy, and science. This farrago is unmatched anywhere else. The playfulness, finally, with which Ovid handles the genres also implies that he is extremely self-conscious about them and that the comprehensiveness is not an accident. The rhetorical duel between the heroes is a kind of staged performance. The hymn to Bacchus is introduced and ended with conspicuous ingenuity. Mercury is merely disguised as a shepherd. The epigrams are well polished. Pythagoras' lecture becomes a joke.[35] The poem is comprehensive, therefore, not only of time and subject, but also of literary genres, and this too becomes a principle of organization.

Dis-organizations

At the same time, each of these principles of organization that we have just recognized is in its execution somewhat askew or incomplete, neglected or violated. The drive to unity is nearly matched by the force working in the opposite direction.

METAMORPHOSIS

All the stories do contain a metamorphosis, but sometimes the metamorphosis, far from being the center or the climax, is incidental to the main line of the story. The long narrative of Phaethon's winning permission to drive the chariot of the Sun and his disastrous ride is justified, so to speak, only by the metamorphosis of his weeping sisters into amber at the end (2.340–66). Very similar is the close of Meleager's story: his bereaved sisters are changed into birds (8.542–46), and theirs is the sole metamorphosis. And the extensive account of Orpheus ends not with his transformation, but with that of the Bacchants, who, after tearing him apart, become trees fixed in the forest (11.67–84). In these instances Ovid has contrived the metamorphosis of some group on the margins of the story. Elsewhere he attaches a metamorphosis to a story only through a tale inserted into it. The important tale of Pentheus lacks one, though within it Acoetes, who seems to be the disguised Bacchus, describes how the Tyrrhenian pirates were changed into dolphins (3.670–86). In these cases the metamorphosis is tangential to the chief episode.

NARRATIVE LINKS

All the stories are linked to one another in succession, but the link is often extremely artificial. After the story of Apollo's slaying of the monstrous Python, Ovid continues like this: the god founded the Pythian games to commemorate the event, and each victor there "received the honor of an oak wreath: the laurel did not yet exist, and from any tree whatever did Phoebus gird his own temples, lovely with their long locks" (1.449–51). By this ingenious, circuitous route he passes to the story of Daphne, who became the laurel tree. The link between the accounts of Theseus and of Minos is forged by a contrast: although the whole city of Athens rejoiced at Theseus' return, nonetheless (*tamen*) his father did not feel a joy unmixed with anxiety, because Minos was preparing to wage war on them (7.451–56). The particle *tamen* is used again when Ovid moves from Aesculapius, whose worship was imported to Rome from Delphi, on to Julius Caesar: "Nevertheless, he arrived at our shrines as a stranger: Caesar is a god in his own city" (15.745–46).[36] A similarly *recherché* contrast joins Memnon to Hecuba. Even the gods who were the implacable foes of Troy considered Hecuba's sufferings unmerited, with one exception:

> *non vacat Aurorae, quamquam isdem faverat armis,*
> *cladibus et casu Troiaeque Hecubaeque moveri.*
> *cura deam propior luctusque domesticus angit*
> *Memnonis amissi.* (13.576–79)

> Although she had supported the same side, Aurora had no leisure to be moved by the destruction and fall of Troy or Hecuba. The goddess was vexed by a closer concern, a domestic grief, over her lost son Memnon.

Thus the reader is moved along to the next story. More examples are given later, but these should suffice to show how the impression of a connected narrative is undermined by a self-consciously artful transition.

Quintilian noticed this feature of the poem too. When discussing how the orator should handle the proem to a speech he stresses the importance of a smooth transition from there into the next part, making his point clear by means of a contrast: "In the schools, to be sure, we find that frigid, childish affectation whereby the transition itself forms some kind of clever saying (*sententia*) at any cost and seeks to win applause for this, so to speak, sleight of hand. Ovid is prone to this self-indulgence in the *Metamorphoses*. Still, he can be excused on the grounds of necessity, since he was attempting to give the appearance of a continuous whole to the most varied subjects. But what need does the orator have to glide over this transition?" (*Inst.* 4.177–78). Quintilian perceives a difficulty for Ovid in composing the *Metamorphoses*, that of unifying very varied material, and on that basis is willing to excuse a feature which he obviously does not otherwise approve of (clever transitions). The difficulty, however, was not imposed on Ovid. He chose to seek the appearance of unity for his poem (as Callimachus in the later books of the *Aetia* chose not to). Quintilian also observes that Ovid does not merely make transitions: he makes ones that "seek to win applause for themselves," that draw attention upon themselves. Quintilian has pointed out, in other words, what will prove to be opposing strategies for winning unity—narrative linkage and authorial presence. His moralizing prevents him from making a more positive evaluation of Ovid, and also from seeing the deep kinship between him and the orator. Altieri, a modern critic, is far more sympathetic. As he felicitously describes the significance of Ovid's transitions, "There is no logic, no divine order or destiny which promises either a unified eternal story or a pattern for the recurrence of particular stories. Ovid's solution to the problem of continuing his tale may be makeshift, but it's the only one available in a world without a God or other underlying patterns of meaning."[37] The feature which Quintilian objects to (as others have) is in fact the sign of a world perceived in a different, liberating way.

Critics like Otis and Ludwig would perhaps claim that the actual transition is trivial and would draw attention rather to the relations that obtain between successive stories: this panel balances the previous one, the theme of that section anticipates the following, and so on. But such schemes, I feel, are invisible to the reader working his way through and can be glimpsed, if at all, only from a lofty, large-scale survey. The reader's primary (and perhaps single) experience is of the narrator's leading him by the hand, as it were, from one tale to the next. Events do not cohere of their own accord.

THEMATIC LINKS

Many of the stories are joined to one another by thematic links, but these thematic links regularly prove to be red herrings. Similarities between stories may invite the reader to see in them the examination of some human problem from varying perspectives; but on closer look he discovers little substance behind the similarity. Ovid makes the situations of Daphne and Io parallel. What does he show us thereby? Nothing in particular. Pygmalion's statue, changed from stone into flesh, represents the reversal of the Propoetides, yet the contrast does not teach us anything about the nature of stone or flesh or about chastity or art. The themes of sacred tree and food/hunger may tie Erysichthon's story to that of Baucis and Philemon, but only in a superficial way, since neither is illuminated by the other.

For a contrasting example of how a poet capitalizes on a thematic relationship, or rather creates such a relationship for expressive purposes, we may turn to the *Aeneid*. Virgil portrays Dido and Aeneas as resembling one another in character and situation. Each, an exile who has lost a beloved spouse, is engaged in founding a new city alone and far from home; both are strong leaders and also compassionate and generous persons. This parallel affects in turn our understanding of the poem. Placed in similar circumstances and confronting the same decision between personal affection and sense of duty, Dido chooses the one, Aeneas the other; and to the extent that our sympathy lies with her—and Virgil creates much sympathy—we are enabled to measure the difficulty of Aeneas' course and the price he pays for continuing with his mission. This is the kind of "added dimension" which is missing from Ovid's thematic links. The connections suggested between his stories are in the end decorative; the parallels, balances, and antitheses are rhetorical in the narrowest sense. They convey no conclusions, no morals, no illuminations. Like the forced narrative links, they remind us that the world does not conveniently arrange itself thematically. This is not a merely discouraging notion, or a sobering one, but aims at liberating us from a constricting (and unacknowledged) point of view and heading us towards another which honors more the individual experience as unique in itself.

COMPREHENSIVENESS

The poem's various forms of comprehensiveness are also all undermined. In time it does begin with the creation of the universe and end with, as it were, the day before yesterday. Nevertheless, it gives no sense of embracing a vast expanse of time. Consistency in the chronology of the stories is flagrantly violated in several places. The twin constellations of the Bears are mentioned as never touching the water, that is, never appearing to set (2.171–72), before Callisto and her son Arcas are transformed into these constellations and forbidden to sink into the ocean (2.530). In the same book Atlas is already a gigantic mountain holding up the sky (2.296–97), although not until afterwards are we told how Perseus changed Atlas from a king into a mountain (4.657–62).[38] If, as seems likely, the reference at 7.358 is to the snake who is metamorphosed at 11.56, that constitutes another instance of violated chronology. And similarly we read about Memnon's death only after the end of the Trojan War (13.576–622), and also about an exploit of Hercules (11.212–15), though he has been dead for two books (9.272).

Although the examples are neither few nor inconspicuous, broken chronology dulls the reader's sense of temporal movement less than do certain pervasive features of the narrative. The numerous inserts and the several story-telling parties also have the effect of making it unclear which event followed which. Thus Helenus' prophecy to Aeneas, an episode from the *Aeneid* which ought to have found its place in Book Thirteen, is recalled by Pythagoras in Book Fifteen (439–49), well after the time of the event. Meanwhile in Book Thirteen a mixing bowl presented to Aeneas depicts a pair of stories from the Theban cycle (13.685–99), which had been related all the way back in Books Three and Four. Ludwig, who analyzes the poem in terms of three ages, admits that in the central age, the mythical (1.452–11.193), on account of the various inserts, "the reader does not so much have the impression of a deliberate forward motion, but rather imagines himself lingering in a large and uniform time period."[39] The sense of timelessness extends beyond these bounds to the entire poem, however, and it is created by something still more basic to the poem. From beginning to end all the stories are told as if

they were taking place in contemporary Rome. Thus an assembly of the gods closely resembles a meeting of the Roman Senate, Pentheus speaks of siege-engines, characters know the triumph and the census, Diana with her maids might easily pass for a Roman matron, and a pet deer is even found wearing the *bulla*, the locket symbolizing free birth.[40] Since everything is portrayed as happening "now," there is no feeling of temporal progression as the poem unrolls.

In subject matter the poem does touch upon all the major stories of ancient mythology. But many of them it *merely* touches upon. The more well-known a story is, the slighter or more oblique Ovid's version of it becomes. Sometimes a story is even rendered conspicuous by its absence. The most famous episode in Medea's life after the adventure of the Golden Fleece, the episode which forms the center of the most popular tragedy in antiquity, Euripides' *Medea*, is utterly slighted. Ovid fills 250 verses with accounts of Medea's magic-working and of her subsequent flight over Greece (7.159–403), which are narrated at the expense of her more well-known deeds in Corinth: a mere four verses, and those very allusive, suffice to recount how she killed Jason's new wife and then her own children (394–97). If the weight or focus of a story is not shifted, it is often told in a new setting or from an unusual angle. No other account of Hercules' mighty labors is offered but the one of the hero himself, who reviews them while lying upon his funeral pyre, wrapped in a poisonous mantle which is consuming him with fire. The language again is allusive: *saevoque alimenta parentis / Antaeo eripui* (9.183–84, "from savage Antaeus I took away the nourishment of his parent") is the way Hercules describes his defeat of a wrestler-king who recruited his strength through contact with the Earth, his mother, and who needed therefore to be lifted up and strangled. The speech includes anaphora (181, 187–88, 197–98), other repetitions (184–85), apostrophe (176–80, 185, 186–90), and paradox: *nec profuit Hydrae / crescere per damnum* (192–93, "nor did it boot the Hydra to grow through loss"), and the catalogue of labors closes with an epigram:

> *defessa iubendo est*
> *saeva Iovis coniunx, ego sum indefessus agendo!* (9.198–99)
>
> Jove's cruel wife is weary of giving orders: I am not weary of carrying them out!

These all serve to sharpen the point he is making. Hercules recalls his feats of prowess solely as a foil, to give the contrast to his present situation:

> *sed nova pestis adest, cui nec virtute resisti*
> *nec telis armisque potest.* (9.200–201)
>
> But a new source of ruin [the fiery cloak] is at hand, which can be resisted neither with courage nor with arms and weapons.

The Labors of Hercules then are introduced into the poem allusively and obliquely, not recounted for their own sake but referred to as part of a rhetorical argument.

Such dramatic shifts in weight or angle are also exampled in Ovid's handling of the *Odyssey*. Though Ulysses himself appears in the contest over the arms of Achilles at the beginning of Book Thirteen, the first mention of his voyage home occurs only later in the book, when Ovid, like Virgil before him, has Aeneas sail past several sites where the Greek hero had stopped (13.711–13, 719–20). The remainder of what we are given from the *Odyssey* is told to us not by the poet, but by one or another of his characters. The episode with the Cyclops Polyphemus, one of the most memorable of the Greek epic, is approached twice in the *Metamorphoses*. The nymph Galatea narrates Polyphemus' love for her as a kind of counterpart to the story familiar from the *Odyssey*, and a pair of details invite this view. Galatea says that the giant, once he had fallen in love, was so busy grooming himself—using a rake, for instance, to comb his hair—that as a result he gave up his usual ferocity and thirst for blood, and ships could come and go in safety (13.768–69). Then, told by a prophet that Ulysses will take his one eye, Polyphemus laughs and replies: *"o vatum stolidissime, falleris," inquit. / "altera iam rapuit"* (774–75, "'O most blockheaded of seers, you are wrong,' he said. 'Another, a girl, has already taken it.'"). In the next book when Achaemenides, one of Ulysses' companions, begins to speak, we might expect him to give an account of the adventure. In fact, however, he tells only of its consequence, of what befell him when he was stranded on the island with the Cyclops (14.167–222).[41] Thus Ovid touches twice upon this episode without ever recounting it. The *Odyssey* appears in the *Metamorphoses* for the last time when Macareus, replying to Achaemenides, relates the adventures with the Laestrygonians and with Circe. The former he abridges very greatly: no one unfamiliar with the Homeric original is likely to understand immediately that the words *Laestrygonis inpia tinxit / ora cruore suo* (14.237–38, "he stained the impious lips of the Laestrygonian with his blood") indicate that one of Ulysses' men was eaten for dinner by Antiphates, king of that region. The latter adventure Macareus recasts so as to emphasize the homey quality of the scene (Circe surrounded by her maids and tame

animals), the preparation of the magical herbs and drugs, and his own metamorphosis into a pig and then back again (248–307).[42]

As a last instance of how Ovid treats literary classics we may consider his version of the *Iliad*. Though Books Twelve and Thirteen concern chiefly the Trojan War, Homer's poem is more evidently absent than present. Nestor's campfire tale of the battle between the Lapiths and the Centaurs, which fills two-thirds of a book (12.146–535), acts as a substitute for the extensive fighting around Troy. The only actual fighting Ovid describes is the duel waged by Achilles and the almost invulnerable Cygnus—an episode which, though embellished by clear Homeric reminiscences (cf., e.g., 96–97 with *Il.* 7.219–23, 245–48; 140–41 with *Il.* 3.369–72), is unknown to Homer. The material which does derive from the Greek original is reported to us indirectly, not by Ovid but by one of his characters. All the familiar incidents come up exclusively in the debate between Ajax and Ulysses, who refer to them while conducting their suit for the arms of Achilles: the near departure of the Greeks (13.216–35), the nighttime scouting expedition (15, 98, 243–52), Ajax' duel with Hector (85–89, 275–79), Ajax warding off fire from the Greek ships (8, 91–94), Patroclus wearing the arms of Achilles (273–74), to mention but a few. For the *Metamorphoses*, Homer's epic exists as ammunition to be used in an oratorical duel.[43] Ovid's relation to the *Iliad*, near yet utterly removed, is most aptly expressed in his mention of the confrontation between Hector and Achilles:

> *perque acies aut Cygnum aut Hectora quaerens*
> *congreditur Cygno (decimum dilatus in annum*
> *Hector erat).* (12.75–77)
>
> Ranging the battlefield in search of either Cygnus or Hector,
> Achilles meets Cygnus (Hector was put off until the tenth year).

The climactic event of the *Iliad* is relegated to nothing more than a casual parenthesis. Not only does Ovid recount familiar stories only through a displacement or from a novel perspective which makes it his own, but he even contrives to call attention to this. This is a recognized feature of Alexandrian literature too, though, as it seems to me, less significant than in Ovid. It is true that those writers shared his questioning of literary authority; in this sense Ovid is the fulfiller of neoteric tendencies.

The poem, to be sure, does embrace all literary genres. But the very variety of genres, and of their concomitant styles, produces a kind of inconcinnity. The epic battle surrounding the death of Achilles (the end of Book Twelve) directly precedes the oratorical duel between Ajax and Ulysses (beginning of Book Thirteen). The intimate, even homely story of Baucis and Philemon (8.618–724) contrasts with the broad, nearly heroic narrative of Erysichthon (8.738–878), in the retelling of which Ovid has stripped from the Callimachean original a whole series of domestic details. The switching of styles does not always wait for the end of a story, but may take place in the middle of its course. In Book One the scene of the dispatch of Mercury and his journey and arrival comes straight from epic (668–75); when he puts on different clothing he enters the world of pastoral (beginning at 676). Mercury needs to be a quick-change artist: so abrupt is the shift of generic scenes. Ovid makes no attempt to soften the contrasts; the result is cacophony rather than symphony. Particularly instructive is the mixing of genres within the story of Daphne and Apollo. The elegiac elements we have already noted. The evocation of epic is most notable in the simile for Apollo's pursuit of Daphne, which begins: "as when a Gallic hound spots a hare in an empty field, and with their feet the one seeks its prey, the other its own safety . . ." (1.533–34).[44] Insofar as the narrative is elegiac, it represents the point of view of Apollo, for whom the whole is a lark, a love adventure, with nothing much at stake. Insofar as it is epic, it represents Daphne's—and for her it is a matter of life or death. Here the clash of genres reveals its most important meaning. Each genre carries with it certain presuppositions and a certain way of looking at the world, and the styles which point to the different genres can thus signal opposing interpretations of the same event.[45]

Ovid does not aim at providing several interpretations from which we are to select the one that appeals to us, as on a multiple-choice test. There is no right answer, nor a pair of right answers. His goal is more profound, to shake us from the very habit of thinking in terms of genre and to stir us to an awareness of what such thinking means. Lanham has described this effect produced by the works of Ovid and other genre-mixers, including Lucian, Rabelais, and Sterne:

> They seem to war on the stable orientations literary genres enshrine. They think narrative coherence a sham, not because it is unreal but because we impose it on the world without acknowledgment. They seek to make us self-conscious about the imposition, about literary form at all points. Their narratives are always posing; their style aims always for effect. They keep faith with their own pleasure, not with a reality somewhere "out there."[46]

In regard to the poem's chief organizing features, then, we find on the one hand a large number of overlapping schemes and structures,

which hint at an ordered, coherent world. On the other hand, all of these are undermined and undercut; they all prove to be inadequate.

Altieri relates this to the contents of the poem and the one subject it does have: "the theme of flux, like the multiplicity of stories, by its very nature asserts both the absence of all informing structures or principles of form and the equality of all present moments."[47] The poem invites us to look for structures within it and makes a number of proposals, and then it systematically defeats them all. What we read is not the result of a plan that failed, a design that went awry in the execution, nor does it represent mere chaos or randomness. It clearly strives for order, and in many different ways, but it never consistently achieves it: the poem might claim as a motto its own phrase, *discors concordia* (1.433, "an inharmonious harmony"). Instead it conveys a sense of dis-order, of orderings undone. This is not the Euripidean perception, found for instance in the *Hercules Furens*, that there is a metaphysical disorder in the universe, but rather the more commonsense observation that things are so uncertain and unstable as to elude the schemes set to catch them. People and things change from moment to moment (the poem gives a very lively sense of this), relations among them are many-sided and ever in flux, generalization is impossible, and the observer is always bound by his own subjectivity. From no single, fixed point of view is everything seen to fall into place, certainly not from that of any god. As no god brought Ovid's universe into existence,[48] so none directs its course. These are the notions that Ovid renders artistically. Every aspect of the poem's arrangement tells us to beware interpreting structures which must, necessarily, falsify the riotous diversity and changeableness of reality. The *Metamorphoses* does not simply reveal an awareness of this notion: one of its central concerns is to demonstrate the inadequacy of schemes and structures for making sense of the world.

Story-telling

The premise of the poem is that story-telling is a fundamental means of comprehending the world. It is the most popular activity in the poem. Again and again, when a character wants to describe or explain something, he resorts to a story. Bacchus, going by the name of Acoetes, shows Pentheus his power through the story of the Tyrrhenian sailors rather than through direct statement or any other means (3.582–691). Lelex proves the possibility of metamorphosis with his account of Baucis and Philemon (8.618–724). Anaxarete's harshness towards Iphis is used by Vertumnus as a cautionary tale to Pomona (14.698–764). The drive to tell stories is revealed no less clearly when people are taking their leisure than when they are acting purposefully. The daughters of Minyas whiling away the time of Bacchus' festival, Theseus' companions spending the evening *chez* Achelous, the Greek heroes sitting about the campfire before Troy, all turn naturally to narrative. There is nothing peculiar in this; the poem only reminds us forcefully of how basic an activity story-telling is. This remains true for us, but it must have been all the more so in a society which scarcely relied on the abstractions of social science to provide understanding of human behavior.

The poem, moreover, does not deal with mere story-telling; it is not concerned with casual or carelessly told anecdotes. The highest form of story-telling is found in literature, for writing offers the opportunity of employing language for utmost effect. Furthermore, the ripest (by far) of literary subjects is mythology; this material, potent since Homer at least and worked and reworked through the centuries, allows the ancient writer the maximum in variety and nuance. The *Metamorphoses* thus focuses on story-telling at its acme of content and expression. And no one has ever hesitated to agree that Ovid's stories *are* superb![49]

Implicit in narrative (at least the narrative of the ancients) are certain features which we may overlook because we take them for granted but to which Ovid was alert and wished to draw our attention: linear movement, variety combined with unity, and (often) thematic repetition. That these are all proper to literature can be seen by comparison with the visual arts, from which they are perforce absent. These features, which might well be termed "structures" since they support the narrative and make it possible, the *Metamorphoses* deliberately calls into question.

The chief expectation created by narrative is of linear movement, starting with one situation at moment *X* and going to another at moment *Y*; as time can be neither stopped nor reversed, so the action of a story moves in one direction. This expectation is assaulted in the poem, with its occasionally impossible chronology and its refusal to allow us to sense any sweep of time between the Creation and Caesar's assassination. The inset stories, more complex, extensive, and baffling than, say, Books Two and Three of the *Aeneid*, fuel the assault, not only in the poem as a whole but in many individual stories as well. And, as we shall see, the essential narrative technique militates against a sense of movement. Because there are

bound to be several scenes or episodes between points X and Y, another expectation arises, of variety combined with unity: the distinct parts ought to form a larger unity; the whole ought to be articulated. This too the *Metamorphoses* strives to defeat. At the same time that it includes immense variety, it raises questions about boundaries (what belongs with what?) and decorum (what suits what?). It keeps us off balance. The poem counters, furthermore, our expectation that the various parts of a story will be grouped about a theme, that they will treat, in however complex a manner, a single subject or a closely related group.

By the way he composes his poem Ovid undermines our reliance on story-telling. He reminds us of its conventions and artificialities and exposes them to view, suggesting that they do not need to be accepted. His aim is to liberate us from whatever trust we place in literature, or at least to make us aware of this trust. But he does more than attune our consciousness. As an alternative to story-telling he presents us with another form of understanding: the visual picture. The stories strive towards a kind of pictorial realization, which is usually found in metamorphosis. There is something paradoxical in a story-telling which, while reveling in itself and the manifold opportunities open to it, looks beyond itself to a fundamentally different mode. The poem, we may say, moves from narrative towards image, from story towards icon. Ovid delights in exploring the relationship between the two, as we shall see. Here let it suffice to note that the structures implied and undone in the *Metamorphoses* amount to a commentary on story-telling and, with it, on mythology and literature.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NARRATOR

The conclusions so far may seem mostly negative. No single narrative line draws the whole poem together, no thematic link (except metamorphosis itself), no evident unity of subject or style. The conspicuous absence of the structures that ordinarily support a literary narrative calls into question the adequacy of those structures for making sense of things. Yet all is not utter chaos either; the world of the poem does not altogether lack a point of focus. One thing does stand out, dominating and informing the whole: the narrator himself, the poet Ovid. His distinctive voice we learn to recognize as we read the poem, we feel him present everywhere mediating the transmission of the stories, we rely on him as a kind of guide through the vast confusion of the world. He alone unifies the poem. Here is the positive counterweight to the falling structures. And like them the strong presence of the narrator reflects on the nature of story-telling. Ovid recalls and holds up to scrutiny the convention that the narrator is impersonal and objective. He may be the center of this world, but he represents himself as no godlike creator, rather a man who is fallible and has doubts even about his own narrative.

How Many Narrators?

Of the poet's imposing presence we have had some indication already. Before going further into this, however, we need to deal with the question whether there is one narrator or more than one. The *Metamorphoses*, unlike any other ancient narrative poem, raises this question because of a certain peculiarity in technique. One conspicuous feature of the poem is the large number of stories told by the

characters themselves. Thus Pan, to put Argus to sleep, tells him the story of Syrinx (1.689–712); a citizen of Croton recounts to Numa the founding of his city (15.12–57); and so forth. We have already noticed the tales exchanged by Alcmene and Iole, the account given by Orpheus of the Propoetides, Pygmalion, and others. Often Ovid describes in effect story-telling parties, at which characters swap tales: Minerva, visiting the Muses, hears a full account of their singing contest with the daughters of Pierus, the entries of both contestants plus two other stories thrown in for good measure (5.269–678); the river god Achelous and the traveling heroes who have stopped off at his cave try to top one another with stories of incredible metamorphoses (8.547–9.92); and, gathered around a campfire before Troy, the Greek warriors listen to a set of stories, all recounted by Nestor, of course (12.168–579). A considerable proportion of the poem reaches us at second hand, as it were.

It cannot be denied that the multiplicity of narrators serves several practical ends. A narrative of this sort is more varied, in that it allows for direct discourse and for interplay between characters. (This possibility, hardly developed here, is greatly elaborated by Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*.) It also permits some stories to be fitted in without pains being taken over linking them: the natural turns of ordinary conversation provide an adequate motive. Moreover, if the conversation is focused, it makes possible a sequence of stories which have some theme in common, for instance, as in Achelous' cave, where the night's topic of discourse is whether or not metamorphosis is possible. Still, we may wonder if the apparent changes in narrator indicate anything more than the practical difficulties of a poem conceived like this one. How many narrators in fact do we hear? Are the different speakers—Ovid, his characters, those whom they quote in turn—distinct from one another? Do they have separate voices like Chaucer's pilgrims? And if so, do they signify changing points of view, like other features of the poem?

It has been asserted that the poem does include multiple voices, and this is not surprising today when we are keenly conscious of the persona who inhabits a poetic or other fiction. Nonetheless, I believe there is basically a single narrator throughout, who is Ovid himself. The introduction of other speakers is more formal than consequential; the words are heard as those of the poet. The most important general reason for thinking this—the uniformity of tone maintained through the poem—does not, unfortunately, lend itself to ready demonstration. It is true that the tone of the narrative varies greatly. Still, this itself amounts to a kind of uniformity over a long enough

stretch, in that the variation is constant and not linked to change in speakers. The mixture of tones and all the other features that characterize Ovid remain the same when he yields the floor to one of his own characters. Other figures in the poem are characterized by their speech—Deucalion is shown by his words to be pious, Niobe arrogant, Ulysses clever—but no narrator is.

We can test this question further by examining a particular passage. Nearly the whole of Book Ten is recounted by Orpheus. Can we distinguish his voice from Ovid's? At the beginning of the song, when he declares his two themes and we recognize that one of them (pederasty) touches his own life, we are led to expect a well-focused section reflecting the concerns of the teller and illustrating a certain moral as well:

> *puerosque canamus*
> *dilectos superis inconcessisque puellas*
> *ignibus attonitas meruisse libidine poenam.* (10.152–54)
>
> Let us sing of boys loved by the gods and girls smitten with unlawful passions, and of how lust earned its punishment.

In the event, however, Orpheus' performance diverges from his promise. Only some of the stories fall under the announced rubric. Anderson says that the lengthy story of Myrrha (298–502), a girl who committed incest with her father, is "the only one which accurately carries out Orpheus' theme,"[1] but this is not quite fair. Orpheus begins with two brief tales of pederasty, Ganymede and Hyacinth (155–219), and Adonis is a lad loved by a divinity (503–739). But none of these except Myrrha appears to deserve his fate: on the contrary, they are blameless victims. Moreover, the Cerastae, the Propoetides, and Pygmalion (220–97) are unrelated to the main themes, and the greater portion of the story of Venus and Adonis is occupied by the goddess's narration about Atalanta and Hippomenes (560–707)—a tale within a tale within a tale.

It has been noticed that other inserted stories are also told in a way that fails to correspond to their ostensible purpose. Thus when Vertumnus, urging Pomona not to spurn love, recounts to her the tale of Iphis and Anaxarete, he ought to emphasize the girl's harshness and the punishment which follows it; instead he shows more interest in the young man's sufferings and fate (14.698–761).[2] Why does Vertumnus' version not suit his purpose well? Because the narrator is not really Vertumnus at all: it is Ovid.

To return to Orpheus, a pair of further details also suggest there is little or no separation between him and our Roman author. His ac-

count of Myrrha he prefaces with a long apology for its immoral nature (300–10). Anderson notes some discrepancy here between Orpheus the pederast and Orpheus the puritanical critic of a scandalous story; besides a mere slip from consistent characterization, might we not see in this a sign that Orpheus is not altogether distinct from his creator? A small problem of geographical reference hints at the same. Orpheus' performance is set, we know, in his native Thrace (77, 83).[3] He begins by dwelling on the enormity of Myrrha's crime:

> *si tamen admissum sinit hoc natura videri,*
> *gentibus Ismariis et nostro gratulor orbi,*
> *gratulor huic terrae, quod abest regionibus illis,*
> *quae tantum genuere nefas.* (10.304–7)
>
> If nature allows this offense to be seen, I felicitate the Thracian peoples and our region, I felicitate this land, because it is far removed from those parts, which produced so great an abomination.

It may be that Orpheus is contrasting Thrace alone with Myrrha's homeland. In that case "Thracian peoples," "our region," and "this land" would all refer to the same place—an abundance that Ovid is certainly capable of. Yet to say the same thing three times is somewhat unusual,[4] and the repetition of the verb makes me wonder whether the reference in all three is in fact the same. *Orbis* can mean "region" (as at 8.100) but also "world." And I think, like Haupt and Ehwald and Fränkel, that with "this land" Orpheus has Thrace no longer in mind, but Italy. The last observes that verse 309 echoes *Georgics* 2.139, part of Virgil's famous praise of Italy.[5] As the passage goes along then, the land contrasted with Myrrha's seems to shift from Thrace (which in fact was notorious for its libidinousness, not its sexual restraint; cf. 6.459–60) to Italy. Here too therefore we may feel that Ovid is peeking out through the figure of Orpheus.

A later passage also deserves to be examined in this connection. Venus is describing the climax of the footrace between Atalanta and Hippomenes:

> *neve meus sermo cursu sit tardior ipso,*
> *praeterita est virgo.* (10.679–80)
>
> And so that my speech not be drawn out longer than the race itself—he overtook the girl.

A witty remark, in a complex setting—three narratives placed one inside the other, like a series of Chinese boxes: Ovid tells the story of Orpheus, within that Orpheus tells the story of Venus and Adonis, and within that in turn Venus tells the story of the athletic couple. Ovid is self-reflective here: by repeating the basic story-telling situation to the point of exaggeration, he reminds us of the tralatician nature of mythology and the subjective quality of each telling. And yet the remark quoted denies as much as it acknowledges the fictive situation. For to whom is it best suited—Venus, who has been speaking only since verse 560? Orpheus, speaking since 148? Or Ovid himself, now in his tenth book? The question cannot be answered really, but the fact that we can reasonably entertain it suggests that the boundaries between the poem's narrators are blurry.

One final possibility for multiple narrators remains. The voices of the characters cannot be distinguished from that of the poem's narrator, but is that narrator Ovid himself or is he instead a persona, a sovereign figment of the poet's with his own character, interests, and view of the world? Many may be inclined toward the latter view. I cannot bring myself to agree, however. I can find no sign of distance between narrator and poet. Never does the one permit us to see through him to his maker. Nothing he says betrays him as ignorant, mistaken, naive, or foolish. Still, he might be an all-encompassing fiction, as completely the manufacturer of the narrative as Ovid is of him. In that case I wonder what the worth is of assuming such a persona; I do not see that it is in any way fruitful. Not only does the hypothesis gain us nothing, but it needs to answer several difficult questions, such as why the "signature" at the end of the poem is so personal, or why the voice here is so similar to that in Ovid's other poetry. Only one narrator then is present, so far as I can hear.

Transitions

The central importance of the narrator, the fact of his ubiquitousness, is indicated by the multiplicity of ways in which his presence is felt. Reserving some of the subtler and more pervasive of these for a discussion of subject and style, we can take up here those which are more easily isolated. We may conveniently begin with a feature already noticed, the frequent evidence of the narrator in the transitions from one story to the next. We often are moved along through the poem not by the consequence of action but only by some extraordinary manipulation or act of cleverness on the poet's part. Without his personal intervention, as it were, we would never have heard this new story. The narrative does not follow any kind of natural course.

On the contrary, the poet seems almost to flaunt his own directing and diverting of it.[6]

A simple example is found in Book Ten. Orpheus is singing, and the trees come to listen. After a long enumeration of the trees, the poet says:

> *adfuit huic turbae . . . cupressus,*
> *nunc arbor, puer ante deo dilectus ab illo.* (10.106–7)
>
> This crowd also included the cypress, now a tree, formerly a boy loved by the god Apollo.

Thus he launches into the story of Cyparissus. The casualness of the transition takes the reader by surprise. No logic connects Cyparissus to the story of Orpheus, merely a chance observation, almost a whim, of the narrator. Equally contrived is his movement onward from Arachne, who was turned into a spider for challenging the goddess Minerva in weaving. Arachne's story, Ovid says, made the rounds of Lydia and then spread through the world; a childhood friend of hers who heard it, though now living across the sea in Thebes, nevertheless paid no heed; this was Niobe, who persisted in boasting that her offspring were more numerous than Leto's (6.146–51). Ovid performs a similar sleight of hand to get from Achelous to Nessus. The former's love for Deianira cost him merely the loss of one of his horns, the narrator says; but you, Nessus, he adds, apostrophizing the centaur, paid with your life for the love of Deianira (9.98–102). The comparison of these two, which forms the bridge between them, can be envisioned from only one point of view, that of the narrator.

Other instances are more intricate; the very intricacy measures the manipulativeness of the teller. Having sealed Callisto's fate (and brought her story to an end), Juno flies away from the scene:

> *habili Saturnia curru*
> *ingreditur liquidum pavonibus aethera pictis,*
> *tam nuper pictis caeso pavonibus Argo,*
> *quam tu nuper eras, cum candidus ante fuisses,*
> *corve loquax, subito nigrantes versus in alas.* (2.531–35)
>
> Saturn's daughter enters bright heaven in her maneuverable chariot, drawn by painted peacocks. The peacocks had been painted just as recently, after the slaying of Argus, as you, o talkative raven, had been turned all at once from your former white into a black-winged bird.

Ovid then proceeds to tell the raven's story. This transition resembles the previous one, even down to the apostrophe, but it is still more *recherché*. One half of the comparison here, the peacocks, is not the subject of a story at all, merely a prop dragged in by the narrator. Like a good prestidigitator Ovid knows how to displace interest: he gets the reader to pay attention to one thing while busy with another himself. A passage in Book Four (604–11) is no less contrived. Cadmus and Harmonia, metamorphosed into snakes, are consoled for this change through the fame won by their grandson Bacchus, who is worshiped as a god in both India and Greece. Acrisius, the only member of the family remaining in Greece, drives away Bacchus (who is only his third cousin once removed) and denies he is the son of a god. Is this the lead-in to Bacchus' story? Not at all. The narrator, swerving in a new direction, continues: *neque enim Iovis esse putabat / Persea* (610–11, "nor for that matter did he think Perseus was the son of Jupiter"). Here begin the episodes surrounding Perseus; Bacchus' story is related elsewhere. Again we are made aware of the poet's activity in cleverly stitching the material together.

For a final illustration we may turn to a section of Book Nine in which a string of tales is assembled with attention-grabbing ingenuity (273ff.). When we begin, Hercules has just been made a god. Ovid now describes the situation of those who survive him. His children are still pursued by his archenemy Eurystheus. In Iole, Hercules' widow, his mother Alcmene has a person to whom she can confide her complaints, her pride in her son, and her own misfortunes. Iole by this time is remarried and pregnant. Having established all this, the poet is ready to move ahead. Alcmene says to her former daughter-in-law, "I hope you have an easier time than I did when I gave birth to Hercules." This licenses the telling of that story, which ends with the metamorphosis of a servant into the weasel. Iole in turn replies with an account of how her own sister Dryope became a lotus plant. The weeping of the two women which ensues is ended by the appearance of a thoroughly rejuvenated Iolaus, the nephew of Hercules, which launches another series of stories. And so forth.

TRANSITION THROUGH ABSENCE

A peculiarly Ovidian form of transition has often been remarked, which might be termed *transitio per absentem*. The narrator notes the absence of a particular person from a scene; he then tells us why that person was absent and what he was doing instead, and thus moves on to another story. This form of transition makes especially clear

the role of the poet, since only from his point of view, outside the narrative, is such an observation possible. In Book One, for instance, all his fellow river gods of Thessaly gather at the house of Peneus either to console or to congratulate him for the metamorphosis of his daughter into the laurel tree—all, that is, except for Inachus, who was home bewailing the loss of his own daughter (1.583–87). Thus we pass from Daphne to Io. Elsewhere Bacchus, after punishing the Thracian women who had murdered Orpheus, deserts the scene of the crime for Lydia. All his entourage accompanies him:

at Silenus abest: titubantem annisque meroque
ruricolae cepere Phryges vinctumque coronis
ad regem duxere Midan. (11.90–92)

Silenus was missing, however. Tottering with years and wine, he had been captured by Phrygian countrymen and, tied with wreaths, brought to their king, Midas.

Midas releases and entertains him, in recompense for which Silenus' master Bacchus grants him a wish. There follows now the familiar story of Midas' golden touch. Similarly, a little further on, Priam, not knowing his son Aesacus has been transformed into a bird and believing him to be dead, holds a funeral for him, which is attended by all his brothers—except Paris, who is busy carrying off Helen from her husband (12.4–10).

Let us look finally at a transition made by the narrator's noting the lack not of a person but of something abstract. From Peleus, who has just become the husband of Thetis and by her the father of Achilles, Ovid shifts the focus away to Ceyx, frame for the next stories, by introducing an extraneous character, Peleus' half-brother Phocus:

felix et nato, felix et coniuge Peleus,
et cui, si demas iugulati crimina Phoci,
omnia contigerant. (11.266–68)

Peleus was blessed in his offspring, blessed too in his wife; everything good had come his way—if you except the crime of murdering Phocus.

After slaying Phocus, Peleus takes refuge with Ceyx. This might be called a *transitio per rem absentem*.[7] By such contrivance the narrator draws our attention upon himself.

TRANSITION THROUGH CONTRARY-TO-FACT CONDITION

Ovid often makes the transition between stories with a contrary-to-fact condition. Though at first this might seem unrelated to what we have been examining, in fact it is akin. In each case the narrator observes what did not exist—now not a person who was absent but (rather as in the last example) a situation or an action which did not take place. Again the peculiar nature of the observation refers to the narrator who makes it. In this way, for instance, Ovid passes from Byblis, a Milesian girl changed into a fountain, to Iphis, a girl changed into a boy:

fama novi centum Cretaeas forsitan urbes
implesset monstri, si non miracula nuper
Iphide mutata Crete propiora tulisset. (9.666–68)

The report of this new and remarkable metamorphosis would have filled the hundred cities of Crete perhaps, had not Crete produced a wonder closer to hand in the metamorphosis of Iphis.

The transition between Ganymede, brought to heaven by Jupiter, and Apollo's beloved Hyacinth, is managed like this: "You too, son of Amyclas, Phoebus Apollo would have elevated to heaven, if the grim fates had granted enough time for the elevating" (10.162–63). In each of these examples, we may note, the repetition of a word gives the sentence a slightly epigrammatic sound, which in turn reinforces the artificiality of the expression. A third instance occurs shortly afterwards. The story of Pygmalion has just ceased with the statement that his wife gave birth to a daughter Paphos. The narrator continues: "Of her was Cinyras born: had he been childless, he could have been counted happy" (10.298–99). This ushers in the tale of Cinyras' notorious daughter Myrrha.

An interesting example is furnished by Medea. She has persuaded Pelias' daughters that she will be able to rejuvenate the old man as she did Aeson (Pelias' brother and Medea's father-in-law) if they allow her to cut him up and put the parts in a pot with magic herbs; she in fact intends to kill him. Immediately after describing the butchering and boiling, the narrator continues: *nisi pennatis serpentibus isset in auras, / non exempta foret poenae* (7.350–51, "had she not taken to the air on her winged dragons, she would not have been exempt from punishment"). We notice Ovid's characteristically elliptic narrative: the murder of Pelias, that is, Medea's failure to rejuve-

nate him, which the preceding lines lead up to but do not mention, is merely alluded to. The contrary-to-fact sentence also moves the story onward.[8] In her flight Medea passes over the sites of several metamorphoses, which Ovid then reports.

Kraus well describes in general terms the place of the narrator: "Where relations among characters and transitions by means of spatial or temporal concurrence fail, he has recourse to the imaginary connections of analogy and antithesis, which are not always set in the consciousness of narrating characters but are expressed by the poet himself: thus in place of the usual historical connection there appears one which is merely that of discourse."[9] In the techniques of transition, especially *per absentem* and by means of a contrary-to-fact statement, we sense the presence of that figure "behind" the poem (as we are wont to say) who is in control of it.

Epigram

This voice behind the poem is a very insistent one. Another of the prominent ways it makes itself felt is through epigrammatic expression. We may understand "epigram" broadly as any saying which is brief, neat (that is, contained in itself), and marked by antithesis, repetition of words, paradox, or some other play upon the verbal surface. It is not necessary here to create a stricter definition. Naturally, the elements mentioned are often found in combination. Because of their form epigrams tend to stand out from their contexts and to be memorable and quotable.[10] And as expressions that always look studied, they are intrinsically self-conscious; more than other features even of highly stylized poetry they point beyond the narrative, beyond the verbal surface, back to the poet himself.

It has often been observed not only that this is a feature of Ovid's writing, but also that he shares it with his age. Although the effects of it have not perhaps received due attention, the tendency is well known. We have only to glance at the literature of Ovid's generation and the several succeeding ones, where we find, as prominent as studs, neat formations like Manilius' *nascentes morimur, finisque ab origine pendet* (*Astron.* 4.16, "we die at our birth, and our end follows from our beginning") or Lucan's more well-known *victrix causa deis placuit, sed victa Catoni* (*Bell. Civ.* 1.128, "the vanquishing cause was dear to the gods, but the vanquished to Cato"). The writings of the elder Seneca, Ovid's slightly older contemporary, teach us that such turns of phrase, far from being confined to verse, permeated oratory

and, we know, other forms of prose composition as well. The commonness of epigrammatic expression in Latin literature of the Silver Age may make it seem fruitless to try to interpret its importance in the *Metamorphoses*. Yet I believe we can arrive at a worthwhile conclusion which fits with the distinctive features of the poem and at the same time, though its precise bearing varies, may also be valid for many of those other works. In all of them perhaps the fondness for epigram draws attention to the speaker.

PARADOX AND OTHER EPIGRAMMATIC EXPRESSIONS

Epigrams in Ovid sometimes describe unusual or paradoxical situations. The expression seems almost to arise naturally out of what is given in the story. Set as a guard over Io is the monster Argus, who is well fitted for his duties: his head is ringed with a hundred eyes. Ovid observes:

> *constiterat quocumque modo, spectabat ad Io;*
> *ante oculos Io, quamvis aversus, habebat.* (1.628–29)
>
> Whichever way he stood, he was looking towards Io; though turning his back, he had Io in front of him.

The repetition of the point is typical, with the second version somewhat more pungent that the first. Myrrha, the girl in love with her own father, is the subject of a fine pair of epigrams: *scelus est odisse parentem, / hic amor est odio maius scelus!* (10.314–15, "hatred of one's parent is a crime, but this love is a crime greater than hatred!"); and regarding her suitors, *ex omnibus unum / elige, Myrrha, virum, dum ne sit in omnibus unus* (10.317–18, "choose, Myrrha, one man from amongst them all, except for one amongst them all"). Similarly the situation of Narcissus is conducive to epigram. Of the young man who has unwittingly fallen in love with his own reflected image the poet says: *oculos idem, qui decipit, incitat error* (3.431, "the same mistake which leads his eyes astray leads them on"). Shortly afterwards, when Narcissus himself realizes his error, he cries out: *quod cupio, mecum est: inopem me copia fecit* (3.466, "what I desire, I have with me; abundance has impoverished me"; the second half of the verse also suggests "opportunity has left me helpless"); and then finally: *nunc duo concordes anima moriemur in una* (3.473, "now we two hearts which beat together will perish in a single soul"). In passages like these it is not so much the case that a given situation itself evokes the epigrammatic expressions as that Ovid seeks out such a situation, or, more

important, in fact creates it through his language. The paradoxes do not inhere in the material, but are called into existence by the poet's bent towards epigram. Epigram is among other things a means of discovering and fixing what is unique in a situation.

A number of such expressions are likely to strike us as somewhat hollow or mechanical, as having the form of an epigram while lacking any spark of aptness or ingenuity. The phrase cited last might be judged so, like another used of Narcissus: *fuit in tenera tam dura superbia forma* (3.354, "in a soft shape there was pride so hard"). Atalanta, pained at the thought that the attractive Hippomenes, entering the footrace in order to win her hand, is doomed to forfeit his life, exclaims: *occidet hic igitur, voluit quia vivere mecum* (10.626, "therefore will he die, because with me he wanted to live"). The antithesis of *occidet* and *vivere* is as weak as it is unmistakable; it seems almost ornamental. Elsewhere Daedalion, sorrowing for the lost Chione, becomes a hawk, who savages all the other birds. His metamorphosis is closed with the sentence: *aliisque dolens fit causa dolendi* (11.345, "grieving himself, he becomes a cause of grief to others").

Yet at the same time some of Ovid's highest achievements are his perfect epigrams. Could he more brilliantly summarize the figure of Envy than by telling us that as she flies over the talented and prosperous city of Athens, *vixque tenet lacrimas, quia nil lacrimabile cernit* (2.796, "because she sees nothing to weep over, she weeps")? Marsyas, flayed alive by Apollo, is made to exclaim: *quid me mihi detrahis?* (6.385, "Why do you tear me from myself?"). The clever observation is made of Achilles: *armarat deus idem idemque cremabat* (12.614, "the same god [Vulcan] who had armed him was cremating him now"). (This playing within the realm of mythology is also typical.) As an outstanding example we may cite Ovid's extremely ingenious description of Erysichthon, who is starving to death: *ventris erat pro ventre locus* (8.805, "in place of a belly there was a space for a belly").

The chief thing to notice is not so much the quality of the individual epigrams as the tendency for them to appear wholesale in the poem. Let several more examples serve as a reminder of this fact. A race of men, produced from the dragon's teeth which Cadmus had sown, no sooner arises fully grown from the earth than they begin to do battle with each other. One dies: *exspirat, modo quas acceperat, auras* (3.121, "he gives up the life-breath which he had gotten but a moment before"). Pygmalion carves a statue so lifelike that the viewer might believe it wanted to move: *ars adeo latet arte sua* (10.252, "to such an extent is art concealed by its art"). Peleus, who is both grandson of the supreme deity and husband of Thetis, boasts: *lo-*

vis esse nepoti / contigit haud uni, coniunx dea contigit uni (11.219–20, "while scarcely one man is lucky enough to have Jupiter for a grandfather, only one man is lucky enough to have a goddess for a wife"). An especially vicious wolf is said to be *dulcedine sanguinis asper* (11.402, "bitter because of the sweetness of blood").[11] Contrasting Ino with the other daughters of Cadmus (Semele, annihilated by Jupiter's thunderbolt, Autonoe and Agave, who lost their sons Actaeon and Pentheus) Ovid reports: *de totque sororibus expers / una doloris erat, nisi quem fecere sorores* (4.418–19, "of so many sisters only one was free of pain—except for the pain that her sisters brought her"). This touching epigram, which introduces Ino and her story, is a *transitio per rem absentem*. The scene in which a storm engulfs Ceyx' ship is illuminated weirdly:

> *praebentque micantia lumen*
> *fulmina: fulmineis ardescunt ignibus ignes.* (11.522–23)
>
> Light is provided by the flickering lightning: with the fires of the lightning glow the fires of heaven [the stars].

(Ovid is fond of using the same word in two different senses, as he does here: see Murphy for a defense of *ignes*.) And so on, almost beyond measure.

THE EFFECTS OF EPIGRAM

What are the effects of a style which tends towards epigram? For one thing, such sentences, essentially ornamental, slow the forward movement of the narrative. The action described comes to a halt for a moment—or more than a moment, when the poet is inclined to repeat himself. Another effect is humor. Humor, of course, is a notoriously subjective reaction. The passages that evoke a smile or a chuckle from one may not from another. Among the examples quoted I would single out 1.628–29, 2.796, 6.385, and 11.522–23 as humorous. However that may be, it is hard to believe that a reader would find humor in none of the poem's epigrams. A third, more general effect is related to this. Epigrammatic expression, even when not humorous, often diminishes the pathos of a particular scene. The excessively neat, contrived phrase calls attention to itself and distracts the reader from the business at hand. Thus the horror that might be felt at Myrrha's incestuous passion or the terror and pity of Ceyx' plight lose their edge because of the accompanying epigrams.

Even in scenes which are light and gay or simply plain, epigrams abound. The several effects already discerned—the slowing of the

narrative pace, humor, the slackening of emotional intensity—are but manifestations of a more general effect: Ovid's tendency to epigram concentrates attention on the narrator himself. It is as if he does not want us to become so engaged by the story as to lose sight of him; one may feel a gentle tug-of-war between the two. This is the comprehensive effect in both this poem and many other works from the Silver Age. The tale shares the limelight with the teller. Interest is focused not only on what is being said but also on the narrator, who consciously delivers the epigrams.

We can confirm this observation and also its interpretation by referring to Latin literature. Comparison of Ovid with Virgil illustrates Ovid's marked tendency towards writing epigrams and something of the quality of the epigrams. And the testimony of several ancient writers on rhetoric strengthens the conviction that such a style drew attention to the speaker.

During the capture of Troy we read the following in Virgil: *trahebatur . . . / . . . a templo Cassandra adytisque Minervae* (*Aen.* 2.403–4, "Cassandra was being dragged from the temple and shrines of Minerva"). Ovid refers to the same event like this: *a virgine virgine rapta* (14.468, "when one virgin had been carried away from another," that is, from the temple of another). The phrase is an enigmatic, somewhat playful reference, teasing the reader's knowledge of mythology. It is also a recasting of the Virgilian description in epigrammatic language. Another, keener example shows this again. Virgil describes King Anius thus:

> *rex Anius, rex idem hominum Phoebique sacerdos,*
> *vittis et sacra redimitus tempora lauro.* (*Aen.* 3.80–81)
>
> King Anius, at the same time king over men and priest of Apollo, his temples encircled with fillets and holy laurel.

Ovid transforms this into the following:

> *hunc Anius, quo rege homines, antistite Phoebus*
> *rite colebatur, temploque domoque recepit.* (13.632–33)
>
> He was received both in temple and at home by Anius, under whose kingship men were duly looked after, under whose priesthood Apollo was duly worshiped.

(What I cannot capture in English is that with both subjects in the passage from Ovid the same Latin verb is used, *colebatur*, its meaning varying with each, "look after" and "worship"; the play on the same word at 8.724 is more nearly a pun than a zeugma.) Both poets make

the same double identification of Anius as king and priest. Both reinforce this by echoing it in an added detail: Virgil's Anius wears both fillets (of a priest) and laurel (of a triumphant general, says Servius); Ovid's receives his visitor both in his palace and in the temple. But Ovid tries to outdo his predecessor and give the verses a special touch through the zeugma with *colere*. A plain statement in Virgil becomes in him an epigram.

I do not, of course, mean to suggest that antithesis or repetition of words is unknown to Virgil; it is simply that such features of language are much less common and have a different place in his poetry. First, Virgil may sometimes merely imply a contrast, as in this verse: *teneras arcebant vincula palmas* (*Aen.* 2.406, "shackles held her tender palms"). He suggests an antithesis between Cassandra's tender hands and the chains, but he does not articulate it. Ovid would not have left this to our imagination; he would have added an adjective like *dura* or *saeva* to point the contrast, as in the epigrammatic phrase about Narcissus (3.354, quoted above). Moreover, when Virgil does employ an antithesis, it is rarely decorative or otiose. Of the dying Priam, for instance, he writes: *sanguine foedantem quos ipse sacraverat ignis* (*Aen.* 2.502, "befouling with his blood the fires which he himself had hallowed"). The verbs *foedare* and *sacrare* contrast with one another here—and the contrast is sharpened by *ipse*—but they are not a pair of obvious opposites like *tener* and *durus*.[12] The contrast is at the same time less obvious and more substantial. The phrase points up the horror of Priam's death and even touches the problem of belief in the gods.[13] Similar in its thematic relevance is a sentence which Jupiter speaks: *mortalin decuit violari vulnere divum?* (*Aen.* 12.797, "Was it right that a god be injured by mortal hand?"). The verse is framed by the opposing words, which do not quite face one another squarely: *immortalis* would be the precise antithesis of *mortalis*, as *homo* of *deus*.

Ovid's propensity to such expressions was recognized in his own day. Seneca the Elder recalls Cestius' saying of him that "he drummed into the ears of the present generation not only his *Art of Love* but his epigrams too" (*Contr.* 3.7); Cestius deplores the poet's influence over an orator. Elsewhere Seneca faults Ovid for heaping up epigrams instead of being content with one (*Contr.* 9.5.17, citing as an example *Met.* 13.503–5). A pair of ancient writers can guide us to a proper appreciation of this. Cicero and Quintilian, for us the two chief Latin exponents of rhetoric, both remark on the effect which elaborate care over words has upon oratory. The former tells us: "A suspicion of careful preparation, of an attentiveness which is artificial . . . very

greatly deprives the speech of credibility, the speaker of authority" (*Inv.* 1.25). The latter writes: "When one has to fight by evoking powerful emotions like brutality or jealousy or compassion, who could tolerate a speaker who waxes wroth, weeps, or pleads in antithetical phrases, matching rhythms or sounds, and so forth? For in these matters excessive care over words detracts from the credibility of the feelings: truth appears to be wanting wherever artificiality is paraded" (*Inst.* 9.3.102). The two authors agree that excessive attention to language diminishes the credibility of the representation. Applying this to the *Metamorphoses*, they would claim (I imagine) that the epigrams, a particular form of care over words, make us feel as if Ovid is not concerned solely to convey the material to us, to make us experience pathos, joy, or whatever.

The positive interest that such a style does convey is suggested once again by Seneca. He puts into the mouth of Votienus Montanus an explanation of why he did not prepare declamations ahead of time: he who does do this "is content to charm his audience with epigrams and descriptive passages: he wants them to approve of *him*, not his case" (*Contr.* 9.praef.1—is not this itself an epigram?). Here then an ancient author expresses precisely my own view, that language studded with epigram deflects attention away from the material to the speaker.

The Narrator's Point of View

We have at hand more, and more vivid, evidence of the narrator's omnipresence. The texture of the poem is marked with comments that can be made only from his point of view and from nowhere else. This is hardly a matter of interpretation, rather of fairly simple observation. Such remarks are constant reminders to the reader that someone is *telling* this story. It does not exist independently, on its own; it does not reach us unmediated. The narrator frequently breaks in on the story with his own voice. These interruptions, as is natural, often take the form of a parenthesis or an apostrophe; they are often expressed epigrammatically. But the manifestations of the narrating voice are legion. I begin by suggesting the range.

The most obvious examples are remarks which the narrator makes to the reader directly in the first person. We can leave aside here passages in which the poet announces his own subject, on the grounds that the first person singular is traditional: Virgil's *arma virumque cano* finds its counterpart in Ovid's proem. But there is nothing traditionally epic in the first-person discourse at the close of the

Metamorphoses. The passage which ends the poem (15.871–79) is a lengthy statement of the poet's own immortality, more closely resembling personal lyric—Horace *Odes* 3.30 is the chief model—than anything familiar from more "objective" narrative.

Even apart from this the poet is not shy of speaking in his own voice. In Book Two, after describing some of the destruction visited upon the earth by Phaethon's fall, Ovid pauses for a moment before picturing still greater catastrophes. In that pause he says: *parva queror* (2.214, "I utter but small complaints"). Who is this "I" who suddenly intrudes but the narrator himself? The effect, unparalleled by anything in Virgil, is very striking. We were reading about the burning of the fields with their crops, and perhaps were being drawn into the story, when out pops the narrator to announce that *he* has greater woes to speak of. Near the opposite end of the poem, when comparing Augustus with Caesar, he gives other instances of sons who were greater than their fathers: Agamemnon and Atreus, Achilles and Peleus, and so on. His last instance, Jupiter and Saturn, he introduces thus: *ut exemplis ipsos aequantibus utar* (15.857, "so that I may use examples which are equal to the subjects"). That a character in the poem should say "I" is not surprising. It is remarkable, however, when the narrator does so. And the alternation somewhat blurs the difference between the two.

Ovid's presence is felt less directly, but clearly nevertheless, in other novel ways. In Book Nine he is bringing to a close the story of Iphis, who, though born a woman, has now been changed to a man; Iphis and his mother are thankful to Isis for bringing about the change. First Ovid addresses Iphis: *nam quae / femina nuper eras, puer es!* (9.790–91, "for you who were recently a girl are now a lad!"). The apostrophe is hardly remarkable. At once, however, it nearly turns into an exchange between narrator and character: *date munera templis, / nec timida gaudete fide! dant munera templis* (791–92, "Offer gifts to the temples and rejoice in your sturdy faith! They do offer gifts to the temples"). The plural imperatives must be addressed to Iphis and his mother. The echoing of the command in the statement that follows it makes it seem that the two hear Ovid's words and harken to them. The poet strikes an extremely personal note. He expands the apostrophe to the point of breaking its usual bounds: where else does a character respond to the teller? and does not that response affirm the existence of the teller? The narrator has an easy entrance into his story.

On several occasions he steps in to finish speeches for his characters. During the battle between Perseus and the supporters of Phineus he reports in direct discourse the boastful words of Lycabas

but then adds, "he had not yet said all this" (5.65–66). Conspicuously he rounds out his account. A passage about Syrinx is far more remarkable. To lull Argus to sleep, Mercury has begun telling him the story of that nymph, which proves to be so powerful a soporific that long before it is over the hundred-eyed monster is fast asleep. At this point, his goal achieved, Mercury abruptly stops speaking—but then the narrator himself steps in to pick up the thread and finish the story, telling us what Mercury was going to say (1.700–12)! The transition is handled in a surprising way. Equipped with the clarities of modern punctuation, the lines run as follows:

> *"Pan videt hanc pinuque caput praecinctus acuta*
> *talia verba refert"—restabat verba referre*
> *et precibus spretis fugisse per avia nympham . . .* (1.699–701)
>
> "Pan sees her and, his head girt with pointy pine needles, he speaks the following words"—it remained to speak the words and say that the nymph, spurning his entreaties, fled over the trackless wastes . . .

The last words of Mercury's direct discourse, *talia verba refert* ("he speaks the following words") are a familiar enough phrase for introducing direct discourse. What follows, however, is not Pan's words, nor those of Mercury, but rather those of Ovid: *restabat verba referre* ("it remained to speak the words").[14] Moreover, the indirect discourse which now follows, six main clauses spread over twelve verses, stands in an odd syntactic relationship to the rest: these infinitives, though they appear parallel to *referre*, cannot be so, but must depend in a different and very loose way on *restabat*.[15] The unannounced double shift of voice, so abrupt as to be deceptive, and the varying constructions with *restabat* reinforce our sense of the narrator's interruption.

Sometimes we are reminded of the teller behind the tale through a parenthetic quip inserted in the narrative. Perseus, intent on rescuing Andromeda from the monster which is about to devour her, asks her parents whether they will betroth her to him if he succeeds: *accipiunt legem (quis enim dubitaret?)* (4.704, "they accepted the terms (indeed, who would have hesitated to?)"). Of similar effect is a parenthesis in Book Ten. Eurydice, because Orpheus has turned to look at her, slips back to the Underworld:

> *iamque iterum moriens non est de coniuge quicquam*
> *questa suo (quid enim nisi se quereretur amatam?).* (10.60–61)
>
> And dying now for the second time, she uttered no complaint against her husband (indeed, what could her complaint have been, save that she had been loved?).

With remarks like these the narrator brings his story to a halt and addresses to the reader a brief aside, a comment delivered, as it were, with a knowing wink.[16]

Such hints about the range of ways in which the narrator manifests himself should enable the reader to recognize the many other examples there are in the poem. Once the ear is attuned, that voice can be heard almost everywhere. In order to sharpen this faculty let me describe several particular, peculiarly Ovidian features of language which introduce the narrator's perspective. Others could be found, no doubt.[17]

SIMILE

The simile is a hallmark of epic narrative style. Ovid several times employs similes which are marked by an unexpected personal note. One begins: *sic ego torrentem . . . vidi* (3.568–69, "just so I myself once saw a torrent which . . ."). This represents a bold, unparalleled interjection on the part of the teller. What has happened to epic anonymity? No less arresting is the passage where Ovid describes the chief gods as Roman nobles, their residences located in the choicest quarter of town:

> *hic locus est quem, si verbis audacia detur,*
> *haud timeam magni dixisse Palatia caeli.* (1.175–76)
>
> This is the place that, if the boldness of the phrase were to be permitted, I should hardly be shy of calling the Palatine of great heaven.

Though lacking the regular identifying tags, such as a *sicut* or *veluti* or *ceu*, this is in effect a simile—and a sly and playful one, since the narrator offers it tentatively in the form of a future-less-vivid condition. This paves the way to a full-blown simile shortly afterwards, applied to the outcry arising from the assembled gods when Jupiter reveals to them the treachery of Lycaon:

> *sic, cum manus impia saevit*
> *sanguine Caesareo Romanum exstinguere nomen,*
> *attonitum tantae subito terrore ruinae*

humanum genus est totusque perhorruit orbis;
nec tibi grata minus pietas, Auguste, tuorum est
quam fuit illa Iovi. (1.200–205)

In the same way, when the unholy band was raging to extinguish the Roman people by shedding Caesar's blood, the human race was smitten by the sudden fear of awful destruction, nor was the loyalty of your supporters less pleasing to you, Augustus, than that was to Jupiter.

Instead of a universal, familiar experience like a storm or a forest fire this simile appeals to a recent, time-bound, unique event, an attempt on Augustus' life. It reverses the working of the usual simile and has a personalizing effect. This is reinforced by the apostrophe of the emperor, who is not a character within the narrative but a contemporary figure present only in the simile. The grand first simile of the *Aeneid*, in which Neptune calming the stormy waters is compared to a statesman calming a crowd, is similar—and this not by chance either. Both passages compare an event to human political activity; but whereas Virgil's is presented as timeless, something that could happen at any time, Ovid's is specific. The simile thrusts upon us both the poet and the contemporary world.

The poet is more in evidence in a very interesting simile from Book Six:

ecce venit magno dives Philomela paratu,
divitior forma, quales audire solemus
naidas et dryadas mediis incedere silvis,
si modo des illis cultus similesque paratus. (6.451–54)

Look! here comes Philomela, rich in her splendid dress, richer in her beauty: just like her, so we are wont to hear, are the naiads and dryads who parade through the middle of the forest—provided you give them similar dress and adornment.

(We might note the epigrammatic quality of the description, *dives . . . divitior*, the adjective shifting its meaning from literal to figurative.) Philomela's entrance into the narrative—"Look! here she comes"—is dramatic in the sense that it is unexpected and arresting, and also in that it resembles the technique with which new characters are often introduced in a play. In a play, however, such words are spoken about one character by another; see, for example, Plaut. *Pseud.* 693, *Per.* 543. In bringing Philomela on by speaking the words himself, Ovid for a moment makes himself appear to be one of the figures on the stage: again the barrier between creator and creature is lowered.

This prepares the ground for the simile that follows, with the highly personal expression *audire solemus* ("we are wont to hear").[18] This is just like the *sic vidi* simile from Book Three, cited above. Here the effect is reinforced by two details. With this same phrase the narrator implies the possible fictiveness of the naiads and dryads in his own simile, as if to say, "Well, at least that's what we're always being told." Then, after making the comparison, he adds that it is valid only if you dress up the naiads. Strange simile, in which the poet nearly undoes his own comparison! (Compare 10.515–18, quoted in Chapter Six.) All this leads us to feel vividly the presence of the narrator in his simile.

Ovid has several more on-again, off-again comparisons. He likens the beautiful Adonis to the Cupids we see in paintings—but only on condition: "either give a light quiver to him, or take it away from them!" (10.518). Elsewhere he describes the metamorphosis of the lad Hyacinth:

Tyrioque nitentior ostro
flos oritur formamque capit quam lilia, si non
purpureus color his, argenteus esset in illis. (10.211–13)

A flower arises which is more brilliant than Tyrian purple and looks like a lily—if the one were not purple and the other white.

Ovid even has a do-it-yourself simile. Of the party thrown for the marriage between Perseus and Andromeda, which will end in a battle royal, he says: *inque repentinos convivia versa tumultus / adsimilare freto possis* (5.5–6, "the festive celebration that turned to sudden tumult you might liken to the sea"). The roundabout, self-conscious form of the simile perhaps advertises its literary ancestry: it recalls a simile from the *Iliad* (2.144–46). It invites the reader to join the author in making the comparison.

CONTRARY-TO-FACT CONDITIONS

Another recurring feature of the narrative which draws attention to the poet because it is a remark that can be made only from his point of view is a certain kind of contrary-to-fact statement. These are found not only in the transitions between stories but throughout the poem generally. Ovid is not the only poet to write contrary-to-fact sentences, of course; rather, many of his are different from those of earlier narrative poets. By grasping the difference, which is subtle, we can come to see how these sentences remind us of the narrator.

The contrary-to-fact statements made by other authors invariably follow the description of an unfolding action and represent the action as continuing if only some unexpected force had not checked it. In Ovid, far from arising out of the progress of the narrative, they break upon the reader unexpectedly; only the narrator could introduce so unforeseen an event. The peculiar quality of such conditions in the *Metamorphoses* can be illustrated by a comparison with Homer and Virgil. Typical Homeric examples are (I paraphrase): "Then the Greeks would have captured Troy, had not Apollo made a stand on the Trojans' behalf" (*Il.* 16.698–701), and "Then, Menelaus, you would have been slain by Hector, since he was far stronger, had not the kings of the Achaeans rescued you" (*Il.* 7.104–6; the apostrophe is rare in Homer). In these and in every single other example the narrator merely represents the natural tendency of an action already under way as being checked or blocked somehow: the Greeks were already doing well in their attack on the city and would have continued it to the point of success, had not Apollo intervened; and so forth. The form of expression does not deviate from the line of narrative, but is only an extension of it—a hypothetical extension, to be sure. Precisely the same holds true for the contrary-to-fact sentences in Apollonius' *Argonautica* (e.g., 1.492–95), as well as in the *Aeneid*, for instance, in the passage where Turnus, having forced his way into the Trojan camp and then been shut inside alone, attacks the Trojans so ferociously that he forgets to open the gates to his own men outside:

et si continuo victorem ea cura subisset,
rumpere claustra manu sociosque immittere portis,
ultimus ille dies bello gentique fuisset. (9.757–59)

And if at once there had come over the victorious Turnus concern to burst the bars by force and let his companions in through the gates, that would have been the last day of the war and of the Trojan race.

This is in effect a climactic statement about Turnus' battle fury, which the narrative has been illustrating for a while; it explains why, great though his fury is, it does not have the issue it might be expected to. Although contrary to fact, it still belongs intimately to the story.[19]

The contrary-to-fact sentences of Ovid with which we are concerned are fundamentally different. They represent not an extension or continuation of the narrative but an interrupting of it and a directing of attention to the speaker himself, the only one in a position to make such a remark. They lack roots in the story and are extraneous to it. It does not seem to me coincidental therefore that they are usually found combined with some other feature which signals the presence of the narrator—epigram, apostrophe, the clever use of mythology. Scylla, for example, changed from a girl into a monster, destroys the companions of Ulysses. The text continues:

mox eadem Teucras fuerat mersura carinas,
ni prius in scopulum, qui nunc quoque saxeus exstat,
transformata foret. (14.72–74)

Soon she would also have sunk the Trojan ships, had she not first been transformed into a cliff, now too extant as rock.

This sentence (which makes the transition back to the story of Aeneas) is nearly gratuitous. No spectator present at the preceding action could have witnessed the near occurrence of this one. It can only be imagined from some more remote point outside the story.

Jupiter, cheating on his wife, as often, attempts to rape the lovely Callisto; of her vain efforts to fight him off Ovid says:

(adspiceres utinam, Saturnia, mitior esses!) (2.435)

(Would that you were witnessing this, Juno—you would be less harsh!)

Here the apostrophe and parenthesis as well as the syntactic form of the sentence point to the narrator. Apostrophe is also found in a passage about Achilles, who had been slain by Paris, the effeminate abductor of Helen. The poet says to Achilles:

at si femineo fuerat tibi Marte cadendum,
Thermodontiaca malles cecidisse bipenni. (12.610–11)

But if you had to fall in battle with a woman, you would have preferred to fall to Penthesilea's axe.

This is also a witty epigram.[20] Geography too can be treated the same way, as when Ovid describes a Thessalian bay: *bracchia procurrunt, ubi, si foret altior unda, / portus erat* (11.230–31, "the arms of land run out where, were the water higher, there would be a harbor"). And he cleverly observes about the maiden Andromeda, who, while chained stark naked to a rock, is spotted by Perseus: *manibusque modestos / celasset vultus, si non religata fuissset* (4.682–83, "with her hands she would have hidden her bashful face, if she hadn't been chained"). Epigram again marks what we are told about Hecuba, mother of Hector and part of the booty from Troy:

quam victor Ulixes
esse suam nollet, nisi quod tamen Hectora partu
ediderat: dominum matri vix repperit Hector! (13.485–87)

Victorious Ulysses would not have wanted to take her, except that she had given birth to Hector: Hector, with difficulty, helped find a master for his mother!

This is unusually clever writing. It cannot but lessen the pathos of the moment—Ovid has just been deploring the fall of one who was a queen—at the same time that it deflects attention from narrative to narrator.

Our last example is drawn from the story of the Calydonian boar. The fierce creature has killed several hunters already; now the narrator continues:

forsitan et Pylius citra Troiana perisset
tempora, sed sumpto posita conamine ab hasta
arboris insiluit, quae stabat proxima, ramis
despexitque loco tutus, quem fugerat, hostem. (8.365–68)

Perhaps Nestor also would have perished, before the time of the Trojan War; but, pole-vaulting vigorously with his spear, he leapt into the branches of a nearby tree and watched from a position of safety the enemy he had fled from.

We can see here clearly the difference between Ovid and his epic predecessors in this point of usage. If the statement were simply "Nestor too would have perished, had he not gotten out of the way," it would precisely resemble the sentences from Homer and Virgil, extending one stage further an action already begun, here the boar's rampage. As it is, though, the word "perhaps," telling us this is only a conjecture, and the phrase "before the time of the Trojan War," which implies a perspective that cannot be Nestor's own or any other character's either, both serve to distinguish this from the earlier uses of contrary-to-fact sentences. Once again, in this subtle way, the reader is put in mind of the narrator. Let us also notice how Ovid plays with mythology in this passage. These lines are a wonderful joke on the Nestor of the *Iliad*. Homer's Nestor, who always boasts of how brave he was when young, is here unmasked by Ovid as a liar. It is worth observing the coincidence of the narrator's personal voice with untraditional treatment of the material.[21] The coincidence both reminds us that the usual narrating voice is impersonal and implies that a personal voice is bound to treat mythology in an iconoclastic way.

FUTURE PARTICIPLES AND *NONDUM*

The contrary-to-fact sentences mark out the narrator as one who knows what never happened. Similarly, a pair of recurring constructions, one the obverse of the other, mark him out as knowing what (to his characters) lies in the distant future. This perhaps does not seem remarkable. A narrator after all may speak freely of what has already happened before the time of the present action: upon introducing a character or a piece of armor Homer does not hesitate to report its previous history. Yet this license does not extend, symmetrically, into the future. It is a convention of epic narrative that the teller reveals through himself virtually no knowledge of the future; the occasions when he does are few and carefully circumscribed. Ovid breaks with this convention, and thereby reminds us of his special position. One of the ways he refers to coming events is through a certain distinctive use of the future active participle. In the *Metamorphoses* he employs this form of the verb often and with a great freedom. To realize what is remarkable in this we must keep in mind that before Ovid's day the participle had occurred only in very restricted situations. The attributive use of the participle, with which we are concerned, narrowly confined before, had been extended somewhat by the lyric and elegiac poets of the previous generation. Narrative, however, remained more conservative. Again comparison with the *Aeneid* shows most clearly what is distinctive in the *Metamorphoses*.

Virgil employs the future participle as an attributive not rarely, but he always does so in one of only two ways. First, he uses it of actions which are very close to happening and the imminence of which is evident to the characters within the narrative. Thus when Aeneas says to Anchises near the end of Book Two: *perituraeque addere Troiae / teque tuosque iuvat* (*Aen.* 2.660–61, "you want to add both yourself and your family to Troy, which is about to perish"), he is certain that Troy *is* about to perish; for not only has he witnessed its near destruction himself but he has been vouchsafed a vision of the gods' completing the task. Later the Sibyl in describing Tartarus to him mentions the boulder which hangs over Ixion and Pirithous: *atra silex iam iam lapsura* (*Aen.* 6.602, "the black rock which even now, even now is on the verge of falling").[22] Second, Virgil uses the participle of future actions which are foretold by the gods, oracles, seers, and others granted special precognition. Apollo, for instance, addresses Iulus as *dis genite et geniture deos* (*Aen.* 9.642, "thou who art born of the gods and will have gods born of thee"). As a god himself, he cannot be mistaken in his prediction. In the Underworld Anchises, pointing out to Aeneas their future descendants, claims:

hic Caesar et omnis Iuli
progenies magnum caeli ventura sub axem. (*Aen.* 6.789–90)

Here is Caesar and all the progeny of Iulus which is to arise beneath the vault of heaven.

The divine scheme of the universe, which he has already unfolded, justifies his prophecy.[23] Virgil, then, uses the future participle attributively only for events which are completely certain from the point of view either of the gods or of the humans within the story.

Against this background we can see the novelty of Ovid's usage. A rather recent innovation in the language, handled by other writers with hesitation and restraint, the future participle develops in Ovid's hands a very extended, free use. Let us look at several examples. Among the rivers set ablaze by Phaethon's downfall Ovid mentions *arsurusque iterum Xanthus* (2.245, "the Xanthus, which is going to burn for a second time"). He refers of course to the episode in Book Twenty-One of the *Iliad* where the Trojan rivers, trying to overwhelm Achilles, are attacked by the fires of Hephaistos. In another passage Ovid says that once upon a time crows were so white they rivaled geese: *servaturis vigili Capitolia voce / . . . anseribus* (2.538–39, "geese which were to save the Capitoline with their watchful cry"), he adds by way of description—a reference to the famous event of 390, in which the Gauls would have captured the citadel of Rome had their stealthy approach not been thwarted by the honking of Juno's sacred geese. Still another instance occurs when Hercules' weapons are placed upon his funeral pyre: *regnaque visuras iterum Troiana sagittas* (9.232, "his arrows, which once again would see the kingdom of Troy"). Next time Philoctetes will be carrying them. And so on.[24]

Whereas the participle in the *Aeneid* described an event that either was immediately evident to the human characters within the story or, if distant, was foreseen with certainty by a divinity or someone who shared the divine knowledge of what is fated, in the *Metamorphoses* it most often represents an observation that can be made from a single point of view, that of the narrator himself. Phaethon does not know nor does any god report that the Xanthus is going to burn once more—only Ovid himself makes the connection between the present event and the one to come. Moreover, the point of view from outside the narrative is rendered all the more evident because the information which the participle adds is wholly irrelevant to the narrative. It affects not a bit either the course of the story or our understanding of it that the river will burn again, the geese save the Capitoline, or Hercules' arrows revisit Troy. Again, the opposite is

true of the *Aeneid*, in which the phrases quoted are affective. In Ovid the phrases with the future participle are extraneous; they are side comments, mere interruptions made by the narrator. For a moment at least they direct attention away from the narrative to the man who is telling it. In them one can hear the voice of Ovid intruding upon the tale.

Such participial phrases are matched by a set of phrases with the adverb *nondum* which refer to the future by stating not what will happen, in positive terms, but what has *not yet* happened. These are only a roundabout form of the other, and they equally signal the existence and the detachment of the narrator. A fine example is the reference to Castor and Pollux as *gemini, nondum caelestia sidera, fratres*[25] (8.372, "the twin brothers, not yet stars in the firmament"); had it scanned, Ovid might have said *futura caelestia sidera*. Others include the mention of *gramen / nondum mutato vulgatum corpore Glauci* (7.232–33, "grass not yet brought to renown by the metamorphosis of Glaucus' body") or *nondum torvae Calydon invisa Dianae* (6.415, "Calydon, not yet hated by savage Diana"; Diana's hatred later unleashes the Calydonian boar).[26]

Once again a comparison with Virgil is helpful. Both poets refer to the fact that the port of Caieta in Latium was named for Aeneas' nurse, who was buried there. Virgil's lines combine aetiology with a moving epitaph:

tu quoque litoribus nostris, Aeneia nutrix,
aeternam moriens famam, Caieta, dedisti;
et nunc servat honos sedem tuus ossaque nomen
Hesperia in magna, si qua est ea gloria, signat. (*Aen.* 7.1–4)

Caieta, nurse of Aeneas, you too in your death have given eternal renown to our shores; even now your fame keeps its abode, and in great Hesperia your name marks the resting place of your bones, if this be any glory.

Ovid touches upon the same fact in passing:

litora adit nondum nutricis habentia nomen. (14.157)

He came to the shores which did not yet bear the name of his nurse.

In its phrasing the latter version is allusive, even coy. Virgil presupposes in his readers a knowledge of toponymy; Ovid, who does not name the nurse, presupposes a study of Virgil.[27] The two versions also fix the narrator in a very different relation to the narrative. Virgil

stands in his own day and looks back to the thread which continues from the past down to the present, linking the one with the other. He cherishes the link, we feel, and appreciates the value of history as a memorial (though in characteristic Virgilian fashion he mutes his appreciation with the phrase "if this be any glory"). Ovid by contrast appears to stand outside of time. A disinterested, perhaps uninterested, observer, he remarks for the reader's benefit that at the moment of one event (Aeneas' arrival) the other had not yet taken place (the naming of the port). He shows no sense of history, only of the simple logic of temporal sequence. And by couching the observation in a negative way he contrives to call even more attention to himself, the figure outside the narrative who makes the observation.[28]

Self-doubt and Self-criticism

The poet of the *Metamorphoses* never makes himself more evident than when he turns on his own narrative and criticizes it. Not only does he remind us again and again that *he* is telling the story; he also frequently hints that it is not altogether reliable, but instead is *merely* a story that *he* is telling. By wondering aloud about it, the poet calls into question the truth of mythology. At least he seems to deny its literal truth. And when he does this repeatedly he reinforces the implicit, unspoken assumption that literal truth is the only kind, as if there were no symbolic truths, and once one has cast doubt on whether a reported event took place it is robbed of the values traditionally ascribed to it. Such literalization is characteristic of Ovid. It is not coincidental that he appears before us prominently as both narrator and critic at the same time. His skepticism is linked to his artistic self-consciousness: aware of his own role in manipulating the story, he is bound to be aware of others' as well, and correspondingly distrustful of them.

He may be signaling this in a passage from Book Eight. The setting ought to be recalled first. We are in the middle book of the poem, and a group gathered in Achelous' cave is discussing the possibility of metamorphosis. Lelex has just finished the tale of Baucis and Philemon. Intent on proving his point, that metamorphosis does in fact take place, he vigorously affirms the reality of the couple's change into a pair of sacred trees.

> *haec mihi non vani (neque erat cur fallere vellent)*
> *narravere senes; equidem pendentia vidi*
> *serta super ramos . . . recentia.* (8.721–23)

> This was recounted to me by old men who were not unreliable (and there was no reason why they should wish to deceive); I myself saw fresh garlands hanging upon their boughs.

In a central passage regarding the central phenomenon of the poem, a story-teller mentions deceit. Lelex, as it seems to me, occupies the same position as Ovid. To mention deceit, even while denying it, is to call attention to it and to raise, willy-nilly, the issue of the story's veracity. Within its context Lelex' "I myself saw them" sounds almost defensive, as does the litotes in "not unreliable" and in a phrase he employed when introducing the tale: *quoque minus dubites* (620, "so that you have fewer doubts"). This passage brings into relation matters of theme and vehicle; it appears to link the question whether metamorphosis is possible with whether the mythology recounting it is reliable. The narrator's alertness to deceptive story-telling here receives expression which is effective because oblique, and is especially significant because of the juxtaposition.

TELLER DETACHED FROM TALE

The range of ways Ovid reveals his skepticism is wide. Certain characteristically Ovidian turns of phrase suggest a fussiness on the part of the poet. He conveys to readers the sense that he picks and chooses among the materials at his disposal—and might well have chosen differently, had he wanted to. Thus he says of Hecuba: *plura quidem, sed et haec laniato pectore dixit* (13.493, "from her tormented breast she uttered more words, to be sure, but also the following"). In other words, he declares he is giving us but a partial report, breaking the illusion of epic fullness and objectivity. With this casual, unmotivated phrase he recalls his own act of selection. More remarkable is a phrase that he uses to describe Ceyx' progress on a sea voyage: *aut minus, aut certe medium non amplius aequor / puppe secabatur* (11.478–79, "with his ship he had traversed less than half the sea—or certainly not more than half"). The narrator permits himself to mention alternative versions of how far Ceyx had traveled when the storm struck his ship. Here is no historian debating a crucial question of variant traditions—only a story-teller momentarily uncertain what exactly happened. The triviality of the matter throws into relief the narrator's pickiness as well as presence. At the end of the story he invents an anonymous character—*aliquis senior*, he calls him (749, "some old fellow")—who praises the love Ceyx and Alcyone have retained as kingfishers in metamorphosis. There follows in direct discourse a comparison between them and the bird who was formerly

Aesacus; this forms the transition. The narrator is not sure, however, who precisely spoke the words: *proximus, aut idem, si fors tulit, . . . dixit* (751, "one who was nearby, or, if so it chanced, the very same old man, said . . ."). Though it is of the smallest importance, the narrator makes a point of revealing his uncertainty.

The story of the kingfishers offers a more complex example of critical distance between teller and tale. The corpse of Ceyx, who was shipwrecked in the storm, has floated back to the shore, where his wife Alcyone has been awaiting him. Transformed now, she flies to him and "kisses his cold lips with her hard beak." Then we read:

> *senserit hoc Ceyx, an vultum motibus undae*
> *tollere sit visus, populus dubitabat; at ille*
> *senserat.* (11.739–41)
>
> The people were uncertain whether Ceyx had felt this kiss or, because of the movement of the waves, had only appeared to lift his face; but he *had* felt it.

First Ovid offers two explanations for what was seen (here he sets them in the minds of the observers), one supernatural, the other rational; then he himself, unusually, opts for the more fantastic of them. The stand that he ultimately takes is less important than his raising the possibility of a rational explanation for the event. A passage like this makes us wonder about the reliability of what we read, and it is the narrator himself who induces this skepticism.

Ovid sometimes marks more distinctly the variations he knows of, as with the conjunctions *sive . . . sive* ("whether . . . or"). The ordinary context of this construction is illustrated at 15.324–28, where Pythagoras gives two explanations of why a certain spring causes those who drink from it to shun wine: the tone is cool and dispassionate, the doubt that of an honest, inquiring scientist (note also the triple example at 342–51). Yet when the poet speaks in the same way about the events he is narrating himself, he is withholding the traditional sanction of his authority. Thus he introduces with *sive . . . sive* his varying explanations of why man was created with greater moral and mental powers than other animals (1.78–81) and why Orpheus shuns women (10.80–81). Appropriate to certain writing, the construction is foreign to narrative.

Elsewhere the poet talks about Circe's love for Glaucus:

> *neque enim flammis habet aptius ulla*
> *talibus ingenium, seu causa est huius in ipsa,*
> *seu Venus indicio facit hoc offensa paterno.* (14.25–27)
>
> No other woman has a heart more susceptible to the flames of love, whether the cause of this lies in herself, or Venus is the one responsible, offended by her father's informing.

(Circe's father is the Sun, who had tattled about Venus' adultery with Mars: this is an example of the ingenious connections the poet makes among mythological characters and tales.) The separate and incompatible explanations introduced by *seu . . . seu* again imply some distance between Ovid and his story.[29] At first glance this may not seem remarkable, since similar constructions are found in Virgil:

> *primusque Thymoetes*
> *duci intra muros hortatur et arce locari,*
> *sive dolo seu iam Troiae sic fata ferebant.* (*Aen.* 2.32–34)
>
> Thymoetes was the first to urge that the horse be brought within the walls and set upon the citadel, whether by guile or because Troy's fate was already leading in that direction.

These words, however, are delivered by the character Aeneas, not by Virgil himself (and Virgil should not be considered the narrator of inset stories). It would be inconceivable in the *Aeneid* for the poet to speak as if uncertain of what happened or why.

Another comparison with Virgil points to the same difference. In Book Six of the *Aeneid* the hero, while visiting the Underworld, thinks he has caught sight of Dido, *obscuram, qualem primo qui surgere mense / aut videt aut vidisse putat per nubila lunam* (*Aen.* 6.453–54, "who was dim, like the moon at the beginning of the month which a man sees, or thinks he sees, through the clouds"). With similar words Ovid describes what happens when Althaea, Meleager's mother, throws into the fire the log which represents her son's life: *aut dedit aut visus gemitus est ipse dedisse / stipes* (8.513–14, "the log itself gave a groan, or seemed to give one"). We might note first of all the personification in the groaning log, which is characteristic of Ovid. (*Ipse*, however, is Bentley's emendation of *ille*.) This extends into the following verses. In the phrases *invitis conreptus ab ignibus* (8.514, "seized upon by the reluctant fire") and *flamma . . . ab illa / uritur* (8.515–16, "is burnt by that flame") the preposition *ab* personifies as agents the fire and the flame. (The personification may be especially appropriate here, since in some sense the log *is* Meleager.)[30] Yet the expression of alternatives, "groaned or seemed to groan," in a self-conscious way questions the personification, for it evokes the thought that maybe the log did *not* really groan.

As for content, although both the Virgilian and the Ovidian pas-

sages convey in similar language a difficulty of discernment, they are essentially different. In Virgil the difficulty lies wholly within the narrative; it is Aeneas who is uncertain whether it is or is not Dido whom he glimpses. Moreover, in the passage which was Virgil's model, Apollonius too was describing the uncertainty of one of his characters (*Argon.* 4.1479–80). Ovid may similarly be referring to Althaea's uncertainty about the noise issuing from the log which she has just thrown into the fire. But in the context he seems rather to be expressing his own uncertainty whether what he has just said is true or not. Playfully the narrator induces skepticism about his own narrative. The phrase in Virgil reflects in the end upon Aeneas, in Ovid upon himself.

In another passage as well Ovid draws attention to a possible disparity between what actually happened and what appeared to happen. Hercules is wrestling with Achelous: *captat, / aut captare putes* (9.37–38, "he grapples with his limbs, or you might think he grapples"). The distinction is unmotivated and gratuitous—all the more so since it is made by Achelous himself, who was in a position to know! By reminding his audience vividly that we often rely on deceptive appearances, the narrator casts doubt over everything he reports.

EXPRESSIONS OF DISBELIEF

But Ovid often indicates much more directly that the stories he tells have been handed down to him and therefore may not be reliable or even believable. Like the Hellenistic and earlier Roman poets, he writes his share of phrases such as *dicitur, fertur, ferunt, ita fama ferebat, memorant*, meaning "it is said," "they say," "so the story goes," and so on. He is not unique in using these phrases. Nevertheless, it would be inadequate to label this simply an "Alexandrian feature," for Ovid differs markedly from his predecessors in the extent and the intensity of his use, with the result that he much more strongly suggests the conventional, and suspect, nature of mythology.[31]

Even when he employs traditional language, he often applies it in unusually personal and critical ways. *Fertur* ("is said") occurs commonly in Latin poetry. Ovid uses it in the passage from Book Six where he recounts how Tereus raped his sister-in-law and then cut out her tongue, to prevent her from telling:

> *hoc quoque post facinus . . . fertur*
> *saepe sua lacerum repetisse libidine corpus.* (6.561–62)
>
> Even after this crime . . . he is said, because of his lust, to have attacked her mutilated body again and again.

If this were all, it might seem no more remarkable than any one of a score of phrases in Catullus or Virgil. But into the middle of the sentence (after *facinus*) Ovid inserts the parenthetic comment: *vix ausim credere* ("I should hardly dare to lend it credence"). In this context the word *fertur* takes on special weight, because the secondhand reporting which it denotes is set in opposition to personal belief.

A second example is strikingly clear in that it lends itself to a comparison with Virgil. Ovid reports the unusual gestation of Zeus' son Bacchus, snatched from his dying mother's womb: *patrioque tener, si credere dignum est, / insuitur femori* (3.311–12, "the tender babe is sewn into his father's thigh, if this deserves to be believed"). The phrase *si credere dignum est* could have been lifted directly from Virgil, who employs it in speaking about Aeneas' trumpeter Misenus, killed because he had challenged a divinity to a contest:

> *aemulus exceptum Triton, si credere dignum est,*
> *inter saxa virum spumosa immerserat unda.* (*Aen.* 6.173–74)
>
> His rival Triton took the man by surprise, if this deserves to be believed, and drowned him in the foaming wave, amongst the rocks.

The ancient commentators remark on the connotation of "ambush" in the word *exceptum*.[32] It is about this, and nothing more than this, that Virgil expresses the reservation. Like the famous *tantaene animis caelestibus irae?* (*Aen.* 1.11, "can heavenly spirits be so angry?"), this phrase refers to the difficulty of attributing "low" behavior (anger, stealth) to the gods. In Ovid, however, the very same phrase questions the likelihood of a well-known piece of mythology.

We catch the poet criticizing his own material, and thus bringing himself squarely before us, in many another phrase, most of them unparalleled in earlier literature.[33] The Sun mourns his son Phaethon, and, Ovid adds: *si modo credimus, unum / isse diem sine sole ferunt* (2.330–31, "one day, so they say, went by without daylight—if only we believe it"). *Quis credere possit?* (15.613, "who could believe it?"), remarks Ovid parenthetically of the Romans' unwillingness to look upon a citizen whose forehead has sprouted horns; and *credere quis posset?* (6.421, "who could have believed it?") of Athenian failure to participate in a pan-Hellenic war. (The latter is marked by apostrophe and is a *transitio per absentem*.) About Scylla, a monster with the head of a girl, we are told:

virginis ora gerens et, si non omnia vates
ficta reliquerunt, aliquo quoque tempore virgo. (13.733–34)

She had the looks of a maiden, and, unless the poets have left behind nothing but fiction, she also *was* a maiden at some time.

The piquancy of this remark is enhanced by a literary echo: the expression *virginis ora gerens* ("had the looks of a maiden") had been applied by Virgil to Venus, Aeneas' mother, on an occasion when she appeared to him in disguise (*Aen.* 1.315).[34] At the very end of his poem Ovid writes a similar phrase:

perque omnia saecula fama,
si quid habent veri vatum praesagia, vivam. (15.878–79)

If the presages of poets have any truth to them, I by my fame shall continue to live through all the ages.

There might be a touch of modesty here. (If so, the rest of the epilogue suggests it is false modesty.) Be that as it may, in the closing lines of the *Metamorphoses* Ovid hints that not everything said by poets is reliable.[35]

The effect is similar when instead of the narrator himself one of his characters expresses similar notions. Indeed the effect may be all the sharper when a mythological figure is made to suggest the possibility that mythology might be false. Thus Orpheus, pleading before Pluto and Proserpina for the return of his beloved Eurydice, argues that Love is known even in the Underworld. The proof:

famaque si veteris non est mentita rapinae,
vos quoque iunxit Amor. (10.28–29)

If the story of that long-ago rape is not a lie, you too were brought together by Love.

This is an ingenious form of argument, by which the judges themselves are introduced as witnesses for the prosecution. To be sure, the phrase in question is perhaps merely a polite form of expression: Orpheus, one feels, does not necessarily doubt that Pluto carried off Proserpina. Still, the expression resonates with much else in the poem. Further along, when Pythagoras calls mankind's fictitious images of the Underworld *materiem vatum* (15.155, "the stuff of poets"), we should recognize that he is influenced by a particular philosophic tradition. But this is not the case when to the fantastic explanation of why the river Anigros is poisonous he appends the remark: *nisi vatibus omnis / eripienda fides* (15.282–83, "unless, that is, all trustworthiness is to be withdrawn from poets").

Still more directly critical are several other expressions which we read in Ovid's pages. Cadmus sows in the ground the teeth of the dragon he has slain: of the clods of earth which now begin to move about (they are to become men in a moment) the poet says: *fide maius* (3.106, "an event too great to be believed"). Could there be a blunter statement than this? Similarly Ovid terms the transformation of the Minyads' looms into vines "a thing that goes beyond belief" (4.394). Nor are we surprised to hear Nestor claim about the labors of Hercules, *ille quidem maiora fide, di! gessit* (12.545, "By heaven! his deeds *are* too great to credit"), or Anius say about the gifts Bacchus gave his daughters, *voto maiora fideque / munera* (13.651–52, "gifts greater than could be hoped for—or believed"). How could we be surprised, when we are likely to feel the same ourselves? Ovid does retell mythology, with all its incredible episodes, but at the same time he encourages our skepticism through the expression of his own.

This stance towards mythology is encapsulated in a last example. Near the very beginning of the poem, as virtually the first of the hundreds of metamorphoses to follow, Ovid describes how after the Flood the earth was repopulated. The sole survivors, Deucalion and Pyrrha, tossed stones behind their backs, and the stones, he reports, grew soft and took on human form. Of the stones' losing their hardness he observes in a parenthesis: *quis hoc credat, nisi sit pro teste vetustas?* (1.400, "Who would believe this, were it not vouched for by antiquity?"). This is a remarkable, ingeniously double-edged comment. Ostensibly it supports the truth of the narrative, yet it has precisely the opposite effect.[36] In the very act of affirming the episode the poet succeeds in casting the gravest doubt on it. In fact, as I believe, he is indifferent to the truth of it, but here we particularly want to notice how he steps forth and comments on his own narrative.

Haupt and Ehwald compare a verse from the *Aeneid*. Virgil apostrophizes Lausus just as he is about to die at Aeneas' hands: the poet will not pass over in silence the doomed young man or his outstanding deeds. To this statement he adds the phrase cited by the editors: *si qua fidem tanto est operi latura vetustas* (*Aen.* 10.794, "if some antiqueness will bring credence in so great an achievement"). The word *vetustas* and, still more, the very personal intervention of the narrator recommend the comparison. The differences, however, are no less striking than the similarities and help to define the special quality of Ovid as a narrator present in his own poem. Such an appearance of the narrator in Virgil is rare. Moreover, Virgil introduces himself *qua* poet, speaking only of the power of his own poetry to survive and so to commemorate the heroic young man.[37] The note struck is

elegiac rather than doubting.[38] Ovid expands the role of the narrator. He does not confine himself to mournful reflections about his own poetry (in fact, he never in the *Metamorphoses* hints at any such thought), but instead allows himself even to criticize the very material that he is offering. And this is but the most dramatic way that he is present in his own narrative.

The norm of decorous behavior for narrative poets had been defined by Homer. Aristotle singles out for mention his relative absence from the poem: "Homer deserves to be admired on many grounds, particularly because he alone of the poets knows what he ought to do: the poet himself ought to speak as little as possible" (*Poetics* 60a5–7).[39] Aristotle's prescription, no less than Homeric practice, was probably responsible for the endurance of this doctrine. The doctrine survived intact, so far as we can tell, until Roman times, when we find first Virgil and then Ovid violating it. Certainly Virgil is very much a presence in the *Aeneid;* this is what Otis called "the subjective style." And yet the two Latin poets are not at all like one another. The narrator of the *Aeneid* is felt as participating in the poem, engaged with its subject, concerned for his characters and what they represent as if they were independent of their creator. The foundation of Rome is important to Virgil, as is—such is the poet's sympathy—even Dido, who threatens to obstruct it.

Ovid, by contrast, not only is more prominent but also stands in an altogether different relation to his narrative. He tends to be withdrawn from the narrative, not plunged into it. He remains separate from it and is not to be confused, much less identified, with it. We are aware of him and his story, and some gap between. The story is always and evidently seen from his point of view. He creates the consciousness that it reaches us only through him. In this way he renders the narrative "subjective" in a new way, in the sense of "arbitrary" and even "unreliable."

Ovid does not really criticize the literal truthfulness of mythology. Instead he reminds us that it is a human product, mediated to us by a person, not handed down from a god on tablets of stone. He conspicuously eschews the role of authoritative story-teller. He manifests himself differently from Virgil. As Altieri says, "All writers participate in their materials in some sense, but Ovid calls attention to his involvement, and he does it by attending to immediate surface phenomena, not by calling attention to deeper meanings in the text."[40] The concerns of the two poets are not on the same plane. Questioning the material, Ovid thematizes the narrator's involvement in it.

Spitzer well describes the place of the narrator in *Don Quixote*:

> For, let us not be mistaken, the real protagonist of this novel is not Quijote, with his continual misrepresentations of reality, or Sancho, with his skeptical half-endorsement of quixotism—and surely not any of the central figures of the illusionistic by-stories: the hero is Cervantes, the artist himself, who combines a critical and illusionistic art according to his free will. From the moment we open the book to the moment we put it down, we are given to understand that an almighty overlord is directing us, who leads us where he pleases.[41]

The novel is akin in many ways to the *Metamorphoses*, and these words suit the narrator of the one as well as the other. The hero Ovid is active in several fields. As he himself continually reminds us, he has created the world of the poem, he has brought it into existence and shaped it. He is also one of the chief elements holding it together. And at the same time he maintains a certain distance from his creation. This is a remarkable series of roles. Missing from all of them is any sense of derived authority. Instead, the poet appears before us on his own as a refreshing, liberating, fruitful spirit. Who desires the steady seriousness of a Virgil? Why should every antithesis be significant? How much more real seems a world at the center of which stands a fellow human! More than anything else Ovid represents the freedom and the power of the individual. By his candor he may give a new life to poetry.

moves away from the present scene towards general statements: for instance, that Envy does not smile or sleep. So far does he go in the direction of abstraction that he can soon say that "at the same time Envy gnaws and is gnawed" and then, as an epigrammatic curtain line, the logical consequence of this: "she is her own torment." The wit derives from representing Envy simultaneously as a feeling affecting a person and the person affected.[63] Except for the end the passage conveys only what can be seen of the figure.

Another special feature of the passage is the use of words which have both physical-real and abstract-figurative applications. In the successive phrases *livent rubigine dentes, / pectora felle virent* (776–77), we note the chiasmus and the contrast of colors. More remarkable is the double sense of each verb. *Livent* means both "be livid, discolored" and "be envious." *Virent* means both "be green" and "be blooming with, full of." The language is perfectly apt for the portrait of an abstraction given physical reality.

Ovid builds up his portraits almost solely through descriptions of appearance, that is to say, of surfaces. To understand Envy we need only to look at her. She simply is what she seems to be. In no ordinary sense of the word then can we call her and similar figures "allegories," for there is no "other" that they refer to, no meaning or significance that does not lie on the surface. The poet, in his reliance on surfaces alone as means of representation, is not unlike a painter.

CHAPTER SIX

ART

Metamorphosis as Art

One more step remains towards our understanding of metamorphosis. We have established that metamorphosis is clarification, but the purpose that it serves is still unexplored. The best way of getting at that purpose is to notice that metamorphosis is a kind of art and that therefore the poem is about art. By calling it "a kind of art" I mean that metamorphosis results in a form—a bird, a tree, a stone—which shares the essential properties of a work of art. After the similarity (or identity) between metamorphosis and art has been indicated, the investigation of art's relation to nature, the place of the artist, and the function of art in the world will all shed light on the poem's central phenomenon. Ovid's employment of several terms, principally *imago*, yields some of the most valuable evidence on these questions.[1] The conclusion which emerges is that art/metamorphosis is necessary for perception.

INDICATIONS

The poem invites us to draw the parallel between metamorphosis and art in a number of ways, for instance, through a simile found near the beginning. Mankind, all but wiped out in the flood, is restored through the stones which Deucalion and Pyrrha are ordered to toss behind them. Ovid describes the stones as they appeared at the midpoint of their transformation:

> *ut quaedam, sic non manifesta, videri*
> *forma potest hominis, sed, uti de marmore coepta,*
> *non exacta satis rudibusque simillima signis.* (1.404–6)

> The form of man could be seen. It was some kind of form, though not a very clear one. It closely resembled a half-worked statue of marble, begun but not yet finished.

The simile suggests that the processes of metamorphosis and artistic creation are alike: while turning into people the stones are on the way to becoming statues. The language reinforces this, echoing famous passages in which two poets had referred to art. The word *exacta* ("finished") may recall Horace's verses on his own artistic creation: *exegi monumentum aere perennius* (*Carm.* 3.30.1, "I have completed a monument more enduring than bronze"). A phrase applied to the stones a few lines earlier, *ducere formam* (402, "mold their shape"), is especially suitable to sculpture: the Virgilian *vivos ducent de marmore vultus* (*Aen.* 6.848, "they will mold lifelike faces from marble") may be compared. And earlier Deucalion, observing that they two were the only mortals left, had said to his wife, *hominumque exempla manemus* (366, "we remain the *exempla* of mankind"). Whether *exempla* means "(sole) copies," with regard to the other, lost originals, or "(artist's) models," with regard to the people whom they are to create afresh, this word too belongs to the realm of art.

The implication of the simile and its context is borne out by the language Ovid often chooses for metamorphosis, through which he represents the results of it directly as a work of art, either a painting or a sculpture. Many characters are changed into stones, and some of these are said to be statues, Aglauros for one. Refusing because of jealousy to allow Mercury to enter the bedroom of her sister, she slowly loses all movement and turns into a rock: *signumque exsangue sedebat* (2.831, "she sat stock still, a bloodless statue"). Anaxarete, who treated her suitor so harshly, also becomes a rock, and *dominae sub imagine signum / servat adhuc Salamis* (14.759–60, "the city of Salamis still preserves her statue in the likeness of its mistress"). Similarly we hear in passing about "the statue of a long dragon made of rock" (7.358); the word here is *simulacrum*. Metamorphosis into stone would have been adequate, because it would have preserved eternally Aglauros' standing fast and Anaxarete's lack of feeling. In each case, though, Ovid did not stop with that but took the further step of identifying the transformed figure as a statue.

By far the most prolific creator of statuary is the head of Medusa. Perseus relates how on his way to do battle with her he had seen the effects of her glance upon the neighborhood:

> *passimque per agros*
> *perque vias vidisse hominum simulacra ferarumque*
> *in silicem ex ipsis visa conversa Medusa.* (4.779–81)

> Throughout the fields and roadways he had seen statues of men and animals, changed from their own selves into stone because of having looked at Medusa.

Cutting off the head and taking it for his own use, he moves on to his next adventure, with Andromeda. At the marriage feast, finding himself outnumbered in battle by Phineus, to whom Andromeda had first been betrothed, and Phineus' henchmen, Perseus resorts to the ultimate weapon. Thescelus, preparing to cast at him, is his first victim: *in hoc haesit signum de marmore gestu* (5.183, "he remained fixed in this gesture—a marble statue"). He, like the others, it should be noted, is changed into marble, not merely stone (cf. 206, 214, 234). Soon all but the leader are turned into statues (*simulacra*, 211), a two-hundred-piece sculpture gallery created with the twinkle of an eye. Before doing in Phineus, Perseus taunts him with the thought that his statue will remain in their house; he speaks of it as a *monumentum*[2] and an *imago* (227, 229).[3] That the statues are not intrinsic in the story of Medusa but special to this version we may confirm by comparison: Apollodorus nowhere refers to or hints at statuary in his handbook summary of the story (2.42–43), neither do Hyginus (*Fab.* 64) or the First Vatican Mythographer (74), nor does Claudian in an otherwise strikingly Ovidian account of how Minerva wielded the petrifying visage (*Gigant.* 91–113).

A key term in the coinciding vocabularies of art and metamorphosis is *imago*, "image" or "representation." The frequency with which it is used of the results of metamorphosis indicates how strongly Ovid felt them to be like works of art. In its general sense *imago* can be applied to statues. Thus the poet says of one of Perseus' victims, *immotusque silex armataque mansit imago* (5.199, "he remained stone unmoving, an armed image").[4] *Imago* can also have the more specific sense of "picture," which suggests the art of painting. Ovid summarizes his portrait of Lycaon thus: *eadem feritatis imago est* (1.239, "he is the very same picture of savagery"). For aid in battle Jason avails himself of special means, and each warrior produced by transformation from the dragon's teeth is called *imago hominis* (7.128–29, "an image of a man"). An identical phrase is used for both Procne and Hecuba as each, possessed by thirst for revenge, begins her metamorphosis: *poenaeque in imagine tota est* (6.586 and 13.545, "her entire being is in the image of punishment").

The sense of metamorphosis as a form of art runs so strong in Ovid that he employs terms from the latter sphere where they hardly seem to fit; the strain upon the language indicates the bent of his imagination. The dead Adonis is addressed thus by Venus:

luctus monumenta manebunt
semper, Adoni, mei, repetitaque mortis imago
annua plangoris peraget simulamina nostri. (10.725–27)

The monuments of my grief will remain eternally, Adonis, and the repeated image of your death will perform the annual simulations of my lament.

The words *monumenta*, *imago*, and *simulamina* (here translated quite literally) are all regularly used for works of art.[5] And yet here they refer not to any physical object, but rather to the Adonia, an annual ritual evocation of Adonis' death celebrated widely through eastern Mediterranean lands. *Simulamina* perhaps suggested "reenactments," which of necessity cannot be the real, original thing, and this notion may have been picked up by the peculiar *imago*; perhaps too Ovid was influenced by the earlier lines 515–17 (on which see below). However that may be, the poet's tendency towards employing the vocabulary of art for metamorphosis is evident.

CONTENT

The content of the parallelism thus indicated is also evident. Art shares the qualities of metamorphosis which we have recognized in the poem, and our sense of them is reinforced by special turns of phrase. The word *imago*, for instance, is several times used in such a way as to assert the connection between art and clarity. When Ovid says of the transformed Lycaon *eadem feritatis imago est* (1.239), his choice of language refers both to Lycaon's similarity to a work of art and, as such, to his ready recognition. Now an image, the wolf is easily grasped. The English idiom, "the very picture," conveys the multiple sense of *imago* here. Closely akin is the use of the word in a verse from the opening of the poem: *modo quae fuerat rudis et sine imagine tellus* (1.87, "the earth which just now had been rough and without *imago*"), where *imago* means something like "recognizable appearance." *Simulacrum* has the same meaning at least once. Aesculapius promises he will transfer his abode to Rome but will receive worship there in the form of a snake, no longer a man: *veniam simulacraque nostra relinquam* (15.658, "I shall come, leaving behind my familiar appearance"). The phrase repeated for Procne and Hecuba also points to the likeness between metamorphosis and the clarity won by art, as does another with which Ovid describes Hecuba: *Asiae florentis imago* (13.484, "the very picture [or embodiment] of a prospering Asia"). Such passages invite us to view all the transformed figures as *imagines*, "clear pictures," of their former characters, relations, or activities.

Naturally, the many who are changed into rocks must remain motionless. Ovid shows keen awareness of the (obvious) fact that immobility is a property of statues. When Perseus catches sight of the chained Andromeda, the narrator remarks parenthetically:

nisi quod levis aura capillos
moverat et tepido manabant lumina fletu,
marmoreum ratus esset opus. (4.673–75)

Except that a light breeze had moved her hair and warm tears were flowing from her eyes, he would have thought her a marble statue.[6]

The proposition is restated elsewhere through its corollary, that motion is the sign of a living being, not a statue: the sculpture Pygmalion made, we are told, was so lifelike that you would think it wanted to move (10.250–51). This is the other feature of works of art, their fixity and permanence. We may take the immobility of statues as representing the inability of all metamorphosed creatures ever to change again. Once changed, they will remain what they are now. A price is paid, however, in obtaining the results of metamorphosis. Though perhaps able to move about, the creature is "dead" in that it has lost its personal existence. Of Niobe, stiff with grief and in the process of becoming a statue, Ovid says, *nihil est in imagine vivum* (6.305), which may equally well mean "there is no life in her appearance" or—such is the ambiguity in a language lacking the article—"there is no life in an artistic representation."[7] Plucking something from the random flux of the universe, fixing it, establishing it as a clear point of reference for the rest of us, metamorphosis acts like the eye and hand of an artist.[8]

Nature as Art

We may widen our understanding of metamorphosis therefore by considering the place of art within the world of the poem. Ovid's interest in this is obvious, for he adverts to it often, directly as well as obliquely. It arises chiefly as the question of how art stands in relation to nature.

NATURE OVER ART

Much of the evidence goes to suggest the view, familiar in antiquity and still today, that art is an imitation of nature, and that though art is better in proportion as it succeeds in imitating nature, yet it always remains a secondary order of reality, ever striving to match nature but unable to do so completely. Such a view Ovid expresses most clearly when he emphasizes the realism of works of art, the extent to which they seem actually to be what they represent. One of Phineus' comrades is caught by the Medusa's glance, and the poet says, *adapertaque velle / ora loqui credas* (5.193–94, "you would believe his opened mouth wished to speak"). Cephalus, after relating how both his hound and the fox it had been pursuing were changed into marble statues, adds, *fugere hoc, illud captare putares* (7.791, "you would have thought the one was fleeing, the other still pursuing"). An important example is the sculpture which Pygmalion makes:

> *virginis est verae facies, quam vivere credas*
> *et, si non obstet reverentia, velle moveri.* (10.250–51)
>
> The appearance is that of a real maiden: you would believe she was alive and, if not prevented by modesty, eager to move.

And in the realm of what might be called painting, though the medium is colored, woven thread, we are told about Arachne's representation of the rape of Europa that *verum taurum, freta vera putares* (6.104, "you would have thought the bull real, the seas real too"). All four passages invite attention to the work of art's lifelike quality. It is noteworthy, moreover, and not coincidental, that in each one the realism is reported by an indirect statement depending on a second-person potential subjunctive. The form of the verb momentarily establishes a point of view outside the story and secures the audience's special interest,[9] breaking the frame slightly in order to insist on fiction's close proximity to what is real.

This view is also implicit in a certain distinctively Ovidian semantic usage. With remarkable latitude Ovid often employs the word *imago* in the sense of "deceptive appearance." This connotation repeatedly given to a word which is a standard term for art suggests that art is unreal, in that it merely represents a thing: the gap between thing and representation justifies the notion of deception and in effect asserts the priority of nature over art. The breadth of the uses to which Ovid extends the word gives a measure of his fascination with it. Here is a survey. *Imago* = "disguise": *Liber falsi sub imagine cervi* (7.360, "Bacchus under the guise of a false stag"); *inque pyra sacri sub imagine facti* (14.80, "atop a pyre made under the guise of a sacred rite"); also 1.213, 2.804, 3.1, 3.250, and elsewhere. More abstractly, without reference to actual appearance, *imago* = "illusion": *amicitiae mendacis imagine* (7.301, "through the illusion of feigned friendship"); *genitoris imagine falsi* (1.754, "the delusion of a false father"); also 2.37. *Imago* = "reflection": *me . . . in imagine vidi / . . . aquae*, says the Cyclops (13.840–41, "I saw myself in the reflection of the water"); also 4.349, 15.566. By extension from the visual to the auditory, *imago* = "echo": *deceptus imagine vocis* (3.385, "deceived by the echo of her voice"). *Imago* used for the figure in a dream-vision: *deceptus imagine somni* (13.216, "deceived by an image of sleep"); also 7.649, 8.824, 9.474, 11.587, and elsewhere. Collectively these uses of *imago*, reinforced by the words found in the neighborhood, hint at the strictly imitative, secondary nature of art.[10] In a pair of other passages Ovid plays on two senses of the word: *Maeonis elusam designat imagine tauri / Europam* (6.103–4, "Maeonian Arachne outlines Europa, deceived by the image of the bull"). Here, as also at line 110, *imago* refers at the same time both to the god's disguise and to the artistic representation of it by the weaver-artist. The points of view of Europa and of the spectators, of actor and audience, coincide in a deception.

The doctrine that art is an imitation of nature is, of course, hardly special to Ovid. On the contrary, it was extremely common, perhaps nearly universal, in classical antiquity. A few examples serve as reminders. The doctrine recurs incessantly in the pages of Pliny the Elder which deal with the history of art, Books Thirty-Four through Thirty-Six of his *Natural History*: it is nearly as strong a theme there as it was to be centuries later in Vasari. Beside the figure of the practical encyclopedist we may set that of the greatest of philosophers. Plato views the relation of art to nature in the same way; indeed, in Book Ten of the *Republic* he ranks the reality of art third, the bed painted by the artist being an inferior copy of the object itself, which in turn is less real than the "idea," or "form," of the bed. Phrases that fall from poets' lips betray the same notion. In a passage very similar to several from Ovid, Apollonius of Rhodes emphasizes the lifelike quality of the figures on a mantle Jason wears. "In it was Phrixus the Minyan as though he were really listening to the ram, while it looked as if it were speaking. You would fall silent at the sight of them, and you would deceive your heart with the hope of hearing from them some shrewd utterance, and with that hope you would continue to gaze for a long time" (*Argon.* 1.763–67). And in that famous passage from Book Six of the *Aeneid* where Anchises expounds the distinctive skills of the Greeks and the Romans, he foretells to his son:

excudent alii spirantia mollius aera
(credo equidem), vivos ducent de marmore vultus. (*Aen.* 6.847–48)

Others will forge more softly breathing bronze statues (so I believe), they will shape living countenances from marble.

That is, the sculpture of the Greeks will be superior by virtue of its approximation to life. Again, nature is the norm. This is the traditional notion which we find echoed in the *Metamorphoses*.

ART OVER NATURE

And yet at the same time the poem embraces the very reverse, a doctrine that is astonishing for its utter novelty and unexpectedness—namely, that nature imitates art. In this view art becomes the norm, the prime creator or definer of reality. This runs completely counter to the commonsense view of how art is made and what role it plays in the world. No one before Ovid, so far as I know, ever conceived this; since him, however, it has reappeared occasionally.[11] The poet's bold originality in turning a conventional notion upside down commands our attention. Though it coexists in the poem with its opposite, it does not seem equal in importance; rather, on account of its startling nature and not infrequent expression, it outweighs the other. The doctrine that art follows nature is a kind of foil: in the doctrine that nature follows art we have a valuable clue for understanding metamorphosis.

Again, the best evidence for this view lies in Ovid's comparisons between the two realms. He several times compares the beauty of a person to that of a work of art, implying the superiority of the latter. The bull into which Jupiter transforms himself in order to rape Europa is depicted as tame and lovely: *cornua parva quidem, sed quae contendere possis / facta manu* (2.855–56, "his horns were small, to be sure, but such as you would assert had been made by hand"). Emphasized by *quidem . . . sed*, the contrast here between size and artificiality—a bull's horns are esteemed for size and splendor[12]—shows that the resemblance to human craftsmanship constitutes praise for the horns. Ovid's account follows that of Moschus, and at this point the Greek poet had also introduced a simile: "the matched horns rose from his head opposite one another in a half-orb like the half-circle of the horned moon" (2.87–88).[13] Ovid has refashioned and refocused this simile so as to make prominent the idea of art.

Elsewhere, in the description of the centaur Cyllaron, we are told how extraordinarily beautiful his human parts are: *cervix umerique manusque / pectoraque artificum laudatis proxima signis* (12.397–98, "his neck and shoulders, hands and breast were most like the renowned statues made by artists").[14] Art also sets the standard by which to judge the looks of Adonis:

qualia namque
corpora nudorum tabula pinguntur Amorum,
talis erat, sed, ne faciat discrimina cultus,
aut huic adde leves aut illi deme pharetras! (10.515–18)

Like the bodies of naked Cupids painted on canvas, such was he; but, so that adornment not make a distinction between them, either give a lightweight quiver to the one or take it away from the other!

The remarkable editorial comment, in which the narrator adjusts his own simile, is no less distinctive of the poem than is the simile itself.[15] Other comparisons of people to works of art carry the same implication, that the beauty of art is superior. The effect of Hermaphroditus swimming in the waters of the pond Salmacis is "as if someone should cover an ivory statue with clear glass" (4.354–55).[16] And with similar connotation the poet likens both Andromeda (4.675) and Narcissus (3.418–19) to marble statuary, and Pygmalion carves his ideal woman in ivory (10.245–69), though in the former the point is also immobility,[17] in the latter chastity.

The superiority of art over nature is not confined to beauty, but is more general, and indeed Ovid makes his strongest statements of this in regard to something neither beautiful nor ugly. He is setting the scene for Peleus' meeting with Thetis, on the coast of Thessaly; sea and sand are present, and also the myrtle tree,

est specus in medio, natura factus an arte,
ambiguum, magis arte tamen. (11.235–36)

and in the middle was a grotto: it was uncertain whether made by nature or art, yet more by art.

Here the terms are stated directly. After a moment's hesitation the poet decides that the grotto is more artifice than phenomenon of nature,[18] despite the fact that all the other surroundings appear natural. More remarkable is the description of another grotto, where Diana is bathing when she is seen by Actaeon:

cuius in extremo est antrum nemorale recessu
arte laboratum nulla: simulaverat artem

ingenio natura suo; nam pumice vivo
et levibus tofis nativum duxerat arcum. (3.157–60)

In the most distant corner of the valley is a sylvan grotto, produced by no art: nature by its own power had simulated art; for it had shaped a natural arch of living pumice and smooth tufa.

The stream which runs through the cave makes this a grotto-nympheum, like the one inhabited by Achelous (8.562–64; see Chapter Three). Here Ovid informs us who was responsible for the artifice: it is not man, but nature itself. What an extraordinary form of statement—"nature by its own power had simulated art"! The words *laboratum* and *ingenio* and the syntax of the sentence, with *natura* the subject of a transitive verb, tend to personify nature, which renders more plausible the inversion of a familiar relationship. And nature's role is emphasized by repeating the root of *natura* in *ingenio* and *nativum*.[19] The same odd relationship is suggested elsewhere by the phrase *artifices natura manus admovit* (15.218, "nature used her artful hands"). To be sure, *artifices* might mean simply "skillful," but in the context of the poem the juxtaposition with *natura* seems intended and the notion "artful" justified. The point of view taken by Ovid brings to mind an exchange from *The Winter's Tale*, where the discussion is about parti-colored flowers and how they are produced:

Perdita. For I have heard it said
There is an art which in their piedness shares
With great creating nature.
Polixenes. Say there be;
Yet nature is made better by no mean
But nature makes that mean. So, over that art
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes. . . .
This is an art
Which does mend nature—change it rather—but
The art itself is nature. (4.4.86–92, 95–97)

Perdita raises the question of art's role in what is considered natural. In his reply Polixenes denies the antithesis of art and nature: art, he claims, is itself finally nature. Ovid too erases the antithesis, but by the opposite move!

The description of Diana's grotto is one of the most important passages in the *Metamorphoses*. It states most clearly the poem's unique view of how art is related to nature.[20] This is not, to be sure, the only work of Ovid's to which the theme of art is central. The *Ars Amatoria* is concerned with it also, though it takes a different view. The notion that dominates in the *Ars* is that art is deception, and the ideal lover is instructed to be an artist/deceiver. Yet there too another notion is found, which adumbrates that of our poem. In speaking of the recognition which art bestows, Ovid advances this extreme claim:

si Venerem Cous nusquam posuisset Apelles,
mersa sub aequoreis illa lateret aquis. (*Ars* 3.401–2)

If Apelles in Cos had never painted Venus, she would be unknown, sunk beneath the waters of the sea.

Referring to a famous painting of Venus' birth in her temple at Cos, he tells us it is the artist who makes things real: were it not for Apelles, Venus would not have been born, would not have come into existence. Here, as later in the *Metamorphoses*, art is not the imitator but the definer and creator of reality.[21]

Metamorphosis, as a form of art, plays the same role. Several phrases at the start of the poem open this perspective on its central subject. After a short preface Ovid begins with a brilliant description of the primeval chaos out of which the world will evolve. The chaos, the very first thing to be transformed, Ovid terms a *pondus iners* (1.8), which is a pun, meaning "a mass" that is both "inert" or "sluggish" and "inartistic" (from *in-ars*).[22] A little further on, the unpeopled earth is called *rudis et sine imagine* (1.87, "crude and without recognizable appearance"); as we saw earlier, the words are regularly applied to works of art.[23] The language here, tellingly placed, suggests that as the world became recognizable in form and occupied increasingly by animals, plants, and objects whose names and characteristics are known to us, it was evolving in the direction of greater artfulness. Through metamorphosis creatures pass from the realm of nature, which they inhabited before, and enter the higher realm of art. The only discernible movement in the poem is the greater number of clear embodiments to be found in the world, as it becomes populated with more metamorphosed figures.

Fundamentally this evolution is an advance in perception. We are invited to see metamorphosis as not only clarifying a character, activity, or emotion, but also by that effort encapsulating and defining it. The wolf shows us the essence of Lycaon and at the same time so clearly embodies ferocity as to define ferocity for us—and so with Arachne, the spider, and weaving, or the Lycian peasants, frogs, and boorish truculence, to the same effect. Art/metamorphosis transmutes what was personal or individual into a monument for all, and

these monuments give us our bearings, identifying and representing and even creating for us notions such as ferocity. Without art, Ovid says in effect, the world would be not so much unlovely as unintelligible. Henri Matisse expresses this leading role of art in similar terms: "It is the painters who, by creating images, allow the objects and scenes of nature to be seen. Without them we could distinguish objects only by their different functions of utility or comfort."[24] With this Ovid would agree, for in the *Metamorphoses* art is "poetic" rather than mimetic: it creates reality, it does not solely imitate it.

The visual arts, moreover, are regularly analogues to the arts of language—poetry, story-telling, rhetoric. *Imago*, we have seen, can be used for sound as well as sight. Implicit in the poem's view of the relation between art and nature is an equally remarkable view of the relation between language and experience. Language too, far from distorting or merely reflecting reality, in fact creates it. Words create reality in that they make it possible to discriminate and identify phenomena. As Isidore declares at the start of his encyclopedia, "if you do not know the name, the knowledge of things is lost" (*Etym.* 1.7.1). Actaeon, unable to speak his own name, loses his identity, and soon his existence. The movement that marks several artworks as virtually alive is the movement of the mouth: *adapertaque velle / ora loqui credas* (5.193–94, "you would think his opened mouth wishes to speak"), says Ovid of one of Perseus' victims.[25] More generally, speech is the principal tool by which characters try to shape themselves and the world around them: the largest example may be the alternative remakings of the Trojan War (and therefore of themselves) presented in the speeches of Ajax and Ulysses. It is not surprising that the verbal artifacts far outnumber the visual in the poem.

The Figure of the Artist

THE DEMIURGE

In this view the artist becomes a supremely important figure: he is the creator of what sense and order there is. An important hint of this is given, once again, near the opening of the poem. To explain how original chaos was changed into cosmos, Ovid invokes a creator god. He is, however, studiously vague in identifying him. "God and better nature" are the subject of one verb (1.21); that the verb is singular may imply the second term is only a restatement of the first. More clearly evasive is the phrase *quisquis fuit ille deorum* (32, "whoever of the gods it was").[26] Instead of naming the god Ovid refers to him as *mundi fabricator* (57, "maker of the world") and *ille opifex rerum* (79, "that artisan of the universe"). A little of the language in the passage is Epicurean—for example, *semina* (9, "seeds")—and some of the ideas, including that of the creating demiurge, which Ovid seems to refer to here, resemble those of Plato and the Porch, in particular the neo-Stoicism of Posidonius.[27] Nevertheless, since several philosophies seem mixed together and since no poet can be imagined to whom philosophy was more uncongenial than to Ovid, it is difficult to believe that he was aiming at a particularly philosophical portrayal of the Creation. The choice of terms suggests rather that the creator of the world is an artist himself; not only the first metamorphoses in the universe but, presumably, the others that follow as well are the handiwork of the Great Artist. Moreover, by nearly defining this god as "better nature" and calling him "the origin of a better world" (79), the poet indicates that the development here begun takes a certain direction: the world, in becoming more art-filled, becomes clearer and therefore better.

PYGMALION

The greatest, or nearly the greatest, artist in the poem is Pygmalion. His story follows that of the Propoetides, the women who after becoming the first prostitutes were changed into stone (10.238–42). Reacting with disgust to them, Pygmalion sculpts an ivory statue, with which he then falls in love. He prays to Venus that he may have a wife like the ivory statue, and upon returning home he finds that it grows warm at his touch and quickens to life, becoming his bride (10.243–97). As is often the case, the story forms various patterns with a number of others nearby, offering contrasts and parallels to them. It is the reverse of the one directly preceding: the Propoetides are turned from flesh to stone, Pygmalion's creation from ivory to flesh. Like the tale of Iphis, which closes Book Nine (666–797), it includes a miraculous transformation, bestowed by a goddess upon one who was blameless and pious.[28] It is recounted not by Ovid directly, but by Orpheus, another artist whose powers were great enough to bring his spouse to life.

Nonetheless, comparison of this version with its Greek source shows how, in making it over, the poet gave it a new subject and reconceived it so powerfully that it became a paradigm for later ages. Philostephanus of Cyrene, a pupil or friend of Callimachus, wrote what appears to be the original account; Philostephanus' work is

lost, but two later writers have preserved notice of it.[29] That version makes Pygmalion, there a king of Cyprus, so possessed by the beauty of a cult statue of Aphrodite that in his lust he has sexual relations with it. Ovid has kept the idea of love for a statue; he devotes a good number of lines to describing the tender words, gifts, and attentions Pygmalion bestows on his ivory statue.[30] But he has turned Pygmalion from an iconophile king into the sculptor himself, and by this invention—for so it is universally agreed to be—made him the exemplar of the artist's power. He has substituted artistic force for political. The opposing views of art conveyed by the poem meet here, and the dominance of one of them over the other gives the story a special significance.

The tale falls into two parts of nearly identical length, Pygmalion's creating of the statue and falling in love with it (243–69) and the animating of the statue (270–97). Successive lines early in the account, ending with the contrasting words *arte* and *nasci* (247, 248), announce the terms of the argument: this is a story about the relation between art, that which is made by human skill, and nature, that which is born.

In the first half Pygmalion is the talented sculptor who carves an extremely lifelike woman. The statue is outstanding both morally and physically. The modesty and chastity which were the first impulse to its creation are found in the statue, with its becoming, maidenly bashfulness (251), and later in the living woman, who blushes upon feeling her first kiss (293). Much more is made of its pulchritude, for the statement that "he conceived a love for his own work" (249) directly follows upon mention of its beauty, and throughout the passage emphasis is laid on its physical, not to say sexual, attractiveness. Pygmalion's sculpture is successful because it imitates nature so faithfully: "the appearance is that of a real maiden: you would believe she was alive and, if not prevented by modesty, eager to move" (250–51). By calling the ivory a *simulatum corpus* (253, "a simulated body"; cf. *simulacra*, 280), Ovid reminds us that art can only strive towards an (unattainable) imitation of nature.

In a famous, witty sentence the poet tells us that art is not only the means of achieving this but also the means of concealing its achievement: *ars adeo latet arte sua* (252, "to such an extent is art hidden by its own art"). The word *sua* is crucial to the epigram, for over that art which imitates nature is an art which art serves. It is extremely interesting that the doctrine derives from the precepts of rhetoric.[31]

Yet at the same time, still in the first half and less conspicuously, Ovid also suggests the other view, that art is superior to nature. "By

his miraculous art" (247) Pygmalion *formamque dedit, qua femina nasci / nulla potest* (248–49, "gave to the ivory a beauty such as no woman can be born with"). The realism of the work, the power of its art, is carried so far as to reach the point where it surpasses what is real and natural.

It is that extra measure of ability which produces the statue's extraordinary effect. To appreciate this properly we may recall an anecdote that Pliny the Elder tells in his history of painting (*HN* 35.65):

> It is reported that Parrhasius and Zeuxis entered into competition. Zeuxis exhibited grapes painted so successfully that birds flew up to the wall of the stage. Parrhasius exhibited a linen curtain which was painted with such realistic representation that Zeuxis, swelling with pride over the birds' verdict, demanded that his rival remove the curtain and show the picture. When he realized his error, he yielded the victory, frankly admitting that whereas he had deceived the birds, Parrhasius had deceived Zeuxis himself, a painter.

Ovid in his account has gone this one better: Pygmalion's representation is so persuasive that it deceives not the birds, not a fellow artist, but the maker himself! The poet elaborates this conceit, somewhat playfully:

> *saepe manus operi temptantes admovet, an sit*
> *corpus an illud ebur, nec adhuc ebur esse fatetur.*
> *oscula dat reddique putat loquiturque tenetque*
> *et credit tactis digitos insidere membris*
> *et metuit, pressos veniat ne livor in artus.* (254–58)
>
> Often he lays upon the work hands that test whether it is flesh or ivory, nor yet does he concede that it is ivory. He gives it kisses, and thinks they are returned. He speaks with it and embraces it, believes that his fingers sink into the limbs he touches, and fears lest by squeezing them he turn them black and blue.

If the artist himself is so deluded, how extraordinary the work must be! Imagine, *a fortiori*, its effect on others! This sculpture has no equal. Since it is the most conspicuous piece of art in the poem, it is not surprising that Ovid is at pains to draw the parallel between its creation and the act of metamorphosis. Anderson has demonstrated that Ovid uses for the statue's creation language that is the standard vocabulary of metamorphosis.[32] Pygmalion then, the artist/metamorphoser, practices what might be called "super-realism."

The second half of the story may appear to dim Pygmalion's glory. The statue is animated in answer to the prayer which the sculptor addresses to Venus. The scene of the goddess's festival is not to be skipped over lightly. Ovid describes the sacrifices offered, Pygmalion's carefully worded prayer, Venus' harkening to it, and the favorable omen which she then gives (270–79). Pygmalion, moreover, when certain of the metamorphosis, renders full and solemn thanks to Venus (290–91). Does this not rob Pygmalion of the credit for bringing the statue to life and confer it instead on Venus? Is not divine intervention the cause rather than artistic power? It cannot be denied that the goddess plays a role in the miraculous awakening; yet a look at the scene in which the ivory becomes flesh shows that Ovid has narrated it so as to call attention once again, and more dramatically, to the artist's own creative power.

The tenor of the passage makes us feel not that the statue has been changed all at once by the waving of a magic wand, as it were, but rather that it is being changed, gradually, under the sculptor's hands:

incumbensque toro dedit oscula: visa tepere est.
admovet os iterum, manibus quoque pectora temptat:
temptatum mollescit ebur positoque rigore
subsidit digitis ceditque, ut Hymettia sole
cera remollescit tractataque pollice multas
flectitur in facies ipsoque fit utilis usu.
dum stupet et dubie gaudet fallique veretur,
rursus amans rursusque manu sua vota retractat:
corpus erat, saliunt temptatae pollice venae. (281–89)

Lying upon the bed, he kissed the girl: she seemed to be warm. Again he puts his lips to hers, with his hands too he touches her breasts: the ivory, touched, grows soft and, surrendering its stiffness, gives way and yields to his fingers, just as Hymettian wax is softened by the sun and, when worked by the thumb, is turned into many shapes and by use becomes usable. While the lover in his amazement is but doubtfully joyous and fears to be deceived, again and again he works by hand the object of his prayers: she was flesh, and her veins throb under the touch of his thumb.

Many of the details, especially the choice of diction, reinforce the overall impression. To begin with, the rhythm of the passage conveys the sense that the statue awakens in response to Pygmalion's efforts. Three times the same alternation is repeated, in which an action of his is followed by, and therefore appears to cause, a reaction

in her. He kisses her: she grows warm (281). He touches her: she grows soft (282–86). He caresses her: she becomes flesh and blood (287–89). Near the beginning the verb *temptare* may mean, as in the first half of the story, both "test" and "touch": Pygmalion treats the statue as if real and at the same time is uncertain whether it is. Moreover, the figure of anadiplosis ("he touches the breasts; having been touched, the ivory . . .") links action and response closely, suggesting a causal relationship.[33] The verb *mollescit* ("grows soft"), it has been claimed, is associated with the sculptor's art.[34] In the simile of the molded wax the association is certainly clear. The thumb that works the wax must be that of a plastic artist; several other times in the poem wax figurines are referred to (3.487–89, 15.169). The neat epigram at the end of the simile—"by use it becomes usable"—can well be applied to the ivory: treated as if it is a body, it becomes a body.[35] Pygmalion not only is the lover but remains still the sculptor as well: he is making the statue for the second time. His caresses, instead of following the act of artistic creation, are the means of that creation.[36] The verb in the next phrase, *sua vota retractat*, picks up *tractata* ("handled") from the simile, emphasizing again the link between Pygmalion and the figurine-maker. *Sua vota* is somewhat unusual. The commentators are surely right to give *vota*, properly "vows," a concrete sense (cf. 1.272, 6.513) and to translate the phrase "he handles again the object of his vows." But perhaps it may also mean "he manages (handles, carries out) his vows," which would suggest that in handling the statue he is himself bringing about what he prayed for.

In the first half of his story Pygmalion is a sculptor whose imitation of nature reaches such a pitch of perfection that it goes beyond imitation and produces a beauty of which nature itself is incapable. His art is superior to nature in its results; in a competition of beauty art comes out ahead. In the second half he brings the inanimate statue to life. The aid rendered by Venus may represent several things: direct divine participation in the creation of art, or an inexplicable superhuman element, or the need for love to be present in addition to skill. In any event, it is clear from Ovid's telling that the power of the artist is chiefly responsible. Here Pygmalion's art is superior to nature in that it usurps what is properly and exclusively the function of nature, the creation of animate life; human existence itself depends on art. What more could Ovid do to establish the priority of art over nature? The story of Pygmalion is crucial to the *Metamorphoses*, for here by a double argument the poet demonstrates most vividly the power of the artist and his art.

OVID

Only one other artist may be held to rank above Pygmalion, and that of course is Ovid himself. A consideration of Ovid in his final capacity, as sovereign creator, brings into focus certain features of him and his work. We have surveyed the many ways in which, breaking with tradition, he obtrudes upon his own narrative and makes himself felt as controlling the world of the poem. But the parallels of the demiurge and Pygmalion remind us that his power extends to the act of ultimate control, the creation of that world. Ovid summons things to life through his extraordinary art, presenting not just one but a large gallery of clear *imagines*. Let us look at him under two aspects: his relation to the other artist figures, and the essentially private, personal nature of his world.

Ovid's work is characterized by attention to visual effects. Not only do its descriptions often represent actual paintings and sculptures—this observation has often been made, and we will return to it shortly—but the narrative, moreover, consists for the most part of static pictures. Both the chief event in the poem and the style of its narration tend towards crystallization; they capture some complexity (character or movement) in a clear and unchanging visual image. Nonetheless, Ovid the artist is different in kind from Pygmalion. His work is literary rather than plastic, words and stories are his medium, and he belongs properly with the other literary artists in the poem. There are, strictly speaking, no writers. Yet we do find great singers (Orpheus, for example) and musicians (Marsyas), who ought to be considered figures of the poet. A much larger group of literary artists is composed of the story-tellers, those who compete with their tales (the Muses and the daughters of Pierus) or simply swap them (Theseus and his companions with Achelous), those who have a particular purpose (Vertumnus) or just want to pass the time (the daughters of Minyas). These are in fact far more numerous than the visual artists.

A certain paradox informs Ovid's creation. It strives for visible clarity and for the public and permanent qualities of a monument. And yet at the same time it remains a feat of triumphant subjectivity. Ovid is keenly aware of the personal and even arbitrary elements that enter into a work of art; it is not easy to know the creator from the creation. The poem's ever-shifting subjects, tones, points of view, and emphases imply that the narrator is not consistent or uniform but rather is himself a changing, willful medium. This shows itself sometimes in regard to the poem's central act too. The plays on

words that occasionally link the states before and after metamorphosis evoke the presiding artist, as does also the somewhat arbitrary nature of the changes wrought. Continuity is always present, but who determines which features shall be preserved and in what way? Though the transformed Lycaon reveals the essence of his character, Niobe might have been a monument to pride as well as to maternal grief. The poet's sense of the subjectivity involved in creation can be seen as an extension into the personal sphere of the flux and uncertainty which govern events in the universe. Not yet metamorphosed, he is not simplified and fixed.

The subjectivity of Ovid's monument is also reflected in the *sphragis*, the "seal" or "signature," the closing lines where the poet speaks directly about himself. It is worth quoting in full:

> *iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iovis ira nec ignis*
> *nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere vetustas.*
> *cum volet, illa dies, quae nil nisi corporis huius*
> *ius habet, incerti spatium mihi finiat aevi:*
> *parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis*
> *astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum,*
> *quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris,*
> *ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,*
> *siquid habent veri vatum praesagia, vivam.* (15.871–79)

> And now I have finished my work, which neither Jove's wrath nor fire, neither steel nor consuming time can destroy. Let that day which has title over this body alone end the span of my uncertain life whenever it wants: still, by my better part I shall be raised forever above the lofty stars, and my name will be indestructible. Over whichever conquered lands Roman power extends I shall be read aloud by the people, and down through all the ages, because of my fame, if there is any truth in what sages say, I shall live.

The language, sequence, and position of these lines recall unmistakably the poem which closes Horace's first collection of odes, *exegi monumentum aere perennius . . .* (*Carm.* 3.30, "I have finished a monument more enduring than bronze . . ."). Comparing the passages sheds light on how each one defined what he had accomplished.[37]

In several ways Ovid's claim is grander. He enlarges considerably the extent of his fame in both time and space. Horace predicted his fame would grow so long as Roman religion persisted, "while the Pontifex and Vestal Virgin shall ascend the Capitoline"; Ovid's will

continue "through all the ages." The one expected to win renown at least in his native Apulia; the other, throughout the Roman Empire. Ovid's claim, nonetheless, is in every point more private. Horace pictures his achievement as a *monumentum*, a "monument" or "memorial," perhaps a tombstone; the comparison ("loftier than the pyramids") and the forces arrayed in opposition (wind, rain, time) add to the sense of his poetry as a solid and concrete construction. Ovid, by contrast, presents a more abstract notion: he merely terms his poetry an *opus*, "work," while the forces of time which might harm it are divided between the natural (thunder, perhaps lightning) and the human (steel, perhaps fire), with the result that they evoke no one particular image.

At the end of the ode Horace, turning to the Muse, bids her "receive the pride won by her merits" and asks that she crown him with laurel. However conventional it may be, to whatever extent it is a figure of speech, such a reference to divine inspiration is absent from Ovid, who implicitly claims for himself all responsibility for the achievement and who by the cast of his language even suggests that the achievement will make him like a god: his words here, "by my better part (*parte . . . meliore mei*) I shall be raised forever," recall those he used for the apotheoses of Hercules (*parte sui meliore*, 9.269) and Aeneas (*pars optima*, 14.604). Horace, moreover, advances a historical claim, that he is the first to have introduced Greek lyric poetry into Italian meters. And he strengthens his own setting within the historical and political world through an invention the boldness of which has been dimmed by subsequent repetition: the laurel crown that he requests for himself likens the poet to a triumphant general. Horace, though he is a lyric poet, makes his achievement seem objective, nearly impersonal. Ovid's farewell, by contrast, emphasizes the opposite. His feat is wholly private. It originates in him, its sphere is himself, the glory that results will be his alone. Neither the poet nor his poem claims to speak for anything larger than the individual, not divinity or national life, not history or society. The *Metamorphoses* is the very personal creation of Ovid.

The Role of Art

Art may be any number of things. What does it mean in this poem to say that metamorphosis is a form of art? Here art is not cunning or concealment or pretense, as it was in the *Ars Amatoria*. It is not simply beauty or adornment. It is not represented as the product of skill

or talent, magic or genius. It is not the vehicle of allegory, symbolism, or any other transcendent meaning. It is not "art for art's sake," whether the autonomy of art is meant by this or the aestheticization of experience. In the *Metamorphoses* art is clarity. It encapsulates, brings out to the surfaces of appearance, and makes plainly visible some human experience, and by this process becomes a monument to that experience. But art does not solely crystallize; it also, as we have seen, defines and creates reality. It enables us, when we look out upon the world, to recognize there such things as love, ferocity, maternal grief, and anger. Ultimately the theme of metamorphosis betokens a concern with perception and understanding. How do we see the universe? What sense can we make of it?

Ovid's view becomes more distinct if it is set in relief against the view of Plato, which is virtually its opposite.[38] (I have in mind the Plato of the *Republic*, where the doctrine of the forms and the role of art are most fully developed.) For Plato this world around us is a world of appearances and for that reason is unreal. Reality must by definition be fixed and unvarying, removed from all contingencies of place and time, perfect. It therefore is abstract and lies outside the realm of the senses. The objects and qualities of this world, because they are material and contingent, are but shadows of what is real. The artist's representation of such things, an imitation of a copy, therefore is two jumps removed from reality. In Ovid precisely the reverse holds. The poet refuses to believe in that which is not open to the senses, particularly to sight. Nothing lies behind or beyond this world. What you see, the surfaces of things, is what is most real.

Despite the differences, the views of Plato and Ovid are rooted in the same fundamental sense: both feel very strongly the chaos and confusion and deceptiveness of the sensible world, the difficulty of finding meaning amid a welter of ever-varied experiences. Plato responds by positing another world, a world of forms accessible only to the intellect, which bestows reality upon this one. Ovid by contrast discovers in this world something which is itself open to the senses and at least makes perception possible: art. Ovid's metamorphosed figures, embodying clearly an emotion like grief or an activity like spinning, somewhat resemble the Platonic forms: each provides a norm by which to recognize the things about us. The direction of movement and the results sought, however, differ sharply. For Plato the abstract and universal form of a bed, or of the Good, is the source of all particular realizations. On Ovid's view the individual Niobe is metamorphosed into a monument of grief and set before mankind retaining traces of her specific character and history. The

abstractness of the Platonic system permits a hierarchy of values to be established, and so the system naturally issues in a code of conduct. Morality is altogether absent from Ovid's purpose: far from wanting to state (much less enforce) what ought to be, he simply aims at making clear what is. *Imago* may be used in the sense "deceptive appearance"—but never after metamorphosis.[39]

The background to the world of the poem, in which human experience strives to attain clarity, is not only that experience but also the forms of art which have already communicated it. Direct apprehension of the world not being possible, any concern with apprehension must also take account of those monuments which have previously mediated experience. At many points and in various ways Ovid reminds us that art refers to—art. The art that is metamorphosis, and Ovid's own art, which is analogous to it, are shown to rest very evidently on previous works of art. The evidentness needs to be stressed. It is not simply that both classes of art exist in a tradition, which is undeniable, but that Ovid calls attention to this so conspicuously. He meditates on the fact of artistic tradition.

PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

This is evident in the relation of Ovid's narrative to the visual arts. It has repeatedly been observed that he describes figures just as they were represented in well-known works of painting or sculpture. A river god *innixus cubito* (8.727, "leaning on his forearm"), Europa seated on the bull that is about to carry her off (2.873–75), Niobe's many children slaughtered with a dramatic array of arrow-shots, the latter two groups rendered with detailed attention to the pose of hands, limbs, and torsos—these are a few among many examples.[40] It is not poverty of imagination that leads the poet to rely on such models, nor mere hospitality towards other forms of art, in which he had a particular interest, being a connoisseur of the fine arts. Instead this feature of his style serves as a steady reminder that the world shaped by this poem is indebted to earlier art.

But, it may be objected, do we not find such descriptions elsewhere? To be sure, we do. In the *Aeneid*, for instance, the picture of unholy Furor bound fast within the temple of Janus (1.294–96) reflects a famous painting by Apelles which Augustus had placed in his forum.[41] And the awful scene in which Virgil tells of the death of Laocoon and his sons (2.213–22), whatever its precise relation to the famous statuary group, is certainly influenced by some plastic work.[42] Yet there are important differences. These evocations of already existing works of art are far more common in the *Metamorphoses* than in the *Aeneid* or any other poem, and they are scattered about more casually, not reserved for moments of special dramatic intensity. Moreover, the self-consciousness of Ovid's use marks out the phenomenon.

Narcissus admiring himself in the pool was a frequent subject of wall paintings, mosaics, gems, and reliefs. Ovid stresses this by repeatedly likening his Narcissus to a statue (3.418–93).[43] Elsewhere Apollo engages in a singing contest with Pan and appears in full rig:

> *ille caput flavum lauro Parnaside vinctus*
> *verrit humum Tyrio saturata murice palla*
> *instructamque fidem gemmis et dentibus Indis*
> *sustinet a laeva, tenuit manus altera plectrum.* (11.165–68)
>
> His golden locks bound with laurel of Parnassus, Apollo swept the ground with his deep-dyed purple mantle. His left hand lifts the lyre, adorned with jewels and ivory, while the other holds the plectrum.

The crown and gown as well as the employment of the hands recall quite precisely the well-known statue type, originated by Scopas, of Apollo Citharoedus.[44] So far this is like the description of the river god; then Ovid adds the ambiguous *artificis status ipse fuit* (169), which may mean "the very pose is that struck by a master performer" or "that created by a sculptor." The play on words draws attention to the source of the pose. In Book Fifteen, after the Romans have debated whether to bring the worship of Aesculapius to their city, the god reveals himself to one of them at night. The poet describes him as *qualis in aede / esse solet* (15.654–55, "as he is accustomed to appear in his temple"); the following verses give the details of the cult statue, a figure holding a snake-entwined staff in his left hand while with the right he strokes his beard. When Aesculapius speaks, though, he announces that he will appear in a different form—as a snake: "I will come, leaving behind my usual appearance." Later, upon his actual arrival at Rome, he resumes the guise by which he is recognized (743). Here the resemblance to a statue is completely explicit, and it is only emphasized by the god's temporary assumption of another form. Things which appear real and natural turn out to be modeled on artifacts.

That behind the world of phenomena there lies the world of art is also suggested by an odd use of the word *imago*. Several times we find *imago* with the genitive of a noun ("image of") where we would

have expected the noun itself. Perseus, for example, catching sight of Andromeda, is *correptus imagine formae* (4.676, "enraptured by the image of her beauty"), though he could more directly have been "enraptured by her beauty." Here Ovid might have been influenced in his choice of words by the previous verse, in which he compares Andromeda to a statue. Similar turns of expression are *solis imago / evicit nubes* (14.768, "the image of the sun has overcome the clouds") and *aequora me terrent et ponti tristis imago* (11.427, "the seas and the gloomy image of the deep do affright me"); in the latter the parallelism suggests that "*image of* the deep" does not differ much from "seas." More arresting is an instance where *imago* is used in the same way, but without any reference to what can be seen. Minos, learning that Scylla has betrayed her father and city because of her love for him, is: *turbatusque novi . . . imagine facti* (8.96, "perturbed by the image of this novel deed").[45] Repeated recourse to such turns of phrase indicates the poet's view.

We are already familiar with Ovid's intensely visual imagination. We can now add that the *Metamorphoses* is not only the product of such an imagination but also an explication of it. Given that art, which provides the model of reality, is timeless and unchanging, it follows that narrative is likely to be a series of static pictures. Moreover, existing works of visual art enable the poet to envision a scene or a character and what it expresses. It may be that statues of river gods completely defined "river god" for him, as the wolf metamorphosed from Lycaon defined a certain bloodthirstiness.

LITERATURE

Literature, however, has an even higher claim on Ovid's interest than do the visual arts. A contest may be sensed in the *Metamorphoses* between the visual and the verbal, like the great *paragone* enacted in the Renaissance between painting and sculpture. And as Leonardo comes down decisively on the side of painting, so, predictably, does Ovid on the side of literature. Literature forms a more important background to the poem. Ovid is at pains to remind the reader of this body of art which lies behind the world and art of the poem. Both the playing with mythology (almost the sole subject of imaginative literature) and the elimination or drastic truncation of the most famous stories and episodes from particular works suggest that the present telling takes its rise from earlier tellings, not from any particular thematic concerns.

This is implicit in several smaller features as well. Ovid tends to identify characters periphrastically and sometimes not at all, as if the

Metamorphoses directly continues earlier literature and its reader can be expected to follow it with familiarity.[46] Thus Ino is introduced simply as the *matertera* of Bacchus (4.417, "maternal aunt"), while Dido and Pythagoras are not even granted this much. Another fine example can be recalled from Ovid's treatment of the story of Aeneas. Achaemenides, rescued from his miserable life on the island of Polyphemus, is described thus:

> *iam non hirsutus amictu,*
> *iam suus et spinis conserto tegmine nullis.* (14.165–66)
>
> Now no longer did he have a shaggy cloak or clothing sewn with thorns, now he had returned to himself.

The temporal reference is made not to any earlier moment in the *Metamorphoses*—this is Achaemenides' first appearance—but rather to the *Aeneid*, where Virgil had described him as unkempt and ragged (3.590–94; cf. esp. 594, *consertum tegimen spinis*, "his clothing sewn with thorns"). By playfully attaching his own poem to Virgil's Ovid reminds us how closely literature is made from literature.

Other passages are also so self-conscious as to be probative; these cluster towards the end, where perhaps the Roman setting gives greater opportunity. At a council of the gods called to debate the apotheosis of Romulus, his father Mars argues with Jupiter:

> *tu mihi concilio quondam praesente deorum*
> *(nam memoro memorique animo pia verba notavi)*
> *"unus erit quem tu tolles in caerula caeli"*
> *dixisti.* (14.812–15)
>
> Once upon a time in the presence of a divine assembly you said to me (for I remember it, and with remembering mind noted your sacred words): "One there shall be whom you will raise to the blue of heaven."

The emphasis on exact recollection only sharpens the wit of the remark, for Mars is quoting a verse from Ennius' *Annals*![47] His past history proves to be earlier literature. A similar parenthetic note on memory is put in the mouth of Pythagoras. Offering himself as an illustration of metempsychosis, the philosopher recalls—*nam memini* (15.160, "for I remember")—that at the time of the Trojan War he was Euphorbus, a warrior slain by Menelaus. Again the mention of his memory stirs ours: what Pythagoras is remembering is the *Iliad* (17.43–60). And this literary allusion is rendered more piquant through its juxtaposition with a concrete piece of historical reality: Pythagoras adds that he has just seen the shield Menelaus stripped

from him hanging as a dedication in the Argive temple of Juno, where in fact it was still to be seen in Ovid's day.[48]

Later Pythagoras recalls something else from his days as Euphorbus, the prophecy Helenus had given to Aeneas: *quantumque recordor, / dixerat Aeneae . . . Helenus* (15.436–38, "as far as I can recollect, Helenus had said to Aeneas . . . "). Naturally, what he actually has in mind is the *Aeneid* again (3.374–462). As if to underline his source, Pythagoras begins his version with the same words as Virgil's Helenus: *nate dea* (439, "O goddess-born"), and then adds, self-consciously: *si nota satis praesagia nostrae / mentis habes* (439–40, "if my prophecies are sufficiently well known to you").[49] Indeed they are! Elsewhere, to assure his audience that bees really are born from the putrefying carcasses of oxen, the philosopher states that *cognita res usu* (365, "the fact has been learned by experience"). Yes, but the experience proves to be that of reading the *Georgics*, where the same story is retailed (4.538–47). And again Ovid reinforces the link with an echo of Virgil's language (cf. 15.364 with 4.538). These passages are different from literary allusions such as we are accustomed to meet in the *Aeneid*. These do not complicate or otherwise enhance their meaning by evoking contexts from earlier literature: rather, they point to the fact that such literature has helped to create them. With especially sharp wit these passages remind us that literary art is a principal background to the poem.

ECPHRASES

This sense is confirmed by the three ecphrases in the poem. In view of the prominence of art it is surprising that so few ecphrases are found: the *Aeneid* can show fully as many.[50] The explanation probably lies in the large number of stories narrated within the poem, which serve the same purpose of self-reflection.[51] If we confine ourselves to the visual arts, the contrast between Virgil and Homer on the one hand and Ovid on the other makes clear what is distinctive. The chief characteristic in Ovid's descriptions of works of art is the unrelenting consciousness that they are works of art. The earlier poets' handling of ecphrasis has been well described thus: while Virgil, like Homer, "professes to be describing a work of art and even (unlike Homer) alludes to technique in the appropriate use of metals, his pictures come to life before his eyes and transcend the limitations of art: the scenes become scenes of action, with movements and circumstances which art could not represent."[52] This is precisely what is absent from Ovid. His scenes never break away from their frame

and take on a life of their own. All three descriptions are brief and dry, nearly a catalogue, and they never allow us to forget that they are artifacts.

The first is the doors of the Sun's palace, worked by Vulcan with representations of the land, sea, and air. The description opens with the fabulous materials out of which the doors are constructed: gold, silver, ivory, and an alloy of gold with bronze. But, Ovid says, *materiam superabat opus* (2.5, "the workmanship was even greater than the material"). This is a kind of argument *a fortiori*, emphasizing the artisan's skill. A group of the Naiads *nare videtur* (11), which can mean either "are seen to swim" (by the spectator Phaethon) or "appear to swim," which reminds us that this is only a fictitious work. A pair of familiar words at the end of the passage does the same, an ambiguous meaning being involved in each case: the *caeli fulgentis imago* (17, "the image of the gleaming sky"), where the modifier reflects equally well the light of the stars represented or of the silver employed; and, on each of the panels, the six *signa* (18), which are both "constellations" and "sculpted figures." The reader is not allowed to lose sight of the work's artifice.

The longest ecphrasis is actually a pair, the two webs woven by Minerva and Arachne for their contest (6.70–128). Both parts include tell-tale words: *imago* (74, 103, 110, 122), *videri* (100, 105), *simulare* (80). Since Arachne's subject is gods in disguise who raped women, Ovid can again use *imago* in a double sense. The Jupiter who carried off Europa is an *imago* in that he was disguised as a bull in the story and also in that he is now represented on a work of art (103; similarly in 110 and perhaps 74). Ovid applies a revealing phrase to Minerva's tapestry. The twelve chief gods were, as we might say, recognizable by their attributes. The poet puts it thus: *sua quemque deorum / inscribit facies* (73–74, "his appearance identified each of the gods"). The word *inscribit*, however, properly means "inscribe, write," and Haupt and Ehwald correctly explain its odd use here: "*inscribit*: 'labels,' as clearly as if the name were written beside, as is often found on ancient vases and wall-paintings." Pictorial art is implicitly likened to the art of writing.

The last of the ecphrases in the poem, a bronze mixing bowl given to Aeneas (13.685–99), also compares the sculpted to the written. The artist has carved a city with seven gates, of which Ovid says, *hae pro nomine erant et, quae foret illa, docebant* (686, "they were in place of a name and told which city it was," meaning Thebes). The description falls into nearly equal halves (685–91, 692–99). In the first there is an interesting progression in the cognitive status of the representa-

tion. As Ovid moves along he states different relations between the scenes and the viewer/reader's understanding of them. The gates "tell" (*docebant*) which city it was. Next pyres and funeral mounds "signify" (*significant*) grief. The nymphs then "appear" (*videntur*) to weep. And finally the subject is described immediately: the trees are bare of leaves, the goats nibble at the rocks. The stages are: absolute declaration of meaning; qualified declaration, one thing standing for or pointing to another; approximation to reality; and reality apprehended directly. This steady movement from interpretation to reality leads us to feel that now the work of art will take off, its figures come to life, as happens with Homer and Virgil. The second half, however, defeats such an expectation. Syntactically it is a single sentence, with the verb *facit* (692, "he makes, represents") governing a series of accusatives with infinitive: *facit . . . / hanc . . . dare vulnus* (692–93, "he represents this woman as dealing wounds"), and so forth. The construction is extremely rare with pictorial representations, and nowhere else in Latin is it so extensive as here.[53] We ought to note how the construction usual for reporting discourse is transferred to reporting images. Ovid employs it because it marks most clearly the subordinate nature of the scenes portrayed on the bowl. In this novel way he again reminds us that art is artifice, and also suggests either that the visual and verbal arts are almost interchangeable or that the visual can ultimately be translated into the verbal. This, like the other ecphrases, conveys the sense that in the background of art there lies other art.

Metamorphosis, we may say in conclusion, is a phenomenon in which two domains meet, art and experience. Where does the balance lie between them? Does metamorphosis chiefly encapsulate some human experience, or does it echo art itself? Ovid both acknowledges the claims and is aware of the limitations of each. His interest is directed to the ways in which the two interpenetrate one another. Our experiences of ordinary life are endlessly varied, complex, unique, and to some extent mysterious. Mythological narratives, literary structures, artistic works of any sort, are inadequate for capturing experiences in their fullness; they necessarily falsify them. Yet at the same time no experience is unmediated; art, visual or literary, is itself an inextricable part of experience and has already shaped our perception of it.

It is on these grounds that Ovid is skeptical towards the possibilities of art and yet disposed to have faith in it as a means, limited but indispensable, for making sense of experience. As for Ovid's own

literary art, though subject to the same restrictions, it is at least less liable to misrepresent or mislead: it is more self-conscious and more open. And of course it is also true that as the poem has itself come to occupy an important place in Western tradition, and not only the Latin and literary traditions, it too in turn has played a large role in shaping our perceptions of art and experience. Even now, twenty centuries after Ovid composed it, the *Metamorphoses* remains a source of enjoyment, enlightenment, and liberation.