



OVID

METAMORPHOSES

TRANSLATED BY
STANLEY
LOMBARDO
INTRODUCTION BY
W. R. JOHNSON

OVID

METAMORPHOSES

Translated by Stanley Lombardo

Introduction by W. R. Johnson

Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
Indianapolis/Cambridge

Copyright © 2010 by Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

14 13 12 11 10 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

For further information, please address

Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

P.O. Box 44937

Indianapolis, Indiana 46244-0937

www.hackettpublishing.com

Cover design by Brian Rak and Elizabeth L. Wilson

Interior design by Elizabeth L. Wilson

Composition by Agnew's, Inc.

Printed at Sheridan Books, Inc.

Cover art: *They Snaked Together (Cadmus and Harmonia)* by Micheline Klagsbrun.

Reprinted by permission of the artist.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ovid, 43 B.C.–17 or 18 A.D.

[Metamorphoses. English]

Metamorphoses / Ovid ; translated by Stanley Lombardo ; introduction
by W. R. Johnson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-60384-307-2 (pbk.) — ISBN 978-1-60384-308-9 (cloth)

1. Fables, Latin—Translations into English. 2. Metamorphosis—Mythology—
Poetry. 3. Mythology, Classical—Poetry. I. Lombardo, Stanley, 1943– II. Title.

PA6522.M2L66 2010

873'.01—dc22

2010019307

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48–1984.



Introduction

The History of Everything

Who among Ovid's first readers could have predicted that this master of numerous short comic poems, just at the midpoint of his poetic career, would undertake and complete a long and complex poem that would come to rival the *Aeneid* (and perhaps outdo it) in its influence on the literature of Western Europe? He had begun with publishing five volumes of lighthearted love elegies (later harshly winnowed and reduced to three volumes). He had then turned to witty, sometimes poignant representations of legendary ladies writing letters to the men who had absented themselves from their felicity (the *Heroides*). After this splendid compilation, he had written a poem in three volumes, giving cynical and shamelessly sexist (and hilarious) advice to men who needed help in obtaining the consent of the women they lusted after, the *Ars Amatoria*, a sort of seducer's manual. This poem (which may have earned him the intense displeasure of Emperor Augustus and his permanent exile to the Black Sea) was followed by the *Metamorphoses*, an immense poem in fifteen volumes, which took as its chief theme a paradox to which Heraclitus had given its essential form: "all things flow," "you never step into the same river twice,"—in short, it is changing realities that constitute the only real permanence in the universe.

Ovid may have been drawn to this particular theme because it gave him warrant to retell stories that he happened to like, stories drawn from Greek myths that focused on (and explained) how given entities came into existence, in particular how certain beings, both semidivine and human, were transformed into animals, vegetables, and minerals. This seemingly limitless source, a narratological paradise, offered the storyteller all the material he needed to construct vivid characters, dramatic conflicts, and surprising outcomes. The major problem facing the poet who found this treasure house irresistible

was how to impose on this delicious welter some semblance of intelligible order. (One of Ovid's masters, the Alexandrian poet Callimachus, had found a solution to this problem, but his *Aitia* [*The Origins*] exists for us only in fragments, and we have no real notion of how much help Ovid may have gotten from his great predecessor as he set about trying to devise a shape for, a pattern to, the tales of transfigurations he wanted to narrate.)

Ovid found the answer to his problem in history. To be more precise, in the history of the time he was living in. Like most of his contemporary inhabitants of the Mediterranean world, he felt that he was living at a moment of *weltwende*, of radical change in the world's destiny. Seventeen years before he was born, Julius Caesar had begun his conquest of Gaul and was preparing to invade Britain; six years before he was born, just as the Roman republic entered upon its implosion, Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon and began his struggle to secure for himself absolute control of Rome; finally, in the year in which Ovid donned the toga of manhood (30 BCE), Octavian, Caesar's heir, defeated Antony and Cleopatra and was well on his way to becoming emperor of the Roman Empire. The nature of these events and the metamorphosis of Rome's political, economic, and military institutions they produced were quickly understood by some and gradually understood by everyone living in the Roman Empire.

But a writer born in the generation before Ovid's, Diodorus of Sicily, undertook to provide a remarkable representation of that knowledge and the feelings that it engendered. He wrote a universal history of the known world, beginning with the Middle East and India, going down through the Trojan War and the history of Greece to Caesar's invasions of Gaul and Britain. Substantial portions of his work remain, but much of it is fragmentary. We can surmise from his preface however that he was convinced that the successes of Julius Caesar—he was writing his history during the early years of Octavian-Augustus' reign—had marked a significant alteration in the history of the (known) world. It is perhaps not too much to say that he saw the history of the nations that he examined as being elements in a progression leading to the establishment of Rome's permanent hegemony or that he felt (he would not be alone in the feeling) that Caesar and Augustus had between them saved the

world from its long zigzag patterns of law and disorder: there broods over Diodorus' preface a sort of intuition that what he and his first readers are witnessing is the end of history. That sense of a triumphant finale for history and its nations, one provided by Augustus and his role model, provides the frame for Ovid's great counter-epic. Augustus is emphatically (and wittily) alluded to early on in Book 1, and he and Julius put in a sudden and splendid joint appearance at the very end of Book 15. But before turning to these passages and the ironic world-historical frame they impose on Ovid's diverse and disparate tales of mutability and impermanence, it might be well to see how Ovid begins his poem.

Ovid's Cosmology

Unlike Diodorus, Ovid does not begin with Egypt and other ancient civilizations. Instead, like Hesiod's *Theogony*, he begins with Chaos, but he replaces Hesiod's primeval Void with a vision of the world's origins that smacks of something like atomic theory. Ovid's Chaos is "a crude, unsorted mass, / Nothing but an inert lump, the concentrated / Discordant seeds of disconnected entities," (1.7–9). This unpromising mess is gradually transformed into ordered entities by "Some god, or superior nature" (1.21), whichever god it was "who had sorted out this cosmic heap" and "divided it into parts" (1.32–33). We are here near the realm of Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura*, God or Nature. This god that is nature or this nature that is god is as much a product of the scientific imagination as it is of metaphysical speculation. The purpose of this surprising fusion of Epicurus' world-constituting atoms and the all-pervasive, all-governing god of the Stoics is to remove the true matrix of Ovid's stories from their usual playground, the one that Hesiod and Homer combine to design when they give Zeus (in this poem Jupiter) and his Olympians their permanent poetic identities. Jupiter and his Olympians will indeed dominate many of the stories in the first two-thirds of the *Metamorphoses*, but the poem and its stories is not about them. It is rather about the world in which human beings live and love and suffer. In initiating his poem in a space-time outside the realm of religious mythology that the stories he retells inevitably inhabit, Ovid

makes clear that this is going to be a poem about nature and her progeny—even if the exact means by which the human beings who enact Ovid’s stories come into existence is uncertain:

Man was born, whether fashioned from immortal seed
 By the Master Artisan who made this better world,
 Or whether Earth, newly parted from Aether above
 And still bearing some seeds of her cousin Sky,
 Was mixed with rainwater by Titan Prometheus
 And molded into the image of the omnipotent gods.
 And while other animals look on all fours at the ground
 He gave to humans an upturned face, and told them to lift
 Their eyes to the stars. And so Earth, just now barren,
 A wilderness without form, was changed and made over,
 Dressing herself in the unfamiliar figures of men.

(1.79–89)

The awkward and no doubt vexatiously intended mythological linking of Epicurus (seen here in the world’s shared material substance, down to the divine seed from which humans are fashioned) and the Stoics (seen here in the gods who govern all, down to the orientation of the human face) gains in a provocative indeterminacy what it loses in clarity. But in this passage the two strains of thought conspire to provide nature (here Earth) and humankind (in its noblest aspect) with a unity that can be seen independently of the traditional mythologies that religion and politics nourish and depend on.

Heaven’s King and His Earthly Double

Having accounted for the world and the creatures in it, the poet now turns to the description of the early history of humans: the Four Ages—Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Iron. The happy Golden Age is ruled over by Jupiter’s father, Saturn, but “after Saturn was consigned to Tartarus’ gloom / The world was under Jove, and the Silver race came in’ (1.115–16). This means that the stories that make up the poem, from this moment on, take place in the Iron Age over which Jupiter holds dominion.

The first challenge Jupiter must deal with is the rebellious Giants, whom he easily defeats. In retaliation, Mother Earth creates a race of violent humans from their blood, and this “incarnation,” which “also was contemptuous / Of the gods” (1.164–65) makes Jupiter very angry, so angry that he summons a council of the gods. Unlike Hesiod, his chief model up to this point, the poet does not relate how Saturn had seized power from his own father (Uranus) just as he has had his power wrested from him by his own son. By representing the creation of humans and their early history (the Four Ages) in such detail and by very briefly sketching Jupiter’s seizure of power in a couple of verses, Ovid avoids explaining how Jupiter and his fellow Olympians came to possess the immense power they will wield throughout the rest of the poem. In doing so he avoids implicitly dwelling not only on Rome’s implosion as a republic, its rise to empire, and its bloody history of civil war but also on the Olympians’ earthly counterparts themselves. But the angry entrance of the king of Olympus into the poem creates a different and disturbing impression. Still irate with the Giants and now furious with their replacement (and doubtless with Earth who had given birth to all of his recent enemies), Jupiter summons a council of the gods and lays bare his plan to destroy mankind (1.186–203). The Olympian gods hasten by way of the Milky Way “to the royal palace / Of the great Thunderer” (1.174–75). The lesser (plebeian) gods live elsewhere, “but the great / All have their homes along this avenue. This quarter, / If I may say so, is high heaven’s Palatine” (1.178–80). Ovid’s blasphemous (and witty) equation of Olympus with the Palatine where Augustus lives is hardly mitigated by the ostentatious timidity of Ovid’s “if I may say so.”

Jupiter’s is not a constitutional monarchy, and the council of the gods has not been summoned to debate or to advise. Nevertheless, when Jupiter singles out “infamous Lycaon” (1.203) as the worst of the humans whom he intends to destroy, the gods instantly demand his death.

So it was when a disloyal few
Were mad to blot out Rome with Caesar’s blood,
And the human race was stunned with fear of ruin
And the whole world shuddered. The loyalty

Of your subjects, Augustus, pleases you no less
 Than Jove was pleased.

(1.205–10)

Here Augustus is formally identified as Jupiter's earthly counterpart, and these verses might, save for the wry irony that suffuses this passage, be reasonably judged as the copious flattery of a court poet. Some readers will decide against an ironic reading of this passage, but what cannot be denied is that the first story in the poem represents Augustus as Jupiter's human double and depicts Jupiter as a capricious tyrant, since despite what we have been told about those who live in the Iron Age, it is by no means clear that the majority of human beings are as wicked as Lycaon is purported to be, much less that all of humankind merits annihilation.

This emphatic linking of Jupiter and Augustus recurs in yet more spectacular form in the poem's final pages. When Ovid's history of everything that matters is almost complete, he concludes his poem with the apotheosis of Julius Caesar, whose supreme achievement, surpassing all his conquests and triumphs, turns out to be his having fathered the emperor Augustus: "For in all Caesar has done, / Nothing is greater than this, that he became / The father of our emperor" (15.834–36). Augustus, of course, was in fact the great-nephew of Julius, and Julius had only adopted him as his heir. But because Augustus has to be divine, it is necessary that his "father," Julius, be himself transformed into a divinity: "And so, that his son not have a mortal father, / It was necessary for Caesar to become a god" (15.846–47). When Venus realizes this, knowing that Julius, blood of her blood and her direct descendent, is about to be assassinated by his enemies on the Ides of March, she appeals to the other gods, but they are as helpless as she is against the decrees of the Fates. Then Jupiter calms and consoles his anguished daughter by revealing to her the splendid destiny that awaits her Roman progeny after Julius is murdered and deified (15.911–55). Once Julius has taken his fated place in heaven, his (adopted) son will perform his glorious deeds throughout the known world and, having gifted it with enduring peace, he will furnish it a model for morals, with an eye to its future, and he will pass on his name and reign to his stepson, Tiberius, and then follow Julius into godhood in the heavens:

And when peace has been bestowed on all these lands
 He will turn his mind to the rights of citizens
 And establish laws most just, and by his example
 Guide the way men behave. Looking to the future
 And generations to come, he will pass on his name
 And his burdens as well to the son born to him
 And to his chaste wife. And not until he is old
 And his years equal his meritorious actions
 Will he go to heaven and his familial stars.

(15.933–41)

Having finished this prophecy of Augustus' restoration of the Golden Age, Jupiter instructs Venus to rush down to Rome and snatch up the soul of dying Julius and bear it up to its heavenly destination and final home. This she does, clutching it to her breast, but its heat is such that she is forced to let go of it and it speeds off on its own, traversing the sky as a glorious comet until it becomes a star. It is from this vantage that Caesar comprehends the real meaning of his former life on earth:

And now he sees
 All his son's good deeds and confesses that
 They are greater than his own, and he rejoices
 To be surpassed by him. And though the son forbids
 His own deeds to be ranked above his father's,
 Fame, free and obedient to no one's command,
 Puts him forward, only in this opposing his will.

(15.954–60)

So had Atreus yielded in glory to Agamemnon (a dubious comparison), and Aegeus to Theseus, and Peleus to Achilles, and Saturn to Jupiter. Jupiter reigns in heaven, and Augustus, surpassing his "father," reigns on earth: "And as Jupiter is in control of high heaven / And the realms of the triple world, the earth / Is under Augustus, as both ruler and sire" (15.965–67). Having said so much, Ovid prays to several of Rome's special guardian gods, those to whom a vatic poet may offer his supplication, that after a long life on earth Augustus may go to his heavenly reward and, once there, give ear to the prayers of the Romans he left behind (15.968–80).

Once he has testified to the imminent divinity of Augustus in fulsome measure (deftly pilfering from Horace, *Odes* 2.20, 3.30), Ovid proceeds to claim deathlessness for himself, one that rivals the emperor's and in certain ways may surpass it (15.981–92). This immortality will be proof not only against fire, sword, and time but also against the anger of Jupiter. If, as seems as likely as not, this closing challenge to oblivion and power was composed after Ovid had arrived at his bleak destination on the Black Sea, he here underlines, again, his comparison of Augustus to Jupiter. In any case, thus far the poet has been right about both Augustus and himself. The emperor's influence on Western Europe and its various offspring is enduring if fragmentary. The poet's has been and continues to be as hardy as it is fertile. And his masterpiece, that strange omnium-gatherum of fragments, is whole and intact.

Augustus and the Prophecy of Pythagoras

Curiously, there is one more reference to Rome's and Augustus' supremacy, one that seems intended to reinforce the poem's Augustan frame. Toward the beginning of Book 15, Ovid introduces a long speech by the philosopher Pythagoras (15.69–515). This speech, part philosophical explication and part sermon, is peculiar in several ways. It takes up nearly half the book in which it appears, contains no story, and thereby awkwardly interrupts the easy, steady flow of narrative transitions that the poem has up to this point maintained. But incongruous as they may at first seem, the figure of Pythagoras and his lengthy discourse serve Ovid's design in a number of ways.

First, Pythagoras, exponent of the transmigration of souls, allows Ovid to brush aside, with his customary sleight of hand, the centuries of Roman history that separate the death of Romulus from the triumph of Augustus (Ovid hardly has any space for them, and, in any case, the coming of Augustus and his Peace render them all but irrelevant).

Second, Pythagoras' doctrine (his explanation of the nature of things) provides the entire poem, just as it is hastening to its closure, with a very powerful counterperspective, one which completely

ignores—and in so doing disavows—the theological underpinnings that provide the Olympians and their stories with much of their verisimilitude. Sounding something like Lucretius and something like the Hesiodic voice with which the poem opens, Pythagoras argues for a world governed by an unending and dynamic mutability (15.184–96), one in which souls migrate forever from body to body, both the spiritual and the physical realms being subject to transformations without end. This speech, then, provides Ovid with a new and complex warrant for this representation of the world as metamorphosis. But, in a strategy of self-ironization that suits this poet perfectly (deliberately hoist with his own petard), it abolishes the Olympians who figure so prominently in the stories he has been telling. Pythagoras is by no means an enemy of the divine: he worships nature (15.278–85) which (or who) is clearly associated with (if not identical to) the earth. In his view, nature and earth are wholly benign and wholly opposed to the slaughter of animals for food (15.88–159, 492–515).

Finally, we come to the essential reason for Pythagoras' strange intrusion in a poem that would not seem to want him. Just before his final plea for a vegetarianism that is both merciful and pious, he had extended his doctrine of the unfailing mutability of things to history itself. "Times, too, change; we see some nations grow strong / And others decline" (15.459–60). After the fall of Troy, Sparta, Mycenae, Thebes, and Athens flourished for a while, but they are now little more than names (15.464–66). It is now Rome's turn in the spotlight of history:

And now we hear Dardanian Rome is rising,
Laying her foundations with monumental effort
On the banks of the Appenine-fed Tiber River.
She changes form by growing, and, one day,
She will be the capital of the boundless world.

(15.467–71)

So even the mystic proponent of moral vegetarianism cannot resist repeating a prophecy he has chanced to hear, namely, that with Augustus the history of humankind and its nations will have reached its final goal:

. . . one born of the blood
 Of Iulus will make her mistress of the world,
 And when the earth has made use of him, heaven
 Will enjoy him, and the sky will be his final abode.
 (15.484–87)

Pythagoras is not much interested in the swerve his logic takes from philosophic disquisition to a validation of Augustan propaganda. But Ovid and his readers, the lines about Sparta and Mycenae and Thebes and Athens still echoing in their ears, may find themselves wondering if Rome is immune to decline and fall, if Augustus has in fact brought history to its stop. Heard in one way, this is the poetry of praise, as eloquent in its reverence as, say, Anchises' prophecy of Augustus in *Aeneid* 6. But heard in another way, in a speech that refuses permanence to anything or anyone and that excludes any possibility of "divine right," the eloquence seems stained with irony.

The Olympians

Ovid's gods seem at first glance to be identical with the gods of Homer. On closer inspection, however, they diverge radically both from their Homeric models and from the Roman versions of those models (as we find them, for instance, in Virgil). Homer's divinities manifest human emotions, and their motivations are for the most part transparently clear. More importantly, their actions are closely monitored by Zeus, who, for all his power, is himself subject to the dictates of both Justice and Fate. Justice and Fate have little place in the *Metamorphoses*, and Jupiter himself, in most of his appearances in the poem, is as capricious and as vindictive as the other gods whose behavior he ought to be supervising. When Ovid's gods encounter human beings they are likely to rape, maim, or murder them (usually by transforming them into some lower, uglier entity). Blessed with enormous powers as well as with immortality, they are beyond good and evil, they have little acquaintance with reason, and it is mostly whim and cruelty that govern their activities. Taken all in all, the impression they make is that of malicious children whose favorite playground is the human world.

This sustained defabrication of the Olympians constitutes one of the chief strategies of the opening books of Ovid's poem (roughly from Book 1 through Book 9 or more than half of it), and its purpose would seem to be a dual one. On the one hand, this attack on the Roman Olympians (in their Augustan avatars) is a part of Ovid's criticism, throughout his poem, of the idea of epic and of its indispensable theological foundations. On the other hand, the gods as he represents them here function as symbols of the mysterious causes of evil in the world, as a way of imagining (and protesting against) the suffering that marks the human condition, most specifically the suffering that human beings endure when they are confronted with power in its various guises. The Olympians represent, both in their poetic and their political representations, the power and glory that epic poetry exists to celebrate (Homer and Virgil, in their different ways, offer objections to the idea of epic, but from Ovid's perspective they are nevertheless complicit in propagating its fundamental untruths). Ovid's cartoons of the Olympians (in their Homeric and Virgilian guises as well as in their political representations) are not fair-minded and are not intended to be. What shapes them is an irony that is rooted in sarcasm and satire. What sets them in motion is a determination to speak truth to power.

Jupiter's and Apollo's rapes need little in the way of comment. It is ludicrous (not to mention, wicked) when Jupiter, during his inspection tour of the damage caused to the earth by Phaëthon's fiery crash, transforms himself into a replica of his chaste daughter, Diana, before raping Callisto (2.473–81). It is equally ludicrous (and hardly less wicked) when Apollo gains access to Leucothoë by assuming the appearance of her mother and then raping the terrified girl once he has restored himself to all his godly beauty (4.244–61).

But these crimes of the heart (or the groin) seem almost trivial when compared with what happens when the gods are bent not on rape but on revenge. Sometimes the revenge seems to have some basis in human wrongdoing, as is probably the case with Jupiter's anger at Lycaon (though it is possible that Lycaon angered Jupiter because he protested Jupiter's rape of his daughter Callisto). But, even when it is in some degree merited, divine vengeance is often extravagantly cruel. Certainly, in the case of Niobe, her arrogant

claim that her fourteen children, seven boys and seven girls, gave her warrant to challenge the fertility of Latona (who could boast but two children, Apollo and Diana), was asking for trouble (6.183–231). And trouble comes when Latona goads her son and daughter to punish Niobe's stupid boast, and they, in one of the poem's most devastating scenes (6.250–345), obey their mother by performing on Niobe's innocent offspring a piece of baroque mayhem (and epic pastiche) that ranks with similar set pieces in the poem (Perseus 5.1–270; Lapiths and Centaurs 12.247–615).

Worse is the punishment of innocence, as when Actaeon comes upon Diana when she is bathing with her nymphs in her grove (3.184–201). He catches only a fleeting glimpse of her—if he does—because she is taller than the nymphs who try to hide her from his gaze. But he is doomed. She splashes him with water from her bath, and, in a lengthy, elaborate, and utterly gruesome passage which is perhaps preeminent among the poem's frightening pictures of divine murder, transforms him into a stag which his own hunting dogs tear to pieces (3.202–67).

The Gods of Nature

These selfish, ruthless Olympians intrude themselves into many if not most of the stories that make up a little more than the first half of the poem. Their arrogance and malicious contempt for human beings are thrown into sharp relief by another, admittedly smaller, group of deities whose virtues far outweigh their vices. Demeter and Dionysus were not admired by Homer and his noble patrons, and their visits to Olympus seem to have been infrequent and unmemorable: they are gods of the earth, they are, respectively, Bread and Wine. Their Roman counterparts, Ceres and Bacchus, resemble them closely in the functions they perform and, above all, in the benevolence that motivates their behavior. In Rome, Ceres and Liber (Dionysus), along with his female aspect, Libera, shared a temple and worship, and they enjoyed ardent devotion by the *populares*, the common people. (For fascinating observations on Dionysus as Liber, and his crucial place in Roman religion, see T. P. Wiseman's *The Myths of Rome and Unwritten History*.)

The spirits of Bread and Wine have little to do with law and order, which seems to be a major concern for the Olympians. By contrast, the spirits of Bread and Wine cherish peace and plenty; their chief concerns are for nature's health and fertility and for the welfare of the human beings who revere them and thank them. They are the deities who foster the horn of plenty. As emblems of the operations of nature they will find their ultimate validation, in this poem, in Pythagoras' impassioned testament to the goodness of Nature.

On the other hand, they are quick to punish those who deny their divinity or show ingratitude and contempt for the bounty that they and nature provide them with. During her long search for her missing daughter, Persephone, a grieving and weary Ceres transforms the nasty brat who mocks her into a spotted lizard (5.516–33). In a long passage (8.832–990), when impious Erysichthon chops down her sacred oak, Ceres arranges to have him taken over by an insane, ravenous hunger that drives him, when he has consumed everything he can lay hold of, to devour himself. Ceres is in fact an avatar of Mother Earth, as her frenzied search for her daughter (resulting in earth's renewal in spring) clearly shows. Her rare outbursts of anger cannot blemish her essential goodness.

The acts of revenge committed by Bacchus are far more extensive and far uglier than those of Ceres. But in each case, modeled on Euripides' *Bacchae*, Bacchus' cruelties are fueled by the rejection of his godhead by arrogant men and women who reasonably (and foolishly) demur at embracing a new object and new style of worship. The tale of Pentheus' crime and punishment is told at 3.562–810, but it is interrupted by the parallel tale of the god's angry transformation of the impious Tyrrhenian pirates at 3.641–765, which is the origin of one of Pound's most brilliant passages (*Cantos II*). Bacchus' angry revenge on the daughters of Minyas (transformed into bats) is represented in 4.1–11, 425–54; unlike the Pierians, whom we will shortly encounter, they are punished not for the kind of stories they tell but for their refusal to accept the divinity of Bacchus (who seems not in the least bothered that one of the sisters relates the story of Venus' adultery with Mars, 4.189–211). Ceres and Bacchus equal the Olympians in their swift anger and contempt for their victims, but differ from them in that the punishments the former inflict are never on the innocent but only on the guilty, on those who despise these

givers of the precious bread and wine without which humankind could not live.

Earth (Hesiod's Gaia) and her surrogates counter the Olympians' rage for order with a passion for fertility and variety. Earth gave birth, as we have seen, first to the Giants and then, from their blood, to a new race of humans whom Jupiter hated and sought to destroy with the flood. Two humans alone, Deucalion and Pyrrha, survive Jupiter's wrath, and when they approach the shrine of Themis and beg her help, she instantly grants it, telling them to scatter the bones of their mother as they walk on (1.332–34, 388–96). The bones, of course, are rocks that are transformed into men and women. Themis is in fact an earth goddess, and it is her bones that they cast behind them, so it is the Earth Mother, not Jupiter, who has saved the earth and mankind. This event is paralleled in the next book when Earth cries out to Jupiter to end the conflagration that was caused by the crash of Phaëthon's chariot and that is about to destroy the world. Jupiter listens to her and puts out the fire (2.296–328). Here, as in the matter of the flood, it is Earth, not Jupiter, who is responsible for the salvation of nature and mankind.

Possibly, the earth mother puts in another appearance, this time as Isis, when the girl Iphis begs the goddess to change her into a boy so she can marry her beloved Ianthe (9.888–915). And possibly it is also the earth mother who is the nameless and mysterious deity (seconded by other nameless gods) who hears the plea of the grieving, incestuous Myrrha and transforms her wretchedness into something beautiful, a myrrh tree (10.529–50). In any case, these moments of compassion, rare and dwindling though they are, offer an undersong, sometimes poignant, sometimes tragic, to the tales that reveal the injustice and savagery of Olympian power. In so doing, they help define Ovid's grieving perspective on the condition of humankind.

Ovid's Heroes

While Ovid gives his gods generous exposure, he provides his readers with only a few random snapshots of his heroes, and those brief glimpses represent them in unflattering, sometimes comic, postures. This odd parsimony may be best explained in two ways: first, like

the gods (whose children they are), the great Greek heroes flourish in the world of epic, the very genre Ovid is committed to deflating; second, Ovid begins to notice the Greek heroes only when they are about to enter “history,” that is to say, when they exist on the verge of or take part in the Trojan War. Up until the time when the Greek heroes start making their appearances in it, the poem has made ample use of a vague chronology. But with the advent of the war at Troy and of Aeneas, one of the few Trojans to escape his city’s fiery ruin and Rome’s founding father, Ovid gradually turns his attention to Rome, its evolution, its “history” and its myths. He is getting ready to prepare his readers for the splendid epiphany of the Caesars with which his poem will reach its closure and its goals: on one level, the triumph of Augustus, and, on the other, the perfection of the poet’s ironic meditations on how myths become epics.

We have noted how Ovid enlisted Perseus to enact one of his epical pastiches (5.1–270). Theseus fares little better, whether reduced to being rescued from the Minotaur by Ariadne, whom he quickly deserts (8.203–12); or saved by his father from Medea’s poisoned cup and then serenaded by the citizens of Athens with songs that scantily sketch his heroic deeds (7.453–503); or noted only in passing among the opponents of the Calydonian boar (8.348–49); or even depicted briefly and bloodily as initiating the Battle of the Lapiths against the Centaurs (12.272–89). Hercules garners the opening passages of Book 9 (1–304) for himself, but it is the tale of how, poisoned by the Centaur Nessus, he comes to his agonized and glorious apotheosis that Ovid focuses on (147–304). There would be no point in Ovid’s trying to compete with Homer, so, ironically, Achilles is permitted his biggest moment when he meets Cygnus on the field of battle and is the instrument of his foe’s translation into a swan just at the moment when he prepares to strip away the armor he has won (12.81–172). And he is the luckless subject of the long and funny (mostly grandiloquent) debate that Ajax and Ulysses engage in when they attempt to demonstrate which of them has the better claim to the armor of the fallen Achilles (13.1–460). It is this debate that replaces (and all but effaces) the Trojan War.

Retrieving himself and his nearest kinfolk from the immediate aftermath of the Greek triumph and rapine, Aeneas is ready to step into the pages of history (13.752–63). But again, Ovid is loathe to

compete with Virgil and his *Aeneid*, so he decides to break up the journey of Aeneas toward his goal, the founding of Rome, with a variety of interwoven tales, until, when his war with the native Italians is ended, he can enjoy his own special apotheosis. When Venus orders the river Numicius to wash her son clean of his mortality and render unto her what of him is deathless, he becomes, like his remote descendant Julius, heaven-bound (14.691–99). Then, with Aeneas safely gathered up among the Roman Olympians, Ovid quickly transfers his attention to Romulus, greatest of Rome's indigenous founding fathers, until the coming of Augustus and his great-uncle. It is these *Roman* heroes the world has been waiting for.

The Perils of Artists and the Perils of Lovers

(i)

It is no surprise to discover that Ovid is partial to artists or that he is fascinated (and proud) of the power of art. But he combines his celebration of artists and their art with a vivid awareness of the dangers artists tend to encounter when their art challenges the official version of reality. At times, reading these stories that focus on the perils of art and on what happens to artists when power speaks power to truth, one senses that Ovid had a presentiment of his own destiny. (But of course we know neither when Ovid wrote that final coda to the *Metamorphoses* nor what revisions he might have made to his portraits of luckless artists once he had settled into his exile.)

The ugliest of these tales of artistic crimes and their punishment is the one that sketches with chilling brevity the fate of Marsyas. Ovid dispenses with the scene that depicts the contest between Apollo and this satyr (who had apparently challenged the god's preeminence as a flautist) but instead we are instantly confronted with his repentant screams as the victorious god has his skin flayed from his body:

As the satyr screamed
His skin was peeled from his body's surface
And he was one massive wound. Blood flowed
All over the place; his muscles were laid bare;

His veins throbbed and quivered without any skin;
 You could count the pulsing entrails; the fibers
 Of his lungs showed clearly through his chest.

(6.441–47)

Any feeling we might entertain that, however great his virtuosity, Marsyas gets what he deserves for his arrogance in daring to vie with the god of music is instantly effaced by the response of the crowd of onlookers who weep so abundantly at his suffering that the Earth can gather their tears and transform them into the clearest stream in Phrygia (6.448–57).

In yet another story Apollo is again challenged to a musical performance (once again, on the flute), this time by Pan, who has some claim to being a virtuoso on this instrument; his music is described as “foreign,” but when we keep in mind that he is a follower of Bacchus, we can regard this contest as one being one, almost à la Nietzsche, between the official music of Olympus and a rival music, wild, primeval, and ecstatic, that constantly threatens to replace it. Mt. Tmolus in Lydia (a suitable place for Pan and his music) acts as judge of the contest. He listens first to Pan, whose music pleases King Midas, and then to Apollo, who takes the stage gorgeously and every inch a star:

Phoebus Apollo’s golden head was wreathed
 With laurel from Parnassus, and his mantle,
 Dyed deep Tyrian purple, swept the ground.
 In his left hand was his lyre, inlaid with gems
 And Indian ivory, and his plectrum
 Was in his right. His very pose was an artist’s.

(11.190–95)

Tmolus decides in Apollo’s favor, a judgment unanimously approved by the audience—except for Midas, who protests that the judge’s decision is unfair. Apollo severely punishes him for expressing the opinion he does, but that does not mean that his judgment of Pan’s performance is wrong. The glittering grandeur of the Olympian contestant and the pomposity that it reveals may fool Tmolus and the audience but they fail to take Midas in.

Artistic arrogance meets with retribution once again when the daughters of Pierus, nine in number, offer to compete in song and

story with the Olympian Muses (5.342–57). The nine Muses accept the challenge, and, with nymphs as judges, the competition begins. The leader of the Pierians sings a song, briefly described, wherein the Giants war with the Olympians, whose deeds are trivialized: they flee in terror from Typhoeus, transforming themselves into various animals to escape detection (5.373–86). (Bacchus is incongruously numbered among these cowards, for he had no place in traditional war with the Giants, being born after it was concluded.)

Calliope, representing the Olympian Muses, undertakes to answer these blasphemies with a long tale which centers on Ceres' grieving search for her daughter, Persephone, whom Pluto had abducted and taken as his wife in hell (5.396–766). Her song begins with a vivid picture of the punishment of Typhoeus and ends (after the interpolated tale of Arethusa, 5.659–740) with Ceres' restoring to earth the fertility that, in her grief and anger, she had deprived it of and with her establishing the Eleusinian mysteries in Athens (5.741–766). Interestingly, Calliope doesn't bother refuting the Pierian's brazen tale of Olympian shame but instead ignores the Olympians to celebrate an earth mother whose true home is not among the Olympians. Since we do not hear the Pierian song we cannot say for sure whether the nymphs fairly judge Calliope to be the victorious singer. Yet, with the evidence of the next story clearly in mind, we may be tempted to think that, as was the case with Marsyas and Pan, the Pierians were perhaps cheated of victory and that their transformation into chattering magpies has more to do with revenge than with justice (5.767–87).

There is no doubt that Arachne is guilty of an inordinate artistic vanity which drives her, despite Minerva's stern warnings, to persist in challenging the goddess to the weaving contest that will prove to be Arachne's undoing (6.30–50). The question is whether she loses the contest (if she does) because her skills are inferior to those of the goddess who transforms her into a spider. Rooted in a naïve egotism, the tapestry of Minerva centers on her victory over Poseidon when the two vied with one another over the naming of Athens while the Olympians watch their rivalry and approve her triumph (6.80–92). And to remind her opponent of what happens to fools who fail to acknowledge the power and glory of the Olympians, in the four corners of her tapestry she depicts exemplary miscreants

and the severe chastisements the Olympians inflict on them (6.95–112). To frame her square, ultraconservative, and purely Academic work of art, Minerva chooses her signature vegetation: “She bordered it all with peaceful olive wreaths / And with her own tree brought the work to an end” (6.113–14).

Arachne’s composition differs from the goddess’ in several ways. She represents nine of Jupiter’s rapes, six of Neptune’s, the various disguises of Apollo and his rape of Isse, one of Bacchus’ rapes, and one of Saturn’s. As a frame for her elegant representation of divine crimes, she designs a spare, swirling pattern of flowers and ivy intertwined, one that is as unobtrusive as it is beautiful. Once again, the artist is primarily interested in countering the propaganda and alibis of the Olympians, but the hostile content is no more crucial to the excellence of her art than its exquisite style. In the first of her pictures, the rape of Europa, a combination of deft, vivid image and exact psychological detail bespeak an artist as sophisticated and sensitive as she is talented:

Arachne depicts Europa deceived by the false bull,
 But you would think the bull real, and the water too.
 She looks back at the shore and calls her friends,
 And, afraid of the waves, tucks up her dainty feet.
(6.115–18)

Arachne, like the tapestry she produces, is Ovidian in feeling and in form, and her art may be easily read as Ovid’s statement about his own artistic credo.

Naturally, Minerva’s response to her opponent’s accomplishment goes well beyond displeasure. She knows great art when she sees it, and reacts to the humbling experience of being bettered by an arrogant human by transforming her successful rival—the picture of the transformation is horrendous—into a deathless spider, condemned to repeat the making of its meaningless, ugly web forever. From the Olympian perspective, Arachne may be read as the culprit in an indelible cautionary tale about people who are tempted to quarrel with the reigning ideology. For other readers, she, like her creator as he sat staring at the Black Sea and pondering his career and his fate, is an emblem of the power of art and of the risks that sometimes

confront artists whose temperament and genius are such that they cannot refrain from scrutinizing the myths that power lives by.

(ii)

Orpheus, to whom Ovid devotes Book 10 in its entirety, is far from being a critic of power. He is instead a lover who happens to be a poet as well, and it is therefore not by chance that most of the stories he sings are about the ups and downs (but mostly the downs) of the amatory life. We first encounter him when, here as in Virgil's *Georgics* 4, he descends into hell to win back from the dead his beloved Eurydice whom a snakebite killed.

He charms the rulers and the denizens of hell with his song and his wife is returned to him. When summoned she comes limping from her wound, a nice touch of parody (10.51–52) that arouses our suspicion—if it has not stirred before—that Ovid's Orpheus will not be immune to Ovid's penchant for ironic send-ups of “classical” icons.

After Orpheus loses his wife again, he returns to the upper air, desolate and bitter. He swears off women, introduces pederasty to Thrace, and resumes performing his poetry to an appreciative audience of trees, among whom is the cypress. This tree reminds Orpheus of the beautiful boy Cyparissus, much loved by Orpheus' father, Apollo. This boy doted on a stag which he adorned with lots of jewelry (the parody here of Silvia's stag in *Aeneid* 7 is gorgeous in its malice). But unfortunately Cyparissus killed the stag with a random cast of his javelin, and then, broken by a grief that Apollo himself could not console, faded away into a funeral tree.

The mocking sentimentality that drenches this tale finds an echo in yet another tale of Apollo's attraction to handsome adolescents. This time Apollo forsakes his usual pastimes (music and archery), and spends his days in rough Spartan athletic activities with his beloved Hyacinthus (10.153–60). But an unlucky discus throw hits Hyacinthus in the head. Unable to revive the stricken young man, Apollo addresses him a lengthy, somewhat operatic monologue and watches as the boy's blood becomes a lovely flower (10.185–227).

In one of Orpheus' most famous stories, that of Pygmalion and his Galatea, the singer turns from sad and sentimental pederasty to

heterosexual fulfillment. Pygmalion, another artist, disgusted with women as nature has made them, refuses to marry, and, repressing his sexual instincts, sculpts for himself his ideal woman from ivory. He soon falls in love with his creation, adorns its, fondles it, kisses it, and ends by taking it to his bachelor's bed. What happens in that bed Ovid refrains from telling us but we do learn that on one of Venus' festal days, the sculptor, who has been smitten with his own creation, shyly begs the love goddess to help him. Knowing that he wants his statue for his wife, beneath his ardent caresses, she promptly transforms the cold dream girl into a living, breathing woman (10.306–25). This clever and very influential tale is capable of various interpretations, but the reader who senses, beneath its soft erotic shimmer, not a little sour misogyny ironically prettified may be close to the truth of Pygmalion. It is the sort of "happy" love story that Ovid's Orpheus might contrive.

A child born from this lucky marriage is Cinyras, whose daughter is Myrrha, and she, a paradigm of perversity, falls in love with her father. Orpheus is shocked by the story that he is somehow compelled to narrate and he warns his listeners, especially fathers and daughters, to put their hands over their ears while he performs this vile history:

My song is dire. Daughters, stay away; and fathers, too.
 Or if my songs charm you, do not believe this story;
 Believe instead that it never happened,
 But if you do believe it, believe the punishment too.

(10.334–37)

This story is among Ovid's longest and very best, and one sometimes gets the impression while reading it that two storytellers are simultaneously engaged in devising it. Orpheus, who warns us not to experience it, is as prurient as he is puritanical, and he delights, almost like a voyeur, in each detail his conflicted imagination can concoct. But Ovid concerns himself with Myrrha's dilemma, and his sympathetic study of her thoughts and feelings is sophisticated and persuasive, not least when he represents her complete contrition and her exquisite transformation (10.560–75).

Orpheus expends all his gifts for combining easy pathos with rich ornament (and a touch of *schadenfreude*?) when he closes his

recitations with two more tragic and perhaps cautionary tales about unsuccessful heterosexuals (Adonis and Venus, Hippomenes and Atalanta). We are not surprised when, at the opening of Book 11, a mob of women tears him limb from limb (11.23–44).

The love stories Ovid tells without the assistance of his Orpheus offer a wide spectrum of lovers, one that ranges from the luckless to the lucky, from the selfish and cruel to the generous and humane, but sorrow far exceeds joy, and it is sorrow that triumphs in the most complex and most memorable of these stories. The horror story that Tereus, Procne, and Philomela enact represents the pathology of eros at its worst (6.472–780). With Ceyx and Alcyone, by virtue of Ovid's rare fusion of empathy and skill, a tale of happy marriage and true love shifts imperceptibly and plausibly from melodrama to pathos to tragedy (11.481–862). Since the *Metamorphoses'* central inspiration is the poet's intimations of the world's suffering, it is not surprising that one doesn't need all the fingers of one hand to count its happy love stories: Deucalion and Pyrrha (1.324–431), Baucis and Philemon (8.697–817), Iphis and Ianthe (9.812–915), Vertumnus and Pomona (14.716–803, 883–90). His major concern is with young people who encounter the attractions and the dangers that eros brings with it. A variety of young lovers come to ruin in a variety of ways, victims of powers both inside them and outside them that their innocence and inexperience expose them to. Narcissus (3.371–561), Hermaphroditus (4.321–424), Medea (7.12–113), Scylla (the one enamored of Minos, 8.12–183), Byblis (9.503–764), Iphis, and Myrrha are all of them hurled suddenly into passions that they cannot comprehend and cannot shake themselves free of. Medea, though she initiates this pattern of young despair and provides it with its major rhetorical tropes, finally releases herself from her infatuation with Jason, and Iphis is rescued by the intervention of Isis from tragedy and reassigned to comedy.

But these exceptions prove the rule, which is that under the sign of eros humans who fall in love (no less than victims of divine rape) fare no better than artists. Like everyone else in the poem, the innocent and the guilty alike, they exist in a universe whose only constant is mutability. Change sometimes happens for the better (for some human beings to be transformed into a flower, a tree, or a fountain is preferable to the suffering or the humiliation they find

they are unable or unwilling to endure), but more often metamorphosis provides only an endless prolongation of suffering: For unrelieved horror, Arachne's fate is hard to match, but those of Scylla (14.20–80), Dryope (9.366–445), and Aesacus (11.863–922) come close. In any case, Ovid's lovers are rarely rewarded, and his artists almost always punished.

The Author and His Authors

Ovid's poem glories in its perpetual ambivalence. On the one hand, it offers an ironic promise to provide its readers with a grand narrative that will let them view the world, in all its complex unfoldings, from a stable perspective. Starting from utter chaos it ends with the perfect order that Augustus imposed on human history (which seems always to have been working its way, however hectically, toward the salvation that he alone could proffer it). On the other hand, in the wide gap between its abrupt and opaque beginning and the clarity of its salvific conclusion, the poem consists both of a fascinating jumble of people, places, and things and a deceptively smooth, yet ultimately disturbing series of broken images, a seemingly plausible representation of intelligible realities that are caught up by and disappear into the incessant, incoherent, purposeless flux that the poem posits as the really real. In the clash between these two strategies it is the grand narrative that is swallowed up into the myriad fragments that compose it and that it sought to compose. This peculiar design, at once pastiche epic and self-consuming artifact, invited, indeed required, a system of storytelling that is as original as it is complex and beguiling.

From time to time, Ovid or his chief narrator delegates his duties to roughly thirty surrogate narrators. In his primary models, the two Homers and Virgil, some of their characters undertake storytelling, but these interruptions of the chief narrative voice (the omniscient epic narrator) are for the most part few and far between (the obvious exception to this rule is Odysseus, a born raconteur). The two Homers and Virgil control their grand narratives from beginning to ending, but they permit their surrogate narrators to temporarily replace them when these substitutions serve the interests of

their plots and furnish a welcome variety of tone and perspective. Ovid's purpose and his task differ from theirs. Since, despite his hints to the contrary, he really has no grand narrative to control, he is not required to invent and maintain a traditional omniscient narrator. Instead, he can construct a sort of unreliable pseudo-omniscient narrator who, after establishing his credentials early in the poem, is free to pop in and out of the poem as his whim chooses and to play ventriloquist when his imagination has fastened on a new tale or a new protagonist and it seems proper for a new character to tell his or her own story or someone else's story. This freedom may make for some degree of disorder, but it fosters a pleasing variety of voices and vantages, and in addition to releasing him from the onerous duties which a traditional omniscient narrator would impose on him it permits him to choose whatever tone suits him in any given tale (dispassionate, skeptical, judgmental, empathetic) without worrying much if this variation in attitude does damage to a unified persona or to its coherent moral code and its omniscience. Such freedom does not mean that the inventor of this narrative strategy is committed to flippancy (ever the *poeta ludens*, the poet at play) or that he places himself beyond good and evil. This narrator cares deeply about injustice and corrupted power and inexplicable suffering, even if such concerns are never explicitly announced but instead lie veiled beneath the flux and the flow of the stories told by him or the storytellers who replace him. This freedom from omniscience means, moreover, that Ovid can concentrate on sharpening his technical skills, that he can focus his attention on inventing the short story, or, if that seems too wild a claim, on perfecting the idea of the short story.

What Callimachus did with the short story is lost to us, though we can perhaps see some of his achievements reflected in Catullus' poem on Ariadne or in Virgil's on Orpheus and Eurydice. But when we turn to Ovid it is in the range of his experiments in the representation of personality (his efforts to make his human beings as verisimilar as possible) and in the variety of his themes and tones and shades that we can see already in existence what Dante, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton found in Ovid's stories, found and loved and strove to imitate and outdo. The task that Ovid set himself—outside that of commenting on the injustices and

sorrows of the world and celebrating some of its joys—was to try to figure out how, in the best possible ways, to concentrate plausible (verisimilar) representations of important, universal human experiences in a few thousand words or less. He saw that big emotions and exemplary events could be compressed into small forms in which they could, paradoxically, sometimes become more resonant, more vivid, than would be the case if they were given larger canvases. (He might well have admired *The Satyricon* and *The Golden Ass*, but it is hard to imagine him showing much patience with the Greek novel.) He was eloquent about the human heart and its woes and blisses, he was ferociously hostile to what meddles with human happiness, but conjoint with moral passion was dedication to the succinct tale and the precise artistry it requires. (That artistry, it should be stressed, is equally in evidence when Ovid finds room for short stories in his *Ars Amatoria* and in the *Fasti*, his unfinished poem about the Roman calendar.)

“A big book is a big bore,” said Callimachus. In Ovid’s version of this prescription for stories that elude boredom, the briefer the tale, the more vivid the core of its design, and the more vivid that core, the closer comes the tale to truths about the human mind and heart that it has fastened on. The scores of brief stories that combine to make up Ovid’s sad and funny counter-epic satisfy Poe’s recipe for a successful short story: in their economy of detail and minute particulars and in the stylized compression that marks their exposition and resolution they provide “a unity of effect or impression” (as when the arrow pierces the bull’s-eye). This doesn’t mean that we should be willing to give up the *Iliad* or *Paradise Lost*, that we can get along without *Moby Dick* or *War and Peace*. It means rather that Ovid (and Poe) offer us alternative styles of pleasure and cognition, that they furnish us with perspectives that can challenge the wider, larger realms of feeling and form that epic and the novel open up to us.

This formula (compression, concentration on a simple, vivid impression into which all the elements of the entire narrative are gathered and firmly knotted) works its magic even when the tale turns out to be, on rereadings, complex and ambiguous. The hero Cephalus tells some strangers the story of how he lost his wife Procris and then won her back and then lost her again, this time forever. This

is a tragic tale of jealousy and infidelity, one in which Cephalus' efforts to relate what really happened to him and his wife seem to unfold with admirable simplicity and impeccable honesty. Early one ordinary morning, two months after his marriage, Cephalus went out to hunt (his favorite pastime), and was seen and seized (raped) by Aurora, goddess of the dawn (7.768 ff.). The goddess has her way with him, but, faithful to his Procris in mind if not in body, he keeps singing her praises to Aurora. She becomes irritated with this pillow talk, and sends him back home, but not before she has planted doubts in his mind (so he claims) about his wife's fidelity. Having decided to test her, he slips into a disguise and attempts to seduce her by promising generous monetary rewards. At last he names a price that makes her hesitate to say no again (or so he thinks). When he reveals himself in triumph, she leaves him (out of shame, he thinks) and goes off into the mountains to become a devotee of Diana, goddess of the hunt and of chastity. Having become remorseful (how long it took for him to become so is left vague), he asks her forgiveness and begs her to return to him. Won over by his pleas, she goes home with him and gives him two marvelous gifts that Diana had given her: a hound that cannot be outrun (7.834–36) and a javelin that goes "Straight to the target, no luck involved, / And comes back bloodied all on its own" (7.748–49). After her return, husband and wife enjoy several years of wedded bliss when, one ordinary day, Cephalus begins hunting once again. He gets into the habit of finding himself a shady place to relax when tired out by the hunt and of speaking with fervent gratitude to the breeze (Aura) that refreshes him. Someone overhears this passionate speech and reports it to Procris. After first refusing to believe what she has been told, she ends by going off to see for herself the truth of the matter. She hears him speaking like a lover to Aura. He hears the rustle of falling leaves coming from the place where she has concealed herself and hurls his javelin at the animal that he thinks lurks there. She cries out, and he, recognizing her voice, rushes to her as she tries to pull the javelin from her breast. As he attempts vainly to staunch her wound, she begs him never to replace her with Aura. Grief-stricken, he understands how she came to confuse the breeze with a goddess (Aura/Aurora), and watches her expire:

While her eyes could still focus on something,
 She looked at me, and breathed out on my lips
 Her unfortunate spirit, but as she died
 Her face at last seemed to be free from care.

(7.953–56)

It would seem she bestows on him a final, dying kiss. Is it possible that he imagines she is smiling up at him?

It is hard not to take from this tangled tale the comforting, satisfying image of this grieving, unfortunate, and *innocent* young husband. That image blossoms vividly from the final scene when Cephalus embraces the corpse of Procris, faithful, loving, but jealous. This is the definitive picture that this teller of his own tale has of himself, it is the idea (the truth) toward which all the events of the story *as he selects and judges them* have been inevitably propelled. If we are not moved (as Ovid tries to move us) to reread and rethink this teller and his tale, this image-truth is what our memory may well recall of it.

But that final (unique, simple) image is deceptive. For all Cephalus' efforts to make sense of what he has done and what has happened to him, when we examine the discrepancies in the tale he tells, we begin to suspect that this apparently reliable narrator is utterly incapable of telling it "the way it really happened." Supreme among the author's substitute authors, he is not unreliable because he is lying; he cannot be trusted because he has revised and refurbished his alibis so frequently (the technical term here is *confabulation*), he has told and retold his story so often for decades, that he now believes it absolutely. He did enjoy his rape by Aurora (and how long did it go on?); he did not manage to shake Procris' fidelity (she left him in anger at his duplicity and mistrust); and, strangest lapse of all, he did not remember that the unerring javelin had not stayed stuck in his wife's wound but had instead returned to him, dripping with blood, as it always did, as it was always fated to do. What actually happened was: hearing her cry, his magic javelin in his hand, he rushed toward the voice he recognized, and he could not bear what he found. Still less could he endure what he afterward came to see as he pondered that image of himself and his wife and uncovered, beneath it, the pattern of egotism and selfishness that produced it

and that destroyed her life and ruined his. Out of his sorrow, guilt, and self-hatred he had evolved a story, an elaborate alibi, that he could almost live with and could not stop retelling. The tale of Cephalus could easily have been told by the omniscient narrator, but that direct version would entirely lack the complex ironies of Cephalus' efforts to retell, to revise, and to hide his real story. Placed in the mouth and mind of Cephalus, his story combines Ovid's gift for designing the simple, single effect with his equally fertile capacity for the ironic deconstruction of simplicities (sometimes the stories retain their simplicities, sometimes they yield their simplicities to the poet's ironic scalpel).

What it shares with all his stories is his handling of character. Cephalus, like all the characters in all the stories, is constructed from a careful selection of plausible psychological details, so exact in their probings that a Schnitzler or a Wharton might envy them. No less crucially, we believe in the conflicted, complex voice of Cephalus (as we believe in Medea's or Byblis' or Myrrha's) because its rhetorical precision and the illusions that it creates are at once psychologically convincing (this is, in accordance with Aristotle's prescription, the kind of thing such a person would say in such a situation) and artistically beguiling (this person is saying things with a sort of elegance, clarity, and passion that is *not* what we are likely to hear in life, in the real world). That oxymoronic fusion of the real and the imaginary is near the heart of fiction, and, in the creation of his people and their voices, Ovid is among its supreme masters.

W. R. Johnson
University of Chicago