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Backstories and Knowledge in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Classics

by

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Backstories and Knowledge in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

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ABSTRACT

Backstories and Knowledge in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

by

Maria Leventi

In this dissertation, I read three story *clusters* from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* through the intersection of temporality and (characters' and readers') knowledge. My reading is based on the importance, to Ovid's account, of sensory recognition, focalization, or cognitive understanding, on the one hand, and on the other of temporality and *pastness*, or a narrator's tendency to flash back to a previous moment in narrative time.

I propose that in the *Metamorphoses* temporal schemes are more complex than a simple present-past binary. Thus, I introduce the concept of a *backstory*, or of a temporal level situated at two removes from the main narrative. I also suggest that the interaction between different temporal levels may be reconstructed in different ways by readers and characters. Our reading of *clusters* is enriched if we compare the fullness of information we receive through reading to the limited information available to characters about previous levels.

In composing the dissertation I went through the following steps. First, I briefly mapped out each story *cluster* based on its inclusion of a *present*, a *past*, and a *backstory* level. I then explored the ways in which knowledge about one level may (not) pass along to characters of a posterior level, as well as the tension between the methods of unlocking their past that are available to the characters and the act of reading, on which we readers base our information.

Chapters II and III focus on two such character methods: visual perception in the Bacchus/Minyads *cluster* and information transmission in the *Little Aeneid cluster*. In the

former, the links in the chain of visual recognition limit characters' understanding of (a past that has shaped) their present circumstances — but there is a way of reconciling characters' perception with the narrator's statements. In the latter, I explore two cycles of information transmission about (repetitive) danger: a *backstory-to-past* unsuccessful one and a *past-to-present* successful one, which then helps characters navigate their *future*. The dependence of such success on the availability of informers shows the relative reliability of the method itself, and their marginal identity may be a comment on Ovid's own epic marginality. In chapter IV (Ceres *cluster*, "Proserpina" and "Erysichthon") I examine a case of non-contiguous *backstory* and *past*, and suggest that knowledge about the connection of personified divinities to hunger does not cross levels. Moreover, we may detect Ovid's pervasive tendency to detach characters from any construction of meaning, even within the same temporal level — thus, the reader-character tension reaches its peak.

A story *cluster* thus emerges as a narrative unit stretching over three temporal layers and displaying thematic coherence. In each *cluster*, the ironical lack of characters' knowledge turns them into rival narrators, who conjure up the possibility of another story than the dominant one. Conversely, repetition may cause the fusion of two stories into one, rather than the derivation of two stories from one. But, regardless of different plot possibilities, each *cluster* centers around one thematic question, or one way of understanding the world (visual recognition, information transmission based on repeatability, and different divine identities). Thus, I introduce a twofold macroscopic reading based on *clusters*: a temporal one, i.e. different story *clusters* governed each by its own timeline, and a thematic one, i.e. all *clusters* (here examined) pose a knowledge-related question.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction	1
A.	Setting the scene — The proem	1
B.	Bibliography overview	11
C.	Putting the pieces together: definition of a <i>backstory</i> and questions of method	21
D.	Structure of the dissertation.....	34
II.	The Minyads/Bacchus	41
A.	Introduction.....	41
B.	Visual perception and <i>backstories</i> in “Pyramus and Thisbe”	48
C.	Ninus and Semiramis: Location and a parallel <i>backstory</i>	65
D.	Vision and the three Minyads’ inset stories	73
E.	Vision in another inset tale: Acoetes and/as Bacchus.....	83
F.	Vision and the main Minyad story	93
G.	Conclusions.....	99
III.	Little Aeneid	105
A.	Introduction.....	105
B.	Macareus as a narrator: Circe’s repetitive methods of punishment	115
C.	Achaemenides’ story: the Cyclops and twofold repetition	127
D.	Survivor-type versus memory-type <i>backstories</i>	130
E.	<i>Backstories</i> , prophecies, and the Cumaean Sibyl	136
F.	Felicitous information transmission and the decentralization of narrative	148
G.	Circe’s, Canens’, and Ovid’s <i>carmina</i>	154
H.	Ovid’s stance towards tradition	170
I.	Conclusions.....	179
IV.	Ceres	183
A.	Introduction.....	183
B.	Food consumption and hunger.....	191
C.	Scythia as a link between <i>past</i> story and <i>backstory</i>	199
D.	Two different configurations of starvation	206
E.	Ceres/Demeter’s and <i>Fames</i> ’ fields of control	211

F. Achelous as abstraction and metapoetic marker	218
G. Ceres/Demeter as metapoetic marker; genre in “Proserpina” and “Erychthon”	223
H. Springs as metapoetic markers, and aquatic/generic intermingling.....	231
I. Achelous as a narrator and the notion of boundaries	239
J. The need to impose an end.....	250
K. Characters and knowledge; conclusions	256
V. Conclusions	274
VI. Works cited.....	295

I. Introduction

A. *Setting the scene* — *The proem*

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* contains over 60 inset stories, a majority of which refer to their own past. This observation is so obvious that it hardly needs restatement. Put in a slightly different way, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and its multiple narrators, are interested both in temporality generally and in references to the past in particular. This interest is evinced in the longer textual space dedicated to the distant mythical past than to Ovid's relatively recent historical past; but also in the frequent occurrence of inserted stories which flash back to the (distant) past¹ compared to their narrating instance.² The Ovidian narrator's interest in *pastness* is also displayed in the premise that multiple animal and plant species are the results of human transformations, and therefore that a whole different world was once in existence — a world to which the work constantly harks back. The poem's manifold interest in

¹ An inset flashback story rearranges events as they took place “in the story” into a different order “in the narrative” — thus, if event A happened before event B, they might be narrated in a B-A order instead of an A-B order, if a character of event B opens a parenthesis during which they recount event A as an event of the past. Thus, inset flashback stories (which could also be termed retrospections, or *analepseis*) constitute an instance of narratological anachrony (Genette 1983, 35-79). The opposite of a flashback is a flash-forward (anticipation or *prolepsis*); while a flashback refers to the past of its narrating instance, a flash-forward refers to its future. The *Metamorphoses* features impressively more flashbacks than flash-forwards — which is not necessary, since its unlimited timespan might have put some stories in the mouth of anticipatory, rather than retrospective, internal narrators. Hence my assumption that Ovid's poem is pointedly, and variously, interested in *pastness*. For a practical guide to Genette's narrative theory and its application in various (mostly embedded) *Metamorphoses* stories see Nikolopoulos 2004.

² For the “narrating instance”, and its temporal relation to the inset story it includes, see Genette (1983) 212-231.

pastness would then justify any scholar's simultaneous excitement and trepidation before *pastness* and inset flashback stories in the work: excitement, because such stories are an ever-fruitful motivation for further readings of the *Metamorphoses*; trepidation, because this pool of stories may be considered too inexhaustible to be covered by a single contribution.

Therefore, in this dissertation I will be exploring the function of *pastness* and inset flashback stories in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* — but simultaneously the scope of such an examination will be limited, or only a subset of inset flashback stories will form the core of its material. This subset will be defined, and marked off from the larger pool of inset flashback stories, later in this introduction. At the same time, in this dissertation *pastness* and temporality will be linked to another interpretive thread: that of the tension between characters' knowledge and understanding about their own world, and the parallel knowledge of readers. This latter thread is based on the pivotal role, both of vision or sensory perception, and of intellectual understanding in general, across multiple *Metamorphoses* stories — the very versatility, mutability, or instability of the universe envisaged by Ovid requires that the characters constantly (re)acquaint themselves with their circumstances, and that readers follow along in this process. *Pastness* may thus intersect with knowledge, in the sense that both characters and readers (may be presumed to) gain insight into a new (or present) situation by glancing back at a previous (or past) situation and comparing the two.

But before delineating in more detail the interest of scholarship in narrative, temporality and knowledge, as well as the scope of the dissertation, a reading of the first lines of the work may be helpful in suggesting that Ovid is deeply interested in *pastness* even as soon as the *Metamorphoses* starts — even when there is no ostensible textual (before the first lines of the poem) or chronological (before the creation of the universe) past to flash back to. Thus my

reading, in the main body of the dissertation, through a lens of narrative and *pastness* is seen to be consistent with a tendency introduced by Ovid in the very beginning of the poem.

The proem of the *Metamorphoses* sets the reader up to expect an exposition of forms changed into new bodies (*In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas / corpora, Met. 1.1-2*), as well as an interaction of the gods both with the poem and (as characters) with its subject matter ([...] *di, coeptis (nam vos mutastis et illa)*³ / *adspirate meis, primaque ab origine mundi / ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen, Met. 1.2-4*). Within the same brief proem, the timeline sketched out for this exposition is introduced as *primaque ab origine mundi [...] ad mea tempora*. These first four lines are thus rich in significance for what will follow. What interests me here is the conception of time and temporality, both the p(ro)em's relationship with chronology and the intersection of time and narrative — and more specifically with the idea of *pastness*, or of events (viewed from the present as) already completed in the past.

What the text superficially says is that the inclination of Ovid's/the narrator's mind is to talk about transformations. This means that the work is about to start, hence the traditional invocation to the gods to inspire such a beginning. In terms of temporality, though, the second line presents us with a doubly intriguing conception of time: first, the *Metamorphoses* presupposes an autobiographical, or literary-historical, Ovidian elegiac past; and second, the

³ Throughout this dissertation I follow Richard Tarrant's OCT edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2004). Tarrant *ad loc.* (*Met. 1.2*) adopts the writing *illa* (sc. *coepta*), which he traces back to minor medieval manuscripts (*U*³ or Vaticanus Urbinas (corrected by the *correctores Gothici*) of the 11th century CE, and *e*^v or Erfurtensis of the 12th century CE) and an 1894 conjecture by Lejay (defended by Luck 1958 and Kenney 1976, see footnote 5 below), whereas the ancient manuscripts unanimously read *illas* (sc. *formas*) instead.

term *coeptis* presents the *Metamorphoses* both as taking off right as he is uttering these very words and as having already (in a past situated a few seconds before!) started.

The first point is more straightforward. On the one hand, Ovid implicitly identifies himself as a quite seasoned poet. At the same time, he is perhaps staging the generic change from his previous elegiac output to (a sort of) epic. This is especially the case if one reads *nam vos mutastis et illa* (the antecedent being *coeptis*) in line 2: on this reading, the object of the divinely caused transformations is Ovid's poetic products, his undertakings. This change may be conceived as a reversal of Cupid's previous transformation of the epic that Ovid had supposedly started composing into elegy, through the theft of one metrical foot (that was the fiction of *Amores* 1.1).⁴ During Ovid's self-fashioned life, a (perhaps never composed) epic was once turned into elegy, which in turn is "now" being transformed back into a *sui generis* epic. In this way, the beginning of a work is already temporally situated *in* (autobiographical) *medias res*, or there is always a conceivable past predating it — this chain of pastness may go back even further. On the other hand, we may read *nam vos mutastis et illas* (i.e. *formas*), which would be a less self-reflexive, more literal construal of the line: the gods have brought about transformations of forms into new bodies, presumably because gods have supernatural abilities. The reading *illa* has by now more or less been established as the preferable one⁵ — but since the question has been posed in the past, perhaps the alternative *illas* may remain as a latent possibility. If, therefore, we choose to oscillate between the two readings, we may

⁴ Kenney (1976) 49-50 and Gildenhard/Zissos (2000) 68-70, who deploy the term *anti-recusatio* (2000, 74).

⁵ To this clear preference have contributed mainly Luck (1958) 499-500, Kenney (1976) 49ff., Tarrant (1982) 342ff., Knox (1986) 9-10, Kovacs (1987) 458 ff., and Anderson (1993) 109-110.

end up with a twofold interpretation of divinely brought-about transformations: the self-reflexive change of poetic genres (which is supposedly taking place as the *Metamorphoses* starts) may be a parallel to the literal transformation of bodies to be recounted in the following books. The divine invocation in the case of *illas (formas)* would simply align with, or result from, the idea that divine beings habitually transform themselves, or other beings; in the case of *illa (coepta)* it would be in line with poetic tradition (harking as far back as the *Iliad*'s and the *Odyssey*'s invocations of the Muses to inspire new poetic beginnings).

This is then a way in which even the beginning of the poem presupposes something that has taken place in the (literary-historical, or quasi-autobiographical) past. But the presence of *coeptis* in line 2 is even more ambiguous. It could refer to nothing more than the work that has just gotten under way (which is implicitly being compared to Ovid's previous poems), but there might be additional connotations to it. The traditional invocation of divinities for inspiration is, as expected, placed towards the beginning of (a section of) the work, but specifically the word *coepta* rarely appears so close to the beginning of extant Latin poems. This is because the term self-reflexively refers back to the part of the work itself that has already been composed — and Ovid is perhaps being playfully ingenious by referring to little more than a line as his already composed poetic undertaking.⁶ But this formulation may also set us up to view the *Metamorphoses* as always presupposing a past, however short, to which each utterance (even its second line) looks back.

⁶ Heath (2011-2012) 199-201. Since the gods have apparently appeared as soon as he started composing the *Metamorphoses*, "Ovid" has not had the time for a fully-fledged invocation — the vocative *di* is all he uttered when he saw them coming, but still he binds them to his undertaking, since they inspired it before even being invoked.

The very first lines might, then, direct the reader to envisage a type of past in terms of the poem's composition itself: although these are the very first words of the *Metamorphoses*, there is still notionally an autobiographical, or a literary-historical, event preceding even *Metamorphoses* 1.1 (or *Met.* 1.2 already looks back to *Met.* 1.1 as its past). Of course, as the poem moves along we realize that its subject matter also concerns Ovid's (distant) past. It is only the last (the fifteenth) book which brings us down to the Ovidian, or Augustan, present. In this sense, the entire *Metamorphoses* is a huge flashback⁷ — although the poem does not reveal the relative distribution of narrative space to distant mythical events vis-à-vis events of Ovid's recent past. Finally, by the time the modern (and partly the ancient) reader ends up interacting with the *Metamorphoses*, everything, even the Augustan times, even the last lines of book 15, belong in the past.

What the poem states clearly is the starting and finishing points of the work, from the creation of the world down to the Augustan times, as well as perhaps the organization of the corresponding narrative material. The parallel configuration of the *Metamorphoses* as both a *carmen perpetuum* and a *carmen deductum* may have implications, not only for the composite generic identity of the poem to follow, with *perpetuum* bringing it closer to traditional epic and *deductum* to the anti-epic (Callimachean or neoteric) register, but also for

⁷ For a distinction between *subsequent* narration (the events narrated have already taken place), *simultaneous* narration (the events are taking place during their narration), and *prior* narration (the events narrated are expected to take place) see De Jong (2007) 2 and cf. flashbacks vs. flash-forwards in footnote 1. This distinction may be posited not only for narrators, but also for authors: in our case Ovid is composing the *Metamorphoses* after (most of) the events recounted are supposed to have taken place (historically or fictionally, it makes little difference).

the order of stories across its books. But here the reader may be entering somewhat shakier ground.

If the term *carmen perpetuum* translates into Latin the Callimachean phrase ἐν ἄεισμα διηγεκέξ (*Aetia* 1.3 Pf.), Ovid might be imagining such a poem as, not just long and dealing with heroic subject matter, but also linearly organized across a particularly long stretch of time.⁸ This is the traditional type of epic, one which Callimachus himself had rejected. By combining the idea of a *carmen perpetuum* with the verb *deducite*, however, Ovid seems to be introducing Callimachus into the *Metamorphoses*' program as well, in dialogic opposition, or in conversation, with the non-Callimachean type of epic.⁹ If a *carmen deductum* is the opposite of a *carmen perpetuum* not only in its length, style and subject matter, but also in its structure, Ovid may here be heralding the combination of two types of poetic structures as well.¹⁰ Especially if we keep in mind the potentially thematic, rather than strictly

⁸ I mostly agree with the thesis of Heath (2011-2012) 204-205, that *perpetuum* does not securely point either to narrative linearity or to thematic unity — thus, not only is there tension between *perpetuum* and *deductum* as binary opposites, but the terms themselves might be too difficult to define. Sometimes even the association of *perpetuum* with epic and *deductum* with “smaller” forms may be questioned: Grewing (1993) 249-250, for example, sees Ovid as parodying epic while working within epic, just as he turned both love elegy and didactic epic on their heads with his *Amores* and *Ars Amatoria* respectively.

⁹ As first analyzed by Kenney (1976) 51-52 — he also connected Callimachus and Ovid through Virgil's *deductum carmen* (see below). Already Otis (1966) 45-90 had tied *perpetuum* to an epic third-person (non-visible) narrator and to an ostensible cause-and-effect chain of events, while he also ascribed to Ovid a Callimachean/neoteric tendency to generate empathy for his characters' feelings (without mentioning *deductum*). See also Hofmann (1986) for binary settings in books 5, 6 and 10, where Ovid's inclusion of both types of *carmina*, and his preference for *deductum*, are evident. For the opposite opinion, i.e. that *deducite* just has the meaning of “bring down to my own times”, and thus is perfectly compatible, not in tension, with *perpetuum*, see Kovacs (1987) 461-462. For the various metaphors implicit in *deducere* see Heath (2011) 91-92.

¹⁰ Knox (1986) 10 was perhaps the first to observe that Callimachus' διηγεκέξ does not, in and of itself, denote excessive length. According to him, it need not refer to a “unified

chronological, arrangement of the aetiological stories recounted by the Callimachean narrator in the *Aetia*, Ovid may be saying (through *deducite*) that the common thread running across the *Metamorphoses* is precisely transformation (just as Callimachus' is aetiology), and that theme rather than plot is his main organizing principle.

Regardless of its linguistic opposition to *διηγεκῆς* (which may be debatable because of the different languages), the Ovidian verb *deducite* also directs the reader back to the phrase *deductum carmen* itself, as attested in yet another Callimachean-type poem: Silenus' song in Virgil's Sixth *Eclogue*. The poetic "I" (named Tityrus) starts the poem off through an *Aetia*-type epiphany of Apollo and a concomitant *recusatio*. Both of them sketch out the Callimachean associations of *deductum*, and thereby of Virgil's/Tityrus' poetic self-fashioning: *cum canerem reges et proelia, Cynthius aurem | vellit et admonuit: "pastorem, Tityre, pinguis | pascere oportet ovis, deductum dicere carmen."* (*Ecl.* 6.3-5). Silenus' song that follows afterwards has a cosmogonic beginning, but the rest of its stories appear in the form of a (non-chronological) catalogue, with only very loose (amorous-bucolic) connections between its constituent items. Notwithstanding the thematic affinities between different (neighboring) stories, each of them is considered self-sufficient and detachable from its surrounding tales, perhaps because of the catalogue structure. Thus, if Ovid's

plot", but to a "coherent structure" (perhaps a thematic structure). This is interlinked with Knox's tendency a few pages later (1986, 13) to detect superficial organization but also a great degree of fluidity in both theme and chronology. Conversely, Heyworth (1994) 74 thinks that Callimachus is rejecting precisely the length of his adversaries' poems, not the heroic subject matter or the thematic continuity implied by *διηγεκῆς*. Yet another opinion is represented by Cameron (1995) 360, with *perpetuum* seen as positively valued by Ovid himself but *διηγεκῆς* as connoting haphazard babbling and lack of organization. Even the absence of *ἔν* from the Ovidian rendition might imply that the Ovidian definition of *perpetuum* oscillates between unity of theme (like traditional epic) and a lack of a cause-and-effect scheme (unlike traditional epic). See Mensching 1969.

Metamorphoses is supposed to follow a model provided by (Callimachus and) Virgil, the stories that comprise his work are conceived as self-enclosed entities, with (at best) thematic links between them — but without a cause-and-effect relationship from one to the next, or a clear chronological sequence that creates at least an illusion of cause and effect.¹¹ What unmistakably binds the Virgilian stories together is that they are subordinated, or embedded, into the overarching story of Silenus singing to the shepherds and nymph who have tied him up in playful shackles (*Ecl.* 6.13-30), much as the various aetiological stories are embedded into an overarching thread of Callimachus' dialogue with the Muses.¹² If Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is both "epic" and "neoteric" (as inspired by both Callimachus and Virgil), chronological linearity may thus be combined with thematic coherence and structural embeddedness to produce the end result.¹³

¹¹ A catalogue poem need not necessarily be made up of stories embedded within an overarching tale — therefore, thematic repetitiveness does not need to coincide with narrative embeddedness, which however seems to be the case in both Callimachus (at least *Aetia* 1-2) and Virgil's *Eclogue* 6. If we throw into the mix the transitions between successive stories, the problem gets even more compounded. For example, the Ovidian catalogue-type *deductum* poetry envisaged by Kenney (1976) 55 is superficially structured around metamorphosis, but then the transitions themselves show the inability of the topic to create clear structure. There is still some unity to be detected — but narrative embedding is not mentioned at all. Lyne (1984) 23-25 sees a discontinuous narrative technique and a concentration on the "narrative periphery" (the embedded stories) instead of the overarching one as the core of Callimachus' more overt, and Ovid's rather more subtle, "art pour l'art".

¹² Incidentally, Virgil's introduction of Silenus is couched within another story, that of "Virgil"/Tityrus wanting to send his poet friend Varus a poem in the neoteric mode (*Ecl.* 6.1-12). For the multiple embedded pasts-within-pasts, and the multiple first-person speakers, all of whom may alternately be taking over Virgil's position as poet, see Kania (2016) 97-107.

¹³ For a similar, more focused, discussion of *Met.* 3, or the Theban cycle, as representative both of a *carmen perpetuum* (a genealogical chain of the Theban royal family) and of a *carmen deductum* (with an emphasis on each protagonist's story) see Feldherr (1997) 40-41.

Whether the combination of *deductum* and *perpetuum* signals a combined emphasis on narrative linearity and thematic relevance/narrative embeddedness or not, the idea of *pastness* is quite evident as early as the proem of the *Metamorphoses* (although a proem may logically be assumed to have no past to look back to). But before I go on to explore in more depth how this notion of *pastness* is more specifically borne out through the *backstory* structure, a last word is in order about *pastness* in the introductory lines of the Ovidian account. Not only the proem, but also the very first lines of the narrative proper (the cosmogony) invite the reader to cast a retrospective glance on the past from a later perspective, instead of moving in a straightforward linear manner.

Put very simply, *Met.* 1.5-7 (*Ante mare et terras et quod tegit omnia caelum / unus erat toto naturae vultus in orbe, / quem dixere chaos*) do not say “chaos was the first state of the earth”. Instead, they say “before the current state of the earth, chaos was what it looked like”. Thus, the reader is prompted to think back to the original cosmos from their contemporary temporal standpoint, or at least from a standpoint where the current makeup of the world (with sky, land and sea separated from one another) makes more sense than chaos. Although technically no inset flashback story is involved here, there is this retrospective consideration of a “past” situation from a “current” situation. Even a few lines later, the *ante* of line 1.5 reappears in a slightly different guise, as a *non [...] adhuc* (*nullus adhuc mundo praebebat lumina Titan, Met.* 1.10). Once again, the third-person narrator does not start from the beginning, or does not immerse the reader immediately into a primordial moment in time, but looks back at this moment through a moment perceived as more recent, by means of an implicit flashback. The third-person narrator thus takes for granted the separated makeup of

the universe, and introduces *pastness* from the very first words, the ones recounting the creation of the world itself.

B. Bibliography overview

Now is the time to move from Ovid's own thoughts to thoughts on Ovid. I have signaled the relationship of the following dissertation with temporality (and more specifically flashbacks, or *pastness*) and knowledge. Such issues are also linked to the *Metamorphoses* through narrative and structure. Characters live in narrative time, which is also tied to the narrative organization, or the narrative structure, of the *Metamorphoses* — a problem which becomes compounded by the potential detachability of *Metamorphoses* stories from one another. Such an organization may at times be conditioned by temporality; at other times it may be more thematic. Thus, the question of *pastness* specifically in this work is inextricably linked to the issue of internal narrative time, and of narrative time's relationship to narrative organization. The latter in particular, or the organizing principle(s) behind the *Metamorphoses*, are not easy to reconstruct. Therefore, internal temporality, to the extent that it overlaps with, or contributes to, narrative organization is hard to decipher.

Both temporality (and narrative structure) and knowledge (although perhaps not in conjunction with each other) have been the object of multiple scholarly works on the *Metamorphoses*, on which I will be drawing in the following pages. The guises under which such questions have been posed over the last three decades are multiple — the headings, or interpretive questions, under which I divide the scholarly pieces are by necessity somewhat schematic. Temporality may overlap with narratological embedding, or knowledge with focalization. Still, these questions are indispensable in setting the scene, so to speak.

1) Is the *Metamorphoses* a poem with an internal structure?¹⁴ Which implications

does the theme of transformation have for the structure of the poem as a whole? Is the premise of a world in constant flux merely reflected on a very loosely structured hexametric

¹⁴ Older, or shorter, studies of structure in the work: Steiner 1958 mostly believes in the theory of disjointed *epyllia*, but acknowledges a thematic progression within a “frame-narrative”, as well as perhaps intentionally repeated terms from one story to the next; Swanson 1959 argues for slight switches in motifs that tie together adjacent *epyllia* (which he does not thus see as arbitrarily connected); Otis 1966 combines the idea of chronological cause-and-effect linearity (epic, *perpetuum*, often with Augustan/political undertones) with humane empathy imported from elegy and Hellenistic poetry (perhaps *deductum*); Buchheit 1966 sees the ring-compositional associations of books 1 and 15 with the Augustan times as holding the entire work together; Segal 1969 uses the *locus amoenus* as a recurring spatial setting that creates tonal unity, which however Ovid turns on its head by associating it with the emergence of (sexual) violence (its inherent sensuality opens it up to the possibility of witnessing, or causing, the satisfaction of aggressive erotic instincts — the theme is then taken up again by Hinds 2002); Davis 1969 explores one *mode* of the crime/punishment *constant* (his terms): informing on a transgression and transformation of the informant as punishment — its different configurations are one of the forces that lend unity to the poem; Coleman 1971 points out the chronological and narrative linearity of the beginning and end of the poem, and detects thematic patterns (e.g. love that dooms one partner to destruction, defiance of the divine in love, or unconventional love preferences) that tie together embedding and embedded stories mainly in the Orpheus story *cluster* — thus, he establishes most clearly (1971, 471) the interconnection of chronological linearity (*perpetuum*) and thematic embeddedness (*deductum*); a similar task of identifying recurrent abstract motifs that link together shorter sections has been undertaken within specific books (assuming that a book constitutes a thematic unit), by Hofmann 1971 in book 6 and Crabbe 1981 in book 8; Galinsky 1975 (79-110) rejects metamorphosis as the topic of the hexameter poem (according to him, love is the actual topic, and metamorphosis functions merely as a metaphor, insofar as it produces a poem of constant variation), and focuses on the thematic, rather than the (semblance of a) chronological, link between subsequent stories — at some points mentions of “story groups” recur; Gordesiani 1985 comes up with three narrative units, which he sees as governed by the combination of thematic motifs in symmetrically clear ways (the motifs are also common across his three structural units); Barkan 1986 conducts a serial reading of blocks of stories, from the creation of the cosmos and its constituent elements, to the conspicuous influence of universal irrational forces upon mankind, to the transcendence of (not physical but) socially sanctioned categories, to the emergence of artificers who may shape their destinies for themselves, to metamorphoses into one’s “essential nature” through deification, to Rome’s permanence; Heath 1990-1991 takes Segal’s sexual-attack-in-a-*locus-amoenus* theme to a self-reflexive level, by considering Diana a close reader of the *Metamorphoses* — so close indeed that she fails to understand her own incompatibility with violated nymphs and Actaeon’s inherent innocence.

poem, or are some of the poem's organizational principles too important to overlook?

Quintilian (*Illa vero frigida et puerilis est in scholis adfectatio, ut ipse transitus efficiat aliquam utique sententiam et huius velut praestigiae plausum petat, ut Ovidius lascivire in Metamorphosesin solet, quem tamen excusare necessitas potest res diversissimas in speciem unius corporis colligentem*, *Inst.Or.* 4.1.77) was perhaps the first critic to attribute a haphazard, arbitrary construction to the material of the *Metamorphoses* — the question, although significantly altered, still keeps readers engaged. This question runs parallel to that of the presence of a (more or less) unified narrator with a (more or less) consistent identity across the *Metamorphoses*. In other words, Ovid is the historical composer of the *Metamorphoses*, but is his overarching, so-called third-person narrator uniform, or does (s)he vary with different stories?

Joseph Solodow generally argues against a clear organizing principle of the *Metamorphoses* stories.¹⁵ The only exceptions are the unifying presence of the Ovidian narrator and the permanence underlining a transformation, i.e. the principle that some features remain constant (become literalized, or “clarified”, in his terms) despite an ostensible outward change. Solodow sees Ovid as breaking radically with epic tradition through his choice of flux as paradoxically the only constant element of his narrative, and through his disavowal both of divine providence and of overarching moral principles.

Garth Tissol conducts a structural analysis of shorter or longer textual units, which results in their correlation with the principle of transformation or never-abating flux.¹⁶ From syllepsis and linguistic puns, to disjointed narrative outcomes that thwart intertextual

¹⁵ Solodow 1988.

¹⁶ Tissol 1997.

expectations, to aetiology that always brings to mind the violent emotions leading to a metamorphosis, Tissol shows that Ovid's fluid discourse is representative of his subject matter (transformation) on multiple levels.

Stephen Wheeler makes another attempt to construe a consistent identity for the narrator of the *Metamorphoses*.¹⁷ There are two aspects to that identity, one pertaining to the medium of presentation and the other to (loosely defined) politics. According to Wheeler, the concept of metamorphosis is reflected in the mutation of the text itself during the oral recitation that the Ovidian external narrator imagines for himself (while the internal one is more narrowly textual). The political strand of the argument is that the external narrator often undermines the statements of the internal one, especially when it comes to submission to any type of authority: notwithstanding the internal narrator's often rebellious stance, the external one implicitly advises obedience.

In yet another monograph, Stephen Wheeler establishes organizational principles governing some parts of the *Metamorphoses*: by marking out a cluster of stories as thematically consistent around the same pattern, but also by pointing out a progression in the section of the pattern that receives the most attention in each story (he terms the former "repetition" and the latter "narrative continuity"), he accounts for the order of stories in both the beginning and the end of the lengthy poem.¹⁸

2) How is time and temporality relevant to the *Metamorphoses*? One potential organizing principle may overlap with chronology, or temporality. Ovid's expansive hexameter poem, which professes to record universal history from the beginning of time

¹⁷ Wheeler 1999.

¹⁸ Wheeler 2000.

down to his own days, has invited the exploration of temporality: in terms of “scientific, objective” chronography, in its connection with the genre of universal history, and with regard to its own internal temporal order.

Starting from the latter, the chronological breakdown of the *Metamorphoses* into three pentads by M.M. Crump,¹⁹ with each pentad covering the period of gods, heroes and men respectively, is a milestone in the study of the work’s internal chronology. Rudolf Rieks takes this argument further, and suggests that each pentad is closed off with a metapoetically important figure, or a character functioning within the narrative as a poet-substitute (the Muses, Orpheus, and Pythagoras).²⁰

From the edited volume *Ovidian Transformations. Essays on the Metamorphoses and its Reception* (eds. Hardie, Barchiesi, Hinds, 1999), two contributions in particular will intersect with my analysis. Denis Feeney views the Ovidian narrator as one dispensing with conventionally agreed-upon temporal milestones (whether mythological or historical), while signaling his tendency to do so. Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos’ chapter, by contrast, highlights the deconstruction (through anachrony, temporal regression or anticipation) of logical temporal patterns that the *Metamorphoses* itself has set up — thus Ovid flags his own temporal inconsistency not as a drawback, but as yet another aspect of his distinctive poetics. In a companion piece, Gianpiero Rosati highlights the importance of Ovid’s contrived internal chronology against “real-life” chronology as a political stance against Augustus’

¹⁹ Crump (1931) 274-278.

²⁰ Rieks 1980.

world order.²¹ More recently, Joseph Farrell, based on the comparison drawn by Thomas Cole between “scientific” genealogical chronography (or universal history) and the *Metamorphoses*’ structure, uses the concept of temporal synchrony as an interpretive tool. He thus suggests that Ovid draws attention, not just to the emphasis laid by chronography on the perpetuation of important local families, but also to the limits imposed on that perpetuation (in the *Metamorphoses* itself) by transformation into non-human entities.²²

The relationship of Ovid’s extensive narrative poem, as foregrounded by the chronological starting-point and end-point introduced in the proem (*primumque ab origine mundi [...] ad mea tempora*), with the premises of universal history has been approached in various, often oppositional, ways. Ernst Schmidt rejects teleology, progress, or culmination as organizing principles predicated on chronology, glosses over any conceivable sense of the passage of time, and claims that Ovid’s purpose is mostly thematic, anthropological, and universalizing. Thus, instead of events unfolding in time and involving various characters, Schmidt sees the work as cumulatively exemplifying different (often contradictory) aspects of human nature through the metaphorical use of non-human beings, regardless of the (temporal, and, in his view, arbitrary) settings of different tales. Schmidt thus responds

²¹ Rosati 2002. For self-reflexive references of internal narrators to the pace of their own narratives (or to the relationship between time “in the story” and time “in the narrative”) see Rosati (2002) 284-286. Rosati himself, in a chapter of the *Ovidian Transformations* volume (1999, 240-253 = 2006, 334-350) points to the association, extant already in Homer, of a story’s unwinding with the processes of spinning and weaving — thus the spinning/weaving stories of the *Metamorphoses* constitute an aetiology of this association.

²² Farrell 2020; Cole 2004 (on which he expands in Cole 2008). Along similar lines, the structural importance of genealogy in the *Metamorphoses* is at the heart of Ziogas’ 2013 monograph about the intertextual resonances of Hesiod in Ovid. According to Ziogas, the ordering of mythological time is as important in Ovid as it clearly is in Hesiod’s *Catalogue of Women* — even when Ovid diverges in ideology from his predecessor, e.g. by pointing out the terror of rape as opposed to Hesiod’s naïve mention of marriage and procreation.

(mainly) to Walther Ludwig's conception of universal history as the backbone of the *Metamorphoses*.²³ But progress through time (or chronological structure) and thematic structure are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In fact, Stephen Wheeler has shown that Ovid's proem may signal the tendency of universal history (which the *Metamorphoses* purports to be) to dovetail synchrony into diachrony, by mentioning contemporaneous episodes set at different geographical locations one after the other — this technique nuances chronology, but does not violate it.²⁴ (I will argue for a similar interweaving of a temporal (through *backstory*) and a thematic (through knowledge, not through geography) reading in the pages to follow).

3) How is narratology pertinent to the *Metamorphoses*, and how may inset narratives/internal narrators be approached? Stemming from the structural and the temporal questions, another issue that has kept scholars occupied has to do with the technical narratological issue of inset narratives within the main storyline. One question along these lines is which purpose a narrative serves when placed in the mouth of an internal character narrator instead of the so-called third-person narrator; another issue is whether this choice has an impact on the audience of the narrating instance it sets up, and thus what the relationship of an inset narrative is to its surrounding overarching story.²⁵

²³ Ludwig 1965; Schmidt 1991.

²⁴ Wheeler 2002.

²⁵ A first attempt was already made by Nagle 1988, who studies love triangles in *Met.* 13 and 14, and combines the change of characters' roles in the plot with the change of their narrative identity (narrator, narratee, or narrative topic) to argue for the metapoetic significance of these love triangles to Ovid's project. A few years later, Cahoon 1996 argued for the emergence-through-the-cracks of sympathetic embedded narrators within Calliope's tale (*Met.* 5), which is generally dismissive of Proserpina's plight. Specific narratological work has also been conducted on individual inset stories, mainly employing the concept of

In two contributions, Alessandro Barchiesi expresses *aporia* at Ovid's ostensibly random choice to place a story in the mouth of an internal narrator instead of the third-person narrator.²⁶ Still, without completely overlooking Ovid as an overarching presence, he argues for the benefit of configuring differently the various localized narrators of the *Metamorphoses*: the narrating instance and the respective audience should be brought to bear on the narrator's identity and arguments as well. Sometimes Ovid is ironizing multiple aspects of his internal narrators' incompetence or internal contradictions;²⁷ at other times the internal narrators' arguments are specifically and consciously political, when they attempt to ingratiate themselves with their powerful audience.²⁸ A similar argument for the contextual politicization of internal narratives, both verbal and visual, has been put forward by Patricia Johnson.²⁹ Johnson detects a similarity between the success of artists (within the *Metamorphoses*) who indulge their audiences' arrogance (and the failure of those who do

focalization, in conjunction with either the creation of black humor (Peek 2003, on Procne in *Met.* 6) or the establishment of empathy between reader and character (Libatique 2015, on Medea in *Met.* 7).

²⁶ In other words, since the temporal span envisaged for the *Metamorphoses* is the entire history of mankind, there is no reason why any story should not constitute part of this time span, or why it should be relegated to an internal narrator who might be flashing back, or forward, outside the (unlimited) time span of the poem (Barchiesi 2002, 183).

²⁷ Barchiesi 1989 (the English version forms a chapter of Barchiesi 2001). Perhaps not coincidentally, those inconsistencies sometimes have to do with time and knowledge, e.g. the irony resulting from the fact that, if at the fall of Troy Helenus had prophesied to Aeneas about the rise of Rome (as he does in *Met.* 15), Aeneas' toils and insecurities would have been rendered trivial.

²⁸ Barchiesi 2002. The very choice of stories to narrate, whether it is presented as made by the third-person narrator or by internal narrators, may also be fitting and conscious, both in aesthetic and in political ways. See Tarrant 2005.

²⁹ Johnson 2008.

not), and Ovid the poet's wavering adherence to and detachment from Augustus' objectives (in her opinion, this stance dates back to before the poet's exile).³⁰

4) Is knowledge pertinent to the *Metamorphoses*? The inconsistencies of character narrators may lead us to consider another question that has occupied scholars in the past. The issue of what characters (are or) become aware of throughout the work has mostly been approached through the narratological lens of focalization, or by means of the question “through whose eyes does the reader view narrative events?”³¹ According to this approach, knowledge or perception is tightly linked to sensory reception: in order for a character to process, interpret, and communicate an event, whether in dialogue with another character or as an internal narrator, they have to perceive it with their senses first — one important, if not the most important, sense is vision. In some passages the viewing process is set up more clearly than in others. At any rate, it might be important to note that when a character (literally) views or (metaphorically) focalizes any event and then passes it on to the reader, this event is mediated, colored, or skewed by (Ovid and) the focalizing character. Concomitant questions are: does (a change in) focalization relativize what characters (and readers) see, and does the characters' object of vision/knowledge invite the readers' identification with them, or the readers' detachment from them?

³⁰ In a reading combining genre and (internal) narratives, Myers 1994 views the *Metamorphoses* as an aetiological confluence of “scientific” natural philosophy and Callimachean poetic exegesis of the world. An inset aetiological narrative aligns the internal narrator with such authoritative figures of didactic discourse as Lucretius' or Callimachus' *personae* in the *De Rerum Natura* and the *Aetia* respectively.

³¹ Bal (2017⁴) 145-146 defines focalization as “the relation between the vision and that which is “seen”, perceived.” She thus revises the more traditional term “point of view” or “narrative perspective” (Genette 1983, 185-189), since her term makes allowances for the frequently observed disjunction of narrative “vision” and narrative voice. “Focalization” keeps up this distinction by referring to the identity only of the *viewer*, not of the *narrator*.

Andrew Feldherr concentrates on two relevant binaries.³² One is the ambiguous priority of the (aetiological) stories related in the poem compared to the world experienced by Ovid's contemporary audience — or in other words the tension between Ovid and Augustus as simultaneous creators of artifacts professing to represent the world. The other binary is between the standpoints of a socially superior character and a marginalized or sidelined one — the reader is encouraged to alternate between the two focalizations. In both instances, literal vision and metaphorical focalization shape both a character's and a reader's conceptualization of power dynamics, in the work and in (Augustan) life.

Philip Hardie partly deploys the concept of what characters know exists in their surroundings, especially in juxtaposition to what they desire.³³ He does not limit his analysis to the *Metamorphoses* (or to vision), but he explores absence and desire (with the help of modern critical theory), both amatory and non-amatory, across Ovid's poetic output. According to Hardie, language may compensate for the characters' absent objects of desire by conjuring up figuratively whatever they miss — however, this partial compensation still leaves a lot to be desired. Thus, Hardie's reader is invited to construct two parallel *Metamorphoses* worlds through his concept of "absent presences": one world in which the characters are within reach of whatever they desire (with "presences" being more operative than "absent") and another where they know that desire is purely desire (with "absent" being more operative than "presences"). What characters know or perceive as existing in their

³² Feldherr 2010. Some preliminary remarks along the same lines are offered in Feldherr 2002.

³³ Hardie 2002.

circumstances, and to what extent that object is to be identified with what they construct as existing (although it may not exist), are relevant questions that run through the book.³⁴

On a note different from Feldherr's ritual and political reading, but more along the lines of Hardie's intersection of vision and desire, Patricia Salzman-Mitchell links gaze, focalization and narrative agency specifically with characters' gender.³⁵ The ability of male characters both to penetrate-in-viewing and to fix in time the object of their vision, as well as the alternatives available to female characters to articulate and communicate the object of their own gaze, result from Salzman-Mitchell's systematic reading of the *Metamorphoses* in conjunction with feminism and film studies.

C. Putting the pieces together: definition of a backstory and questions of method

Drawing on the Ovidian account and an extensive body of scholarship, I will be examining temporality, or *pastness*, and characters'/readers' acquisition of knowledge, in conjunction with each other. I will be articulating the oscillation between metamorphosis as order and chaos (as explored by previous scholarship) in a slightly different way. The flux of the poem may render characters less competent in understanding their present (or future) circumstances, but one of the ways in which such an understanding may be attempted is

³⁴ Similarly, Perry 1990 in her Ovid chapter explores the relativity of fictional occurrences, partly through the relativity of flawed perception and partly through the inherent flexibility of transformation (to the point of metamorphosis always being partial and statuses never being demarcated clearly). Thus, the characters' inability to perceive events or identities leads the reader to question the claims of the Ovidian narrator to representational qualities, and suggests even more poignantly the purely fictional omnipotence of Ovid the poet. We may suspend disbelief within the discursive context of the stories themselves, but such elusive boundaries may make us question categories in general.

³⁵ Salzman-Mitchell 2005.

through recourse to the past — readers may be encouraged to follow a similar path. The characters' past, of course, is not indisputably clear in all its details, and even when it is, the characters' perception of it might be fraught with various flaws; at other times knowledge is closed off to any possible character insight, and the characters are simply disconnected even from the potential of understanding. In this way, I retain the ambiguity of a poem about metamorphosis connoting both stability and instability: the tendency to reach stability is there, but this expectation is variously fulfilled or thwarted.

Knowledge gained by the characters, and simultaneously by the readers, then, will be read in conjunction with a backward glance to a past level. Ovid's interest in inset flashback stories, or stories which are inserted into the main storyline and refer to their narrating instance's past, has been acknowledged. But in this dissertation I go a step further by suggesting that there is a further level of the characters' past — within, beyond, or in comparison to inset flashback stories.

Put differently, if we adopt the temporal standpoint of the main storyline's characters, we can take this temporal level as the *present*. Of course, this perceived *present* will be selected as a springboard largely arbitrarily: it could constitute the past compared to a story of a subsequent *Metamorphoses* book, and of course the entire fifteen books (with the exception of the last part of book 15) are situated in the past compared to Ovid's time of composition. Therefore, in the following pages the *present* is defined as such only relatively, as it could alternatively (in another study) be considered the past or the future, compared to another

story posited as the present. The *present* is however always unembedded, or part of the primary third-person narration.³⁶

Taking this *present* as a starting point, an inset flashback story would take place in the *past*; and whatever is situated at a time stamp belonging in the past compared to this inset story, or in the *past of the past*, will be of particular interest to me in the following pages. The term deployed for these *past-of-the-past* stories will be that of a *backstory*, and the respective temporal level will be called the *background* level.

In other words, in this dissertation a *backstory* is a story that unfolds during the narrative time of the *background*, or during the time before that of the inset story proper. The idea of *backstory* will encompass any reference to a temporal level prior to the narrative time of the inset story itself, whether that level is immediately prior to the narrative time of the inset story or it reaches back into a far distant past. Sometimes, such distinctions are not particularly clear-cut, since the time elapsing between the *background* level and the *past* is not clearly stated — but there is, at least in theory, a distinction between a prior temporal level that precedes the inset story by a notional longer or shorter time span. However long the time that passes in between, I will be referring to all these indiscriminately as *backstories*.

A term partly overlapping with, but constituting only a subcategory of, a *backstory* is a *plupast* story. A *plupast* story may be defined against a *backstory* in the following way: 1) it

³⁶ In this dissertation, all *present* stories are unembedded, but not all unembedded stories are *present* stories (the most important unembedded *backstory*, i.e. non-*present* story, is “Glaucus and Scylla” in books 13-14). Other than unembedded, the *present* is a narrating instance with at least two interlocutors, which also provides the occasion for a multivocal exchange of (almost always flashback) stories. Thus, the *present* is additionally selected as a point of departure because in all instances here examined it thematizes, or displays a self-conscious awareness of, narrative and *pastness*.

is clearly demarcated as separate in time (and sometimes place) from the *past*, while a *backstory* does not necessarily presuppose that separation, and 2) consequently, it occupies a temporal level quite far back into the past, while a *backstory* is not necessarily separated by such a long temporal distance from the *past*.

I am borrowing the term *plupast* from the volume *Time and Narrative in Ancient Historiography* (2012), edited by Jonas Grethlein and Christopher Krebs. In the introduction to the volume, they define the *plupast* as “an account or at least mention of the past prior to his [i.e. the historian’s] narrative’s proper past” that is frequently “a past evoked from within the narrative (by, for example, a historical character)” and always “denotes a past *completed* prior to the past that the narrator focuses on”.³⁷ Many contributions to the volume refer to speeches voiced by characters within historiographic narratives (characters of the historian’s past) who recall their own past (the historian’s *plupast*) for rhetorical, persuasive, justificatory or exemplary purposes. Especially when these flashbacks are internal, and therefore the respective events have previously been covered by the historian in his own voice, potential differences between the two accounts shed light on the relativity of historical truth and further strengthen the hypothesis that ancient historiography verged more on the rhetorical and literary (therefore on the relative) than on the epistemologically objective. According to the editors of the volume, such explorations of the historians function as self-reflexive comments that problematize the very practice in which they are engaging, thus offering an implicit metahistory alongside history proper.

³⁷ Grethlein and Krebs (2012) 1 (emphasis mine). The contributors of the volume do not use the term “backstory”, which is being deployed for the purposes of this dissertation for reasons explained in this introduction.

However, in the pages to follow the distinction between *plupast*-type and non-*plupast*-type *backstories* will not be of cardinal importance. The potential flow of knowledge between *backstory* and *past* may be studied irrespective of the temporal distance separating *backstory* from *past*. A significant difference between Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the genre of historiography also contributes to the only marginal significance of the difference between *plupast* and non-*plupast* *backstories* for my purposes. To Ovid's internal chronology and expansive temporal trajectory, clearly demarcated "objective" time stamps are perhaps not as useful as to a historian. As illustrated above through reference to scholarship, Ovid's internal temporal structure rests less on absolutely conceived constructions of time than on an (often inconsistent) concept of mythological chronology and sometimes on its own riddling premises. For this reason, and also for terminological consistency and convenience, I will be using the term *backstory* indiscriminately, whether the story in question is separated from the *past* story by a longer or a shorter stretch of narrative time. Although my discussion is based on the same premises as investigations of a *plupast* in historiography, I will therefore dispense with the term *plupast* itself.

Temporality or *pastness* may connect the historiographic *plupast* to my discussion, but there are yet more generic differences between a historical account and Ovid's expansive hexameter poem. The most important of these is historiography's claim to objectivity, or its claim to be recounting true events. In fact, a loosely constructed poem about supernatural transformations may occupy the opposite end of the plausibility, or the objectivity, spectrum from that belonging to historiography. In this sense, a historical character who presents events in a way divergent from the historian's own viewpoint may quite comfortably be seen as mistaken, deluded, or even as a conscious distorter of facts — but of course the opposite

inclination, that of questioning the authority of the historian's voice, may also arise in the reader's mind because of this divergence.

The assumption of the main narrator's authority is even more debatable in the case of Ovid's poem, where most occurrences cannot be classified as historical facts. However, in the following pages I will take the so-called third-person narrator's statements as in principle neither questionable nor unreliable (unless otherwise indicated),³⁸ of course within the fictional bounds of the *Metamorphoses*. In other words, this non-character narrator erases her/himself as a distinct voice with a vested interest in a specific narrative presentation — in this sense (s)he is notably different from an internal first-person narrator, or a character focalizer.³⁹ A similar concept will apply to heterodiegetic narrators, or narrators who participate in the overarching story as characters, but narrate their embedded tales in the third person, i.e. are not simultaneously characters of those inset stories. In this case, I will refrain from completely erasing the subjectivity of the heterodiegetic narrator, since the possibility may not be ruled out that they are deploying a story to prove a point.⁴⁰ For example, the stories narrated in book 5 by Calliope as heterodiegetic narrator may be used to show the (poetic) superiority of the Muses themselves over the Pierides (chapter IV), but the stories exchanged by the Minyads (also as heterodiegetic narrators) in book 4 have a rather

³⁸ Sometimes the Ovidian third-person narrator or an internal narrator undermines their own narrative through a formula of uncertainty or arbitrariness. See Rosati (2002) 290-291.

³⁹ There are instances where the presence even of this third-person narrator is detectable — in that sense zero focalization, or completely objective focalization, is not possible. Even in the *Iliad* the third-person narrator may intrude intermittently. See De Jong (1987) 41-60.

⁴⁰ Cf. Rosati's (2002, 278) distinction between homodiegetic (i.e. first-person) and heterodiegetic (i.e. third-person) inset stories in the *Metamorphoses*. The latter presuppose a longer distance of the narrator from the occurrences of the story than the former. But at the same time this distance of the third-person narrator may grant them more impartiality, or authority, than is assumed for first-person narrators.

tangential plot relevance to their own situation (chapter II). Generally, whatever the third-person narrator has stated happened will be by default the option from which the reader is encouraged to start, and the one that characters, or first-person narrators, may only on a secondary level attempt to contest.

The very fact that a character may indirectly dispute the accuracy of the third-person narrator's account makes the latter the yardstick against which other narratives are measured — but of course the yardstick itself may be questioned.⁴¹ For example, Achaemenides in book 14 (chapter III) foresees his destruction at the hands of the Cyclops — the third-person narrator has already stated that he has escaped, but the possibility may still be entertained that this was a narrow escape. Thus, this potential discrepancy between character focalizers/first-person narrators and third-person narrators both takes its lead from scholarship on narratology in the *Metamorphoses* and approaches the question in a slightly different way.

Lastly with regard to objectivity, plausibility and accuracy, the idea of “accuracy” in the *Metamorphoses* has to be substantially modified, or detached from a modern-day sense of verisimilitude: even if the third-person narrator describes an occurrence that does not meet modern criteria of realism (such as, most notably, a transformation), in the following pages I will still consider the event as having taken place within the fictional world that the work sketches out. The question of (a lack of) realism, and therefore of the reader's potential abstractly to comprehend the world as set up by the Ovidian narrator, will be addressed

⁴¹ Put slightly differently, and with regard to flashbacks versus flash-forwards, by De Jong (2007) 5: “Just as prolepses heighten the narratees' expectations of what is to come, analepses may cause them to *revise* their previous interpretations.” (emphasis mine). For the invitation to the reader to compare *narratorial* and *actorial* flashbacks, which will partly intersect with my discussion, see De Jong (2007) 7-8.

starting from the following assumption: supernatural transformation sets the characters conceptually apart from the readers, but the readers are simultaneously encouraged to immerse themselves in a supernatural world by suspending their disbelief while reading. If characters of books 8/9 do not wonder about Achelous being a twofold river god, who possesses both identities at the same time, the reader is invited to embrace this composite identity as well (chapter IV).

The default position of the third-person narrator's statements as facts (no matter how disputable) within the work, and the divergent position of characters highlight another link between *pastness* and understanding: sometimes the characters of the inset story are neither characters nor narrators of the *backstory*, and therefore cannot become directly involved in its plot. This relationship of *backstory* level and *past* level is then quite different from that between *past* and *present*, which is precisely that of a *present* character functioning as (first-person or third-person, i.e. homodiegetic or heterodiegetic) narrator of a *past* inset story. Therefore, in the former case the *backstory* may serve a more indirect function, which invites both a detachment and an assimilation of readers' knowledge and characters' knowledge.

Simply put, a reader may have been informed (through the very act of reading) of a *backstory* which a *past* character has not experienced, or of which they are not a narrator, and of which in some cases they are not clearly aware. Thus the reader's position in terms of understanding may be both similar to that of *past* characters (both we and such characters find out about events after the fact, we/they do not experience them) and at the same time somewhat elevated, at the relative expense of the characters (unlike the trust we may place in the third-person narrator's account, the methods of understanding employed by the characters are not always successful). We have read that the lioness has bloodied only Thisbe's veil, but

Pyramus has to decipher visual signs to find out what has happened to his beloved (book 4, chapter II). At other times (which will be evident in chapter IV), the characters are simply not connected to knowledge — thus the possibility of their understanding, which may or may not follow along the lines of the readers' understanding, is not activated at all. The characters of Erysichthon's *past* story in book 8 do not know anything, not only about the temporal level of Proserpina (or their *backstory*), but not even about their own circumstances. In this case, the separation of readers from characters is quite unbridgeable.⁴²

But in the other two cases (chapters II and III) the tension between readers and characters fluctuates. The absence of a *past* character from a *backstory* opens up more nuanced possibilities for the juxtaposition of their knowledge to (what the readers know happened in) the *backstory*. If a character of the *past* story does not also participate in the *backstory* (or does not experience it as it is unfolding), they have to make sense of it in an alternative way. In other words, the prospect of the *backstory* being presented to them, or perceived by them, instead of experienced by them, comes up as a (thwarted) possibility. The version offered to the reader and various alternate versions which are reconstructed, speculated on, or foreseen by the characters are thus juxtaposed, in the readers' minds, with the result that one story gives rise to multiple others. If, however, there is no common character between *backstory*

⁴² I refrain, in this dissertation, from deploying the concept of Ovid's, or the reader's, *specifically emotional* ironical detachment, in the sense of their emotional distance from the turmoil experienced by characters, or the Ovidian characters' detachment from the emotional turmoil experienced by their intertextual counterparts. Emotional detachment may be combined with cognitive identification/detachment (insofar as a character may feel, for example, desperate because they are unaware of the particulars of their own situation), but the *pathos*-eliciting potential of each Ovidian scene is beyond the scope of this study. Ovid's ironical wit, often thought to function at the expense of his characters, is a recurring interpretive tool in the monographs of the 1960s and 70s (cited above, footnote 14). For a recent discussion of irony see van Schoor 2011.

and *past*, and no other forms of connection between the two, agents of each story occupy each their own separate temporal level, and the reader is the only one in a position to draw a (thematic) link between the two.

When it comes to the readers, we get informed about such *backstory* events through the very act of reading. Characters, however, do not read about the same events, but become familiar with them through (among others) two means of understanding: information transmission and the interpretation of visual clues. I will be focusing on these two ways in two chapters of this dissertation (on which more later in this introduction). Both methods function as gradual ways in which characters (and readers) connect the *backstory* to other temporal levels. Chapter IV is in many respects a counterpoint to the other two, since *backstory* and *past* are not contiguous in the narrative, and therefore no *past* characters may acquire knowledge of *backstory* events — but there is also a pervasive disconnect of all characters from the potential of knowledge acquisition, even within their own temporal level. Thus, the construction of meaning is to be attributed exclusively to the reader.

A last methodological issue has to be pointed out, before I move on to the construction of the dissertation around the types of knowledge (not) sought by the characters. This question concerns the relationship of *backstories* with the narratological concept of embedding. Although knowledge and temporality partially intersect with the pursuits of narratology, and although this partial overlap will inform my discussion, the following pages will not necessarily provide a typology of textual markers that lead to the classification of a story as a *backstory*. In other words, I will not be applying an exclusively philological, or narratological, method of demarcating the exact boundaries of a *backstory* (although such explorations will form part of my discussion). Put in yet another way, I will not primarily

associate a *backstory* with the notion of double embedding. It is true that the relationship of *present* to *past* across the *Metamorphoses* is mainly one of embedding: a character of the *present* story opens a parenthesis, or inserts their *past* flashback story into the overarching narrative, which then resumes once that character narrator wraps up their (inset) story. If the notion of *pastness* is strictly connected to the narratological concept of embedding, then a *backstory* (or a past-of-the-past story) would have to be doubly embedded, or embedded within another embedded story (the *present* story embeds the *past* story, which in turn embeds the *backstory*). However, such a relationship of embedded and embedding stories does not necessarily obtain between (what I define as) a *backstory* and a *past* story. Put more technically, the narrative boundaries of a *backstory*, the stitches where the embedding begins and where the *past* story once again takes over, will not necessarily always be pinpointed, because they are not always evident in the text.

There are multiple reasons for this minimal emphasis on a philological bookending of *backstories*. Sometimes the *backstory* is not narratologically, or textually, embedded within the *past* story (“Glaucus and Scylla” in books 13-14/chapter III). Another reason is that the *backstory* may only be hinted at within the *past* story (through the mention of its main characters and setting, for example) and activated through recourse to Ovid’s intertexts (“Ninus and Semiramis” in book 4/chapter II). Yet another reason may be that *backstory* and *past* story are even more indirectly linked: the *backstory* is neither textually situated within the *past* inset story nor even relatively close to it, but they may be separated even by multiple books (“Proserpina” in book 5 and “Erysichthon” in book 8/chapter IV). In all these cases, the argument about the connection between *past* inset story and *backstory* has to be (and will be) supported more thoroughly, since this relationship is not immediately obvious, or it

manifests itself in various ways. However, at the same time this capaciousness, and flexibility, of the *backstory* concept will grant my analysis less of a technical catalogue function, and will thus enable the *backstory* to be intertwined with larger interpretive concerns of these stories (i.e. with readers' and characters' construction of knowledge).

Despite the absence of a bookending of the *backstories'* boundaries, my approach still retains a link with the narratological relationship between embedding and embedded stories (which obtains more clearly between Ovid's *present* and *past* inset flashbacks). Even if the *backstory* is not philologically detectable within (and detachable from) the *past* story, the oscillation between embedded and embedding story's similarity and difference is still operative in the relationship between *backstory* and *past* story too (the former presupposes, and depends on, the latter, regardless of their formal relationship of embedding).

Mieke Bal's narrative theory offers narratological premises that will inform the following dissertation. Bal argues for the mutual elucidation of embedded and embedding stories; for the *Metamorphoses*, more useful may be her observation that the relative length of embedded and embedding story attributes more significance to one or the other.⁴³ It is quite clear that the proportionate length of *past* stories (compared to the *present*, overarching story) in Ovid's hexameter poem is impressive, but the relative length of *backstories* may be somewhat more limited (especially since they may be classified as part of the *past* story anyway). Still, the recurrence of both *past* stories and *backstories* argues for the pivotal role of *pastness* throughout the poem. This is not to suggest, of course, that we should lose the

⁴³ Bal (2017⁴) 53. For the (opposite) view, namely that the Ovidian stories "in the imperfect and pluperfect" tense (which I will variously construe as *backstories*) are lesser in rank than "chief events", see Solodow (1988) 140.

thread of the overarching story (*present*), but that the effects of the *backstory* extend beyond its own formal limits (and into both *past* and *present*), just like those of the *past* spill over into the *present*. We may thus be justified in triangulating the discussion, and in comparing the relationship of *backstory* and *past* with that of (*backstory* and) *past* and *present*.

Also, Bal's characterization of events belonging to the embedded and the embedding story as mirrors of each other (or as significantly similar, but also different enough to be considered distinct stories), while applicable to the relationship between the Ovidian *past* and *present*, will also be examined in terms of the *backstory-past* relationship as well. With regard to the mirroring effect, Bal points out that the embedding story's denouement, in conjunction with the assumed similarity between embedding and embedded story, may alert the reader to a similar outcome in the embedded story too, or vice versa; the embedding story's characters themselves, depending on their awareness of the embedded story's events, may gain in understanding too.⁴⁴ My discussion will also center around this partial similarity between *backstory*, *past* and *present*; other than the pure similarity of plot (which I will sometimes connect with repetition, or predictability, and thus with the reader's expectation that what happened in the *backstory* will possibly happen in the *past* story too), I will suggest that the relationship between readers' knowledge and characters' knowledge is one of fluctuating identity. This fluctuation creates tension between a universe both recognizably different from ours (a supernatural one) and, perhaps unexpectedly given this supernatural nature, similar to ours (because of the deployment of similar means of understanding).

⁴⁴ Bal (2017⁴) 55-57.

D. Structure of the dissertation

In what follows, my reading of *backstories* will by necessity be selective and limited, but at the same time it will not merely constitute a list of randomly selected *backstories* and their function. The *backstory* approach will be used as a tool with which to explore characters' (and readers') different methods of understanding. One of these methods has emerged clearly from the above overview of scholarship: vision and the interpretation of visual signs. Whether in the form of decoded visual clues or in that of focalization distributed among different characters, vision will be an important way in which to connect past and present. Another way in which characters acquire insight is also indispensable to this narratively multilayered poem: information transmission. Characters passing on warnings, or information about dangers lurking in certain locations, thus embody both the self-conscious inclusion of storytelling in the plot of the *Metamorphoses* and the (successful or unsuccessful) exchange of practically valuable knowledge. In chapter IV, I will argue that vision and information transmission are also tangentially pertinent, but for the most part no sign is provided by the text which may connect characters with (an attempt at the acquisition of) knowledge — thus, understanding is granted almost exclusively to the reader.

Each of these ways (or non-ways) of knowledge attainment will be the focus of each chapter of my dissertation. In Chapter II, I examine the reliability of vision in the Minyads and Bacchus story *cluster* from the end of book 3/beginning of book 4, with the inset story of Pyramus and Thisbe as my springboard. In Chapter III, I explore information transmission, or survivor cautionary tales, in the inset stories narrated by Ulysses' former comrades Achaemenides and Macareus to Aeneas' Trojans, after which I expand my discussion to most of the so-called "Little Aeneid" (books 13-14). In Chapter IV, I combine Proserpina's

abduction and the earth's subsequent starvation as Ceres-inflicted punishment (book 5) with Erysichthon's violation of Ceres' grove and his subsequent punishment with never-ending hunger (book 8) — they may function as *backstory* and *past* because of their conspicuous thematic similarities. Still in chapter IV, I discuss both the disconnection of the *backstory* and *past* characters from each other and the general disconnect of characters from knowledge: not only does knowledge *not* pass from one temporal level to the other, but the characters of each temporal level are also consistently *not* shown in a process of attempting to understand. Of course, these stories, and the corresponding chapters, function as sample case studies within the *Metamorphoses*. Although Ovid's constant preoccupation with knowledge, vision, and information exchange in the form of narrative may render these methods quite salient, the length of the dissertation only allows for a somewhat selective reading.

This is, in a nutshell, the structural outline of the dissertation at large, designed as it is around the readers' and the characters' different means of attaining understanding. Also, each of the chapters follows a similar structure: In chapters II (Minyads/Bacchus) and III (*Little Aeneid*), I start off by reading a *past* inset flashback as the narrative unit that hosts a *backstory*. I then locate the *backstory* itself (either within or in relation to the inset flashback), based on the general definition provided earlier in this introduction, and I explore the relationship between *backstory* and *past* story along the lines of the characters' search for (or acquisition of) knowledge. Each chapter is structured around a different type of knowledge acquisition, as sketched out above. In chapter IV, the structure is slightly different: I start from the *backstory* and connect it to the (non-contiguous) *past* story, so that the linear change of plot and intellectual framework may become clearer. Afterwards, (in all three chapters) I expand my discussion in order to focus on the longer narrative unit of the

story *cluster* (which includes *present* stories of the overarching narrative, *past* stories or inset flashbacks, and *backstories*). I argue for a specific (however composite) identity of each *cluster*'s narrator, along with a specific development in each *cluster*'s methods of understanding — in chapter IV I suggest that such a development may be detectable on the level of readers and not of characters. Intertextual considerations will inform my discussion at various points across each chapter.

The three main chapters of the dissertation will also acquire a temporal aspect, beyond their common connection with the *background* temporal level. To explore this temporal aspect, I take the inset story (or the *past* level) as my main point of reference, and I concentrate on its characters as possessors, or seekers, of knowledge. Chapter II (vision) will connect the inset story's present with the *backstory*, insofar as visual clues of the present lead the viewer to reconstruct their past; chapter III (information transmission) will relate the inset story's future to the *backstory* through the notion of quasi-prophetic cautionary tales. In chapter IV, the characters' knowledge of plot events and their conceptual background is disconnected significantly enough from *backstory* to *past* (and possibly from *past* to *present*) to warrant the conclusion that knowledge is not transferred from one to the other; it is confined within the inset story's past, i.e. within the *backstory* itself. Thus, chapters II and III argue for the (attempted) transference of knowledge from one temporal level to the other, and thus for a dynamic process of temporal interpenetration; chapter IV argues (mostly) for the separation of knowledge from one level to the next and for a lacking potential of characters' knowledge, even regardless of temporality.

So far I have introduced: 1) ways of knowledge acquisition and 2) the link of the *backstory* to three temporal levels as structural principles informing the dissertation to

follow. But there are also three additional threads that run consistently across the following pages: 1) intertextuality, 2) a story *cluster* and the identity of its collective (or composite) narrator, and 3) the ways in which the *backstory* approach may provide some insight into structural issues of this *cluster* as a narrative unit.

The idea of a *backstory*, or of a story somehow situated in the past, is also operative on another level: that of intertextuality. A story may belong in the past, not only in the sense that it is set before the story under examination, but also in the sense that it has been composed at a previous stage of literary history compared to Ovid. In all three chapters, a parallel examination of Ovid's chronologically earlier intertexts (ranging from the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* to Propertius, Diodorus, and Homeric and Callimachean Hymns) adds nuance to the ways in which the interaction between *backstory* and understanding unfolds.⁴⁵ Especially when Ovid makes a poetic choice that diverges from the story handed down by his predecessors, or when he self-reflexively alludes to them but ends up reworking their texts, we may catch a glimpse of Ovid himself gaining (or displaying) expertise in his poetic craft through his own backward glance — a glance that runs parallel to that of his readers and characters.

⁴⁵ The most notable recent study about the merging of *intratextuality* (within the *Metamorphoses* or across Ovid's oeuvre) and *intertextuality* as different configurations of repetition is Fulkerson and Stover (eds.) 2016. Different contributions obviously place more emphasis on one or another definition of repetition — the merging of intra- and intertextuality is most obvious in the chapters by Boyd and Heslin, while those by Feldherr (about the mirroring effects of art and "reality") and James (on the diminishing frequency of rape stories towards the end of the *Metamorphoses*) constitute uses of repetition as a structural interpretive tool within the work. They thus fall under the structural question 1 of the bibliography overview (above).

But, other than Ovid's relationship with his predecessors, the *backstory* approach may shed some light on the characteristics of Ovid's narrator *within the work*. In other words, the temporal nuancing introduced in this dissertation will help in the construction of particular narrative identities, which of course vary with the different story *clusters* (Bacchus, *Little Aeneid*, Ceres). Characteristics of such narrators include orality or visuality, open-endedness or closure, repetition or predictability, as well as the narrators' respective social and personal status (gender, divinity/humanity, enslavement/freedom).

It has perhaps become obvious that both the thematic strand, or the one about methods of understanding, and the strand about a collective narrator's identity will also illustrate the importance (not of a story but) of a somewhat longer narrative unit. In other words, while it is in principle plausible that 1) all three stories narrated by the Minyads, perhaps together with Bacchus' attempts to establish his divinity, or 2) the so-called *Little Aeneid*, perhaps together with the Sicilian tales a few lines earlier, or 3) the entire Muses-Pierides contest (which is partly about Proserpina),⁴⁶ or all three stories narrated by Achelous (one of which is about Erysichthon), may be taken as separate narrative units, my reading will revisit this observation by mapping out the common intellectual and narrative takeaways of each, always with the help of the *backstory* as a concept. I will term this narrative unit (whose textual boundaries are, however, to some extent subjective) a story *cluster*.⁴⁷ This story *cluster* is the

⁴⁶ The tales of "Proserpina" and "Erysichthon", insofar as they are not contiguous in the Ovidian text but display pervasive thematic similarities, may be considered either one *cluster* (taken together) or two (separate) *clusters*. At the end of the day, the choice between one and two *clusters* need not here be absolute: they may be two self-sufficient parts of the same *cluster*, or two *clusters* that merge into one.

⁴⁷ Given the expansive nature of the *Metamorphoses*, there is often a tendency to limit the scope of a monograph to one story *cluster* (not necessary deploying the term itself), often

longer narrative unit on which I will focus — I will refrain from exploring larger issues of the *Metamorphoses*' macrostructure.

Similarly to *backstories*, the boundaries of a *cluster* are somewhat fluid. In detecting the three narrative units, or three *clusters*, that constitute the main passages of my dissertation I went through the following process: First, I selected three sample *clusters* based on their inclusion of the three temporal levels of *backstory*, *past* and *present* — at this stage I mapped out the three levels in a quite rudimentary way. Afterwards, I examined in more detail the narrative, or temporal, relationship of the three levels. Finally, I dovetailed my exploration of knowledge (or construction of meaning, by readers and characters) into the tripartite temporal scheme. Such a dovetailing consists in a discussion about the potential of knowledge to cross temporal levels: on the one hand, on the part of the readers such a possibility is by definition there, and the reader's interaction with the text is enriched through such a temporal crossover; on the other hand, on the part of characters this possibility is not always activated, and it is this tension between different constructions of knowledge by the characters and the readers that also lends the *cluster* unity.

Lastly, I will be employing the concept of the *backstory* in confronting some perhaps puzzling questions of each *cluster*'s structure, with my discussion at times spilling over into the interaction of some *clusters* with each other. Although the *backstory* approach cannot be considered an adequate solution to all (or most) structural problems of Ovid's notoriously

with the help of narratological or metapoetic tools. For example, Keith 1992 studies the self-conscious exploration of free speech and censorship in the "Crow and Raven" and the "Daughters of Erechtheus" section of *Met.* 2, Papaioannou 2005 reads the section on Aeneas' journeys (*Met.* 13-14) as a self-conscious declaration of an independent revision of Virgil's *Aeneid*, while Janan 2009 reads the Theban section of *Met.* 3-4 through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis and the male/female subject position.

labyrinthine poem, at least in the *clusters* discussed in this dissertation it goes some way towards accounting for each *cluster's* structural issues. Some such questions are: paired stories and how they relate to each other; the inclusion of a story featuring no obvious metamorphosis; the repetition of ostensibly identical stories; the transition from the Greek to the Latin (mythological) territory; and the relationship between two stories that are not consecutive in the narrative and their relative order.

II. The Minyads/Bacchus

A. Introduction

My first test case, to be examined through the intersection of the *backstory* approach and the (potential) acquisition of knowledge, is a block of stories narrated by the Minyads, the intransigent Theban sisters who scorn Bacchus' divine powers and refuse to participate in his rites — they prefer to stay at home and weave instead. This block in turn forms part of a yet broader *cluster* about the establishment of Bacchus' divinity and his revenge on impious disbelievers (end of book 3-beginning of book 4). At first glance, this Bacchus narrative may be considered a treatise on misleading visual perception and tragedy resulting from it — a hypothesis to which I will have to return towards the end of the chapter. For now, suffice it to note that the accuracy, or the compatibility with variously defined “truth”, of interpreted visual clues is a question investigated across the *cluster* — the particular nature of the question possibly stems from its obvious thematic relationship to Bacchus. My exploration of the reliability of vision will extend across the entire Bacchus *cluster*, with one inset story narrated by one Minyad, “Pyramus and Thisbe”, as my point of departure. I will trace the various manifestations of the issue on three temporal levels:

- 1) the *backstory* level of the “Pyramus and Thisbe”, that is, events that take place before the proper action of the “Pyramus and Thisbe” starts,
- 2) the *past*, that is, both the “Pyramus and Thisbe” itself and the other two inset tales narrated by the other two sisters, Leuconoe and Alcithoe, and
- 3) the *present*, that is, the overarching *Metamorphoses* narrative, the establishment of Bacchus' divinity through his encounter with Pentheus and the Minyads.

Thus, the thematic question of visual understanding will be explored through, and shown to benefit from, a partial intersection with a temporal reading through *backstories* (as defined in the introduction and classified immediately above). The common thread linking together all the stories in this *cluster* is visual perception and its accuracy — *backstories* do not always feature. The temporal layering reconstructed through my reading will hopefully not only show different ways of investigating the reliability of vision, but also structure these ways in time, with the chronologically later characters, the Minyads, discussing previous levels.

This particular chapter, and this particular story *cluster*, centering as it does around Bacchus and visual perception, has strong affinities with the study of narrative through the concept of focalization. To be sure, in any narrative passage the same words may be differently, though simultaneously, attributed to two different entities, a narrator and a focalizer. It is the narrator who officially and ostensibly voices the words, but it is the (literal or metaphorical) eyes of the focalizer, their standpoint, their preconceptions and general situation, which condition focalization. If the reader focalizes through a specific character, this character enjoys a privilege over others, whose perception of events the reader never (or only partially) gets to find out⁴⁸ — even if the reader is intermittently aware of the inevitably distorted view of narrative events thus caused. Of course, focalization need not explicitly be literal, or mediated through verbs of vision,⁴⁹ but when some hints are provided to the effect

⁴⁸ Bal (2017⁴) 135-136.

⁴⁹ This association of focalization with literal vision is Bal's case of attributive signs, which clearly signal a transition from third-person, or external, focalizer to character focalizer (2017⁴, 143).

that an interpretation of events results from actual visual contact, the interlacing of vision and narrative through focalization is even more palpable.

The very nature of focalization, and specifically the prospect of every event's focalization being distributed among many focalizers, brings with it open-endedness: the question of which focalization to follow may be left open for the reader to choose. In this chapter, instead, I am focusing on stories where there is a certain sort of prescriptiveness. In other words, because I am dealing with *backstories* that have been clearly introduced to the reader by the respective narrator (third-person or heterodiegetic), and have come to a close by the time the characters confront them, there is less doubt about what has transpired. The presence of the third-person, or of a heterodiegetic, narrator (or, in narratological terms, external focalization) induces us to lend more (although not exclusive) trust to them than to the characters as focalizers (as stated in the introduction).⁵⁰ In this sense, open-endedness is relatively restricted.

However, as I hope to show in the following pages, *interpretation* may still work quite subjectively. There are multiple ways of construing this “factual truth” of *backstories* — and some of these ways can reconcile what “really” happened (or what the external narrator has stated happened) with characters' *inferences* about it. Moreover, the fluidity of the universe created by and in the *Metamorphoses* precludes fixed conclusions. In this way, the ostensibly erroneous conclusions of characters not only *cannot* be classified as straightforward mistakes — they may also invite a retrospective reading of the so-called “true” statements and question their validity. In this way, even the reader who is resolved to believe in the superior

⁵⁰ Bal (2017⁴) 136.

truth value of the third-person narrator still engages in a comparison of narrator and character focalizations. At the end of the day, questions are posed about whether there is objective truth, who decides what it consists in, and whether *interpretation* is all that is available to humans, both characters of a literary work and its readers. The convergence of the notions of a *backstory*, visual *interpretation*, and character/narrator focalization facilitates this process.

Before launching into this process, however, a plot summary of the “Pyramus and Thisbe” is in order. Pyramus and Thisbe live in Babylon, in adjacent houses separated only by a wall, in which one day they discover a small chink. It is through this chink that their first conversations take place and their mutual passion starts to bloom. Because of their parents’ objections they cannot form a relationship, so they decide to escape and meet in person outside the city walls. Thisbe arrives first, only to be confronted with a menacing-looking lioness. She flees in terror, leaving behind her veil, which the lioness chews and stains red with the blood of the cattle she has previously devoured. When Pyramus finally arrives, he sees lion footprints and the veil (no sign of Thisbe herself) and concludes that his beloved is dead, torn to pieces by the lioness, so he stabs himself to death. As he loses his life, Thisbe reappears, infers what has happened and commits suicide alongside his body.

In reading the inset story in terms of time and narrative, I am borrowing Genette’s terminology, in order to draw a distinction between a *singulative* and an *iterative* narrative. As part of his discussion on narrative frequency, Genette handles the issue of how many times an event is considered to have taken place “in real life” or “in the story”, versus how many times it is recounted, how many times it takes place in the text or “in narrative”. An event that happened once may be narrated once; he calls that a *singulative* narrative. An event that happened multiple times may also be narrated once, with the narrator glossing over

potential differences of its different instantiations;⁵¹ he calls that an *iterative* narrative. He argues that it is more natural to conceive of a *singulative* narrative as the narrative “as such” in classical literature, whereas an *iterative* narrative is usually subordinated to it,⁵² or forms the backdrop, setting, or background to it.⁵³ In this sense, he draws a distinction between narrative that moves the action forward (*singulative*) and narrative that does not, but of course is indispensable to making sense of the action (*iterative*).

When it comes to the “Pyramus and Thisbe”, I define as an *iterative* narrative the nightly meetings of the newly enamored couple on either side of the wall separating their houses. These meetings took place multiple times “in the story”, but the text provides no reason to assume that any meeting was different from the others. Thus, these meetings form an *iterative* narrative, or the backdrop of the action, strictly speaking, without which, however, the latter would be inconceivable. On this reading, the *iterative* narrative both may and may not be separated from the *singulative* narrative.

⁵¹ Genette (1983) 113: “The “repetition” is in fact a mental construction, which eliminates from each occurrence everything belonging to it that is peculiar to itself, in order to preserve only what it shares with all the others of the same class, which is an abstraction [...]”

⁵² Genette (1983) 117: “Like description, in the traditional novel the iterative narrative is *at the service* of the narrative “as such”, which is the singulative narrative.” (emphasis mine).

⁵³ Genette (1983) 116-117: “But in the classical narrative [...] iterative sections are almost always functionally subordinate to singulative scenes, for which the iterative sections provide a sort of informative frame or background [...]” Cf. Bal (2017⁴) 110-111: “Iterative presentation used to be regarded as subordinate to singular [i.e. *singulative*, in Genette’s words] presentation. It was employed to sketch a background, against which the singular events were highlighted.” Bal then explains that this practice is the default position of narrative before Flaubert and Proust, who employ *iterative* narratives at length to question the very distinction of singular/*singulative* versus *iterative*. Therefore, I posit that the distinction still holds strong in Ovid’s time.

All their conversations through the wall crack are essentially the same, except the last one. During this conversation, they agree to meet in person near Ninus' funeral mound. This is the narrative time when action, strictly speaking, or the *singulative* narrative, starts. From then on, there is a cascade of single occurrences. Everything happens once: Thisbe arrives at the agreed-upon place first, sees the threatening lioness, withdraws from the scene, Pyramus appears, tries to figure out what happened, stabs himself to death, Thisbe reappears, realizes what has transpired and kills herself too.

The main difference between what I have termed *iterative* and *singulative* narratives is one of narrative frequency, as Genette's scheme indicates. Both the conversations through the wall crack and the events from the lovers' resolution to meet down to their death are narrated once, but the former "happened" multiple times whereas the latter only once. Another difference, however, is more important to my scope than narrative frequency: a certain separation of *iterative* and *singulative* narratives also detaches them temporally, with the *iterative* narrative, as also implied by Genette, preceding the *singulative* narrative. In this way, an *iterative* narrative verges more on description than on the presentation of a sequence of events — it delineates a situation rather than stretching over a considerable narrative time span, with discrete events marking its passage.

Whether *background* qualities are a common element of *iterative* narratives or not, they are evident in the "Pyramus and Thisbe". Other than happening more times than the tragic night events, the conversations through the wall also took place before them. Therefore, if one considers the overarching *Metamorphoses* narrative (the narrative time of the Minyad narrator) as the *present*, and the narrative time of the *singulative* narrative as the *past* (the "Pyramus and Thisbe" is a flashback), the *iterative* narrative constitutes the *backstory*.

Because of the latter's temporal precedence, it is articulated in the *pluperfect* tense (at the same time, because of its iterative qualities it is also articulated in the *imperfect* tense).

Other than the *iterative* narrative, however, there are traces of another narrative that unfolds in the *past* compared to the "Pyramus and Thisbe", or at the *background level* of the inset story. Attention is drawn to it through the mention of Babylon, the city founded by Semiramis, as the setting of the inset story, and the tomb of Ninus as the setting specifically of the *singulative* narrative. This *background* narrative, which is alluded to but never explicitly spelled out, has taken place even further back in narrative time (in a sense, it is more of a *backstory* than the *iterative* narrative) at the same place as the main action of the "Pyramus and Thisbe". I will then be reading both the *iterative* narrative of "Pyramus and Thisbe" and the "Ninus and Semiramis" as *backstories* to the *singulative* narrative of "Pyramus and Thisbe", or to the sequence of events that leads to both their deaths. The notion of the *backstory* will be connected to that of visual interpretation — in other words I will attempt to show that the reader may investigate the question of visual understanding through the temporal layering of *backstory*, *past* and *present* that I have sketched out above.

Explicit use of a *backstory* (as defined above) will *not* be made in sections D, E and (partly) B — in these sections, therefore, the characters' visual understanding, and its potential compatibility with what the narrator has stated happened, will be operative, but not across different temporal levels. Instead, these sections will help support the thesis that the question of the reliability of vision is broached across the Bacchus story *cluster*, and that a definitive answer is not provided. The beginning of the "Pyramus and Thisbe" story (or its *iterative* narrative) introduces the question (section B); section D links narrative with visual understanding through the metapoetic significance of weaving and tapestries, and thus helps

classify the three Minyads as oral/aural, instead of visual, narrators; section E will consider yet another *past* story, narrated not by the Minyads but by Acoetes. The latter story foregrounds the pitfalls of visual perception, and slightly transforms the object of potential knowledge, from practical plot events to the recognition of Bacchus as a disguised divinity.

After section E, once both the ambivalence of visual reliability and the reluctance of the Minyads to take a stand on that reliability is established through a reading of *backstories*, *past* and *present* stories, I will return to the Minyads' outer frame (or the *present*) and to their punishment. Their rejection of vision is partly criticized because of the indispensability of vision, but their lack of a chance to confront Bacchus (even in disguise) might outweigh both their particular transgression and the general problems associated with visual understanding. Thus, the whole *cluster* is a discussion of the reliability of vision, with the temporally later characters (the Minyads) not only narrating previous events, but also commenting on them — and eventually being subject to a transformation befitting their stance towards vision.

B. Visual perception and backstories in “Pyramus and Thisbe”

But first, I will try to show that from the first few lines of the “Pyramus and Thisbe” the reader is set up to expect the ambivalence of visual understanding. In this case, the *iterative* narrative provides clues which cast doubt on the acceptance of vision as generally safe, without however any clear hint at its reliability or unreliability. Once the actual action (*singulative* narrative) kicks off, each of its sections contains elements that might be taken as *backstory* to the next section. Pyramus and Thisbe thus engage in a process of regressive backward glances: they try to look back to their own past, about which they reach partially

inaccurate conclusions. Since we have been given by Ovid/the Minyad narrator the standard version of “what happened”, the two focalizations (character focalization and narrator focalization) unfold in a way parallel to one another.

During their repeated meetings on either side of the wall separating their homes, Pyramus and Thisbe are not explicitly said to have visual access to each other. Although they are both introduced as exceptionally good-looking (*iuvenum pulcherrimus alter, | altera, quas Oriens habuit, praelata puellis, Met. 4.55-56*), they are by no means exposed to each other’s outward appearance. Only a small chink on the wall facilitates their interaction — hence the limited visual contact between the lovers. However, the narrator goes a step further by opening up the possibility of visual interaction, only immediately to close it down.

Pyramus and Thisbe communicate through *nutus* and *signa* (*nutu signisque loquuntur, Met. 4.63*) — therefore, the reader may be led to the assumption that they interact visually. The appearance of such visual markers alongside the verb *loquuntur* suggests either a transparent metaphor, with *loquuntur* embracing the entire semantic field of communication instead of merely speech, or a poetic, but still understandable, confluence of vision and hearing.⁵⁴ Still, lines 65ff. not only set the scene for the daily meetings of the couple, but

⁵⁴ Bömer (1976) 40 interprets the correlation of *vultus/oculi/nutus* and *loqui* as elegiac. It is interesting that the elegiac *nutus* are both literally silent (eg. *Am. 3.11.23 iuvenum tacitos inter convivium nutus*) and at the same time eloquent (eg. *Am. 2.5.17 non oculi tacuere tui* and Tibullus 1.2.21 *nutus [...] loquaces*). The elegiac framework requires that the love affair remain clandestine, just as in the “Pyramus and Thisbe”, but it is precisely for this reason that *amator* and *puella* exchange exclusively visual (hence quiet) signals, rather than oral ones. On this reading, Ovid here manipulates the elegiac motif to keep sight away from this first part of his narrative, and at the same time invents the wall crack to lend his transformed motif an air of verisimilitude. There is no questioning the elegiac nature of many motifs of the “Pyramus and Thisbe”: the designation of the lovers’ words as *blanditiae* and *questus*, the address to the wall separating the lovers, the woman escaping her *custodes* etc.

with a further flashback (and the use of the pluperfect *duxerat*, *Met.* 4.65) they provide a further level of background, or explanation, to the situation. The wall chink can be presumed to allow only minimal, if any, visual signs to pass through it. In fact, no explicit mention is made of the lovers catching even a momentary glimpse of one another through that chink. Rather, throughout this *iterative* narrative the only object of their vision is the hole itself (*id vitium [...] primi vidistis amantes*, *Met.* 4.67-68). Moreover, the only use they can put it to is to make it the pathway of their voices and their words of desire (*Met.* 4.69-70). Therefore, the introductory scene-setting lines draw the reader's attention to the potential of visual communication, only immediately to privilege hearing instead of sight as the sense facilitating their interaction. The lovers do not see one another (or at least are not said to be looking at one another), but only the wall crack. Still, they can hear one another, and this form of communication moves the story along.

Thus far a matter-of-fact reading of the situation rules vision out as the sense at work during the couple's meetings. Moreover, both lovers seem unanimously to forget about vision, even in the hypothetical scenario where access to it were granted them. They both express the same wish: that the wall could disappear, and that they could thus embrace each other, join their bodies in sexual union and/or exchange kisses (*Met.* 4.73-75). The wall is configured as standing in the way not of vision, but of touch. It seems as if they could still enjoy their love, even consummate it, if they were completely bereft of vision. In both cases, then, the text draws attention to the effect vision might have on passion, but then immediately swerves away from it and focuses instead on hearing and touch, respectively. It

has not occurred to two people with an impressive outward appearance that vision can make a difference to their amorous life.

Nevertheless, their nocturnal encounters satisfy them only so much, and they resolve to meet face to face by Ninus' tomb, outside Babylon's walls. One suspects that after all they have acknowledged the power of sight, and agreed that their love will acquire a new dimension once they satisfy themselves with the sight of each other.⁵⁵ Still, the lines that transition from the factual details of their prospective meeting to the narrative of the fatal night itself point to the limitations of sight and to the biases connected to it. Lines 91-92 (*pacta placent; et lux tarde discedere visa | praecipitatur aquis, et aquis nox exit ab isdem*) indirectly hint that a) things may be seen which directly contradict the laws of nature and b) precisely because the latter statement is a bit of a paradox, vision is always tightly connected to *inference*, and therefore is less objective than anybody would feel comfortable to admit.⁵⁶ In other words, if one sees the sun setting more slowly than normal, this means that a subjective factor, one's desire for the day to go by faster, has distorted, not one's vision *per*

⁵⁵ According to an alternative (Eastern/Greek) version of the story, the fateful night never happened (perhaps because Pyramus and Thisbe were never prevented from meeting), but the couple committed suicide because of Thisbe's pregnancy (Knox 1989, 324). After their deaths, they were transformed into a river and a spring respectively. Whether Ovid was aware of that version is unclear; but if he was, he both removed the couple's metamorphosis and added a string of events that revolve around the ambivalent trustworthiness of vision.

⁵⁶ It might be important that such a view of the sunset (focalized through Pyramus and Thisbe) is mentioned after their decision to meet, whereas the sunrise, which takes place before their decision, is mentioned in an unmarked way (*postera nocturnos Aurora removerat ignes | solque pruinosas radiis siccaverat herbas, Met. 4.81-82*).

se, but one's interpretation of visual signs. The universe follows its unchanged path, but if one is unwilling (literally) to see it, one is perfectly capable of seeing whatever one wants.⁵⁷

At the same time, exactly the opposite possibility is opened up. The reader's expectations from everyday experience lead to the conclusion that the sun sets at about the same time every single day. However, the fictional world of the *Metamorphoses* (or of the "Pyramus and Thisbe", for that matter) may be operating under different principles — and the sunset may serve to introduce this difference. Therefore, even if the lovers' visual perception offers them data that seem jarring compared to a reader's experience, this incongruity does not necessarily render their conclusions incorrect. Or, a third alternative is that the whole question of truth value is irrelevant — what matters is the couple's emotional disposition, which encourages them to see the sunset as they see it.

So far I have referred only to the *iterative* narrative, the nightly meetings of the couple and the growth of their passion. The *singulative* narrative of the catastrophic night can be broken down into three parts: Thisbe's first arrival at the agreed-upon place (*Met.* 4.93-104), Pyramus' appearance and his fatal misunderstanding of Thisbe's status and whereabouts (*Met.* 4.105-128), and finally Thisbe's reappearance at the tragic setting and her own suicide alongside Pyramus (*Met.* 4.129-166). Within each part of the narrative, focalization is neatly concentrated on each lover: Thisbe-Pyramus-Thisbe again. However, the first part includes two lines focalized through (none other than) the lioness who will cause the tragic misinterpretation of signs. The lioness, who had just left the scene of her attack on a herd of

⁵⁷ In a sense, the couple's *background* experience plays a part in their perception of the sunset — the conclusion that this particular sunset is rather slow results from a rough idea of when sunsets take place and how long they take to happen. This *background* knowledge functions as a foil to this particular, unusual (at least for the lovers) sunset.

cattle, intended to quench her thirst in the spring near Ninus' tomb (*venit ecce recenti | caede leaena boum spumantis oblita rictus | depositura sitim vicini fontis in unda, Met. 4.96-98*).

This strange, almost anthropomorphic, attribution of a further past and a planned-out future to an animal draws attention to itself and is perhaps telling.

Thanks to these lines, we get alerted to the fact that this lioness is an innocuous one, because a) she has presumably already satisfied her hunger on the cattle, and b) her current state of thirst rather than hunger has been explicitly spelled out through this aside. Of course (and this is the starting point of a gradual build-up of irony) Thisbe has no access to the lioness' state of mind. Visual images are all she can trust, and the fact that the lioness is a savage beast with concrete evidence of this voraciousness on her blood-spattered jaws is a sign of impending disaster. Thus, she flees the beast in terror, leaving behind her veil, which turns red with the cattle's blood in the mouth of the lioness.

Similarly to the setting of the sun, the bloody jaws of the lioness bring up again, though in a different way, the close link between visual perception and *inference*. In the first case, anybody would be safe to assume that the laws of the universe are quite stable and little subject to change, but subjective emotions obstruct clear interpretation of quite an unambiguous visual sign, the sunset. In the second case, Thisbe's *inference* about the lioness' intentions is skewed because she lacks the evidence she needs. Simply put, she cannot build the puzzle, or she builds a puzzle that shows the wrong picture, because she is missing some of the pieces she has to put together. She cannot read the lioness' mind (the lioness could not even have voiced her intentions, because she lacks speech) or conjure up in her mind the latter's past (her feast on the oxen).

In both of these cases, the visual sign is in itself quite unproblematic. The lovers see a sunset, presumably at the time a sunset is expected to take place, and Thisbe sees blood on the lioness' mouth (and she has clear view of the lioness, despite the darkness of night, *quam procul ad lunae radios Babylonia Thisbe | vidit, Met. 4.99-100*). There is little question about either of these instances of perception. It is the second level, that of drawing *inferences* about what one's eyes see, that can sometimes prove tricky. Although Thisbe clearly sees the blood marks on the lioness' jaws, she has no way of reconstructing the story that created this visual sign. And she is quite justified in not reaching the correct conclusion about the future, or the lioness' intentions, based just on the blood drops. If such an everyday occurrence as the sunset is viewed differently by the lovers, then an *inference* based on common sense but lacking in *background* information is all the more justified in being less than accurate.

It should be clear by now that what we conveniently call vision, or the process of *visual perception*, can be separated out into two stages, which of course often overlap temporally: a) the first, superficial level, which in the above cases rarely, if ever, goes wrong (it *is* a sunset that the lovers see, it *is* blood on the lioness' jaws that Thisbe sees), to which I will refer from now on as *sensory reception* and b) the second, deeper level, or what I have above termed *inference*. This last part hinges on certain factors which might not always lead the viewer to a conclusion agreeing with the facts of the narrator. In Thisbe's case, it is a whole narrative about the lioness' past that she is missing, so her *inference* about the meaning of the bloody jaws does not match the narrator's information. In the sunset case, impatience for the next day to come confuses the lovers' *inferences* about the duration of a sunset. If the above distinction is accepted, the process of *visual perception*, which consists in both the superficial

(*sensory reception*) and the deeper (*inference*) level, is unproblematic to a certain extent, but ultimately fails. Therefore, vision itself is neither reliable nor unreliable.

Matters get more complicated once Pyramus steps out onto the stage of the future tragedy. The visual clues available to him are more than enough to lead to quite a failsafe conclusion (or so he thinks). He sees a beast's footsteps in the dust (*vestigia vidit in alto | pulvere certa ferae totoque expalluit ore | Pyramus, Met. 4.105-107*) and the veil dyed red with blood (*ut vero vestem quoque sanguine tinctam | repperit, Met. 4.107-108*). If we apply the distinction between *sensory reception* and *inference* to this test case too, the first level is again unambiguously clear. What Pyramus sees (the footsteps and the bloodied veil) is what there is to see, according to the narrator. And he actually goes a long way towards fully *inferring* the meaning of what he sees before he is led astray to the wrong conclusion. He actually guesses that these are the traces of a lion (*o quicumque sub hac habitatis rupe leones! Met. 4.114*), and he presumably correctly identifies the veil as belonging to Thisbe. But ultimately he is wrong to extrapolate her death from the evidence he is presented with. In a sense, Pyramus is quite a successful viewer, compared to the two previous examples, but he still does not reach all the way to the correct *inference* and to "what really happened".

The Ovidian narrator might be pointing to the relative effectiveness of Pyramus' *sensory reception* and *inference*, but at the same time also ironizing them, through the use of two adjectives qualifying precisely the footsteps and the veil. The former are *certa* (*Met. 4.106*), the latter is *nota* (*utque dedit notae lacrimas, dedit oscula vesti, Met. 4.117*). On the one hand, these words point to the ultimate reliability of sight, as they might insert an editorial comment on the viewer's conclusion. The narrator (the Minyad or "Ovid") does not distance him/herself from Pyramus' focalization (with a marker such as "Pyramus considered,

viewed, thought, said”) and on the surface seems to identify with Pyramus’ evaluation of the signs as trustworthy. And yet there are significant reasons why he need not necessarily trust them. It is not necessary to think that Pyramus has encountered enough lions, let alone seen enough footprints to be able to tell a lion’s footprints from a tiger’s, for instance. Moreover, there is not a compelling reason for him to conclude that the veil belongs to Thisbe beyond any doubt. He is quite safe to assume it does, because it is unlikely that any other woman is roaming the streets outside Babylon at that time of night; but still the veil is not *nota* to him in that he has possibly never seen it before. At the end of the day, he is right to trust these signs, and his *inference* up to this stage is quite to the point, but there is no incontrovertible reason why he should trust them. In that sense, his relative success is a result more of chance than of any particular responsiveness to visual clues, or reliability of the visual process.

Essentially, the conclusion reached by both Thisbe and Pyramus is the same: Thisbe’s death. Although Thisbe’s *inference* corresponds to what has taken place in the narrative less than Pyramus’ (and also projects her death to the future whereas Pyramus imagines it as an event of the past), overall they both fail in their conclusion (their second-level *inference*) but they are both right in their first-level *sensory reception*. This means that *visual perception* overall is neither reliable nor unreliable. This neutrality of vision may also be highlighted through an additional way of considering what I have called second-level *inference*. This additional comment goes some way towards explaining not only the standpoint of the characters within the story, but also their level of perception vis-à-vis the audience of the “Pyramus and Thisbe”, both the internal and the external one.

My earlier suggestion that “character x’s *inference* is incompatible with the narrator’s statement” perhaps needs more unpacking. How does one conclude that x’s *inference* is

different from what the narrator has stated? In the first case, that of the sunset, by being free from the lovers' emotional involvement in the story. In the case of Thisbe viewing the bloody jaws, by having been exposed to a *backstory*, a narrative which explains the lioness' current state of mind. In the case of Pyramus viewing the bloodied veil, by having been exposed to another *backstory*, that of Thisbe fleeing the menacing lioness. In the last two examples, then, the past shapes one's *inference* about what one views in the present and determines whether that *inference* is successful or not. In other words, the past plays a crucial role in processing visual data, and lack of access to it may lead to a fatally wrong conclusion.

But it is precisely the characters who lack that kind of access, whereas the audience of the story, both the sisters of the narrating Minyad and Ovid's own readers, have been privileged with all the details of this past. In the case of Thisbe-as-viewer, a tiny peripheral narrative of the lioness' past adventures (as well as a tiny flash-forward to her intentions) leads the audience to the correct conclusion. This story is a little self-enclosed entity within the inset story, and also a *background* narrative. If one shares the narrative time of Thisbe viewing the lioness, what the latter has already done is a *past* narrative; if one shares the Minyad's narrative time (which seems more natural, as the "Pyramus and Thisbe" is a flashback), Thisbe's narrative time is in the *past* tense, and therefore the lioness' adventure belongs in the *past of the past*, or the *pluperfect*. Similarly, if one considers the time of Pyramus-as-viewer as the *past*, what has transpired before is another *pluperfect* narrative. It is not peripheral, since it forms part of the bare action of the *singulative* narrative, but it is just as much of a *pluperfect* narrative as the previous example. In both cases, however, a notion of *pastness* conditions *inferences* about the characters' present. They have no idea what that past involves, whereas the audiences have formed a more or less detailed picture of it.

Precisely because they have an idea of it, the audiences can judge the characters' second-level *inference* as largely inaccurate. But the external audience, the readers of Ovid's text, could also take *visual perception* a step further and reach a more nuanced conclusion. Having read the entire story and its outcome, the readers could trace their way back to these points in the narrative and try to reconcile them with the "truth". They can take *inference* to the next level, that of *interpretation*. Thus, for example, the lioness has not killed/will not kill Thisbe, but her death is somehow to be attributed to the lioness.⁵⁸ In hindsight, if one were to recount the events in a few words, one would be justified in saying, even if in a vague and roundabout way, that Thisbe perished because of the lioness.⁵⁹ The lioness is the one setting in motion the narrative action that culminates in the death of both lovers. The difference is that of agent versus cause; what the characters *infer* is that the lioness will be/has been the *agent* of Thisbe's death, the perpetrator of her murder, whereas in actual fact she will be/has

⁵⁸ Fowler (2000) 161-162 reads the "Pyramus and Thisbe" as a futile attempt of the lovers to transition from the realm of the symbolic to that of the imaginary, or to transcend the stage of linguistic communication with its inevitable misunderstandings. According to him, the lovers should have settled for (mis)communication rather than tried to inhabit a world of simultaneous presence where language effectively does not exist. In his own words: "Better to be satisfied with the tiny crack in the wall that is language than to attempt to remove or circumvent it. Pyramus' mistake [...] is to believe that there can be unambiguous signification. Lion footprints and bloody clothing can indeed signify the death of Thisbe, but had Pyramus read more widely in twentieth-century semiotics, he would have realized that even such apparently natural signs can mislead. It is foolish to kill oneself on the most obvious reading of anything: better to wait a little and see if one can introduce a little ambiguity and *différence*." I take this thought a step further, and suggest that the meaning of the footprints and bloodied veil as physical signifiers, as well as the meaning of "(the cause of) Thisbe's death" as a linguistic signifier, is even more complicated. Claiming that Pyramus read the signs totally incorrectly might thus prove no less reductive than claiming that he read them totally correctly.

⁵⁹ Also, Pyramus' statements *una duos [...] nox perdet amantes* (*Met.* 4.108) and *ego te, miseranda, peremi, / in loca plena metus qui iussi nocte venires / nec prior huc veni* (*Met.* 4.110-112) later turn out to be technically correct.

been the *cause* of her death, and the agent will be/has been Thisbe herself. Cause and agent, of course, are not identical concepts, and this is what makes *inference* essentially different from what the Minyad narrator has stated happened. But these concepts have some elements in common (they both temporally precede the actual event and somehow bring it about) and could help reconcile *inference* and truth by means of *interpretation*. The problem with the characters is that they are trapped in their narrative present. They have no access to their past, other than some riddling visual signs, and very little way of predicting their future based on a hard-to-reconstruct past. Therefore, they can understand neither how their *inference* clashes with, nor how it can be reconciled to, what has happened/been mentioned before.

The internal audience of the story, the sisters Leuconoe and Alcithoe, occupy some kind of middle ground between the characters and the readers. They have heard the lioness' past story before they hear Thisbe's *inference*, and they know what "really" happened to Thisbe before they hear Pyramus' assumptions — so they are in a position to evaluate both these *inferences* as incorrect. But they have no way of (and do not seem interested in) reconciling *inference* and "truth" through *interpretation*, once they have heard the entire story.

The reader, though, is fully capable of doing so, since the Ovidian text is written, and can be re-read as many times as the reader wishes. The story is transmitted in two different ways for the benefit of two different sets of audiences.⁶⁰ The medium for the internal audience is

⁶⁰ Based on this distinction between internal audiences as listeners and external audiences as readers, Wheeler (1999) 66-93 posits an original audience of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, whom he identifies as listeners. He ties the idea of listener vs. reader with their levels of immersion or belief in the stories. Because a reader can re-read the work, it is obvious to them that they are interacting with a work of fiction — but listeners are absorbed in the narrative, to the point of disregarding its fictionality. Although I see no reason why Ovid's original audience cannot have been readers, Wheeler's correlation of different means of story transmission with different levels of audience engagement is compelling.

oral speech, or sound (the narrating Minyad tells her sisters the story), whereas the medium for the external audience is written speech, or signs perceived through vision. The reception of oral speech is necessarily linear and a lot of what one hears can be considered as good as lost once the narration is over, whereas the reception of written speech can include multiple back-and-forth cross-readings. Therefore, vision is somehow given precedence over sound in mediating (some sort of) truth, but only on the level of words on paper, on a *meta*- level.

Thus far, the characters' *inferences* about visual clues have been considered ineffectual (contrary to their first-level, *sensory reception*), but in a sense also potentially compatible with the Minyad narrator's truth, on the level of the external audience. The similarities and differences between the concepts of agent and cause could help bridge the gap. Therefore, one could conclude that the answer to the question of the reliability of sight is both positive and negative, or too complicated to be resolved.

A reverse tendency can be detected at the same time. Once a reader engages in the process of *interpretation* and finds a way of reconciling *inference* and "truth" (as presented by the Minyad narrator), they can take it even another step further and question the validity of "truth". For example, one might think that Thisbe's fear of the lioness was unfounded, because the *backstory* about the latter reveals her as quite harmless. Still, if the lioness had not yet been satisfied with the food she had consumed, Thisbe might still have been devoured — and then the whole process of *interpretation*, or reconciling *inference* and "truth", might have been pointless. In that scenario, *inference* (that the lioness is dangerous) and "truth" would have been identical, and therefore *interpretation* would have been redundant. The very notion of *interpretation* thus destabilizes the binary of truth and falsity, and introduces a view of the *background* through a less restrictive lens. At the same time, the characters'

focalization, or reconstruction of their own past, opens up the possibility of an alternative outcome. Two alternatives, one that “happened” according to the Minyad narrator and one that could have happened (whether the readers relate to one of them or they are willing to reconcile the two), coexist in the same story.

The last stage of the *singulative* narrative brings it to a close with both lovers dying alongside each other. Before that, however, Thisbe steps out onto the scene, views it and tries to figure out what has transpired. A mulberry tree has been part of the setting from the start, to which her lover and her veil have now been added. Although slightly changed (the mulberries have, just like her veil, turned red, this time with Pyramus’ blood, *Met.* 4.121-127), the image of the tree is still recognizable, and so is her lover, her veil and the fact that he is on the verge of death, pierced by his own sword. These gradual instances of realization are signposted by the repetition of forms of the verb *cognoscere* (*Met.* 4.131, 137, 147).

The first form is different from the other two, both because of the slight tense difference and because of the nature of recognition involved. In the first case, she recognizes the setting, or rather how it has not significantly changed in its inanimate elements (barring the mulberry color, *utque locum et visa cognoscit in arbore formam*, *Met.* 4.131). The second and third cases may both function as instances of Ovidian intratextual (within the “Pyramus and Thisbe” itself) self-annotation. In other words, Thisbe, as a fictional character of an Ovidian story, may be said to have been exposed to, or to have read, previous parts of her own story. A character of Augustan poetry may self-consciously not only “remember/recognize” something within the narrative of which they are a part, but also escape these boundaries by becoming “a reader” of an earlier literary piece that monumentalizes that very object of

remembrance/recognition.⁶¹ In a slightly twisted version of this trope, the objects of Thisbe's recognition encapsulate in minute form summaries of the previous stages of the narrative, arranged in chronological order. *Suos cognovit amores*⁶² (*Met.* 4.137) may sum up their period of through-the-chink conversations (that is, the love narrative proper), *vestemque suam cognovit* (*Met.* 4.147) may sum up the first narrative stage of the fatal night (the Thisbe-focalized one, the resolution of that scene being the bloodied veil) and *ense | vidit ebur vacuum* (*Met.* 4.147-148, both the veil and the empty scabbard can be considered the objects both of vision and recognition) can refer to the Pyramus-focalized part of the fatal night narrative.⁶³

⁶¹ Ross (1975) 78 is generally credited with the invention of the term “Alexandrian footnote”, as an interpretive tool and a self-conscious marker of (post-)neoteric Latin poetry. Ross defines the Alexandrian footnote loosely, as an implicit incorporation of poetic tradition into the recipient text in the mouth of the receiving poet, through the use of such verbs as *dicunt/dicitur, ferunt, fama est*. I am referring to a specific strand of the “Alexandrian footnote” semantic field: the inclusion of poetic tradition which is voiced by a character of the recipient text and mediated by a verb of remembrance/recognition. This strand is more famously pursued by Conte (1986) 60-69, who uses as his textbook case (of what he calls a “reflective allusion”) the Ovidian *Fasti*'s Ariadne, when she reminisces about her Catullan self's actions and utterances. According to Hinds (1998) 4 the Conte strand of the “Alexandrian footnote” is “more fully integrated into its narrative context” than the *dicunt* case, because “spoken “in character””. Since Thisbe's recognition is intratextual (referring to the “Pyramus and Thisbe” itself) rather than intertextual (incorporating previous poetic tradition), it might be thought to lose some of its “Alexandrian” character. However, her self-conscious evocation of previous narrative stages as such (and the designation of the crucial prop of the story, her veil, as *tenues [...] amictus* [*Met.* 4.104]) might actually enhance its Alexandrianism.

⁶² Having pointed out the elegiac undertones of “Pyramus and Thisbe”, one could here turn to the choice of Cornelius Gallus and Ovid himself to call their elegiac collections *Amores*. Viewed thus, the term describes the entire elegiac situation. Of course, a literal interpretation of the *Met.* passage would translate *suos amores* as “the object of her desire”, i.e. Pyramus. The two readings are not mutually exclusive.

⁶³ Again, the fact that what Thisbe recognizes is textually constrained shows the relativity of the truth value of any statement. Since everything is in a sense a product of language, it cannot have absolute authoritative value.

Still, the text itself undermines such certainty by casting doubt on Thisbe's potential for correct *inferences*. When looking at the tree, she is not even sure about the efficacy of her first-level, *sensory reception* of it. She is not sure that it is the same tree, because she sees red berries on it instead of the expected white ones (*sic facit incertam pomi color; haeret, an haec sit, Met. 4.132*). Perhaps she doubts whether she actually saw white berries before in the first place? When seeing Pyramus about to die, she also hesitates (*sed postquam remorata suos cognovit amores, Met. 4.137*). She ultimately reaches a conclusion about what has happened that is identical with that of the Minyad narrator ([...] "*tua te manus*" inquit "*amorque | perdidit, infelix.*", *Met. 4.148-149*), but she is constantly hinting at the possibility that her first-level *sensory reception*, let alone her second-level *inference*, might be incorrect. Therefore, as in the *certa/nota* case, the efficacy of *visual perception* is anything but straightforward and unproblematic.

Let me sum up some patterns observed thus far before moving to another narrative. A notion of *pastness* is inherent both 1) in the switch from *iterative* to *singulative* narrative and 2) in the three, differently focalized, building blocks of the *singulative* narrative itself. In the first case, the change of narrative frequency (although not pertinent to my argument *per se*) clearly separates the two narrative entities from each other, and the *iterative* narrative's descriptive qualities render it quite an obvious *background* to the *singulative* one. In the case of the *singulative* narrative itself, the three building blocks, although split between the two focalizers, form a continuous narrative sequence. Since all three building blocks belong to the same narrative voice (the Minyad sister) and frequency (*singulative*, not *iterative*), the first building block works less conspicuously as a *backstory* to the second and third block. For this reason, I would not term it a *backstory*, but just a temporally prior event, which

nevertheless does bear on the way subsequent events unfold — the temporally prior event's outcome shapes the situation as established at the start of the subsequent event(s), and as viewed by the respective focalizer.

The *backstory* approach then leads to interpretive possibilities about the accuracy of visual comprehension. Both during the *iterative* narrative and during the *singulative* narrative, the question of the reliability of vision is posed and explored. In both narratives, there is at first a reassuring possibility that vision conveys the correct message, a possibility that is then immediately questioned and subverted. The first-level *sensory reception* might be quite failsafe, but it is at the second level of *inference* that the greatest danger lurks. The *iterative* narrative precedes the *singulative* narrative in internal chronology and foregrounds the question of vision as crucial for what is to come. In this way, the *past* of the *singulative* narrative, or the *backstory*, shapes what follows it.

In the *singulative* narrative itself, a notion of *pastness* is also instructive by providing ways of interpreting visual clues. In each of its three building blocks (focalized through Thisbe, Pyramus and Thisbe respectively), each focalizer tries to interpret what (s)he sees by trying to imagine what happened in the immediately preceding building block (or, in the first case, what happened in the lioness' past). This means that the *past* is considered a significant guide to the *present* (or, from the readers' standpoint, the *background/backstory* is considered a significant guide to the *past*), and lack of access to it on the characters' part ultimately leads even to death. The different blocks may not always be perceived as such, since narrative flows seamlessly from one to the next — but some details within one block may survive beyond it, and spill over into the next level as a linking clue.

On first inspection, we may be tempted to conclude that characters reach incorrect conclusions. Still, since the *backstory* is also a text and its meaning up for debate, the reader can go back and question the truth value of the Minyad narrator's so-called authoritative statements. But whether we tend to agree with her or not, the cardinal importance of ambivalent vision is a question to which Ovid has his characters (perhaps Pyramus and Thisbe, but most vividly the Minyad narrator) seek an answer. The first Minyad then is setting the question, an answer to which is provided not in an abstract way, but through narrative — her sisters, as I will show below, take her cue and follow along, with narratives that investigate the same question.

C. Ninus and Semiramis: Location and a parallel backstory

In the previous section, repeated reference has been made to the setting of the inset story of Pyramus and Thisbe: their homes and the tomb/spring/mulberry tree landscape. I will now consider the actual geographical location of the story. I will read the two references to it as markers of an implied *backstory* and an internal clue on how to read the Pyramus-Thisbe narrative within which they are included. Although this *backstory* is not explicitly narrated but only hinted at, it does exist in Ovid's literary predecessors, and intertextual allusions to its prior versions can potentially direct the reader to reconstruct it through these predecessors. Still, in Ovid the story is merely alluded to, and is therefore only an *implicit backstory*.

The first geographical marker of the setting is mentioned in the third line of the inset story: [Pyramus and Thisbe] *contiguas tenuere domos, ubi dicitur altam | coctilibus muris cinxisse Semiramis urbem* (*Met.* 4.57-58). The city founded and demarcated with walls by

Semiramis is to be identified as Babylon. An eastern setting might here serve to carry the connotations of luxury, indulgence and carnal delight. However, in a story where the visual perception of anything other than “crime scene evidence” is conspicuously absent these connotations are never explored. Why then Babylon, explicitly described as Semiramis’ city? As far as extant literary texts are concerned, no author before Ovid recounts this story. Therefore, based on regrettably little evidence, I tentatively dismiss the possibility that Ovid was following a literary model in the configuration of the setting.⁶⁴

The second reference to a Babylonian landmark is found when the lovers are contemplating the scene of their future face-to-face encounter: they are to meet *ad busta Nini* (*Met.* 4.88). The insertion of this sinister element in an otherwise unproblematic *locus amoenus* (there is the mulberry tree under whose shade they can sit, *sub umbra | arboris*, *Met.* 4.88-89 and a cool spring nearby, *gelido [...] fonti*, *Met.* 4.90) is jarring. Thus a premonition of death and destruction is foregrounded before the scene is even set. Still, the mention specifically of Ninus’ tomb could lead the reader to connect the dots and identify Ninus as the husband of the very Semiramis mentioned at the beginning of the story.⁶⁵ But still, why this couple?

⁶⁴ There probably was a parallel Greek/Eastern version of the Pyramus and Thisbe myth, which is today preserved on a mosaic (dated around the middle of the 4th century CE) at New Paphos, Cyprus. Although Thisbe’s bloodied veil is part of the representation, visual perception and its interpretation (if at all present) does not seem to include Pyramus, who is not looking at the veil. Also, the tomb is not present on the mosaic — which may help us identify the setting by Ninus’ tomb as Ovid’s innovation (as far as we can tell today). See Knox (1989) 317-321. Of course, we have no way of deciding whether the addition of the Semiramis/Ninus strand and the importance of vision were connected in Ovid’s mind — but the reader may make such a connection from the text as it stands.

⁶⁵ Bömer (1976) 46-47 points out that only after Ninus’ death and the erection of his tomb did Semiramis found Babylon, so Ninus’ monument could not technically have been

A closer look at Diodorus Siculus' *Bibliotheca Historica* 2.6-7 may provide an answer to this question. In these sections Diodorus relates how Semiramis, the wife of the Assyrian king's councilor Onnes, cross-dressed and led the Assyrian army on a successful siege of Bactra. To be more specific, Semiramis is not explicitly said to cross-dress, that is to dress as a man, but to dress in a way that would render her gender ambiguous to the beholder (στολήν ἐπραγματεύσατο δι' ἧς οὐκ ἦν διαγνώσκειν τὸν περιβεβλημένον πότερον ἀνὴρ ἔστιν ἢ γυνή, 2.6.6).⁶⁶ Although her intention in adopting this uncommon garb was freedom of movement during her long journey through lands of scorching heat (2.6.6), the end result was that, presumably mistaken for a man, she accomplished the difficult siege of Bactra (2.6.7-8), which had seemed an arduous task even to the Assyrian king Ninus himself (2.6.4). Thereupon Ninus fell in love with her and demanded that Onnes yield her to him; Onnes hanged himself and Semiramis married Ninus (2.6.9-10). Immediately afterwards, the birth of the royal heir Ninyas is recounted and, within a few lines, Ninus' death and the erection of his funeral mound by Semiramis (2.7.1-2).

located in Babylon. He dismisses previous attempts at explaining away the inconsistency as irrelevant to Ovidian poetics, arguing that "Im Gegensatz zu oft liebevoll and minutiös gestalteten Bildern, Erzählungen usw. war dem Dichter poetische Genauigkeit, logische Konsequenz u. dgl. oft gleichgültig". He does not, however, point to a possible literary reason for the mention of either Semiramis' walls or Ninus' tomb.

⁶⁶ I do not share the certainty of Auberger (1993) 258 about Semiramis' clearly intentional cross-dressing ("Soyons plus net que l'auteur. Sémiramis s'est fait faire un vêtement d'homme [...] La femme se fait donc homme volontairement"). Even if one agrees with her, she has already pointed out that visual perception of Semiramis' garment is complicated because culturally conditioned: an Easterner would view it as characteristically masculine, whereas a Greek would (and indeed Strabo 11.13.9 did) view it as that of an eastern male and therefore effeminate. In that sense, viewed from the Greek perspective of Diodorus, Semiramis "cross-dressed" as a woman!

In the case of the crucial episode in Semiramis' life, the siege of Bactra, visual signs are again significant and potentially misleading. Moreover, the dilemma over the reliability of visual signs consists in uncertainty caused by a garment.⁶⁷ These two elements resemble the overarching story of Pyramus and Thisbe, a discourse on the potential (un)reliability of sight, mediated primarily through Thisbe's veil. Although there is no direct allusion to the importance of clothing to both stories, the centrality of Semiramis' garb to previous versions of her life story may be activated by the Ovidian use of the infinitive *cinxisse*, with regard to Babylon's walls (*ubi dicitur altam / coctilibus muris cinxisse Semiramis urbem, Met. 4.57-58*). It might be telling that such a brief reference to Semiramis encapsulates the metaphorical use of a verb whose literal meaning relates to putting on clothing or armor.⁶⁸

If we apply the two levels of *visual perception* to this story too, what the soldiers perceive on a first inspection of Semiramis is an ambiguously dressed person, which is exactly what Diodorus says. On a second level, their *inference* would be that this person is a man — since they follow this person as one placed in charge of the siege. Although biologically this conclusion is less than accurate, there are ways in which she *acts* as both a man (what the soldiers *infer*) and a woman (her anatomical sex) throughout her entire lifetime.

⁶⁷ Of course, not every learned reader of Ovid may have been expected to recall the particular detail of Semiramis' cross-dressing from Diodorus. As I will discuss below, however, the cross-dressing might only be figurative — even if the reader cannot activate the specific detail of Diodorus' Semiramis donning gender-neutral clothes, they could possibly recall her as a figure that transgressed gender boundaries and performed alternately as a man and a woman throughout her lifetime.

⁶⁸ It might be important that *cingere* as a verb of wearing can refer both to the girding of a man or a woman and to the donning of a baldric — therefore the verb is also bi-gendered, or gender-neutral. See *OLD* s.v. *cingo* 1, 2.

Performing as a man, she inverts power dynamics in her relationship with her first husband (συνέβαινε τὸν ἄνδρα τελέως ὑπ’ αὐτῆς δεδουλωθῆναι, καὶ μηδὲν ἄνευ τῆς ἐκείνης γνώμης πράττοντα κατευστοχεῖν ἐν πᾶσι, 2.5.2). The very fact that she conquers Bactra, a hard task even for the Assyrian king Ninus himself (2.6.4), renders her superior even to a man in military prowess. Having sacked Bactra, she rises to the status of queen (the word denoting social status ambiguously also designating a garment, πρόσχημα, 2.6.10). Upon Ninus’ death, she is the sole person left on the throne of Assyria, that is, she supplants Ninus. But on the other hand, she simultaneously acts very much as a woman. She is described as exceptionally beautiful throughout (2.5.1, 2.6.9). She is not allowed to express her opinion before she gets married off either to Onnes or to Ninus. Her most important accomplishment as the king’s wife is to produce the heir to the Assyrian throne (2.7.1). Upon Ninus’ death, she erects his funeral mound, as is expected of a dutiful widow (2.7.1). Her actual sack of Bactra is portrayed more as a result of (stereotypically considered as feminine) cunning and trickery than pure military virtue. She directs the Assyrian soldiers towards the citadel, where almost no guards were posted because of the ostensible safety of the spot. She thus seizes the citadel and at the same time gives a signal to the soldiers besieging the city from below to press harder on their attack. This concentrated effort on two fronts brings about the sack of the city (2.6.7-8). Therefore, while the soldiers’ *inference* (that Semiramis is a man) is literally false, the reader may apply their *interpretation* to the story and conclude that at a figurative level she performs both as a man and a woman; her uncommon garb at the siege of Bactra instantiates her ambivalent, bi-gendered nature, to which her ambiguous behavior throughout her lifetime testifies.

Ovid was probably a younger contemporary of Diodorus (c. 90-30 BCE), so the possibility that he has come across his work is not to be ruled out completely. Propertius' elegy 3.11 is also thought to have been modeled on some aspects of Diodorus' narrative. There, Semiramis features as part of a *Priamel*-like catalogue of women transgressing gender boundaries and/or asserting control over their male partners. The siege of Bactra (3.11.25-26) and the erection of Babylon's walls (3.11.21-24) are briefly mentioned as the two most illustrious milestones of her life. The elegy itself plays with the idea of figurative gender inversion, or simultaneous coexistence of both genders, in the *persona* both of the man (the Propertian *amator* and the men in the catalogue) and the woman (the Propertian *puella* and the women in the catalogue). The last item on the list is Cleopatra, who (unlike the other women) has had a more clearly negative, almost aggressively pictured, effect, not only on Anthony, but almost on the entire body of Roman *patres* (3.11.29-32).⁶⁹ Every man tries to assert his (literal) masculinity by performing as a man but is also significantly effeminized, and conversely every woman tries (largely successfully) to exercise "masculine" control over the respective men. Propertius has produced work of the same genre as Ovid (elegies), and is

⁶⁹ Propertius does not mention Semiramis' ambiguous garb. She is however portrayed in his account as the linking element between women who imposed themselves on men privately, as their partner (Medea, Penthesilea), and Cleopatra, whose power also spilled over into the realm of military and political power. See Stahl (1985) 239-241. For a reading in favor of unity between the previous items on the list and Cleopatra (she was potentially as dangerous as the other women, regardless of whether she accomplished her threats) see Gurval (1995) 195; for emphasis on a Propertian *amator* who is torn between celebrating Augustus' submission of Cleopatra and sympathizing with Anthony's submission to her see Wallis (2018) 85-86. At any rate, Propertius seems to be placing Semiramis in the public, not the private, realm — her gender, regardless of her association with her husband Ninus, seems important to the elegiac poet, potentially because of the political connotations of her masculine performance.

generally considered his precursor. Therefore, the possibility can be entertained that if Propertius has read Diodorus, Ovid has too.

Even if he has not, Diodorus' second book is largely based on the *Persica* by Ctesias of Cnidus (5th century BCE). The latter claimed the status of an eyewitness to the events recounted throughout the contemporary part of his historical account, since he was the physician of Artaxerxes II on his expedition against his brother Cyrus the Younger (401 BCE). Although the historical double of Semiramis, Šammu-ramāt, wife of the Assyrian king Šamši-Adad V, lived back in the 9th century BCE,⁷⁰ and therefore was no contemporary of Ctesias, his (apparently implausible) positivist claims to objectivity had drawn attention to him as a figure of the historiographical landscape of the 5th century. The debate about this now relatively unknown figure was apparently still going strong when Lucian (2nd century CE) squarely placed him in the realm for the eternally punished alongside another writer of paradoxes, Herodotus (*VH* 2.31, they were both punished because their writings had consisted in lies).⁷¹ Therefore, it is possible that Ovid has come into contact with either Diodorus' account of Semiramis' feats or that of his source Ctesias.⁷²

⁷⁰ It is possible that the Semiramis of Greco-Roman historiography and literature is not quite the historical Semiramis, but rather a fictional syncretistic persona, who embodied the Achaemenid state ideology about a continuous empire and similar imperialistic ideals linked with Alexander's expeditions. See Stronk (2017) 525-542 for a summary of his conclusions.

⁷¹ Lucian also implies that Ctesias did not, moderately speaking, stick to the bare facts of what he recounted because of his slavish fear of Artaxerxes, and that he therefore failed in the one task expected of the true historian, ὡς ἐπράχθη εἶπεῖν (*HistConscr* 39).

⁷² The argument that every aspect of the Semiramis narrative in Diodorus must beyond doubt derive from Ctesias could be seen as an oversimplification. Comploi (2000) 235 sounds a note of caution by pointing to multiple references to Diodorus' own time, his mention of sources other than Ctesias, and the discrepancy between Diodorus and other sources that trace their descent back to Ctesias. However, when handling passages where Diodorus fairly certainly deviates from Ctesias (2000, 233-234) she leaves out the cross-

If he does indeed draw his Semiramis elements from either Diodorus or Ctesias, their presence in “Pyramus and Thisbe” might be providing the reader with an internal clue, a set of guidelines or a framework, within which to situate the inset tale. In both “Pyramus and Thisbe” and “Ninus and Semiramis”, a piece of garment leads to an *inference* that is ostensibly different from the truth. However, the reader could find a way of resolving the difference by means of *interpretation*. In the case of Thisbe’s veil, the crucial question is that of cause versus agent. In Semiramis’ case, the issue revolves around the distinction of literal versus figurative. Ultimately, the walls of Semiramis and the tomb of Ninus both mark out the setting of the “Pyramus and Thisbe” and flash far back in narrative time to the “Ninus and Semiramis”. Not only are the two stories (among other things) about vision; they also explore the issue of the reliability of vision, and they do it in a similar fashion. They both point to a correct first-level *sensory reception*, a less-than-straightforwardly correct second-level *inference* about the visual sign, and a possible reconciliation of the characters’ *inference* and truth by means of the readers’ *interpretation*. As in the case of the lioness and Thisbe’s veil, the soldiers who view Semiramis lack access to her life story, and therefore are deprived of a way to figure out who/what that person is. The reader, however, can detect patterns in her life that match both a man and a woman and render her somehow bi-gendered, even if only at a performative and figurative level.

dressing and siege of Bactra. If, as she claims (2000, 231), Ctesias’ historiographical goals bordered more on sensationalism and entertainment of his audience whereas Diodorus aimed at moral edification and modified Ctesias’ passages that ran contrary to this goal, there is no reason to assume that Semiramis’ transvestism, with its vivid visual element, has been invented by Diodorus and not taken over from Ctesias.

D. Vision and the three Minyads' inset stories

So far I have traced a link between the Pyramus and Thisbe story and the references to a *backstory* along whose lines “Pyramus and Thisbe” may be read. In its turn, the Pyramus and Thisbe episode is a tale embedded within the story of the Minyads, the three Theban sisters who refused to acknowledge Bacchus’ divine status and, scorning his rites, preferred instead to stay at home and weave wool and stories. It is to this simultaneity of weaving and storytelling that I wish to turn next.

It has been duly noted by scholars, most brilliantly by Rosati,⁷³ that the Minyad story constitutes a foundation myth of weaving/spinning wool as a metaphor for storytelling, with the end product, the piece of fabric, functioning as a metaphor of a text (both of them signified by the term *textus*). It might therefore be fruitful to turn to Thisbe’s veil and to consider its potential as a marker of such self-referentiality. Admittedly, Thisbe’s veil is

⁷³ Rosati (2006) 344. He bases his argument on the premises a) that the Ovidian narrator places special emphasis on the temporal simultaneity of spinning/weaving and storytelling, thereby making them interchangeable, b) that the *Metamorphoses* overall is an aetiological poem about beginnings, c) that these aetiological interests tie in with the Augustan poets’ interest in reviving such transparent metaphors as text-as-*textus* and d) that the weaving metaphor (especially the verb *deducere*) additionally serves the Callimachean aspirations (as programmatically foregrounded in the proem) of the *Metamorphoses*. He does not consider Thisbe’s veil as a *textus*, possibly because of its limited appearance in the text and the lack of explicit reference to wool-working. It would also be internally anachronistic for Ovid to mention a product of weaving in a flashback story, or at a temporal level preceding the first appearance of weaving in the world. Such chronological inconsistencies, however, are by no means atypical in the *Metamorphoses*. Heath (2011) 90 hints at the (Augustan, or cultural) importance of weaving specifically in the Minyads’ inset stories. He detects the motif as a recurring one, which does not allow the reader to lose sight of it throughout the stories (and which thus accords cultural, even “Callimachean”, significance to what Ovid’s contemporaries might have dismissed as “old wives’ tales”), and does not attach any particular significance to Thisbe’s veil as potentially encapsulating a narrative in itself.

nowhere termed a *textus*, only a *velamen/velamina* (*Met.* 4.101, 115) and a *vestis* (*Met.* 4.107, 117, 147). It is not without significance that the veil-as-*vestis* appears only in the context of the message it carries for its viewer (both Pyramus and Thisbe). By contrast, it is designated as a *velamen* in simpler, almost mundane, contexts where it is not necessarily imagined bearing witness to an event or enclosing an account.⁷⁴ Ever since Catullus' 64 and its ecphrasis of the *vestis* on the bridal bed of Peleus and Thetis (*haec vestis priscis hominum variata figuris*, 64.50 and *talibus amplifice vestis decorata figuris*, 64.265), a *vestis* featuring in a literary text can be said to encompass a mini-narrative of its own, a story within a story.⁷⁵ In Catullus' case, this is the narrative of Theseus' abandonment of Ariadne and the hero's sorrowful arrival at Athens. Could Thisbe's *vestis* be said to include a narrative, and if so, a narrative of what?

In section B, I have identified Thisbe's *vestis* as a piece of evidence which both Pyramus and Thisbe process visually. Pyramus tries to figure out whether Thisbe has been ripped apart by a lion, Thisbe whether the *vestis* has misled Pyramus into believing her dead. In each case,

⁷⁴ Thus, the veil-as-*velamen* appears only when it falls to the ground and when Pyramus picks it up, whereas the veil-as-*vestis* when it is expressly connected to vision and/or knowledge (*vestem [...] repperit* 4.107-108, *notae [...] vesti* 4.117, *vestemque suam cognovit* 4.147).

⁷⁵ Laird (1993) 19 configures Catullus' ecphrasis of the *vestis* as a "disobedient" one, i.e. one defying visualization of the described artwork as a concrete object. In considering Catullus' innovations in handling the ecphrastic medium, he points out the narrative dynamics within the ecphrasis itself, the multiple temporal back-and-forths, the incorporation into the ecphrasis of direct speech uttered by the portrayed characters, and the use of rhetorical terms in connection with the weaving of the couch coverlet. More pertinent to my discussion is a parallel text he brings up (1993, 27): Aeneas' shield is described as *clipei non enarrabile textum* (*Aen.* 8.625). While, as Laird observes, this line serves to show the Virgilian narrator's limitations in adequately representing the shield in words, in Thisbe's case the correlation of narration and *vestis* seems to point to the opposite direction, namely that words (Thisbe's potential narrative to Pyramus) are more reliable than a physical artwork (her veil that sends a less than straightforward message).

the veil might be metaphorically telling a story. This supposition, in turn, might render Thisbe an additional narrator figure in this complex of stories inside stories. My hypothesis is further strengthened by the presence of the unquestionably self-reflexive term *narrare* in connection precisely with Thisbe: *illa redit iuvenemque oculis animoque requirit, | quantaque vitarit narrare pericula gestit* (*Met.* 4.129-130). Thisbe is burning with the wish to provide Pyramus with a truthful account of what happened between herself and the lioness. However, she is denied this opportunity, and can only narrate something by proxy, as it were, through her *vestis*. This *vestis*, unlike the Catullan one, does not literally contain the story it is meant to tell, so its decipherment rests solely on the recipient. As discussed above, Pyramus' *inference* might be less than congruent with the Minyad's narrative, but the reader has a way of reconciling the two. Perhaps then Thisbe's potential narrative, that is, aural signs, is favored over the visual signs sent forth by the *vestis*?

The problem with such an argument is that Thisbe is not portrayed as weaving a story into her veil. This means that a story on the veil might or might not have been trustworthy, but a veil just spattered with random blood drops verges more on the unreliable than the reliable. Once again, the question of reliability is pursued but in the end left unresolved.

The correlation of storytelling and weaving is more prominent in the embedding story, that of the Minyads. Although the temporal simultaneity of spinning and storytelling forges a clear link between these two activities, the respective products (i.e. [presumably] their tapestries and the stories) are notably separate from each other. Unlike Catullus' *vestis* (or other sublime artworks that receive narratorial attention as ecphrastic objects, such as the shields of Achilles and Aeneas, or Arachne's and Minerva's tapestries in Ovid's own *Met.* 6),

the Minyads' weaving product does not bear the mark of its sister product, the stories.⁷⁶ In other words, the sisters do not weave their stories into their spun wool.⁷⁷ In this sense, the product of their artwork both *is* and *is not* able to be visually processed. The tapestries they produce can be visually appreciated, but they are bare, empty of any story. The bridge passages between the inset stories continually drive home a preoccupation with the oral (and hence aural) quality of their stories (*perque vices aliquid [...] in medium vacuas referamus ad aures*, *Met.* 4.40-41, *dixerat, et factum mirabile ceperat auris*, *Met.* 4.271), but the sisters are still interested in weaving tapestries that are presumably pleasing to the eye.⁷⁸ As storytellers, they (perhaps unintentionally) explore the issue of the reliability of vision, but

⁷⁶ The disjunctive function of their tasks (*aut ducunt lanas aut stamina police versant / aut haerent telae famulasque laboribus urgent*, *Met.* 4.34-35) may reveal precisely a lack of simultaneity between wool-working and narrating. If they do not pass from one task to the other, they may also not pass from one (event of a) woven story to another. By contrast, Catullus' *Parcae*, though not weaving stories onto tapestries, retain that sense of simultaneity through a linear sequencing of tasks (instead of the Minyads' *aut... aut* their tasks are described through a *tum... tum* construction [64.309-317]). Alternatively, the distribution of tasks (if that is what the Ovidian text implies) may be representing the distribution of stories, or the distribution of stories to each sister (stories which are all, however, embedded into the *present* level) may stand in for the distribution of different tasks to different sisters — tasks which, however, all have to do with wool processing.

⁷⁷ *Pace* Salzman-Mitchell (2005) 164-165, who believes that the Minyads' transformation silences them as weavers too, with whatever is depicted on their tapestries being transformed into vines. It is not clear from the text that anything specific was portrayed on the tapestries (despite Arachne's or Philomela's narrative tapestries), and it is nowhere said that the images on the tapestries were turned into images of vines. The statement is actually a lot simpler: the tapestries get turned into vines and ivy (*coepere virescere telae / inque hederæ faciem pendens frondescere vestis; / pars abit in vites, et quæ modo fila fuerunt, / palmitum mutantur*, *Met.* 4.394-397).

⁷⁸ Similarly, at the very end of Pyramus' life, Thisbe calls on him to listen to her (*tua te carissima Thisbe / nominat; exaudi [...]*, *Met.* 4.143-144) — he probably does, but he does not reply to her (with words she can hear) — rather, he fixes his eyes on her (*ad nomen Thisbes oculos iam morte gravatos / Pyramus erexit visaque recondidit illa*, *Met.* 4.145-146). Thus, hearing and sight locked together seal the end of the protagonist's life, highlighting the ambiguity about which one is preferable.

they never provide an answer to it. As weavers, they sidestep the same question, because there is really nothing on the tapestry that would send forth a message, whether clear, ambiguous, straightforward or problematic. In two complementary ways, then, they refrain from taking a stand on whether one can trust what one sees after all. Their coloring of the narrated events thus matches their identity as narrators: they speak instead of weaving (or instead of speaking and weaving simultaneously), so they are not interested in producing visual narratives — at the same time, their plots do highlight the problematic nature of vision, but do not reject it altogether.

But first we need to establish that this observation is applicable in its entirety to all three sister narrators. Although the aural/oral narrative identity may apply collectively to all three sisters, so far I have only explored the plot of “Pyramus and Thisbe”, or the narrative of the first (anonymous) Minyad — and I have shown that it does not incline either in favor of or against vision. The two other narrating Minyads, Leuconoe and Alcithoe, similarly pose the question of vision’s reliability, but fail to answer it. The “Pyramus and Thisbe” story implies that the same visual sign might or might not carry a message agreeing with previous facts, depending on the viewer’s processing of it. I will now go on to suggest that the other two inset stories show the ambivalent reliability of vision by 1) presenting not one (at a time), but multiple visual signs, some of which are relatively trustworthy, while others are deeply misleading, and 2) shifting the focus from the viewer decoding visual signs to the sender emitting them. In this way, the ambivalence might be located not so much in the signs themselves or their recipients, but in the intentions of those sending them forth — a fact which, in turn, can be brought to bear on the moral characterization of the senders.

The two inset stories narrated by Leuconoe and Alcithoe belong to the *past* (according to the time scheme deployed across this dissertation), so they do not constitute *backstories*. However, the temporal layering fleshes out even more clearly vision's reliability as the question that the reader is invited to pursue across this story *cluster*, and again helps consolidate the argument about the Minyads as decidedly oral/aural narrators.

First, Leuconoe narrates the story of Sol witnessing the affair of Mars and Venus and reporting it to the cuckolded husband Vulcan (*Met.* 4.169-189),⁷⁹ and that of Sol's sexual encounter with Leucothoe and its aftermath (*Met.* 4.190-270). In this pair of inset tales, what Sol sees is largely what there is to see, at least according to Leuconoe. His vision does not grant him an unclear message — Mars and Venus are indeed sleeping together. Later on in the narrative, he sees a woman, Leucothoe, and identifies her as exceptionally beautiful. One might think that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder (and the narrator at first encourages this thought, *Met.* 4.204-208), and that Sol's assessment is to a great extent due to his infatuation with the young woman. The narrator Leuconoe, however, goes out of her way to validate Sol's judgment by stating that he was right: Leucothoe was the prettiest woman on earth. In fact, there is also a hereditary aspect to her beauty, since her mother Eurynome had claimed that title for herself before Leucothoe reached puberty, but then she passed it on to her daughter (*Met.* 4.210-211). This quite assertive statement of the narrator lends a certain amount of truth value to Sol's judgment of Leucothoe's outward appearance.

⁷⁹ This is another story whose *background* potential could be investigated. Especially the idea of literary-historical *background* retellings of the story, from Homer's Demodocus down to Ovid's own *Ars Amatoria*, have perhaps contributed to the limited length of the story (although Leuconoe gives it a special twist to emphasize the parallelism between Vulcan's and her own art) as explored by Boyd (2016) esp. 57-63.

Sol as a recipient of visual signs shows the relative reliability of vision. But what about the visual signs he emits? He fulfills that function mainly in the story of Leucothoe, in which he gains access to her inner chambers by cross-dressing. He disguises himself as Eurynome, Leucothoe's mother, in order to approach her and eventually force himself on her (*Met.* 4.218-219). In this case, vision is misleading, and both Leucothoe's servants and presumably Leucothoe herself get tricked into believing Sol to be Eurynome. Still, there seems to be more to this instance of deception than the inherent deceptiveness of visual signs. Sol has consciously distorted the visual image of himself that he projects to Leucothoe and her companions, since otherwise he could not have invaded her room. Having gained access to this place, where Leucothoe had normally expected to be safe, and finding her alone there, he forces her into a sexual encounter with relative ease.

Thus, "Sol and Leucothoe" serves to enrich the question of the reliability of visual signs by adding the issue of the senders' intentions. It is not just that visual signs are by default ambiguous, but also that certain characters can manipulate them to their own advantage. A similar situation is to be found in the Mars and Venus story. Vulcan fashions invisible bonds for the illicit lovers ([...] *et laqueos, quae lumina fallere possent, | elimat, Met.* 4.177-178),⁸⁰ and again this is an instance of unsuccessful viewing, from the standpoint of Mars and

⁸⁰ In line with her reading of the Minyad stories as expressive of a feminine viewpoint (an uncertainty about Woman as a pinned-down, constituted subject, and a divergence from male-sanctioned institutions, law and rules of moral conduct), Janan (1994) 434-435 points out that the description of the webs directs attention to the vivid visual element of the bronze shackles, only finally to describe them as invisible. According to Janan, this visual emphasis directs attention away from moral value judgments on the characters' actions, and towards the appreciation of art for its own sake. The tension between the visual expressiveness of the lines and the trait of invisibility might be telling for a reading of the story through (unsuccessful) sight.

Venus. Again, the lack of visual understanding does not necessarily lie in the ambivalence of vision as a process in itself or in the ambiguity of visual signs themselves, but in the clear intention of Vulcan to construct misleading visual signs. At any rate, the above idea can work the other way around as well: perhaps the emphasis is to be placed on the malicious intentions of those sending visual signs, but perhaps these malicious intentions are successfully carried out precisely because of the inherent ambiguity of the visual process.

Sol is similar to Vulcan in that they both send forth deceptive visual signs. However, one of Sol's primary functions in the *Metamorphoses* (and possibly in ancient myth generally) is that of the personification of light. In other words, he does not merely (accurately) see everything, but he also provides mankind with light to see by (*Met.* 4.227-228). While still madly in love with Leucothoe, Sol displays negligence in the fulfillment of his duties as the "eye of the world". He forgets to grant daylight to most regions of the earth and focuses it exclusively on Leucothoe (*Met.* 4.195-203). This lack of daylight is configured as a substantial loss for mankind. The relationship of Sol's absence with catastrophic consequences may also be implied through the cross-reference to Phaethon's notorious ride on Sol's chariot that almost razed the entire earth to the ground (*Met.* 4.245-246, after Leucothoe gets crushed under the earth). Put simply, in book 2 (in the Phaethon story) Sol is fire whereas in book 4 he is light, but the total lack of light in the latter is considered just as destructive as the excess of fire in the former.⁸¹ Therefore, while sight is often misleading

⁸¹ There is a less explicit connection between Sol-as-fire and Sol-as-light in lines 194-197: *nempe tuis omnes qui terras ignibus uris | ureris igne novo, quique omnia cernere debes, | Leucothoen spectas et virgine figis in una | quos mundo debes oculos.* This compressed statement might imply that Sol is normally a source of light and moderate warmth/heat, with both Phaethon's scorching ride through the heavens and the darkness spread over the world by lovestruck Sol deviating from the healthy norm. When Sol lingers in the sky for longer than

and susceptible to manipulation by deceitful senders of visual images, it is still a necessary evil — the total elimination of light/sight, or its focus on one region of the earth at the expense of the rest of the world, would result in the end of the world itself.

The third inset story, narrated by the Minyad Alcithoe, revolves around another moment of forced sexual encounter, with the lake nymph Salmacis essentially raping the young boy Hermaphroditus (*Met.* 4.285-388). In this case too, as in “Sol and Leucothoe”, there seems to be some tension between the “active” partner, who imposes their wish to have sex, as a sender of untrustworthy visual signs, and the “passive” partner, who sends largely accurate signs while being deceived as a recipient of signs themselves.

Hermaphroditus’ distinctive quality is his ambivalent gender configuration. It is not just that his age qualifies him as a person at the transitional stage between young man and adult (*Met.* 4.292, he is fifteen years old), but that there are both feminine and masculine aspects to him (*cuius erat facies, in qua materque paterque | cognosci possent, Met.* 4.290-291). These aspects are inherited from his parents, Hermes and Aphrodite, and reflected onto his outward appearance (as well as onto his name, *nomen quoque traxit ab illis, Met.* 4.291). In other words, it is not just that he performs both as masculine and feminine, but that he looks like both too. His looks match his gender identity, and therefore Salmacis’ (or anybody’s, for that matter) visual perception of him is quite accurate (in *Met.* 4.316 she sees a *puer*, which is exactly how the narrator has characterized Hermaphroditus at the beginning of the story, *Met.* 4.285).

usual and thus prolongs daylight (*Met.* 4.197-199) his actions seem strange but not necessarily unpleasant; whereas when he absents himself from the sky darkness is said to be terrifying (*vitiumque in lumina mentis | transit, et obscurus mortalia pectora terres, Met.* 4.200-201).

Salmacis is generally quite a successful viewer. The scene of her examining her reflection on the surface of her own lake is quite a clear counterpoint to Narcissus' at first misleading and then destructive viewing process (*Met.* 3.407-505). She seems to have no problem recognizing that this is a reflection of herself, and deciding which accessories will make her look more attractive (*et quid se deceat spectatas consulit undas*, *Met.* 4.312). She also seems specifically able to control the way Hermaphroditus will perceive her once she presents herself to him (*et finxit vultum et meruit formosa videri*, *Met.* 4.319).⁸²

However, Hermaphroditus proves to be a less successful viewer when Salmacis, as a sender of visual signs, decides to deceive him. After he rejects her amorous advances (*Met.* 4.336) she pretends to leave him alone (*Met.* 4.337-338), while in fact spying on him with the intention of sneaking on him stealthily (*Met.* 4.339-340). In order to bring about the sexual union she longs for, she is willing to send a visual sign to the effect that she is absent (and to confirm it with words), when in fact she is present, just hiding. Similarly to Leucothoe, Hermaphroditus is left alone at a place that he considers safe, and this provides Salmacis with the opportunity to force herself on him.

In both "Sol and Leucothoe" and "Salmacis and Hermaphroditus" the issue of the reliability of sight is tied to the question of gender power relations and the morality of visual

⁸² Salmacis' control of the "other"'s gaze, as well as her ability to exercise intrusive, objectifying gazing on Hermaphroditus, is one of the less clear-cut test cases of Salzman-Mitchell's study on gender-conditioned gazing in the *Metamorphoses* (2005, 161-163). Salmacis seems to possess a typically male gaze, but this fact renders her aberrant as a woman and raises the question of whether a woman should adopt a male gaze and what the consequences will be. There is another reason why this story's gender categories, and its reading of a gendered gaze, are less than clear-cut: from the beginning of the story both Salmacis and Hermaphroditus perform as both stereotypically male and stereotypically female, with the gender boundaries blurred not only in Hermaphroditus' outward appearance, but in his and Salmacis' actions as well. See Robinson (1999) 217-218.

sign senders. Sol and Salmacis impose themselves on Leucothoe and Hermaphroditus respectively, with the less powerful partners unwillingly submitting themselves to the more powerful ones. The different gender of Sol and Salmacis might perhaps indicate that in these two stories such power relations are not gender-specific, since both a male and a female can act as the more powerful partner in such unequal sexual encounters. Rather, one of the ways in which the active partner is distinguished from the passive one is their intrusive and successful gaze, as well as their cunning ability to deceive the passive partner and trick them into believing in visual signs that do not correspond to the dominant version of the story.⁸³ They use vision to gain access to private spaces from which they are normally excluded (a maiden's private chambers, a boy's bath in a secluded lake) and, while their perception of visual signs is largely accurate, their emission of visual signs is largely untrustworthy. Therefore, Sol and Salmacis are successful viewers, while Leucothoe and Hermaphroditus are unsuccessful ones, primarily because of the deceitful intentions of their respective sexual partners.

E. Vision in another inset tale: Acoetes and/as Bacchus

All three inset stories told by the Minyads approach the issue of the trustworthiness of vision, but in different ways fail to provide a definitive and foolproof answer to it. This is

⁸³ The unequal sexual relations in Leuconoe's and Alcithoe's stories are notably different from the egalitarian love relationship of Pyramus and Thisbe. Vision, or the narratological concept of focalization, also mediates this difference — as Salzman-Mitchell (2005) 65-66 observes, the asymmetry of the elegiac *exclusus amator/dura puella* relationship is modified in "Pyramus and Thisbe", with both lovers playing the role of the *exclusus amator* by addressing the wall that stands as an obstacle between them. Focalization (2005, 165-166) is also roughly evenly shared between them.

articulated in two different ways: in the “Pyramus and Thisbe” and the “Ninus and Semiramis” the same sign can be both reliable and misleading; in the other Minyad tales each story contains a multitude of signs, some of which are reliable and some misleading (according to the external narrator’s standpoint). These stories occupy the same level of embeddedness in relation to the main, overarching story, the contempt shown to Bacchus’ godhead by the Minyads and their consequent transformation into bats. To proceed with my reading, I am here starting from the assumption that there must be some, at least tangential, thematic relationship between embedded and embedding stories, in addition to the linking figure of Bacchus. The lens of sight or vision might provide the reader with an answer.⁸⁴

At first sight, such a scope does not seem particularly fruitful. Even if all three inset stories converge around the notion of vision, vision is not necessarily an important theme in the overarching Minyad story. Or is it? But before that, perhaps a look at another inset story, loosely connected to the three sisters’ tales through the unifying *persona* of the ambiguously divine Bacchus, is in order.

In stark contrast to the Minyads, the rest of the Theban people have been persuaded to worship Bacchus by the epiphany of the god and the punishment of another *contemptor divum*, the Theban king Pentheus (*Met.* 3.511-733). The main body of this episode follows along the lines of the earlier dramatization of the myth by Euripides’ *Bacchae*. According to the tragedy, Dionysus robs Pentheus of his senses, launches him into a voyeuristic expedition against his bacchant mother and aunts, and has him rent apart by them under the influence of

⁸⁴ The relationship of Bacchus specifically with deceptive vision and/or the theatrical spectacle may also permeate all three Minyad tales (which is quite ironical, given their stated contempt for his godhead). See Keith (2010) 187-217.

the delusional frenzy he causes.⁸⁵ Within the dramatic time of the play both Dionysus and Pentheus disguise themselves, the latter as a bacchant woman (in order to spy on the Bacchic ceremonies unharmed), the former as a follower of Dionysus (in order to trick Pentheus into approaching the bacchants). Although Ovid does not adopt Pentheus' cross-dressing and only indirectly hints at Bacchus as the agent of Pentheus' downfall, he does not significantly alter the outline of the plot. He even retains the scene where Pentheus interrogates the disguised god (in the Ovidian epic he is provided with a name, Acoetes⁸⁶) about his supposed encounter with Dionysus/Bacchus and his initiation into the Bacchic rites (*Met.* 3.572ff.). The Euripidean Dionysus answers with just one line, ὀρῶν ὀρῶντα, καὶ δίδωσιν ὄργια (*Ba.* 470). It comes as a surprise, therefore, that at this point Ovid inserts an entire inset narrative revolving around the abduction, by Acoetes and his fellow Tyrrhenian sailors, of a boy who turned out to be Bacchus (Acoetes adds this information as an afterthought: *tum denique*

⁸⁵ Pentheus may be seen here as a perverted spectator at the theater — Ovid may be retaining Euripides' self-reflexive connotations (although of course Ovid is here no playwright) through the lines that set the scene of Pentheus' demise: *monte fere medio est, cingentibus ultima silvis, / purus ab arboribus spectabilis undique campus, Met.* 3.708-709). Of course, if his mother Agave and the other Bacchantes are to be taken as the “actresses” at the metaphorical theater and Pentheus is the “viewer”, there is gazing both ways: *hic oculis illum cernentem sacra profanis / prima videt, prima est insano concita cursu, / prima suum misso violavit Penthea thyrsos / mater (Met.* 3.710-713).

⁸⁶ If an intertext can provide a direction to our reading of the *Metamorphoses*, the story of Dionysus' disguised appearance to a group of disbelieving sailors, their failure (with the exception of the helmsman) to recognize him, and their transformation into dolphins as punishment is also found in the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*. There, the anonymous helmsman is obviously not Dionysus himself, but a regular perceptive human (and he does not subsequently relate the story to anyone else, with the freedom to alter any details). However, this lack of identification between the helmsman and Dionysus in the *Hymn* does not rule out the possibility that in the Ovidian narrative “Acoetes” is indeed Bacchus.

Bacchus / (*Bacchus enim fuerat*) [...], *Met.* 3.629-630), and the different outcomes of the encounter for his impious companions and for Acoetes himself (*Met.* 3.582-691).⁸⁷

Before recounting the epiphany of the god, Acoetes provides Pentheus with an account of his life story. The *backstory* (or a story set in the past compared to the *past inset story*) unfolds as follows: He inherits the fisherman's occupation from his father, but later on he realizes that he cannot settle for random fishing. Instead, he trains himself in astronomy, the position of the stars, the direction of the winds and the hospitable harbors for his maritime activities (*Met.* 3.594-596). He does not merely inherit his father's art, but seeks to enhance it through a perceptive reading and interpretation of the sky and land formations. Similarly, during the narrative time of the inset story proper, when faced with the boy who turns out to be the newly established god, he is capable of seeing through his disguise and perceiving his divine qualities. He cannot put his finger on the precise name of the divinity or the precise trait(s) that render(s) him divine, but he can still tell a god disguised as a human from a regular human (*specto cultum faciemque gradumque; | nil ibi quod credi possit mortale videbam. | et sensi et dixi sociis* [...], *Met.* 3.609-611).

It should be obvious by now that this story can be added to the ones thematizing the question of the reliability of vision, with the additional aspects of a) vision sharpened through training and observation, and b) the reliability of vision specifically when it comes to recognizing a disguised god for what he really is. Acoetes succeeds in recognizing the/a god, however vaguely, whereas his fellow sailors fail to do so, presumably because they lack the

⁸⁷ For Acoetes' story as contributing to the frustration of Pentheus-as-a-listener (which is added on top of his frustration at the earlier reception of his speech by the Theban population) see McNamara 2010.

background training in which he has invested so many years of his life. However, such a simplified conclusion is not necessarily all there is to it.

Although Acoetes surpasses his father in visual perceptiveness, there is a limit beyond which such perceptiveness does not (and possibly is not permitted to) go. It is one thing (and a very important thing) to learn how to read the sky (*oculis [...] notavi*, *Met.* 3.595, cf. *ipse quid aura mihi tumulo promittat ab alto | prospicio*, *Met.* 3.603-604), the land and the sea, that is to form a proto-scientific way of adapting to one's natural surroundings; it is quite another to reach all the way to the realm of the gods and to be able to tell a god disguised as a human from a regular human. The two spheres of existence are by no means similar, and access to the latter could be considered significantly more restricted to humans than access to the former.

In any case, Acoetes does not explain what exactly led him to the conclusion that the boy is in fact divine (the verb used is *sensi* (*Met.* 3.611), which points perhaps to intuition rather than logical reasoning),⁸⁸ let alone which part of his previous training he applied to reach that conclusion.⁸⁹ In fact, when the boy resumes Bacchus' regular appearance the change is signified through his casting aside of the somnolent, intoxicated look ([...] *veluti clamore*

⁸⁸ One possible solution is evident in the words of Feldherr (1997) 34: "However, it is precisely this ability to conceal his (i.e. Bacchus') identity through disguise that more than anything else reveals the god's essential nature." Of course, this conclusion is possible for the reader, not for the fictional Acoetes — Feldherr at this point assumes that "Acoetes" is Bacchus, therefore the process of recognition is perhaps immaterial to him.

⁸⁹ A Lacanian reading leads Janan (2009) 213-214 to the conclusion that Acoetes (as evidenced by his name, which means "wife" — although she admits that it can also mean "husband") is endowed with a feminine perception of the world: his not strictly logical way of identifying the boy as Bacchus shows an intuitive understanding that belongs more to the (feminine) Imaginary than to the (masculine) Symbolic realm. Thus, Acoetes is a fitting candidate as a future votary of Bacchus, since he displays gender ambiguity from the outset.

solutus / sit sopor atque mero redeant in pectora sensus, Met. 3.630-631) — the one precisely that supposedly led to his identification as Bacchus by Acoetes. Overall, Acoetes’ ostensibly acute conclusion that the boy is a god might also be attributed to chance and by no means guarantees that training is the key to successful visual perception.

Things are about to get even more complicated. Throughout the narration of the inset story and afterwards, when “Ovid” recounts Acoetes’ miraculous release from Pentheus’ shackles, he does not explicitly cast Acoetes as Bacchus in disguise. In other words, Acoetes (*pace* Euripides) might after all be just who he says he is, a follower of Bacchus and a practitioner of his rites. In this case, the above reading of his inset tale holds good. However, if “Acoetes” is Bacchus in disguise,⁹⁰ the inset tale has not taken place, it is not true. To be sure, any story is an invention, but if “Acoetes” is Acoetes, then within the fictional world of his encounter with Pentheus the story he relates can be safely considered true. However, if “Acoetes” is Bacchus in disguise nothing is true, not even in this self-enclosed fictional world. Therefore, even the little hope that vision has reached some way towards the truth is immediately shattered just when such a possibility is opened up. There is “in fact” no

⁹⁰ Acoetes’ oath in the name of Bacchus (*per tibi nunc ipsum [nec enim praesentior illo | est deus] adiuro, Met. 3.658-659*) might imply that Bacchus is literally present before Pentheus’ eyes. Of course, there is no way of deciding between the literal and metaphorical meanings of *praesens* (when applied to gods, the participle seems to combine bodily presence and promptness to assist, see *OLD* s.v. *praesens* 3). For the opposite opinion, namely that there is nothing to suggest that “Acoetes” is Bacchus, especially because he narrates his tale with no implicit moral lesson for Pentheus, but just as an extraordinary occurrence that converted him into one of Bacchus’ votaries, see Miller (2016) 107.

Acoetes, nor has he ever existed, so no perceptive human has ever been able to identify Bacchus in disguise.⁹¹

This ambiguity of “Acoetes” identity supports a reading of the Bacchus story *cluster* as also thematizing the relativity of “truth”. In the previous instances of successful or unsuccessful vision, the reader’s *interpretation*, or a way of reconciling *inference* and “truth”, might be the most effective way for the reader to understand the text. There is no external “truth” against which to measure any statement, and therefore a character’s *inference* is not necessarily less trustworthy than the *interpretation* of a reader, or the narrator’s statement. At least, however, what the narrator presents as “truth” is established as such by the narrator him/herself. In this instance, the very identity of the narrator, upon which the validity of the story within the fictional world of the *Metamorphoses* depends, is debatable. Read thus, the question of the story’s “truth value” is cast under even more serious doubt than usual. In a sense, “Acoetes” both is and is not Bacchus, inasmuch as the story he tells can be interpreted either way.

In previous sections, I have distinguished between a correct first-level *sensory reception* of a visual sign, a wrong second-level *inference* about it (both on the part of the characters) and a way of reconciling *inference* and “truth” through *interpretation* (granted only to the

⁹¹ Acoetes (not to be identified with disguised Bacchus) may have featured in a Pacuvian tragedy. See Fantham (2004) 41-42. For “Acoetes” oscillation between identification with Acoetes and Bacchus see Feldherr (1997) 29 (although at 32ff. he prefers his identification with Bacchus): “And since Acoetes himself, who tells this tale as a warning to Pentheus, may very well be the same god in another disguise, the audience of this narrative (or audiences, since Ovid gives his reader no more certainty about the speaker’s identity than the clues that Acoetes himself gives Pentheus) faces the same challenge as the characters within it.” For Bacchus as oscillating between presence, both as narrating subject and narrated object, and absence (mainly because of his disguise), and for the correspondence between Pentheus’ and Acoetes’ stories, see Hardie (2002) 168-170.

reader). In this story, “truth” is a little more complicated, depending on whether one takes into account the details of the *Bacchae* as an intertext. In the Euripidean tragedy, Dionysus disguises himself as one of his own votaries in order to confront Pentheus. If one follows this version, then in the *Metamorphoses* “Acoetes” is actually Bacchus in disguise. If one does not follow it (Ovid might have innovated in this respect while following the general lines of his source’s plot) “Acoetes” is who he says he is. Let me now consider how the schema of visual perception plays out in the Acoetes inset tale, both if “Acoetes” is who he says he is and if he is Bacchus in disguise.

If “Acoetes” is Acoetes, what happens in the inset story is: a) on the first level he perceives a boy, b) on the second level he *infers* that he is a god — which is only partially true, because he cannot put his finger on the god’s precise identity. In fact, the signs Acoetes encounters could very reasonably lead the reader through the reverse process, namely to the fact that the boy is Bacchus, and after that, by definition, to the conclusion that he is a god. He is a young boy (*puerum*, *Met.* 3.607) with quite an effeminate appearance (*virginea [...] forma*, *Met.* 3.607), slightly somnolent (*somnoque gravis*, *Met.* 3.608) and with an unstable step (*titubare videtur | vixque sequi*, *Met.* 3.608-609), both signs of inebriation (*mero*, *Met.* 3.608). These are explicitly cast as parts of Acoetes’ first-level, superficial *sensory reception* (*videtur*, *Met.* 3.608). He repeats his observations in the very next phrase: he gazes at the boy’s garb, face and walk (*specto cultum faciemque gradumque*, *Met.* 3.609). There is little doubt that what he saw was what there was to see. However, his *inference* that these signs are exclusively indicative of a god, other than very vague, is not compelling either. There are surely many mortals who would match that description, and, conversely, many gods who would not. Instead, a reader familiar with standard representations of Dionysus/Bacchus

would be able to match this boy's appearance not to any god, but to this particular god (which Acoetes does not realize at the time).⁹²

The problem with Acoetes as a viewer is that he presumably has never laid eyes on Bacchus before this encounter. Moreover, in view of how newly established Bacchus is as a god, to the point that his godhead is still debatable for some mortals (his worship is called *ignota* [...] *sacra*, *Met.* 3.530 and *morisque novi* [...] *sacra*, *Met.* 3.581), there does not as yet exist a stereotypical, generic, standard description of his appearance — which would be another way that (an implicit) *background* shapes one's perception in the main inset story. In that sense, much as Pyramus and Thisbe or the Assyrian soldiers, Acoetes lacks some *background* and thus quite reasonably fails to identify the boy as Bacchus. Moreover, the reader might assume that Acoetes is not interested in showing Pentheus how the boy is Bacchus (that is to be expected), but rather how Bacchus-as-a-boy is a god (this is the controversial part). However, the boy's outward appearance is not enough to qualify him as a (generic) god, and indeed the other sailors do not get the message.

In contrast to the “Pyramus and Thisbe” and to the “Ninus and Semiramis”, Acoetes' *inference* is (partially) true, because the boy is indeed a god. Therefore, the reader does not need to step in and reconcile *inference* and truth, but instead *sensory reception* and *inference*. In other words, the entire process of vision is still less than smooth, but the problem occurs at

⁹² Again, comparison with the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* proves illuminating: in the *Hymn*, the helmsman comes to the conclusion that the boy must be a god in disguise only after the boy supernaturally escapes all attempts of the sailors to tie him down (*HHD* 13-14). The outward appearance of the boy is similar to the Ovidian description (he seems effeminate and potentially rich, *HHD* 3-6) but the elements of somnolence and intoxication are absent. Therefore, the Homeric helmsman's conclusion that the boy is supernatural and therefore a god is more logically consistent than that of the Ovidian Acoetes.

a different link in the chain. In general, much as in the “Pyramus and Thisbe” and the “Ninus and Semiramis”, some steps of the process are straightforward and uncomplicated, but others still are alarmingly problematic.

If “Acoetes” is Bacchus in disguise: a) Pentheus sees (and is informed that he is talking to) Acoetes, b) Pentheus takes what he sees for granted; his *sensory reception* and *inference* lead to the same conclusion, i.e. that he sees Acoetes, which is wrong. In this case, the readers cannot take matters in their own hands and try to reconcile *inference* (“Acoetes” is Acoetes) and “truth” (“Acoetes” is in fact Bacchus). There is no way, figurative, conciliatory or other, that Bacchus can somehow be both Bacchus and Acoetes — as the lioness could somehow both kill and not kill Thisbe (agent vs. cause), or Semiramis could somehow be both male and female (literal vs. figurative). The reason for this is that Acoetes has no independent existence within the fictional world of Ovid’s narrative. He is just a construct, a mask assumed by Bacchus for the purpose of encountering Pentheus, testing his piety and eventually bringing about his destruction. Pentheus’ slaves seem to voice this mutual exclusivity when they tell Pentheus that they have not seen Bacchus, but only his votary Acoetes (*Met.* 3.572-575). In this instance, there seems to be no room for the readers to apply their additional knowledge and reconcile the steps of the visual perception process.

This last inset tale aligns with, and complements, the conclusions of the “Pyramus and Thisbe” and of the “Ninus and Semiramis”. Acoetes’ story is not a *backstory*, or it takes place at one remove from the overarching temporal level — in this sense, the temporal layering observed in the building blocks of the “Pyramus and Thisbe” or in the implicit *backstory* of “Ninus and Semiramis” does not obtain here. It is also not narrated as a *past* inset story by the Minyads, but rather by “Acoetes” (although they belong to the same

temporal level, they are not recounted by the same narrators). But, beyond their coexistence on the same temporal level, they all converge in constituting an extended discussion on visual perception. In all of these cases, the question of the reliability of vision is posed, vision figures as a complex process consisting of several steps (involving both the characters and the readers), and all its inherent complications and tensions are highlighted. If the Minyad stories show that a character's *inference* is incongruent with the main narrator's facts but could somehow (through *interpretation*) fit into a concept of "truth", the Acoetes story shows either how *inference* and truth are ultimately incompatible ("Acoetes" is Bacchus) or how *inference* can be factually correct but still problematic ("Acoetes" is Acoetes). This discussion has also shown the relativity of the concept of "truth" itself — the reader is unsure not only about the events of the story, but also about whether "Acoetes" is a "real" person within Ovid's narrative in the first place. Therefore, the question of how accurate, or how necessary, *interpretation* is rendered even more obscure by the uncertainty of what can safely be counted as "true".

F. Vision and the main Minyad story

It seems quite evident by now that another inset story, this time more closely connected to Bacchus than the ones recounted by the Minyads, investigates the complicated question of the reliability of vision. But what does any of it have to do with the overarching narrative? The Minyads, as mentioned above, favor oral instead of visual stories, despite the importance of sight within the inset stories themselves and their designation as practitioners of visual art. Their preference for sound over sight, however, refers to them as storytellers (narrators of

their respective inset tales) rather than as agents in the main story. Although it looks like I have reached a dead end here, I will simply backtrack for a moment and consider, not what Ovid is saying about Bacchus, the Minyads and vision, but instead what he might have said and is most certainly not saying.

Antoninus Liberalis (2nd/3rd century CE) has possibly preserved some metamorphic stories (from Nicander's *Heteroeoumena* and/or Boeos' *Ornithogonia*) that might have inspired some of the Ovidian *Metamorphoses* tales. In Antoninus' take on the Minyads story (*Metamorphoses* 10), Dionysus himself appears to the sisters, albeit disguised as a young girl, and tries to persuade them to worship the god. When they refuse, he transforms himself into a variety of animals in quick succession, which significantly sways them. Then they cast lots on who will be the one to rend her son apart and sacrifice him to appease the slighted god. After the sacrifice, they roam the mountains as newly enlisted bacchantes, with Hermes finally transforming them into three different birds.

Antoninus' version looks like a double of the Pentheus story, with the slight difference that in his case the mother (the Minyad Leucippe) and not the son (Pentheus) is unresponsive to the disguised god. In both cases, however, the mother (Agave/Leucippe) tears her son (Pentheus/Hippasus) to pieces, under the destructive influence of Bacchus/Dionysus. In any case, Antoninus' Minyads are different from Ovid's in two respects: they have seen the god with their own eyes (his disguise notwithstanding), and their end is more tragic.⁹³ To be sure,

⁹³ It is probable that Nicander and Boeos wrote within a moralistic didactic tradition, and articulated their metamorphic stories as uncomplicated instances of pious/impious behavior resulting in divine reward/punishment. This might account for the tragic end of Antoninus' Minyads. Because of their sometimes simplistic conciseness, Antoninus' (and perhaps Nicander's and Boeos') myths do not presuppose actual visual contact of the god and the mortal. In that sense, Antoninus' Minyad story is an exception, and Ovid's potential choice

the Ovidian Minyads get transformed into bats in a terrifying scene (*Met.* 4.389-415), but the pathos of the mother mercilessly rending her son apart is missing.

I have suggested above that Ovid's Minyads are listeners and oral storytellers, rather than viewers and producers of visual stories (especially with respect to their weaving). Their only experience of Bacchus is through the stories/rumors they have heard about him — they base their opinion about whether he is a god exclusively on these rumors. They are never offered the opportunity to lay eyes on him, even in disguise, not even during their transformation — it is not really certain that Bacchus is present as the direct agent of that transformation either (the god's drums, which signal the beginning of the transformation section, are explicitly called unseen, *non apparentia*, *Met.* 4.391).

Therefore, the Ovidian Minyad section explores the question of the reliability of vision, but towards its end deprives its protagonists of direct visual contact with the god. If they had been granted that contact, they might have recognized Bacchus as a god, the way Acoetes (says he) did. Or they might not have recognized him, the way Pentheus or the Antoninus Minyads did not. The inset stories (both the ones narrated by the Minyads themselves and the Acoetes tale) show that visual recognition can work either way. But if the goal of the main story is to have the impious sisters transformed into bats as punishment, by the logic of the story the Minyads have to persist in their transgression — they need *not* to recognize Bacchus until the very end. Still, if they come into visual contact with him, there is a chance, no matter how slight, of their recognizing him. Thus, the only way for the story to end

to deviate from it might be all the more telling. On morality and conciseness in Hellenistic metamorphic stories see Fletcher (2012) 90-97.

unequivocally in failed recognition is if the sisters do not see Bacchus at all — they will surely not recognize him if they do not see him to begin with.

The conclusion slowly emerging is that vision is not totally reliable or unreliable, but that non-vision is ultimately untrustworthy, or that vision is a necessary evil. The only guaranteed way for one to fail in one's recognition is if one is deprived of vision altogether. Similarly, the Minyads do not necessarily misrecognize Bacchus — they just have no visual signs on which to base their attempt at recognition, whether accurate, misleading, ambivalent or otherwise.

In the end, the sisters get metamorphosed into bats. In that sense, they might be perpetuating the characteristics or habits they had displayed during their human existence, or more specifically at the moment of their metamorphosis.⁹⁴ During their storyline in the *Metamorphoses*, they consistently avoided visual contact with anyone but one another, whether intentionally or not. At the moment of their transformation, they try to avoid the lamps and fires which produce a supernatural light, in order not to get blinded by it (*Met.* 4.401-406). They are not really aware of the details of their transformation, because they seek darkness and cannot see what is happening to them (*Met.* 4.409-410). As bats, they also avoid daylight and prefer to wander around by twilight and at night (*Met.* 4.414-415).

Does the end of the story imply that they were transformed into blind creatures because vision is ultimately unreliable, therefore blindness is preferable? Or, conversely, were they blinded because they had transgressed their boundaries and had to be deprived of a skill

⁹⁴ Solodow (1988) 176-186 was the first to coin the term “clarification” to describe this literalization of a human's traits into their subsequent existence as animals or plants. The trait had been latent in metaphorical form during the human phase, but during the animal/plant phase it is brought forth literally and more vividly.

precious to animate beings? Possibly neither. The answer to the above questions rests on whether bats are considered (partially) blind, in the *Metamorphoses* and generally in ancient thought. What Ovid seems to be implying is not that bats cannot see during daylight, but that they, as a species, avoid exposure to daylight (*lucemque perosae*, *Met.* 4.414) — it is not clear that they can see in a traditional sense of the word during nighttime either. This is also what they had consciously been doing during their previous life as humans — they were not willing to engage in the process of seeing (and consequently of processing what they saw).

Quasi-scientific writings about the visual skills of bats are sparse before Ovid. The only relevant passage that has come to my attention is part of the introduction to the second book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (993a30-b12), where the philosopher makes some general observations about the potential of humans to reach the truth. In the relevant section, Aristotle claims that our grasp of the truth is neither absolute nor non-existent, but somewhere in between (τῆ μὲν χαλεπὴ τῆ δὲ ῥαδία, *Metaph.* 993a30-b1). On the one hand, it is relatively easy for anyone to grasp a tiny part of the truth, but on the other it is virtually impossible for any human being to lay hold of the truth in its entirety (*Metaph.* 993b1-4).

To support both his claims, Aristotle uses two images with which his audience was presumably relatively familiar. To show how easy it is to perceive a morsel of the truth, he uses the proverbial phrase τίς ἂν τῆς θύρας ἀμάρτοι; (*Metaph.* 993b5). In other words, if one is literally aiming for an entire door, one is sure to hit a part of such a broad surface. Metaphorically, if one aims to understand any part of the truth about any topic, it is very unlikely that one will *not* obtain any piece of sound knowledge about it. On the other hand, it is hard to understand everything about a topic, a fact which Aristotle attributes not necessarily to the obscurity of the object of understanding itself, but also to the incompetence

of the observer/thinker him/herself (*Metaph.* 993b9). This is where bats come in, to stand for humans who are incapable of seeing and recognizing what is quite objectively there to see (ὥσπερ γὰρ τὰ τῶν νυκτερίδων ὄμματα πρὸς τὸ φέγγος ἔχει τὸ μεθ' ἡμέραν, οὕτω καὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας ψυχῆς ὁ νοῦς πρὸς τὰ τῆ φύσει φανερώτατα πάντων, 993b10-12). It is not that bats do not have the ability to see, but that they, as a species, are programmed to avoid circumstances that are normally amenable to vision.

There is quite a significant chronological gap between Aristotle and Ovid; but if Aristotle is anything to go by, Ovid might have had in mind some empirical information about bats avoiding vision. Ovid's narrative seems to align with this idea. Since the *Metamorphoses* also functions as a collection of aetiological stories, the Minyads' habits as bats show that they have retained the tendency to avoid light from the time they were human. This does not amount to a negative value judgment about vision itself, but it is a specific observation about the visual habits of a particular animal species.⁹⁵ If anything, the Ovidian Minyads seem to suffer a somewhat lighter destiny than Antoninus' Minyads, possibly because they were expected to rely on aural and not on visual signs. Thus, after spending the entire Bacchus section thematizing the ambivalence and unreliability of vision, Ovid seems to be ending on a rather positive note. Lack of recognition, in the Minyad main story, is attributed to lack of visual contact, not visual incompetence — and sight, with all its limitations, is tentatively preferred over blindness.

⁹⁵ Ironically, and taking into account the incorporation of the tale into a broader Bacchic group of stories, the association of bats with night might also signal a partial association of them (or the Minyads) with Bacchus. See Keith (2010) 199.

G. Conclusions

From this chapter, multiple ways of defining *backstories* have emerged — narratives or references that temporally precede the narrative time of inset stories may take on many forms. As a conclusion to this chapter, I now proceed by identifying these forms and describing how, in this *cluster* of stories, vision is interlinked with *pastness*. According to the scheme sketched out in the introduction, visual perception is the method through which the characters of this story *cluster* attempt to comprehend the world, and the question running through it is whether one may trust what one sees. The question applies, whether one is trying to reconstruct what has already happened based on visual clues, or one is trying to recognize a disguised god despite their altered appearance (as in the case of Leucothoe recognizing disguised Sol, or Pentheus, Acoetes or the Minyads recognizing disguised Bacchus).

In the “Pyramus and Thisbe”, the inset story I have used as my springboard, the first manifestation of a *backstory* is linked to the distinction between the *iterative* and *singulative* parts of the narrative — the former belongs in the past compared to the latter. The problematic nature of vision in the *iterative* narrative, and during the transition from *iterative* to *singulative* narrative, sets the scene for a potential reading of the entire “Pyramus and Thisbe” through this lens.

In the *iterative* narrative vision is presented as ambivalently useful, without an explicit divergence between these characters’ visual perception and what probably happened. However, once the actual action of the story starts, a difference is detectable between the characters’ reconstruction of their past (based on visual clues) and what the Minyad narrator has stated. In other words, in the *singulative* narrative the visual process consists in the

attempt of the focalizers to transport themselves to the preceding building block and to figure out its outcome. Since the reader is provided both with the narrator's and with the character's exposition of what happened, a comparison may be drawn between them, and the reliability of vision may be (mostly) questioned. Conversely, when a character's and a narrator's viewpoints diverge, the reader is invited to question not only the character, but also the narrator — everything that aspires to some truth value is expressed by language, so its validity is always at best relative.

The geographical setting of the “Pyramus and Thisbe”, Babylon, clearly designated as Semiramis' city, and the meeting place of the couple by Ninus' tomb point to a *backstory* reference — an *implied* story is introduced that has taken place a considerable time before the inset story, with some inactive time having elapsed in between. “Ninus and Semiramis” can also be read as a story centering around ambivalent vision, and more specifically ambivalent vision mediated by a garment — Semiramis' clothing creates confusion very much like Thisbe's veil. The internal audience of Semiramis' ambiguously gendered appearance again lacks any kind of *background* insight into her identity, and presumably identifies her as a man. However, again the reader can apply *background* knowledge and square this *inference* with the “truth” — Semiramis' gender is ambiguous in a performative sense. A section from Diodorus and a Propertian elegy shed more light on this part. In a way, then, I have been engaging in a *background*-influenced reading myself, this time an intertextual one. If Ovid is the *past* from modern readers' perspective, his elder contemporaries Propertius and Diodorus are an external *background* that resonates in his text.

If, however, one wants to remain within the Ovidian narrative, one can fall back into it through my discussion of woven fabrics. A *backstory* may not only be introduced in words by the respective narrators or Ovid, but also encapsulated in a material object such as a *vestis* — though of course the material object's description is mediated by the narrator's/Ovid's words anyway. In other instances, most notably in Minerva's and Arachne's tapestries in the 6th book of the *Metamorphoses*, there is a clear correlation between weaving and storytelling, and thus a certain temporal dynamic transforms the two tapestry ephrases from static descriptions into narratives unfolding in time — but in the Minyad story these connotations are bypassed. I suggest that they are only raised here, to be fully realized in book 6. The possibility of an ephrastic narrative, through both the Minyads' tapestries in the main story and Thisbe's veil in the inset story, also thematizes the different forms that a *backstory* can take on. Thisbe cannot provide Pyramus with an oral truthful presentation of a temporally prior event, nor can her veil perform that function for her, because it contains only random blood drops that do not converge into a coherent visual narrative. In this instance, the possibility both of an oral narrative and of a visual (veil) narrative are conjured up only to be rejected. Thus, at least in the inset story, Ovid refuses to prioritize visual over oral *backstories*.

In the following section, I take a break from the notion of the *backstory* to show that the question it introduces, the ambivalent reliability of vision, can spill over into the other two inset stories narrated by the other two Minyad sisters — thus, the *backstory* approach introduces, or reinforces, the question. I shift my focus from the process of vision itself, or the role of the recipient trying to decipher visual signs, to the intentions of visual sign senders

and the resulting inequalities in the sexual relationships of Sol/Leucothoe and Salmacis/Hermaphroditus.

Moving on to the last inset story of my discussion, that of Acoetes narrating to Pentheus his encounter with Bacchus, an *iterative* narrative might be unfolding here again, in the supposed autobiographical story of Acoetes' youth. Based on the experience he has spent some time building, he is expected to be able to pass any visual recognition test. As shown in section E, however, he identifies the somnolent effeminate boy as a generic god, and only afterwards as Bacchus. This might be due to the lack of another sort of *background* — it seems that, at the narrative time of Acoetes' encounter with Pentheus, Bacchus is such a recently established god that there is no standard representation of his divine appearance. Acoetes' inability to match a standard description of Bacchus to the boy in his story potentially even compromises his case in front of his listener Pentheus. Acoetes cannot convince Pentheus that the boy was Bacchus in disguise (and that he was the only one to recognize him) if he cannot persuasively walk his listener through the mental process (*inference*) he applied to reach that conclusion.

By the end of book 3 (before the Minyad story starts) two Bacchus stories (a main one: Pentheus and an inset one: Acoetes and the sailors) have been recounted. In both, Bacchus appears to a human in disguise, the human succeeds in recognizing him or fails to recognize him, and is rewarded or punished accordingly. If we construe these stories as cautionary tales, one can learn a lesson through listening to them. First, Bacchus appears to the sailors in disguise, which results in different outcomes for the impious disbelievers and for Acoetes. Even if this story has never “really” taken place, and “Acoetes” is really Bacchus in disguise, he uses this cautionary tale to put an end to Pentheus' hubristic behavior — but Pentheus is

unresponsive to this story and fails to recognize the god. Similarly, the Minyads seem to have heard about Pentheus' demise as a result of his failure to recognize disguised Bacchus — but they do not understand what is happening to them when something similar takes place. It is true that they do not encounter disguised Bacchus, as Pentheus and the sailors do, but they have heard what happens when someone dismisses Bacchus' divinity. However, they have heard only the Pentheus story, not the one of Acoetes and the sailors. If one adopts the Minyad standpoint, Pentheus belongs to the *past*, but the story of the impious sailors belongs to the *past of the past*, or is a *backstory*. In that sense, the Minyads have access to the *past*, but not to the *backstory*. The two stories are quite similar, and the differences might not be particularly illuminating, but the cumulative effect might have led the sisters to change their mind. In other words, if they had heard about the severe punishment of Bacchus' disbelievers not once but twice, they might have been persuaded to recognize his godhead.

In this chapter, various forms of *backstories* have produced a discussion on the reliability of vision. Through the use of two more intertexts (Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and Antoninus Liberalis' *Metamorphoses*), I suggest that Ovid ends his Minyad story *cluster* on a rather positive (but not exclusively positive) note. As in the Sol inset story, the conclusion seems to be not that vision is ultimately reliable or unreliable, but that non-vision is to be avoided. The Minyads are mildly accused not of faulty visual skills, but of their aversion to daylight. As agents of the main story, they avoid visual contact with the world outside their home. As storytellers, they rely on orally transmitted stories about Bacchus' godhead and do not weave their stories onto their tapestries. At the moment of their metamorphosis, they avoid the supernatural light cast by Bacchus all over the room. As bats, they perpetuate this habit by flying around only in the evening and at night. However, this habit of a particular species is

not an all-encompassing statement about the unreliability of vision. Quite the opposite: their particular inclination stands out as an exception to the general use(fulness) of vision among animate beings, while the lessening of their penalty (compared to Antoninus' Minyads) implicitly comes down less hard on them for not recognizing a god they had never seen.

III. Little Aeneid

A. Introduction

The previous story *cluster*, and chapter, centered around vision and focalization. This chapter will view *backstory*, *past* and *present* through the lens of information transmission, i.e. through the exchange of stories that conceivably have a practical function. The reliability of this method, and the tension between the competing constructions of meaning by readers (who have become aware of plot events through the reading process) and characters (who rely on information transmission, or cautionary tales, as I describe them in this introductory section), will thus be explored here.

My story *cluster* in this chapter, one that has been singled out as an autonomous narrative unit by scholarship, is the so-called *Little Aeneid* (*Met.* 13.623-14.608), namely the part of the *Metamorphoses* narrative that covers the story of Aeneas, from his escape from the ruins of Troy down to his arrival in Italy, death and deification. Intertwined with this main storyline are multiple other stories, narrated both by the third-person narrator and by internal narrators, some of which are only tenuously connected to Aeneas.⁹⁶

One of the goals of the following pages, therefore, will be to suggest an approach to the *Little Aeneid* that incorporates those stories into it and establishes a plausible connection between them. Another way of looking at the issue is that of (at least partly) accounting for the repetitiveness of some of those stories, in particular those on love triangles (Polyphemus-

⁹⁶ For Scylla's lack of relevance to Aeneas' frame story see Solodow (1988) 138-139.

Galatea-Acis, Circe-Glaucus-Scylla and Circe-Picus-Canens).⁹⁷ The *backstory* approach will be a helpful tool in addressing both of these issues. Repetitiveness, as I suggest below, is not a sign of Ovid's, or his narrators', carelessness, but potentially the very point of the *cluster*. Especially Polyphemus and Circe display a specific pattern of punitive actions (regardless of who has provoked their rage, and why), which renders them essentially predictable.

A reader of the *Little Aeneid* can scarcely avoid a reading in terms of intertextuality — which could also be construed as another instance of repetition.⁹⁸ Similarly, Ovid could not have afforded to overlook the story of Aeneas, especially as a vehicle for the transportation of his universal narrative from Greece to Rome: the Trojan War saga and its Aeneas aftermath segues smoothly from the Greek/Aegean to the Italian/Roman geographic location and poetic tradition. Ovid is in the (perhaps uncomfortable) position of having to include both the Odyssean and the Virgilian narratives into the adventures of his Aeneas — perhaps also to negotiate Virgil's intertextual backward glance towards Homer by means of his own

⁹⁷ Although his relationships between Circe and Dido, or his genealogical connections between “Picus and Canens” and the Italian part of Aeneas' saga, may not hit the mark, Ellsworth 1986 is successful in incorporating the love-triangle stories into a coherent geographical scheme.

⁹⁸ My reading in terms of repetition has been inspired by the volume *Repeat Performances* (2016), and more specifically by the chapter on Hecuba in the *Metamorphoses* by Augoustakis. Other than the obvious thematic similarities between “Hecuba” and the *Little Aeneid*, what Augoustakis defines as repetition is a flexible interpretive tool: the reference to frequentative verbs, or to repetitive actions of Hecuba herself; or, more macroscopically, the intratextual connection between the *ira* of Hecuba and Procne in the *Metamorphoses*; or the intertextual/self-referential action of “digging out” that Hecuba engages in. Similarly, I look at instances of repetition in the actions of the same character (Circe), an intratextual connection with the Cyclops (they always punish in the same way), and I connect such repetitions with an intertextual and metapoetic reading.

backward glance towards both Homer and Virgil.⁹⁹ In a literary-historical and intertextual sense, there are then three temporal levels: Ovid himself, and his twofold past, Virgil and Homer. Added to the epic predecessors are yet more poets and genres, such as Theocritus' *Idylls* 6 and 11 about Polyphemus, and potentially Latin love elegy¹⁰⁰ as a generic background. Especially the role of the Ovidian Circe as a double of the (Ovidian) elegiac *amator* and *praeceptor amoris*, and by extension of Ovid himself, will inform the relevant part of my discussion. The incorporation of a *Metamorphoses* love story into an elegiac background may work to a certain extent, but the differences are also important.

But the intratextual levels of mythical, or narrative, time are configured differently from the intertextual ones — and this is where the division of narrative time into *present*, *past* and *backstory* level is operative. In this chapter, I define these three levels as follows:

1) The *present* is the temporal level of Aeneas, having escaped from burned-down Troy, on his way to Italy. During his journey, he encounters two former comrades of Ulysses, Achaemenides and Macareus, who have both abandoned the journey back home to Ithaca (the former by accident, because the Greeks forgot about him, the latter out of aversion or fear for the impending dangers, *Met.* 14.158-159 and 440).

2) The *past* is the inset flashback stories narrated by Achaemenides and Macareus. Achaemenides refers back to the Greeks' adventures on the Cyclops Polyphemus' island, while Macareus covers Aeolus, the Laestrygonians, and mainly Circe.

⁹⁹ In a sense, Ovid is thus reworking not only Virgil and Homer, but also Virgil's Homer, or Virgil in relation to Homer. Thus, parts of my discussion would fall under Thomas' "window reference" (1986, 188-189).

¹⁰⁰ On elegiac motifs as reworked in the love-triangle stories see Farrell (1992) 249-250 and Barchiesi (2006) 419 about Polyphemus, and Aresi 2013 about Circe.

3) Within the latter flashback story (the *past*), Macareus recounts a story he has heard from one of Circe's nymph servants, the love story of Picus, Circe and Canens. Picus rejected Circe's advances in favor of his beloved wife Canens, which led to Circe transforming him into a woodpecker and his companions into wild animals, and to Canens withering away until she disappeared. This is a *backstory* proper, namely a part of the inset story (or a story inset within an inset story) that is doubly embedded (Macareus narrates that the servant narrates what happened to Picus and Canens) and refers to a level of the past before the past.

4) There are two more stories that could function as *backstories*, in the sense of referring to a temporal level before Ulysses and his comrades' visit to Circe and Polyphemus. They are both love-triangle stories as well. One also involves Circe as the rejected party, and the revenge she takes on Scylla, whom Glaucus prefers over her. She turns Scylla into a monster, which then turns into a rock. In the other story, the sea nymph Galatea rejects the Cyclops for her beloved Acis. Polyphemus tries to hurl a rock at him, but eventually Galatea transforms him into a river god. These two stories occupy different levels of embeddedness, both from each other and from "Picus and Canens". The Cyclops story is singly embedded, narrated as it is by Galatea. "Glaucus and Scylla" is not embedded at all, since it is narrated by the third-person narrator. Still, they can both be considered *backstories*, when viewed from the perspective of Aeneas and his journey.

In fact, Scylla is a particularly apposite example embodying, so to speak, the tripartite temporal division that I will be exploring in the following pages. This is because of her different ontological status during each of the three temporal levels, a status which precisely

signposts them as discrete temporal entities.¹⁰¹ At the time before Ulysses, or what I have called the *backstory* level, she is a beautiful maiden. After Circe’s intervention, she gets transformed into a monster, the form in which Ulysses encounters her (*Scylla latus dextrum, laevum inrequieta Charybdis / infestat; vorat haec raptas revomitque carinas, / illa feris atram canibus succingitur alvum, / virginis ora gerens, et, si non omnia vates / ficta reliquerunt, aliquo quoque tempore virgo, Met. 13.730-734*). What caused her last transformation, from monster to rock (*Scylla loco mansit cumque est data copia, primum / in Circes odium sociis spoliavit Ulixem; / mox eadem Teucras fuerat mersura carinas, / ni prius in scopulum, qui nunc quoque saxeus exstat, / transformata foret: scopulum quoque navita vitat, Met. 14.70-74*, which also seems like a permanent transformation extending all the way to the narrator’s “now”), is left unclear; but when the Ovidian Aeneas sails past her, she is just a harmless rock.¹⁰² It seems reasonable, then, that the Ovidian *Little Aeneid* conceives of the time before Ulysses, the time of Ulysses, and the time of Aeneas as separate and chronologically consecutive time stamps.

The temporal separation specifically of Ulysses and Aeneas is not necessarily obvious, since they fought on opposite camps of the same war and began their homeward journey at

¹⁰¹ There is also a parallel gradation of the danger that the men of Odysseus/Ulysses, the men of the Virgilian Aeneas, and the men of the Ovidian Aeneas face from Scylla. The first are the most exposed to danger, the last are the safest. Cf. Musgrove (1998) 101. Other than ontologically different during different temporal levels, Scylla may also be considered “repetitive”, in that she sums up qualities that belong to, and may stem from, both her rejected lover Glaucus and her love rival Circe. See Hopman (2012) 239-245.

¹⁰² *Pace* more allegorizing interpretations, which claim that no “actual” transformation from monster to rock has taken place, and that all this is a poetic fiction (what the poet/prophet Helenus has called a monster is merely, in “actual fact”, a harmless rock, see especially Casali [1995] 63-66). Of course, what poets fabricate is the actual stuff of poetry, and an allegorizing reading of the rocks-as-monsters deprives the *Metamorphoses* of its supernatural element, a move that may or may not be valid.

around the same (point in mythical) time. This chronological spacing out of Ulysses' and Aeneas' wanderings seems to be Virgil's innovation. The poet of the *Aeneid* probably invented Achaemenides — a character who got left over (or literally left behind) from Ulysses' temporal level, and who served to connect it to that of Aeneas, was quite useful in addressing Virgil's own intertextual preoccupations. By inventing Macareus as a double of Achaemenides, Ovid not only retains the temporal separation (which, again, is not presupposed by the myth) of Ulysses and Aeneas, but also triangulates the scheme through the *backstories* of Picus and Canens (narrated by Macareus, Ovid's invention), Scylla and Glaucus, and Galatea and Acis. There is a difference in the levels of embeddedness, since the *backstories* narrated by the third-person narrator or at one, instead of two, levels of embeddedness are formally different from the story narrated by Macareus as the nymph's mouthpiece. I will explore this tension in what follows. For now, suffice it to say that the love triangle *backstories* frame, in a ring-compositional way, the *past*-level stories of Achaemenides and Macareus.¹⁰³

Before moving into the detailed reading of selected passages, there are a few concepts that will prove fundamental to my discussion in this chapter. First, as mentioned above, there is the idea of repetition, and repetitiveness. As I will try to show below, specific patterns may be detected in the behavior of the two supernatural characters, Polyphemus and Circe, especially in the way they get back at other characters whom they wish to punish or destroy

¹⁰³ All stories (the love triangles, Macareus, Achaemenides) are set in Sicily, and most of the *Little Aeneid* in the region of Southern Italy/Sicily. This pristine landscape, then, does not get introduced to violence and evil just with the arrival of the Trojans — it has been full of it from the start. For the deconstruction of this idealistic, possibly Virgilian, picture as performed by a work (i.e. the *Metamorphoses*) written after the *Aeneid* but referring to events that precede its narrative time, see Bernstein [2018] 254).

for whatever reason. The repetition inherent in all those stories creates a sense of consistency or predictability, which extends to events that actually do not take place within the narrative — some of which are postulated as future events. This observation creates an uncanny temporal tension between stories that are formally classified as flashbacks but could also double as a peculiar sort of quasi-prophecies, in the sense that whatever happened in the past is posited as a probable occurrence of the future as well.

I will also classify some stories as cautionary survivor stories. I take the “survivor” type of story as a tale about the survival of a character from an extremely dangerous situation, especially from the wrath of Circe and Polyphemus, from which other characters have not escaped (they lose either their human form or their life). They are mostly narrated by the surviving characters themselves, except for the Picus story — I will return to the removal of Picus from the main strand of the narrative in section F. Also, in every case the narrator, or the main character, has run serious risk of destruction themselves, rather than observing as an indifferent bystander. Odysseus has been explored as a survivor-type narrator, especially during his stay at the Phaeacians, to whom he recounts a sizeable part of his adventures — but my approach will be slightly different (Ulysses does not narrate anything in the *Little Aeneid* anyway). While a survivor story’s usefulness can be considered in terms of healing the narrator, of helping them register their traumatic experience and come to terms with it as a part of their lives,¹⁰⁴ my reading will be narratee-oriented rather than narrator-oriented.

¹⁰⁴ The community of the Phaeacians (Odysseus’ audience) has been viewed as facilitating such a narrative healing process — especially since Odysseus is prompted to reveal his identity and share his story by another set of narratives, the songs performed by the bard Demodocus. See Race 2014. The link between narrative and healing, in the case of (ancient and modern) war veterans (along with the function of narratability in incorporating traumatic events into a temporal horizon), has been illustrated by Shay (1994) 183-195. In his

“Narratee-oriented” means that a story serves a practical purpose (or the narrator believes it does) at its narrating instance — in other words, the story may include a specific use to which the narratee can put it in the future. This brings me to the identity of the stories as cautionary: implicit in the narration may be the idea that what happened in the past will inevitably continue on into the future, unless the internal narrators tell the story and keep the narratees away from a potentially dangerous location or character. The narrator explains what the danger has consisted in, or what it invariably consists in. Therefore, the story both refers to the past (it is a flashback story) and is detached from any particular time stamp, thus functioning as a cautionary story looking to the future as well. The distinctiveness of such cautionary narratives lies also in that they predict something that may happen but, by warning against it, they may avert its actualization. They are paradoxically narrating it both as a past and as a future story — but, while in the past it has really (within the bounds of the Ovidian narrative) taken place, in the future it may or may not take place, with the narrator perhaps contributing to its cancellation. It seems that the main purpose of Achaemenides and Macareus as narrators is to keep the Trojans away from Polyphemus and Circe — and this goal is achieved.

The paradoxical nature of flashback quasi-prophecies, as well as their practical cautionary aspect, lead me back to the pivotal significance of information transmission as a way for the Ovidian characters to comprehend the world — this is the method of knowledge with which I am working in this chapter, in contrast to visual perception in the preceding chapter. Since Circe and Polyphemus do not come into direct contact with Aeneas’ men (and

words: “Narrative can transform involuntary re-experiencing of traumatic events into memory of the events, thereby reestablishing authority over memory.” (1994, 193).

since, in fact, it is imperative that that direct contact, and danger, be avoided), the only means left to the Trojans to understand what invariably happens at both places is through information conveyed by others. Compared to the previous chapter of my dissertation, therefore, sensory reception can serve the *Little Aeneid* characters only so much, since their *present* situation is more or less elided — they hear about the *past* in order to get prevented from experiencing a certain *future*, and the only means for this effect to be achieved is through storytelling.

In other words, while in chapter II I have suggested that the characters get confronted with a *present* that contains traces of the *past* (which they then try to decipher through the interpretation of visual signs), in this chapter the characters do not essentially confront this *present*. If information transmission is successful, this means that news of the *past* reaches them through storytelling, and this (lack of) success leads to a certain *future* — but the *present* moment is dedicated solely to this information transmission, not to any significant character action. Therefore, storytelling replaces the need for characters to come visually face to face with their *present* circumstances — and thus the way of characters' understanding in this chapter changes accordingly, from visual interpretation to information transmission.

But this cautionary nature of tales does not guarantee their success. Just because a character is in a position to issue a warning does not mean that information transmission goes through smoothly. As will become apparent in what follows, the three intratextual temporal levels I have sketched out may be tied together through two rounds of (potential) information transmission: the first from *backstory* to *past*, and the second from *past* to *present*. The first is a case of only potential information transmission, which however is never actualized. The characters of the *backstory* do not survive to tell their cautionary stories to the *past* characters

(Ulysses' men), with the result that the latter get exposed to the same dangers, and a certain degree of repetitiveness prevails. The second time around, however, from *past* to *present*, Achaemenides and Macareus are successful in getting their stories across and in keeping the Trojans away from both Polyphemus and Circe.

As in the previous chapter, a question of reliability runs through all three temporal levels (*backstory*, *past*, *present*), but the characters do not theorize on the question. Instead, repetitiveness is in the background of their narratives and their objectives. The readers are in a better position to gauge the pervasiveness of this repetition: they actually gain access to stories that look like mirror images of each other, and thus consistency is a conclusion they can reach for themselves, instead of vaguely positing it as a given (as the characters do).

Having established three intertextual temporal levels (Homer, Virgil, Ovid), as well as three intratextual ones (pre-Ulysses, Ulysses, Aeneas), I also explore the implications of repetitiveness, not only on the level of the plot, but also on that of metapoetics.¹⁰⁵ Despite the composite nature of the *cluster's* multiple narrators, the one common takeaway is a sense of repetitiveness and predictability. That trait of his narrators can then be transferred over to Ovid the poet himself (the slippage between narrator and poet/author is reasonably motivated), and may perhaps serve to convey his anxiety about his position towards his epic predecessors. According to a rather pessimistic reading, Ovid may thus be implying that 1) since repetition is intratextually well-established (Circe and Polyphemus always punish their victims in roughly the same way), and since intertextuality is a form of repetition, he can contribute only little to the epic tradition, other than a mere retelling of already well-known

¹⁰⁵ For a first nod to intratextual repetition (of Circe's and Polyphemus' actions) as translatable into Ovid's/thr narrator's need to vary his stories, see Feldherr (2014) 27-28.

tales, or 2) since some characters are altogether deprived of the opportunity to tell their stories (for example Picus/Canens or Glaucus/Scylla), or to experience a story they can then pass along (Aeneas' men do not see Polyphemus and Circe), perhaps it is also preferable for Ovid the poet to fall silent, rather than to repeat the stories of his predecessors.

But according to a more optimistic reading, a certain self-deprecating stance of Ovid may lead to an implicit self-assertion. The characters who have been granted the role of narrator are socially and ontologically unmarked, or marginal — and, conversely, Ovid has disposed of more distinguished characters as potential narrators. Virgilian prophets, usually endowed with special flash-forward skills, are either transformed into non-seers or suppressed altogether by Ovid. If, then, all those different marginal narrators make up a picture of the *Little Aeneid* narrator, and perhaps even of Ovid the poet, he may be signaling the ultimate success of his own work. If he is considered less of an expert (or less interested) in standard epic composition than Virgil and Homer, he can still communicate to his audience compelling stories. Moreover, his marginal characters' relative success in achieving their practical, cautionary goal again showcases Ovid's tentative proclamation of poetic success.

B. Macareus as a narrator: Circe's repetitive methods of punishment

To unpack the sense of intratextual repetitiveness that prevails throughout the *Little Aeneid*, we need to look at two case studies, those of Circe and Polyphemus, in rather more detail — predictability results from their similar behavior across the temporal levels of *backstory* and *past*. Out of the two, Circe's surroundings seem more straightforward. As soon as Ulysses' companions approach Circe's dwelling, they see wild animals that behave like

domesticated ones: they wag their tails and fawn on them (*Met.* 14.254-259).¹⁰⁶ In hindsight, Macareus realizes that this unnatural behavior should have put the Greeks on their guard, but apparently it did not. This, then, is an instance of split focalization: Macareus-of-the-*present* (the narrator) realizes that the animals' tame behavior was an unusual one, but Macareus-of-the-*past* (the main focalizer) presumably did not catch that hint and proceeded recklessly into Circe's palace. The lines about the animals then (also included in the *Odyssey*, 10.212-215¹⁰⁷) may be a first hint that there is a further temporal level, beyond the *past* (or beyond Ulysses' visit to Circe) — a *backstory* level, which could have provided the Greeks with information about Circe and prevented them from exposing themselves to danger.

It is possible that Macareus mentions those animals as in hindsight it dawns on him that he and his comrades were not Circe's first victims — rather, those abnormal animals had at some point been humans,¹⁰⁸ who could in theory have warned the Greeks about the danger.

¹⁰⁶ In the *backstory* level, i.e. while contemplating how to avenge herself on Scylla, Circe is also pictured among her fawning animals in similar language, which enhances the impression of repetition (Macareus about the *past*: *quin etiam blandas movere per aera caudas / nostraque adulantes comitant vestigia*, *Met.* 14.258-259 vs. third-person narrator about the *backstory*: *caerulaque induitur velamina perque ferarum / agmen adulantum media procedit ab aula*, *Met.* 14.40-41).

¹⁰⁷ *Od.* 10.212-213 (ἀμφὶ δέ μιν λύκοι ἦσαν ὀρέστεροι ἢ δὲ λέοντες, | τοὺς αὐτὴ κατέθελλεν, ἐπεὶ κακὰ φάρμακ' ἔδωκεν) may actually suggest that Circe had used her witchcraft to turn normally wild animals into tame ones — not humans into animals, which ever since have retained some human characteristics such as a tame nature. The Ovidian passage is even more unclear — and may indeed invite either interpretation, but for the fact that Virgil clarifies the (former) identity of those wild animals: *hinc exaudiri gemitus iraeque leonum | vincla recusantum et sera sub nocte rudentum, | saetigerique sues atque in praesepebus ursi | saevire ac formae magnorum ululare luporum, | quos hominum ex facie dea saeva potentibus herbis | induerat Circe in vultus ac terga ferarum* (*Aen.* 7.15-20, with Yarnall [1994] 82). These animals behave as a wild animal would, unlike the Homeric ones — but the Ovidian passage seamlessly merges both predecessors into a composite picture.

¹⁰⁸ On the previous visitors (of numerous Odyssean locations and) of Polyphemus and Circe in the *Odyssey* see Burgess (2012) 273-278. It may be important that the scholar names

Of course, the obvious reason why those warnings never materialize is that their potential narrators have turned into animals. While Macareus himself seems still to be thinking as a human during his brief existence as a pig (*Met.* 14.279-305 are focalized by Macareus as a pig), he explicitly mentions his lack of articulate speech, and thus his inability to communicate ([*coepi*] *pro verbis edere raucum* | *murmur*, *Met.* 14.280-281 and, as soon as he turns back into his human form, he and his friends resume their speaking ability: *nec verba locuti* | *ulla priora sumus quam nos testantia gratos*, *Met.* 14.306-307). This then is a hint at a potential *backstory*, which could have warned its recipients in the *past* — but it never gets actualized because of the disappearance of the potential narrators in their human form.

Another character transformed into an animal by Circe may be more helpful for my reading: Picus. The story of the love triangle of Picus, Circe and Canens is a more straightforward case of a *backstory*, as I have defined it in the introduction. It comprises part of the inset story told by Macareus to the Trojans and to Achaemenides when they meet at Cumae, close to the Underworld entrance (this narrating instance is the *present*). Within this *past* story narrated by Macareus about his and his friends' adventures at Circe's palace, a character, Circe's nymph servant, narrates a flashback story about a further level, a past within the past — or a *backstory* (*Met.* 14.320-434). But what exactly is the relationship of this story to survivor stories and cautionary tales?

In one sense, this *backstory* is a completely infelicitous cautionary tale. It is not really narrated by a survivor — and that could not have been so, since all victims have perished

the relevant chapter “travel nobodies” — those people's identity does not make a difference, and their presence might actually be an element of standardized pre-Homeric travel lore. Still, they are there, in the Ovidian inter- and intratextual background.

(Picus is metamorphosed into a woodpecker in *Met.* 14.389-394, and then memorialized by means of the stone statue that Macareus sees in *Met.* 14.312-317). It is introduced as a cautionary tale by its narrator (“*accipe*”, *ait*, “*Macareu, dominaeque potentia quae sit | hinc quoque disce meae; tu dictis adice mentem!*” *Met.* 14.318-319), but at its moment of utterance it can probably serve no practical purpose: the Greeks are by now completely safe from Circe’s witchcraft, thanks to the intervention of Mercury and Ulysses. It might have functioned as a warning in the hypothetical case where the Greeks decided to deceive Circe, or Ulysses to abandon her; but when the latter actually happens, Macareus/Ovid presents the Greeks’ departure as unproblematic, and in fact Circe aids them on their journey with instructions (*Met.* 14.435-439).

The superfluity of the Picus story gets compounded by the fact that earlier on, at the beginning of book 14 (1-74), the narrator in their own voice had told a similar love-triangle story about Circe as the rejected party, the couple being Glaucus and Scylla instead of Picus and Canens. Generally, there seems to be precious little difference between the plotlines of the two stories. What purpose does the repetition serve, then?

In both cases, Circe employs exactly the same means to bring about revenge: a concoction of drugs/herbs or a touch with her wand, and the utterance of spells/charms. In Scylla’s case, Circe uses the same methods both in preparation for revenge (*venerisque offensa repulsa | protinus horrendis infamia pabula sucis | conterit et tritis Hecateia carmina miscet*, *Met.* 14.42-44) and in its implementation, i.e. in polluting the pool in which she expects Scylla to swim (*hic pressos latices radice nocenti | spargit et obscurum verborum ambage novorum | ter noviens carmen magico demurmurat ore*, *Met.* 14.56-58). In the story of Picus, the same combination of herbs/wand and charms is applied: when she transforms

Picus into a woodpecker (*ter iuvenem baculo tetigit, tria carmina dixit, Met. 14.387*) and during the transformation of his companions (*illa nocens spargit virus sucosque veneni | et Noctem Noctisque deos Ereboque Chaoque | convocat et longis Hecaten ululatibus orat, Met. 14.403-405* and *illa paventis | ora venenata tetigit mirantia virga, | cuius ab tactu variarum monstra ferarum | in iuvenes veniunt: nulli sua mansit imago, Met. 14.412-415*).

Some elements in both “Picus and Canens” and “Glaucus and Scylla” may be slightly different from those of Macareus’ experience (to which I return below). But still both a physical and a linguistic element of destruction are always present, with the linguistic temporally following upon the physical (except in the case of Picus’ companions). If, then, Circe’s method of punishment is more or less the same in both of those instances, we have ample reason to assume that this is her method of preference every time she finds herself in a similar situation. Ulysses’ Greeks have not somehow harmed Circe, but she still transforms them into swine. But does she use the same method with them as well?

When Macareus describes his first impression of Circe’s palace, he inserts another bit of hindsight knowledge, or split focalization, into his narrative. In other words, while he mainly focalizes as Macareus-of-the-past, and thus as unsuspecting, he also (as Macareus-of-the-present) drops sinister hints to the effect that Circe is the mistress of herbs, as are her servants. That, in and of itself, may not have threatening connotations, since herbs can theoretically be used for good or for ill (*Met. 14.264-270*). But when he narrates the welcome extended to the Greeks by Circe, the single phrase *reddidit omina votis* (*Met. 14.272*) looks ambiguous. Are these omens of a positive outcome to their visit, or are they truly ominous? Once Macareus goes on to say that juices have secretly made their way into the sweet drink she offers them (*quique sub hac lateant furtim dulcedine, sucos | adicit, Met. 14.275-276*),

we realize that they have exposed themselves to grave danger. After the magical potion comes the *virga*: the touch with her wand looks like the finishing touch to her transformative actions (*quae simul arenti sitientes hausimus ore, / et tetigit summos virga dea dira capillos* [...], *Met.* 14.277-278). The wand does not feature when either Scylla or Picus' friends get transformed, but it does appear when Picus and Ulysses' men get transformed, as well as at two other narrative points, to which I now turn.¹⁰⁹

A further hint that survivor stories are a significant means of information transmission is provided by Eurylochus' presence (also an Odyssean invention) as the only companion who refuses to drink from the potion, and who then notifies Ulysses of the danger (*Met.* 14.286-290, Macareus stresses Eurylochus' contribution to the rescue plan in the counterfactual conditional of lines 288-290, lines that are missing from the *Odyssey*¹¹⁰). Ulysses decides to expose himself to Circe in order to save his comrades from her. Mercury's instructions and the herb *moly*, passed along from god to mortal, protects him and renders his metamorphosis only an attempted one (*Met.* 14.291-296). Still, Circe resorts to the same method: first the herb, then a touch on Ulysses' head with her wand ([...] *et ad insidiosa vocatus / pocula conantem virga mulcere capillos / reppulit* [*Met.* 14.294-296]).

¹⁰⁹ The Virgilian Picus' transformation does not involve *carmina*, only herbs and wand: *aurea percussum virga versumque venenis | fecit avem Circe* (*Aen.* 7.190-191). As I will argue later, one way in which Ovid highlights his own tendency towards repetition is through intertextual resonances. In this story, then, Ovid repeats Circe's magical regime against Picus from Virgil — but then he adds *carmina*, a step away from his predecessor (also Picus and Circe are husband and wife in *Aen.* 7.189-190, while Ovid narrates their story as a love triangle). See section G below.

¹¹⁰ The *Odyssey* (10.251-260) includes the flashback story that Eurylochus narrated in direct speech. While this poetic choice formally attributes more agency to Eurylochus as a storyteller in his own right, the Ovidian passage, despite not quoting the story itself, emphasizes the practical, plot-centered, importance of this narrating instance.

There is yet a third transformation, this time only a reversal of the regular process, which results in the companions resuming their human form. Although one would expect the order of Circe's previous actions to get reversed, it does not: first she sprinkles the pigs with herb antidotes (*spargimur ignotae sucis melioribus herbae, Met. 14.299*), then she touches them with the reverse side (the bottom?) of her wand (*percutimurque caput conversae verbere virgae, Met. 14.300*). What Macareus only now adds are the incantations, which effect the most crucial result: the gradual transformation of pigs back into humans is narrated simultaneously with the recitation of magical words (*verbaque dicuntur dictis contraria verbis. / quo magis illa canit, magis hoc tellure levati / erigimur [...], Met. 14.301-303*).

Moreover, if we linger a little bit more on the actual words of Macareus, these words imply that Circe had also used magical incantations during the initial transformation process, from humans into swine. Macareus explicitly refers to *verba [...] contraria verbis (Met. 14.301)*.¹¹¹ The latter have to be the *verba* she used in the first instance: just as the antidote herbs and the upside-down wand reverse the original herbs and the top-up wand, a reverse verbal charm is presumably matched against, and undoes, an original charm — one which Macareus has somehow not mentioned while recounting the initial transformation. Whatever the reason for this absence, the phrase *verba [...] contraria verbis*, even if added as an afterthought, informs the reader that words of magic had effected the original transformation, just as they are successful in reversing it.

¹¹¹ The symmetrical, almost palindromic, construction of line 301 (*verbaque dicuntur dictis contraria verbis*) also creates an image of action undone by another action. See Myers (2009) 301.

The maid's story about Picus then provides a yardstick of accuracy against which the reader can measure Macareus' references to Circe's methods of punishment. Macareus' story is thus more or less accurate, but for the fact that he does not fully acknowledge the cardinal role of *carmina* in Circe's transformational regime. The third-person narrator (the narrator of "Glaucus and Scylla") provides similar information about the details of Circe's magic — which makes sense, since the reader is conventionally expected to attribute the highest possible level of plot knowledge to that narrator. Our three narrators (the servant as mediated by Macareus, Macareus about Ulysses and his men, and the third-person narrator) thus coincide — but there is even more.

Although she does not function as a narrator, Circe herself defines the essence of her witchcraft in the same way on two occasions (*"non" ait "effugies, vento rapiare licebit, | si modo me novi, si non evanuit omnis | herbarum virtus, et non mea carmina fallunt"*, *Met.* 14.355-357 and *carmine cum tantum, tantum quoque gramine possim*, *Met.* 14.34). Also, Glaucus may not be a narrator of Scylla's story in his own right, but he is a character reacting to it. In hindsight, when mourning for his lost beloved, he attributes her destruction to *viribus herbarum* (*Met.* 14.68-69). But when he first seeks Circe's help, he seems to acknowledge the efficacy of both methods (*at tu, sive aliquid regni est in carmine, carmen | ore move sacro, sive expugnacior herba est, | utere temptatis operosae viribus herbae*, *Met.* 14.20-22). To be sure, he needs Circe's help in order to win over his beloved, not in order to destroy anyone, but he seems to apply the same methods indiscriminately both to beneficial and to destructive purposes. In fact, he explains to Circe what exactly he needs her help for: not to be cured from love, but to instill in Scylla reciprocal love for himself (*Met.* 14.23-24, which shows that Circe's method is always roughly the same, regardless of the desired outcome).

He also seems to think that the use of herbs and charms is mutually exclusive (reflected on the *sive...sive* construction), but he still includes both alternatives in his request.¹¹²

Where does all this leave us, with respect to the importance of survivor stories? It seems that the experiences of Glaucus, Macareus, and Picus follow more or less along the same lines, at least in their denouement, in the ending consisting in transformation (and in the means by which this transformation is brought about). So if, in theory, either Glaucus or Picus (or Scylla or Canens, for that matter) had met Macareus and his comrades, who visited Circe's palace after them, the former victims could have warned the Greeks about the danger posed by the witch. Unfortunately, neither option is viable — as I have shown above with regard to the sailors-turned-domesticated-animals. Glaucus has somehow disappeared from the scene after Scylla's destruction, and of course so has Scylla (in her human form). Picus and Canens have also disappeared — even though Picus' statue, the man with the woodpecker on his head, has triggered the aetiological-style question of Macareus to the servant (*Met.* 14.310-319) and her doubly embedded *backstory*.¹¹³

¹¹² The repetitiveness, and thus predictability, of the Ovidian Circe's punitive actions is markedly different from those of the Odyssean Circe, whose magic is inconsistent. She first mixes into a drink magical herbs, with the explicit aim that the Greeks forget their homeland, not that they turn into animals (*Od.* 10.235-236). Then she touches them with her wand and shuts them into a pigsty, which implies that they have somehow been transformed into pigs (*Od.* 10.237-238). When she tries to transform Odysseus, she repeats the same actions, but without the purpose of bringing about forgetfulness (*Od.* 10.316-320, in 10.290-295 Hermes had accurately predicted what she would do). During the reverse transformation of Odysseus' men, she uses neither herbs nor her wand, but some kind of ointment (*Od.* 10.392). The Ovidian text pointedly does not retain this inconsistency. Quite the opposite: both within and outside the Odyssean part of the *Little Aeneid*, Circe's means of bringing about punitive transformation are quite consistent and repetitive.

¹¹³ Myers (1994) 106.

It is also true that the servant's story is accurate, when compared to the one recounted by the third-person narrator. It seems that the perpetrator's helper (at least as Macareus has informed the reader, the nymph servants are Circe's assistants, or her accomplices in witchcraft, *Met.* 14.264-267) has as much detailed knowledge as the so-called omniscient narrator about Circe's methods. But she could not have warned the Greeks about the danger, because then her mistress' schemes could not have played out — and, instead of Mercury, the servant herself would have thwarted Circe's plans.¹¹⁴ To be sure, she does end up narrating Picus and Canens' adventures to Macareus, and she claims that the point of the story is to showcase once again Circe's powers (*Met.* 14.318-319), but, in terms of the Ulysses storyline, her tale does not really add anything significant. For the reader of the *Metamorphoses*, though, it adds a narrator with more accurate information, or with a level of knowledge closer to the third-person narrator, about Circe's punitive transformative actions.

It also adds instances of infelicitous communication, or non-communication. The servant's *backstory* about the transformation of Picus could have been immensely helpful to Ulysses' comrades if it had been uttered at the right time — that is, before they had exposed themselves to Circe's witchcraft. Glaucus and Scylla's story also could have served its purpose as a cautionary tale, but for the fact that Glaucus does not feature as a character after Scylla's destruction. Therefore, the *backstory* narrated by the servant is different from

¹¹⁴ It may be significant that the Odyssean narrative introduces multiple servants, but they only help prepare Odysseus' bath and meal after his and Circe's reconciliation has been sealed through sex (*Od.* 10.348-372). In this way, Circe's servants are disassociated from her magical status. By contrast, since the Ovidian Circe's servants are introduced alongside her uncanny ability to handle various herbs, their potential identity as witches remains open.

“Glaucus and Scylla” insofar as it shows the reader the importance not only of a story’s content, but also of its narrating instance.

The two *backstories* (“Glaucus and Scylla” and “Picus and Canens”) may conceivably have taken place at around the same (mythical) time, but the double embedding of “Picus and Canens” creates the impression that it¹¹⁵ has happened in the very distant past.¹¹⁶ On closer inspection, however, there is no reason to believe that there is a big temporal distance between the two events of the storyline, or that one necessarily predates (or presupposes) the other. Circe may have used the same means against one victim and then applied it against other victims too — but this order is not specified, perhaps because the relative order of the two love-triangle stories is not as important as their denouement, or repetitiveness.

In this sense, both tales, standing as they do on either side of the Achaemenides/Macareus stories, establish a (repetitive and thus) compelling framework as to what it means to get punished by Circe. They serve their function well if one considers the information transmitted from Ovid the poet to the readers. But if one looks at them from the perspective of intratextual communication, they are both instances of unsuccessful information

¹¹⁵ Picus also seems very ancient because of the geographical epithets surrounding him (*in Ausoniis [...] terris [...] rex*, *Met.* 14.320-321, *Laurenti* (*Met.* 14.336) and *Latiis* (*Met.* 14.326)) and because he is son of Saturn (*Met.* 14.326). However, the calculation of his age by means of the Greek Olympiads (*Met.* 14.324-325), other than an obvious anachrony, qualifies the claims he could stake at pristine antiquity. Cf. Feeney (1999) 21.

¹¹⁶ The different levels of embeddedness do not influence the *reach* of the flashback (i.e. “the temporal distance between the story time covered by an anachrony and the “present” moment [or moment when the chronological recounting of a sequence of events is interrupted to make room for the anachrony]”, Prince 1987 s.v. *reach*, cf. Genette [1983] 48-61). For example, narrator A may narrate that narrator B narrated something that happened two hours before narrator A’s narrating instance, whereas narrator A can narrate a story that took place a century before her narrating instance. In other words, although we may get the impression that the deeper the embeddedness, the longer the *reach*, this is not always so.

transmission. Glaucus does not share his adventures, simply because Ovid removes him from the epic after his own storyline (I will return to such arbitrary removals in section F). When the servant shares the story of Picus and Canens, the timing of her narrative utterance is not particularly suitable, since Ulysses' men have by now escaped (at least immediate) danger from the witch. But if either Glaucus' or the servant's stories had been narrated (in the former case) or narrated at the proper moment (in the latter case) to the Greeks, Ulysses' partial catastrophe might not have taken place. Since Circe's method seems quite similar in every case examined, a cautionary tale could have warned the Greeks not to approach her. And even if it had not warned them successfully, the plot would have taken a different turn if, for example, Ulysses had still been able to argue in favor of approaching her because he could see some benefits resulting from such a move.

The loss of Glaucus as a potential storyteller may be considered even more important for this relay of information than the infelicitous moment of the servant's tale. This is because he is deprived altogether of the opportunity to tell his story, but also because his disappearance from the narrative is quite abrupt and not accounted for, not even in a superficial way. But the idea that a survivor, or at least an eyewitness who has momentarily been in danger, of Circe's witchcraft can convey an accurate and instructive cautionary tale is enhanced by the repetition of such tales. These tales are predicated on the idea that the potentially dangerous character always operates in more or less the same way. This is the case in another set of stories, one narrated by a companion of Ulysses (flashback story, or story about the *past*), and the other having taken place in the past compared to Ulysses (*backstory*).

C. Achaemenides' story: the Cyclops and twofold repetition

There is sufficient reason for the reader, both of the *Odyssey* and of the *Metamorphoses*, to associate Polyphemus and Circe with each other. In the *Odyssey*, they constitute the culmination of Odysseus' adventures in books 9 and 10 respectively, both of them preceded by two less important stops (Cicones/Lotus-Eaters, Aeolus/Laestrygonians respectively). In the *Metamorphoses*, Achaemenides' story is about the Cyclops, and Macareus' (mostly) about Circe. They are different sorts of supernatural criminals, but they seem to share some common elements — not least of which, I suggest, is the repetitiveness of their actions. This is where another *backstory*, or story having taken place before Ulysses' arrival at the Cyclops' location, enters my discussion.

Similarly to the two stories about Circe's love triangles, there is a story of amatory rejection and revenge on Polyphemus' part. This is narrated to Scylla, obviously before she was turned into a monster, by Galatea, the nymph who rejected the Cyclops' advances. Galatea preferred her lover Acis (a sixteen-year-old young man, the son of Faunus and a nymph) to the Cyclops, and the monster avenged himself on Acis by throwing a huge rock at him. To save him, Galatea turned him into the river god he has been ever since.

Although the love-triangle aspect of the story seems to be an Ovidian innovation, one detail about Polyphemus' revenge seems quite familiar to the reader of the *Odyssey*: the Cyclops hurled two rocks at Acis, just as he did at Ulysses' ship (*Od.* 9.481-483 and 537-540, cf. *Met.* 14.181-186). The reason for his destructive attempt is different: he lashes out at Odysseus after the latter has revealed his real name, and of course the deeper issue is the hero's blinding of the monster, but he attacks Acis because he is his rival (and a successful one at that) for Galatea's love. This difference of reasons behind different instances of his

rage (one having to do with amatory competition, the other not) ties him to Circe, who punishes both Scylla and Picus/Canens (both *backstories*) for amatory reasons, but turns the Greeks into swine (*past*) for no obvious reason, other than (perhaps trespassing and) inveterate exercise of her witchcraft.¹¹⁷

But another element tying Circe and Polyphemus together is that they repeat the same method (at least) twice over. First, Polyphemus against Acis: *insequitur Cyclops partemque e monte revulsam | mittit, et extremus quamvis pervenit ad illum | angulus e saxo, totum tamen obruit Acin* (*Met.* 13.882-884). His attempt to bury Acis under the heavy rock is relatively successful, but for the fact that Galatea has transformative powers and turns him into a river god. As Achaemenides tells the story of Polyphemus hurling two rocks at Ulysses' ship (he is watching from the Cyclops' shore), his diction is quite similar: *vidi, cum monte revulsum | inmanem scopulum medias permisit in undas; | vidi iterum veluti tormenti viribus acta | vasta Giganteo iaculantem saxa lacerto | et, ne deprimeret fluctus ventusve carinam, | pertimui, iam me non esse oblitus in illa* (*Met.* 14.181-186). This all leads to a conclusion similar to the one reached above about Circe. When rage seizes Polyphemus, he always acts on it in the

¹¹⁷ In a passing reference to this *backstory*, Aresi (2013) 155 claims that a series of amatory rejections (which has taken place before Ulysses) has transformed Circe into a punitive witch, regardless of whether, or how, her visitors incur her wrath: “Non è così improbabile ipotizzare, allora, che la serie dei rifiuti e delle delusioni subite la (sc. Circe) portò a diventare, infine, quella che essa appare – e non irrimediabilmente – nell’ *Odissea*: un automa capace solo di trasformare in animale chiunque venga in contatto con lei.” In this sense, the origins of this epic heroine are located in elegiac amatory rejection (which could have transpired otherwise, and thus poetic tradition could have been violated). Ovid may thus be expressing a programmatic message about the importance of amatory vs. epic poetry. At any rate, the Ovidian Circe’s behavior as a scorned lover is quite consistent, and, because of the condensation of the Odyssean saga, more prominent than her benevolent actions when involved in reciprocal love with Ulysses — the latter forms only a short part of the narrative. Cf. Yarnall (1994) 86-91.

same way: he throws multiple rocks. In Circe, this process repeats itself multiple times across three stories, not just two: she may or may not use her wand (usually she does), but both the herbs and the magical incantations are standard features of her witchcraft.

Similarly to Circe, then, the Polyphemus set of stories leads us to tie the *backstory* with the *past*. If Glaucus, Scylla, Picus or Canens had told their *backstories* to Ulysses' Greeks as cautionary tales, the latter's partial destruction might not have taken place. Similarly, if Galatea had told her and Acis' story to Ulysses and his men, they might not have approached the Cyclops. Galatea, however, tells her story to an audience perhaps even more suitable than Ulysses — and, unlike Circe's servant, she tells it at a narrative moment when it can still function as a warning. But it most certainly does not.

Scylla's punishment by Circe takes place after that of Acis by Polyphemus — in fact, after Galatea narrates the latter. One could expect Scylla to be on her guard against her love rival Circe, since she has heard a story about the punishment inflicted by a scorned lover on his competitor. Perhaps the point is that the two cases, similar as they are, are not completely identical. Other than their gender configuration (two men vying for a woman versus two women vying for a man), there is a difference between the *personae* constructed for the sorceress and for the monster. The Cyclops is brutal and openly malicious from the start, whereas Circe is at first sight a seductive beauty, who only subtly inflicts serious damage.

Therefore, the difference between the two stories is highlighted precisely through the non-translation of the information Scylla received from Galatea (about Polyphemus) into a warning at the moment when a similar situation (Circe) arises. Thus, information transmission is problematized, not only at the vital moment of cautionary tales being recounted to Aeneas' Trojans (to which I return below), but also secondarily when Galatea

warns Scylla. Aeneas' Trojans heed the warning, but Scylla (perhaps inadvertently) does not — which may have to do precisely with the slight difference between the information transmitted to Scylla and her own subsequent predicament. She has to face a different supernatural character (Circe) from the one Galatea cautioned her against (Polyphemus), but the Trojans receive information about both (Circe and Polyphemus), and are thus equipped with everything they need to avoid danger from both.

There is some speculation in this latter part of my discussion. However, what emerges clearly throughout is that the stories told about (or by) survivors can function within the plot as cautionary tales. When a *backstory* is conceived as performing such a function towards the level of the *past*, the Ovidian main narrator raises the possibility of such a function only to shut it down, in different ways. Either the story never gets told because this survivor/narrator (the animals at Circe's palace or Glaucus) no longer exists, or the story gets told when it is too late ("Picus and Canens"), or to the wrong audience, or about the wrong sort of danger (Galatea warns Scylla about Polyphemus, but Scylla actually incurs the wrath of Circe). But the bottom line seems to be that those survivor tales could potentially prove useful to their audiences. More than that, as I show immediately below, they seem even more impactful than a character's own recollections.

D. Survivor-type versus memory-type backstories

In the pages above, I have foregrounded the importance of (survivor) cautionary tales, or of information transmission, for the progression of the *Little Aeneid* narrative. In this section, I will briefly consider information which may tie past and future together, but does not

involve information transmission between *different* characters. In other words, both story types discussed in this section, namely survivor-type and memory-type stories, are flashbacks within the level of the *past* (i.e. *backstories*) that may predict the future. But, while the survivor-type tale is narrated by character x to character y, the memory-type story is narrated internally, by character x to themselves. It seems that the latter stories are less accurate harbingers of the future than the former. By showing the survivor-type stories' relative reliability compared to the memory-type, I highlight the importance of information transmission as a way in which characters understand the world around them. Exchange of information between different characters thus emerges as effective, both affirmatively (through the success of Achaemenides' and Macareus' survivor tales) and negatively (through the relative ineffectiveness of memory-type stories).

My first example is drawn from Achaemenides' story. While Achaemenides, abandoned by his comrades, is hiding from the Cyclops, he anticipates that he will get caught and devoured by the monster immediately. This expectation makes some sense, since this is exactly what happened to those of his unfortunate friends who perished in the Cyclops' cave, and in fact he assumes that what happened in the past will probably repeat itself in the future (*Met.* 14.198-212). But this is what most certainly does not happen to him — he survives quite unscathed.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ There might be a self-reflexive hint, on Ovid's part, that Achaemenides' narrative will not materialize: *Met.* 14.213, which starts with *talia fingebam*, might lead us back to the Tibullan *amator's* programmatic *haec mihi fingebam* (1.5.35). The latter signposts the discrepancy between his fantasy about himself and Delia hosting Messalla in the countryside (1.5.21-34) and the harsh reality of his *puella* having taken up another lover (1.5.16-17). Whether the Tibullan *amator's* fantasy is conjured as a repetition of an ideal past is unclear — but its counterfactual nature is signaled through its designation as *fictum*.

A modern reader could argue that, while Achaemenides' expectations do not really materialize, and thus do not serve a plot function, Ovid the poet needs to insert previous mythological tradition (both Homeric and Virgilian) by means of this flashback.¹¹⁹ Contrary to the *Odyssey* (where Achaemenides does not feature), both the Virgilian and the Ovidian Achaemenides' stories mostly cover the narrative time after the narrator was left behind at the Cyclops' island. The moment of monstrous cannibalism, which took place before Ulysses and the rest of the men fled, can therefore only be inserted as a further flashback within a flashback, or a *backstory*. In Ovid (and Virgil), if the *present* is Achaemenides telling Macareus (and the Trojans) his Cyclops adventures after he was left behind, and those adventures constitute the *past*, then the incidents in the cave can be classified as a *backstory*.

In Virgil, this minute flashback story may work as successful transmission of information consisting in a warning — Aeneas' men, Achaemenides' audience, are close to the Cyclops' dwelling and in immediate danger from him.¹²⁰ The Ovidian Aeneas' men, though, have possibly already heard the story of Polyphemus devouring Ulysses' men at another narrative moment: when they first encountered Achaemenides at Polyphemus' shore and he convinced them to take him on board their ship, presumably by relating some of his adventures (*hanc procul adspexi longo post tempore navem | oravique fugam gestu ad litusque cucurri, | et movi: Graiumque ratis Troiana recepit!*, *Met.* 14.218-220, this is the narrating instance in

¹¹⁹ For an application of the Conteian argument about *memini*-cognates and reflexive annotation specifically to the *Metamorphoses* see Miller 1993.

¹²⁰ The Virgilian Achaemenides inserts this flashback story without, however, the element of repetitiveness being as explicit as in Ovid (*Aen.* 3.623-638). He does say that the Cyclops habitually *visceribus miserorum et sanguine vescitur atro* (*Aen.* 3.622), but not that, while he was hiding on the shore, he feared that such a misfortune as had befallen his friends might happen to him too.

Virgil as well). At the narrative moment of Ovid's exchange of stories, Aeneas' Trojans have already heard Achaemenides' tale once, which is being repeated for the sake of his new audience member, Macareus. But the part about the destruction of their comrades does not need to get narrated to Macareus, because he was also one of the survivors from the cave.¹²¹ Therefore, there is little intratextual reason for this tiny flashback to get repeated — but this little insertion points us to the lack of consistency between what happened to some of the Greeks, which then gets inscribed as a memory in Achaemenides' mind, and his own relatively smooth escape from Polyphemus. The reader is thus in the privileged position of comparing Achaemenides' inaccurate prediction, not only to the *backstory*, which would justify this prediction, but also to the *present*, which shows him as a survivor and thus proves his prediction wrong. Achaemenides-of-the-*present*, of course, knows as much as the reader (namely that he has survived), but Achaemenides-of-the-*past*, when he recalls a *backstory* internally, knows less than the reader.

Achaemenides' recollections then constitute a *backstory* that does not actually repeat itself on the *past* level. Another instance of internal memory-type stories that provide agents with a less than accurate preview of the future is situated right before the episode of Circe in Macareus' narrative. Intertextually speaking, Macareus recounts roughly the entire tenth book of the *Odyssey*, not just the Circe episode. Aeolus and the Laestrygonians are also

¹²¹ Although she dismisses the redundancy of the cannibalism narrative as “entertaining”, Papaioannou (2005) 105 puts her finger on it in passing: “[B]oth accounts (sc. of the Virgilian and the Ovidian Achaemenides) are set in a posterior narrative time. The reason for this discrepancy is self-evident. Macareus was also present in the Cyclops' cave when the tragedy took place. Thus, Ovid, who wishes to stage a performance out of Polyphemus' butchery, has to come up with a different narrative time to accommodate these events — he comes up with two, and this overstatement of the already redundant transforms the incongruous into entertaining.”

included in Macareus' narrative. In the scenes immediately before the visit to Circe's dwelling, Ulysses' men vehemently refused to go in search of the inhabitants of the land, because they remembered the misfortunes they had suffered at the hands of the Laestrygonian king Antiphates and the Cyclops.¹²² But they, i.e. Polites, Eurylochus, Elpenor and Macareus himself, along with eighteen others, were compelled by the casting of lots to explore the area (*nos quoque Circaeο religata in litore pinu | Antiphatae memores inmansuetique Cyclopis, | ire negabamus; sed tecta ignota subire | sorte sumus lecti, Met.* 14.248-251).

In this case, the events remembered and summed up in a few words are again both experienced and revisited by the same agents, Ulysses' men. Contrary to Glaucus' story, which never gets intratextually transmitted, and to Achaemenides' and Macareus' stories, which are mostly narrated by the survivors themselves to third parties, the cases of Achaemenides by the seashore reflecting on Polyphemos' cannibalism and of the Greeks anticipating dangers similar to Polyphemos and the Laestrygonians are self-reflexive stories. As pointed out above, Achaemenides' memory does not really predict the future. But what about the memory about Antiphates and the Cyclops? Is this self-reflexive cautionary tale (disguised as recollection) helpful to the men at all?

In a very important sense, the answer is no. No matter what has happened in their past, this little *backstory* recollection does not prevent the Greeks from actually going on their exploration mission, and from running the risk they eventually did face at Circe's hands. In

¹²² Maybe this is just a case of intertextual repetition: the same adventures are recalled by the Homeric Odysseus' men: [...] τοῖσιν δὲ κατεκλάσθη φίλον ἦτορ | μνησαμένοις ἔργων Λαιστρυγόνος Ἀντιφάταο | Κύκλωπός τε βίης μεγαλήτορος, ἀνδροφάγοιο (*Od.* 10.198-200).

another sense, the choice of those stories out of all the adventures that the Greeks have faced up to this point is slightly strange. Both the Cyclops and the Laestrygonians are quite visibly and unmistakably monsters, whose only reaction to any newcomers is to try to devour them. Circe works differently: at first she seduces them with her looks and her potion, and then she does not actually kill them (let alone devour them) — she just transforms them into pigs, which she presumably keeps around, just like the animals the Greeks saw at her palace.

This difference between monsters and sorceresses is, however, not evident to Ulysses' men at the narrative time of their decision-making. In other words, they cannot know how Circe operates, or that she operates visibly differently from the Cyclops, because they have not encountered her yet. As in the previous case, Macareus-of-the-*present* shares with the Trojans (and with us readers) the focalization of Macareus-of-the-*past*, not his hindsight knowledge at the time of narration (or the *present*).¹²³ The only thing the Greeks know, or have stored in their memory, is how supernatural inhabitants of those far-away lands invariably operate. This is similar to Achaemenides-of-the-*past*, who could only rely on his memories of Polyphemus devouring his friends, and thus predicted that a similar disaster would befall him too. In the case of *backstories* disguised as recollections, then, or as stories with the same narrator and narratee, the *past* character's *past* (or a *backstory*), although (or

¹²³ In this sense, they are parallels to, or elevated to the role of, Odysseus in *Odyssey* 9-12, who focalizes both through his past self and through the hindsight knowledge he has acquired at the time of narration. Cf. Suerbaum (1968) 157-161, and for the role of this split focalization in Ovid's intertextual relationship with the *Odyssey* Baier (1999) 441-448. According to Baier, Odysseus thus becomes a reliable narrator, who does not withhold information from his audience, even when Odysseus-of-the-*past* was not aware of such information — while Macareus and Achaemenides are even more personally involved in the narrated events (they are victims instead of just witnesses), and thus they render the narrative less traditionally heroic. Thus, the deheroization of narrative (from Homer to Ovid) happens also on the level of focalization.

perhaps because) it is based on a certain degree of repetitiveness, does not predict their future accurately. Both *past* characters (Achaemenides and Macareus) implicitly testify to that.

E. Backstories, prophecies, and the Cumaean Sibyl

It seems, therefore, that the mental faculties, or the memory, of regular characters in the *Little Aeneid* do not offer them an accurate preview of their future — they mostly need another character’s storytelling intervention in order to figure out that future. But what about privileged characters, those by definition considered to have superior prophetic abilities? The Sibyl is a case in point — perhaps the only case in point in the *Little Aeneid*.

The Sibyl of Cumae is a character common to both Virgil and Ovid, and, as Apollo’s priestess, she is usually associated with prophesying.¹²⁴ Contrary to other internal narrators of the *Little Aeneid*, and because of her Virgilian predecessor’s identity as a seer, the Ovidian Sibyl is the only internal narrator with a potential for accurate prophecies (she is in fact introduced as possessed by Apollo, *deo furibunda recepto*, *Met.* 14.107, and she is called a *vates* in *Met.* 14.129) — but she does not actually fulfill that potential.

¹²⁴ For ancient testimonies about historical Sibyls (and extant fragments of Sibylline oracles) see Parke (1988) 136-152 and Potter (1994) 58-98. The mytho-historical first Sibyl is a blurry construct, but she seems invariably prophetically gifted (whatever her methods of communication or the origin of her gift). Her relationship specifically to Apollo seems to be an invention of Augustus, whose Apolline self-fashioning is well-known (Augustus also transferred the collection of the Sibylline books from the Capitol to his Palatine complex, around the time of his dedication of the temple of Palatine Apollo in 28 BCE). Although the Virgilian Sibyl is not necessarily described as an older woman, the Ovidian one may be — a trait added later to her myth, possibly when Sibylline books were reestablished in Rome after their storage space at the temple of Capitoline Jupiter was burned down in 83 BCE.

The fact that Ovid retains this Virgilian character but does not explicitly show her in her capacity as a seer calls for an in-depth discussion of her role in his (and in Virgil's) narrative. I suggest that this Ovidian choice 1) aligns the Sibyl with the overall pattern of the *Little Aeneid*, where every story with practical value for the future is voiced not by a seer, but by someone who is predicting a future similar to what they themselves have experienced in the past. The Ovidian Sibyl has not experienced (something similar to) the Italian wars — therefore she cannot predict them, which she (possibly) does not, and 2) it frees the Sibyl from the overall need for the *Little Aeneid*'s internal narrators to tell cautionary tales. Unlike her Virgilian counterpart, the Ovidian Sibyl cannot utter an ambiguous prophecy that would potentially deter Aeneas from his Italian mission. The Virgilian Sibyl's oscillation between optimism and pessimism does not match the rest of the Ovidian quasi-prophecies, and therefore the Ovidian Sibyl cannot retain such an oscillation. But unlike other narrators in the *Little Aeneid*, she cannot tell a straightforwardly cautionary tale either — again that choice could have stopped Aeneas from his mission, since cautionary tales, when told as such, are generally effective. Therefore, the only way around the problem is for the Ovidian Sibyl to tell an exclusively flashback story instead of a regular flash-forward prophecy, as her Virgilian counterpart does.

In Virgil's *Aeneid*, the Sibyl helps Aeneas through the entrance to the Underworld (*Aen.* 6.384-416), she directs him to the body of his helmsman Misenu (*Aen.* 6.149-155), she describes various locales in the Underworld and their respective inhabitants (e.g. Cocytus and Styx in *Aen.* 6.329-330 and Phlegethon in *Aen.* 6.562-627), as well as fulfilling other functions (such as preventing Aeneas from wasting time talking to Deiphobus in *Aen.* 6.539-543). But perhaps the most monumental contribution of the Sibyl to the *Aeneid* is her

prediction of the *horrida bella* (*Aen.* 6.86) that await Aeneas in Italy (the prophecy occupies lines 83-97). This is one of the two prophetic stories that Aeneas receives in book 6; the second is the parade of the as yet unborn souls of future Romans, as shown to him by the soul of his father Anchises (*Aen.* 6.756-853). Of course the two prophecies are inextricably tied together, since Aeneas' personal foundation of the Lavinian city will ultimately lead to Rome down to the time of Augustus. But Aeneas and his men's personal future is formally prophesied by the Sibyl (only secondarily by Anchises, as I will show below), while the distant future is handed over exclusively to Anchises.

In the Ovidian version, the only functional role played by the Sibyl is to direct Aeneas to Anchises through the golden bough (*Met.* 14.113-115). In the Underworld, Aeneas sees a parade of the shades of his ancestors and his father Anchises, and learns about the laws of the Underworld and the new wars he has to go through (*paruit Aeneas et formidabilis Orci / vidit opes atavosque suos umbramque senilem / magnanimi Anchisae; didicit quoque iura locorum, / quaeque novis essent adeunda pericula bellis, Met.* 14.116-119).¹²⁵ The magnificent parade of his descendants is left out of Ovid's narrative, therefore the only part of Virgil's *future* narratives that Ovid retains are the wars to be undertaken by Aeneas (*[Aeneas didicit] quaeque novis essent adeunda pericula bellis, Met.* 14.119). It is not clear (although it is reasonable to assume) that this clause refers to the wars at Latium, let alone that Aeneas receives other, more specific, information about those wars. Who narrates these future stories is also left unclear — whether that is the Sibyl or Anchises.

¹²⁵ This list is so brief that it earns a spot as one of Tarrant's "roads not taken" (2005, 70-71), that is, as a stitch in the main narrative where a long flash-forward narrative may be expected, but this expectation is frustrated.

To make matters more complicated, even in the *Aeneid* not only the Sibyl (memorable though her formulation may be) but also Anchises' prophecies about the Italian wars (*Aen.* 6.890-892). Perhaps the Ovidian passage is summing up in one line the ambiguity of the Virgilian passage, where the two prophecies overlap on this important point, the Italian wars — and where generally multiple prophecies tend to intersect and overlap with each other.¹²⁶

The point about the Ovidian narrator of future war stories may remain inconclusive; but it is certain that the Sibyl, in place of a lengthy story about Aeneas' future, narrates a story about her own past. According to this story, she attracted the love interest of Apollo, who, after granting her eternal life, promised her eternal youth as well, if she submitted to his love.¹²⁷ She refused and is immortal but not unageing. She does refer to the future, but only to her own personal future, when her bodily form will shrink and she will become unrecognizable even to Apollo (*Met.* 14.129-153).

Whether her recollection of her relationship to Apollo leads her to an accurate prediction of her future is less than clearly determined. But what remains clear throughout is that the Ovidian narrative divests her of the monumental prophetic role that Virgil had granted her. This might be in line with a general tendency of the Ovidian narrative to suppress long prophetic tales of the *Aeneid* (such as Jupiter's in *Aen.* 1.257-296 and Helenus' in *Aen.*

¹²⁶ On the confusion created by this partial overlap, whether it is considered a Virgilian inconsistency or not, see Horsfall (2014) 611, who concludes on a note of *aporia*.

¹²⁷ The fact that the Sibyl initially forgot to ask for eternal youth alongside eternal life (*ego pulveris hausti | ostendens cumulum, quot haberet corpora pulvis, | tot mihi natales contingere vana rogavi; | excidit, ut peterem iuvenes quoque protinus annos, Met.* 14.136-139) need not have been added to her refusal to yield to Apollo's sexual advances as parallel causes of her protracted old age (*hos tamen ille mihi dabat aeternamque iuventam, | si Venerem paterer: contempto munere Phoebi | innuba permaneo; sed iam felicior aetas | terga dedit, tremuloque gradu venit aegra senectus, Met.* 14.140-143) — it is largely superfluous. Thus, it may also serve to stress her lack of (prophetic) perceptiveness.

3.374-462), or even shorter ones, such as Creusa's (*Aen.* 2.776-789) and Celaeno's (*Aen.* 3.246-257), or even the Penates' correct interpretation of Apollo's "ancient mother" prophecy (*Aen.* 3.154-171) — although Ovid keeps Apollo's enigmatic prophecy itself (*Aen.* 3.94-98 in *Met.* 13.677-679), presumably because its linguistic ambiguity is crucial for the development of the plot. Therefore, Ovid is not totally averse to prophecies in his rendition of Aeneas' story — and, even when he does not cite a prophecy as a narrative *per se*, whether in direct or indirect speech, he still mentions it as being given (for example *inde futurorum certi, quae cuncta fideli | Priamides Helenus monitu praedixerat* [...], *Met.* 13.722-723).¹²⁸

The unique trait of the Ovidian Sibyl is that she is the only narrator with potential prophetic skills in the *Little Aeneid*.¹²⁹ Other stories looking to the future are voiced by characters with no supernatural perceptiveness, based on the assumption that events tend to repeat themselves. As my reading above has shown, a character's own recollections (a story they tell themselves internally, in the form of revisited memories) do not really materialize. By contrast, a story told by one character to another seems to show some kind of reliability, even if the narrating instance never gets activated. "Glaucus and Scylla" seems similar both

¹²⁸ On the condensation of Virgilian prophetic passages in the *Metamorphoses* see Solodow (1988) 144-146.

¹²⁹ Just as the Ovidian Sibyl replaces a prophecy about Aeneas and his men's public future with a story about her personal past, Anius at Delos partly replaces the Virgilian Apollo's "ancient mother" prophecy (*Aen.* 3.94-98) with his own children's personal past (*Met.* 13.644-674). There are other brief references to prophets throughout the *Little Aeneid* — but prophets are minor characters, whose insight does not really benefit them. Anius' son Andros has become a prophet, but he cannot (indeed, he chooses not to) protect his sisters from rape by Agamemnon and transformation into birds (*Met.* 13.647-676). Ovid retains the Odyssean seer Telemus, who had warned Polyphemus of his blinding by Ulysses (*Met.* 13.770-775, cf. *Od.* 9.509-514) but the Ovidian Cyclops has not only forgotten or misapplied, but actually disregarded the (meaning of the) prophecy. In this way, prophecy is further denigrated throughout the *Little Aeneid*.

to “Picus and Canens”, and, perhaps more importantly, to Macareus’ adventures — which points to the relative usefulness of those stories as cautionary tales, if they had been told as such. The Sibyl is situated somewhere in between. If she prophesies to the Ovidian Aeneas about future wars in Italy, she does draw this information from somewhere in her mind, or memory. But she talks to another character, Aeneas, so her tale is not a memory-type story, as I have defined them in section D. Besides, contrary to the other examples of recollection that I have discussed above, she does not link his past to his future,¹³⁰ or her past to his future — she only links her own past to her future.

Of course, whether she prophesies at all or not is also left unclear. If she does, then Anchises does not, and the other way around. This instance of potential future storytelling, then, is markedly different from the ones surrounding it. It is not a case of past sufferers predicting the future of potential sufferers and warning them about it. If the Sibyl is the one prophesying wars in Italy, she does not fit Ovid’s *Little Aeneid* pattern because she has not suffered anything in Italy, or in war. Even though in Virgil she is credited with prophetic skills, in Ovid she does not enjoy the same privilege, possibly because the only characters in this *cluster* to tell a story that (among other functions) looks to an unpleasant future situation are those who have been through a similar situation themselves.

¹³⁰ This is in contrast to her Virgilian counterpart, who links the Trojan (past) to the Italian (future) war (*et Thybrim multo spumantem sanguine cerno. | non Simois tibi nec Xanthus nec Dorica castra | defuerint; alius Latio iam partus Achilles, | natus et ipse dea, Aen. 6.87-90 and causa mali tanti coniunx iterum hospita Teucris | externique iterum thalami, Aen. 6.93-94*). The Ovidian Sibyl is aware of the Trojan War, but she does not take this opportunity to link past and future — she just uses Aeneas’ *pietas* as a reason to grant his wish to see his father’s soul (“*magna petis,*” *dixit, “vir factis maxime, cuius | dextera per ferrum, pietas spectata per ignes. | pone tamen, Troiane, metum, Met. 13.108-110*).

On the other hand, if the wars in Italy are foreseen not by the Sibyl but by Anchises, a stronger case could be made about the hero's suitability as an Ovidian prophet. He has acquired supernatural status as a dead soul (which perhaps allows him to see into the future) and he has presumably experienced situations similar to the ones awaiting Aeneas in Italy, such as, most notably, the Trojan War¹³¹ (of course, he does not have to establish a new city, which makes him significantly different from Aeneas). Does he, then, fit the pattern of survivor cautionary tales outlined above?

Anchises' potential characterization as a survivor, and therefore the similarity of his experiences to the ones awaiting Aeneas, is slightly doubtful. There is no specific mention of Anchises' participation in the Trojan War (which may be significantly different from the Italian wars anyway) — even in the *Aeneid* his old age at the time of the sack of Troy prevents him from being classified as a warrior. Moreover, Aeneas' unique destiny and his duty to found Lavinium set him apart, not only from his father, but potentially from any Trojan War hero, either Greek or Trojan. Although other heroes have established cities after the Trojan War (Antenor founder of Padua, Diomedes founder of Arpi, or Teucer founder of Cypriot Salamis come to mind as notable examples), the significance of Aeneas' foundation mission, both in Virgil and in Ovid, marks him out as a special case, even among colonizer heroes. Rome is the city *par excellence* in Augustan collective imagination and, even though

¹³¹ Anchises is, then, another Ovidian instance of a survivor of a war (the Trojan War) predicting a similar war (the Italian war). Things get complicated, however, by the fact that the Ovidian Anchises does not designate the future Italian war as similar to the Trojan one (granted, his prophecy is very brief), nor does either the Ovidian Diomedes or the Ovidian third-person narrator when recounting the Italian war itself (*Met.* 14.445-608).

its foundation is not as prominently repeated in the *Little Aeneid* as it is in Virgil,¹³² Ovid cannot do away with this basic element of epic (or Roman) tradition altogether.

As a result of Aeneas' extraordinary fate, if the Ovidian Anchises does transmit information about Aeneas' future toils in Italy, he does not do so in order to warn his son not to embark upon such toils. While other interlocutors discussed above explicitly signal that their tale is a cautionary one (Macareus in *Met.* 14.247: *moneo, fuge litora Circes!* and the nymph servant in *Met.* 14.318-319), the particular situation of Aeneas as the destined founder of Lavinium makes tales that would keep him away from Latium not only confusing, but also subversive of the entire tradition on which Ovid capitalizes. In other words, if Aeneas is advised, and decides, not to approach the future site of his city, he cannot be the founder that Roman tradition holds him to be.

To be sure, parts of the several prophecies interspersed throughout the third book of the *Aeneid* are cautionary as well. But they either warn Aeneas of dangers by which he must not be discouraged from his ultimate purpose, or they instruct him to avoid something specific,

¹³² In fact, the foundation of Rome is almost not mentioned (although it is attributed, by both *Aen.* 1.275-277 and *Met.* 14.772-775, to Romulus and not to Aeneas). This is in line with Ovid's tendency to avoid milestones of ancient chronology such as the foundation of Troy and the first Olympics. Cf. Feeney 1999. Even when Ovid explicitly mentions Rome, his descriptions of it are elusive and his skills of producing *enargeia* rather circumscribed. Cf. Reitz 2013. The Ovidian Pythagoras in *Met.* 15.418-452 prophesies the grandeur of Rome proper — so the mention of Rome is displaced from a potential prophecy of the *Little Aeneid* to an *ex eventu* prophecy after its foundation, during the reign of its second king Numa Pompilius. Even if the prophecy, as well as Pythagoras' view about the transmigration of the soul, has its (intertextual) flaws (on the Lucretian *imitatio cum variatione* see Segal 2001 and on self-reflexive memory see Miller 1994), it is important that this endowed narrator presents his prophecy as a flashback story, a prophecy he heard from Helenus while fighting in the Trojan War in his previous life as Euphorbus.

which would otherwise jeopardize his ultimate success.¹³³ For example, the Penates in Crete turn Aeneas away from Crete itself (which is not their destined abode) and towards Italy (*Aen.* 3.159-162). Celaeno famously predicts the “devouring of the tables”, but explains that this is a necessary precondition for the foundation (*sed non ante datam cingetis moenibus urbem, | quam vos dira fames nostraeque iniuria caedis | ambesas subigat malis absumere mensas, Aen.* 3.255-257).¹³⁴ Helenus also stresses the same fact (*Aen.* 3.394-395) — but he also warns Aeneas against approaching the shores of Italy that have been colonized by the Greeks, the Trojans’ former, and perhaps perpetual, enemy (*has autem terras Italique hanc litoris oram, | proxima quae nostri perfunditur aequoris aestu, | effuge; cuncta malis habitantur moenia Graeis, Aen.* 3.396-398) and directs him on how to bypass (instead of sailing through) the straits of Scylla and Charybdis (*Aen.* 3.429-432).¹³⁵ Once Aeneas’ wanderings come to an end with his arrival in Italy, the river-god Tiberinus also prophesies about (the omen of the white sow and) the Italian wars (*Aen.* 8.36-65). He is the most explicit in reassuring Aeneas that the wars will not frustrate his eventual victory and foundation: *hic tibi certa domus, certi (ne absiste) penates. | neu belli terrere minis; tumor omnis et irae |*

¹³³ This tendency is in line with the generally optimistic tone of prophecies across the *Aeneid*, which sometimes gloss over “factual” evidence to the contrary, as provided either intratextually (by the end of *Aen.* 12) or generally by tradition. See O’Hara (1990) 88-176.

¹³⁴ For the ambivalent tone of the prophecy, which however resolves itself with a paradoxical solution, see Heyworth/Morwood (2017) 149.

¹³⁵ The Virgilian Helenus describes Scylla and Charybdis as monsters. When the time comes for his prophecy to be fulfilled, the Trojans do not witness the monsters’ rage (*Aen.* 3.684-686). However, when in Carthage Aeneas reminds his men of past adventures, he claims that they have encountered Scylla (*Aen.* 1.200-201). As Papaioannou (2005b) 403-404 notes, this is an instance of “divergent perspectives” on the same event. In Ovid, the inconsistency can be conciliated more smoothly by means of temporal layers: Scylla is a woman *and* a monster *and* a rock, just at different points in narrative time.

concessere deum (*Aen.* 8.39-41). All these pieces of instruction facilitate, rather than hinder, the postulated foundation of the city at Latium.¹³⁶

By contrast, although the Virgilian Sibyl concludes on a note of relative optimism, this optimism, situated as it is at the end of a long series of predicted toils, sounds hollow — more like perseverance in the face of evils than like their eventual elimination (*tu ne cede malis, sed contra audentior ito, | qua tua te Fortuna sinet, Aen.* 6.95-96, also *Dardanidae venient (mitte hanc de pectore curam), | sed non et venisse volent, Aen.* 6.85-86).¹³⁷ This prophecy, although on the face of it still encourages Aeneas and predicts the foundation, could have disheartened the hero — who should still however fulfill this destiny, no matter how frightening it is.¹³⁸

The Virgilian Anchises' prophecy about the Italian wars is articulated in a notably different tone (and in indirect speech): *exin bella viro memorat quae deinde gerenda, | Laurentisque docet populos urbemque Latini, | et quo quemque modo fugiatque feratque laborem* (*Aen.* 6.890-892). This future narrative looks a lot more matter-of-fact and practical — and, while it does direct Aeneas away from some adventures (much like Helenus had), it seems to presuppose a relatively smooth release from others, provided that Aeneas follows

¹³⁶ Some prophecies in the *Aeneid* were identified as *consolationes* by as ancient a reader as Servius — which supports O'Hara's argument that some prophecies are dictated by the speaker's desire to please the recipient, although the result is a deceptive optimistic prophecy (1990, 139-140).

¹³⁷ As it gradually comes to fruition, the Virgilian Sibyl's prophecy proves inaccurately pessimistic, for example on the help provided to the Trojans against the Italians by the Arcadians — in book 8 Aeneas will not have to supplicate them to enlist their help. See Horsfall (2014) 127.

¹³⁸ For this dissonance in tone, especially between the Sibyl, on the one hand, and Helenus and Celaeno, on the other, see Miller (2009) 141-143, along with a comparison between the pessimistic Virgilian Sibyl and her optimistic counterpart in Tibullus 2.5.

his father's instructions.¹³⁹ In this sense, it is similar to the other Virgilian prophecies I have discussed above: it discourages from particular actions but remains ultimately optimistic.

In Virgil, then, there is a discrepancy between prophecies that show a way around an obstacle, and the Sibyl, who implicitly shows almost insuperable obstacles but explicitly remains somewhat optimistic.¹⁴⁰ Even after other prophecies have encouraged Aeneas with the prospect of his eventual arrival in Italy, the Sibyl reveals that yet more evils are in store for him there — evils that cause even the prophetess to exclaim in awe. But all these (past-and-)future narratives in the *Aeneid* are not voiced by a character who has lived through an experience that may be repeated in the future. Instead, prophecies are voiced by characters with exceptional prophetic skills, and largely do not function as cautionary tales (that is, tales dissuading Aeneas from reaching Italy and/or engaging in war once there). Even Anchises, who has been through (at least) one significant war himself, does not predict anything while alive — but only when endowed with prophetic skills as a transcendental dead soul, and that is not a straightforward cautionary tale either.

In Ovid, the scheme is far less complicated. Conventionally prophetic characters of the *Little Aeneid cluster* do not get a chance to utter fully fledged future narratives, whether in direct or indirect speech. The prophecy of Delian Apollo is summed up in just over one line: *qui petere antiquam matrem cognataque iussit | litora* (*Met.* 13.678-679). The epiphany of

¹³⁹ The so-called parade of heroes, earlier on, had led Anchises towards an even more unproblematically optimistic outlook on the future foundation: *et dubitamus adhuc virtutem extendere factis, / aut metus Ausonia prohibet consistere terra?* (*Aen.* 6.806-807).

¹⁴⁰ Or, in an alternative formulation, the multiple mouths, gapings, crevices and hidden openings around the Virgilian Underworld, in conjunction with the “if I had a hundred mouths” formulation (which does literally apply to the Sibyl), represent a poetics of both revealing and concealing. See Gowers (2005) 177-180.

the Penates in Crete is completely elided. Helenus' prophecy again occupies two lines: *inde futurorum certi, quae cuncta fideli | Priamides Helenus monitu praedixerat* (*Met.* 13.722-723). The Sibyl's prophecy is either not about Aeneas at all (just about her own bleak future) or is only indirectly attributed to her (the wars in Italy) and again not quoted in any length. The only stories that both refer to the future and take up a considerable number of lines are those of Achaemenides and Macareus, tales which combine the past and the future in a narrative continuum, and which presuppose a repetition of past events into the future.

This, I suggest, is why the Ovidian Sibyl does not, at least explicitly, tell a story about Aeneas' future. She is not as complicated, or does not participate in as nuanced a context, as the Virgilian Sibyl does. She cannot have the ambivalent stance of both predicting something negative and encouraging Aeneas towards it — the discrepancy between the Virgilian Sibyl's awe at Aeneas' future and the fact that she still pushes him to fulfill it is not operative in Ovid. To conform to Ovid's pattern, she would have to narrate her future tale as the repetition of her own personal past. This is probably why she does not clearly predict anything about Aeneas. Moreover, she would have to narrate it as a cautionary tale, as a warning against the repetition of a markedly negative experience. Even if she is narrating the wars in Italy, the Ovidian narrator's formulation does not include any evaluative words about whether those wars are ultimately positive or negative, or both (she clearly advises Aeneas: *pone metum*, *Met.* 14.110, but this has to do with his success in meeting Anchises in the Underworld in the immediate future, not with his distant future in Italy). Since then an Ovidian Sibyl who would have retained the crucial narrative traits of Virgil's Sibyl is not consistent with the context around her, Ovid discards her prophetic identity altogether.

F. Felicitous information transmission and the decentralization of narrative

Compared to the *Aeneid*, then, Ovid's *Little Aeneid* dedicates a lot of lines to stories narrated by non-prophets, and it possibly turns a Virgilian seer character (the Sibyl of Cumae) into a non-seer. In this section, part of my goal is to account for this removal of seers from the Ovidian narrative. But first, I will discuss a main difference between the intratextual usefulness of *backstory* and *past* narratives: the former do not get successfully transmitted between characters, but the latter do. *Backstory* characters are then deprived of their potential to transmit practical information, but *past* characters are granted this opportunity. At the same time, even among *backstory* characters, some do not narrate anything at all, whereas others do — just not at the right time or to the right audience. Characters who get to function as internal narrators, I will suggest, all share a socially or ontologically marginal identity. The result is that the *Little Aeneid* removes privileged characters from a narrator role, and assigns this role only to character types underrepresented in previous (epic) poetry. Most of the time, the only remaining narrators are such characters; in the case of the Sibyl, a seer is not altogether removed but just deprived of her privilege, her prophetic role.

Formally, in and of themselves, the inset tales of the *Little Aeneid* discussed above may comfortably be classified as flashbacks. But, when read in conjunction with their narrating instance, (with the exception of the Sibyl's tale) they serve a deterring function with an eye to the future. The underlying assumption is that the past repeats itself and remains unalterable. The consistent means that Polyphemus and Circe use to avenge themselves on their enemies may serve to enhance (for the reader) this idea of repeatability and, consequently, predictability.

This means that, had Glaucus/Scylla or Picus/Canens encountered Ulysses' Greeks, they might have warned them about the potential danger posed by Circe. The same goes for Galatea or Acis, who might have been able to warn the Greeks about Polyphemus. Either because they randomly disappear from the narrative or because they no longer occupy a human form, they do not function as narrators. But still, if we assume a relative consistency in the behavior of Circe and the Cyclops, the *background* level might have prevented the repetition of destructive events on the *past* level.

Even in the case where some *backstory* characters are allowed to tell their stories, there is no information transmission specifically from *backstory* to *past*. Circe's servant is not clearly a *backstory* character: she might not have been living at Circe's palace at the time of Picus' transformation. She may be just a *past* character, who has heard the story from another source. The other case of a surviving narrator, who, however, again does not transmit information specifically from *backstory* to *past*, is Galatea. The issue in her case is that her audience, (human) Scylla, is not a *past* character, but another *backstory* character. Therefore, in her case as well communication between two different temporal levels is not operative.

Of course, the potential success of those *backstory-to-past* cautionary tales is not guaranteed, since they are never told as such. Therefore, Circe and Polyphemus repeat their destructive actions in the *past*, against Ulysses' Greeks. But the repetition can also be posited from the *past* to the *present* level. In other words, Achaemenides and Macareus are entrusted with the task of warning Aeneas' Trojans about the impending danger of Polyphemus and Circe. This time, information transmission is more felicitous, since the Trojans heed the advice and do not approach either dangerous location — the repetition of destruction is thus cancelled. Ovid, it seems, provides us with a bad start to the transmission of survivor

cautionary stories (*backstory* to *past*), only to remedy the situation the second time around (*past* to *present*).¹⁴¹ If this (lack of) success is also correlated with the identity of information senders, this identity may merit our attention for a while.

Admittedly, the difference between the first and the second round of information transmission is not all that neat. Even when a *backstory* is not transmitted to the right audience, or at the right time, it still gets told by internal narrators (with the exception of the Glaucus story, which is not an embedded narrative). If character narrators of the *Little Aeneid*, whether of the (infelicitous) *backstory* or of the (felicitous) *past* level, share a common element, and if a picture of the Ovidian internal narrator thus starts to crystallize, then Ovid the poet might be identifying with this internal narrator, whom we may perceive as a composite but still consistent construct throughout the *Little Aeneid*.¹⁴² A metapoetic reading may thus be the next step in the logical process. Before establishing Ovid's metapoetic self-fashioning, however (which I will undertake in section H), a glance at the identity of individual internal narrators, and therefore of the *Little Aeneid* internal narrator as a whole, is in order here.

¹⁴¹ This felicitous transmission of information goes through despite two obstacles. First, a mythological one: the Trojans (audience) are the former enemies of the Greeks (and of the narrator Achaemenides). This reluctance is transcended multiple times (*Met.* 14.167-171, 220, and similarly by Macareus in 245-247). Second, an intertextual one: (the Ovidian) Achaemenides is modeled on both Ulysses and the Virgilian Sinon (who persuaded the Trojans to receive the Trojan Horse into their walls), and therefore may be an embodiment of deceptive speech — but the Trojans and Anchises are willing to disassociate him from his intertextual baggage and to take his words at face value. See Papaioannou (2005) 108.

¹⁴² This observation, if adopted, is naturally limited to the *Little Aeneid*. I am not making an overarching argument about the traits of the Ovidian narrator throughout the *Metamorphoses*, or an argument to the effect that this composite narrator of the entire epic essentially remains always the same.

I have noted above that the characters who engage in some sort of future-looking storytelling are not skilled prophets. This tendency is in stark contrast to Virgil's *Aeneid*, where there is a multiplicity of prophecies, all of them voiced by seers or supernatural beings. Since the Ovidian narrators are not endowed with unique insight into the future, their forward-looking gaze has to run parallel to a backward-looking gaze, based on a background of repetitiveness and predictability.

But, besides the absence of prophets, there is also another sense in which the Ovidian rendition of Aeneas' adventures features unexpected characters as internal narrators. It is evident that some (both *backstory* and *past*) characters do not survive beyond their own storyline, but others do — therefore only the latter can function as internal flashback narrators. But why should this be so? Which characters get to survive, and which are removed?

To be sure, Ovid has taken Achaemenides over from Virgil, and he has modeled Macareus on him as well — intertextual resonances shape his choice of two Odyssean comrades singled out from the mass and made to survive and lag behind, so that they can meet Aeneas' Trojans. This is probably why *past* characters survive into the *present*. But why did Ovid not keep Glaucus or Acis (*backstory* characters) alive beyond their own storylines, and into the *past* level? After all, they both seem immortal towards the end of their respective storylines — the Ovidian narrator actually stresses that they were not necessarily immortal from the outset, but they turned into a marine and a river god respectively (*Met.* 13.917-965 on Glaucus, 13.890-897 on Acis). When it comes to other *backstory* characters, Picus loses his human form, as do his companions, Scylla, and Canens. Their disappearance

makes narrative sense, but not the removal of Glaucus or Acis. Is there a pattern to be detected here after all?

There probably is. The (surviving, or remaining) internal narrators of the *Little Aeneid* may all fall into a category of less-than-privileged characters. They do not enjoy a superior ontological status as divine or supernatural beings, nor are they endowed with special significance as narrators through intertextual (or metapoetic) resonances. The latter is certainly the case with characters that Ovid has probably drawn from Virgil or Theocritus. Achaemenides is one of two narrators common to Virgil and Ovid, and he is introduced by both as a relatively insignificant, unmarked character (only his poverty is remarkable in *Aen.* 3.614-615, while Ovid introduces him by looking back to his Virgilian counterpart in *Met.* 14.165-167, cf. *Aen.* 3.591-594).¹⁴³ The other common narrator is the Sibyl, but she does not clearly retain her Virgilian counterpart's prophetic perceptiveness. The other immortal Ovidian narrator is Galatea, who, however, compared to the Theocritean intertext, represents the silenced, female character's viewpoint. In other words, the female beloved, who remains elusive and is deprived of (narrative) agency by not uttering a word in Theocritus, is restored by Ovid as another example of a minority, non-privileged narrator.

But beyond Ovid's use of purely intertextual character narrators, the *Little Aeneid* may be construed as a forum for a decentralization of narrative agency¹⁴⁴ and its distribution among marginal characters, in yet more ways: 1) Ulysses and Aeneas, the archetypal hero-narrators

¹⁴³ For the unmarked, private narrating instance between two socially insignificant old friends (in contrast to the aristocratically institutionalized narrating instance of Odysseus' tales to the Phaeacians in the *Odyssey*) see Baier (1999) 440.

¹⁴⁴ This decentralization may be in line with "Ovid's/the third person narrator's increasing tendency to yield his narrative voice to internal narrators in the last third of the poem. See Wheeler (1999) 185-195.

of previous Greco-Roman epic, do not feature at all as narrators, 2) prophets, who are by definition specially endowed (flash-forward) narrators, are also removed from the text. The Sibyl is retained but turned into a flashback narrator, 3) other characters possibly expected to qualify as narrators because of their ontological status are also arbitrarily removed (in contrast to Scylla and Canens, who have lost their human form, so their disappearance after their own storylines is accounted for by the plot). The most pointed examples of this case are Glaucus and Acis, 4) decentered or marginal characters serve as internal narrators instead: Achaemenides and Macareus are just Ulysses' companions with no marked characteristics; the Glaucus story is not narrated by Glaucus himself, but by the third-person narrator; the Picus story is not narrated by either Picus or Canens (or by Circe, for that matter), but by an unnamed female servant; and the Galatea and Polyphemus story is an instance of change of focalization, from a male gaze to a female one.

The only character that remains to be discussed along these lines is Circe. She is immortal, and, as I will show below, privileged as a poet-figure both in the *Odyssey* and in Ovid's elegiac poetry, the latter through a connection between witchcraft and poetry. If we accept the pattern for marginal character narrators that I have sketched out above, one does not expect to find her in the role of an internal narrator. Not unsurprisingly, then, she does not play that role. However, she does feature as a potential prophet, although the detail into which she went when outlining future dangers to Ulysses' men is not specified (*ancipitesque vias et iter Titania vastum | dixerat et saevi restare pericula ponti*, *Met.* 14.438-439). Still, the corresponding flash-forward story is suppressed, although it is apparently vivid enough to stop Macareus from following the rest of the crew (*Met.* 14.440).

Circe, then, might be a less clear-cut case of an intertextually and ontologically privileged character, whose narrative credentials are minimized but not altogether discarded. As the next section (G) attempts to show, the shortcomings of Circe's discourse are evident in other realms, besides the suppression of her potential prophetic story. Section G does not refer to the status of characters as narrators (since neither Circe nor Canens is clearly presented as telling a story) but more broadly as users of linguistic discourse or song. In section G I provide some reasons why Circe and Canens, despite not being proper narrators, may still be identified with Ovid the poet (and therefore warrant a metapoetic reading); in section H I use the conclusions of section F about marginal internal narrators to compose a comprehensive picture of the *Little Aeneid* internal narrator as a whole, and I explore the implications of that narrator's identity for Ovid the poet's self-fashioning.

***G. Circe's, Canens', and Ovid's carmina*¹⁴⁵**

The reader may be invited to identify Circe as a poet-figure throughout her storyline. This observation would qualify her, not necessarily as an internal narrator, but perhaps as a substitute for Ovid the poet. This, I will suggest, happens in two ways: 1) she is twice placed in a love-triangle situation, where she has to enlist amatory persuasive discourse to win over her potential beloveds, thus finding herself in the shoes of an elegiac *amator*, and 2) contrary to her Odyssean and Virgilian counterparts, the word *carmina*, a term with obvious metapoetic connotations, is employed to link magic with (one aspect of) her discourse. Both

¹⁴⁵ For the constant emphasis of the *Little Aeneid* love triangle stories, and more specifically of the "Picus and Canens", on illusion, representation and reality (which reinforce the argument for a self-reflexive reading), see Nagle (1988) 87-91.

these links serve to invest her with a self-reflexively important role. At the same time, the question arises whether she is, not only a poet-figure, but also a *successful* poet-figure. Since her identity as an immortal goddess with magical skills makes her a privileged character, and since such characters are usually removed from a narrator/poet role, another question is whether she aligns with the pattern outlined above. In other words, since she falls into the category of privileged, rather than underprivileged, characters, and assuming that the pattern is quite consistent, why is Circe granted a metapoetic function rather than being sidelined?

What actually happens, I will suggest, is that her potential role as a poet-figure is introduced, precisely in order for her discursive shortcomings to be made more evident. This happens in two ways: in the first case, that of her partial identification with the elegiac *amator*, her shortcomings consist in her self-elevation, which is inconsistent with the *amator*'s regular arsenal of arguments; in the second case, that of her use of *carmina*, in the disassociation of the term from her actual amatory arguments (however ineffective those may be) and in its identification only with magical spells (which is, again, not the elegiac way for the *amator* to deal with unreciprocated love).

The second aspect of Circe's connection to metapoetics may be more straightforward, and easier to turn our attention to first. To begin with, the Ovidian Circe, contrary to her Odyssean and Virgilian predecessors, brings about transformation not only through physical means (a concoction of herbs, a touch with her wand, or a salve), but also through the use of *carmina* (for her Virgilian and Odyssean counterparts see footnotes 109 and 112 above). The identification of Circe's discourse, or speech-acts, with *carmina* allows for a relatively smooth association of this character with the poet himself — even more so since Ovid has deviated from his predecessors and invented this special connection of his heroine with

magical discourse. Especially given the love-triangle context (which is also a central concern of the elegiac situation), and since Ovid employs the term *carmen* in a self-reflexive way in elegiac works of his poetic output, the hypothesis may be reasonable that what Circe produces is discourse characterized as poetic, and therefore as comparable to what Ovid himself has produced (both in the *Metamorphoses* itself and in elegy).¹⁴⁶

On closer inspection, however, this statement may be too generalizing. It is true that Circe's words are incorporated into the poetic corpus of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and in this sense do constitute poetry. But the same may apply to any character's discourse, regardless of its generic associations — whenever the Ovidian narrator supposedly quotes the words of a character, Ovid is in fact inventing words and putting them into his character's mouth, not conveying to the reader verbatim words supposedly really spoken. Therefore, why should Circe be singled out as a self-reflexive poet substitute?

One way of establishing a special relationship between Circe and metapoetics would be by delving deeper into the importance of the term *carmina*. *Carmina* are connected with her in no fewer than six instances throughout her storyline (*Met.* 14.34, 44, 357, 366, 369, 387).

¹⁴⁶ More recently, a formal definition of *carmina* in its ambiguity between magic and poetry in *Eclogue* 8 has been published in Minet 2013. Circe features alongside *carmina* in Virgil's poem as well: *carminibus Circe socios mutavit Ulixi* (*Ecl.* 8.70). Propertius juxtaposes the use of *carmina*-as-spells to poetry, in the hope that they will prove more successful than his poetry in seducing his beloved (1.1.19-24). This is a passage from love elegy that most closely resembles the one from the *Ars Amatoria* (discussed below). Both these passages, as well as the one from the *Metamorphoses*, presuppose a certain affinity between, but not complete identification of, spells and poetry. Cf. a similar slippage in Ovid's own *Amores* 2.1.23-34. In the *Amores* the term *carmina*, even when it denotes poetry, is not limited to elegiac or amatory poetry. Although programmatic elegies such as *Am.* 1.1, 1.3 and 2.17 self-reflexively use the term to refer to the *Amores* itself, it sometimes refers to another poet's output (e.g. *carmina sublimis tunc sunt peritura Lucreti*, *Am.* 1.15.23), or to another poet's and Ovid's output indiscriminately (e.g. *est, quae Callimachi prae nostris rustica dicat | carmina*, *Am.* 2.4.20-21).

This observation, in and of itself, should give us pause. But Circe's link to *carmina* specifically with metapoetic connotations comes, not (only) from the *Metamorphoses* itself, but (also) from the *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid's erotodidactic poem, which was probably composed before the *Metamorphoses*.

Towards the beginning of *Ars Amatoria* 2 the *praeceptor amoris*, or the poet's mouthpiece in an erotodidactic poetic context, claims that the best way for an *amator* to seduce, and keep, a beloved is not through magic, but through persuasive discourse — that is, through the composition and performance of elegiac poetry itself. To drive home his point, the *praeceptor* uses two examples of sorceresses who, although (or perhaps because) they employed magic, were not amorously successful. The two examples are Medea and Circe: *Phasias Aesoniden, Circe tenuisset Ulixem, / si modo servari carmine possit amor* (*Ars* 2.103-104). Medea and Circe thus feature as, effectively, potential elegiac poets.

Simple as this argument may look, the word *carmine* draws the reader's attention to a possible slippage between the concepts of magical spells and poetry. Although in the lines quoted above *carmen* may, at least on a first reading, refer exclusively to magical spells, the word itself may call to mind poetic discourse — even though superficially *carmen*-as-a-spell is here placed in a mutually exclusive relationship with poetry. This is in fact the reading that Alison Sharrock has offered: the *praeceptor* rejects *carmina*-as-spells, ostensibly because of their deceptive intent, but essentially because of their inartistic nature. He sets *carmina*-as-spells in competition with *carmina*-as-poetry, a move easily facilitated by the ambiguous meaning of the term. In the end, always according to Sharrock, the term serves for the *praeceptor*, and for Ovid himself, to elevate his own poetry's superiority as a means of

seducing its reader, compared to the efficacy of *carmina*-as-spells in seducing a potential beloved.¹⁴⁷

If the *Metamorphoses* narrator (Macareus, or “Ovid” through him) follows a similar thought process, then Circe’s use of (whatever is denoted by the term) *carmina* may help establish her metapoetic credentials. In other words, Circe may be construed as a poet-*cum*-witch, not only through her association with the term *carmina*, but also specifically through the evocation of the *Ars Amatoria* intertext. However, what in the elegiac work is subject to an ambiguous interpretation (*carmina*-as-spells and/or *carmina*-as-poetry) has, in the *Metamorphoses*, undergone a process of disambiguation. The narrator identifies the term only, and clearly, with magical incantations — at no point is the rest of Circe’s discourse described as *carmina*. Moreover, these *carmina* are the only part of Circe’s language use that definitely achieves its goal — and this goal is pointedly different from what an elegiac context, or even a context of a love triangle, would call for.¹⁴⁸

Contrary to what the *praeceptor* recommends when the *amator* needs to seduce the beloved, Circe’s *carmina* are effective, not at eliciting reciprocal love from Glaucus and

¹⁴⁷ Sharrock (1994) esp. 51-78. Another binary that collapses in on itself is that of *carmen* as *pharmakon*, i.e. as both destructive and curative. The more the spell (or poetry) cures the pain of love (of reading), the deeper it lures its recipient into its seductive web.

¹⁴⁸ The *amator* sometimes invokes the help of witches (esp. Propertius 1.1 and Tibullus 1.2), but the issue is always one of the *amator*’s disbelief in the efficacy of witchcraft to bring about reciprocal love. It may be no coincidence that such contexts evoke Medea as a witch who could not successfully use her own charms in her own amatory life. See Prince 2003. The *lena*, the *amator*’s *alter ego* (esp. in Ovid’s *Am.* 1.8 and Propertius 4.5), may also be accused of witchcraft. Since metapoetically she may be considered not the *amator*’s enemy but his double, one may transfer witchcraft to him as well. However, this connection is not clearly substantiated by the two elegies — rather, the element of witchcraft throws into higher relief the *amator*’s need to counter the *lena*’s *carmina*-as-spells with his own *carmina*-as-poetry. See O’Neill (1998) 61-66, and cf. Myers 1996.

Picus themselves, but at transforming Scylla, Picus, and the latter's companions. In other words, although Circe is potentially placed in the shoes of an elegiac *amator* (she definitely seeks to seduce less-than-accessible beloveds), she does not follow the *praeceptor*'s instructions about such a situation — quite the opposite, she uses *carmina*-as-spells instead of *carmina*-as-poetry. Therefore, the Circe of the *Metamorphoses* seems to evoke the context, and in fact her intertextual equivalent, of the *Ars Amatoria*. However, the disassociation of her *carmina* from elegiac poems (i.e. from artistic amatory discourse that aims to seduce a beloved), together with her tendency to use them only as transformation spells rather than as love charms, further detach her from the *praeceptor*. She is thus repeating the mistake of her *Ars Amatoria* counterpart. Her detachment from *carmina* as poetic discourse may be one indication that this character is a less than competent user of (at least elegiac) language.

But my argument thus far has disregarded one important point. The ending of both Circe's love triangles is unhappy, in the sense that Circe does not accomplish her original goal of seducing either Glaucus or Picus. But why did she need to resort to spells and transform her potential beloveds and/or her love rivals, instead of attempting to win over both men through the use of amatory persuasive arguments?¹⁴⁹ In fact, she did make use of such arguments. Although they are not described as *carmina*, and therefore the terminological slippage between witchcraft and poetry is not activated, such arguments are

¹⁴⁹ If the genre of Latin love elegy is considered as, on a first level, addressing the *puella* and seeking to secure her affection, or even her consent to (uncompensated) sex (the main argument of James 2003, summarized in 13-21), then Circe's seductive speeches to Glaucus and Picus can be conceived of as proto-elegy voiced by a female character.

deployed by Circe in both instances. This is another way in which the Ovidian narrator brings Circe closer to the figure of the elegiac *amator*, and thereby of Ovid the poet as well.

To put it in a different way, Circe is doubly unsuccessful in situations that potentially require of her to act as an elegiac *amator*, and thus as a substitute for the poet. The first aspect of her lack of linguistic success is, as argued above, that she deploys the wrong type of *carmina*, contrary to the *praeceptor*'s instructions: spells in order to transform instead of charms in order to seduce. She is thus a less than competent student of the *praeceptor*, or a less than competent *amator*. But even when she does use amatory persuasive discourse (even if it is not described as a *carmen*), she makes a different case for herself than the one for which the elegiac *amator* regularly opts. In a nutshell, she elevates herself instead of humbling herself (even if only ostensibly) before Glaucus and Picus.

An elementary, textbook overview of Latin love elegy's poetic conventions would list *servitium amoris* as one basic element of the genre.¹⁵⁰ The *amator* adopts the pose of having voluntarily submitted to the *puella*'s dominance (in fact, he often addresses her, or refers to her, as his *domina*), and invariably characterizes himself as her slave. Their different gender betrays his social and financial superiority (and this may be one reason why Latin love elegy focuses almost exclusively on heterosexual love); but the superficial essence of the *amator*'s

¹⁵⁰ For an introduction to the trope, as well as its relationship with power dynamics and the political status of the male speaking subject of Latin love elegy, see Fulkerson 2013. The moments she singles out (2013, 183), during which the *amator* asserts his superiority over the *puella* and over literal slaves, are poignant precisely because they alternate with moments of the *amator*'s self-abasement. For the importance of Propertian elegies where Cynthia gains the upper hand in the relationship, and for the implicit reassertion of the *amator*'s (sexual and narrative) power even in these elegies, see Greene (1998) 51-66. For the constant deferral of sexual pleasure (and therefore the positioning of the *amator*'s success only at some notional extratextual space) see Connolly 2000.

rhetoric, and one to which he hopes the *puella* will be responsive, is his inferiority and his complete submission to her every demand.

Whether this rhetoric ultimately achieves the *amator*'s goal of seducing the *puella* is certainly up for debate. Other than the concept of *servitium amoris*, even a cursory reader of Latin love elegy would detect the *amator*'s tendency to characterize his love for (and his advances towards) the *puella* as mostly unreciprocated. The relationship of *amator* and *puella* is fraught with uncertainty, and therefore with the *amator*'s insecurity about its continuation — the *puella*'s interest in him (at best) fluctuates and varies with each elegy.

But this fluctuation may entail some, even momentary, glimpses of success for the *amator*. There are ups as well as downs, or so the *amator* claims — and this may also be part and parcel of his rhetorical skills, this time more towards the reader than towards the *puella*.¹⁵¹ In other words, the *amator*'s attempts to rekindle the *puella*'s interest in him are based on the assumption (one that the reader is encouraged to believe in) that at some unspecified point in the past it was kindled in the first place — but then for some reason it started fading away. In fact, elegiac poems of triumphal rejoicing are few and far between, and perhaps the *amator*'s relative success is to be placed at some notional extratextual point in time. Still, the premise of some tiny moments of reciprocal love between *puella* and

¹⁵¹ This is the textual game to which the reader is encouraged to subscribe; since the *puella*'s view of the relationship is elided, moments of success are focalized through the *amator*, and so his rhetorical success depends more on his ability to communicate to the reader this background of intermittent amatory success than on his rhetorical skills towards the *puella*. As far as the actual elegies, at least of the *Amores*, are concerned, there is little in the way of triumphal rejoicing (e.g. in *Am.* 2.12). For the ultimate failure of amatory rhetoric in Ovidian elegy and epic see Tarrant 1995.

amator is one presupposition that elegy both relies on and, in a vicious circle, keeps encouraging.

Therefore, even if he does not enjoy untrammelled success, the *amator* does score some points — or at least so he claims. His standard arguments sometimes convince the *puella* (even if at other times she seems less receptive to them). But, even though she may resemble the *amator*, Circe is not granted a similar opportunity, not even for a moment. Both Glaucus and Picus immediately reject her advances — and, while there may be multiple conceivable reasons for such a rejection, her confident, almost arrogant, arguments may be one of them.

Circe is quite unwilling to subject herself to an identification with a slave (even if this identification is only figurative). In fact, she ends up arguing that Glaucus and Picus are fortunate, and worthy of being wooed by any woman, precisely because they have attracted the love interest of such a goddess as herself. She is more outspoken in the case of Glaucus, where she tries to boost his self-confidence by pointing out the importance of her own advances (*neu dubites absitque tuae fiducia formae, | en ego, cum dea sim, nitidi cum filia Solis, | carmine cum tantum, tantum quoque gramine possim, | ut tua sim, voveo, Met. 14.32-35*). In Picus' case she is perhaps more modest (“*per o, tua lumina, | dixit | “quae mea ceperunt, perque hanc, pulcherrime, formam, | quae facit, ut supplex tibi sim dea, consule nostris | ignibus et socerum, qui pervidet omnia, Solem | accipe nec durus Titanida despice Circen.”, Met. 14.372-376*), but the gist is essentially the same.¹⁵² To be sure, the trope of *servitium amoris* may be precisely just a poetic trope, or a pretense that the *amator* adopts in

¹⁵² The fact that she construes herself as *supplex*, or that she hopes one day to belong to Glaucus (*ut tua sim*), along with her characterization of Picus as *durus*, place Circe more squarely in the position of the elegiac *amator*; but still, I would suggest, they fall short of constructing a humble *persona* for the goddess.

order to deceive the *puella* and deprive her of any control of their relationship (and of the narrative voice). But his inevitable superiority is at least nominally covered under his pretense of submission to slavery, whereas Circe has no qualms about asserting her superiority over both Glaucus and Picus — both of whom are not everyday mortals (Glaucus is a marine god and Picus is a Latin king, son of Saturn).

Circe's arrogance, although incompatible with the elegiac *amator*'s nominal stance, is however not necessarily exceptional in the *Metamorphoses*,¹⁵³ or even in the *Little Aeneid* itself. In fact, this self-conceit is another common characteristic that ties her to Polyphemus. The monster is trying to win Galatea over from her beloved Acis (so he might be considered another *amator*-figure), but he (like Circe) opts mostly for a self-hymn instead of an unconditional praise of his beloved. He does launch into a hyperbolic review of her beautiful attributes (*Met.* 13.789-797), but he then slides into a corresponding review of his own belongings (*Met.* 13.798-837, and of his divine parentage, *Met.* 13.854-855). Also like Circe (when she courts Picus), he only fleetingly presents himself as submissive to Galatea's wishes (*tantum miserere precesque / supplicis exaudi! tibi enim succumbimus uni, / quique Iovem et caelum sperno et penetrabile fulmen, / Nerei, te vereor, tua fulmine saevior ira est, Met.* 13.855-858).

Perhaps Circe is more extreme than Polyphemus in not professing to be afraid of her beloveds' wrath, not even momentarily — or perhaps the Cyclops is more extreme, both in

¹⁵³Even the very first lover of the *Metamorphoses*, Apollo, sings a self-praise to attract his beloved Daphne (*Met.* 1.512-524). He is not a quasi-*amator*, or involved in a love triangle, but his diction still resembles that of Polyphemus. For the self-reflexive need to shorten long-winded speeches of characters' self-praise see Gauly (2009) 70-71. He does not mention Circe along these lines, only Apollo and Glaucus to Scylla (*Met.* 13.966-967).

Galatea's praise and in his own self-praise. At any rate, Circe's (and Polyphemus') arguments may not be the (principal) reason why their advances immediately fail — one reason may be Glaucus and Picus' devotion to Scylla and Canens respectively, or that of Galatea to Acis. But the *amator* often finds himself in a similar love-triangle situation (either with the *puella's vir* or with a rich rival) — which may be one reason for his ultimate lack of success, but which, conversely, does not necessarily stand in the way of his intermittent, short-lived success.

To tie all strands of thought together: other than failing to abide by the *praeceptor's* instructions about the “correct” elegiac use of *carmina*, and thus to act as a well-trained *amator*, Circe also fails to employ ostensibly self-deprecating arguments (summed up under *servitium amoris*), as exemplified by the *amator* in conventional (non-didactic) Latin love elegy. In this sense, the *Metamorphoses* narrator (whether Macareus or the third-person narrator) alludes to a generic subtext of Latin love elegy (even if not necessarily to specific passages) in two ways, both of which highlight Circe's inability to make effective use of (elegiac) discourse. Thus, to return to my discussion of ontologically (non)privileged characters of section F: this privileged character, when placed in an elegiac-like context, is deprived of the chance to use elegiac discourse to her advantage.

But there are perhaps other ways in which Circe's use of language, and its effectiveness, are downplayed — not only within an elegiac context, but also in the *past* story about Ulysses (which is not connected to love in its entirety). Similarly to the Odyssean Circe, the Ovidian Circe is endowed with potentially powerful speech before her magical skills become the focus of the narrative. The first hint that Circe might not be as benevolent as she looks can also be read in the opposite way: the signals she sends forth are on the surface very

welcoming, possibly to the extent that the Greeks let their guard down and drink from the potion. The ambiguous phrase *reddidit omina votis* is preceded by *dicta acceptaque salute | diffudit vultus* (*Met.* 14.271-272).¹⁵⁴ Other than her smile, then, the official way in which she exchanges greetings with Ulysses lends her words credibility. Especially the term *salus*, although on a first reading it just means “salutation, greeting”, has a more general meaning of “wellbeing, safety, security”. Her words, then, were such as to imply safety for the Greeks through such a simple linguistic means as a greeting — but for the reader they portend the opposite of safety, at least in the first part of the story. The formal tone continues into her reconciliation with Ulysses after her unsuccessful attempt to transform him: *inde fides dextraeque datae* (*Met.* 14.297). Again, there is an official, almost legalistic, tone to these words, which in this case prove trustworthy — Circe looks benevolent after this exchange of *fides*. But the important element to note in this case is that Circe seems to be reciting standard, official words — not necessarily words whose invention Ovid attributes to her.

A final summary of all the ways in which Circe features as a relatively unsuccessful language user may be in order here: 1) she does not function as an (epic) narrator of a future story, unlike her Homeric counterpart (her narrating instance is evoked, but at the same time her actual story is elided), 2) she is relatively successful in tricking Ulysses’ comrades into drinking her potion, but it seems like she uses standardized, almost formulaic, legal language. She does not sing while at the loom, or seduce anyone specifically with her song, or with her

¹⁵⁴ Ovid uses the same phrase (*dicta acceptaque salute*) when Glaucus first reaches out to Circe for help (*Met.* 14.11). Although the official status of her discourse is also underlined here, it is not clear that she has destructive intentions against Glaucus — in fact, she never harms him because she is in love with him (*Met.* 14.40-41). Therefore, in the case of Glaucus the reference to *salus* need not connote her use specifically of deceptive speech.

arguments, 3) she does not narrate the story of Picus and Canens herself, a poetic choice which is not accounted for. Instead, Ovid has to introduce her servant out of nowhere, 4) although her *carmina* are effective, they are still not successful in eliciting reciprocal love from either Glaucus or Picus; and the amatory persuasive, quasi-elegiac, arguments she deploys to that end fail spectacularly.¹⁵⁵ In other words, when placed in a situation that may call for an elegiac solution, or for the *amator*'s discourse, Circe fails in the task.

Thus far we have seen an ontologically superior character who features as a relatively unsuccessful language user. In a quite symmetrical fashion, her rival in one of the love triangles, Picus' wife Canens, is also designated as a singer (and potentially a producer) of *carmina* (*Met.* 14.341 and 430). Contrary to those of Circe, her *carmina* are straightforwardly described as pure songs, not as speech-acts designed to bring about a practical effect.

Whether or not Canens is able to keep Picus because of her singing skills (which etymologically also explain her name, *Met.* 14.337-338) is unclear. In fact, her ability to alter the physical landscape around her approaches her to, rather than distancing her from, Circe and witchcraft (*silvas et saxa movere | et mulcere feras et flumina longa morari | ore suo volucresque vagas retinere solebat*, *Met.* 14.338-340, cf. *Met.* 14.366-371 about Circe and *Aen.* 4.487-491 about Dido's reference to a sorceress). Still, her song cannot prevent Picus' transformation, or her own gradual pining away until she disappears into thin air. Is this, then, a case of unsuccessful *carmina*?

¹⁵⁵ Of course, the two different means are (not) effective with respect to two different goals. Non-*carmina*-words fail to persuade Glaucus and Picus to love Circe back, and *carmina* are successful, not in accomplishing this same goal (it seems that Circe is not in possession of love potions/charms) but in bringing about punitive transformation. Cf. Aresi (2013) 143 (who suggests that *amor mutuus* would have depended only on the male characters' consent, not on any magical actions).

Along a metapoetic line of interpretation, it is not. “Picus and Canens” is the first purely Latin/Italian story in the *Metamorphoses*, and the fact that it features a skilled singer (or rather two) has to give us pause. To this observation can be added the aetiological note on which this tale ends. “Ovid”/the nymph says that Canens is being commemorated at the place where she finally perished, which has been given the name Canens (*fama tamen signata loco est, quem rite Canentem | nomine de nymphae veteres dixere Camenae, Met. 14.433-434*). Moreover, the *veteres* [...] *Camenae* are the ones responsible for this naming of the site. The *Camenae* are the personifications of poetic inspiration for the Romans, analogous to the Greek Muses. This aetiological ending, therefore, not only accounts for the name of a Roman site (a spring consecrated probably by Numa Pompilius near the Porta Capena¹⁵⁶), but it also grounds the entire Italian/Roman tradition of poetic inspiration granted by the *Camenae* on Canens’ unique singing ability.¹⁵⁷ The important undertones of poet-characters in this part of the *Little Aeneid* are then confirmed again,¹⁵⁸ this time with an ethnic qualification: not only *carmina*, but specifically Italian *carmina* sung by Italian Canens feature prominently as an aetiological conclusion to the first Italian tale of the *Metamorphoses*.

¹⁵⁶ There may be a historical basis behind this aetiological connection of the Porta Capena with the composition or performance of songs/poetry (at first specifically laudatory poetry for military achievements and then by extension any kind of poetry). See Richardson 2016. It may not be coincidental that in Propertius 4.3 (71-72) Arethusa vows to dedicate at the Porta Capena, not only her husband’s weapons when he returns victorious from war, but also an epigram.

¹⁵⁷ For the aquatic associations of the *Camenae*, the spring dedicated to them by Numa, and the Augustan antiquarian tendency to return to the invocation of the Latin *Camenae* after Ennius’ turn towards the Greek Muses, see Myers (1994) 109-111.

¹⁵⁸ The Theocritean associations of Polyphemus may also establish him as a poet singing his own praise. The Ovidian Polyphemus’ song may serve a practical purpose of amatory persuasion (in this he is similar to Circe), whereas the Theocritean one can use his song as a *pharmakon* for himself: he reminds himself of the positive aspects of his life and eventually heals himself from love (in this he is different from Circe). Cf. Payne (2007) 79-82.

At the same time, her general skill as a singer may again be read in line with Ovid's tendency to decenter his poet figures in the *Little Aeneid*. Although not subject to rape herself, Canens may be similar to stereotypical images of vulnerable nymphs/maidens in the *Metamorphoses* (such as Daphne in book 1, Arethusa in book 5, Medusa in book 4, or even Proserpina in book 5, to name a few examples).¹⁵⁹ Some of those young women eventually fall victim to rape (Medusa and Proserpina), the rest are granted a narrow escape when they get transformed into a non-human being. Disappearance into thin air is a rare instance of transformation, but this denouement of the Canens story closely links the nymph to Arethusa (Arethusa melts into the pool that bears her name ever since, *Met.* 5.632-641). Arethusa is granted both a pivotal role in the story of Proserpina (she is the one to tell Ceres that Dis has abducted her daughter, *Met.* 5.504-508) and the opportunity to tell the flashback story of her own almost-rape (*Met.* 5.577-641 — for Arethusa, Ceres and Proserpina see below, chapter IV). Although Canens does not feature as a narrator, she falls into the category of poet-characters — she introduces the metaphor of the Latin Camenae into the universe of the *Metamorphoses*. She is both unlike Arethusa, in that she does not explicitly narrate anything, and like Arethusa, in her capacity as a poet-figure (as well as in the nature of her eventual transformation). Thus, although Circe's servant, and not Canens herself, relates the tale of Picus and Canens, this otherwise marginal character is still more powerful than Circe, her rival in song and love — and her power extends beyond Picus' preference for her over Circe.

¹⁵⁹ For intratextual repetitiveness in the case of literal or metaphorical rapes, and for Circe's effectiveness as a metaphorical rapist because she has been a "reader" of previous *Metamorphoses* stories, see Rufo 2016. Her argument mostly compares Circe to other "rapists", but she sometimes compares the different instances of Circe's aggressiveness to each other.

She embodies the transmission of song and poetic tradition from Greece to Rome — and she serves this function while Ovid recounts his first example of Italian mythological tradition.

I have here examined separately two cases where status and success as a language/song user intersect. Socially, or ontologically, superior Circe is beset by some serious shortcomings, mainly when placed in the shoes of an elegiac *amator*.¹⁶⁰ The *Ars Amatoria* and the rest of Latin love elegy do not recommend that the *amator* flaunt his own superiority over the *puella* — superficially at least, the trope of *servitium amoris* means that the *amator* invariably bows down to his *domina*. But Circe opts for self-elevation instead of, at least nominal, self-deprecation — and this may be one reason why in the end she needs to resort to *carmina*-as-spells (and not to *carmina*-as-poetry, as prescribed by the *praeceptor*) in order, not to win over Glaucus and Picus, but to avenge herself on them. Other instances of Circe's language use support the argument that her metapoetic credentials, and therefore her potential role as a poet-substitute, are evoked, in order then to get cancelled.

By contrast, the less privileged character in one of Circe's love triangles, one who looks like the vulnerable, sometimes sexually assaulted, nymphs throughout the *Metamorphoses*, metaphorically introduces the specifically Latin/Italian poetic tradition into the world of Ovid's work. The self-reflexive term *carmina* links the two heroines together, and may serve to establish a poetic competition of sorts between them. It is true that, on the elementary level of the plotline, Circe survives and destroys her opponent — but on a deeper level, the nymph wins both the love of Picus and an implicit song contest.

¹⁶⁰ Another reading would place Glaucus, not Circe, in the shoes of the elegiac *amator* — or both of them together. See Laigneau Fontaine 2011, who sets Glaucus and Circe up as elegiac characters but suggests that they both behave in a way incongruous with the genre's conventions, the former by seeking external help and the latter by resorting to magic.

This section has not made extensive use of *backstories*, or temporality — rather, the metapoetic implications of the tacit Circe-Canens contest have been explored, with a view to reaching some conclusions about the characteristics of internal narrators, or language users, in this story *cluster*. So far, we have a supernatural person as unsuccessful (elegiac) language user and silenced narrator, and an ostensibly vulnerable nymph, who however serves as a foundational figure for Italian poetry. The story *cluster* under analysis in this chapter, one straddling *backstory*, *past* and *present*, contributes to the delineation of such a composite internal narrator, as the following section will also attempt to show.

H. Ovid's stance towards tradition

So far two observations may suggest a link between the *Little Aeneid* and metapoetics: 1) Canens and Circe may be construed as poet-figures through the use of the self-reflexive term *carmina*, and 2) Ovid the poet's stand-ins, i.e. internal narrators, are stereotypically marginal or less-than-privileged characters (an observation also confirmed in the case of Circe and Canens as song users). I will now return to (back)stories and explore the potential role of repetitiveness, or lack thereof, towards a metapoetic reading. If Ovidian internal narrators are construed as repetitive, then Ovid the poet is describing himself as repetitive to some extent as well. But, what is perhaps more important, since repetition stops in the case of Aeneas' *present*, then the Trojan hero has no story of his own to tell. I will then introduce three intertextual temporal levels (Homer, Virgil, Ovid, parallel to the three intratextual temporal levels of pre-Ulysses, Ulysses and Aeneas), which lead to the idea of Ovid as a latecomer who has to repeat previous epic tradition. Finally, I will pull all strands (repetitiveness,

intertextuality, and marginal narrator figures) together, in order to form a nuanced picture of how Ovid may be alluding to his own stance towards his predecessors.

Going back to repetition and *backstories*, the reader would not even be aware of Circe's and Polyphemus' tendency to repeat themselves if the first attempt at warning (from *backstory* to *past*) had materialized smoothly. In theory, if someone had kept the Greeks safe from the two supernatural beings, the *Odyssey* (and the *Aeneid/Little Aeneid*) would be lacking the part about Polyphemus and/or Circe. On this reading, what keeps the characters within the plot safe from danger deprives them of the opportunity to have a voice of their own, or to become narrators of inset tales in their own right. This last observation applies to the temporal level of the *present*, or of Aeneas. He does not experience Circe or Polyphemus, and thus the cycle of destructive repetition stops with him — but this lack of experience stifles his own potential narrative voice.

In the *Metamorphoses*, Aeneas is completely divested of the role of flashback narrator that he famously enjoys in books 2 and 3 of the *Aeneid* (and shares with the Homeric Odysseus). Out of the entire vita of Aeneas in books 13 and 14 of the *Metamorphoses*, Aeneas himself does not narrate any inset tales (since the *in-medias-res* beginning of the *Aeneid*, which facilitates such first-person inset flashbacks, is replaced by Ovid with linear narration¹⁶¹). There are inset narrators other than Achaemenides and Macareus, often narrating tales that on first inspection have little to do with the *Aeneid* saga (Anius in 13.644-

¹⁶¹ This removal of Aeneas-as-narrator is obviously different from the *Aeneid*, and it makes the corresponding part of the *Little Aeneid* less about flashbacks. However, the sequence of events in the *Aeneid* (mostly book 3), and especially the Trojans' successive stopovers, are a stable framework from which Ovid does not deviate. See Baldo (1995) 101-107. On Ovid's depersonalized, bland Aeneas see Solodow (1988) 155-156.

674, Galatea in 13.740-897, Diomedes in 14.464-511 is more relevant, both to the Trojan and to the Italian wars).¹⁶² The rest of the story is recounted by the third-person narrator — Aeneas is not really a narrator at all.

Viewed macroscopically, then, Aeneas' lack of exposure to dangerous adventures leads to a lack of stories that he might have been able to share. A sizeable part of the *Little Aeneid*, or of the part of the *Metamorphoses* that is supposed to cover Aeneas' life, is taken up with other characters' lives and adventures. Since Aeneas will never get to experience Polyphemus and Circe, the stories to which he is audience both occupy space in the *Little Aeneid* and constitute intrusions of others' lives into his own. The Polyphemus story is about the Cyclops himself or Ulysses, or about Achaemenides, but only tangentially about Aeneas.

Therefore, what ostensibly poses as a story about Aeneas is, in large part, a story about Ulysses, Macareus, or Achaemenides, or about Circe, Glaucus, Scylla, Picus, Canens, Polyphemus, Galatea, or Acis. The two levels of *pastness* (pre-Ulysses and Ulysses) weigh so heavily on Aeneas' *present* that they creep into his own life story. And this observation gains even more in force if we take into account the mythological contemporaneity, instead of the mythological sequence, of Ulysses' and Aeneas' travels after the Trojan War. In other words, while the *backstories* may have taken place a very long time before Ulysses reached Circe or Polyphemus, the *past* stories are set only a little before the *present* level, with the result that Achaemenides and Macareus may still comfortably be characters of both (other than narrators of the former). Virgil was perhaps the first to present Aeneas as somewhat of a

¹⁶² Aeneas is, of course, always there in the background — he can also be thought of as a model for the reader, who is waiting for the ostensibly unrelated stories to be over before resuming the Aeneas tale proper. See Musgrove (1998) 99-100.

latecomer (compared to Ulysses) through the invention of Achaemenides, but Ovid takes over the scheme and doubles it up through the invention of Macareus. The result of the whole process is a twofold past compared to Aeneas, which might make him look even more like a latecomer.¹⁶³

But there is more than just a double intratextual past compared to Aeneas. On a self-reflexive reading one could also spot two literary-historical past levels that have a heavy impact on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*.¹⁶⁴ Of course, things are a little more complicated than this scheme allows for, in two ways. First, there are even more literary predecessors at work in the *Metamorphoses*, even in the Aeneas-cum-Ulysses part of the *Little Aeneid*, such as Theocritus' Cyclops *Idylls* (6 and 11)¹⁶⁵ and potentially Latin love elegy (as section G has shown with respect to Circe). Secondly, and even if the readers restrict themselves to epic predecessors, still the two intertextual literary-historical past levels do not map neatly onto the two intratextual mythical past levels.¹⁶⁶ In other words, the

¹⁶³ Alternatively, the Ovidian text may be drawing our attention to Aeneas as a latecomer, according not only to Ovid himself, but also to Virgil. This is another way in which Ovid is constructing Virgil as his predecessor, similar to the ones noted by Hinds (1998) 104-122.

¹⁶⁴ There are also words denoting iteration/repetition such as *iterum* in 14.167, which function intertextually (the reader has read the same story already in Homer and Virgil) — and, as I have shown above, intratextually as well (even in the *Metamorphoses*, the Cyclops has already devoured humans). For the intertextual part see Papaioannou (2005) 93.

¹⁶⁵ In Ovid, this transference of the epic monster into a quasi-pastoral setting is perhaps less smooth than in Theocritus — Ovid thus associates his Polyphemus story with a never-ending tension between genres. See Farrell (1992) 243-244.

¹⁶⁶ For the generic interaction at work in the *Metamorphoses*, and in the *Little Aeneid* in particular, with an emphasis on the new hybrid text that is the *Metamorphoses*, and for the abandonment of the rigid notion of a basically epic text with only minor intrusions of other genres into it, see Farrell (1992) 236-238.

Odyssey refers only to Odysseus, but Virgil refers to both Ulysses and Aeneas, as does Ovid.¹⁶⁷

Both in intertextual and in intratextual terms, however, disproportionately more lines are dedicated to what happened to Aeneas' predecessors than what happens to Aeneas proper; or more lines are dedicated to what has essentially been narrated already by Ovid's predecessors than what can safely be considered an Ovidian invention. Thus, what in the *Odyssey* (books 9-12) is a linear narrative focusing more or less on the "here and now", and what in the *Aeneid* (mainly books 3 and 6) is a narrative both looking backwards to the Trojan past and propelled forward by multiple prophecies,¹⁶⁸ in the *Metamorphoses* is a constant look backwards — both towards Ulysses and the pre-Odyssean past, on the one hand, and towards Virgil and Homer, on the other.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Aeneas may also be considered as the link between the Trojan/Latin ancestors of the Romans and their more recent history — in this sense he is both backward-looking and forward-looking. Similarly, Augustus is a transitional figure, between the late Republic and the Principate. In Schmitzer's words, in Augustus' days "Vieles war als denkbar und machbar angelegt, wenig nur war wirklich entschieden" (2016, 425). Generally, according to Schmitzer 2016, Ovid's flux represents a different conception of time than the heavy imposition of past on present/future displayed by the *Aeneid* (although he concedes a certain degree of open-endedness to Virgil too).

¹⁶⁸ In a sense, this is an overstatement of the futurity of the *Aeneid*. Especially in the first half, Aeneas is constantly looking backwards (literally and metaphorically) to Troy — only his descent to the Underworld turns him from a backward-looking to a forward-looking hero. See Gale (2003) 337-342, and for this switch as mediated by desire cf. Hardie (2004) 145-147. For the "repetition compulsion", or the nostalgic reenactment of Troy's foundation, which has to be overcome through repetition-with-a-difference in the second half of the epic, see Quint (1993) 50-99. I suggest that the *Little Aeneid* (not necessarily the Ovidian Aeneas himself) is generally more backward-looking than forward-looking.

¹⁶⁹ There is then an oxymoron in Achaemenides' and Macareus' tales as flashbacks that keep their glance directed towards the future. This would also mean that, compared to the *Aeneid*, the *Metamorphoses* includes "prophecies" that look towards the intertextual past, rather than towards the intratextual future. As Tissol (1997) 180-181 notes in passing, the *Aeneid*'s prophecies serve an intratextual structural purpose, in that they do (not) get fulfilled

This is one way of looking at the metapoetic connotations of the *Little Aeneid*. Ovid, namely, may thus be signaling to some readers that he is merely repeating what his predecessors have said, with very little room open for originality and innovation.¹⁷⁰ Just as a story about his Aeneas is essentially more a story about Odysseus, or Polyphemus or Circe, in a similar way a story that is ostensibly Ovid's is in essence something he repeats over and over again from his sources. After all, the monster and the witch always punish mortals in the same way — and narrating different manifestations of the same rage is largely pointless.¹⁷¹

Also, since the first story transmission (from *backstory* to *past*) is infelicitous, and history repeats itself into the *past*, but the second story transmission (from *past* to *present*) is successful, a second repetition is altogether avoided. Aeneas meets neither Circe nor Polyphemus (the latter contrary to the Virgilian Aeneas). In this sense, Ovid may be implying that whatever he composes is just a regurgitation of what has been written before, so he may as well refrain from writing it to begin with. In other words, the Greek internal narrators protect, or prevent, Aeneas' Trojans from exposing themselves to danger, and consequently

within the *Aeneid*'s narrative trajectory itself: “[o]nce Helenus’s prophecy is over, it immediately begins to be fulfilled. We learn along with Aeneas that the prophet’s information can be trusted. What he tells Aeneas about Scylla and Charybdis, for example, enables the Trojans to avoid these monsters without trouble about 120 lines later [...]” (1997, 181).

¹⁷⁰ Thus, Ovid may be flagging his own originality as a counterpoint to his belatedness. Conspicuous is the case of his Achaemenides, designated as *iam suus* (*Met.* 14.166, although he is originally a Virgilian invention) and Macareus as a new character, although largely based on the Virgilian Achaemenides. Cf. Papaioannou (2005) 93 and Hinds (1998) 113-114.

¹⁷¹ This is not to say, of course, that intratextual repetition always goes hand in hand with intertextual repetition. For example, the Circe-Picus-Canens love triangle looks intratextually similar to the Circe-Glaucus-Scylla love triangle, but “Circe and Picus” in Virgil (Ovid’s intertext) is not a love triangle, so the story is intertextually significantly dissimilar. Conversely, Picus gets transformed, differently from his intratextual double Glaucus, but similarly (barring the role of *carmina*) to the Virgilian (intertextual) Picus.

from narrating stories about this danger; Ovid's models may simultaneously be preventing him from the danger of attempting to emulate them. At best, he can just add minor modifications to the established canon; at worst, he is better off keeping silent.

But there is certainly another, more optimistic reading of Ovid's stance towards his predecessors. First of all, this combination of stories is unique in Ovid. Even if the main gist of the stories themselves has remained the same, and even if there is a very strong sense of intertextuality throughout, the end product is distinctly Ovid's own. Moreover, some stories look like Ovid's invention almost completely, down to the characters' names and every instance of the plot (for example, "Scylla and Glaucus").¹⁷²

Secondly, the argument about imitation would presumably rest on comprehensive repetitiveness across the *cluster* — conversely, if repetitiveness is not consistently present within the *cluster*, Ovid may not be associated with sheer, monotonous intertextual imitation. Use of, and variation on, a cohesive theme, which looks more similar to Ovid's practice, is qualitatively different from inane repetition. This is especially the case when variation is correlated with change in temporal levels, or when some important plot differences emerge from one temporal level to another — whether Ovid has designed it or not, this correlation looks less than random.

Circe and Polyphemus punish in the same ways regardless of temporal levels, but the difference lies in the different reasons for their revenge — this difference switches between

¹⁷² Another optimistic way of looking at poetry's dialogue with previous texts is that it helps preserve, even immortalize, the past, and thereby make sense of one's present/future. See Gale (2003) 343-344. Again, this rests on a somewhat totalizing assumption that (literary) history repeats itself — which, however, most characters of the *Little Aeneid* seem to espouse, as I have shown above.

backstory and *past*. The pre-Odyssean level is more straightforward: the reason why Circe and Polyphemus take their anger out on their victims is unreciprocated love, and rivalry in love. The Odyssean level is quite complicated: in Circe's case, it is only trespassing that Ulysses and his companions may be reasonably accused of; in Polyphemus' case, it is trespassing along with blinding. But certainly both reasons are not amatory. Love, or at least sex, features in Circe's relationship with Ulysses, albeit after the (reversed) transformation section; it has nothing to do with Polyphemus and Ulysses.

Thus, the *past* level is in general remarkably different from the *backstory* level, even if they share the same denouement. But even the different *backstories* are full of plot differences from each other. To Circe's attempts to ingratiate herself with her beloveds we could juxtapose Polyphemus' self-praise song (*Met.* 13.789-869, itself a Theocritean element, although widely expanded), which is full of comic or self-deprecating points, contrary to the witch's serious, even arrogant, arguments. Acis' transformation is initiated by Galatea (*Met.* 13.885-897), and is therefore classified as protective rather than punitive — every other character of the love-triangle stories is transformed as a form of punishment.

Even within Circe's two love-triangle *backstories* repetition is mingled with difference. Contrary to Picus, Glaucus is not subject to Circe's metamorphic magic, since he is a god (*Met.* 14.40-41, he tells Scylla the story of his transformation in *Met.* 13.917-965¹⁷³), so she can destroy only Scylla. Picus seems to be human, despite being son of Saturn. Circe transforms both him and his companions — only indirectly does her anger have an impact on Canens. Glaucus approaches Circe of his own volition, to enlist her help in his courtship of

¹⁷³ Glaucus' transformation, or at least its mechanics, may also be connected to Scylla's — this is another instance of repetition with difference. See Hopman (2012) 241.

Scylla (*Met.* 14.1-24). By contrast, Circe has to separate Picus from his companions, so she fashions an image of a boar, which lures Picus into a thick forest (*Met.* 14.358-364). This is only a cursory list of differences between different *backstories*, which however may suffice to establish the element of variety alongside repetition.¹⁷⁴ The ending (magical transformation) is repetitive, but there is a lot more to those stories than just the outcome. Since the Ovidian narrative encourages a past-looking glance, why should we necessarily privilege repetitive endings over diverse beginnings or middles? Thus, a reader who focuses on ostensible repetition may align their view with a pessimistic reading about Ovid as a mere imitator — but the repetition argument itself may not withstand closer scrutiny.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, I have shown above that Ovid restores a narrative voice to stereotypically marginalized characters, while at the same time suppressing the voice of characters whose narrative agency might have been expected to be more prevalent. Aeneas and Ulysses are notably absent as narrators from the *Little Aeneid*, as are the male gods Glaucus, Acis and Picus. The Circe and Polyphemus stories are also not narrated by Circe or Polyphemus; both the attribution of the Picus story to a servant and that of Polyphemus to Galatea showcase Ovid's ability to decenter his narrative through the distribution of the narrative voice among less privileged characters. This distribution of narrative voice may be all the more important, since the method through which characters get acquainted with the world in this *cluster* is information transmission. The identity of information senders is an alternative way of referring to the identity of internal narrators — and their relative success,

¹⁷⁴ Segal (2001-2002) 19-26 implies that Circe's magic in the love-triangle stories is more impressive than in the Ulysses story — which would show off Ovid's skills to surpass his predecessors in such dramatic effects (inasmuch as the love-triangle stories are his own invention but the Odysseus narrative is not).

not only in creating a compelling narrative for readers but also in warning their addressees within the text, may be attributed to (or at least not incompatible with) this identity.

If, then, all those narrators combine to make up an identity of the Ovidian (internal) narrator in the *Little Aeneid*, it does not require a huge logical leap to infer that Ovid the poet may identify with them as marginal characters (finally) able to tell their story. Especially since not only the narrators, but also the content of those stories veers away from epic grandeur, Ovid's identification with more relatable characters is facilitated even more smoothly. The voice of a female who had been reified even in a non-epic genre (Galatea), or that of a random comrade of Ulysses who got too terrified to continue on the journey (Macareus), or that of a woman doomed by love and not able to prophesy (the Sibyl), may stand for an Ovidian attempt, not to devalue his own poetic skill, but rather to point out its difference from standard epic. Through this identification with more everyday narrators, Ovid creates a first impression of self-deprecation; but he may in the end revise that impression through the systematic use of such characters as effective storytellers and through the expulsion of more mainstream narrator choices from his *Little Aeneid*. If privileged characters get removed or sidelined but marginal ones remain, Ovid may be alluding to his own survival even after conventional epic will have died away.

I. Conclusions

In this chapter I hope to have demonstrated the function of the *Little Aeneid's* *backstories* (and *past* stories) as guides to the future. My discussion centers around information transmission from one character, or group of characters, to another, as the main way in which

characters in this story *cluster* acquire knowledge about the world around them. Contrary to the previous chapter, there are no inanimate hints (or visual clues) left over from *backstory* to *past* or from *past* to *present*, but some characters survive beyond their own temporal level, thus functioning as vehicles of information.

Quite counterintuitively, stories that cover the *past* (i.e. those narrated by Achaemenides and Macareus), although formally constituting flashbacks, also point to the future in their capacity as (survivor) cautionary tales. The “survivor” part qualifies them as flashbacks (or stories about the past), the “cautionary” part as quasi-prophecies about the future. The translation of flashback stories into prophecies is based on an assumption of repetitiveness, and therefore of predictability, of certain characters’ behavior (most notably Circe and Polyphemus). If the future looks relatively similar to the past, easy access to it is guaranteed even to non-seers.

However, the characters themselves do not, at least openly, express their conviction about such a repetitiveness, since each of them cannot produce multiple stories with a similar denouement. By contrast, the reader is in a better position to gauge this repetitiveness, based on their potential to compare Circe’s and Polyphemus’ behavior across the temporal levels of *backstory* and *past*. At any rate, by combining past and future in this peculiar continuum, Ovid’s prophetic scheme (most quasi-prophecies quoted at any length are essentially survivor cautionary tales) is more uniform, and less ambiguous in its relative optimism, than Virgil’s convoluted array of prophecies (mainly in books 3 and 6 of the *Aeneid*).

I have also sketched out three intratextual temporal levels: the time before Ulysses, the time of Ulysses, and the time of Aeneas, which I have identified as the *backstory* level, the *past* level, and the *present* level respectively. The transmission of (survivor) cautionary tales

from *backstory* to *past* is not activated, with the result that characters of the *past* get exposed to the same dangers that their *backstory* counterparts had already lived through — but since the latter cannot warn the former about the impending danger, repetition is inevitable.

However, information transmission from the *past* to the *present* temporal level goes through successfully, thus cancelling the need for yet more repetition. Thus, while the characters of “Acis and Galatea” and those of “Glaucus and Scylla” and “Picus and Canens” never meet Ulysses’ men, and therefore never warn them of Polyphemus and Circe, Achaemenides and Macareus perform this exact function for Aeneas’ men. I have also shown that information transmission from one character to another is significantly more accurate than information that a character gives themselves, i.e. internal recollection of past events. Thus, the question of who survives to narrate their story (to someone else) is correspondingly crucial.

My discussion has led to a possible reason why the Ovidian narrative dispenses with socially or ontologically superior characters as internal narrators — all of them essentially *backstory* characters who, despite not having lost their life (or their human/divine form) at the end of their own storyline, suddenly drop out of the Ovidian account. I have suggested that the remaining narrators (Circe’s servant, Galatea, Achaemenides, Macareus, the Sibyl as a non-prophet) are marginal figures, whether because of their gender, their unmarked social position, or their human frailty.¹⁷⁵ Ovid, then, decenters the right to narrative agency, depriving such characters as Aeneas, Ulysses or Circe of such an exclusive prerogative. And if characters’ predictions are predicated upon repetitiveness, they do not need to be metapoetically distinguished (i.e. prophets) either.

¹⁷⁵ As far back as 1971, Segal observed Ovid’s sympathetic tendency to humanize otherwise less relatable characters, even e.g. Apollo during his pursuit of Daphne in book 1.

Other than three intratextual temporal levels, I have also outlined three literary-historical intertextual temporal levels: Homer, Virgil, and Ovid himself (without losing sight of other intertextual resonances). Potential information transmission, whether activated or not, either leads to repetition (*past* endings are surprisingly similar to *backstory* endings) or is altogether superfluous (*past* stories prevent the creation of *present* stories by Aeneas); thus the reader may discern in the text Ovid's implicit anxiety about his potential characterization as a passive recipient of tradition, who can only imitate without originality or keep silent.

Although this reading may be there in the text, it is potentially countered, and complicated, by the acute Ovidian self-reflexivity that we may detect in this story *cluster* — spotting the problem is one step towards confronting the problem. Moreover, the pessimistic reading would privilege endings at the expense of, roughly, beginnings and middles — which are anything but repetitive, if the reader pays attention. The very fact that information transmission (from one party to another) meets with a certain amount of success may affirm Ovid's relative confidence that the extratextual communication to which he aspires (his communication with his reader) will go through quite smoothly too. If Ovid identifies with less privileged characters, who are nevertheless overall successful information sources, then again we may detect his confidence that his less mainstream epic poetry can still make a difference in the epic tradition.

IV. Ceres

A. Introduction

Chapters II and III have dealt with the reconstruction of previous temporal levels by characters and readers, with the object of each party's knowledge being practical plot events. In this chapter, I am moving to a more thematic concern, and to a complex of *backstory*, *past* and *present* which does not involve commonly experienced, or commonly transmitted, events. *Backstory* and *past* are not set at the same location; there are no clues left over from one to the other; they involve only one common character (the goddess Ceres); and their topic is tightly linked to her, i.e. hunger and nutrition. To hunger we shall then turn our attention first.

Hunger in the *Metamorphoses* is a counterpoint to agricultural abundance or nutrition, as represented by the goddess Demeter/Ceres. It is therefore a deprivation, or a notion defined negatively, as the withholding or absence of Ceres' gifts. The most well-known myth about this collective deprivation is that of Ceres' wrath about the abduction of her daughter Proserpina by Dis, and her subsequent withholding of grain/agriculture from the entire earth. One story on which this chapter will center, therefore, is Proserpina's abduction and rape from the second half of the fifth book (337-678) of the *Metamorphoses*. But there is also another story, this time of individual infliction of hunger by the goddess on the impious Erysichthon, in retaliation for his violation of her sacred grove and oak tree — this story appears at the end of book 8 (738-884).

Both stories are inset flashback stories, or occupy a level of the *past* compared to their narrating instance. The story of Proserpina (book 5) is narrated as part of a poetic contest

between Muses and Pierides: by singing it, the Muse Calliope reacts to the Pierides' impious song about the Olympians' attempts to escape Typhoeus' attack. These two competing songs are embedded in another narrative: an unnamed Muse relates the song of the Pierides (mostly in indirect speech) and of her sister Calliope (verbatim), in order to explain to Minerva how they came to preside over the spring Hippocrene, but the defeated Pierides were turned into magpies because of their impiety. The Erysichthon story (book 8) is narrated by the river god Achelous to Theseus and his men, who have taken refuge in his cave to protect themselves from the river's flooding, on their return journey from the Calydonian boar hunt. Achelous slides from Erysichthon's desperate attempts to satisfy his hunger to the enslavement of his daughter, who thus tries to provide food for her father.

In what follows, I will suggest that the reader may construe "Proserpina" as a *backstory* to "Erysichthon". In this sense, Achelous' banquet in his cave is the *present*; the story of Erysichthon is a flashback inset story, therefore it is the *past*; and the story of Proserpina takes place in the *past of the past*, and is thus to be considered a *backstory*. In terms of relative mythological chronology, "Proserpina" takes place at a time closer to the establishment of Jupiter's power over the earth, while "Erysichthon" rather closer to the Trojan War.

There are obvious thematic links between the two stories, both because they both feature Ceres and starvation and because of their intertextual connection with two works of the Greek hymnic tradition: the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and Callimachus' *Hymn to Demeter*. But what is more challenging to show is that "Proserpina" may be read as constitutive background to "Erysichthon", and in this way enrich the reader's understanding by sketching

out a diptych consisting in conceptual simplicity and complication respectively.¹⁷⁶ Therefore, the order of these two particular stories cannot be reversed, as may happen with other *Metamorphoses* tales, whose (relative) positioning in the text is arguably unaccounted for.¹⁷⁷ The switch that I will try to establish in this chapter can obviously be conveyed only if “Proserpina” is read before “Erysichthon” — otherwise, not only would we move from a more sophisticated to a simpler worldview instead of the other way around, but at least one key aspect of both stories’ plot (Scythia, on which more below) would make less sense.

This chapter is markedly different from the previous two, insofar as *backstory* and *past* story are not contiguous, but separated by three entire books of the *Metamorphoses*. For this reason, the first part of this chapter will be devoted to the multiplicity of common motifs linking together “Proserpina” and “Erysichthon” — in other words the question of why we may be justified in reading them together will be explored. Plot, character and setting elements are important in marking this connection. But at times the discussion will move to a more abstract level: that of concepts personified as divinities, sometimes with a complex

¹⁷⁶ The concept of complication and sophistication (and by contrast the concept of simplicity) is by necessity somewhat subjective and capacious. In this chapter, it mostly refers either to the difficulty with which a less than verisimilar occurrence may be comprehended by the modern reader (perpetual hunger despite monstrous food consumption is more complicated than hunger because of no food availability; Ceres’ prevention of agriculture is less complicated than the inspiration of *Fames*’ essence into Erysichthon), or to a logical process consisting in multiple steps (the notion that Ceres is grain, which in turn is (the only type of) food is simpler than the idea that there are multiple dietary habits, some of which may (not) be compatible with the goddess’ realm). It goes without saying that a certain degree of generalization about simplicity and complication is operative throughout.

¹⁷⁷ Wheeler (2000) *passim*. For the narrative continuity of non-contiguous *Metamorphoses* stories (which however share the same characters) see Wheeler (2000) 50-54. Cf. below, footnote 192. For chronological inconsistencies, or violations of the commonsensical order of events (which obviously do exist in the *Metamorphoses* overall), see Coleman (1971) 463ff, Gildenhard/Zissos 1999, and O’Hara (2006) 121-122.

slippage between their anthropomorphic form and their identity as concepts (Ceres as a personification of crops/nutrition, *Fames* as a personification of hunger, Achelous as an embodiment of (river) waters). In this way, I will show that both stories share not only plot and character elements and (partly) a common setting, but also some more overarching concerns about ontology.

It may be striking that two questions about divine identities and realms, one about the relationship of the divine to nutrition and hunger and one about (rivers and other) aquatic elements, may be asked of both “Proserpina” and “Erysichthon”. In both stories, the workings of hunger, as mediated by Ceres (as the personification of nutrition) and/or *Fames* (as the personification of its opposite), are at the heart of the Ovidian narrative. Similarly, the two stories have in common a role played by river gods and spring/forest nymphs, which enhances the importance of divine identity in both. The identity of both Demeter/Ceres and rivers/springs as incarnations of metapoetic considerations starting from Hellenistic poetry (and making their way into the *Metamorphoses*) also links the two stories together.

Thus, similar questions may be asked by the reader in both “Proserpina” and “Erysichthon”, and this initial similarity is worth exploring in further detail, even if the answers end up being slightly different. As in the previous two chapters, the characters act out the answers to such questions about divine personifications or realms. But, contrary to their counterparts from the Bacchus and the *Little Aeneid clusters*, they are minimally, if at all, aware of the existence of such questions, or even of some plot events that generate them for the reader.

In the following sections, I will start from the linear connection of “Proserpina” and “Erysichthon” on a basic plot level: the idea of hunger does not really make an appearance in

“Proserpina” until Ceres decides to afflict mankind with it — at least the goddess herself does not clearly engage in fasting. Hunger, then, makes a late entrance into the narrative: it is placed within a cosmogonic trajectory, where spontaneous growth is succeeded by the need of humans to cultivate the earth, and then by Ceres’ withholding of grain as a reaction to her daughter’s abduction. This, in turn, is followed by a restoration of agriculture, again by Ceres through Triptolemus, whose efforts get thwarted by the Scythian king Lyncus’ attempt to murder him. Contrary to the earth’s deprivation of grain, Erysichthon experiences personal hunger, but (similarly to book 5 characters) not from the outset. His Callimachean predecessor cuts down the sacred poplar tree to build himself a banquet hall, but the Ovidian Erysichthon has no motivation other than his impiety — only as a penalty does the need for food consumption enter the narrative at a later stage (section B).

When Ceres decides to punish Erysichthon, she sends a mountain nymph over to Scythia to fetch the personified *Fames*, who resides there. Scythia will then form the basis for my argument about a “correct”, logical order of “Proserpina” and “Erysichthon”: the last time the reader had read something about Scythia, it was when agricultural restoration had not taken place there (book 5). Thus, other than plot changes consisting in the presence, absence, withholding or restoration of nutrition, there is a resulting change in the description of Scythia as a geographical location: first it enjoyed the potential to introduce agriculture anew, but because of its king it was transformed into a place emblematic of hunger (section C).

I then discuss the conceptual complication of hunger, from a technical, objective lack of access to food (book 5) to its subjective interpretation as a feeling of lack of satiety despite an abundant availability of food (book 8). Interlinked with this discussion is the mechanics of *Fames* as a personification and the process through which she/it impacts the individual. The

individualization (and the heightened subjectivity) of hunger in book 8 again mark further complication compared to book 5 (section D).

The status of *Fames* as a personified abstraction then leads me to a discussion of Ceres as her counterpoint, i.e. as an embodiment of grain, agriculture, or nutrition. The metonymic associations between Demeter, grain and sustenance in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* are possibly ironized by Callimachus through the implicit observation that there are multiple food types — but Ovid expands the function of Ceres, from an incarnation of grain (or meat consumption) to an incarnation of any type of sustenance in general (section E).

Section F moves to yet another personified abstraction, Achelous, and to his composite identity as an anthropomorphic god, a physical river, and a metonymy for water. Such metonymic associations slide (both in scholarship and in this dissertation) into a metapoetic discussion: Achelous in particular, and rivers in general, stand for the counterpoint to Callimachean poetry, both in Callimachus himself and in Augustan Callimacheanism. Section G then considers Ceres/Demeter as a representative of the Callimachean tendency (or as a counterpoint to Achelous/rivers), through Callimachus' predecessor Philetas and Propertius' literary debt to him. Ceres and Achelous may thus be read as personifications, not just of nutrition and water, but also of self-conscious poetic registers. It seems, then, that "Proserpina" and "Erysichthon" are also linked together through their metapoetic allusions to genre; but Ceres as a metonymy for Callimachean poetry cannot really establish a generic clash between the two stories, not least because she is also a character in the supposedly "epic" Erysichthon story. What is more, both the Callimacheanism of "Proserpina" and the epicism of "Erysichthon" are not necessarily unequivocal.

What is relatively clear throughout, though, is a variable association of aquatic elements with metapoetic considerations. In section H, I use the juxtaposition of springs and rivers, as one between “low” and “high”, to undermine again the clear Callimachean credentials of the Proserpina story. “Low-style” springs may feature in it, but the intermingling of Arethusa’s waters (“low”) with those of Alpheus (“high”), regardless of their lovemaking in their human forms, may also make a case for a metaphorical blending of registers — thus complicating the binarism of the *backstory*. Genre may then be central to both *backstory* and *past* story, but not in the black-and-white sense of “epic” versus “Callimachean”.

If the difference between *backstory* and *past* inset story, or “Proserpina” and “Erysichthon”, is not mainly one of opposite stylistic and generic registers, in sections I and J I suggest that the difference is one of intermingling versus separation — both on a literal plot level, and beyond that, on a narrative and structural level. Whether in the embedding of narrators, in the refraction of Proserpina’s rape onto those of Cyane and Arethusa, or in the implicit negation of a clear endpoint (as, of course, in the literal mixing of spring’s and river’s waters) the *backstory* represents flux, while Achelous’ *past* story (and his narrative identity overall) stands for a rather strict sense of separation. His statements about (or allusions to) literal separation or the observance of boundaries may be transferred into an *intratextual*, or *intertextual*, level: Achelous’ stories are not to be confused with other (whether Ovidian or non-Ovidian) tales, and Ovid makes him signal that. Achelous also avoids narrative flux by avoiding open-endedness: although Ovid has inherited a story where hunger gives rise to yet more hunger, and where multiple side-stories could have been added infinitely, Ovid/Achelous imposes a quite definitive ending (autophagy), which both is motivated by the plot and can hardly be transcended.

I thus set the scene for a parallel reading of *backstory* and *past* story on multiple levels. These similar issues are certainly available to the reader of the Ovidian text, but then the problem arises whether the characters themselves are alerted to the possibility of posing similar questions to their world, and how they handle them. Both previous chapters have outlined a tension between the conditions of knowledge of characters and readers — simply put, the latter has to do with both an intratextual awareness of (past) plot elements that characters lack, and with an intertextual nuancing that is open exclusively to the reader. The characters' ways of comprehending the world, whether through vision (“The Minyads/Bacchus”) or through information transmission (“Little Aeneid”), showcase both the payoffs and the limitations of both these methods.

Visual interpretation and information transmission may or may not work. Still, they are deployed across the narrative, thus serving as potential links (and rendering characters potential vehicles) between successive temporal levels. In light of such constant (successful or unsuccessful) attempts of the characters in chapters II and III to acquaint themselves with the world through flashbacks, it is striking that such an attempt is not signaled at all in the two stories under examination in this chapter. This may be because they do not share common characters — although they do share Ceres, and her own memory could have recalled events from “Proserpina” during the narrative time of “Erysichthon”. But even though knowledge is not transferred from one temporal level to the next for obvious reasons, there is still no connection of characters even to a thwarted quest for knowledge, even within a single temporal level (section K).

Thus, the tension between characters' and readers' understanding in this chapter is starkest, or least stark, depending on how the reader interprets it. The thematic similarities

are so pervasive that the two stories may be read as parallel (the reasons for such a reading will comprise the main part of my discussion below), but the characters do not experience both, nor are they aware of both. In this respect the tension is greatest because the distance between characters' and readers' knowledge is unbridgeable. However, the opposite opinion may also be supported: namely, that because characters and readers never converge concerning their object, or level, of knowledge, the potential for tension is by necessity elided.

B. Food consumption and hunger

But before the difference in readers' and characters' understanding can be explored, the case should be made that "Proserpina" and "Erysichthon" may be read as a pair, with the latter presupposing the former. The plot of both "Proserpina" and "Erysichthon" introduces hunger as the counterpoint to food consumption — with food consumption being the default condition and the appearance of hunger postdating it, and consciously caused by Ceres. In "Proserpina" Ceres is first hailed (by the Muse/Calliope, *Met.* 5.341-343) as the one who granted mankind sustenance at some unspecified primordial time, with the implication that she will soon take it away as the story unfolds. Therefore, everything starts out with regular nutrition, and hunger appears only as an aberration while Ceres is searching for Proserpina.

Meanwhile, the text gives no indication that Ceres is imposing voluntary starvation on herself as well. When she first scours the earth, Ceres is *fessa labore* and suffers from thirst (*sitim conceperat ora que nulli / conluerant fontes*, *Met.* 5.446-447). There may be a slight slippage between the concepts of thirst and hunger. To be sure, at her stopover the old Sicilian woman hands Ceres a drink sprinkled with barley grain (which would in theory

satisfy both hunger and thirst, *Met.* 5.450), but she does so in response to a request for water (*lymphamque roganti*, *Met.* 5.449), and Ceres is described as drinking it rather than eating it (*dum bibit illa datum*, *Met.* 5.451).

Only after Cyane has shown Ceres Proserpina's girdle in her pool (*Met.* 5.468-470) does the goddess start to realize quite how much trouble her daughter is in. This is when she inflicts famine on the earth, in the sense of withholding the gift of grain — which, according to her new mindset, the entire earth (and especially Sicily) is now unworthy of (*Met.* 5.474-477). Thus, agricultural fertility is considered as a given by book 5, and this leads Ceres to inflict starvation as a removal of such a given. In fact, the *Metamorphoses* itself bears witness to the establishment of, not only fertility, but also human cultivation of the earth, and it situates both milestones towards the very beginning of the creation of the universe.

During the cosmogonic section of book 1, which is followed up with the Myth of the Four Ages of Man, it is not Ceres specifically who grants the gift of fertility (besides, the Olympians get introduced only later), but the gift is coeval with the creation of the universe. In the Golden Age sustenance is connected to fertility, but the earth produces fruit of its own accord, without human intervention (*ipsa quoque immunis rastroque intacta nec ullis / saucia vomeribus per se dabat omnia tellus; / contentique cibus nullo cogente creatis / arbuteos fetus montanaque fraga legebant*, *Met.* 1.101-104). A gradual deterioration in mankind's quality of life is signposted through more limited access to (spontaneous) agricultural produce (Silver Age: *semina tum primum longis Cerealia sulcis / obruta sunt*, *Met.* 1.123-124,¹⁷⁸ Iron Age: *communemque prius ceu lumina solis et auras / cautus humum*

¹⁷⁸ The Silver Age, then, marks the change from spontaneous growth to the need for agriculture — and Ceres, as line 1.123 implies, may have mediated this change. This is

longo signavit limite mensor. / nec tantum segetes alimentaue debita dives / poscebatur humus, sed itum est in viscera terrae, / quasque recondiderat Stygiisque admoverat umbris / effodiuntur opes, inritamenta malorum, Met. 1.135-140). In any case, the interaction of humans with the earth and the production of sustenance is placed at a point in time close to creation.¹⁷⁹

Therefore, revenge in book 5 takes on the form of a reversal of the previous abundance, and it takes place in two parallel ways: there is a (*mutatis mutandis*) technological issue and there is also the link of weather conditions with fertility and barrenness. Hunger is conceived of as deprivation, either of the equipment necessary to plow the land or of favorable weather

clearer in the *Fasti* version of the Proserpina story (4.393-620), in whose cosmogonic prelude (*F.* 4.393-416) Ceres replaces (naturally growing) acorns with animal husbandry and cultivation of the earth (*F.* 4.401-404). In what follows, I do not treat the *Fasti* as a predecessor of the *Metamorphoses*, because their relative order of composition is uncertain. I will remark only on instances where the *Metamorphoses* version is uniquely different from the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, while the *Fasti* version follows the Greek model.

¹⁷⁹ There might be a slight overlap between the introduction of agriculture to mankind (or the Silver Age) shortly after the Gigantomachy, on the one hand (*Postquam Saturno tenebrosa in Tartara misso / sub Iove mundus erat, subiit argentea proles, Met. 1.113-114,* and *semina tum primum longis Cerealia sulcis / obruta sunt, pressique iugo gemuere iuveni, Met. 1.123-124*), and the withholding of agriculture by Ceres, also shortly after the Gigantomachy/Typhonomachy in book 5, on the other. There is no significant logical inconsistency since in book 5 we are still in the Iron Age, with agriculture (not spontaneous growth) being a given, which then gets disrupted by Ceres. *Cerealia* may not attribute any agency to the goddess herself — it may just work as a metonymy, translated as “pertaining to grain”. Thus, the name of Ceres (but perhaps not the goddess herself) is identified with grain very early on in the poem — as I show later in “Erysichthon”, this close association is expanded, with Ceres standing for every type of nutrition. In another way, Calliope, by introducing her Ceres as the provider of a quasi-Golden Age (*Met. 5.341-345*) and by setting Proserpina’s abduction at a location of perpetual spring (*Met. 5.385-391*), signals the end of that Golden Age through the agency of (Ceres and primarily) the imperialistic Venus. See Ham (2022) 176-178, with more intertextual support. It is not necessary that the death of oxen (*Met. 5.479*) be read as a hint at (the first ever) animal sacrifice in honor of Ceres, and thus as a transition away from a Golden Age — although such a reading (clearly of a sacrifice) is more certain in *Fasti* 1, with Fantham (1992) 42-49.

conditions. This may be an indication that nourishment and hunger are two sides of the same coin, but also that the negative aspect has been introduced after the positive. The concept of deterioration, from the Golden to the Iron Age, also shows that at first hunger did not really exist, but it came about later on in the evolutionary history of man as a form of punishment for moral decay (although it could still be overcome through agriculture). But Ceres only now starts to withhold food, and thereby to induce hunger, in a more tangible way.

In the narrative, Proserpina's potential fasting is not introduced until after hunger has taken hold of the entire earth. The narrator states that Proserpina had broken her fast (*ieiunia virgo / solverat*, *Met.* 5.534-535), assuming that, perhaps because of her grief, Proserpina would naturally abstain from food in the Underworld. But still, sustenance seems natural to the girl herself. She ends up consuming the seven pomegranate seeds because she is *simplex* (*Met.* 5.535) — which may point to her lack of suspicion about a link between deceit and food consumption,¹⁸⁰ but also to her general need to eat. Eating, therefore, and not necessarily abstention from food, seems to be the default situation for the Ovidian Proserpina — as it would be for any human, or humanized, character. In any case, the condition that Proserpina should not have consumed food in order to get restored to Olympus and to her mother is added by the Ovidian Jupiter as an afterthought (*si tibi discidii est, repetet Proserpina caelum, / lege tamen certa, si nullos contigit illic / ore cibos*, *Met.* 5.530-532, this is also the version of *Fasti* 4.603-608), when the father of the gods seems to realize that his counterarguments cannot persuade Ceres to give sustenance back to mankind (*Met.* 5.523-

¹⁸⁰ It seems that Proserpina randomly plucks the earth's products out of it both shortly before her abduction and in the Underworld — both look like spontaneous actions (or aspects of her *simplicitas*), without any other express motivation — which shows her propensity to repeat reckless actions twice over. See Hinds (1987) 88.

529). By contrast, in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* Hades purposely, and deceitfully, feeds Persephone a pomegranate seed in order to tie her to himself (*HHD* 371-374, 411-413).

Even if Proserpina is not anthropomorphically perceived as a character who does not normally fast, the issue of hunger is quite consistently downplayed in importance, compared to the Greek intertext. I have shown above how the Ovidian Ceres is described as thirsty rather than hungry. The sections about Cyane (*Met.* 5.409-437 and 464-470) and Arethusa (*Met.* 5.487-508 and 572-641), as well as the transformation of Proserpina's companions into birds (*Met.* 5.552-563) have little, if anything, to do with sustenance. The transformation of Ascalaphus into a screech-owl (*Met.* 5.538-550) is only indirectly linked to it: this change of form was a means of punishment because Ascalaphus reported on Proserpina having eaten the pomegranate seeds. Therefore, the Ovidian stories that take place while Ceres is searching far and wide for her daughter deemphasize the element of personal hunger. Even collective human deprivation is deemphasized through the lack of focus on actual starving agents: as far as the literal meaning of the text goes, neither individuals nor communities are starving, but rather the earth itself (*Met.* 5.474-486).¹⁸¹ Hunger is then introduced, not as a default situation afflicting every party involved in the story, but slowly and not from the

¹⁸¹ By contrast, supernatural nourishment by means of rubbing with ambrosia (*HHD* 235-238) is one way in which Demeter attempts to raise a mortal, Demophoon, to be superior to common humans. Similarly, in the *Fasti*, where Triptolemus is Celeus' son, Ceres combines nourishment with spells and a touch on his lips to cure him from his mysterious illness (*F.* 4.539-554). In the end, Ceres restores fertility to the entire earth indiscriminately (*F.* 4.615-620). The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* links the restoration of fertility to the foundation of her Eleusinian temple and the establishment of the Mysteries; it thus links the universal and the local, but the restoration of fertility is definitely universal. This is perhaps in contrast to versions where Demeter rewarded the Eleusinians/Athenians for their hospitality by initiating the restoration of fertility there along with the institution of the Mysteries. Cf. Richardson (1974) 301 and 359.

beginning. This observation also holds in the case, not of the withholding of grain, but of its restoration.

When the Ovidian Ceres, her wrath assuaged, decides to give grain back to the earth, she starts from Athens, and from Triptolemus (*Met.* 5.642-662). For some unspecified reason Triptolemus, possibly at Ceres' instigation, has to return the gift of grain to one geographical location at a time, and he starts out in Scythia (*Met.* 5.648-650).¹⁸² But when the Scythian king Lyncus attacks Triptolemus, aiming to usurp the role of benefactor himself (*Met.* 5.657-661), the matter of the Athenian's potential death is resolved (Ceres saves him), and so is that of Lyncus' punishment (he gets transformed into a lynx, *Met.* 5.659), but the issue of the restoration of sustenance across the earth is left hanging in the air. When Triptolemus once again mounts Ceres' chariot (*rursusque per aera iussit (sc. Ceres) / Mopsopium iuvenem sacros agitare iugales*, *Met.* 5.660-661), Calliope finishes her song — the lines quoted above are the last ones that the *Metamorphoses* has to offer about Ceres and Proserpina. This abrupt ending and lack of clarity, on the one hand, and the geographical specificity of the attempted restoration of agricultural fertility in Scythia, on the other, differentiate Ovid from the *Homeric Hymn*, in which Demeter herself restores grain to the entire earth indiscriminately (*HHD* 470-473). There is then a linear plot progression, from Ceres' and Proserpina's lack of (at least clear) hunger, to the imposition of hunger all over the earth, to the attempt at

¹⁸² The words of Calliope/the Muse show that Triptolemus' task is symmetrical to, or reverses, the withholding enacted by Ceres: *Triptolemo partimque rudi data semina (sc. Ceres) iussit / spargere humo, partim post tempora longa recultae (Met.* 5.646-647) and *dona fero Cereris, latos quae sparsa per agros / frugiferas messes alimentaue mitia reddant (Met.* 5.655-656). Cf. *vitiataque semina fecit (Met.* 5.480), *avidaeque volucres / semina iacta legunt (Met.* 5.484-485) and *lolium tribulique fatigant / triticeas messes et inexpugnabile gramen (Met.* 5.485-486).

nutritional restoration, to the cancellation of that attempt as far as Scythia is concerned — and there the plot stops.¹⁸³

Between the Proserpina story in book 5 and the Erysichthon story in book 8 there is little, if any, mention of hunger and Ceres. In a quite different context, Achelous, hosting Theseus and his companions on their return journey to Athens from the Calydonian boar hunt, narrates a story about the Thessalian king Erysichthon, who features as a typical case of a *contemptor divum*.

The Ovidian Erysichthon intrudes Ceres' sacred grove and cuts down one of her holy oaks (*Met.* 8.741ff.). While his impious act is completely unmotivated, his Callimachean counterpart offers a reason for his action: he needs the wood from the poplar for a practical reason: to build a place where he can host, and offer meals to, his friends (ταῦτα δ' ἐμὸν θησεῖ στεγανὸν δόμον, ᾧ ἔνι δαίτας | αἰὲν ἐμοῖς ἐτάροισιν ἄδην θυμαρέας ἄξω, *Cer.* 54-55). By contrast, the Ovidian Erysichthon's reply to the nymph inhabiting the oak is not articulated in words, just in deeds — he goes ahead and cuts the tree anyway (*persequitur scelus ille suum*, *Met.* 8.776). Even earlier on, when one of his men tried to stop him at the sight of the tree's blood flowing out of the struck trunk (*Met.* 8.761-766), he took the same

¹⁸³ This is contrary to the *Fasti*, where the earth's starvation is not mentioned, and thus the story does not presuppose the existence of agriculture on the earth before Triptolemus' gift to mankind. This might have to do with the fragmentation of the multiple *Fasti* stories, compared to the relative flow of the *Metamorphoses*. In any case, the designation of the *Fasti*'s Triptolemus as a *prōtos heuretēs* of agriculture (*iste quidem mortalis erit, sed primus arabit | et seret et culta praemia tollet humo*, *F.* 4.559-560) is significantly different from the *Metamorphoses* sequence of agriculture, then starvation of the entire earth, then reintroduction of agriculture through Triptolemus — thus, the *Metamorphoses* presupposes a linear development in place of the *Fasti*'s fragmentation. See Montanari (1974) 129-131.

axe that he had used against the oak and decapitated his bold companion (*Met.* 8.767-769). He is thus monstrously impious, and not capable of providing a justification for his actions.

This all goes to show that, contrary to his literary predecessor, in the beginning the Ovidian Erysichthon does not experience even a mild form of need to consume food. This is not to say that he is somehow immune to hunger — but that his relationship with food consumption, which is commonly problematic towards the end of the story in both the Greek and the Latin work, is suppressed by Ovid (or Achelous) towards the beginning of the story.

In Callimachus Demeter punishes Erysichthon by making him an eternal victim of his initial hunger (she states this connection between crime and punishment in *Cer.* 63-64). In Ovid Ceres' decision to punish Erysichthon specifically with unending hunger is presented as one possible option out of many (*moliturque genus poenae miserabile, Met.* 8.782). There may conceivably be other forms of pitiable punishment — why is this one (of course, other than because it is intertextually motivated) selected in the end? There immediately follows a counterintuitive justification for the particular penalty: not only is it quite random, it is also unsuitable for Ceres, since apparently the goddess is in charge only of nourishment, not of hunger (*neque enim Cereremque Famemque / fata coire sinunt, Met.* 8.785-786).¹⁸⁴ This may, of course, be an intratextual hint at the Proserpina story, where Ceres and hunger do precisely this: they go together, or rather the goddess is responsible as much for offering as for withholding nourishment.

¹⁸⁴ Bömer (1977) 249-250 lists other instances where god(desse)s interact with their opposites, but he dismisses Achelous' statements as "Möglichkeiten zur Variation der Darstellung, keine Fragen der Theologie, der römischen Tradition oder des römischen Wesens" (250).

The Callimachean *Hymn to Demeter* does mention the incident of Persephone, without however explicitly linking Persephone's disappearance with mankind's near destruction because of famine. Instead, the hymnic "I", the initiate in Demeter's mysteries, opts out of this story, not because it has wreaked havoc on humans, but because it has caused the goddess great grief (*Cer.* 17). She states that she would rather praise Demeter's benevolence and generosity, or in other words how she taught humans agriculture through Triptolemus. Perhaps Callimachus (or his narrator) finds Demeter's relationship to starvation somehow jarring, but the attempts (s)he makes to reconcile it to her generosity are rather vague.

Thus, the Ovidian Achelous may be reiterating the self-contradiction inherent in Demeter's/Ceres' configuration: although she is supposed to be connected with nutritional abundance, she can always switch into the punishing mode, or the withholding mode. She does not regularly resort to such a solution (Persephone's case was an exception, perhaps because of her special relationship to her daughter), but, since there is precedent, she may resort to such an extreme solution again. The only difference is, of course, that Erysichthon is just one individual, who has clearly committed impiety against the goddess, whereas the (Sicilian) earth had to pay the collective penalty for Dis' actions.

C. Scythia as a link between past story and backstory

There is, then, a certain level of agreement between the Callimachean and the Ovidian versions, when it comes to the link between the Proserpina and the Erysichthon stories, on the one hand, and the discrepancy between Ceres' benevolent and destructive sides, on the other. But at any rate, in both Ovidian stories Ceres has actively to inflict hunger, which is not always present in the background: in "Proserpina" she does it in a technical way (by

making agriculture impossible), but in “Erysichthon” she has to call for hunger from a specific place. This geographical element may warrant our attention here.

Callimachus’ *Hymn* is quite specific geographically. The community of Erysichthon is the Pelasgians, who live (not yet in Cnidus, Asia Minor but) in Dotium, Thessaly (*Cer.* 23-25). Once hunger seizes Erysichthon, the geographical element is present through both the rejection of invitations extended to him by elite guest-friends of his household and the excuses made up by his mother so that the hosts may not suspect anything (*Cer.* 75-86).

There is no such precision in Ovid’s case: the geographical setting of the story is not immediately specified. The introduction to Erysichthon proper is made up of just a couple of lines: [...] *qui numina divum / sperneret et nullos aris adoleret odores* (*Met.* 8.739-740). The *iterative* narrative¹⁸⁵ that sets the stage for this story provides only the bare essentials — what is important to know about this character is that he is a *contemptor divum*, everything else is superfluous. The name of Erysichthon’s father Triopas is provided further down the line (through the patronymic *Triopeius*,¹⁸⁶ *Met.* 8.751), but it does not seem to make any difference either. The same happens with his geographical placement (*dixit / Thessalus*, *Met.* 8.767-768), which also seems to occur to the narrator Achelous only in passing — one

¹⁸⁵ For a narratological definition of an *iterative* narrative, and my application of the distinction between *singulative* and *iterative* narratives in the “Pyramus and Thisbe” inset story of book 4, see above, footnotes 51-53, and the discussion of the main body.

¹⁸⁶ The alternative reading is *Dryopeius*, which could mean just “Thessalian”, and would draw attention to geographical placement, even if belatedly. Other than its superficial meaning, it might also allude to a metaphorical identification of Erysichthon with oak trees (*drys* = oak tree), and would thus render his sacrilege more ironic. See Griffin (1986) 57-58, who argues that Ovid has been influenced by a tradition about a giant named Erysichthon. In this case, the Erysichthon episode would have cosmic connotations, much like its sister episode (“Proserpina”) in book 5. However, “Erysichthon” is not technically set during/shortly after the Gigantomachy, while the Ovidian “Proserpina” is.

wonders, is the man whom Erysichthon addresses, and whom he is about to decapitate, not Thessalian as well? In any case, these two (*Thessalus* and *Triopeius*) are the only proper names in the Erysichthon story up until Ceres' reaction.

This is why the sudden introduction of Scythia may come as a surprise to the reader. In Callimachus, hunger inflicted by Demeter takes on the form of a disease (*Cer.* 66-67). This may look like a physical manifestation of hunger, but in Ovid Famine is even more concrete, since she is described as a personified female being. And as if that personification were not enough of a change towards the concrete, *Fames* is introduced as dwelling in Scythia. Why is it necessary for her to be living at a specific place,¹⁸⁷ let alone at that specific place?¹⁸⁸

An intertextual look at *Fames*' predecessors from Virgil's *Aeneid* may be in order here. *Fames* does not appear as an acting character in previous poetry; still, abstract notions, specifically personified as female characters, are employed at least a couple of times by Virgil. One notable example is *Allecto*; she may be considered a personification of *furor*/(war) madness, although she gets a proper name of her own. In book 7, Juno uses *Allecto* as her go-between to stir up the war between Italians and Trojans: she has to call for her from the Underworld (*Aen.* 7.324-325). Once *Allecto*'s task is carried out, she returns to a location in Italy that leads to the river Acheron, and through it to the Underworld (*Aen.* 7.563-571) — her

¹⁸⁷ In fact, in a ring-compositional fashion, Achelous makes *Fames* return to Scythia (or, strictly speaking, to a barren place) after she has fulfilled her duty: *functaque mandato fecundum deserit orbem | inque domos inopes adsueta revertitur antra* (*Met.* 8.821-822).

¹⁸⁸ The *Metamorphoses* "Proserpina" is also quite vague geographically, in contrast to the detailed description of the Sicilian landscape that Ceres traversed in search of her daughter in the *Fasti* (4.419-422, 467-480, 563-572). The *Fasti* version may reflect an Augustan interest in geographical expansion (and therefore the Romans' need to acquaint themselves with the new Roman *imperium*), hence its high degree of specificity. See Maniotti 2017. Compared to other aspects of the difference between "Proserpina" and "Erysichthon", then (on which more below), geographical descriptions do not get more sophisticated — quite the opposite.

route is geographically plausible, but her place of residence is not.¹⁸⁹ Likewise, the Virgilian *Fama* is first introduced when she spreads the news of Dido and Aeneas' relationship to king Iarbas, a rival suitor for Dido (*Aen.* 4.173-197): at no point throughout the story is her place of permanent residence mentioned.¹⁹⁰

Why, then, does it matter to the Ovidian Ceres to point the nymph specifically to Scythia as *Fames*' abode? It may not be a coincidence that the last time the reader heard about famine, even if in a different guise, the narrative had left off precisely at Scythia. This is exactly where Triptolemus did not restore agricultural fertility after king Lyncus' failed attempt to murder him. There is only one other mention of Scythia between books 5 and 8: in book 7, Medea, once safely settled in Athens, uses against her stepson Theseus an herb she had collected from the Scythian shores, presumably Colchis (*huius in exitium miscet Medea quod olim / attulerat secum Scythicis aconiton ab oris, Met.* 7.406-407). The fact that here Scythia has nothing to do with food or lack thereof, but only with magic, possibly renders this mention one of little significance for my purposes. Perhaps nothing really happens in Scythia between its non-liberation from the earth's famine and its visit by the Oread to fetch *Fames* to Thessaly.

¹⁸⁹ The only mention of *Fames* herself in the *Aeneid* is in a catalogue of personified abstract notions residing precisely where Allecto does: in the Underworld (*pallentesque habitant Morbi tristisque Senectus / et Metus et malesuada Fames ac turpis Egestas, / terribiles visu formae, Letumque Labosque, Aen.* 6.275-277). No special significance seems to be attached to her, but she still lives in the Underworld, apart from regular human life.

¹⁹⁰ Ovid's own *Fama* dwells at a geographically unspecified place in the middle of the earth, so that she/it may always be aware of everything (*Met.* 12.39ff.). For the realistic representation of her abode (which however is not geographically determined) see Braun 1991. Ovid's Fury Tisiphone (an intertextual parallel of Virgil's Allecto) also resides in the Underworld, by the Ocean and the waters of the Styx (*Met.* 4.432-463). In this sense, again, Ovid's *Fames* is quite unique.

Moreover, no significance in terms of hunger is attached to Scythia before the incident in book 5. In the cosmogonic narrative of book 1, when the four main wind-gods divide the earth among themselves, Boreas settles in Scythia, thus making it cold, but not necessarily barren (*Scythiam septemque triones / horrifer invasit Boreas, Met. 1.64-65*). In an equally universal narrative, that of the scorching of the earth through Phaethon's catastrophic ride on his father Sol's chariot, the narrator notes *nec prosunt Scythiae sua frigora (Met. 2.224*, so that it may avoid getting burned down). All in all, the text of the *Metamorphoses* gives no reason to associate hunger with Scythia before Triptolemus' visit and Lyncus' attempted crime, and no reason to assume that, once the Athenian hero spread agriculture all over the earth, anything about Scythia changed at all.

In general, we may be justified in reading "Proserpina" and "Erysichthon" alongside each other: 1) because of the common presence of Demeter/Ceres in both (especially given her relatively rare appearance in Greco-Roman myth), 2) intertextually (since both stories point back to Greek Hymns to Demeter) and 3) intratextually, through the common reference to Scythia.¹⁹¹ But there is perhaps more to Scythia than this obvious link of the two stories. This development of Scythia, first as merely a cold place (through the two brief, individual references to it in the cosmic narratives of books 1 and 2), then as a place where the restoration

¹⁹¹ There are also lexical similarities between restoration of fertility by Triptolemus and retrieval of *Fames*, beyond the mention of Scythia: *Hac Arethusa tenuis; geminos dea fertilis angues / curribus admovit frenisque coercuit ora / et medium caeli terraeque per aera vecta est / atque levem currum Tritonida misit in urbem (Met. 5.642-645); lynca Ceres fecit rursusque per aera iussit / Mopsopium iuvenem sacros agitare iugales (Met. 5.660-661) and neve viae spatium te terreat, accipe currus, / accipe quos frenis alte moderere dracones!' | et dedit; illa dato subvecta per aera curru / devenit in Scythiam (Met. 8.794-797); quamquam aberat longe, quamquam modo venerat illuc, / visa tamen sensisse famem est, retroque dracones / egit in Haemoniam versis sublimis habenis (Met. 8.811-813).*

of fertility is thwarted, and lastly as a place where *Fames* is supposed to reside, unfolds parallel to the *Metamorphoses* narrative. In other words, those references, and especially the ones from books 5 and 8, not only make sense together, but they additionally make sense *in the specific order* in which they appear in the epic. This may be an important hint that the Proserpina story is correctly, logically speaking, placed before the Erysichthon story, and that their temporal order cannot be swapped — otherwise the logical linear sequence of no relationship to hunger, then establishment of hunger, then summoning of *Fames* from the same location, would have been disrupted.¹⁹²

A conclusion that slowly emerges is that the Proserpina story may function as a *backstory* to the Erysichthon story. This is quite a different configuration of a *backstory* than the ones I have provided in the preceding chapters (since the two stories are not contiguous), but the temporal narrative scheme looks quite similar. Achelous' banquet, during which he narrates stories to Theseus and the rest of his guests, is the *present*. Erysichthon's time, or the time covered by the inset flashback story, is the *past* — and "Proserpina"'s time is a necessary step of the overall narrative of Scythia and hunger that precedes "Erysichthon", or a *backstory*. In both stories, the entrance of hunger/Hunger into the narrative is quite clearly marked, and the

¹⁹² Part of my thought process at this point stems from the third chapter of Wheeler's *Narrative Dynamics in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (2000) 70-106: repetition of a thematic motif across successive stories (Jupiter's *amores* in books 1-3), in conjunction with a progression in the part of the motif on which each story focuses (courting, transformation, Juno's reaction, Jupiter's attempts to remedy her reaction, Juno's counterreaction), lends narrative continuity to a part of the *Metamorphoses*. I am referring only to two stories ("Proserpina" and "Erysichthon"), which are also connected through a similar plot (transgression and hunger as punishment) and the same protagonist goddess. They are not contiguous, so there are no textual markers showcasing this continuity. But still, the location of Scythia undergoes a transformation from book 5 to book 8, and this change also runs parallel, as I will show below, to a conceptual complication that can possibly not be read in the reverse way.

concept is not generally presupposed: neither Ceres/Proserpina nor Erysichthon is hungry, the former generally, the latter at the beginning. Hunger then follows a linear course, both in each story and between the two: it comes about collectively at a certain point in the Proserpina *backstory*, it is cancelled for the rest of the world at the end of the same story, but it remains unchanged in Scythia, where it is picked back up in the *past* story of Erysichthon, once its presence is needed for the plot. One could also phrase the relationship of hunger/Hunger to both stories in the following way: hunger is not in the *conceptual* background of either story. It gets introduced by Ceres in “Proserpina”, and after “Proserpina” it remains dormant in the *narrative* background, in order to get reactivated in “Erysichthon”.

This observation about relative order also makes sense in terms of notional mythological chronology. Erysichthon, according to Achelous, is father-in-law to Autolycus (*Met.* 8.738), who is maternal grandfather to Ulysses — so Erysichthon is about three generations older than the Trojan War heroes. Achelous’ audience (Theseus and his men), about one generation older than the Trojan War heroes, are then suitable audience, since they were born later than Erysichthon and Autolycus. By contrast, the Proserpina story takes place shortly after Jupiter’s position as ruler of the universe is consolidated: Dis goes on a tour of his Sicilian realm in fear that Typhoeus, and the Olympians’ battle against him, have annihilated his territory, and it is then that he catches sight of, and falls in love with, Proserpina (*Met.* 5.346-384, after getting pierced by one of Cupid’s arrows). The story is told by an anonymous Muse to Minerva shortly after Perseus’ accomplishments, Perseus possibly being contemporaneous with Theseus. But, although the Muse’s narrative moment to Minerva and that of Achelous to Theseus may not be separated by a huge chronological gap, the mythological time during which each of their

respective flashbacks is set is clearly different: the former shortly after the end of the Titanomachy/Gigantomachy sequence,¹⁹³ the latter rather closer to the Trojan War.¹⁹⁴

D. Two different configurations of starvation

If the reader accepts the Proserpina story as important background to the Erysichthon story in terms of temporality, the next step could be to trace the configuration of hunger in both stories. In this section, I will show that in the Erysichthon story, although hunger is superficially simplified by being personified, this personification presents hunger/*Fames* in a conceptually manifold, more complicated way than the earth's total deprivation of food.

Upon realizing that Proserpina has been abducted, Ceres imposes famine all over the earth through quite realistic, verisimilar actions. She makes the cultivation of land impossible by breaking the farmers' plows (*ergo illic saeva vertentia glaebas / fregit aratra manu, Met. 5.477-478*), by destroying the quality of seeds (*vitiataque semina fecit, Met. 5.480*), or by sending down birds to eat up the seeds before they are properly planted (*avidaeque volucres / semina iacta legunt, Met. 5.484-485*), by bringing about extreme weather conditions, either

¹⁹³ The Homeric Hymn's version also has cosmic significance, with Demeter attempting to avenge herself on Zeus by trying to bring about, first an admission of a mortal (Demophoon) into the realm of the Olympians, and then the gods' deprivation of their prerogatives — the destruction of mankind is just collateral damage. See Strauss Clay (1989) 202-266. In this sense, the Persephone myth may have cosmic undertones in and of itself, not only in the Ovidian rendition (which does not include the Demophoon episode anyway).

¹⁹⁴ As he enters an era of heroes chronologically closer to the Trojan War, Ovid abides by relative mythological chronology. For example, his rendition of the Argonautic expedition, and Medea's relocation to Greece, precedes Theseus' adventures such as the Minotaur and the Calydonian boar hunt, which (also in Callimachus' *Hecale*) are motivated by Medea's attempts to destroy him. This is a logical mythological sequence, which "corrects" that of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, where Jason knows of Theseus and Ariadne's love enough to use it as an *exemplum* to persuade Medea. See Murray (2004) 231-232.

heavy rain or intense heat, in order to prevent plant growth (*et modo sol nimius, nimius modo corripit imber*, *Met.* 5.482), or lastly by causing stubborn weeds to choke the plants (*lolium tribulique fatigant / triticeas messes et inexpugnabile gramen*, *Met.* 5.485-486). There is no agriculture, therefore there is no produce; hunger comes about naturally in the sense of non-existent food availability.¹⁹⁵ This technical aspect of deprivation seems more important to Calliope/the Muse than the condition of humans who might have attempted access to harvest and been denied it, or a focalization through starving humans: it is tacitly assumed that the withholding of agricultural produce (focalized through Ceres) means lack of access to that produce (which would have been, but is not, focalized through humans).

When it comes to Erysichthon, Ceres works quite differently. The goddess wants to avenge herself specifically on the impious king, and not on the entire earth. This individualization of characters and of blame apportionment represents another complication of thought compared to, for example, Lycaon's story. In the story from the first book, Jupiter wants the entire humankind destroyed for a single human's scorn of the gods (*Met.* 1.260-312, cf. *occidit una domus, sed non domus una perire / digna fuit*, *Met.* 1.240-241) — although Lycaon's community showed deference to Jupiter (*Met.* 1.220-221). At least the exceptionally pious Deucalion and Pyrrha (*Met.* 1.318-321) do survive this first flood, once the Olympians implement a decision about a punishment for Lycaon's transgression. Protection from a general penalty is also reflected in book 8, immediately before the Erysichthon story, in the case of Philemon and Baucis: their hospitable reception of Jupiter and Mercury saves them from another flood, which afflicts the rest of the unreceptive

¹⁹⁵ For Ceres' active obstruction of agricultural production vs. her passive lack of assistance to farmers in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* see Anderson (1997) 547.

community (*Met.* 8.703-720).¹⁹⁶ The community no longer has to pay the penalty collectively for one individual's transgression, and, conversely, exceptional mortals are exempted from the penalty paid by an impious community.

There is, then, a step-by-step change of individualization when it comes to the infliction of punishment for impiety, and this change spans both books 1 and 8: at first everyone is supposed to perish (Lycaon), then two pious humans are rescued (Deucalion and Pyrrha), then in book 8 the same pattern is picked up again (Philemon and Baucis are rescued from another flood), then only one individual is punished for his own transgression (Erysichthon). Arguably, such an individualization is more complex than indiscriminate punishment: the divinities engage in a more difficult thought process if they want, not only to inflict punishment, but also to exclude some humans from it (and both narrator and readers have to follow along this thought process). In Erysichthon's case, the individualization of hunger, or the apportionment of blame to an individual for his own actions, may or may not be considered complicated in principle, but the logistics of the penalty is quite sophisticated.

In Erysichthon's story, the personification of hunger lays hold of the human and transforms him into itself/herself. The fact that *Fames* is an anthropomorphized creature, who suffers from hunger herself, is highlighted by her particular place of residence in Scythia: a field covered in stones, where she has to pluck out some tiny little scraps of grass to feed

¹⁹⁶ The livelihood, and poverty, of Philemon und Baucis may be compared to a blessed primitive *Ur-Rome*, which Augustan poetry tended to idealize. The elderly couple, then, embodies a distinction between an objective lack of means and a subjective feeling of self-sufficiency (with Lelex-as-narrator wondering at their life situation both in the sense of surprise at its deviation from the heroic lifestyle and in the sense of admiration for their endurance and piety). See Tsitsiou-Chelidoni (2003) 300-332. The subjective nature of abundance, and the resulting connection between Philemon/Baucis and Erysichthon, is touched on by Anderson (1972) 392.

herself (*Famem lapidoso vidit in agro / unguibus et raras vellentem dentibus herbas*, *Met.* 8.799-800). To the extent that a personified concept allows, the rest of her appearance reminds the reader of an actual hungry person (*Met.* 8.801-808). The description culminates in her belly that in fact looks like the absence of a belly (*ventris erat pro ventre locus*, *Met.* 8.805). Although, then, this personified concept stretches the capacity of language to describe it to its limits, in the sense that it can be perceived more as an absence than as a presence, it can still find some linguistic expression if identified with a person suffering from the very condition it represents.¹⁹⁷

But when *Fames* actually starts infecting Erysichthon (at the nymph's behest), things start to get more conceptually complicated. The effect *Fames* has had on Erysichthon (and there is no indication that she has not been immediately effective) starts to manifest itself in his dream (*Met.* 8.823-834). Erysichthon dreams about grabbing at non-existent food (*Met.* 8.824-826). This might just mean that everything happening in a dream is illusory (which may be supported by *petit ille dapes sub imagine somni*, *Met.* 8.824); but perhaps we are to envision an image of Tantalean torture, where the luxurious meal initially looks real to the individual, but, once he stretches out his hands towards it, it turns out to be an illusion (this is supported by *ut vero est expulsa quies, furit ardor edendi, / perque avidas fauces immensaue viscera regnat*, *Met.* 8.828-829).¹⁹⁸ At any rate, it is not conceivably possible that the food is real, and consumed, throughout the dream, but that it somehow fails to sate

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Tissol (1997) 68-69.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Piazzì (2019) 15-16, who argues for a metaphorical conception of hunger (based on Lucretius as an intertext), and therefore for moral connotations to Achelous' narrative.

Erysichthon's hunger. But this is precisely what happens once he orders food in a state of wakefulness (*Met.* 8.828-834).

The workings of the concept of hunger are therefore more convoluted in this case than in the Proserpina story. Not only does *Fames* zero in on one person, but she makes the perception of herself subjective, contingent on the individual himself — while the initial imposition of hunger is focalized through *Fames*, its results (contrary to the Proserpina story) are focalized through the human Erysichthon. The narrator points out that, to an objective observer, the meals devoured by Erysichthon are enough not only for a person with ravenous hunger, but even for whole cities and a whole nation (*quodque urbibus esse / quodque satis poterat populo non sufficit uni*, *Met.* 8.832-833). But it is the subjective perception of a void in one's stomach, and not the objective configuration of hunger as lack of access to sustenance, that suits Erysichthon's situation. This also complicates the claim that a personification of an abstraction (such as this one) causes an individual the same symptoms that the abstraction represents,¹⁹⁹ and that the personification herself displays in her anthropomorphic form.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ As argued, e.g., by Hardie (2002) 234 and Lowe (2008) 423 (he calls this the personification's "medio-passivity") — in 427-428 he makes an exception in the case of Erysichthon, labeling his case one of "reverse medio-passivity". In fact, another concept personified as a female character is described quite similarly to *Fames*, namely *Invidia*: *pallor in ore sedet, macies in corpore toto* (*Met.* 2.775, cf. *hirtus erat crinis, cava lumina, pallor in ore*, *Met.* 8.801 and *auxerat articulos macies*, *Met.* 8.807). In this sense, outward appearance may not necessarily be marked in laying out the symptoms caused by the personified abstraction.

²⁰⁰ Line 102 of the Callimachean hymn (νῦν δὲ κακὰ βούβρωστις ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσι κάθηται, with either Boubrostis herself or Erysichthon-as-Boubrostis as verb subject) sums up the ambiguous status of Erysichthon: he is both a person emaciated by hunger and a demonic force that causes the same type of destruction (annihilation of his family's flocks and herds) that hunger has caused him. He is both a victim of Boubrostis, and Boubrostis him/herself. See Faraone (2012) 63-67. In 75-76 Faraone equates the Callimachean and the Ovidian

Fames seems to have no access to food while in Scythia, but she afflicts Erysichthon so that, despite the culinary abundance available to him, he is still not satisfied.

If, therefore, one reads the Proserpina story as necessary background to the Erysichthon story, not only is there a temporal progression, from lack of agricultural restoration in Scythia to its establishment as *Fames*' permanent residence; there is also a relative *conceptual* complication, from lack of access to grain towards a subjective configuration of hunger as dependent on each individual.

E. Ceres/Demeter's and Fames' fields of control

But there may be even more nuances to this configuration of hunger, which may be brought to bear upon another potential personification: Ceres herself.²⁰¹ To be sure, Ceres is a goddess with clear anthropomorphic features in both the Proserpina and the Erysichthon stories, and is portrayed as an acting character little different from human ones. Still, the idea of Ceres as a metonymy of grain, or corn, or crops, and thereby generally of nutrition, is

Erysichthons on this count — I suggest that the difference of food availability for *Fames* and for Erysichthon makes them different rather than similar.

²⁰¹ I take Ceres and Achelous as personifications, not of abstract notions, but of natural elements (grain and water), since a personification attributes human form to inanimate entities (whether they be concepts or more tangible elements). To my mind, a personification is not necessarily an instance of metamorphosis (so, for example, river waters do not transform into Achelous, a field of corn does not transform into Ceres, or hunger does not transform into *Fames*). The formulation of Hardie (2002) 232-233, that “[...] a personification may be regarded as the product of a process of metamorphosis, the changing of a linguistic abstraction into a concrete person”, and that “The personification thus appears in the disguise of immutability, a mask concealing the processes of metamorphosis that bring it into being” is quite compelling, but this transformative process of an abstraction into a relatively concrete being takes place at a notional extra-textual level, and is not of particular concern to the Ovidian characters, or to the third-person narrator.

complex enough (both in Callimachus and Ovid) to warrant further attention. Ceres as a personification thus adds more information through which the reader may provide answers to the question: how is nutrition and hunger to be conceptualized in the *Metamorphoses*?

I have outlined above the mechanics of grain starvation that Ceres imposes on mankind in *Metamorphoses* 5. Conceivably, though, grain is not the only type of sustenance available to mankind — meat consumption could be an alternative. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (305-311), the mechanics of starvation is visibly similar to Ovid. It is all about planting seeds and sowing the land, which goes awry for an entire year because of Demeter's intervention. The point is that Demeter stands for grain, and that grain stands for nutrition; therefore, a series of metonymic associations, or substitutions, works to provide the myth with the conceptual background with which to comprehend Demeter's actions.²⁰²

The metonymic association of Demeter/Ceres with agriculture, and through it with nutrition, is thus operative both in the *Homeric Hymn* and in its Ovidian rendition. But the Ovidian picture has not always been the same — and this is another way in which to read Ceres' field of control intratextually, or linearly, within the *Metamorphoses*. In the story of Lycaon in book 1 (which I have also referenced above), the flood survived by Deucalion and Pyrrha is not the only punishment inflicted by Jupiter on mankind. Lack of sustenance is also one of his penalties: *sternuntur segetes et deplorata colonis | vota iacent, longique perit labor inritus anni* (*Met.* 1.272-273). Perhaps (as was observed above about the Callimachean Erysichthon's transgression) Lycaon's particular hubristic action (or one half of it) is directly

²⁰² It is true that Ovid here also provides a tiny glimpse into a food chain, by having his Ceres destroy, not only crops, but also oxen: *parilique irata colonos | ruricolisque boves leto dedit* (*Met.* 5.478-479). It is not clear, however, that the cattle mentioned here could have been consumed, rather than being used as beasts of burden.

linked to nutrition, and therefore invites a penalty that is also tied to nutrition: other than intending to murder disguised Jupiter (*Met.* 1.224-225), Lycaon cooked up one of his hostages and served them to Jupiter, in order to test his perceptiveness (*Met.* 1.226-231).

But, despite the common realm in which crime and punishment are logically placed, Jupiter's action might have raised the objection that sustenance is not his specific field of jurisdiction, and therefore that he may not use starvation as a means of punishment. The positioning of this story in book 1, and its proximity to the Four Ages of Man (discussed above, section B), may point to a primordial (narrative) time, during which the Olympians might not have been appointed each their separate field of control — or at least this may be the case with Ceres. As the most powerful god, Jupiter was perhaps still in control of the earth's fertility during those primordial times. Although he summons a council of the gods to inform them about Lycaon's transgression (*Met.* 1.167-176), the third-person narrator does not make any distinction between the different divine participants — they are simply all in unison (*confremuere omnes studiisque ardentibus ausum / talia deposcunt*, *Met.* 1.199-200, and *qui* [i.e. Jupiter] *postquam voce manuque / murmura conpressit, tenuere silentia cuncti*, *Met.* 1.205-206). Thus, the assignment of nutrition to Ceres may not have taken place so early on in the evolutionary history of the universe, or in the development of the *Metamorphoses* narrative (although the attribution of waters to Neptune has taken place, *Met.* 1.274-282). This is not to say necessarily that "Proserpina" is set, in notional mythological chronology, significantly after the time of "Lycaon" (which presupposes the Gigantomachy as its past, *Met.* 1.151-155). In fact, they might constitute alternative stories about what ensued shortly after Jupiter's ascension to the throne of the universe. Still, it seems that the

construction of Ceres' realm is more specific in "Proserpina" than in "Lycaon", perhaps because the former story is meant to center around her.

At any rate, Demeter in the *Homeric Hymn* and Ceres in Ovid's book 5 are identified specifically with agricultural production, and thus they deprive mankind of crops (which, however, may still entail a metonymic relationship of crops to food in general). But in Callimachus' *Hymn* Erysichthon is decidedly carnivorous. His father Triopas, when praying to Poseidon to relieve him (and his son) from his predicament, describes Erysichthon as having attacked herds of cattle or flocks of sheep (*Cer.* 105-106). The third-person narrator then goes on to announce the complete annihilation of the household's animals (*Cer.* 107-110).²⁰³ Why is Erysichthon not at all interested in what would more strictly belong to Demeter's realm, i.e. agricultural produce?

To be sure, the argument cannot be made that Callimachus innovated by making his Erysichthon resort to meat-eating because (he implies) Ceres has actually withheld grain, or because she may do that once her wrath is (further) provoked. The curse on the Callimachean Erysichthon is operative regardless of what whets his hunger, or of what type of nutrient Demeter decides (not) to withhold. Instead, Callimachus' use of meat consumption may in the end make the reader aware that the metonymic associations of the *Homeric Hymn*, or Demeter's jurisdiction as exemplified in that Hymn, are too reductive for him.

²⁰³ The Callimachean incongruity between Demeter/Ceres as the goddess of agriculture and the carnivorous aspect of Erysichthon's hunger was first detected by Faraone 2012. He turns to historically attested scapegoat rituals aiming to appease a deity that ravaged animals, with the deity and/or the castaway being called *Boubrostis/Boulimos*. He supports his reading with the end of Erysichthon's story, where he becomes a castaway from his community too.

Contrary to Callimachus, Ovid does not at all specify Erysichthon's choices in terms of sustenance: *quod pontus, quod terra, quod educat aer | poscit et adpositis queritur ieiunia mensis | inque epulis epulas quaerit; quodque urbibus esse | quodque satis poterat populo non sufficit uni, | plusque cupit, quo plura suam demittit in alvum* (*Met.* 8.830-834). In this way, Ovid's readers are not explicitly introduced to the different items that constitute a human's diet; but, especially given their possible intertextual experience, they may be in a position to contemplate the complications to Ceres', or *Fames*', personification that arise from such differences. There is, then, another conceptual complication, an expansion of Ceres' field of control, from agricultural produce (book 5) to sustenance of any type (book 8). My intra- and intertextual readings, from the Homeric and Ovidian "Proserpina", to the Callimachean "Erysichthon", to the Ovidian "Erysichthon", establish such a gradual complication.

The question arising in the reader's mind may thus be one about Ceres' field of control. But the issue of Ceres' jurisdiction may also be a suitable springboard to the issue of *Fames*' jurisdiction. Put differently, can Ceres provide in abundance what *Fames* can withhold, or is their field of control similar? How exactly does their relationship work, especially given the dual comment of the narrator Achelous to the effect that Ceres and *Fames* are incompatible (*neque enim Cereremque Famemque | fata coire sinunt, Met.* 8.785-786 and *dicta Fames Cereris, quamvis contraria semper | illius est operi, peragit, Met.* 8.814-815)? The reader may already have been alerted both to a change in Ceres' field of control from book 5 to book 8 and to a certain parallelism (or parallelism-in-opposition) of Ceres with *Fames*. Therefore, they may be interested in exploring a potential change in *Fames*' field of control as well.

One way of going about this task would be by looking at references to *fames* (as an abstract concept, not as a personification) before the Erysichthon story. There is only one: *tigris ut*

auditis diversa valle duorum / exstimulata fame mugitibus armentorum / nescit, utro potius ruat, et ruere ardet utroque, / sic dubius Perseus, dextra leavane feratur, / Molpea traiecti submovit vulnere cruris (*Met.* 5.164-168). This is not narrative, strictly speaking, but the reference to *fames* is part of a simile about a tiger, who is undecided about which way to go when, seized by hunger, it catches the sound of lowing from two herds of cattle. In this case, then, *fames* refers specifically to a carnivorous animal, which cannot change its dietary habits, regardless of external circumstances. By contrast, the personified *Fames* in Erysichthon's story, insofar as she resembles a hungry person, is pulling out a few tufts of grass to feed on (*Met.* 8.799-800) — so she is possibly constructed as herbivorous.

A sequential reader of the *Metamorphoses* is perhaps not expected to remember the tiger simile, or to be in a position to compare the two intratextual moments. But both references together may converge in showing that, in the *Metamorphoses*, *fames* as a concept, and by extension *Fames* as its personification, are quite capacious. They may lay hold of either humans or animals; they may cover any type of sustenance; and they may embrace, not only the case of yearning for unavailable food (*Fames* is hungry because Scythia is barren), but also the triggering of hunger regardless of that availability: in the tiger's case, its hunger may have been stimulated precisely by the sudden appearance of cattle, or by the sudden availability of food; in Erysichthon's case, his hunger is unabating despite the quantities of food he consumes.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ In *Met.* 13.52 *fames* refers to Philoctetes hunting birds to feed on while stranded on Lemnos; in 14.216 Achaemenides sates his hunger by collecting greens and acorns; in 15.138 Pythagoras uses it specifically to criticize carnivorous humans, or to support his argument for vegetarianism; in 11.129 it refers to Midas, a parallel figure to Erysichthon, whose transgression may be construed even more allegorically than Erysichthon's as metaphorical

Ceres and hunger, then, undergo a similar expansion of their respective fields of jurisdiction, from *backstory* to *past* story — while the latter acquires substance as an anthropomorphic deity only in book 8. In the *backstory*, Ceres stands for grain, and hunger results from banned access to sustenance; in the *past* story, Ceres stands for any type of sustenance, and hunger becomes not only personified, but also doubly complicated by being detached from the technical, or realistic, issue of food availability. Of course, Ceres presiding over sustenance in general, or *Fames* representing hunger in general, are not complicated concepts in and of themselves. This is where the contribution of “Proserpina” as a *backstory* to “Erysichthon” (i.e. an intratextual reading of hunger), in conjunction with a reading of Ovid’s intertexts, lies. “Erysichthon” is not hard to wrap one’s head around as a self-standing story, but perhaps it is if read alongside (or “after”) “Proserpina”.

Ceres and hunger/*Fames* expand in a parallel way, and thus are mirror images of each other, beyond the obvious fact that they are both associated with food consumption — and thus my hypothesis about a conceptual complication, both of Ceres and of hunger/*Fames*, beyond the superficial plot level still holds quite true. It is the expansion of both fields of control that represents, or is the essence of, complication — and the expansion may be taken as such only through a comparative reading of *backstory* and *past* story. But this section, inasmuch as it argues for a certain type of symmetry between the two entities, has not so far provided an explanation for Achelous’ statements that they do not go together by nature. These statements may just be a reflection of Achelous’ tendency, as a narrator, to impose boundaries where they are not obvious — I will return to this issue in section I. Alternatively, they may mean that

greed. Thus, *fames* is quite unmarked across the *Metamorphoses*, although it may be slightly skewed towards meat consumption.

Ceres habitually causes hunger by restricting access to food (as she has done in book 5), but, if she wants to impose the subjective hunger-in-abundance evident in Erysichthon's case, she has to enlist a different deity as the immediate agent. Or, lastly, we are not meant to take such statements completely at face value: either Ovid is ironizing his internal narrator by having his plot contradict his general statements, or Achelous himself may merely be saying that Ceres and *Fames* are generally to be conceived as the positive and negative sides of the same coin, regardless of the details of their actions in the story to follow. Ultimately, the question may have to remain open.

F. Achelous as abstraction and metapoetic marker

So far I have explored the connotations of both Ceres and *Fames*, both as acting characters in Ovid's narrative and as anthropomorphized personifications of abstract notions. But Achelous himself may be a suitable narrator for stories with such protagonists, since he himself may be construed as a metonymy, or a personification of a concept. If the potential to act as a personification, or to be embodied as a narrative agent, has been applied to Ceres and hunger/*Fames* (or to food, simply speaking), it may be applicable to water as well. In this section, I explore the identification of Achelous, first with all rivers, second with (fresh) natural water in general, and third, metapoetically, with non-Callimachean, epic poetry.

Achelous features in a debate among Alexandrian commentators of the *Iliad* as interchangeable with the Ocean, and therefore as the source of all rivers in the world. An

Oxyrhynchus papyrus (*POxy* 221)²⁰⁵ dated around the end of the 1st/beginning of the 2nd century CE preserves scholia to the 21st book of the *Iliad*, among which appears an Alexandrian disagreement about the possible excision of line 21.195. The removal of this line would effectively make Achelous stand for every river, even for every aquatic formation across the earth.

Similarly, in Hellenistic times Achelous was deployed as a metonymy for water in general — and more specifically for water drunk at symposia, which brings him/it closer to a context of food consumption. In one of his epigrams, Callimachus juxtaposes Achelous as a river-god invoked in solemn contexts with the handsome *eromenos* Diocles: Ἐγχει καὶ πάλιν εἰπέ “Διοκλέος.” οὐδ’ Ἀχελῷος | κείνου τῶν ἱερῶν αἰσθάνεται κυάθων. | καλὸς ὁ παῖς, Ἀχελῷε, λίην καλός, εἰ δέ τις οὐχὶ | φησὶν — ἐπισταίμην μοῦνος ἐγὼ τὰ καλά (*AP* 12.51). Part of the wit of this epigram lies in the simultaneous configuration of Achelous as a personified god (the addressee of the epigram), as a river, as a metonymy for all kinds of aquatic elements, and finally as a metonymy of drinking water (as opposed to the wine drunk at symposia). This mutual exclusivity of Achelous-as-water and wine may also potentially correspond to a Callimachean juxtaposition of serious to playful poetry.

What may tie this Callimachean moment to the Ovidian Achelous is precisely that the river god is hosting a banquet, during which he narrates a story with obvious non-Callimachean

²⁰⁵ Grenfell/Hunt (1899) 63-64 (text) and 79 (commentary). On the relationship between Ocean and Achelous as metonymies for earthly water see D’Alessio 2004. If *Il.* 21.195 (the reference to Ocean) is removed, the antecedent of the relative clause would be Achelous, from whom every aquatic formation would then spring: ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἔστι Διὶ Κρονίῳ μάχεσθαι, | τῷ οὐδὲ κρείων Ἀχελῷος ἰσοφαρίζει, | οὐδὲ βαθυρρεῖται μέγα σθένος Ὠκεανοῖο, | ἐξ οὗ περ πάντες ποταμοὶ καὶ πᾶσα θάλασσα | καὶ πᾶσαι κρῆναι καὶ φρεῖατα μακρὰ νάουσιν (*Il.* 21.193-197).

associations. The swelling of his torrent has persuasively been shown to correlate with the inflated style of the stories he narrates about Erysichthon and Hercules — his literal swelling seems to be reflected onto both his choice of subject matter and his narrative style.²⁰⁶ To be sure, the only fully surviving intertext for “Erysichthon” is (literally) a Callimachean work, the *Hymn to Demeter*. But still, Achelous blows Callimachean references out of proportion: Erysichthon is a morally monstrous character; Ceres’ oak is a tree of gigantic dimensions; also monstrous is the personification of *Fames* and Erysichthon’s punishment with autophagy.²⁰⁷ Conversely, the realistic elements of guest-friendship impacted by the Callimachean Erysichthon’s perpetual hunger are completely elided by the Ovidian Achelous.²⁰⁸

According to this argument, Achelous as a character narrator is incompatible with Callimachean metapoetic associations. His topics and narrative register distance him from the *tenue* and approach him to the *grande* end of the stylistic spectrum; he metonymically stands for water, and metapoetically for pompous poetry, on the one hand, and wine stands for ludic, Callimachean poetry on the other.

However, there are slight “anti-epic” hints in his narrative as well. One objection to Achelous’ “grand epic” aspirations is that he explicitly does not condone Erysichthon’s crime

²⁰⁶ Barchiesi (1989) 57-61 and cf. below, footnote 241.

²⁰⁷ On Virgilian and Homeric motifs in the Erysichthon story see Van Tress (2004) 181-183. She points out the similarity between Hypnos in *Iliad* 14 and the Ovidian *Fames* (2004, 182), especially since Erysichthon is sleeping while *Fames* engulfs him in her embrace. Also important for my discussion is that the Homeric Hypnos has to be summoned by Hera from a particular place, Lemnos. On Vergilian reminiscences in the Achelous-Hercules duel of book 9 see Schmitzer (1990) 170-177.

²⁰⁸ Also, both Achelous and Theseus have become more “inflated” since their previous appearances in Callimachus’ *Hymn to Demeter* and *Hecale* respectively, as well as within the *Metamorphoses* itself: the river used to flow more smoothly and the hero was at the start of his career. See Murray (2004) 225-226.

(he calls his hand *manus impia*, *Met.* 8.761, his axe *saevamque [...] bipennem*, *Met.* 8.766, and his act a *scelus*, *Met.* 8.774, in passages not focalized through Ceres but through Achelous himself). There is also nothing in the text to suggest that Achelous criticizes Erysichthon's eventual punishment — in fact, when he transitions to the enslavement of Erysichthon's daughter, he comments that she is *non illo digna parente* (*Met.* 8.847). In that sense, he implicitly takes a stand against the gigantic dimensions of his character's crime; if the crime has metapoetic connotations beyond the level of the plot, Achelous criticizes an "epic" transgression, so he may be classified as "anti-epic".

Similarly, there may be some hints that are not "anti-epic", but "pro-Callimachean" — elements which paradoxically coexist with the "epic" hints, even to the point of being subsumed into the same physical entity. Achelous presents *Fames* as both swollen and slender, in programmatically charged terms. To be sure, *hirtus* (*Met.* 8.801) is associated with filth, and therefore with the construction of epic by Callimacheans (see section G below), and lines 807-808 include vocabulary variously reminiscent of increase, swelling, or bulging (*auxerat articulos macies, genuumque tumebat / orbis, et inmodico prodibant tubere tali*). But on the other hand, the image overall is one of a hungry, and therefore slim, person. This identification of *Fames* with slenderness, which may be consonant with Scythia's barrenness, also creates a tension in her relationship with Erysichthon as her victim: she is hungry and slender because of food unavailability, he is hungry (but not necessarily slender) because of (her effect on him, i.e.) his individual interpretation of his bodily needs. Thus, her configuration as slender creates an unnecessary discrepancy between herself and her victim — perhaps then her description is metapoetically, rather than thematically, motivated. Still, she is not only slender, or *tenuis*, but also swollen, or *tumens/grandis*. She is thus a self-contradictory entity, one characterized by

two opposite, and thus mutually cancelling, traits. If this is a conscious Ovidian choice, it might constitute either an allusion to Callimachus’ perceived self-contradictions or a subsumption of both “Callimachean” and “anti-Callimachean” elements into his own poetry. Lastly, not only Achelous’ narrative *per se*, but also his place of abode, his grotto, may be programmatically reminiscent of (one variation of) a *locus amoenus*,²⁰⁹ or the place of inspiration conjured up by “Callimachean” poets when they profess to narrate their moment of initiation.²¹⁰

One may raise certain objections to the unequivocal classification of these three elements (Achelous’ antipathy towards Erysichthon, slender *Fames*, Achelous’ *locus amoenus*-like cave) as “anti-epic”, or “pro-Callimachean”. For example, slender *Fames* is realistically easier to conceptualize than swollen *Fames* (inasmuch as she has to resemble a hungry person), so it is the swollen part of her that is harder to account for than her slender aspect (and thus it is this swollen aspect of hers that may take on generic, or “epic”, rather than plot-motivated, connotations). Similarly, Achelous’ castigation of Erysichthon as an overweening transgressor paradoxically provides an opportunity to the internal narrator to deploy his inflated discourse — he criticizes the character morally while adopting discourse that metaphorically reflects

²⁰⁹ In fact, the very Propertian passages where the elegist identifies as a descendant of Philetas/Callimachus (see section G below) envisage a grotto as a setting of poetic initiation: *Callimachi Manes et Coi sacra Philitae, | in vestrum, quaeso, me sinite ire nemus. | primus ego ingredior puro de fonte sacerdos | Itala per Graios orgia ferre choros. | dicite, quo pariter carmen tenuastis in antro | quove pede ingressi? quamve bibistis aquam?* (3.1.1-6) and *dixerat, et plectro sedem mihi monstrat eburno, | qua nova muscoso semita facta solost. | hic erat affixis viridis spelunca lapillis, | pendebantque cavis tympana pumicibus, | orgia Musarum et Sileni patris imago | fictilis et calami, Pan Tegeae, tui* (3.3.25-30). Thus, the Propertian programmatic passages may be in the (intertextual) background of both *backstory* (more clearly) and *past* story (less clearly).

²¹⁰ For all three instances of Achelous’ generic ambivalence, which may undermine or problematize the reductive generic binaries propounded by Callimachus, see Tsitsiou-Chelidoni (2003) 339-359, with further linguistic parallels and bibliography.

Erysichthon's out-of-proportion hubristic actions. Regardless of the possible arguments and counterarguments, however, what is most important is that such generic questions may validly be raised and contemplated in the first place. Therefore, Achelous' narrative is less than black-and-white, or it incorporates elements from both ends of the generic spectrum to varying degrees.

G. Ceres/Demeter as metapoetic marker; genre in "Proserpina" and "Erysichthon"

The complicated ontological status, or fourfold nature (anthropomorphic god, natural element, metonymy for water) of Achelous is highlighted through the intertexts referred to above. This ontological status may place him on the same footing as Ceres and *Fames* — they all personify, or embody, abstract notions. But what has also emerged from the previous section is a metapoetic function of Achelous. In this section, then, and in line with my parallel reading of both Ceres stories in the *Metamorphoses*, I will look into Ceres' metapoetic role in poetry before Ovid, and I will explore the relevance of that role to Ovid's use of her as a character. If Ceres and Achelous are personifications of food and water respectively, they may also be considered metapoetic incarnations (or personifications) of poetic genres, or of a mixture thereof — an observation which in turn may have generic implications for "Proserpina" and "Erysichthon".

There is first a piece of literary historical trivia, according to which the most notable precursor of Callimachus himself, or a very representative Callimachean *avant la lettre*, is Philetas from Cos. His short narrative poem was possibly titled *Demeter*, and it narrated the

story of Persephone's abduction.²¹¹ The fragmentary status of the poem limits our ability to gauge Philetas' Callimacheanism, but Augustan poetry identifying as Callimachean may be more helpful and pertinent here.

Propertius is the only Augustan poet to mention Philetas as interchangeable with Callimachus, either alongside Callimachus (2.34.31, 3.1.1, 4.6.3) or during the Propertian *amator's* initiation into Callimachean poetics (3.3.51-52).²¹² So Philetas, and potentially his most well-known work, the *Demeter*, may function as a byword for non-epic, proto-elegiac poetry according to Propertius, who presents himself as one of Philetas' literary heirs.²¹³ From Propertius as well, we get a closer association, or rather a clash, specifically between Philetas (and his *Demeter*?) and Achelous (2.34.31-50). His friend, the poet Lynceus, is in love; the Propertian *amator* advises him to compose in the manner of Philetas and Callimachus, and not to describe Achelous' torrent, which is swollen and frightening, despite (or because of) his

²¹¹ Philetas' *Demeter*, and not generally the myth of Persephone's abduction, may be what the Callimachean narrator rejects in the *recusatio* of *Cer.* 1-23. See Faulkner (2011) 77-78. If Achelous invites the prospect of narrating another Proserpina story, but then keeps his distance from it (by narrating the Erysichthon story instead), Ovid may be using his character to repeat Callimachus' stance towards Philetas and/or the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.

²¹² Philetas' *Demeter* possibly included a section on the poet's initiation by the goddess during an epiphany — perhaps this moment is being reworked by Propertius. For the juxtaposition between the water of Philetas, which may refer to the spring Hippocrene (the setting, and the prize, of the contest in *Met.* 5), and Ennius' epic *magni fontes*, see Heyworth/Morwood (2010) 125. For the Callimachean associations of Demeter specifically with water vs. Erysichthon's with wine see Müller (1987) 42. This is quite different, metapoetically, from the positive associations of wine in *Ep.* 12.51 discussed above: if in the Hymn wine stands for excess and for non-Callimachean poetry, in the epigram a sympotic context points to the ideal of playful poetry in place of serious epic.

²¹³ It is relatively easier for Propertius to characterize himself as the "Roman Callimachus" across the aetiological book 4 — the attempts of Augustan elegists to construe Callimachus as their predecessor specifically in terms of love poetry are more uncertain. See Barchiesi (2011) 520-521. Propertius' entrance into Callimachus' and Philetas' sacred groves may also take on sacral connotations, i.e. he (as a *vates*) is paying them homage as to deities, so that he himself may be memorialized in a similar way. See Hunter (2006) 7-16.

amorous situation. Here Achelous stands for pompous subject matter, while Philetas stands for non-pompous style.

Additionally, we may establish, in Callimachus' own *Hymn to Apollo*, a clashing relationship between Demeter, to whom bees bring pure dew from a sacred fountain, and the Assyrian river, perhaps Euphrates, which sweeps along with it a lot of refuse (*Ap.* 108-112). In this case, both Demeter and Euphrates are associated with water, the former with pure spring water and the latter with a defiled torrent of water.²¹⁴ And in Callimachus' *Aetia* itself, there may also be a reference to Demeter's *tenuitas/leptotēs*: Demeter Thesmophoros is outweighing something designated as long, so by implication she is *tenuis/leptē* (fr. 1.9-10 Pf.). This may in fact be another reference back to Callimachus' own predecessors, possibly Philetas' *Demeter* and Antimachus' *Lyde* (which may be designated as a long poem).²¹⁵ Both Callimachus and Propertius, then, may help establish a clashing metapoetic relationship between Ceres and rivers/Achelous, which is often literalized through the image of water.

To return to Ovid, water is precisely the element through which genre tension is foregrounded in the two Ceres stories of the *Metamorphoses*. First, a word about their narrators. The Proserpina story of book 5 is the most deeply embedded story among the multiple Chinese-box constructions in this epic. Minerva has arrived on Mount Helicon to visit the spring Hippocrene, which was formed by a blow of Pegasus' hoof. Here she encounters the

²¹⁴ Ovid's generic categories are quite fluid, but those of Callimachus seem more strictly binarized, at least based on the *Aetia* prologue and the *Hymn to Apollo*. In a sense, Callimachus needs his opposite to define himself. As succinctly put by Müller (1987) 33: "Dieses (i.e. Callimachus') poetische Programm realisiert sich aber nicht mit Selbstverständlichkeit, sondern es begreift sich seinem Wesen nach als antithetisch und muss sich nach seinem eigenen Verständnis gegen eine Welt von böartigen und stupiden Widersachern behaupten."

²¹⁵ Or Mimnermus' *Nanno*. See Harder (2012) 43.

Muses, one of whom, after a disconcerting story about their escape from king Pyreneus (*Met.* 5.269-293), narrates a contest between the Muses themselves and the Pierides over residence by the spring, with the local nymphs acting as judges. One of the Pierides narrates a twisted version of the Typhonomachy (*Met.* 5.319-331), while Calliope sings the “Proserpina”. There are, then, two narrating instances, the second of which is embedded into the first: 1) the anonymous Muse to Minerva, and 2) Calliope and the Pierides before the nymphs.

The genre idiosyncrasies of this pair of stories (Typhonomachy and Proserpina) are, I suggest, even more complicated than they seem. But for now suffice it to note that, according to a still quite authoritative monograph on the Proserpina story, the Pierides are defeated not (only) because of their impiety (i.e. because they present the Olympians as cowardly beings who transform themselves in order to escape their enemy), but (also) because the nymphs (and essentially Ovid through them) espouse a Callimachean poetics, and thereby favor the Callimachean Proserpina story over the inflated Typhonomachy story.²¹⁶ Put simply, even simplistically, for now: Ceres as a character participates in a story that at first sight may be labeled anti-epic — and so do the anonymous Muse and Calliope, the narrators of her story.

The narrator of the other Ceres story, Achelous, is usually seen as a representative of the opposite tendency. So, on a first superficial level one could argue that Ovid through Ceres is representing a generic clash, with book 5 occupying the more Callimachean end of the spectrum and book 8 the more epic one. But things are not quite as clear-cut as this formulation suggests. One reason for this has been pointed out above: it is not clear that Achelous-as-a-

²¹⁶ Hinds (1987) 129-131. According to Hinds, if the Pierides story is epic-style, Calliope counters it with a Callimachean-tinged counter-entry in the poetic contest, and this tendency makes her deviate slightly from the epic context in which her Proserpina story is situated (at least in comparison to the version of the *Fasti*).

narrator is decidedly “epic”. Another obvious reason is that Ceres, even if identified with a Callimachean tendency, is an acting character in the Erysichthon story (even if it is taken as “epic”) as well.²¹⁷

Things are about to get even less neat. Regardless of a generic clash between the two Ceres stories, even within the Proserpina narrative it is not clear that Calliope, its immediate narrator, is *not* affiliated with epic — quite the opposite. She is the oldest of the Muses, and in postclassical poetry she presides specifically over epic poetry.²¹⁸ Her narrative itself may also embrace multiple elements of lofty poetry. The most significant of these are: the hymnic introduction; the imperialistic language deployed by Venus in her attempt to extend her power over Proserpina and Dis;²¹⁹ a possible insensitivity towards the plight of a rape victim; and the repetition (from Helios in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*) of the argument that Dis is one of the three masters of the universe, and therefore not a negligible husband for Proserpina.

Conversely, the revision of the Typhonomachy story, according to which the Olympians fled to Egypt after assuming the forms of animals, may represent a rebellious stance towards

²¹⁷ Conversely, insatiable Erysichthon is a character of the Callimachean *Hymn to Demeter* — but his inclusion may precisely foreground Callimachus’ rejection of the excess, both in culinary and in (im)pious terms, that Erysichthon represents. By contrast, Demeter does not get intoxicated with wine but drinks only water, when she does not altogether fast. Thus, within the Callimachean narrative Erysichthon represents the “other”, or the analogue of the Telchines in the *Aetia* prologue. For these associations see the seminal work of Müller (1987) 34-37, and cf. Faulkner (2011) 86 about the transitional function of food from Demeter’s abstinence in the “rejected” Persephone material to Erysichthon’s transgressiveness in the “desirable” Erysichthon material.

²¹⁸ Cf. Hinds (1987) 125-126.

²¹⁹ Hinds (1987) 108-109, Johnson (1996) 134-135 and (2008) 65-66. Johnson 1996 argues for the selfish motivation of the Ovidian Venus, in comparison to her Virgilian counterpart, who just wants to secure her descendants’ fate. Conversely, we may assume, not that the love goddess’ interests are politicized, and thus “masculinized”, but that Augustan epic, and Augustan Rome, has been “feminized”, with Venus (through her son Aeneas) exerting control over the city in various ways. See Barchiesi (1999) 114-119.

the handed-down story, or a deconstruction of the invincibility of (epic) gods — it may therefore be Callimachean in a peculiar way. More than that, it could be Callimachean in the sense of aetiological: Jupiter’s transformation into a ram accounts for his worship in Libya as Ammon, precisely in the form of a ram (*‘duxque gregis’ dixit ‘fit Iuppiter: unde recurvis | nunc quoque formatus Libys est cum cornibus Ammon, Met. 5.327-328*).²²⁰ Therefore, not only is the supposedly neoteric song not clearly marked as neoteric, but the supposedly epic one may not be so epic after all.²²¹

The twisted intricacies of the generic interplay in the two Ceres stories gets compounded by yet another factor: even if, for the sake of argument, we classify the Proserpina story as “Callimachean” and the Erysichthon story as “epic”, their respective intertexts belong to opposite milieus from each other, and from the Ovidian stories themselves. In other words, the

²²⁰ Johnson (2008) 60-61. The representation of the gods by the Pierides may be in line, not only with the poetic learnedness of Callimachus, but also with the philosophical learnedness of Lucretius: the Pierides lead to the rationalization of Typhoeus’ catastrophic cosmic effect as a purely physical one, and claim to be disabusing the *vulgus* of inane representations of the divine (which stem precisely from the Muses): *desinite indoctum vana dulcedine vulgus | fallere, Met. 5.308-309*. See Chaudhuri (2014) 99-100.

²²¹ This obvious generic tension may not necessarily lead to the conclusion that genre questions are irrelevant to this *cluster* of stories, or to Ovid as their ultimate composer — quite the opposite. In Hinds’ words: (critics who have dismissed the importance of genre base their arguments on) “[...] a simple and apparently commonsensical assumption: namely, that to prove generic inconsistency in a piece of poetry is to prove the irrelevance of genre to it” (1987, 115) and “[...] the presence in the *Fasti* of elements which tend to epic rather than to elegiac norms does not undermine the genre-based approach, but actually constitutes an important part of it: the poem’s generic self-consciousness is expressed not just in observance but also in creative transgression of the expected bounds of elegy.” (1987, 117, the reverse applies to the *Metamorphoses* too). Hinds is here reacting to the binary distinction between Ovid’s “elegiac” style in the *Fasti* “Proserpina” and his “epic” style in the *Metamorphoses* “Proserpina” (based on: dialogue vs. third-person narrative, intense vs. mild emotions, tyrannical associations of divinities vs. their identification with mortals etc.) as suggested by Heinze (1919) 1-14 and *passim*. Thus, an important question affirmatively answered by Heinze, namely whether the two Proserpina stories are representative of the genres in which they belong, is similarly answered with a tentative affirmative by Hinds.

“Callimachean” Proserpina story is mostly indebted to the Homeric diction and mindset, while the “epic” Erysichthon story has its roots in a literally Callimachean work. This observation does not detract, in and of itself, from the potential generic associations of each story. But, especially in conjunction with the lack of absolute boundaries between epic and neoteric as evinced by the Muses-Pierides contest, it certainly goes a long way towards casting doubt on such absolute distinctions.

But the Muses-Pierides contest has recently been approached anew, with an emphasis not on the generic connotations of each competing song, but on the (broadly) political needs of the narrative moment, or on the imperative that each contestant persuade the nymph judges — or that the narrating Muse win over her powerful visitor Minerva. Therefore, it has been argued that the Typhonomachy story might actually have appealed to the martial goddess (even if it is an “epic”-type story — Minerva herself weaves a similar high-brow story into her tapestry in *Met.* 6) if it had been used as an encomium for the Olympians.²²² But the Pierides, by suppressing the end of the story and the subsequent consolidation of the Olympians’ power, cannot really win her favor. Conversely, the martial goddess can still appreciate a lower-register story (Calliope’s about Proserpina) because she can sympathize with the plight of

²²² Johnson (2008) 56-60. She adduces Horace *Carm.* 3.4 as a parallel of a close relationship between the Muses and the Gigantomachy. In this poem the Giants stand in for Augustus’ enemies, who stand no chance against him (thanks also to the Muses’ *consilium*), and therefore the Muses are included in a political praise poem (Augustan *recusationes* are also relevant: the rejected poem in praise of Augustus/Maecenas would align them with Jupiter fighting the Giants). For the different objectives of the different embedded narrators in *Met.* 5, i.e. for their need to produce a story that pleases their respective audiences, cf. Barchiesi (2002) 190-195.

virginity being violated — after all, she is mentioned in Calliope’s very story as one of the maidens stubbornly resisting Venus’ power (*Met.* 5.375).²²³

The interrelation of both arguments, the one about style (and generic self-consciousness) and the one about content (or the narrator’s need for *captatio benevolentiae* of their audience), creates a complex web of similarity and opposition between Muses and Pierides. The metapoetic relationship of “Proserpina” and “Erysichthon” is similarly not as neatly antithetical as seems at first glance — but perhaps their stylistic juxtaposition could be supported through a similar juxtaposition in terms of *content*. In fact, there is a common thread running through both stories’ content, which may also take on stylistic, or generic, connotations: water. The metapoetic connotations of gushing rivers and pure springs in Callimachus (and in Augustan Callimacheanism) have already been noted. The self-reflexive undertones of the Ovidian Achelous, both as an individual river and as an incarnation of all rivers, have also been pointed out.²²⁴ If Achelous is on first inspection an image of the inflated epic poet, but on a second reading defies such expectations, perhaps he may find his parallel in another set of characters, who are ostensibly “Callimachean” narrators, but whose generic affiliations may on a second reading be more nuanced.

²²³ Barchiesi (2002) 193.

²²⁴ In Greek comic and Roman satiric tradition the flooding of rivers may have been used as a marker of unrefined poetry by a practitioner of a genre, mainly as polemic against a predecessor (e.g. Aristophanes on Cratinus and Horace on Lucilius). See Farmer 2013.

H. Springs as metapoetic markers, and aquatic/generic intermingling

In fact, two narrators in the Proserpina story are designated as nymphs coeval with springs or pools: Cyane and Arethusa. They are allowed to tell their own stories of (successful or unrequited, forced or blessed) love/sex; also their stories of metaphorical rape (Cyane's by Dis himself as he opens up a path to the Underworld through her by plunging his spear into her/the spring, and Arethusa's by Alpheus, on which more below) refract and articulate Proserpina's rape, which is not explicitly narrated by Calliope/the Muse.²²⁵

On a first reading, an identification of those spring/nymph narrators as anti-epic is relatively clear. In terms of their characterization as acting characters (as vulnerable nymphs), of their stories' content (which sympathize with Proserpina), and of their metapoetic (Callimachean) associations, Cyane and Arethusa are a counterpoint to the stereotypical swollen river. But a second reading may nuance their generic affiliations to a certain extent.

Cyane is easier to read as a non-epic character. Her short speech, with which she tries to prevent Proserpina's abduction, includes an important catchphrase for the division between lofty and neoteric poetry: (*si*) *componere magnis / parva mihi fas est* (*Met.* 5.416-417). She then explains that her own love affair with Anapis is representative of the *parvum* — which self-reflexively would mean a Callimachean-type story, in opposition to a lofty one, possibly represented by Dis and Proserpina's own story.²²⁶ This observation gains even more credence from the relative rarity of other, intertextual references to Cyane, especially to her relationship

²²⁵ For the mirroring of the main (Proserpina) story on the inset (Arethusa and Cyane) stories, and for the Ovidian variation on epic repetition as a counterpoint to Persephone's own recapitulation of her plight in the Hymn, see Hinds (1987) 91-92, Johnson (1996) 139-144 and Zissos (1999) 99-103.

²²⁶ For Cyane's (and Calliope's) metapoetic boldness here see Anderson (1997) 541.

with Anapis.²²⁷ Her own transformation into the spring bearing her name also contains multiple references to *mollitia* and *tenuitas*. If her narrative as a nymph was a sign of preference for a lower register instead of an elevated one, her bodily form then gets transformed to match this lower, or *tenue*, register: there is a short moment of transformation (*brevis [...] transitus*, *Met.* 5.433-434) from the *tenuissima* (*Met.* 5.431) parts of her body to water — and the terms *extenuatur* (*Met.* 5.429), *molliri* (*Met.* 5.429), *exilibus* (*Met.* 5.433) and *tenues* (*Met.* 5.435) may serve the same purpose.

So far, so good. But the distinction that Cyane draws between *magna* and *parva* may serve to undermine her own self-reflexive characterization as *parva*. To be sure, she does become literally *tenuis* by the end of the episode, but her classification of Proserpina's story as *magnum* perhaps qualifies her own claims to *tenuitas*. In other words, a *tenuis* character who participates in a *grande* narrative may thus become less of a *tenuis* character herself.

One spring is thus not enough to classify the larger story in which she belongs as a Callimachean tale. If she is *tenuis*, she may be the exception to the rule of a *grande* narrative, and not representative of a *tenue* narrative. The other nymph involved in the Proserpina story is Arethusa. Her narrative topic, her persecution and near-rape by the river god Alpheus, aligns her with other assaulted (or transformed in a narrow-escape twist) nymphs throughout the *Metamorphoses*, such as Daphne and Io in book 1, Callisto in book 2, Medusa in book 5, or Scylla in book 14. Her theme, therefore, as well as the switch of focalization (from a

²²⁷ For Anapis as a Sicilian river (god) in ancient literature see Bömer (1976) 335-336. Ovid may here be passing up on an opportunity to talk about a river god, whose relationship with a spring nymph looks more similar to that of river Alpheus and spring Arethusa than to that of Dis and Proserpina (both divinities). But he is still hinting at the corresponding story, perhaps in an aetiological/Callimachean manner.

disinterested third-person or the assaulting male to the assaulted female) may be enough to classify the story as a non-epic one.

Throughout her narrative, some self-reflexive words may also serve the same function. She introduces a non-epic *locus amoenus* that will witness the attack against her with *aestus erat* (*Met.* 5.586), which may be a variation on *locus erat*, the standard phrase to introduce such a *locus amoenus* (or *lacus erat*, which Calliope/the Muse use to introduce the Proserpina narrative in *Met.* 5.385).²²⁸ The *locus amoenus* includes a stream, which is clear to see through to its bottom (*Met.* 5.587-589). Her clothes are designated as *mollia* [...] *velamina* (*Met.* 5.594, cf. *mollia de tenero velamina corpore tollit* about Hermaphroditus, another rape victim, in *Met.* 4.345, and *ut stetit ante oculos posito velamina nostros* and *aestus erat* in *Ov. Amores* 1.5.17 and 1.5.1 respectively, words which create an intertextual link to a programmatic elegiac text).

If part of her vocabulary, and her self-fashioning, makes Arethusa fall into a *tenuis* rather than into a *grandis* category, she also introduces a loud-roaring character, who makes her stand out all the more as soft. Alpheus the river god, although not a narrator himself, speaks in a raspy voice (*racon* [...] *ore*, *Met.* 5.600). His shadow, as Arethusa sees it during the chase, is *longa* (*Met.* 5.614-615), and his breath is described as *ingens* [...] *anhelitus* (*Met.* 5.616-617). Their juxtaposition in Arethusa's narrative is palpable, especially through the notion of persecution: three similes align Arethusa with trembling doves, a lamb in its pen, or a motionless hare, with Alpheus being compared to a pursuing hawk, howling wolves, and threatening dogs (*Met.* 5.604-606, 626-627, 628-629). Their relative running speed may take on even stronger metapoetic connotations: *sed tolerare diu cursus ego viribus impar | non*

²²⁸ Hinds (1987) 36-39, and for more details on the self-consciousness of the trope Hinds (2002) 123-130.

poteram (*Met.* 5.610-611) reminds the reader of similar unequal steps, also with potential self-conscious associations. Programmatic intertexts that may be associated with this one include Ovid's *Amores* 3.1.7-8, where the personified *Elegia* walks with a limp due to the unequal length of her two legs, and, through it, *Amores* 1.1-4, where the god *Amor* steals one metrical foot from every other line of the *amator*'s hexameter poetry, thus turning it into elegy.²²⁹

Arethusa, then, is a *mollis* nymph, whereas *Alpheus* is a raucous river. Arethusa's narrative suppresses the high-brow narrative that *Alpheus* might have provided as a narrator/focalizer, focusing attention on her own vulnerability and plight instead. Another story uttered by a spring, on top of *Cyane*'s, may thus be classified as an anti-epic narrative, which would then incline the entire *Proserpina* story towards the anti-epic mode.

But the story about Arethusa's (near) rape leaves the ending quite open. In all probability they did not have intercourse in their human forms, but in their respective aquatic forms they probably ended up intermingling their waters. Arethusa is transformed into a spring (*Met.* 5.632-636, the process takes off when Arethusa starts breaking out in cold sweat with fear), but then *Alpheus* decides to transform himself into his own river waters, so as to match her form and thereby to have metaphorical sex with her (*Met.* 5.636-638). This last attempt of *Alpheus*' may or may not have met with success: *Diana* intervenes and opens up an underground passage for Arethusa's waters, through which she ends up flowing from *Arcadia* to *Sicily* (*Met.* 5.639-641). Did their streams ever mix, and why does that question even matter?

²²⁹ For the overlap of the literal, bodily characteristics of *Elegia*/the *puella* with the stylistic traits of Latin love elegy see Wyke 2006 and Keith 1994.

Other than not explicitly mentioning Alpheus' underground stream, the text does not clearly disagree with this mingling.²³⁰ (Possibly) before the *Metamorphoses*, only two texts clearly connect Alpheus and Arethusa in both their anthropomorphic and their aquatic forms. One is composed by Ovid himself, and belongs in elegy. In *Amores* 3.6, Alpheus features in a list of river gods in love: *non Alpheon diversis currere terris / virginis Arcadiae certus adegit amor?* (*Am.* 3.6.29-30). The actual union of their waters is possibly alluded to through the idea of Alpheus abandoning his native land for Arethusa. Similarly, in Virgil's *Aeneid* a tour of Sicily culminates in a tiny inserted story about the river and the nymph: *Alpheum fama est huc Elidis amnem / occultas egisse vias subter mare, qui nunc / ore, Arethusa, tuo Siculis confunditur undis* (*Aen.* 3.694-696). In this case, the metaphorical intercourse, or the literal mingling of waters, is clearly articulated.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* does not have to be influenced by these intertexts. But at least it leaves open the possibility that Arethusa and Alpheus are by now one physically, if not romantically. There might be an additional clue about the identification of Alpheus and Arethusa's waters, which does not formally constitute part of her self-reported story: when she is first introduced, she is designated as *Alpheias* (*Met.* 5.487).²³¹ It may be a moot point, but on first inspection this term looks like a patronymic or a geographic name — in both cases it

²³⁰ As succinctly put by Bessone (2020) 6, even about Arethusa's self-introduction before the account of the rape: "Anche il primo discorso della ninfa non è esplicito: Aretusa parla di sé, alla prima persona singolare, e non menziona la presenza di Alfeo — ma neppure la nega. Tutto, nel testo, dà l'impressione che sia andata a finire così — come lei lascia intendere —; ma tutto, nel testo, fa pensare che una versione diversa, quella tradizionale, non sia mai effettivamente e definitivamente smentita."

²³¹ Cf. Bessone (2020) 10.

would identify Arethusa with the person or the place. But, quite unexpectedly, she is associated with Alpheus — not with Achaea, not with Arcadia, not with Elis, not with her father.

The answer to the first question, then, is that there are more indications that Arethusa-as-a-spring has been violated by Alpheus-as-a-river than that she has not. But, to turn to the second question: does it matter? It does, insofar as it adds another instance of a nymph who has suffered sexual assault in the *Metamorphoses* (although Arethusa herself does not perceive her own similarity to Proserpina — I will return to this issue in section K). It also matters metapoetically: if rivers and springs, their respective discourses and narratives, are aligned with “high” and “low” poetry respectively, the mingling of both waters may signify a parallel intermingling of poetic registers.

More than her waters, Arethusa’s very outlook on rape may have changed after the incident with Alpheus. To be sure, Arethusa is on Ceres’ side,²³² inasmuch as she provides the goddess with the most important information for her daughter’s retrieval: the name of Proserpina’s abductor (*Met.* 5.506-508). But the way in which she narrates abduction and rape shows a relative change of perspective compared to her own rape story, which predates, but is narrated subsequently to, Proserpina’s violation. Arethusa seems to dismiss Proserpina’s sadness and fright as she was being abducted (*illa quidem tristis neque adhuc interrita vultu*, *Met.* 5.506), or at least to relegate it to a position of secondary importance. Rather, she concentrates on Proserpina’s higher social status now that she is married to the king of the Underworld (*sed regina tamen, sed Opacic maxima mundi, | sed tamen inferni pollens matrona tyranni*, *Met.*

²³² Demeter/Ceres is constantly connected with springs: other than her stop by Callichorus in Callimachus’ *Hymn to Demeter* (16), she may also have led to the discovery of the spring Bourina in Cos in Philetas’ *Demeter* (during her search for Persephone). See Spanoudakis (2002) 144-153 on Philetas fr. 6.

5.507-508). This is in fact the argument propounded in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* by Helios (82-87) and by Hades himself (363-364), and by Jupiter in the Ovidian version (*Met.* 5.524-529). It is surprising that Ovid has his Arethusa, a possible rape victim herself, adopt the male perspective in recounting Proserpina's predicament.²³³ Perhaps, then, not only her waters, but also her discourse is more mixed, or not unequivocally on the side of the female victim.

We have established, therefore, that the contest of Muses and Pierides represents a mingling of different generic categories, conveniently classified under "high" and "low". Even if "high" and "low" are still retained as somewhat helpful categories, they mingle with each other across the contest narrative. This mingling of genres, or stylistic registers, may also lead us to reconstruct other aspects of narrative or structural mingling: 1) its multiple levels of embeddedness make it impossible to distinguish between different narrative voices, and narrative choices. At no given time are we sure that a poetic choice will ingratiate one narrator with their audience, and not another, or both, 2) specifically the Proserpina story often branches out into yet more embedded stories, which deflect onto themselves, refract, and thereby implicitly articulate, the (story about the) rape of Proserpina, 3) the very contest between Muses and Pierides sounds like a false binary, since the Muses may traditionally reside either on Mt. Helicon in Boeotia or on Mt. Olympus in Pieria — so "Muses" and "Pierides" may be

²³³ She also takes over some of Hermes' words from the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, not to mention that her practical role in the Ovidian narrative places her in a position similar to that of Helios in the *Homeric Hymn*. See Hinds (1987) 87. Zissos (1999) interprets the relegation of Helios' role to the Ovidian Arethusa as indicative of an elevation of the female, since Calliope/the narrating Muse want to win the *captatio benevolentiae* of their nymph/goddess audience. This may account for the transference of the informer role, but not for Arethusa's positive interpretation of the abduction. Cahoon (1996) 55-56, who reads Cyane and Arethusa as dissenting voices within Calliope's narrative (the latter just aiming to ingratiate the Muses with the nymph judges, at the cost of overlooking the heinous nature of abduction and rape), views these lines as Arethusa's attempt to comfort Ceres.

interchangeable names for the same goddesses after all,²³⁴ 4) although the overarching story of the contest has a definitive endpoint, with the Pierides being defeated and turned into magpies (*Met.* 5.662-679), individual embedded stories within it display a significant degree of open-endedness, thereby flowing into one another.

This last point needs further clarification. One instance of open-endedness, where a clear ending would have thwarted the objectives of the narrator, is the end of the Typhonomachy, which is missing from the song of the Pierides, at least as relayed by the narrating Muse. The Olympians are supposed to have migrated and transformed into animals to avoid Typhoeus; but still, the world at the time of the contest is dominated by Jupiter, not Typhoeus, so the (king of the) Olympians must somehow have gained the upper hand. Calliope, again as reported by the unnamed Muse, provides an ending to the Typhonomachy, picking up where her adversary left off, and correcting her. Typhoeus has been buried beneath Mt. Etna, and this is when Dis ventures out to survey his kingdom, thus getting pierced by Cupid's arrow (*Met.* 5.346ff.). Whether the Pierides story would have suggested a different ending consisting in Typhoeus' victory (which is less possible) or it just omits the ending because it would have frustrated their argument about the Olympians' cowardice, the beginning of the Muses story overlaps with an ending to the Pierides story, thereby blurring the textual boundaries between the two.

There are yet more inconclusive endings in the Muses' story itself. When Triptotes narrowly avoids murder by the Scythian king Lyncus, he takes up Ceres' chariot again, probably in order to spread nourishment and agriculture across the (rest of the) earth, but still

²³⁴ Cf. Johnson (2008) 43-44.

this ending is not explicitly marked (*Met.* 5.660-661).²³⁵ Lastly, other than a conflation of different generic registers represented by rivers and springs, an obvious characteristic of Arethusa's story is that its end is left unclear. As a nymph, she has possibly avoided rape, but as an aquatic element, Alpheus may have mingled his waters with hers — this is definitely his intention, but whether he succeeds is another matter.²³⁶

I. Achelous as a narrator and the notion of boundaries

Different permutations of mingling (whether the ambiguous application of the name “Pierides”, the embedding of one story and narrative voice into another, the deflection of Proserpina's rape onto the nymphs' narratives, or different forms of open-endedness) characterize the Muses-Pierides contest and all its embedded stories. On first inspection, and regardless of any connections between “Proserpina” and “Erysichthon”, Achelous might be expected to be a “fluid” narrator too. And this is not only because of his aquatic form, but additionally because of the way in which he presents himself upon encountering Theseus: currently his torrent is so swollen that it sweeps along tree trunks and boulders, whole stables, complete with horses and oxen, even sturdy men (*Met.* 8.550-559). Practically, Achelous

²³⁵ Also, the change of Proserpina from sad to happy in *Met.* 5.564-568, where we might have expected a change in *Ceres*' countenance, omits the mother's reaction to the daughter's restoration, and a link between *Ceres*' potential satisfaction and the restoration of agriculture is not activated. Instead, in *Met.* 5.572 the focus switches back to Arethusa. In any case, there is a mutual slippage of *Ceres*' and Proserpina's characteristics and actions, or another blurring of boundaries. Cf. Hinds (1987) 95-96.

²³⁶ Arethusa may be self-reflexively signaling her own need to wrap up her story quickly, even through the imposition of an arbitrary ending. She thus claims that her metamorphosis into a spring took place more rapidly than she is narrating it to *Ceres* (*citius quam nunc tibi facta renarro*, *Met.* 5.653). Cf. Bessone (2020) 5.

seems eager to protect Theseus and his men from his own waves, and to take them under his roof until the torrent starts to flow within its regular bounds (*solito dum flumina curret / limite*, *Met.* 8.558-559). But, although he recognizes the risk posed by the situation for the heroes, he seems unable to stop the flooding — protection from it is all he can offer.²³⁷ In fact, even after Achelous wraps up his stories and the banquet itself, the water flow seems never to abate, with the result that the heroes leave the cave the following morning anyway (*Met.* 9.94-96). His aquatic form may thus be overflowing, or dismissive of boundaries — but his waters may not obey his own wishes, or he may ultimately not have control over his own waters.

In other words, while Achelous-as-a-river does not keep within its appointed boundaries, Achelous-as-a-god possibly views this observance of boundaries as positive. He acknowledges that his torrent is dangerous, but he perceives himself as an entity partly independent of his waters:²³⁸ he claims to have seen from the outside what his torrents are capable of (*vidi*, *Met.* 8.553),²³⁹ and his characterization of them as *rapaces* (*Met.* 8.551)²⁴⁰ may imply a negative

²³⁷ This ontological confusion is pointed out in passing by Feeney (1991) 233-235. Ovid may here be conflating the flood that caused Theseus' stay in Hecale's abode (in Callimachus' *Hecale*, which may be in the intertextual background of Theseus' adventures in the *Metamorphoses*) and Hecale's hospitality. Here Achelous is both the cause of the flood and the host who offers protection from it. See Fucecchi (2002) 98-100.

²³⁸ In the words of Li Causi (2000) 51-52: "Tutti questi eventi sono descritti con un linguaggio altamente epico che vuole essere oggettivo, come se l'«essere fiume» fosse scisso dall'«essere persona», come se Acheloo, osservatore passivo, non fosse responsabile dei disastri causati dalle sue acque. Abbiamo quindi una situazione paradossale di autoesperienza travestita da esperienza oggettiva: è come se *Acheloo fingesse di collocarsi in un punto di vista esterno a se stesso*" (emphasis mine). Cf. Anderson (1972) 382, with an emphasis rather on Ovidian wit: "normally, in serious poetry a reference to personal observation or hearing (*audivi*) serves to document a case and reinforce an argument. Here, however, the amusingly objective testimony which Achelous offers about the ravages of his own waters constitutes a typically Ovidian exploitation of a formal convention."

²³⁹ Cf. Bömer (1977) 172. Lines 550-559 are laden with Virgilian reminiscences. Cf., e.g., *magno misceri murmure pontum* (*Aen.* 1.124) ~ *obliquaque volvere magno | murmure*

value judgment. He thus tries to protect the heroes from himself, registering the havoc he (it?) can wreak on them and signaling his preference for safety — for the expected, for what everyone is used to (*solito [...] limite*, *Met.* 8.558-559), for boundaries. Achelous-as-a-river, thus, does not observe boundaries, but Achelous-as-a-god seems to embrace them as preferable. What about Achelous as a narrator?

As noted above, the image of a river carrying with it whatever it meets on its way may stand for lofty poetry, or for what Callimachus has self-reflexively rejected. And what is literalized by the third-person narrator as Achelous' swollen torrent may be metaphorically reflected on the Erysichthon story itself (as narrated by Achelous). The term that introduces Achelous as a river-god, *tumens* (*Met.* 8.550), has been argued to apply metapoetically to his narrative as well, especially to Erysichthon's story, while *tenues [...] undas* (*Met.* 8.559) signifies the opposite of his current condition (with *inattenuata [...] fames* (*Met.* 8.844-845) being another buzzword for lofty poetry inserted in the embedded story of Erysichthon).²⁴¹ But we have already established in section F that Achelous' circumstances and narrative evince a combination of Callimachean and anti-Callimachean elements, instead of a monolithic epic

saxa solent (*Met.* 8.551-552) and especially the ending of the first lines spoken by Aeneas: [...] *ubi tot Simois correpta sub undis | scuta virum galeasque et fortia corpora volvit!*" (*Aen.* 1.100-101) ~ *multa quoque hic torrens nivibus de monte solutis | corpora turbineo iuvenalia vertice mersit* (*Met.* 8.556-557).

²⁴⁰ As Bömer (1977) 172 notes, the combination *rapaces undae* is otherwise unattested in Latin poetry — this should perhaps give us pause as an instance, both of Achelous personifying his waters, and thereby identifying them with himself, but also distancing himself from them by characterizing them as destructive.

²⁴¹ See Barchiesi (1989) 57-61 and Tsitsiou-Chelidoni (2003) 339-341, with further bibliography. The plot-based excess of Erysichthon may reflect the narrative excess of his story's narrator, Achelous. For Achelous and his audience as violators of the physical landscape, and thus as Erysichthon-mirrors, see Murray (2004) 234-236.

discourse. One might contend that the balance ultimately tips towards the anti-Callimachean side — but still, there is more to his narrative identity than such a generic binary allows for.

Whichever end of the spectrum Achelous approaches, such an affiliation does not, in and of itself, mean that he rejects narrative organization or boundaries. On the one hand, Achelous-as-a-god detaches himself, through his statement, from his waters — should we necessarily take the unruliness of his waters, rather than his stated preference for peace and quiet, at face value, and thus construe him as an epic narrator? On the other hand, even if the anti-Callimachean associations of gushing torrents do lead us toward the identification of his style as epic, lack of organization does not necessarily follow from that. Epic, or elevated, poetry may very well encompass a significant degree of organization. This is, in fact, the impression produced by Minerva's tapestry (ecphrasis) at the beginning of *Met.* 6 (70-102): high style, praise of the gods and an unmistakable sense of structure.²⁴² Whether more epic, more Callimachean, or a mixture of both, Achelous comfortably displays a preference towards narrative organization.

Thus, Achelous may be considered as generically complex as the Muses-Pierides, insofar as there is a detectable mixture of genres in the discourse of both. In this sense, *backstory*

²⁴² As observed already by Anderson (1972) 151-171 and Leach (1984) 104-106, who points out more clearly the dependence of form on content. The parallelism between the contests of books 5 (Muses and Pierides) and 6 (Arachne and Minerva) is too obvious to be overlooked, and the underlying relevance of genre to both may also not be easily dismissed — but even in the early 1990s the simple dichotomy between “Hellenistic” (or “Ovidian”) Arachne and “epic” Minerva was challenged by Harries (1990, 74). Especially his section on Arachne's tapestry (1990, 65-69) shows her combining Hellenistic/Roman neoteric catalogue structures with Homeric/Virgilian ecphrastic techniques. Thus, my complication of genres in the Muses/Pierides contest ties in with discussions, not only of the book 5 contest itself, but also of its parallel in book 6. The similarity of Achelous' narrative preferences with those of Minerva might be highlighted through his prefatory statement before the Hercules story: *referam tamen ordine* (*Met.* 9.4) — Minerva asks the Muse *ne dubita vestrumque mihi refer ordine carmen* (*Met.* 5.336).

(Muses/Pierides) and *past/present* story (Achelous) yield similar answers to the question of their generic affiliations, and thus they may reasonably be read together from that standpoint as well. There is not a clear answer as to the generic affiliations of either party, but it is precisely the value of the generic question itself that may account for the parallel reading of the two stories. But they are simultaneously different from each other inasmuch as the stories from book 5 display a lack of narrative boundaries, whereas Achelous-as-a-narrator, whatever his generic preferences, keeps up such boundaries across all the three stories he narrates.

I am here using the term “boundary” in multiple ways, ranging from the literal to the self-reflexive — but the ontological status of Achelous as subject both to literal limits (as a river) and to textual limitations (as a narrator) may render this term a useful one for my purposes here. This term is also important for the chapter at large, in juxtaposing the flexibility, or relative lack of narrative boundaries, of the Proserpina *backstory* to the *past/present*, or to Achelous’ relative observance of narrative boundaries. Thus, the reader may consider *backstory* and *past/present* together, not only in the sense of generic ambiguity, or in that of a divinity’s (ontological) identity, but also in the sense of the metaphorical translation of Achelous’ literal identity into his narrative identity.

We may start exploring this notion of boundaries by looking at literal limits in the Echinades and Perimele story. Achelous points out, not only that what looks like one island from afar is actually an archipelago of five (*Met.* 8.577-578), but also that there is yet another island at a distance from the Echinades, Perimele (*Met.* 8.589-591). Both the Echinades and Perimele could be mistaken for one another, not only because they are neighboring islands, but also because they all were young women once. Then Achelous explains, not only that they were different entities in their previous form, but that their respective metamorphoses represent

the two different reasons for transformation running throughout the entire epic: punishment (Echinades, because they forgot to sacrifice to him, *Met.* 8.580-589) and rescue from someone else's wrath (Perimele, because they had sex and her father threw her off a cliff to punish her, *Met.* 8.591-610). Intratextually, the two instances, although superficially similar, correspond to the two main categories of transformation across the *Metamorphoses* — both the two women/islands and their respective narratives are considered separate. Achelous may thus be pointing to an internal taxonomy (or to separate categories) of transformation stories within the epic through his reference to a literal separation of Perimele and the Echinades as islands.²⁴³

Moving on to the Erysichthon story, there is reason to assume that Achelous' Ceres tale will bear some kind of relationship to "Proserpina", since Ceres and starvation feature in both. More than that, an evocation of the Proserpina story, together with a rejection of the need to narrate it this time around, is potentially signaled in *Met.* 8.781: (*motu*) *concussit gravidis oneratos messibus agros*. As soon as Ceres realizes that the dryads, and the oak tree, of her sacred grove have been violated by Erysichthon, she starts taking her wrath out on the crops by

²⁴³ Achelous may be self-reflexively alluding to his own tendency to detect (or impose) even imperceptible boundaries through the word *discrimen* (*Amnis ad haec "non est", inquit, "quod cernitis unum: | quinque iacent terrae; spatium discrimina fallit"*, *Met.* 8.577-578). The other appearances of this term across the *Metamorphoses* (1.222, 1.291, 6.62, 7.426, 10.242, 10.517, 10.612) indicate a distinction initially perceived as very slight, which however turns out to be significant — especially in the case of Theseus in book 7 (who narrowly escaped death) and in book 1 (where Lycaon is unsure whether Jupiter is human or divine and wants to make the distinction clearer, or where the deluge causes land and sea to be separated by nothing, although normally they are distinct). The phrase *continuam diduxit humum* (*Met.* 8.588) may also argue for a slippage between literal separation of undivided land into different islands and narrative organization of stories (inasmuch as a *deductum carmen*, in the proem of *Met.* 1.1-4, may point to Hellenistic poetry's tendency to embed separate stories into an overarching narrative — see my discussion in chapter I). Of course, *diducere* and *deducere* are different verbs, but the presence of *continuam* (a synonym of *perpetuam*) alongside *diduxit* may give us (self-reflexive) pause.

shaking them up. This might momentarily lead the reader to suspect that another story about the withholding of grain is to be expected shortly afterwards. Moreover, this initial hint might be not just generally mythological (pointing to the story of Persephone at large), but also specifically intratextual. In “Proserpina” Ceres strikes her chest in mourning as soon as she finds out that her daughter has been abducted (*inornatos laniavit diva capillos | et repetita suis percussit pectora palmis*, *Met.* 5.472-473), and the destruction of the earth’s agricultural produce follows immediately afterwards. In a sense, Achelous combines in his line the shaking/striking image of Ceres in “Proserpina” with her subsequent attack on crops. But, despite the similarity in Ceres’ violent motion upon reception of shocking news in both *backstory* and *past* story, “Erysichthon” is *not* about the destruction of crops after all.

Achelous is also, both intratextually and intertextually, possibly associated with Proserpina’s abduction — in this sense he may also be expected to recount part of it, but he thwarts this readerly expectation. One hint of the connection between Achelous and Ceres/Demeter, specifically as she is searching for her missing daughter, comes from the Callimachean hymn: τρις μὲν δὴ διέβας Ἀχελώϊον ἀργυροδίναν, | τοσσάκι δ’ ἀνάων ποταμῶν ἐπέρασας ἕκαστον (*Cer.* 13-14). It is not necessary, geographically speaking, that Demeter meets Achelous²⁴⁴ on her way to Callichorus at Eleusis, where she is next situated (*Cer.* 15-16) — this depends on where she started out from, and on where the abduction is located in

²⁴⁴ Hopkinson is inclined to believe that the interchangeability of Achelous and Ocean obtains here, since “it seems to make more sense here for Demeter to pass the world’s end than for her to cross a particular Aetolian river” (1984, 93). Cf. D’Alessio 2004, who argues for the chronological priority of Achelous as the source of all rivers in Greek imagination, which was then followed by the introduction of Ocean and reconciled in the *Iliad* 21 passage by the subordination of one to the other. See also footnote 205 above.

Callimachus, which is not specified.²⁴⁵ But still, even if she does cross Achelous (and three times at that) she never drinks from his waters or bathes in them (οὐ πίεις οὔτ' ἄρ' ἔδες τῆνον χρόνον οὐδὲ λοέσσα, *Cer.* 12 and ἀνσταλέα ἄποτός τε καὶ οὐ φάγεις οὐδὲ λοέσσα, *Cer.* 16).²⁴⁶ Ovid may thus be alluding to this intertextual connection of Demeter/Ceres and Achelous through his choice of Achelous as the narrator of a Ceres story, in order in the end to have his Achelous *not* narrate the particular Ceres story about Proserpina. In Callimachus the relationship may be one of literal separation; in Ovid the idea is rather one of self-reflexive separation.²⁴⁷

Moreover, not only in Callimachus, but in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* itself there is a hint linking the Proserpina story to Achelous. In book 5, the Sirens, Proserpina's companions who possibly witnessed the abduction but were unable to stop Dis, and who subsequently got transformed into singing birds, are called *Acheloides* (*Met.* 5.552). However, in *Met.* 8 Achelous does not make any mention of his transformed daughters. The designation *Acheloides* may be a very minor point,²⁴⁸ but for the fact that it is not otherwise motivated by

²⁴⁵ For the various geographical settings of the myth in general, and their connection to the Sicilian spring Cyane in particular, see Bömer (1976) 333. Sicilian Henna as the setting of Proserpina's abduction is important to Cicero, who claims that Verres as *propraetor* of Sicily (among other financial atrocities) stole an ancient bronze statue of Ceres from her temple (*Verr.* 2.4.107ff). For the Hennan setting cf. Diodorus Siculus 5.4.2 ff.

²⁴⁶ Demeter's refusal to wash in the Achelous has been taken as metapoetic rejection of inflated poetics, in contrast to the "slender" tear that the goddess sheds in *Cer.* 17. See Heyworth (2004) 150-152. This argument is indicative of the tendency to examine every allusion to water in metapoetic terms.

²⁴⁷ Callimachus, the Greek predecessor of "Erychthon", may be signaling a similar recollection of, but also desire for detachment from, the *HHD*, or the Greek predecessor of "Proserpina", beyond the *praeteritio*. See Bing (1996) 30-33.

²⁴⁸ For marked patronymics in a story, which link it to another story where the father plays an important part, see Tsitsiou-Chelidoni (1999) 287-288. She thus argues for a comprehensive Ovidian strategy of dense internal cross-references in the *Metamorphoses*,

the plot: the abduction takes place in Sicilian Henna, nowhere near the Aetolian river Achelous.²⁴⁹ Even despite the insignificance of one word, the Sirens-as-singers are envisaged as much more Callimachean than their father, as is shown by their characterization as *doctae* (*Met.* 5.555). Also, the description of their voices as *canor mulcendas natus ad aures* (*Met.* 5.561) may point to a less elevated, more sonorous and melodic voice.²⁵⁰ Even if the reader is tempted to connect the two passages, the relationship of Achelous with both searching Ceres and the Sirens is one of superficial proximity, but ultimately one of separation. The Ovidian Achelous then hints at the possibility of himself as narrator, or his Erysichthon story, being somehow connected to the Proserpina story — but at the same time both the Callimachean intertext and the Sirens intratext point to a chasm between the two.

There are yet more internal references to boundaries in the Erysichthon story, even regardless of its superficial connections to the Proserpina *backstory*. The fact that *Fames* resides in Scythia, however interpreted, specifies a particular location, which is both realistically imaginable and exaggeratedly remote. Ovid takes pains to locate her at a specific,

which is signaled through the use of the same person's name (or their patronymic) in the two stories, through allusions to the main plot of one story in another (either foreshadowing or flashback), or through the mention (and sometimes fulfilment) of prophecies.

²⁴⁹ This paternity of the Sirens is first introduced, as far as we can tell, in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* 4.891-903. Sampson (2012) 91-92 combines the Callimachean reference to Achelous and Callichorus with the Apollonian reference to the Sirens as Achelous' daughters, and concludes that in Callimachus "Callichorus" is an antonomasia for the "beautiful chorus" of the Sirens. According to Sampson, this is a piece of Callimachean learned playfulness, which alludes to the *Homeric Hymn* and its subject matter, although the *Homeric Hymn* is passed over at the beginning of the Callimachean hymn in a *praeteritio*.

²⁵⁰ Zissos (1999) 105-107 aligns the brief reference to the Sirens with his overall argument that various nymphs/maidens are mentioned with a positive valence, so that Calliope may ingratiate herself with the nymph judges (or the narrating Muse with Minerva). Here the Sirens, through their metamorphosis, are indirectly absolved of responsibility for not protecting Proserpina from Dis.

real place — not in the Underworld, or at another conceptual place that cannot be pinpointed on a map.²⁵¹ This place is, however, pointedly distant from Thessaly, the main setting of “Erysichthon”. Also, Achelous points out twice that Ceres and famine (or the personified *Fames*) do not cross paths. Whatever this is taken to mean, the narrator shows a tendency to disassociate from each other concepts that are hard to disentangle. This geographical and conceptual separation of Ceres and *Fames* may again be read self-reflexively: the workings of *Fames* render the Erysichthon story different from the traditional connections of Ceres with hunger (or the withholding of grain), presumably as attested in the Proserpina story.

These are some hints to the effect that Ovid has constructed his Achelous as fond of different sorts of boundaries, as opposed to his stream that sweeps along everything it meets in its path. Most of the time, a literal boundary may get translated as a narrative boundary as well: Ovid has his Achelous show that (in the *Metamorphoses*) retributive transformation is different from transformation that rescues, and the same goes for stories about both; or that his own Ceres story is different from “Proserpina”, or from (Ceres in) the Persephone myth in general, or from Callimachus’ “Erysichthon”.²⁵²

²⁵¹ For ethnic stereotypes about Scythia as barren, and thus about the Scythians as primitive nomads, see *Airs, Waters, Places* 18.7-27, Virgil *Georgics* 3.349-380 with Thomas (1988) 108-113 and Ovid’s own internalization of that stereotype in his exilic works. For the argument that Ovid locates Tomis, his place of exile, in Scythia (perhaps as a result of such stereotypical associations) instead of Moesia (which is more geographically accurate) see Williams (1994) 3-25. In his exilic works, Ovid picks up mainly the freezing Scythian temperatures, but also the lack of agricultural production (e.g. *Pont.* 1.10.31-32) — he attributes it to (the ever-present fear of) war, not necessarily to any weather conditions (*Tr.* 3.10.67-76, cf. *Pont.* 1.7.13-13-14). But his optimistic outlook in *Tr.* 3.12 shows grain growing in the fields too (*Tr.* 3.12.11-12). Cf. Batty (1994) 89-102 for the idea that “Scythian” connotes a broad (nomadic) lifestyle rather than a specific ethnic identity.

²⁵² Achelous has also been read as a marker of narrative repetitiveness: through the mirroring of his hospitality onto the hospitality of Philemon and Baucis in the inset story

But he also tends to separate out different concepts by comparing himself to other characters unfavorably. For example, once the Erysichthon/Mestra story is over, he realizes that his own transformative power is relatively restricted (*etiam mihi nempe novandi est / corporis, o iuvenis, numero finita, potestas, Met. 8.879-880*). This may be a way for him to bookend the Erysichthon narrative and to start his duel narrative at the beginning of book 9,²⁵³ but it also means that the story of his own (attempt to win the duel through) transformation is by necessity limited. In fact, he explains in 8.881-884 that he can only change into a snake and a bull, which would distance him from figures like Proteus and Mestra — they can conceivably take on any form. His corresponding narrative in book 9 about how he transformed himself in order to evade Hercules also mentions only these two animals (he turns into a snake in *Met. 9.62-79* and into a bull in 9.80-86). So, in this sense, boundaries are synonymous with limitations, both in Achelous' skills as a shape-shifter/wrestling contestant and in his narrative of attempts to vanquish his opponent.²⁵⁴ If he had turned himself into yet more beings (so the

narrated during the banquet, or through the reduplication of the Perimele and Echinades story, or through Proteus' and Mestra's multiple metamorphoses. See Boyd (2006) 199-203. Literally, however, Achelous is not the same as Meander who circles back on him/itself, and therefore works as a literalized image of repetition — although Boyd implies that Meander's circling back is theoretically applicable to any river.

²⁵³ The transition from book 8 to book 9 may be mapped onto a transition from a "Theseid" to a "Heracleid". Also, the intertextual relationship between the beginning of *Met. 9* and *Odyssey 9*, which introduces a whole new book sequence about Odysseus' adventures, helps establish the divide between *Met. 8* and *9* as quite sharp. See Holzberg (1998) 83-84. This may be yet another instance of Achelous' observance of boundaries.

²⁵⁴ This wrestling match is paradoxical in terms of ontology as well: the god Achelous looks defeated every step of the way, while the mortal Hercules rebukes Achelous' preliminary boastful words (usually it is the mortals who challenge the gods to a contest and then get defeated). His *gravitas* can only help Achelous so much in the first part of the fight (*Met. 9.39-41*), and he thus resorts to self-transformation — his ontology is at issue throughout, and commented on by Hercules. His snake transformation does not help him because, according to Hercules, Achelous-as-a-snake is tiny compared to the Hydra Hercules

argument goes) his story would potentially have expanded more, until one wrestler finally defeated the other. Or, alternatively, we may infer that his story about his own transformative abilities is shorter than a potential story about Proteus' (*Met.* 8.730-737) countless transformations would have been.²⁵⁵ Once again, literal boundaries (here in the sense of limitations) may translate into narrative limits (or narrative brevity).

All in all, a metapoetic reading of *backstory* and *past* story has highlighted another area where similar questions may be asked of both, but the answers are quite different in each. Simply put, the *backstory* is more manifold than the *past* or the *present* story in the sense of tales spilling over into one another or being left open-ended; Achelous, by contrast, is clearer in his observance of narrative organization. But in the realm of the blending of generic registers both *backstory* and *past/present* are equally nuanced: neither of them is decidedly "epic" or "Callimachean".

J. The need to impose an end

But even if Achelous imposes boundaries on the stories he narrates, there is a dangerous way in which the Erysichthon story specifically threatens to keep chasing its tail, and therefore to keep deferring its ending. The traditional, and crucial, element of the Erysichthon story, that he keeps eating without feeling sated, could have produced an endless series of Erysichthon's

has slain (*Met.* 9.67-76). See Secci 2009. Secci also (2009, 42) observes that Hercules sees Achelous' transformed statuses as add-ons to his original identity, perhaps granted him by the gods (not inherently his own). Thus, Ovid problematizes Achelous' identity during his encounters with both Theseus (*present*) and Hercules (*past*).

²⁵⁵ In fact, he suggests that he is reluctant to narrate the story of his defeat because he feels embarrassed (*Met.* 9.4-5), thus opening up the possibility that he, and any narrator, may consciously limit themselves in what they are willing to narrate. Cf. Rosati (2002) 301.

attempts to procure food for himself. Ovid has chosen not to depart from the sort of punishment that afflicts Callimachus' Erysichthon, nor does he (or Achelous) provide any hint to the effect that there might be some reasonable means for his Erysichthon to evade the punishment — or some kind of food that would eventually cure his lack of satiety.

Callimachus provides a list of social gatherings that Erysichthon started avoiding once infected with perpetual hunger (*Cer.* 74-86). These branch out of the main narrative,²⁵⁶ and can be piled on top of one another endlessly — since the reader expects that Erysichthon is not likely to be cured of his addiction, the invitations extended to the young man and the excuses invented by his mother can be added on infinitely. Moreover, the false stories made up by the mother (that Erysichthon is on a mission to claim back stolen oxen, or that he is recovering from a boar attack, or that he is counting his flocks, or that he has fallen ill) all introduce tiny narratives into the main one. We do not necessarily get distracted from the main story by them, and, other than appreciate the humor, we may find little practical value in them in terms of additions to the plot. If any of these tiny stories were missing, or if even more were added, the overall meaning of social exclusion would still obtain in very much the same way.²⁵⁷

Ovid does not retain any of these stories. In their place, he offers an *iterative* narrative: he takes a fictional event that happened multiple times with little differences between its different instantiations, and he narrates it (or he has his Achelous narrate it) only once. Erysichthon

²⁵⁶ Skempis 2016 shows how the mother's excuses may be accommodating versions about Erysichthon that are incompatible with his identity as a ravenous food consumer, especially by alluding to excluded and then included-through-the-cracks "false" stories about Odysseus' Cretan identity in the *Odyssey*.

²⁵⁷ Erysichthon's mother is remarkably resourceful, both as a narrator and as a participant in social life: she imagines scenarios which describe her son's affliction as socially acceptable (either in a future or in a totally imaginary world). See Skempis (2016) 40.

orders quantities of food that would satisfy whole nations; these huge quantities give rise to yet more intense hunger; thus a vicious circle of food consumption leading to the need for yet more food is set up (*Met.* 8.829-834).

Erysichthon's raging famine reaches a whole new stage once his household runs out of resources that he can consume — and this fact also grants Achelous' narrative some shape. In Callimachus (*Cer.* 111-113), this is the last stage before the end. After this, an ending is provided for the young king, who ends up at the crossroads begging passersby for food leftovers (*Cer.* 114-115). Then the hymnic "I" ends by trying to avert such a divine catastrophic revenge from her own life (*Cer.* 116-117), and from then on the narrative part about Erysichthon is put aside, with the narrator returning to the envisaged ritual context of the hymn's performance.

The Callimachean narrator, then, does close off her narrative in order to return to the moral of the story, but her closing event is rather a non-event. There is no resolution to the question of ravenous hunger, other than a continuous attempt of the protagonist to procure more food for himself in any way possible. No further information is provided (because it is largely insignificant) about whether Erysichthon continued finding ways to satisfy himself temporarily, or died of starvation, or anything in between. Erysichthon at the crossroads is, then, an ending that may be considered open-ended.

Ovid was possibly aware of the Callimachean version, but what is most un-Callimachean about his version is the added story about Erysichthon's unnamed daughter — I am here referring to her as Mestra, a name gleaned from parallel versions.²⁵⁸ Only once she appears

²⁵⁸ Mainly from the *Ehoiae*, Hesiod fr. 43a M-W. Erysichthon's insatiable hunger leads him, not to sell his daughter as a slave, but to marry her to Sisyphus' son Glaucus, with the

does the reader realize that the topic of shape-shifters had triggered the Erysichthon story in the first place. Whatever importance may be attributed to Mestra's story vis-à-vis that of Erysichthon proper, it seems (at least based on extant intertexts) that the link between the king as a violator of Ceres' grove and his shape-shifter daughter is Ovid's innovation (although Mestra and perpetually hungry Erysichthon may have been linked by tradition before him). Now, the Mestra story is motivated precisely by what in Callimachus had led to the open-ended ending: Erysichthon's home is out of resources, he can never satisfy his hunger, and this is when the narrator leaves him in a state of perpetual begging for scraps.

Contrary to Callimachus, in Ovid insatiable hunger does not lead to different variations on the same theme, but to a slightly different narrative: that of Erysichthon selling his daughter as a slave in order to procure food for himself, and Mestra's subsequent liberation from her masters thanks to the gift of transformation granted her by Neptune (in exchange for her virginity, *Met.* 8.843-878). So, for the moment, an end to Erysichthon's story is both imposed, since Mestra's transformations represent a second, intense stage of her father's hunger, and also deferred, because the Mestra story is still tapping into the Erysichthon story, inasmuch as the father's hunger provides the reason for the daughter's metamorphoses.

marriage gifts expected to satisfy his hunger. Mestra does return to her father thanks to her metamorphic skills, but it is not certain (to the extent that the *Ehoia* is readable) that this cycle repeats itself with other suitors — quite the opposite, Sisyphus repeats the narrative by seeking out a new daughter-in-law. The reason for the Hesiodic Erysichthon's hunger is not specified. Another testimony comes from Antoninus Liberalis XVII 5, drawn from Nicander's *Heteroioumena*: the shape-shifter is called Hypermestra, and the repetitive nature of her metamorphoses is not clear from Antoninus' summary. On the different Mestra traditions see also Hollis (1970) 129-130. On the genealogical organization of all three Achelous insets (they all belong in the Porthaon family, and their order of narration corresponds to genealogical progression) see Ziogas (2013) 132-135.

The splitting of Achelous' narrative into two sub-parts may enhance the impression of organization and clear boundaries. But the plot elements that Ovid/Achelous has to handle in both cases lead to stories that threaten to spiral out of control, at least since Ovid has retained the basic element of Erysichthon's hunger giving rise to more hunger. Much as Erysichthon's insatiable hunger might have led to the continuous perpetuation of his story, Mestra is capable of multiple metamorphoses, both into another being and back into her human self. This means that Ovid/Achelous could have infinitely extended either story branch (Mestra's or Erysichthon's proper). But the ending imposed on both is quite hard to transcend, and it limits the possibility that "Erysichthon" may be completely open-ended after all.²⁵⁹

As far as we can tell based on extant intertexts, autophagy as the end to Erysichthon's life is Ovid's invention. If my reading about Achelous' tendency to impose boundaries (and clear endings) on his narrative is correct, Ovid goes one step away from the Callimachean open-endedness by suggesting death as the end of the story — death is quite a clear closural device.²⁶⁰ This implied ending is also plausibly motivated by the context: Erysichthon does not randomly stab himself, for example, nor does he get murdered by another character; but his one

²⁵⁹ Two commentaries *ad* 877-878 tend to acknowledge that Erysichthon is not technically dead at the end of the story, but it can hardly afford to follow another direction: "Erysichthon, whose being has been transformed into Hunger, now acts out his alienation from his body by using it for food and also dying, a self-cannibal." (Anderson 1972, 415) and "With a certain reticence, Achelous stops before the point of death." (Hollis 1970, 147).

²⁶⁰ *Pace* Santucci (2020) 144-145, who claims that Erysichthon is eventually forced to submit to female (or natural, Cereal) cyclical time through autophagy. Erysichthon's eventual death is not mentioned, but the avoidance of repetitive stories about his social isolation, as well as the single instance of Mestra's transformations, alongside autophagy may signal (not quite an irrevocable end but) a tendency towards the imposition of an end. "Cyclicity", a structured form of repetition, is perhaps *not* evident because there are no separate stages in Erysichthon's repetitive actions (for example, the cyclicity of the seasons depends on the rotation of four different seasons, with the first one following again upon the fourth).

addiction, his tendency to eat everything, backfires on him, and leads him (possibly) to death.²⁶¹ If this end is accepted, it also leads the Mestra story to a definitive ending: with her father dead, she presumably does not need to transform herself any longer in order to rescue him from his own destructive habits,²⁶² while she also ends up marrying Autolycus (as Achelous has already mentioned in *Met.* 8.738).

In this case as well, intra- and intertextual readings nuance our understanding of open-endedness or closure: the Ovidian Erysichthon's autophagy gives the story a more definitive ending than the obscure endings of either Callimachus' "Erysichthon" or the Muses/Pierides narratives of book 5. Such a reading may then direct our attention to another notable aspect of the story: the Ovidian "Erysichthon" may not be just about impiety, or lack of satiety, or the divine's revenge, but also about imposing endings — and this insight ultimately stems from a *backstory* reading, combined with intertextuality.²⁶³

²⁶¹ Faulkner (2011) 87-88 construes autophagy, or cannibalism, as undoing the gift of agriculture and civilization granted by Demeter/Ceres in tradition and in the *Metamorphoses* itself. However, cannibalism is not quite the same as autophagy. There is no indication that Erysichthon has consumed (or tries to consume) any other human, and autophagy is both more motivated by the context (there is nothing else anymore for Erysichthon to eat other than himself) and a successful means to end a story definitively (he dies, therefore he cannot consume anything anymore).

²⁶² Pace Fantham (1993-1994) 31: "But having devised a perpetual solution to Erysichthon's needs, Ovid can only end the narrative by violating the logic of Mestra's talent."

²⁶³ I have not referred to Achelous' interlocutor Lelex as an open-ended or organized narrator, but overall he displays a similar tendency to impose an end to a story ("Philemon and Baucis") which thematizes repetitive narrative: while the husband and wife themselves habitually tell stories, either to disguised Jupiter and Mercury or afterwards to various visitors of their temple (the latter are essentially the "Philemon and Baucis", just without the end), their transformation itself puts an end to their narrative instances — and Ovid/Lelex refrains from reproducing those implied narratives throughout. See Gauly (2009) 68-69.

K. Characters and knowledge; conclusions

So far I have drawn multiple connections between “Proserpina” (*backstory*) and “Erysichthon” (*past*), which may offer the reader some abstract takeaways: different definitions of hunger, personifications, open-endedness and closure of stories, even the dynamic opposition of different poetic genres. The *backstory* approach, or the possibility of reading “Proserpina” as background to “Erysichthon”, in the end justifies the reader in posing similar questions to the two stories (and thus subsuming them both under similar conceptual categories), while receiving slightly different (i.e. roughly simpler and more complicated) answers in each case. Such questions may be quite crucial for the particular stories as either the third-person or the internal narrator sketches them out to the reader. But then the question arises whether any of those takeaways are somehow communicated to, or open to investigation by, the characters as well.

The question of the characters’ knowledge, and its differences from, or similarities to, that of the readers is a potential link between this chapter and the previous two. In the latter, a productive tension was detected between knowledge offered to the characters through vision (chapter II) and information transmission (chapter III), on the one hand, and the understanding gained by the reader through precisely the act of reading, on the other. In other words, I suggested that characters and readers explored the same objects of knowledge (i.e. prior events of the plot) and thereby deciphered *backstories* in hindsight. Thus, the readers were invited to rethink about what they had already found out, and to juxtapose it to what characters found out. Readers (through reading) and characters (through vision/information transmission) engage in a similar process, the object of which (plot events) is common to both, but their respective levels of success vary. If the reader tends to believe the (third-

person/heterodiegetic) narrator, they have the standard version of “what happened”. By contrast, the characters within the stories are sometimes deprived of this insight, and their alternative methods are thus proven to be less than perfectly reliable.

Therefore, it may be fruitful to trace a similar parallel process, and an object of knowledge that characters and readers have in common, in this chapter as well. In the preceding sections of this chapter, the readers’ takeaway referred to plot events, but it also centered around broader questions that connect *backstory* with *past* (and *present*). In this section, a discrepancy between the readers’ and the characters’ potential to connect the two temporal levels (and thus to follow their complex relationships, as I have presented them above) is explained by a very simple textual fact: besides Ceres, the two stories share no common characters. Although the relationship between the two stories based on Ceres, hunger, and river gods is open to the reader, this possibility of connecting the dots is foreclosed for the characters simply because of the stories’ separate placement within the *Metamorphoses*. The only common character is the goddess herself, but “Erysichthon” (or its narrator, Achelous) does not present its Ceres as somehow remembering (or flashing back to) “Proserpina”.²⁶⁴ There is nothing to suggest that Achelous has “read” “Proserpina” either,

²⁶⁴ There seems to be no change (no metaphorical metamorphosis) in the identity of Ceres over the course of the Proserpina story — this might be due to her limited interaction with mortals (or with the young man who mocked her) during her search. By contrast, the episode at Celeus’ home (whether he is a king, in the *Homeric Hymn*, or a poor man, in the *Fasti*) shows her first attempting to benefit mankind, but then distancing herself from humans once she realizes their shortcomings (i.e. that Metaneira cannot comprehend her attempts to immortalize her son). Cf. Felson-Rubin and Deal (1994) 196-197. This change runs parallel to the momentary approach of the divine and the human during Demeter’s search — it is this momentary identification that constitutes the main *aetion* for the Eleusinian Mysteries. See Foley (1994) 97-112. In Ovid, there is no indication of a change in Ceres’ character from “Proserpina” to “Erysichthon”, or within the “Erysichthon” (other than the different mechanics of hunger, discussed above in section D). Perhaps significant to her

despite the implicit inclusion of ways in which the reader may connect him to Proserpina's abduction. Nor is there any hint that any other character, either of the *present* (Theseus and his men) or of the "Erysichthon" inset story (*past*) has any information about what happened during Proserpina's abduction (*backstory*).

Therefore, the temporal aspect of the tension I have been tracing in the previous chapters is foreclosed. There is no possibility for the characters to pass down knowledge from one temporal level to another, simply because there are no characters to act as vehicles of information. Nor is there a common setting which would provide characters with visual clues about a *backstory* having taken place at the same location. In other words, the reader may be invited to consider "Proserpina" as a *backstory* to the circumstances of "Erysichthon"'s characters — but access to the *backstory* is open to neither *past* nor *present* characters.

We are also dealing with a case whose metapoetic implications are perhaps more far-ranging than those of the previous chapters. Although the clear-cut distinction between "epic Erysichthon" and "Callimachean Proserpina" has been undermined, generic tension is still relevant to both stories, and it constitutes yet another connecting element between the two. But this part of my discussion, which the reader may be encouraged to reflect on, is also foreclosed to the characters. The same goes for the other aspect of the previous sections' metapoetic reading: we are not meant to speculate that an open-ended narrator has consciously rejected the possibility of closure, or vice versa.

This conclusion may seem like a truism — and it largely is. But our inquiry may not necessarily have exhausted all the angles from which we may view characters' potential for

characterization is only her gradual reaction to her daughter's abduction, from numbness in shock to revenge against Sicily to reproach of Jupiter. See Fantham (2004-2005) 117-119.

knowledge. The possibility of characters' backward glances may not, in this chapter, link *backstory* to *past* through knowledge — but the next logical step may be that (a process through which characters acquire) knowledge still exists, but is by necessity limited within a particular temporal level. To this question I shall turn next.

Even if we remove the temporal element of *backstories* from the characters' potential for knowledge (because in this chapter the *backstory* is not contiguous with the rest), the ironical tension between readers and characters still has to be based on their simultaneous attempts to figure out the same (or a broadly similar) type or object of knowledge. This parallel process is, however, not detectable in the text. If we remove the metapoetic connotations of the two stories, and the potential of knowledge to connect two temporal levels (which are not open to characters, and thus do not connect readers with characters), the remaining objects of the readers' knowledge may be detected in two areas: 1) plot events and 2) broader questions stemming from such plot events: how hunger works, what falls inside Ceres'/Fames' purview, whether starvation is objectively or subjectively perceived, whether Achelous or Alpheus are rivers or gods (or both), and so forth. Do these issues feature as the characters' objects of knowledge as well? Or, in other words, is there a parallel process through which characters and readers may (not) acquaint themselves with such objects?

In a sense, the two objects are interdependent. If the desired object of the readers' knowledge is the different definitions of hunger (lack of access to sustenance or interpretation of one's bodily needs), the lack of characters' knowledge about that topic is conspicuous. Such a lack of abstract knowledge, of course, results from their ignorance about plot events that have brought about their current situation: neither the entire earth's human population in book 5 nor Erysichthon in book 8 are aware of what has happened to them, let

alone of its broader implications. But this is not a case of a character's unsuccessful attempt to gain insight, nor a question of the narrator (Calliope/Achelous or the third-person one) drawing the reader's attention to a character's failure to understand their situation.

In fact, after his visitation by *Fames* and the inspiration of hunger's essence into him, Erysichthon virtually turns into an automaton, or into an incarnation of hunger itself. Although he does not necessarily argue in a structured, logical manner even before cutting down the tree ('*non dilecta deae solum, sed et ipsa licebit | sit dea, iam tanget frondente cacumine terram*', *Met.* 8.755-756 and *aspicit hunc 'mentis' que 'piae cape praemia!' dixit | Thessalus*, *Met.* 8.766-767, and contrary to his Callimachean counterpart), at least he has something to say. Afterwards, however, he does not think, speak, or focalize any part of the text. He does not try to figure out what has happened to him, or what has caused his excessive hunger — in fact, it is not even clear that he perceives his new relationship to nutrition as somehow extraordinary.²⁶⁵ He subsequently sells his daughter in order to provide for himself (*Met.* 8.843-847), but again there is no indication that either father or daughter views the situation as transcending regular human experience. Ovid removes the rest of Erysichthon's family from Callimachus' version (where Erysichthon's mother tried to shield him from social ridicule, in *Cer.* 73-86, and his father Triopas prayed to Poseidon for salvation, in *Cer.* 96-106), therefore we have no access to a potential focalizer other than Erysichthon himself (and perhaps his daughter).

The same goes for the human population that has been deprived of nutrition in book 5: their starving condition, which the reader may infer from Ceres' destructive actions (*Met.*

²⁶⁵ *queritur ieiunia* in 8.831 does not point to a pervasive understanding of his paradoxical situation, just to an individual exclamation of hunger.

5.477-486), is never actually focalized through the humans themselves, either individually (through a typical representative) or collectively. In fact, the divinities themselves do not seem to register Ceres' actions as a disruption of the cosmic order: Jupiter does not approach her with the request to restore sustenance to mankind, in order for humans in turn to restore sacrifices and rites to the Olympians (as happens in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*).²⁶⁶ He just argues in favor of his own good intentions in marrying their daughter to a not so negligible bridegroom (*Met.* 5.523-529, Helios uses a similar argument in *HHD* 83-87). If the rest of the Ovidian gods have become aware of Ceres' revenge on mankind, the text does not show them exploring the implications of that revenge for the world, or even for themselves.

There is, then, a disinclination of the characters for the mental process that the reader may be encouraged to follow — or at least the text does not provide any insight into such issues. Characters are unaware of events that belong outside of their own stories — especially the characters of “Erysichthon” do not seem aware of Ceres' previous affliction of mankind with hunger in response to Proserpina's abduction. But they are also not (shown to be) interested in events of their own story, or in the immediate causes of their current predicament. To take this a step further, there is no unequivocal indication in the text that the

²⁶⁶ In the *HHD*, the narrator sets up a connection between annihilation of mankind and the Olympians' deprivation of their prerogatives: καί νύ κε πάμπαν ὄλεσσε γένος μερόπων ἀνθρώπων | λιμοῦ ὕπ' ἀργαλήης, γεράων τ' ἐρικυδέα τιμὴν | καὶ θυσιῶν ἡμερσεν Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχοντας (310-312). Thus, Zeus first sends Iris to Demeter to change her mind, but the messenger goddess is unsuccessful (313-324) — he then sends down all the gods, who promise Demeter not only gifts, but whatever honor among the Olympians she chooses (325-330). Demeter's intransigence finally prompts Zeus to send Hermes to Hades to have Persephone released because (according to Hermes) Demeter μέγα μῆδεταί ἔργον, | φθειῖσαι φύλ' ἀμενηνὰ χαμαιγενέων ἀνθρώπων | σπέρμ' ὑπὸ γῆς κρύπτουσα, καταφθινύθουσα δὲ τιμᾶς | ἀθανάτων (349-352). Thus, the gods in the *HHD* are painfully aware of Demeter's wrath, her destructive actions towards humans, and the consequences of those actions for the honors of the Olympians themselves.

victims of hunger (whether collective or individual) have registered their situation of starvation in the first place. Characters are unaware of events presented to the reader by the third-person/internal narrators; thus, they do not extrapolate from their situation about how to define hunger, which divinity has effected this state and through which means, which food types Ceres stands for, whether Ceres represents both the positive and the negative sides of nutrition, and so forth. Erysichthon is also not aware of *Fames*' association with Scythia, or of the fact that extreme hunger is supposed to reside there.

This is a slightly different instance of lack of knowledge compared to chapters II and III: here there is no mention of the characters' (thwarted) process of knowledge acquisition. Characters just seem completely disconnected from an understanding of events that impact them directly. In this way, Ovid's reader (or the respective internal audiences) may be encouraged to reflect on abstract issues while following the plot — but the characters themselves seem oblivious, not just to the answers those questions call for, but even to the questions themselves. Even given that characters in the *Metamorphoses* do not generally engage in abstract philosophical contemplation, attempts to reconstruct practically what has happened in their (immediate) past are sometimes evident, as has been shown in the previous two chapters of this dissertation. In the case of the Ceres stories, this attempt at reconstruction need not have been linked to a distinct temporal level, or to the theoretical questions that readers are invited to consider, but there is still no textual hint that the characters register, or wonder about, what has happened to them.

A similar tendency may be detected, not only in the realm of Ceres, *Fames* and hunger, but also in that of river gods. Of course, different ways of identifying the variable associations of Ceres and springs/ rivers with metapoetic considerations, either with

closure/open-endedness or with generic binaries, are lost on the characters themselves. However, the composite nature of Achelous as both a river and a god, who may keep his distance from his waters even to the point of protecting Theseus and his men from them (or from himself, *Met.* 8.550-559), does not come as a surprise to any of the heroes. In fact, Theseus accepts Achelous' invitation by agreeing to make use of his home and his advice, as if his interlocutor were just a regular respectable host. He uses the twofold construction *utar [...] domoque [...] consilioque tuo* (*Met.* 8.560-561), which is perhaps superfluous (or a hendiadys), since Achelous' advice (*consilio*) consists precisely in how Theseus should make use of his home (*domo*). Instead, Theseus could have used a twofold construction that would reflect Achelous' double identity (Achelous himself uses a similar zeugma in *pariter animis immanis et undis*, *Met.* 8.584) but he (i.e. Theseus) does not.

This case is not necessarily one of a character ignoring the issues that surround Achelous' manifold identity — Theseus may very well be aware of them. The point of the encounter between Theseus' men and Achelous is just irrelevant to his status as a river god, and to them it only seems like a fortuitous incident that provides them with shelter from the flood. This observation may be different from the one about the characters' stance towards hunger. The latter characters were unaware both of plot events and of their more abstract implications, and they also never engaged in a process of (however ultimately unsuccessful) knowledge acquisition. Here the characters seem aware of what is happening on the level of the plot (i.e. that Achelous is offering them hospitality, and that it is in their interest to accept it), and perhaps they are also in a position to understand that the entity before them is both a river and a god. However, that understanding of theirs is just as immaterial to the development of

their story as their lack of understanding is to the characters of book 5. The text just does not draw the reader's attention to the connection of these characters to knowledge.

Something quite similar, but perhaps with more far-reaching consequences, is the case with the way Achelous' counterpart in book 5, Alpheus, is perceived. Arethusa does not draw distinctions between her assault by a god and (once she melted away into a spring) her assault by a river — so much so that she does not even elaborate further on their potential union in their aquatic forms (as discussed in section H). To be sure, she does reflect back on her terrifying experience. However, the springboard for this story is her impartiality to Sicily, which she defends against Ceres' vengeful actions although she is Eleian, or non-local — the story is meant to explain how Arethusa relocated from the Peloponnese to Sicily (*Met.* 5.490-501, after the resolution of Proserpina's case Ceres circles back to Arethusa's personal story through a similar question, *Met.* 5.571-572). The reader is potentially encouraged to make the connection between the unuttered rape of Proserpina and the narrated (attempted) rape of Arethusa, but Arethusa herself connects her narrating instance to her audience (Ceres) through a different link (Sicily instead of sexual assault). Therefore, she does not draw logical analogies, such as her own similarity to Proserpina as (potential) rape victims. She does hint at her opinion that Proserpina is fortunate to have been united to the king of the Underworld (*Met.* 5.507-509), but again she does not reach a comparative conclusion to the effect that Alpheus is (not) quite as powerful as Dis, or how her own (non) rape transfers some of his power onto herself.

Thus, a recurring motif of the *Metamorphoses* (sexual assault of young women by men at *loca amoena*) is registered by the reader again here. We are invited to add two more examples to the list of sexually assaulted girls, and we are alerted to the potential of the list to

expand further. But Arethusa herself does not make the connection between her own and Proserpina's story — she is obviously not expected to know the other stories that fall under the same heading, but Proserpina (a stage of whose abduction, if not rape, she has witnessed: *visa tua est oculis illic Proserpina nostri, Met. 5.505*) might have reminded her of herself.

All this means that we may have an instance before us where temporality does not intersect with characters' knowledge — that much is quite unequivocal. But there is also no tendency of the narrator to register the characters' connection with knowledge at all, whether in a practical or a general form. This does not mean that the characters are expressly excluded from registering their surroundings — just that the text does not make any mention of a process of knowledge acquisition or its results. Characters are just automatically assumed (not) to be tuned in to their world — with no marked reference to the fact, or the possibility, or the negation, of their understanding.

The only exception is Ceres while she is searching for Proserpina. She does follow a process of reaching back to the past, although it is not clearly marked as such. One way of finding out about her daughter's whereabouts would be by gaining access to the temporal level during which Proserpina was abducted — but the text does not clearly mark Ceres' search as a backward glance.²⁶⁷ In other words, we may or may not be justified in classifying Proserpina's abduction as a story about a prior temporal level, compared to her mother's search for her. Still, the goddess is in search of practical knowledge, which the readers possess because they have read the account of the abduction.

²⁶⁷ There is just the unmarked *quaesita Met. 5.439, quaerebat Met. 5.445, quaerenti Met. 5.463, quaesitae Met. 5.489*.

It might thus not be a huge surprise that the methods of knowledge we have encountered in the previous two chapters, i.e. vision and information transmission, mediate Ceres' acquisition of knowledge about her daughter's abduction as well. Cyane and Arethusa initiate the two respective processes, the former by displaying Proserpina's girdle on her waters (*signa tamen manifesta dedit notamque parenti, | illo forte loco delapsam in gurgite sacro | Persephones zonam summis ostendit in undis, Met. 5.468-470*) and the latter by providing Ceres with an account (one that is quite practical and pointedly avoids superfluous information, *Met. 5.505-508*) of the abduction and Proserpina's reaction to it (at least as focalized through Arethusa herself).

Thus, the methods of gaining understanding used by Ceres in book 5 are similar to those we have already encountered in chapters II and III. There is also an ironical aspect to Ceres' attainment of understanding, namely its timing: if she had been present during Dis' appearance, she might have been able to check his actions. But the difference between her and, for example, Pyramus/Thisbe (chapter II, section B) as interpreters of visual clues is that she does not reach an understanding that may be considered inaccurate, because her understanding does not (significantly) diverge from the version offered to the reader.

To be sure, the reader has not been given the detail about Proserpina's girdle being left behind at the abduction scene — just of her tunic being ripped at the top, and of the flowers she had been gathering falling to the ground (*ut summa vestem laniarat ab ora, | collecti flores tunicis cecidere remissis, | tantaque simplicitas puerilibus adfuit annis, | haec quoque virgineum movit iactura dolorem, Met. 5.398-401*). However, both images (the loss of the girdle and the flowers) may be symbolic of sexual violence — they may be pointing to the very clear possibility that sexual assault is what occurred between Dis and Proserpina,

without explicitly articulating it.²⁶⁸ Thus, the reader receives superficially different information from the two characters (Calliope/the Muse: tunic and flowers, Cyane: girdle), but there is not a substantial difference to the story, whether the girdle or the flowers (or both) serve as symbolic vehicles of the crime that is never really uttered.²⁶⁹ The same goes for Arethusa's claim that Proserpina looked sad but was queen of the Underworld — the readers are already aware of both these factors, and it is up to them to decide which of the two weighs more heavily in their assessment of the incident.

Therefore, although Ceres starts out being unaware of Proserpina's situation, she explicitly embarks on a quest to attain knowledge (and obviously to get her daughter back, *Interea pavidae nequiquam filia matri / omnibus est terris, omni quaesita profundo, Met.* 5.438-439 and *Quas dea per terras et quas erraverit undas, / dicere longa mora est; quaerenti defuit orbis, Met.* 5.462-463), and once that quest is completed (with the help of vision and information transmission) she is equipped with all the information that had already been provided to the reader. The only question that may be connected with an

²⁶⁸ The phrase *tunicis* [...] *remissis* may remind the reader of similar Ovidian appearances of the noun *tunica/tunicae* immediately after the penthemimeral caesura, its participle rounding off the hexameter: *ecce, Corinna venit, tunica velata recincta* (*Am.* 1.5.10, on Corinna's first appearance in the collection); *delabique toro tunica velata soluta* (*Am.* 3.1.51, on Elegia's sexual instruction of Corinna); *nec mora, desiluit tunica velata soluta* (*Am.* 3.7.81, after sexual encounter has been thwarted by the *amator*'s incompetence); *protinus exilui tunicisque a pectore ruptis / 'vivit? an,' exclamo, 'me quoque fata vocant?'* (*Her.* 6.27-28, on Hypsipyle's inner turmoil at possible news of Jason); *Utque erat e somno tunica velata recincta* (*Ars* 1.529, on Ariadne abandoned by Theseus after sex). The context oscillates between the suggestion of sex and violence (or at least violent emotions), without explicitly articulating sexual violence — but it remains consistently in the background.

²⁶⁹ The immediately following connection of the fallen flowers with the *virgineus dolor* (*tantaque simplicitas puerilibus adfuit annis, / haec quoque virgineum movit iactura dolorem, Met.* 5.400-401) may also implicitly signal that sexual assault of a maiden was what actually took place during Proserpina's abduction.

ironical difference between Ceres and readers is whether the goddess could have stopped (the story of) Proserpina's abduction from unfolding if it had not belonged in the past compared to her appearance at the Sicilian location.

Thus far I have been referring only to the characters of the *backstory* ("Proserpina") and the *past* ("Erysichthon"), since the objects of knowledge were plot events and broader questions of these two temporal levels. But what about the *present* characters, Theseus and his comrades? I have briefly discussed how their potential perception of Achelous is unmarked — but their level of connection to knowledge generally may change slightly during the actual conversation at Achelous' cave.

An excerpt set during that conversation is particularly interesting in terms of self-reflexivity in the *Metamorphoses*. First, Achelous narrates the transformations of the Echinades and Perimele (*Met.* 8.577-610), which he and Neptune have effected. Peirithous' reaction to Achelous' story is one of disbelief: *factum mirabile cunctos / moverat: inridet credentes, utque deorum | spretor erat mentisque ferox, Ixione natus | "ficta refers nimiumque putas, Acheloe, potentes | esse deos," dixit "si dant adimuntque figuras* (*Met.* 8.611-615). Thus, Lelex undertakes the task of refuting Peirithous, with a tale about Philemon and Baucis which (he claims) he has heard from trustworthy old men (*Met.* 8.721-722). Here is, then, a moment in the text when its characters/internal narrators self-consciously debate the plausibility of the very text in which they reside.

What Peirithous' disbelief, and thus his impiety, boils down to is failure to accept the gods' power to effect transformations. This may be an instance of Ovid's witty skepticism about the usefulness of composing an extensive narrative poem about supernatural, implausible events. Peirithous' very word *ficta* (especially in conjunction with the third-

person narrator's *factum mirabile*) self-reflexively points to the fictionality of the narrated stories, which however are taken as facts by most characters within the text (and we may be intermittently invited to accept as narrative facts as well). This passage may also be a self-conscious contradiction of the proem, where "Ovid" in his own voice had declared that it is precisely the gods who are responsible for transformations (as well as for their narration:

*In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas / corpora; di, coeptis (nam vos mutastis et illas)*²⁷⁰
/ adspirate meis primaque ab origine mundi / ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen!,
Met. 1.1-4). Peirithous is then not only a *contemptor divum*, but also an anti-poet, who does not accept the conventional divine mechanisms presupposed by the poem — or who is more outspoken than Ovid in denouncing the omnipotence of gods, or any authoritarian power.²⁷¹

These aspects of the lines are obviously crucial to our (metapoetic) understanding of it. But what may also be important is that, for the (only mildly) attentive reader as well as for Achelous, the possibility for divinities to effect metamorphosis is not only *not* questionable, but perhaps the only consistent takeaway of the extensive narrative poem. If there is any

²⁷⁰ This thought process is possible only if we accept the more questionable variant *illas* (= *formas*, which would give the lines a superficial plot meaning, as opposed to *illa* = Ovid's *coepta*, or poetic undertakings). Even if we accept *illa*, such a reading would not contradict the ability of gods to effect transformations across the work. In fact, the phrase *nam vos mutastis et illa (mea coepta)* might imply that there is also (*et*) something else that divinities have transformed — presumably this points to literal transformations effected by Greco-Roman mythological gods.

²⁷¹ For Ovid's invitation to the audience to identify alternately with both disbelieving Peirithous and pious/naïve Lelex, and for a slight inclination towards Lelex since penalties befall *contemptores divum* across the *Metamorphoses* (an argument which also slides into the political realm, with Augustus taking the place of Jupiter), see Wheeler (1999) 165-185.

single, or predominant, conclusion to be derived from most of the stories (so far and across the poem), it is that divinities may effect transformations.²⁷²

Thus, the incompatibility of characters' and readers' knowledge is evident in this case as well. In the case of *backstory* and *past*, characters and readers do not go through a parallel process of understanding, the results of which may establish ironical tension between them — readers may be encouraged to contemplate plot events or general questions stemming from them, but there is no evidence that characters are. Whether this means that they are so detached from such questions that no such connection is drawn (victims of hunger) or that they connect to them as a reflex (Theseus), the end result is the same: a process through which characters acquire knowledge, or remain ignorant despite trying to gain insight, is simply not activated. Other than Ceres (who in the end receives the information she needs about her daughter's whereabouts), the only exception to this tendency is Peirithous. His hubris might be connected specifically with ignorance (or with a negative configuration of knowledge), and his objection to the possibility of gods effecting transformations triggers an entire array of further stories (narrated by Lelex²⁷³ and Achelous) that serve to refute him. Of

²⁷² Strictly speaking, this impression is sometimes belied by the text, when the immediate agent of transformation is not specified — although divine actions invariably bring events to an impasse that requires resolution through transformation. Thus, Ovid may also be encouraging the reader to go back and confirm whether the gods were actually responsible for already narrated metamorphoses, or to keep reading with an eye specifically to this detail. For the questionable attribution of (some) transformations to divinities see Perry (1990) 37: “In fact, most of the transformations in the *Metamorphoses* occur without specific divine intervention; they occur either of themselves or through a force superior to any and beyond the gods themselves. Ovid does not bother to define this force, or even to inquire about it, perhaps because true comprehension of such a force is beyond the capacities of human knowledge.”

²⁷³ The very characterization of Lelex' inset story as mediated by autopsy and the narrative of trustworthy old men (*Met.* 8.620-624 and 721-723) may raise our suspicions

course, the reader may enjoy these stories either for their narrative richness or for the abstract questions they generate (or both) — but the nominal springboard for their narration, the possibility of divinely caused transformation, is not necessarily elucidated further for the reader by this set of stories.

There is thus a different sort of disconnect between Peirithous and the reader: while in the cases of *backstory* and *past* the characters have never found out (or attempted to discover) what the reader gets informed about, in the *present* one character, Peirithous, does activate a process of explanation. But the refutation of his argument, or another character's attempt to disabuse him of a belief that is perceived as inaccurate, does not really offer the reader anything new.

In fact, it is not even clear that Peirithous himself is converted into a believer (or into less-than-an-atheist) by the end of the conversation at Achelous' grotto. His comrades are said to be amazed at the stories (*Desierat, cunctosque et res et moverat auctor, / Thesea praecipue; quem facta audire volentem / mira deum innixus cubito Calydonius amnis / talibus adloquitur, Met. 8.725-728*), but whether that implies a clarification of their previous uncertainty about the possibility of transformation is not to be determined beyond doubt.²⁷⁴

about its reliability. The object of autopsy is the end result, i.e. the two trees, which however does not lend credibility to the entire transformation story, and the very claim that Lelex' informers have "no reason to lie" draws our attention to their potential unreliability. See Green (2003) 44-46. Even if Lelex' story seems in any way unreliable to the reader, it does not contradict the observation that, within the plot of the *Metamorphoses* so far, there has been a consistent enumeration of metamorphoses effected by divinities.

²⁷⁴ Theseus' particular amazement at the story of Philemon and Baucis may constitute another self-reflexive moment at Achelous' grotto: it might point back to Ovid's debt to Callimachus' epyllion *Hecale*, where Theseus was similarly welcomed into a household that was hospitable despite its meager means (first noted by Kenney (1986) xxviii). Although this intertextual convergence may be signaled by Ovid, one element of "Philemon and Baucis"

They do not openly question such a possibility, but whether they were aware of it before they encountered Achelous is just unclear. And, lastly, the tension between characters and readers is not applicable in the case of Achelous’/Theseus’ *present* because, once Achelous wraps up the stories and the dessert course in his cave (*Met.* 9.89-92), the third-person narrator also wraps up Achelous’/Theseus’ section, without any further mention of the heroes’ fortunes (who just depart the morning after, *Met.* 9.94-96). We do not get informed about a practical impact of the information on their future lives. Thus, in the case of the *present*, if characters gain in knowledge by the end of the narrative (which is not certain anyway), readers do not. This is contrary to the *backstory* and *past*, where the readers’ knowledge about both plot events and broader questions is enriched, but not that of the characters (other than Ceres).

This chapter then provides a different takeaway from the combination of *backstory*, *past* and *present* than the previous two. Despite a similar temporal scheme, the conclusions about the strand of knowledge are quite different. Even though *backstory* and *past* are not contiguous, and therefore no knowledge may be passed along between them, I have also detected a disconnection of characters from knowledge (whether theoretical or event-oriented) even within the same temporal level. Thus, characters may not function as vehicles through which a method of acquiring knowledge is presented, nor do they have at their disposal an alternative way of being informed about what the reader knows through reading. Simply stated, they do not provide an alternative story, to which the reader may juxtapose

that does not feature in the *Hecale* is precisely supernatural transformation. Therefore, even if the Ovidian Theseus has “read”, or experienced, the *Hecale*, he may not be presumed to know whether transformation is possible — nor may the rest of his men.

their own version. However, this does not mean that understanding is irrelevant to this combination of stories.

Instead, through this process the focus shifts towards the reader, who may be invited to combine the two stories as an exploration of the idea of hunger, or the manifold identity of river gods, or the importance of Scythia as a geographical location, or the metapoetic connotations of genres or open-endedness. The construction of a meaning linking the two stories together is not offered to the characters — it is to the readers. This combined meaning is perhaps less plot-oriented, more based on thematic affinities, and thus accessible only to readers and not to characters. Thus, the *backstory* approach across the three chapters may show a variable connection between temporality and knowledge, and a variable tension between readers' and characters' parallel construction of meaning. In chapters II and III the importance of temporality, or the characters' attempt to construct meaning, was largely based on backward glances towards their past, and contributed to tension between the meaning conveyed to the reader and that (re)constructed by the characters. In the Ceres chapter, however, layered temporality is largely absent as far as the characters are concerned, and thus the contribution of backward glances to the characters' construction of their circumstances is never activated. Instead, the connection of different temporal levels is a task entrusted to the reader, who may forge it based not on a broadly common cast of characters, or on strictly corresponding plot events, but on a rather more abstract level.

V. Conclusions

In the chapters above, the intersection of temporality and knowledge has been explored through the concept of a story taking place in the past of the past, or a *backstory*. I have limited the discussion of each chapter to a thematically coherent story *cluster*: I have selected three *clusters* as the material for this dissertation by first generally detecting three temporal levels in each (*backstory*, *past*, *present*, the three levels may not be contiguous in the text). I have then explored the interaction of *backstory* with *past* and *present* both in terms of narrative and, most importantly, through the question: is knowledge passed on from one level to another, and how is this crossover different in the case of characters and readers?

A combined reading of temporality and knowledge means that I have been deploying characters more or less as vehicles through whom a transition between these three temporal levels is (not) effected. As they are trying to figure out the connection between different temporal levels, this connection is simultaneously sketched out for the reader as well (or it is doubly sketched out for the reader, both through the (third-person) narrator and through the characters); if characters are not trying to figure out such a connection, it may still be perceptible to the reader. In this sense, the conspicuous presence of multiple flashback stories across the *Metamorphoses*, or a continuous oscillation between present and past, has been approached anew through a different angle: not only is narrative embedding *per se*, or a past story within the overarching story, a linking element between present and past; but also the characters' (not necessarily narrative but) focalization, or their potential to connect past and present/future, works to forge a link between three different temporal levels. This temporal, or narratological, conclusion supplements the argument that, despite its linear forward thrust, the *Metamorphoses* also constantly harks back to the past, especially through the idea that in

a previous instantiation of the world multiple animals and plants used to be humans. The prevailing power of *pastness* is then retained, but (according to the approach on which this dissertation is predicated) this *pastness* may be separated out into recent past and distant past, or *past inset story* and *backstory*.

If the relationship between the overarching story (*present*) and whatever temporally precedes it is triangulated rather than binarized, we may also detect a common topic or question running through *backstory*, *past* and *present*. From the previous chapters have emerged: 1) the importance of Semiramis' *backstory* in configuring visual perception as flawed on its surface (or *inference*), but ultimately productive if *interpretation* is also employed, 2) the importance of repetitiveness in the *backstories* involving Circe and Polyphemus, or more specifically their methods of revenge when slighted in an amorous situation, 3) the importance of the Proserpina *backstory* in setting up a discussion about personifications of nutrition and aquatic elements. This importance may then be carried over into the respective *past* stories: 1) Pyramus and Thisbe's variously flawed reconstruction of their past based on visual clues, which however may be metaphorically reconciled with what is more "accurate", 2) Ulysses' men and their predicament of having to undergo the same dangerous situations at the same locations as their predecessors did, and 3) the similar presence of Ceres in Erysichthon's story as a personification of nutrition, who then summons *Fames* as a personification of her opposite, or the composite identity of dryads (Ceres and nymphs may similarly work as metonymies of metapoetic considerations). Finally, the issue may be transferred over to the *present*: 1) the Minyads are not offered the possibility of visual contact, and this is the main reason why they are doomed not to recognize Bacchus, but at the same time partly resolved of potential guilt, 2) Aeneas' men receive information

about (the repetitiveness of) Circe and Polyphemus, with the result that they avoid danger, and 3) there is a similarly composite identity of Achelous as a river god, an anthropomorphic divinity, a storyteller, and a metapoetic personification.

In each chapter, thus, a reading through the intersection of *backstories* and knowledge may encourage us to look at each *cluster* as a multilayered narrative consisting in a quest for an answer to a question: 1) the reliability of vision, or the rejection of non-vision as an alternative to vision, 2) the efficacy of information transmission in protecting the recipient from danger, or the accuracy of the premise that events repeat themselves in a (more or less) predictable way, 3) the consistency of the interaction of gods with humans, when it comes to nutrition and its withholding, or their assumption of multiple identities. The way in which I have just phrased these questions seems quite philosophically abstract, but Ovid makes the characters act out the various ways of exploring the questions through their actual lives; while the questions still remain general, narrative is what provides some possible answers. In this respect, chapters II and III are visibly different from chapter IV: in the former, potential answers to such broader questions are closely related to action, and thus more accessible to the characters themselves; in the latter, the thematic connection between *backstory* (“Proserpina”) and *past* (“Erysichthon”) is more abstract, further removed from the action, and consequently less tangible on the level of characters than on that of readers.

The nature of the question, or the realm within which it is posed, may seem quite expected, even self-explanatory, to us: is it possible to talk about Bacchus without a reference to visual illusions, or about Ulysses without some mention of dangerous supernatural creatures, or about Proserpina without some kind of cosmic ramifications of Ceres’ wrath? This may be because of Ovid’s general intertextual, or mythological, involvement with his

predecessors. In a way, Ovid has distilled from his intertexts a basic common element about each of his stories (at least the ones discussed in this dissertation), and has transformed it into a question. The answer to the question then becomes the object of potential knowledge, while the search for this knowledge (as far as the reader is concerned) gets temporally multilayered across the levels of *backstory*, *past* and *present*. Thus, while each of his intertexts may provide a different variation on the plot level, their common takeaway is retained in Ovid's account and granted a special role in structuring the narrative.

For example, the Bacchus *cluster*, although not necessarily connected in his sources with the Minyads, does include them in the *Metamorphoses* — thus, the Pentheus material (perhaps from Euripides' *Bacchae*), the material about the Tyrrhenian sailors (perhaps from the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*) and the Minyad material constitute an elaborate discussion of Bacchus and vision. Ovid dovetails this Bacchus-related material with yet other mythological stories about vision, which his sources may not have linked together before because they are unrelated to Bacchus. Under this heading fall the love affair of Venus and Mars, the Salmacis and Hermaphroditus union, and the main focus of my discussion, Pyramus and Thisbe — they may all fit together into the same *cluster* through their exploration of the same question. The *backstory* reading approaches all those stories as parallel examples about the (un)reliability of vision, but also shows that they are structured in time, with the temporally later characters (the Minyads) expressing their opinion on the previous levels.

Similarly, the connection between Circe and Polyphemus is not as tight in the *Odyssey* (except in the symmetrical way in which they appear at the end of two successive books), and most certainly not in the *Aeneid*, where the Trojans do not approach Circe the way they

do Polyphemus. Ovid not only pairs the two supernatural characters, but also makes them repeat themselves twice, in order to foreground danger as the substance of what they have in common. The Theocritean, or broadly Hellenistic, elements of the *backstories* add a different reason for their anger (amatory jealousy), in contrast to the *Odyssey*'s material about Ulysses' men, who just invade their respective territories. Still, repetitive danger, and thus the importance of information passing along from one temporal level to the next, is further highlighted, regardless of the reason for Circe's or Polyphemus' anger. The different intertexts translate into different temporal layers, inasmuch as the non-epic material mostly constitutes the *backstory*, and the Homeric/Virgilian material the *past* and *present* story. Still, the question, despite its modifications, remains essentially the same, and Ulysses' men remark on their stories as cautionary, and thus on the presumed repeatability of danger.

Lastly, in the Ceres chapter I have shown that an intratextual reading of the two Ceres stories may center around two different definitions of hunger, which then slide into the different workings of Ceres as a personification of nutrition. Regardless of whether Ovid has designed the two Ceres stories to be read together, we may engage in such a comparative reading, which again distills the essence of the goddess as described by Ovid's predecessors: Ovid combines the Homeric and Callimachean broader issues about the relationship of nutrition and hunger, about different ways of interpreting and satisfying one's hunger, and about the role of Ceres in (not) withholding nutrition and thereby (not) causing hunger. Our reading on the level of personifications may then get transferred to aquatic elements, which are actually latent, but not really explored to full effect, in the Greek hymns (especially Achelous in the Callimachean hymn). The intertextual distillation thus applies to both Ceres and aquatic elements. Therefore, the intratextual reading of *backstory* and *past* translates into

a comparison of the different workings of Ceres and the different configurations of multiple-identity beings, taken from Ovid's intertexts and layered temporally.

All in all, Ovid's combination of intertextual predecessors may be not just a textual experiment or a display of his learning, but also a layering of different opinions on, or sample answers to, the same general question. The question may consist in, or overlap with, the essence of the particular saga, or mythical person, as excerpted from the entirety of mythological or literary tradition, at least as we have it — and this is the question that Ovid has his characters/narrators explore. But the details of the intertexts may also be important, in the sense that the temporal levels introduced by Ovid are latent in some form in his predecessors as well. For example, Circe and Polyphemus in their relation to Ulysses are past stories for the Virgilian Aeneas and his men — the stories of Scylla and Polyphemus are also mentioned, albeit very briefly, but their relation to the Odyssean saga is not specified. Ovid is the one to put everything together, and thus to emphasize the repeatability (which is, in a sense, an intertextual repeatability as well). The Ceres chapter, by connecting "Proserpina" and "Erysichthon", transforms into an intratextual link (across the *Metamorphoses*) a link already introduced by Callimachus (who narrates "Erysichthon" after a *praeteritio* about Persephone). Ovid deals with the whole issue on a more abstract plane, however — and the combination of *Fames*/Ceres as personifications, the different definitions of hunger, as well as the metapoetic generic connotations of Ceres and rivers, are his own creation. Lastly, the temporal relationship of the Minyads with any of the stories they narrate is not really to be detected intertextually, because virtually no intertext survives, either of "Pyramus and Thisbe" or of the Minyads' metamorphosis itself (for which we only have the very brief synopsis of Antoninus Liberalis). Still, the intertextual connection I have detected is a

metaphorical, or thematic, one: Antoninus' *Minyads* do not think about Pentheus as having suffered in the past, but Antoninus' version presents their predicament as a parallel to that of Pentheus; or Pyramus and Thisbe are not connected in Ovid's predecessors (because none survive) with Semiramis, but Ovid's Semiramis intertexts (Propertius and Diodorus) help establish a thematic relationship of the two stories in terms of the superficially inaccurate nature of vision, and its eventual reconciliation with "accurate" events.

It is generally accepted that Ovid is a heavily intertextual poet, who, however, adds his own twist to the stories he has inherited. More specifically, I am here suggesting that he makes the most of his intertextual predecessors in two ways: 1) by fleshing out temporal tensions latent in those intertexts and 2) by articulating (for the readers) a question to be explored across each *cluster*, one that distills the essence of particular mythical *personae* from a pool of intertextual tradition. This observation may effect a transition to yet more aspects of the Ovidian self-reflexivity as displayed through the *backstory* reading. Other than his intertextual dialogue with different texts, authors and genres, I have shown above that Ovid constructs a picture of his internal narrator in each story *cluster*. The *Minyads* are oral/aural narrators, because they trust hearsay, do not weave their stories into their tapestries and avoid taking a stand on the reliability of vision — needless to say, the idea of visual narrators as an alternative to oral ones surfaces simultaneously. The surviving narrators of Ovid's *Little Aeneid* are all marginalized in previous epic narratives, whether because of their mortality, their gender, or their lack of distinction — but the issue is also about socially superior character narrators in other genres, such as the archetypal Aeneas and Ulysses, and their removal (as storytellers) from the *Metamorphoses*. Lastly, the idea of imposing narrative limits or endings, or conversely of stories spilling over into one another, is the self-

reflexive takeaway of the “Proserpina” and “Erysichthon” stories, if read in combination with each other.

It is obvious by now that Ovid may be setting up a discussion about various ways, not only of obtaining knowledge, but also of placing this knowledge in the mouths of different narrators — these narrators ultimately make up a picture of Ovid’s internal narrator. Thus, his choice of a dominant narrator type in each *cluster* may not be taken at face value, or as a statement of narrative preference — since in other *clusters* he goes against that preference. Rather, Ovid may be setting up these differences precisely to transcend them, or to point out that different types of narrators (both visual and aural, both open-ended and strictly organized, both “Callimachean” and epic, both intertextually famous and his own inventions) find their home in the *Metamorphoses*.

A last question regards the internal structure of the *Metamorphoses*, as set up in the introduction. This dissertation aligns with the general view that the *Metamorphoses* is not haphazardly constructed, or a random catalogue of mythological stories. Still, it has not undertaken to investigate the macrostructure of the entire 15 books of this lengthy poem, although it has made some observations on the intratextual level. On the one hand, within each *cluster* there is a transition from one temporal level to another, and thus each *cluster* may be viewed as governed by its own timeline. On the other hand, the relative similarity of the *backstory* scheme across the three *clusters* here examined (and perhaps in other story *clusters*, for which this study does not allow space) may argue for a(nother) thematic, rather than a temporal, organization of the *Metamorphoses*. If some story *clusters* share this common element of a *backstory* scheme (or of a tripartite temporal layering), there may be another intratextual link between them. Alternatively, the characters’ search for knowledge,

or the tension between readers who seek knowledge and characters who do not (or who are unsuccessful in such a search), may be considered a recurring intratextual preoccupation.

Thus, a *backstory* reading through the lens of knowledge does not provide arguments for the internal structure of the entire *Metamorphoses*. Still, the applicability of this reading to (at least) three cases may argue for a thematic affinity of some *clusters* with each other, since all of them involve three temporal levels and a (more or less perceptible) attempt for knowledge to pass from one level to another. Inasmuch as this same scheme repeats itself across multiple *clusters*, there is a thematic, temporally unmarked, macrostructure; but at the same time temporality works in a threefold way microscopically, within each *cluster*. This tension between the importance of temporality vis-à-vis thematic coherence may be further explained through a parallel discussion of the importance of temporality, knowledge and narrative to readers and characters.

In all three chapters, the *backstory* approach has facilitated the comparison of two processes of understanding. One is that of the reader who finds out about plot events, or broader issues raised by them, through the very act of reading; the other process of attaining knowledge is that of the characters, which may or may not be taking place. In chapters II and III, visual perception and information transmission hold out the possibility that characters may discover what has happened during the previous temporal levels, whereas in chapter IV such a discovery is mostly foreclosed, not only across temporal levels (because *backstory* and *past* share no common characters except Ceres) but also within the same temporal level (as Ovid/his narrators do not at all connect characters with an (unsuccessful) quest for knowledge).

It might thus be fruitful to summarize the takeaways of such a parallel reading. On first inspection, we may generally observe that the tension created by the comparison favors the readers: they hold the key to what really happened, or to the essential connection between different temporal levels. Thus, the relationship of characters and readers may traditionally, and conventionally, be called ironical. On closer inspection, though, characters who inaccurately perceive their own past often produce (or hint at) an alternative narrative, one which clashes with the dominant one. Readers may view this conflict as functioning at the expense of the characters, whose limited knowledge is thus confirmed — but perhaps this view may be too facile. Characters who inaccurately try to (re)construct a past narrative claim, even if for a fleeting moment, the position of narrator for themselves. This places them in a dynamic opposition to, or competition with, the third-person/internal narrators — and, while one version may ultimately displace the others, those other versions are only minimally sidelined. They are still preserved there, in the text, for the reader to gauge their relative importance to the Ovidian narrative. Now may be the time to sum up some specifics, which have been sketched out briefly, and separately, in chapters II-IV.

Pyramus and Thisbe are probably the test case with the most perceptible doubling of potential stories. In chapter II, I have argued that the *singulative* narrative of the fatal night may be broken down into three building blocks, with the two protagonists trying to reconstruct the previous level based on visual clues left behind from it. Thisbe and Pyramus largely reach inaccurate conclusions: Thisbe believes that the aggressive lioness will devour her because she ignores the mini flashback where the beast satisfied its hunger; Pyramus sees Thisbe's bloodied veil and concludes that she has been savagely ripped apart. I have shown in chapter II that, in a sense, this interpretation of visual clues is fundamentally correct, with

the exception of a slight distinction between cause and agent of death. Although the two versions highlight the divergence between “accurate” story and the characters’ lack of awareness, they may be reconciled through *interpretation* (or through the similarity between cause and agent). But still, they are not completely identical, and the readers may find themselves wondering whether in their own experience this particular denouement may be less expected than Thisbe’s mutilation by the lioness would have been. In any case, the strand produced by the characters’ *inference* remains in the text as an alternative option.

The same goes for the other two stories told by the Minyads (which are not *backstories* but *past* stories). Deceitful vision again generates two versions, one of the deceived viewer and the other provided to the reader from the start. Leucothoe believes that her mother has entered her chambers, when she is actually seeing Sol in disguise; Mars and Venus believe that they are enjoying another day of clandestine lovemaking, until they get tangled in Vulcan’s invisible shackles; Hermaphroditus believes that his rejection of Salmacis’ frank courting is enough to keep her away, because he has not seen her lying in wait. All these are possibilities opened up by the temporary success of deceptive visual signs in drawing their recipient towards an inaccurate interpretation of their situation. But if we momentarily remove the element of deceit, we may realize that the text might have unfolded precisely in the way proposed by the characters’ focalization.

A similar redoubling of interpretive possibilities is opened up in the case of Acoetes and Pentheus. In this case, the distinction between “accurate” and “alternative” versions does not result in a redoubling of stories, but in a redoubling of Acoetes as a narrator. If Acoetes “really” is Bacchus’ votary, and if he has been converted into worshipping the god through the inset story he narrates, this tale may work alongside the Minyad tales in establishing the

ambivalence of vision (here specifically in the service of recognizing a god for who he is). There is then some sort of background knowledge about Bacchus, on which Acoetes (claims he) drew in order to reach the conclusion that the somnolent boy is in reality disguised Bacchus. This background knowledge however is effectively cancelled if Acoetes is Bacchus, coming to Thebes in a last, if concealed, effort to bring Pentheus to his senses. If the latter is the case, the reader is implicitly invited to cancel the comparison between the story of Acoetes, who supposedly came to the correct conclusion when confronted with Bacchus in disguise, and that of Pentheus, whose impiety renders him unable to determine the identity of the person before him.

Thus, in this case Acoetes-as-narrator is undermining his own narrative authority if he is not who he claims he is — and the reader may be tempted to register only one story (Pentheus) as having taken place within the fictional world of the *Metamorphoses*, instead of two (both Pentheus and Acoetes). In this case, Acoetes may be a self-erasing narrator. But in this case also the reader is in the dark about which of the two versions should be taken as conventionally dominant: while the distinction between an “accurate” and an “alternative” narrative is clear in other cases, here Acoetes effectively oscillates between the two identities, with no resolution in sight for the reader.

Other than the possibility of the characters’ knowledge introducing alternative stories, then, the *backstory* approach may also facilitate an effective cancellation of one story when compared with its double. The reader may be tempted to construct one story out of two, or to merge two stories into one. This partial identification of two stories is thus the opposite of the redoubling of stories traced in the Pyramus and Thisbe example. In the latter, characters create a version which stands as a latent alternative, and thus as a double, of the version

officially offered to the reader. In an opposite situation, two non-latent stories may tempt the reader to view them as two sides of the same coin, or as the same story — without however completely eliminating their differences, or the uniqueness of each.

In the *Little Aeneid*, this last tendency is quite evident due to the pervasiveness of repetition. In both the two *backstories* that deal with love triangles and Macareus' / Achaemenides' *past* stories, Circe and Polyphemus deploy the same methods of revenge against whomever provokes their wrath. The premise behind Macareus and Achaemenides' cautionary tales is precisely this repetition. But at the same time each of the characters themselves does not tell double stories (or does not mark them as doubles of each other), so they cannot prove beyond doubt that the supernatural creatures are inherently repetitive in their actions. Narrative repetition is established for the reader, but not necessarily, or only vaguely, for the characters.

In fact, other than Aeneas' Trojans, the rest of the characters in the *Little Aeneid cluster* do not know about the repetitive actions of Circe and Polyphemus across the temporal levels of *backstory* and *past*, precisely because no characters from the *backstory* warn the *past* characters of the danger. Even when Macareus finds out from the servant (through a *backstory*) that Circe habitually turns her perceived enemies into animals or monsters, the timing of the narrative (after he and his comrades have resumed their human form) does not really allow him to put this information to any immediate practical use. Nor does he explicitly remark on the repetitive nature of Circe's actions when he eventually tells his story — he just introduces the servant's tale as one of many marvelous things he heard while spending idle time at the witch's palace. It is thus somewhat strange that a narrator who tells a cautionary tale (and who possibly expects Aeneas to face the same danger he himself did)

makes the connection between his own past and Aeneas' future, but not the one between Picus' *backstory* and his own (i.e. Macareus') *past*. Macareus is also not aware of the other *backstory* involving Circe, namely "Glaucus and Scylla", nor is Achaemenides aware of the *backstory* involving Polyphemus, namely "Galatea and Acis" — they are thus not capable of drawing on particular examples to make a comprehensive case about repetition.

As already noted, this tension between characters (who may be operating under a premise of repetition but do not tell their stories as expressly repetitive) and readers (who clearly get alerted precisely to that repetitiveness) may be the opposite of that traced in "Pyramus and Thisbe", or in the other Minyad tales. In other words, in the *Little Aeneid* the detected tension between readers' and characters' knowledge creates one story out of multiple ones, instead of multiple stories out of one. Simply put, in chapter II there is a multiplication, or an expansion, of stories whereas in chapter III there is a reduction, or a contraction, of multiple stories into one. This is not to say, of course, that there is absolutely no difference between the different iterations of Circe's and Polyphemus' wrath, but that the reader may be invited to detect the pattern. It is precisely when Aeneas and the Trojans receive practical information from the previous temporal level that repetition stops — but only after it has been firmly established for the readers through an actual repetition of stories. This repetition of explicitly narrated stories, however, has not been communicated to, or established by, the characters until that point. Once it does, the possibility for further repetition through Aeneas' adventures is forestalled.

Therefore, tension between characters and readers in the *Little Aeneid* consists in the collapse of multiple stories into one, but tension in the Minyad tales in the branching of multiple stories out of one. However, the latter tendency may be detectable in the *Little*

Aeneid as well. In chapter III, I have also read two instances of repetition-based stories disguised as memories, i.e. as narratives with the same person(s) as narrator and narratee. In this case, the assumption of repetition is even more vivid. Achaemenides assumes that he will get devoured by Polyphemus, as has happened to his friends; Ulysses' men, after escaping from the Cyclops, think that they will always confront the same type of supernatural beast.

In both cases, this memory-type internally narrated story does not materialize: the Trojans rescue Achaemenides before he runs direct risk, and instead of a gigantic beast the Greeks encounter a seductive sorceress. However, the possibility of Achaemenides being directly confronted with the Cyclops is thus opened up as an alternative (granted, Achaemenides' survival in the *present*, and his introductory thanksgiving to Aeneas for rescuing him, foreclose the possibility of his death in the *past*). He might have been wounded, or hunted down, by the Cyclops — again, this is a parallel narrative that Achaemenides-of-the-*past* elicits from the readers, but that does not end up materializing. Something similar happens when Ulysses' men meet Circe instead of a Polyphemus-type beast: Circe makes up a substantial part of the Odyssean tradition, and the Odyssean intertext specifically alerts us that she is next in the line of the hero's adventures, but still the possibility that the Greeks will next meet another monster is momentarily opened up. The pervasiveness of alternative, character-focalized stories is less important in the *Little Aeneid* than in the Minyad tales, at least for the modern reader, because of the heavily intertextual nature of the former. A reader with an intertextual background may lend little credence to those alternative stories, since Ovid's predecessors function as a control against an inexhaustible pool of alternatives. Still, the possibility may be entertained that Ovid will introduce (which he partly does) different turns of the plot.

When it comes to the two Ceres stories (“Proserpina” and “Erysichthon”), in chapter IV I have argued that the possibility of information being passed down across different temporal levels is foreclosed by the absence of common characters in *backstory* and *past*. At the same time, characters are disconnected from any type of reference to knowledge, either to its successful attainment or to (partial) ignorance, even within a single temporal level. This might not be a coincidence: there might be a tighter correlation between *pastness* and knowledge if a lack of *pastness*, on the characters’ part, coexists with their lack of knowledge. But at any rate the tension between a singularity of stories for the characters and an oscillation between singularity and multiplicity for the readers is evident in chapter IV, just as in chapter III.

In the *Little Aeneid*, the reader’s tendency to fuse multiple stories into one is due to their significantly similar plot outcomes: when Circe wants to annihilate an enemy, she deploys a specific regime of herbs, a touch with her wand, and the recitation of a spell; when Polyphemus wants to get revenge, he pelts rocks at his enemies. Similarly, *backstory* and *past* in chapter IV share some basic plot elements, most notably Ceres’ wrath and hunger as punishment. However, the rest of their similarities lie at a further remove from the plot. They are thus reconstructed by the reader mainly on a thematic level, or on the level of the definition of hunger, aquatic divinities, and metapoetics. It is because of the different cast of characters between *backstory* and *past* (mostly divinities in book 5 versus humans and a personification in book 8) that the reader is perhaps still invited to conflate the two stories into a two-sides-of-the-same-coin narrative, but on the basis of different premises: the notion of hunger, or multiple-status divinities, instead of the characters and plot.

If, as shown in chapter IV, the same questions may be posed in both “Proserpina” and “Erysichthon”, the stories merge together; but the answers are slightly different, therefore the two stories also diverge. For a linear reader specifically, “Erysichthon” may bring to mind “Proserpina”, and thus the possibility (which is perhaps detectable even on a primary textual level) that Ceres’ revenge may follow a similar trajectory in the *past* as it has in the *backstory*. In this sense, the *backstory* reading encourages not only the intermittent convergence of the two Ceres stories into one, but also the opposite tendency (not only contraction but also expansion): the reader of “Erysichthon” may initially get tempted to envisage a repetition of hunger as it is defined, and as it plays out, in “Proserpina”, i.e. a destruction of the earth’s agricultural produce. Such a version does not explicitly materialize — but it, and the implications of Achelous’ ignorance of the Proserpina narrative, are always kept latent for a reader with intratextual inclinations.

In this sense, the doubling of narrative possibilities is present in chapter IV, as it has been in chapter II (Pyramus and Thisbe’s *inferences*) and III (the Greeks’ memories). The difference is that the potential of “Erysichthon” to unfold just like “Proserpina” (which is ultimately cancelled) does not result from the inclusion of a latent story, as alternatively imagined or focalized by one of the characters. Technically, such an alternative story is hidden in the text, inasmuch as “Erysichthon” does not turn out the way “Proserpina” did: his transgression does not bring about the entire earth’s starvation, but his own subjective interpretation of a void in his stomach. But, on the other hand, this alternative story is not latent inasmuch as it does take place, just at a different point in the *Metamorphoses*: in “Proserpina”, not in (both “Proserpina” and) “Erysichthon”. In this sense, the tension

between *backstory* and *past* of the Ceres chapter combines the creation of two stories out of one and the fusion of two stories into one — it oscillates between the two.²⁷⁵

All in all, there is tension between the understanding, or the construction of a story, by characters and readers, which becomes evident through the tripartite temporal layering that I have been applying throughout this dissertation. This tension, in turn, may lead the readers in two directions: 1) to envisage alternative stories which would have followed along the lines of characters' "false" insight, but which have, strictly speaking, not taken place, or 2) to oscillate between registering two different (explicitly narrated) stories as self-sufficient entities and fusing them into essentially one story.

In each case, characters are aware only of one story, but because of the multiplicity of characters and temporal levels the reader has access to a corresponding multiplicity of stories (both "accurate" and "alternative" ones). Not only the switching focalization within the same story or temporal level, but also the layering of temporal levels (to which the reader becomes more attuned through the *backstory* approach), and the potential of a character who belongs in one level to gain access to another, contribute to this process.

²⁷⁵ My construction of alternative stories thus aligns with that of Tarrant (2005) 72ff, where he discusses alternative versions of the myth, which are introduced by characters and direct the reader to Ovid's intertexts. In my discussion, the role of characters as rival poets is also evident, and intertexts constitute a type of control against which to measure which version is "dominant" and which is an alternative (either the Ovidian version or the intertext's version could be one or the other). Other than not making my analysis strictly intertextual (for example, "Pyramus and Thisbe" displays a similar alternative structure even though we have no extant intertext for it), I add to the discussion the role of *pastness* and characters'/readers' attainment of knowledge in mediating this double construction of alternatives. It is the characters', and the readers', partial reliance on a past temporal level, and the potential of knowledge to cross temporal levels, that generates alternative versions, according to this dissertation.

So much for the importance of temporality to readers. The corresponding importance of temporality to characters may vary, depending on how large a part of past levels (compared to their own) ends up being unlocked to them. More often than not their past is rather obscure to them, despite the importance it may hold for their current (or future) circumstances. They may attempt to activate past temporal levels, and thus at least to become alerted to their importance; or they may be completely disconnected from previous temporal levels, in which case they do not comprehend that importance.

A case of quite successful passing on of information may still place some characters at a disadvantage: when Aeneas' men unlock most of the *past* (through Achaemenides and Macareus), they are prevented from experiencing their own story at the same places (at the locations of Polyphemus and Circe), although they are thus granted the opportunity to shape a narrative (and history) in Italy. But at any rate characters end up having a less nuanced understanding than the reader: even when they open the door to an "alternative" story, they think of it as the only "accurate" one, and thus the duality is lost on them. The reader, on the other hand, who adopts the *backstory* approach may be encouraged to go back and re-read a narrative which belongs to another temporal level, but which may still function as a double of the story they are currently reading. In this sense, the *backstory* approach means that a back-and-forth reading may unfold at the same time as the more conventional linear reading.

The latter, linear, reading is of course inevitable — sometimes it may even be considered the default type of reading. Even if we start suspecting that a parallel reading of two (or more) stories is a possibility, this thought will probably occur only once we find ourselves quite a few lines into the second story. Thus, temporality may or may not be ultimately important to the characters (depending on their awareness of different levels), but it looks

much more instrumental to the readers' experience of the text. But the intersection between a *temporal* and a *thematic* reading might resurface here too, and complicate things slightly.

On the one hand, the tripartite division of *backstory*, *past* and *present* presupposes an internal temporal organization of each *cluster*. These temporal levels are sometimes not presented in the text in the order in which they unfold, or embedding sometimes results in the rearrangement of the order of events from "the story" to "the narrative"; other times the temporal levels are not always embedded or clearly delineated. But still the overall impression is that of a certain degree of layering, or partial temporal separation. On the other hand, if two comparable stories unfold simultaneously in the readers' minds, temporality may momentarily be suspended, since the point of the comparison is usually thematic rather than temporal. We may thus have found ourselves before a paradoxical situation consisting in 1) a twofold *significance* of temporality (plot events across narrative temporal layers are crucial to characters' circumstances, even when they are unaware of this importance; readers consume the text across time, i.e. they read linearly), and 2) a partial *suspension* of temporality (characters sometimes ignore the existence of other temporal levels, and thus are confined within one level; readers may intermittently tend to connect stories to each other thematically, with little regard for temporality, which Ovid often tends to override anyway).

The *backstory* approach, then, and a reading that connects a temporal scheme within each *cluster* with the ironical distance between characters' and readers' knowledge, results in a tension between the consistent relevance, and the momentary suspension, of temporality. The factor that sometimes functions as a counterpoint to temporality is thematic similarity. Whether because two alternatives may spring from the same point in the narrative or because two stories may effectively turn into one due to repetitiveness, temporality might for a

moment be deemed irrelevant to the reader, compared to a thematic approach. This brings my discussion full circle, back to the introduction and the oscillation of the *Metamorphoses* between being a *carmen perpetuum* and a *carmen deductum*. If (linear or non-linear) temporality is more tightly linked to the term *perpetuum* and thematic correspondences (or grouping based on theme) to the term *deductum*, the *backstory* approach in this dissertation has highlighted the dynamic interaction of the two pivotal terms through a slightly different lens. In other words, while I have not undertaken a systematic examination of chronology or thematic structure in the *Metamorphoses* at large, I have shown their interaction within each story *cluster*. What may arguably be an overarching feature of the narrative poem at large has thus here been shown to function within the shorter narrative unit of a *cluster*. Different narrative *clusters* may thus invite further readings through the lens of *backstories* (or multiple temporal levels) and characters'/readers' knowledge: if multiple story *clusters* display a similar tendency, this tendency may be pervasive across a poem that has proven (in)famously difficult to study in its entirety.

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