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PHILIP HARDIE

Ovidian Middles*

I. STRUCTURE¹

Virgilian and Ovidian middles

Richard Thomas shows how central to Virgilian poetics is the marking of the centre, the point in a work where textual patterning colludes with or strives against the centres of power-structures in the world outside the text. Ovid is as keenly aware of Virgilian middles, as he is of Virgilian beginnings and endings, but equally keen to avoid being trapped within Virgilian 'triumphal forms'.² One sign of the need to create his own, Ovidian, spaces is perhaps the decision to compose books or poems organised around an odd, rather than an even, number of poems or books, thus making impossible the Virgilian 'proem in the middle'³ as frontispiece to the second half of a work: three (originally, if the poet is to

* For comments on earlier drafts I am grateful to Roy Gibson and Damien Nelis.

¹ The division of this essay into two halves acknowledges the structure of the first chapter of Solodow (1988), 'Organizations' / 'Dis-organizations'. Holzberg (1997), p. 129 also traces a recurrent pattern of ordering followed by disordering in the first pentad of the *Metamorphoses*; see also Wheeler (2000), pp. 23-32.

² The title of Alistair Fowler's study (1970) of the numerical organisation of English Elizabethan literature, with its strong emphasis on central sovereignty. On Virgilian middles see Thomas (1983a), and in this volume, ch. 7.

³ Conte (1992).

be believed, five) books of *Amores*, fifteen single *Heroides* (if we take the *Epistula Sapphus* as Ovidian) plus three pairs, and fifteen books of *Metamorphoses*. The *Ars amatoria* was, or purports to have been originally written in two books whose diptych form is thrust before the reader's nose [*Ars* 1.771: *pars superat coepti, pars est exhausta, laboris*; (one part of the task that I have undertaken remains, one part is completed), 2.9-10: *mediis tua pinus in undis / navigat* (your ship is sailing in mid-ocean)], but later succumbed to what might be called a triadic pressure with the addition of a third book, which in a sense forms the other 'half' to the first two books (it is addressed to the second sex, and presents itself as a Stesichorean palinode [49-50], rewriting the first two books), but at the same time is an obtrusively lopsided complement (one book to two).⁴ The *Fasti* alone was unable to escape the gravitational pull of the Virgilian model (twelve books of the *Aeneid*) when to that was added the numerical imperative of the Roman calendar (twelve months). The books of exile poetry are open-ended series: *Tristia* 4.10, Ovid's poetic autobiography, vainly attempts to round off the poems from exile in four books, but is inevitably followed by a supplementary fifth (*Trist.* 5.1.1-2). The *Ex Ponto*, like the *Fasti*, is transmitted as a fragment, an even-numbered collection of four books, but one whose closing image, whether by accident or design, is that of a body rendered incomplete by laceration.⁵

⁴ *Ars* 3.1-3 contains language suggestive of a second half: *arma dedi Danaïs in Amazonas; arma supersunt ... ; ite in bella pares* (I have equipped the Greeks with weapons against the Amazons; the remaining weapons [are those for the Amazons]...; go into battle equally matched). But the last four words also align the relationship between the first two and the third books with the rhetorical (and dramatic) structure of *Dissoi logoi* of which Ovid is so fond, as in the dramatic pairs of poems in the *Amores*, the paired *Heroides* 16-21, and the various examples of poetic, rhetorical, and artistic *agon* in the *Metamorphoses*.

⁵ Theodorakopoulos (1999), pp. 160-1.

Proems in the middle

Ars amatoria 2; *Fasti* 4; *Amores* 2.10(9b)-11 (10)

The beginning of the second book of the (originally two-book) *Ars amatoria* comments on its midway position both explicitly (see above) and allusively, through reference to Virgilian proems in the middle.⁶ The didactic poet celebrates a triumph which is simultaneously the triumph of the lover who has captured his girl.⁷ Ovid's victory is in a poetic contest in which his songs have won the palm over the poems of Hesiod and Homer (4). The proem of the third *Georgic* looks forward to a triumph of poetry in which Virgil will celebrate the military triumph of Octavian, as the poet himself leads back in triumph to Italy the Hesiodic-Callimachean Muses from Mount Helicon (*Geo.* 3.11). Ovid uses two mythological *exempla* that figure the lover's success in terms of a journey by sea (Paris setting sail with Helen) and a journey by land, as Pelops carries off Hippodamia in the chariot in which he had trickily won the race against her father Oenomaus.⁸ The story of Pelops and Hippodamia is one of those hackneyed subjects rejected by Virgil at the beginning of the third *Georgic* (7), to be replaced by Virgil's new brand of charioteering. Virgil's chariot journey looks forward to a poetic achievement in the future, while Ovid and his students are already carried in a triumphal chariot: in other words, Ovid's didactic poem has already achieved the epic success anticipated in the proem of the third *Georgic*. But we are as yet only half-way along this epic path, and the epic *virtus* needed to finish the job (to make sure that the girl once captured stays with the lover) is no less than that needed to hunt down the girl (13) *nec minor est virtus ...*; the claim in the next line that finding a girl is a matter of luck, whereas keeping her requires *ars*, is a piece of proverbial wisdom, but also suggests that this will in fact be as much a *maius opus* as is the second half of the *Aeneid*

⁶ See Janka (1997) on *Ars* 2.3-4.

⁷ Baldo on *Ars* 2.1 [in Pianezzola (1991)], "... una esclamazione che è insieme grido di conquista amorosa e di vittoria poetica".

⁸ The sea journey is a recurrent image of the didactic poet's progress in the *Georgics* (2.39-45; 4.116-17); for the poet's journey by chariot see also *Geo.* 2.541-2 (picking up 1.512-14).

(*Aen.* 7.45).⁹ In order to succeed in this great undertaking (*magna paro*, 17) Ovid invokes the erotic deities Cupid and Venus, and also the Muse, Erato, on whom Virgil calls for the 'greater work' of the second half of the *Aeneid*: *Ars* 2.16 *nunc Erato, nam tu nomen Amoris habes* (Now [favour me] Erato, for you bear the name of love). The explicit etymological note refers us to Virgil's own model, Apollonius' invocation of Erato at the beginning of the second half of the *Argonautica*, where the etymology (3.5) spells out the appropriateness of Erato as the Muse for the story of the love of Medea and Jason.¹⁰

We do not know how Ovid would have marked the beginning of the second half of the twelve-book *Fasti*: perhaps with a great triumphal flourish to introduce July, the month of the Julian *gens*. Yet Alessandro Barchiesi has shown how the end of the sixth book, only half-way through the whole project, contains strong closural signals, whether as a sign that this was all that the poet managed to write, or as a warning to the *princeps* that this was all that he would get unless the poet was recalled to Rome and to circumstances conducive to the composition of the dynastic months of July and August.¹¹ Barchiesi also notes markers of a middle on either side of the central division of the six books that we do have, in the reference to the equinox that balances day and night at the end of *Fasti* 3 (*tempora nocturnis aequa diurna*, 878), and in the similarity of the proem to *Fasti* 4 to a 'proem in the middle', with its "dense discussion of poetics and even a 'doubling' of the proem of Book 1 with a literal citation [4.11-12, *tempora cum causis* ... (times and causes)]."¹² Carole Newlands further points to signs of closure at the end of *Fasti* 3, the conclusion of a journey to Colchis (here of the golden fleece of the ram, Aries, to be followed in aftertime by the Argonauts in quest of the fleece) and allusion to the return of the well-fed flocks to the fold at the end of *Eclogue* 10, endings to be followed by a new beginning in *Fasti* 4.¹³

⁹ So Döpp (1968), p. 103.

¹⁰ See Baldo, [in Pianezzola (1991), and Janka (1997)], ad loc.; Hollis (1977), pp. xii-xiii. Erato etymologised also takes charge of a narrative near the beginning of the second half of the surviving six books of the *Fasti*, 4.195-6: see Newlands (2002), p. 214.

¹¹ Barchiesi (1997a), pp. 200-7; (1997b), pp. 259-71.

¹² Barchiesi (1997b), pp. 56, with note 19; pp. 265-6, with note 6.

¹³ Newlands (2000), pp. 181-3.

There is more to be said, for the poet's interview with Venus at *Fasti* 4.1-18 is saturated with allusions marking its status as a proem in the middle.¹⁴ The first line positions itself between an opening and a closing: the first word, *alma*, 'nurturing', the epithet with which Ovid addresses Venus, refers us to the prayer to Venus with which Lucretius opens the *De rerum natura*, invoking *alma Venus* at the start of the second line, while *geminorum mater Amorum* (mother of twin loves), at the end of the line refers us to Ovid's *envoi* to love poetry in *Amores* 3.15, beginning *quaere novum vatem, tenerorum mater Amorum* (mother of the tender loves, find a new poet). We come from another third book to a fourth, and find that the *Amores* are still there, doubled in another beginning after their appearance in an ending.

Alma introduces a series of echoes of the Lucretian proem.¹⁵ Ovid retains the 'old wound' of love, which has become the 'eternal wound of love' that afflicts Mars at *De rerum natura* 1.34 (*aeterno devictus vulnere amoris*), now 'old' in more senses than one. Ovid has just given us a book all about Mars, god of the month of March, but still bears the wound and standards (7) of Venus. Venus' laugh brings the fair weather that accompanies her advent in the Lucretian proem,¹⁶ the clear skies that will help Ovid in his task of singing of the setting and rising of the stars [*lapsaque sub terras ortaue signa cano* (I sing of the stars setting beneath the earth and rising, 12)],¹⁷ the same stars that watch over Venus'

¹⁴ For a subtle discussion of the poetology and politics of this proem see Barchiesi (1997b), pp. 53-60; for the connections between this proem and the address to Mars at the beginning of *Fasti* 3 see *ibid.*, pp. 61-5; Fantham (1998), pp. 87-8.

¹⁵ And is repeated at *Fasti* 4.90, introducing a lengthier evocation of the Lucretian hymn to Venus.

¹⁶ With *Fasti* 4.5 *risit* cf. *Lucr.* 1.8 *rident*; *serenus*, *Fasti* 4.6, is the adjective applied by Lucretius to the 'calm nights' 1.142) in which he writes his poetry, still under the influence of Venus, we are to assume.

¹⁷ Repeating *Fasti* 1.2 *lapsaque sub terras ortaue signa canam*, defining the astronomical part of the subject-matter of the *Fasti*, which is now brought under the sway of Venus; in retrospect the peacefulness of the dedicatee of Book 1, Caesar Germanicus, was already an inheritance of the ancestress of the Julian gens (*excipe pacato, Caesar Germanice, voltu* (accept my work, Caesar Germanicus, with calm brow, 1.3); *da mihi te placidum* (show yourself calm to me, 17): cf. *Lucr.* 1.40 *petens placidam Romanis, incluta, pacem*, (seeking calm peace for the Romans, famous goddess).

epiphany at *De rerum natura* 1.2 *caeli subter labentia signa* (under the stars that glide in the sky). April is the month in which Venus is *celeberrima* (most celebrated, 13); from Lucretius we know that she makes herself universally known through the generations of creatures with which she populates the world [*quae mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis / concelebras* (who peoples the ship-carrying sea, and the crop-bearing earth, 1.3-4)]. At the end of the proem Venus lightly touches Ovid's temples / 'Times' (as title of the poem)¹⁸ with her myrtle: *sensimus, et causae subito patuere dierum* (I felt it, and at once the causes of the days were revealed, 17). This translates into intellectual revelation the literal daybreak at *De rerum natura* 1.10: *nam simul ac species patefactast verna diei* (for as soon as the spring day's face has been revealed), but we remember that within the economy of the Lucretian poem the fair weather brought by Venus is an image of the insight and mental serenity revealed to the poet and his readers by Epicurus.

Ovid transfers the Lucretian proem from its position at the beginning of the first book of the *De rerum natura* to the beginning of a 'middle' book, but already has Lucretian authority for a proem in the middle that is a repetition of a programmatic passage in a first book, since the opening of *De rerum natura* 4.1-25, repeats the passage on the poet's task from book 1.926-50.¹⁹ The proem to *Fasti* 4 also resonates with echoes of other opening poems, Horace *Odes* 4.1, and with one of Horace's own intertexts, Sappho 1 LP.²⁰ But the proem to *Fasti* 4 is respectful of the fact that while Horace *Odes* 4.1 is a first poem, it is the first poem of a fourth book, and it also registers the numbering of another book which tells of the depredations of a love long intermitted, *Aeneid* 4, opening with Dido's wound of love *at regina gravi iamdudum saucia cura / vulnus alit venis* ... (but the queen long since suffering the heavy pain, feeds the wound

¹⁸ For the pun see Hinds (1992), p. 87 note 7.

¹⁹ On the problems of this repetition see recently Gale (1994a), arguing for retention of the passage at the beginning of Book 4.

²⁰ See Barchiesi (1997b), pp. 54-5, 57, with further references. Another example of Ovidian uprooting of proemial material is the allusion to the Dream of Homer in the proem to Ennius' *Annals* in the Speech of Pythagoras in the last book of the *Metamorphoses*: see Hardie (1995), p. 211.

with her life-blood, 1-2), the same wound that marks Ovid at *Fasti* 4.4-5 *vetus ... volnus ... volnere*; 7 *saucius*.²¹ In the 'old wound' we also catch a trace of Dido's recognition of times past at *Aeneid* 4.23 *agnosco veteris vestigia flammae* (I recognise the traces of the old flame).

But the articulation in the proem to *Fasti* 4 of a career marked by beginnings and returns, and by differences of poetic subject and generic elevation, is possibly a specious one. Horace really had abandoned lyric poetry, the sphere of Venus (by a partial definition of lyric), and turned to philosophical epistles before returning to his old stamping ground. Ovid places comparatives of *magnus* both in the mouth of Venus [*certe maiora canebas* (to be sure your song was set on greater things, 4.3)] and in his own mouth [*nunc teritur nostris area maior equis* (now my horses tread a larger field, 10)], alluding to Virgilian poetological applications of the word in a fourth poem, *Ecl.* 4.1 [*paulo maiora canamus* (let us sing of things a bit greater)], and in a proem to the second half of a poem, *Aen.* 7.44-5 [*maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo, / maius opus moveo* (a greater series of events is coming to birth, I am setting about a greater work)]. Line 10 reworks the statement of generic intent at *Amores* 3.15.18 *pulsanda est magnis area maior equis* (my horses must stamp on a greater field), where the reference is to tragedy. It might be unwise to speculate on how complete a break with erotic elegy was made by Ovid's lost tragedy, the *Medea*, but there is more than a hint of a question-mark over the certainty of Venus' statement at *Fasti* 4.3 *certe maiora canebas* (to be sure, you were setting out to sing of greater things). The imperfect may suggest that Venus turns her gaze on Ovid for the first time since the end of the *Amores*, and remembers what he was then setting out to do, but this could also be the imperfect of the *recusatio*, referring to a project never carried through.²² It is true that we have just finished a book centred around the warlike and epic figure of Mars, but this was a Mars slipped

²¹ Ovid's conflation of materials from first books (or poems) and a couple of fourth books may encourage us to reflect on the similarities between the wound of Dido at the beginning of *Aeneid* 4, and the (Lucretian) *aeternum vulnus* of Juno at the beginning of *Aeneid* 1.36.

²² Cf. *Am.* 1.1.1 *parabam*, and *Ecl.* 6.3 *cum canerem reges et proelia* (when I set out to sing of kings and battles)..

easily into an erotic, elegiac world.²³ At *Amores* 3.15.15-16 Ovid had told Cupid and Venus to pull their golden standards out of his field of poetry, but at *Fasti* 4.7 he tells Venus that he has never abandoned her standards (*numquid tua signa reliqui?*), and in the next line he asserts *tu mihi propositum, tu mihi semper opus* (you have always been my subject, you have always been my work).²⁴ Opening and closing statements of poetic intent, as well as statements in the middle, are so much shadow-boxing. Ovid is always in the middle of the same old thing.

The claim never to have abandoned Venus' standards is an Ovidian self-allusion to another middle where a threatened interruption to the career of love fails to materialise. As he comes towards the central point of Book 2 of the *Amores*, which is also the centre of the three books of *Amores* as a whole (books of 15, 20, and 15 poems respectively),²⁵ Ovid complains (2.9) that Cupid, whose most loyal soldier he is, *qui miles numquam tua signa reliqui* (as a soldier I have never deserted your standard, 3), never ceases to inflict new wounds on him, and asks to be retired from his service. In the paired poem 2.10 (9b) he vigorously rejects the idea of a life without love, and enthusiastically asks Cupid to go on shooting his arrows at him. The threat of a premature conclusion to the *Amores* is averted, and in 2.11 (10), the first poem of the second half of the collection, and a piece full of doublings and divisions, Ovid's renewed erotic vigour expands into an equal infatuation with two girls, rather than one. The half-hearted complaint to Venus at line 11 signals that he has not written *finis* to his love elegy, and will instead give us a double helping, *quid geminas, Erycina, meos sine fine dolores?* (why do you endlessly double my woes, Venus?) Or, in the words of *Fasti* 4.1, *gemini Amores* (twin Loves). Now the only imaginable end to love is death, of a kind that would give the poet-lover a *quietus* 'in the middle of the job' or 'in the middle of the literary work of the *Amores*' (which is precisely where we

²³ See above all Hinds (1992), and also Barchiesi (1997b), pp. 61-5.

²⁴ With the form of this line cf. perhaps another elegiac assertion of constancy, Prop. 1.12.20 *Cynthia prima fuit, Cynthia finis erit* (Cynthia was the first, Cynthia will be the end).

²⁵ Taking what are often printed as 2.9 and 9b, and 3.11 and 11b, to be pairs of poems: for the issues see Damon (1990).

are at this point), *at mihi contingat Veneris languescere motu, / cum moriar, medium solvar et inter opus* (when I die, may it be my fate to fail in the motions of Venus, and may dissolution come in the middle of the job, 35-6).²⁶ Such a death would be a suitable climax, and so doubly an ending, as well as an exit in mid-career, for it is hard not to hear an equation of orgasm with death in this couplet.²⁷

The two halves of the *Aeneid*

In Ovid's own 'epic', the *Metamorphoses*, there is no place for a formal proem in the middle, but on more than one occasion Ovid rewrites the bipartition of the *Aeneid*, on his own terms. Stephen Hinds has well discussed one of these occasions, on which Ovid comments on a complication in any simple division of the *Aeneid* into two halves. The central book division between *Aeneid* 6 and 7 is, unusually for the poem, bridged by the death and epitaph of Caieta. Hinds shows how Ovid, in his version of the death of Caieta in *Metamorphoses* 14, breaks apart the Virgilian bridge by inserting stories about Polyphemus and Circe between the narrative of the Trojans' arrival at the place 'not yet bearing the name of Aeneas' nurse' (14.157) and the note of the commemoration of the now dead Caieta's name on her epitaph at that place at 14.441-4. 'Where Virgil had sought to close the *Aeneid*'s most obvious structural break with a virtuoso narrative bridge, Ovid, with equal virtuosity, forces back open the gap between *Aeneid* 6 and 7, and inserts almost 300 lines of poetry into it.'²⁸ The second story told in this insert, Circe and Picus, also reminds us that it is the figure of Circe, at once marginal and central, which occupies the first major block at the beginning of *Aeneid* 7, immediately after the four-line 'epitaph' on Caieta.

This is not the first time that the *Metamorphoses* has beaten a path to the centre of the *Aeneid*. An approach had been made, not unnaturally, at

²⁶ The allusion of v. 36 to the midpoint of the *Amores* is noted by Barchiesi (1994), pp. 591-2, whose observation is the starting-point for this paragraph.

²⁷ Words in Latin meaning 'kill, die' used of orgasm: Adams (1982), p. 159.

²⁸ Hinds (1998), p. 110.

the start of Ovid's own seventh book, as the journey of the Argo is swiftly brought in six lines to (*Met.* 7.6) *rapidas limosi Phasidos undas* (the swift waters of the muddy Phasis); *rapidus* is one of the epithets applied to the Tiber as the Trojans approach its mouth at *Aeneid* 7.31, while *limosus* unmasks the euphemism in the second attribute of the river in that line, *multa flavus harena* (golden with much sand) [cf. *Met.* 14.448, *in mare cum flava prorumpit Thybris harena* (the Tiber bursts out into the sea with its golden sand), in Ovid's rewriting of the actual Trojan arrival at the mouth of the Tiber]. The arrival of the Trojans at the Tiber at the beginning of *Aeneid* 7 is already a repetition of the arrival of the Argonauts at the Phasis at the midpoint of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, at the end of Book 2.²⁹ Where it will take Apollonius the better part of 300 lines to bring his narrative at the beginning of his third book to the figure of Medea, Ovid's Medea has fallen in love by the ninth line of *Metamorphoses* 7, and a couple of lines later launches into her long monologue, corresponding structurally to the emphatic placement of Medea's aunt and partner in witchcraft, Circe, very near the beginning of *Aeneid* 7.³⁰

Of course, if we do not know it already, we will in time discover that Ovid's poem will continue beyond the Virgilian twelve books, and the beginning of a seventh book has no obviously privileged place within a total of fifteen books. But we might also remember that another fifteen-book epic had received probably its most emphatic internal punctuation at the beginning of its seventh book, Ennius' *Annals*, which chooses this point to introduce a 'major proem in which the poet speaks of himself and his work',³¹ in order to explain why he will not write at length of the First Punic War, already recorded in the uncultured verse of Naevius. For other reasons Ovid also hurries over a major subject of epic, the voyage of the Argo from Pagasae to Colchis, achieved in a resumptive pluperfect by line

²⁹ Nelis (2001), p. 262-3; Kyriakidis (1998), p. 125.

³⁰ *Met.* 7.5 *multaque perpessi claro sub Iasone* (after enduring many adventures under the leadership of famous Jason) aligns the Argonauts with the Odyssean sufferings of Aeneas' Trojans.

³¹ Skutsch (1985), p. 367. Conte (1992), pp. 154-6, argues that the *Annals* were originally planned in twelve books, making of this a proper proem in the middle.

6 of *Metamorphoses* 7, whose first word is the *iamque* (and already) with which Ovid also hurries over long epic journeys in the first words of Books 3 and 14.

Even this is not Ovid's first exercise in halving the Virgilian epic. Two contrasting images of artistic structure are presented in the tapestries woven by Minerva and Arachne at the beginning of *Met.* 6. Minerva's tapestry is heavy-handed in its formal symmetries and hierarchy. The central scene, of the contest between Minerva and Neptune as to which would name the city of Athens, is presided over by the twelve gods with Jupiter seated in their midst and in the middle of the line (72 ... *medio Iove* ...); the presence of the word *augusta* at the beginning of the next line hints that this scene of Olympian order is an image of a Virgilian '*in medio mihi Caesar erit*' structure. This scene is surrounded by four smaller scenes, the kind of four-square structure that Ovid tends to avoid. By contrast Arachne's tapestry is a catalogue of tales of gods who descended from their anthropomorphic dignity into a variety of bestial and other shapes in order to seduce women. Yet this apparently open-ended catalogue may be divided into two groups of twelve lines (103-14, 115-26), the second of which begins with the words *te quoque* (6.115, apostrophising Canace, one of Neptune's victims); the second half of the *Aeneid*, a poem divided into two groups of six books, begins with the words *tu quoque* (addressed to Caieta).³² No such numerical symmetry is apparent in the description of Minerva's tapestry.

Instead of a central division into two halves offering the possibility of a new beginning and a new proem at the start of the second half, a fifteen-book epic has a central book. Anna Crabbe has argued that the centrality of Book 8 of the *Metamorphoses* is marked both by its own internal symmetry, two pairs of narratives flanking the central panel of Meleager, and by the thematic and imagistic links that connect Book 8 backwards and forwards to Books 6 and 7 and Books 9 and 10, as well as more remotely reaching out to establish relationships with overall frame of Books 1 and 2, and Book 15.³³ The story of Meleager is 'the middle myth of the very middle of the book', and will later be turned by Ovid into an

³² *te quoque* are the first words of the second half of the *Georgics* (3.1).

³³ Crabbe (1981).

allegory of his attempt to burn the *Metamorphoses* on going in to exile, as the poet places his inmost parts on the fire in the image of the 'guts' of Meleager, burned at a distance when Althea places the log on the flames (*viscera: Met.* 8.516; *Trist.* 1.7.20), in a scene placed at the very centre of *Tristia* 1.7.³⁴

Book 8 has a high concentration of elements that allude to the central Books 6, 7, and 8 of the *Aeneid*: Daedalus and Icarus, the climactic subject of the *ecphrasis* of the doors of the Cumaean temple of Apollo at the beginning of *Aeneid* 6, and also the subject of what Alison Sharrock refers to as the 'second proem' of the *Ars amatoria* (2.21-98);³⁵ the reworking in the story of Baucis and Philemon of the themes running through Aeneas' visit to Evander and the site of Rome in *Aeneid* 8 of humble piety, Callimachean 'theoxeny', and the contrast between a humble rustic past and the gilded architectural monuments of the present. In the following, highly contrastive, story of Erysichthon, Hunger's infection of the impious tyrant superimposes the Virgilian scene of Allecto and Turnus from *Aeneid* 7 on its Callimachean original, *Hymn* 6. The end of *Aeneid* 7, the arrival of Camilla as the last in the Catalogue of Italians, has earlier been rerun in the inclusion of Atalanta as the last in the Catalogue of Hunters at *Met.* 8.317-23. Meleager is prevented from a more expansive expression of his love at first sight by allusion to the Virgilian introduction of the second half of the *Aeneid*, 7.44-5 *maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo, / maius opus moveo* (a greater series of events is coming to birth, I am setting about a greater work), at *Met.* 8.327-8 *nec plura sinit tempusque pudorque / dicere: maius opus magni certaminis urget* (time and shame prevent him from saying more; the greater task of the great contest presses).³⁶ The turn is from another erotic epyllion of the kind exemplified

³⁴ Everything in this sentence from Hinds (1985), p. 22.

³⁵ Sharrock (1994), p. 90.

³⁶ The other Ovidian uses of *maius opus*: (1) *Am.* 3.1.24 *incipi maius opus* (begin the greater work), the command to the poet to turn from Elegy to Tragedy, from the *puella* to *facta virorum* (25-7); the scene is set in an ancient and unfelled wood, like the wood in which the boar hunt takes place, *Met.* 8.329. (2) *Ars* 3.369-70 *sed minimus labor est sapienter iactibus uti; / maius opus mores composuisse suos* (but to make wise use of the throws of dice is the lightest of labours; the greater task is to compose your behaviour). Might this hint at a contrast between Aeneas' wise endurance of his storm-tossed career

by the Scylla episode at the beginning of the book³⁷ to the properly epic business of the hyperbolical boar-hunt, but the muse of Love, Erato, who presides over the war fought in Latium over a woman, will oversee the tragic dénouement of the boar-hunt, precipitated by the honours awarded by Meleager to the girl he loves. Yet this *maius opus* is a strictly localised

in the first half of the *Aeneid* (1.3 *iactatus*) and the greater task of beginning the construction of Roman *mores* in the second half? *composuisse* also hints at literary 'composition'. Alternatively one could draw the consequences of Gibson's (2002) suggestion, ad loc., that at 370 *maius opus* appropriately introduces the epic subject of anger (the girl must be careful not to get angry if she is losing the game); this too could be processed in terms of the two halves of the *Aeneid*, alluding to Aeneas' (ultimate) success in wisely weathering the storms of the first half of the poem, in contrast to his failure to control his own anger at the end of the second half. The couplet also echoes *Aen.* 6.129 *hoc opus, hic labor est* (this is the task, this is the labour); see Gibson (2002), ad loc., and also on *Ars* 3.467-8 and 499-500 for Ovid's management of the middle of that book, with further Virgilian allusion at 499-500. (3) *Rem.* 107-9 *si tamen auxilii perierunt tempora primi ... maius opus superest* (but if the moment for finding a remedy at the start has been lost...; a greater task remains) [it is harder to cure love once it has taken a hold]. (4) *Met.* 15.750-1 *neque enim de Caesaris actis / ullum maius opus quam quod pater exstitit huius* (in the acts of Caesar there is no greater achievement than that of being this man's father): suggesting that Caesar is as much in the business of fictional constructions as is the epic poet. (5) *Fasti* 5.567-8 *spectat et Augusto praetextum nomine templum, / et visum lecto Caesare maius opus* (he also gazes at the name of Augustus on the front of the temple, and when he reads the name of Caesar, the temple seems a greater work): temples, like epics, are there to be read (cf. Gallus fr. 2 Courtney); see also *Aen.* 6.33-4. (6) *Fasti* 6.591-2 (Tullia) *vivere debuerant et vir meus et tua coniunx, / si nullum ausuri maius eramus opus* (both my husband and your wife should have lived, if we weren't going to venture on a greater task): leading into an epic of impiety as Tarquin the Proud snatches the throne from his murdered father-in-law, 600 *gener socero*, as Aeneas fights against his prospective father-in-law in the second half of the *Aeneid* (7.317). Tullia offers her father's kingdom as her dowry (*regnum facio dotale parentis*, 6.593), as Turnus, in the eyes of his enemies, fights for a 'palace as dowry' (*Aen.* 9.737, 11.369 *dotalis regia*). (7) *Trist.* 2.63, *inspice maius opus, quod adhuc sine fine tenetur* (examine my greater work, which still lacks completion): the *Metamorphoses*, in contrast to Ovid's other, lesser, works.

³⁷ With Meleager's words at 8.326-7, *o felix, siquem dignabitur ... ista virum* (happy the man whom she will take for a husband) compare Scylla's makarismos of Minos' gear at 36-7 *felix iaculum, quod tangeret ille, / quaeque manu premeret, felicia frena vocabat* (she blessed the spear that he touched, and the reins that he held in his hand).

elevation of Ovid's poetic manner, and this allusion to the proem in the middle of the *Aeneid* at a point close to the numerical centre of the *Metamorphoses* is not to be taken as a signal that the second seven and a half books of the *Metamorphoses* will be a consistently 'greater work' than the first seven and a half.

II. ANTISTRUCTURE

In the midst

Many attempts have been made to analyse the structure of the *Metamorphoses*, and there is something to be said for most of them.³⁸ But in the end most readers may feel that the poem runs out from under any grid or blueprint. Of all surviving ancient epics the *Metamorphoses* makes the grandest claim to tell a story that begins with the beginning before all other beginnings [the first word of the narrative, whose starting point is defined in the proem as *ab origine mundi* (from the beginning of the world), is in fact (1.5) *ante* (before)], and which ends with the final seal on the life both of an individual human and of a political organism, the apotheosis of a ruler, which is to say the transformation of the linearity of human temporality into the unchanging status of divinity [note 15.841-2 *ut semper Capitolia nostra forumque / divus ab excelsa prospectet Iulius aede* (so that from his lofty temple the deified Iulius should always look out over our Capitol and the forum)]. The political and ideological investment in such openings and endings is revealed in Vinzenz Buchheit's convincing demonstration of the presence of Augustan structures of a Virgilian kind in Books 1 and 15.³⁹ But there is very little of a similar nature in between, apart from the apotheosis of Hercules at a point close to the centre of the poem in Book 9 - if we want to hunt for a Caesar figure (roughly) *in medio*. The overwhelming experience of reading the greater part of the poem is that of being *in mediis rebus*, and *mediae res* at that which are in no hurry to structure their progress towards

³⁸ For a recent survey see Wheeler (2000), pp. 1-4.

³⁹ Buchheit (1966).

a *finis*. The vast middle of the poem is uneasily contained within the undersized book-ends at either end of the poem that go through the motions of openings and endings. L. P. Wilkinson notes that what sustains the illusion of real narrative time in this sprawling middle is the idea of 'meanwhile' rather than 'after that'.⁴⁰

The destabilisation of a structured sequentiality in fact reaches out beyond this enormous middle place into the poem's beginning and ending, which on a closer view splinter into a plurality of beginnings and endings. The *Metamorphoses* repeatedly dramatises its own failure to realise a fully articulated structure with fixed beginnings, middles, and ends. This ideal structure coherence might be labelled 'Virgilian', so long as we are aware that this is a partial and simplifying model of how to read Virgil, one that the *Metamorphoses* constructs in order to deconstruct in its own practice. Repetition ceases to be a structuring principle at the point that the repetition-with-a-difference which articulates clearly formed structures turns into unmotivated and indefinitely extendible repetition.⁴¹ We have already seen this to be the case with Ovid's repeated imitations of the middle of the *Aeneid*, none one of which seems to have any more claim to be privileged as the middle than any other.

Beginnings

As a number of critics have noted, where the prevailing Virgilian trajectory is from disorder to order, programmatically in the opening storm scene which moves from the unleashing of an elemental chaos to the reimposition of order by the statesman-like Neptune, Ovid flips this into a repeated pattern of order degenerating into disorder.⁴² Possibly the clearest example comes in Book 2, where the opening *ecphrasis* of the

⁴⁰ Wilkinson (1958) p. 238, with reference to the stretch from *Met.* 1.452 to 11.193.

⁴¹ For a recent discussion of repetition as a (de)structuring principle in the *Metamorphoses* see Wheeler (2000), esp. ch. I. On repetition in Latin epic in general see Hardie (1993a), pp. 14-18; on repetition in Virgil, drawing on psychoanalytical models, see Quint (1991); (1993), pp. 50-2.

⁴² See note 1.

doors of the Palace of the Sun presents a strong image of cosmic symmetry and hierarchy that will then be thrown into confusion by Phaethon's uncontrolled wandering through and disordering of the universe.⁴³ But the movement in Book 2 is already a repetition of the pattern in Book 1, in which the providential construction of a world-order is followed firstly by a decline into moral disorder, and secondly by the punishment of that disorder through the return of the world to a version of primitive Chaos in the Flood.⁴⁴ Thus in these opening books structures of linearity fall into a condition of repeatability that deprives them of the possibility of realising any simple scheme of a completed beginning, middle, and end.

A similar unsettling of beginnings unfolds as the *Metamorphoses* gears up for the quintessentially epic matter of the Trojan War, occupying most of Books 12 and 13. Instead of a single, clearly marked, proem functioning as a frontispiece to Ovid's 'Iliad', we work our way through a series of starts and false starts. The reader first comes to Troy in the company of Apollo, travelling from mount Tmolus across the significantly transitional geographical feature of the Hellespont, the narrow stretch of water that divides one continent from another (11.194-5).⁴⁵ The description of the building of the mighty new city of Troy (199-201) is laden with terms that hint at the beginning of a grand new epic poem. After the story of Laomedon's perjury and the rescue of Hesione, given by Hercules in marriage to Telamon, we hear of Telamon's brother, Peleus' marriage to Thetis and the begetting of 'great Achilles' (11.265), another essential stage in the preparation of the Trojan War. Our attention is then diverted to the massive episode of Ceyx and Alcyone, the culmination of the section of the *Metamorphoses* labelled 'Pathos of Love' by Brooks Otis, and a story of very private loss and fulfilment. But this story is also the occasion for Ovid's grandest exercise in the 'epic storm' (11.474-572), self-consciously overreaching the storm that

⁴³ For a metapoetic reading of the contrast between ecphrastic order and the disorder of Phaethon's chariot-ride see Brown (1987a).

⁴⁴ Brown (1987a), p. 216.

⁴⁵ On the symbolic structural significance of the Hellespont here, and of the land equivalent of the Hellespont, the Corinthian Isthmus, at 6.419-20 see Barchiesi (1997a), p. 183.

launches the narrative of the *Aeneid*. Ovid, however, deliberately defuses the power of this hyperbolical storm, in which Ceyx is drowned, to start an epic. This he does by decoupling the storm from the motif of divine anger. Juno does figure in this story, not however as the instigator of the storm, but as a divinity incommoded by a consequence of the storm. Alcyone, unaware that her husband has drowned, continues to make offerings at Juno's temple for her husband's safe return (11.578-82). Virgil's Juno raises the storm out of a fear that if she does not display her power mortals will cease to worship and honour her (*Aen.* 1.48-9), and in raising the storm reveals herself as a goddess of openings.⁴⁶ Ovid's Juno intervenes in order to stop Alcyone making further offerings to her on behalf of a dead man, and triggers the closural moves of the story by sending the dream-god Morpheus to inform Alcyone of Ceyx' death.⁴⁷ Thus the storm is deprived of its causal function within an epic plot, at the same time as the mere presence of a Virgilian storm creates a sense that we are on the threshold of an epic. This storm is also a displacement of the storm that never really was at the beginning of the narrative of the Trojan War itself at the start of Book 12: the adverse storm winds at Aulis are appeased by the sacrifice of the stag substituted for Iphigeneia, and this epic is now launched, surprisingly, by the placation of a divine anger that has manifested itself in the natural world *et pariter Phoebes, pariter maris ira recessit* (the anger of Diana, and the anger of the sea subsided together, 12.36).

Between the conclusion of the Ceyx and Alcyone story and the beginning of the Trojan War there is a coda at the end of Book 11 that tells of another abortive epic beginning, the story of an obscure son of Priam, Aesacus, who, like Aristaeus in *Georgics* 4, unwittingly caused the death of a girl, the nymph Hesperie, when she stepped on a snake as she fled from his erotic attentions. Unlike Aristaeus, Aesacus finds no constructive way out of this minor tragedy; in his grief he attempts to kill himself by jumping off a cliff, but is transformed into a diving sea-bird, doomed to the perpetual repetition compulsion of hurling himself into the sea, but never finding the closure of death. He cannot progress to the kind of epic

⁴⁶ Feeney (1991), p. 138; Hershkowitz (1998a), pp. 95-105.

⁴⁷ Reversal of the Virgilian motif of divine vengeance: Otis (1970), pp. 245-6, 257-8.

career that in other circumstances might have brought him a greater fame *qui nisi sensisset prima nova fata iuventa, / forsitan inferius non Hectore nomen haberet* (had he not met a strange fate in his first youth, he would perhaps have had a name not less than Hector's, 11.759-60). Another epic choked off before it has begun.

When we finally do come to the narrative of the Trojan War in Book 12 we are offered a grand frontispiece, placed at the moment of the Greek arrival at Troy, in the shape of the description of the House of *Fama*, from one point of view the personification of the commemorative power of epic, and also a functional substitute for the epic Muse. *Fama* is a figure of great power, and this is expressed by her location at the very centre of the world (*orbe ... medio*, 12.39). This is perhaps Ovid's strongest image of a Virgilian '*in medio mihi Caesar erit*' type of structure. Is it coincidence that in the central line of the 25-line *ecphrasis* we find the name *Iuppiter*, whose role as central overseer of the universe (*Aen.* 1.223-6) *Fama* has usurped?⁴⁸ But Ovid's *Fama* is at the same time curiously powerless, and complete democracy, or rather mob-rule, seems to prevail in her house, where the mistress imposes no order on the coming and going of the unruly rumours and reports. The striking absence of a political hierarchy in a setting which dupes the reader into expecting strong images of control is paralleled at the level of the text in Ovid's recurrent hints of narrative orderings that collapse into disordering, so that the reader is only ever in the middle of a narrative cycle (*medio orbe*) without firmly fixed points of reference.

Endings

Ovidian endings are similarly plural and inconclusive.⁴⁹ I shall return, at the end, to the ways in which the *Metamorphoses* manages its

⁴⁸ For another central Jupiter cf. 6.72 *bis sex caelestes medio Iove sedibus altis* (the twelve gods on their high thrones, Jupiter in the middle), flanked by six gods on either side, and enthroned at the centre of the line, in Minerva's Virgilianising image of divine order (see above).

⁴⁹ On the multiple endings of the *Metamorphoses* see Barchiesi (1997a), pp. 196-7.

ending(s), but before that I wish to raise two points of reference for such a discussion. The first is again Virgil's *Aeneid*, where in the matter of endings it is even more difficult than with beginnings to operate with a simple Virgil/Ovid contrast, for the *Aeneid* has both a multiplicity of endings and, correspondingly, a tendency to deny absolute closure to any single one of these endings.⁵⁰ The second is the ending of the most perfectly formed of the several *mises en abymes* of the *Metamorphoses*, the Song of Orpheus in Book 10. Like the main narrator, Orpheus concludes with a story in which Venus is unable to prevent the death of a favourite (Adonis / Julius Caesar), but for which she finds consolation in the conversion of the beloved into a divine being, commemorated in cult (the Adonia/the cult of Divus Julius).⁵¹ Both are also commemorated in phenomena of the natural world, Julius in a transient comet, here today and gone tomorrow, and Adonis in a flower, ephemeral but returning annually. What Venus says of the ritual, the Adonia, is also true of the flower (10.725-7) *luctus monimenta manebunt / semper, Adoni, mei, repetitaque mortis imago / annua plangoris peraget simulamina nostri* (a memorial of my grief will always remain, Adonis, and the repeated likeness of your death will perform an imitation of my sorrow every year). This is a state of finality that consists of eternal repetition, an end that is no ending. There is an absolute beginning to both festival and flower in this aetiological tale, but their annual return is repetition without plot, an eternal middle.

The middle (again)

Further lessons on endlessness and repetition may be found if we go back to Book 8 of the *Metamorphoses*. One of the poem's most self-conscious moments comes near the centre of this central book. In the cave

Wheeler (2000), pp. 107-54, while acknowledging the plurality of closural moves, is more sanguine that the poem does move beyond mere continuation to a satisfying closure.

⁵⁰ Hardie (1997), pp. 142-51; Fowler (2000b), pp. 101-9.

⁵¹ On the echoes of Alexandrian poetic treatments of Adonis in Ovid's accounts of Venus' response to the deaths of Julius and his ancestor Aeneas see Barchiesi (1999), pp. 117-19.

of the river-god Achelous, a double of the underwater grotto of Cyrene in *Georgics* 4, the Virgilian original for Ovid's place of watery and poetic origins,⁵² the talk at a very Callimachean dinner table turns to the fictionality or otherwise of the subject of the poem itself, changes of shapes and the gods' part in such changes, when Pirithous exclaims (8.614-15) '*ficta refers nimiumque putas, Acheloe, potentes / esse deos*' (you tell fictions, and you attribute the gods with excessive powers).⁵³ To prove Pirithous wrong, the fictional characters Lelex and Achelous himself tell stories of divinely caused metamorphosis. As proof of the boundless and unlimited power of the gods to bring to a conclusion whatever they wish (8.618-19) the pious Lelex tells a story that confirms the lasting rewards accorded to virtue and piety through the transformation of Baucis and Philemon into trees, and of their cottage into a gilded temple, monuments that survive to the present day. Achelous then draws a crucial distinction between two kinds of transformation (8.728-30) '*sunt, o fortissime, quorum / forma semel mota est et in hoc renovamine mansit; / sunt quibus in plures ius est transire figuras*' (there are some, greatest of heroes, whose shape changes once and remains in this new form; there are others who have the power of shifting into a number of shapes). Of the latter kind of shape-shifter examples are Proteus, and also Erysichthon's daughter, Mestra. After telling their story, Achelous reveals that he too has the power of multiple and reversible transformation (8.879-80) '*etiam mihi nempe novandi est / corporis, o iuvenis, numero finita potestas*' (I too of course, young man, have the power of changing my body into a limited number of shapes). The list of his own transformations (881-2) partly overlaps with the list he had previously given of Proteus' various shapes (732-7).⁵⁴

⁵² Morgan (1999), p. 38 note 65.

⁵³ Feeney (1991), pp. 229-32. On the poetics of Achelous' dinner table see Hinds (1987a), p. 19; Barchiesi (1989), pp. 57-61.

⁵⁴ Why does Achelous draw attention to his 'limited power' *finita potestas* of shape-shifting? It is true that the three shapes of man, snake, bull are those commonly attested for Achelous, but there are no parallels for the explicit limitation of his shapes to three; and 'in late authors he becomes capable of unlimited transformations' (Forbes-Irving [1990], p. 172 with n. 5): Sen. *Herc. Oet.* 495-7 *namque ut subactus Herculis clava horridi / Achelous omnis facilis in species dari / tandem peractis omnibus patuit feris ...*

It is tempting to see in Achelous the central river-god embodying the poetics of the *Metamorphoses*, the split divinity who in his swollen watery shape represents the most turbid of muddy epic rivers, but in his anthropomorphic shape is the perfect host for some Callimachean story-telling, a paradoxical combination that captures the mixture of Callimachean and non-Callimachean in the poem as a whole. In Greek myth Achelous is not just the greatest of Greek rivers, but the oldest of rivers, and according to *Iliad* 21.194-7 the source of all rivers, the whole sea, and all springs and wells.⁵⁵ The Achelous is thus a double of Oceanus, as a universal source. The parallel between the grottoes of Ovid's Achelous and Virgil's Cyrene will have further point, if we are to see the latter as the home of Oceanus, to whom Cyrene and Aristaeus pour libations. Llewelyn Morgan argues that Oceanus is here a figure for the universal poetic source, Homer, with whom Virgil is intensively engaged at this point of the *Georgics*.⁵⁶ Typically, then, Ovid offers the reader a novelty in the shape of an alternative watery source for his poetry, and one

(for when Achelous, able to take on all shapes, was overcome by grim Hercules' club, and finally appeared as himself after going through all the wild beasts), Hyg. *Fab.* 31.7; *Myth Vat.* 1.58. We know that Achelous is a god who stands on his dignity (8.579-84), and is unlikely to draw unnecessary attention to his limitations. I suggest reading *infinita potestas*. This would make a ring with 618-19 *immensa est finemque potentia caeli / non habet* (the power of heaven is boundless and has no limit); it would give extra point to 879 *etiam mihi*: 'even I, I too', share the power of unlimited shape-shifting with Proteus and Mestra (730-9). Anderson (1972) on 8.880 points out that Achelous does pass successively through the shapes of man, snake, bull in his fight with Hercules at the beginning of Book 9, corresponding to Achelous' list at 8.881-2. The further extension of the list is, as it were, broken off with the breaking off of Achelous' bull-horn - which is turned into another emblem of abundant variety, the Cornucopia (9.87-92). 883 *dum potui* picks up 880 *potestas*, a power now infringed. *infinita potestas* would mark an anti-Lucretian moment in the text, since the Lucretian universe is assuringly one where things are characterised by a *finita potestas* (Lucr. 1.76, 595; 5.89; 6.65). In fact the list of three shapes is incomplete even on the evidence of *Met.* 9, since it omits his watery shape as river (549-50), also one of the disguises of Proteus (736-7).

⁵⁵ This assumes that Zenodotus is correct in athetising v. 195 which pairs Okeanos with Achelous. Even if we retain v. 195, the debate among Alexandrian Homerists raises the possibility, onto which Ovid may have latched, of taking Achelous as an alternative Okeanos. On Achelous see Isler (1981), p. 12.

⁵⁶ Morgan (1999), pp. 32-9.

who conveniently embodies the mutability that is the poem's subject-matter. The parallelism between the shape-shiftings of Achelous and Proteus further hints that the river-god stands in for the shape-shifter *par excellence*, whose presence in the *Metamorphoses* is perhaps strangely incidental. Achelous is the personification of the Protean poetics of the *Metamorphoses*.

Achelous is the second shifty river encountered in Book 8; the first is Maeander in a simile describing the twists and turns of Daedalus' labyrinth at 8.159-68:⁵⁷

*Daedalus ingenio fabrae celeberrimus artis
ponit opus turbatque notas et lumina flexu
ducit in errorem variarum ambage viarum.
non secus ac liquidis Phrygius Maeandrus in undis
ludit et ambiguo lapsu refluitque fluitque
occurrentesque sibi venturas adspicit undas
et nunc ad fontes, nunc ad mare versus apertum
incertas exercet aquas, ita Daedalus implet
innumeras errore vias vixque ipse reverti
ad limen potuit: tanta est fallacia tecti.*

Daedalus, most renowned for his skill as a craftsman, laid out the structure, and confused the signs for the wayfarer, leading the eye astray through twists and turns, with an intricate multiplicity of paths. Just as the Phrygian Maeander plays in his liquid waves, and rolling on his uncertain path flows and flows back, and meeting himself sees the waters that are still to come, and turning now towards his source, and now towards the open sea, he plies his doubtful stream; so Daedalus crammed the numberless paths with confusion, and he himself could scarcely find his way back to the entrance: so great is the deceptiveness of the building.

Daedalus, both here and in the parallel narrative of Daedalus and Icarus in *Ars amatoria* 2, has often been read as a figure for the crafty poet Ovid, with precedents in Catullus 64 (the labyrinth as a figure for the twisting and turning text), Virgil (the self-reflexive *ecphrasis* of the doors of the temple of Apollo at Cumae made by Daedalus in *Aeneid* 6) and

⁵⁷ Used by Barchiesi (1997a), p. 182 as an image of the labyrinthine structure of the poem.

Horace (*Odes* 4.2.1-4, looking back to *Odes* 2.20.13).⁵⁸ The Maeander has a beginning and an ending, it winds its way from source to sea, but all inbetween is a place of uncertainty and repetition.

One example of the repetitious wanderings of the poem is found in the introduction of Cyanee, the mother of Byblis and Caunus, at 9.450-2:

*hic tibi, dum sequitur patriae curvamina ripae,
filia Maeandri totiens redeuntis eodem
cognita Cyanee ...*

Here you had carnal knowledge of Cyanee, while she followed the bends of her father's banks, the daughter of Maeander who keeps on returning to the same place.

'Cyanee' is a familiar name, for we have heard the story of 'Cyane' in Book 5 (409-37, 465-70). If Cyanee inherits her tendency to repeat from her father, she in turn passes on the gene, for it is Cyanee's daughter, Byblis, who is condemned to suffer the same fate as Cyane, liquefaction into water, both consumed by their own tears [9.655-65; 5.425-37; cf. especially 9.663 *sic lacrimis consumpta suis Phoebeia Byblis* (Byblis descendant of Apollo, consumed by her own tears) with 5.427 *lacrimisque absumitur omnis* (she is totally consumed by her tears)].

Middle Pythagoreanism

Another image of a repetitious river is used by Pythagoras at a point in his speech where the afflatus of the philosopher comes particularly close to the afflatus of the poet. The passage begins with the common poetic image of the sea-journey, 15.176-85:

⁵⁸ Ovid and Daedalus: Sharrock (1994), ch. 3. On the labyrinthine poetics of Catullus 64 see Theodorakopoulos (2000); Fowler (2000b) also develops the idea of a labyrinthine poetics with regard to Virgil's Nisus and Euryalus episode. In general on labyrinthine texts see Doob (1990), who, however, makes little of the labyrinthine quality of Ovidian texts.

*et quoniam magno feror aequore plenaque ventis
 vela dedi: nihil est toto quod perstet in orbe;
 cuncta fluunt, omnisque vagans formatur imago.
 ipsa quoque adsiduo labuntur tempora motu,
 non secus ut flumen. neque enim consistere flumen
 nec levis hora potest, sed ut unda impellitur unda
 urgeturque prior veniente urgetque priorem,
 tempora sic fugiunt pariter pariterque sequuntur
 et nova sunt semper: nam quod fuit ante relictum est,
 fitque quod haud fuerat, momentaque cuncta novantur.*

And since I am carried along over the wide sea and have spread my full sails to the winds: there is nothing in the whole world that remains constant; all things are in flux, and every appearance is given shape as it wanders. Time itself also flows with perpetual motion, just like a river. For neither a river nor the fleeting hour can stand still, but as wave is driven on by wave, and the one in front is pressed by the one coming behind, and itself presses on the one in front of it, so the minutes equally fly and equally follow, and are forever new. For that which was before is left behind, and turns into what it had not been, and every instant is made anew.

This general statement of mutability echoes elements of the proem of the *Metamorphoses*: the motion of the inspired speaker's mind (1.1 *fert*), the changing of shapes (*mutatas ... formas*), novelty (*in nova*). The proem defines the subject of the *perpetuum carmen* as one with fixed starting and finishing points, *prima ab origine mundi ad mea tempora* (from the first beginning of the world down to my times), a survey of the whole of time. Pythagoras points to the undifferentiated continuity of time's flow (*adsiduo ... motu*), in which there is always a before and after, but every before is also an after and every after is also a before, as brought out in a *tour de force* of Ovidian repetition in 181-3.⁵⁹ Every wave is always a middle. This is a radically anti-teleological image of the passage of time, carrying the implication that a plot can never be more than an arbitrary segmentation of the continuum.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *perpetuus*, like *perennis* (*Met.* 15.875), can be used of everflowing rivers or springs.

⁶⁰ The other occurrence of *tempora labuntur* (*Met.* 15.179) is at *Fasti* 6.771, inaugurating a closural sequence at the end of the last (surviving) book of Ovid's *Tempora* (Barchiesi [1997b], p. 263), but also reminding us that any ending to a poem on time, whether in a sixth or a twelfth book, is an arbitrary foreclosure on time's lease.

Pythagoras' philosophical account of change is also a radical reformulation of the concept with which the poem has hitherto mostly worked. The typical episode concludes with a 'terminal metamorphosis', a change of shape that is fixed for ever. This yields a story with a clear plot-line of beginning (the character's initial shape), middle (the events leading up to, and the process of, transformation), and end (the final shape). The product of a terminal metamorphosis is usually a lasting feature of the world around us, and the logical structure of such stories is the causal one of an aetiology. The *Metamorphoses* constructs the world in which we live, the world which by the philosophical account with which the poem begins emerged into its present fixed and recognisable form out of a pre-cosmic chaos. But the philosophical account at the other end of the poem, the Speech of Pythagoras, reveals that this stability is an illusion, and that the true state of things is now as it was in the beginning (or even before the beginning, 1.5 *ante*). Then, we were told (1.17-18) *nulli sua forma manebat, / obstabatque aliis aliud* (nothing kept its shape, and one thing got in the way of another); from Pythagoras we learn that this is the condition of the world in its present state (15.252-3) *nec species sua cuique manet, rerumque novatrix / ex aliis alias reparat natura figuras* (nothing keeps its appearance, and nature, that makes things new, restores one shape out of another), another passage with strong echoes of the proem.⁶¹ The reciprocal and contrastive polyptoton of *alius alium*, found in both passages, is common in prose, but not in poetry except for didactic.⁶² The Speech of Pythagoras is at once a didactic poem and some kind of formulation of the *Metamorphoses* as a whole, a retrospective redefinition of the 'plot' of the poem. If the poem is a kind of epic, Pythagoras warns us that it is a *perpetuum mobile*, of the kind that towards the beginning of his own epic journey Aeneas senses that fate has in store for him, in what is the only example in the *Aeneid* of the *alius alium* construction (3.493-4): *vivite felices, quibus est fortuna peracta / iam sua: nos alia ex aliis in fata vocamur* (fare you well, you who have already realised your

⁶¹ *manere* is often used in the *Metamorphoses* to refer to the kind of stability whereby a changed body retains, permanently, some vestige of its former condition: Anderson (1963), p. 5.

⁶² Wills (1996), pp. 222-3: in Ovid at *Met.* 1.18; 15.253, 335; *Rem.* 255.

destiny; we are called from one adventure to another). Aencas envies the Trojan settlers at Buthrotum who have completed their wanderings and founded a city, but sees no possibility of a 'happy ever after' for himself, doomed to be for ever in the middle of an unending series of adventures.

Frozen in midtrack

Pythagoras' version of mutability posits a dynamic model of the absence of closure, in which everything in the world is always in the middle of a process of flux. Yet even the products of a typical terminal metamorphosis are stamped with the mark of unfinished business. This may be seen clearly in the case of Myrrha, the girl who confuses boundaries by committing incest with her father, and who eventually prays to be suspended between life and death, in order not to contaminate either the world of the living or the world of the dead (10.482-7):⁶³

*atque inter mortisque metus et taedia vitae
est tales complexa preces: 'o siqua patetis
numina confessis, merui nec triste recuso
supplicium. sed ne violem vivosque superstes
mortuaque extinctos, ambobus pellite regnis
mutataeque mihi vitamque necemque negate.'*

Caught between fear of death and disgust with life, she fell to these prayers: 'if there are gods to hear those who confess, I am guilty and I do not refuse my harsh punishment. But so that I cannot contaminate the living if I survive, or the dead if I die, banish me from both kingdoms, and change me so that you deny me both life and death'.

Her prayer is answered by metamorphosis into a tree, neither exactly alive nor exactly dead. Furthermore as tree she preserves some traces of her former state, still shedding 'tears' for her transgression, tears of a substance different from those of human tears, but bearing the same name as the former human being, *murra* 'myrrh'. The inbetween state also perpetuates her mental condition immediately prior to the transformation,

⁶³ On Myrrha see Hardie (2000), p. 5.

poised 'between fear of death and disgust with life'. Yet the punishment for Myrrha's uniquely monstrous crime turns out to be a metamorphosis of a kind with which the reader is by now very familiar, for Daphne's transformation into a laurel in Book 1 is the first in a whole series of tree metamorphoses in the poem. In general, metamorphosis is a surrogate for death as a form of narrative closure; but, unlike death, it is an imperfect end, for existence is replaced not by non-existence, but by another form of existence, which usually preserves traces of the previous existence. Another example of a metamorphosis which is experienced by a character in the text as a condition poised between life and death is that of Io, transformed into a cow. Her father, the river-god Inachus, at first does not know where she is, *nescit vitane fruatur / an sit apud Manes* (he does not know whether she still enjoys life or is in Hades, 1.585-6). When he does find her, alive but in animal form, he bursts out in a savage lament as if she were dead even though he knows that she lives (after a fashion). The inbetweenness of metamorphosis as a narrative solution is also highlighted in another, briefly told, tale in the Song of Orpheus, Venus' punishment of the horned Cerastae who used to sacrifice strangers at the altar of Jupiter Hospes, 10.232-7:

*'exilio poenam potius gens impia pendat
vel nece vel siquid medium est mortisque fugaeque.
idque quid esse potest, nisi versae poena figurae?
dum dubitat, quo mutet eos, ad cornua vultum
flexit et admonita est haec illis posse relinqui
grandiaque in torvos transformat membra iuencos.*

'Rather let that wicked race pay the penalty, of exile or death, or of whatever lies midway between death and exile. And what could that be, except the punishment of a change of shape.' While she hesitated what to change them into, she turned to look at their horns and was reminded that they could be left with these, and transformed them into the stout limbs of fierce bulls.

Their shape, rather than they themselves, are 'sent fleeing'.⁶⁴ As Anderson (on 235-7) points out, the Cerastae are converted 'into the kind

⁶⁴ OLD s.v. *verto* 9b.

of animal that should be sacrificed at the altar of Jupiter', thus a halfway stage to death. In their new shape they retain the horns which they bore in their human form, leaving a kind of hesitation as it were between their former and present conditions that, in this story, seems also to perpetuate the mental quandary (*dubitat*) of Venus as to how to punish them.

Hermann Fränkel has best characterised the peculiarly Ovidian sense of uncertainty that pervades the *Metamorphoses*, and described the betwixt-and-between quality that is left at the end of a typical narrative of metamorphosis. This is Fränkel on the Ovidian narrative of Apollo and Daphne: «The fabulous nature of the *Metamorphoses* made it possible to offer half-satisfactory solutions for situations which were entirely hopeless otherwise. Daphne's lover Apollo was likewise only half-frustrated ... Ovid makes the ambiguous character of the ending obvious when he says that friends who came to call on Daphne's father after the event were in doubt whether they should condole or congratulate him (578). This is characteristic; Ovid had a natural propensity to undecisive compromises.»⁶⁵ Fränkel elevated this aspect of the Ovidian texts into grand psychological and historical theses: Ovid is the poet of a 'wavering identity', that has its historical correlative in the poet's awareness of his position 'between two worlds', 'between the wonderful self-contained world of Antiquity and that newer one which was to bring Christianity and a different civilization».⁶⁶ Fränkel's approach has been much criticised, but not, I believe, altogether fairly, and elsewhere I have attempted to show how his insights may be recuperated with reference to more recent ways of analysing the linguistic and figurative, psychological, and historical and ideological aspects of Ovid's poems; I have argued that a 'transitionality', a sense of always being in the middle of a process with no firm expectation of reaching an end, is an Ovidian hallmark.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Fränkel (1945), pp. 78-9.

⁶⁶ Fränkel (1945), p. 163.

⁶⁷ Hardie (2000).

World without end

But I want to end this paper with some reflections on endings in Book 15 of the *Metamorphoses* that turn out to be middles. The Speech of Pythagoras reaches a climax with the report of Helenus' prophecy to Aeneas of the destiny of himself and his race, ending with the apotheosis of 'one born of the blood of Iulus', i.e. either Julius Caesar or Augustus: (449) *caelumque erit exitus illi* (the sky will be his fate / the end of his story).⁶⁸ An unambiguous ending, it would seem, the fulfilment of the plot of Fate. A few lines later Pythagoras starts making closural noises himself (453-4), and briefly summarises his doctrine on change thus (454-5): *caelum et quodcumque sub illo est / immutat formas tellusque et quidquid in illa est* (the sky and all that is under it change shape, and the earth and all that is on it). This assertion of the mutability of the sky is often read as a political dig at the Augustan ideology of imperial apotheosis, but I wish to dwell rather on the narratological (of course inseparable from the political) implication of the insistence on the mutability of that which marks the firm end of a story.

The final ending of the *Metamorphoses* is the skyward journey of Ovid's own 'soul', his 'better part', in the Epilogue to Book 15. This seems to be the apotheosis to cap all the apotheoses hitherto, which have come thicker and faster as we approach the end of the poem (Hercules in Book 9, Glaucus in Book 13, Aeneas and Romulus in Book 14, Julius Caesar and Augustus in Book 15). Ovid's immortal part will even be immune to the mutability of the heavens that threatens the permanence of Julian apotheosis, for it will fly above the lofty stars (15.875-6). Like the preceding narrative of the catasterism of Julius Caesar, Ovid's immortalization picks up an element from the end of Orpheus' miniature *carmen perpetuum*, when Venus remonstrates with the fates that have destroyed Adonis, and asserts, *at non tamen omnia vestri / iuris erunt* (but you will not have power over every thing, 10.724-5). In the Epilogue the poet speaks of his last day, *quae nil nisi corporis huius / ius habet* (which only has power over this body, 873-4). We have seen that the immortality

⁶⁸ OLD s.v. *exitus* 3 'A final part or point, conclusion, close, end', incl. Cic. *Part.* 32 *suavis narratio est quae habet ... exitus inopinatos*.

secured by Venus for Adonis will be of a compulsively repetitive kind. How monolithic will Ovid's poetic monument be? Stephen Wheeler asserts that the epilogue «is obviously closural because [Ovid] declares that his poem is finished, perfect, and resistant to the forces of change... Ovid does not end with Caesar's times, but with his own».⁶⁹

However the inauguration of the *aetas Ovidiana* is not an ending, but a beginning that is also a middle. This paradox can be approached by a final return to Virgil's proem in the middle in *Georgics* 3. This proem ends with three lines that look forward to the beginning of a new poetic project, the epic on Caesar (3.46-8):

*mox tamen ardentis accingar dicere pugnas
Caesaris et nomen fama tot ferre per annos,
Tithoni prima quot abest ab origine Caesar.*

But soon I shall gird myself to sing of Caesar's blazing battles, and to carry the fame of his name down through as many years as separate Caesar from his first beginning in Tithonus.

The movement from line 46 to 47 has something in common with the movement in the *ille ego* preface to the *Aeneid*, leading from the poems on woods and fields to the beginning of the martial epic, *at nunc horrentia Martis / arma virumque cano* (but now I sing of the bristling weapons of Mars and the man...).⁷⁰ *mox* has now become *nunc*. *pugnas Caesaris* taken together reads as a trial run for *arma virumque*, defining the subject of this epic as the 'battles' of the 'man / hero' Caesar. But just as *arma virumque* can, and for most readers does, work without the preceding *horrentia Martis*, so line 47 of the *Georgics* 3 can be read as self-contained if we take *Caesaris* to depend on *nomen*, with *et* postponed.

My point is not to use this parallelism as a serious argument for the authenticity of the *ille ego* preface (and it might be suggested that whoever composed them, if not Virgil, had their eye on these lines from the third *Georgic*), but merely to show how *Georgics* 3.46-8 also conform

⁶⁹ Wheeler (2000), p. 154.

⁷⁰ Cf. Thomas (1988), on *Geo.* 3.46-7: '**mox ... / Caesaris**: captures the point of transition from the *Georgics* to the *Aeneid*.'

to a pattern of a beginning. If we take *Caesaris ... nomen* together, the last two lines of the proem are a unit in themselves, looking forward both to the inception of the future epic and to the afterlife of the completed epic as it bears the fame of Caesar down to distant years. The name of *Caesar* is at the beginning and end of this process, framing the two lines, the alpha and omega of this epic. But note that the man Caesar is also in the middle of the time-span that stretches as many years into the future after the earthly career of Caesar as Caesar is distant from the Trojan ancestor Tithonus. *in medio mihi Caesar erit*, along the axis of time, just as he will spatially occupy the centre of Virgil's poetic temple in line 16. This is a position of authority, enthroning Caesar at the centre of a vast stretch of time that would be immemorial were it not for the power of poets working together with the power of princes. One may compare the central position of the deeply rooted oak tree at *Georgics* 2.291-2, whose roots stretch as far down towards Tartarus as its branches reach up to the heavens, and whose spatial reach is matched by its temporal reach, enduring fixed and unmoved for many generations of men. This world-tree is transplanted to the simile at *Aeneid* 4.445-6 where it becomes an image of the steadfastness of Caesar's ancestor Aeneas, the quality that in later time will ensure the fastrootedness of Roman power and empire.⁷¹

The last two lines of the proem to *Georgics* 3 are also a major intertext for the *Metamorphoses*' pretensions to control time. Line 48, covering the span from a distant beginning to Caesar's - and Virgil's - own times, contains elements that span the whole temporal reach of the narrative of the *Metamorphoses*: *prima ... ab origine* is repeated in the third line of the proem to *Metamorphoses* 1, *primaque ab origine mundi*.⁷² The words *abest ... Caesar* point to the absent Caesar at the other end of the poem, *Met.* 15.870 (of the apotheosed Augustus) *faveatque precantibus absens* (may he favour our prayers in his absence). Line 47, looking forward to time's future stretch, contains key terms of the Ovidian epilogue: a lasting

⁷¹ See Hardie (1986), p. 281 note 135.

⁷² At *Tristia* 2.559-60 Ovid adjusts the proem to create a trajectory from the *prima origo* to *Caesar*: *pauca, quibus prima surgens ab origine mundi / in tua deduxi tempora, Caesar, opus* (a few verses, in which starting from the first beginning of the world, I have carried the work down to your times, Caesar).

nomen (Met. 15.876), *fama* (878), conveyance down through the years (with *ferre per annos* compare Met. 15.875-6 *super alta perennis / astra ferar* (I shall be carried enduring above the high stars). In Ovid's epilogue it is the poet, not Caesar, who occupies the central position between the beginning of the world and the whole of future time, through which he will be carried by the fame of his song. But can one say of this enduring life *immota manet* (it remains unmoved), like the oak-tree in the *Georgics* (2.294), or like the oaken fixity of Aeneas' purpose in *Aeneid* 4 (449 *mens immota manet*)? Has Ovid finally proved Pythagoras wrong in saying that everything is in flux?

The *Metamorphoses* ends with the lines: *ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama, / siquid habent veri vatum praesagia, vivam* (I shall be read on the lips of the people, and, if the prophecies of the gods contain any truth, through all ages in fame I shall live, 15.878-9). This will be an afterlife 'on the lips of the people', a life in *fama*; we know from the beginning of Book 12 how volatile and shifty are the inhabitants of the House of *Fama*. Ovid will live as long as people reembody the 'soul' of his work in their own readings, but this is at the same time to fall into the endlessly varied rereadings that constitute the reception of any work, a fall into the uncontrolled vagaries of *fama*. Reception is always a story that has no end, unless of the non-teleological kind in which an author or work simply disappears from the archive or from the consciousness of readers. But Ovid is confident that he will be swept on *perennis* (875), carried down through time on the ever-flowing - and ever-renewed - stream of reception.