

PART ONE

Fiction and Empire

CHAPTER 1

Metamorphosis and Fiction

The aim of this first chapter is to offer a fuller description of the distinctive nature of Ovidian fictionality. A close reading of the extensive narrative sequence that occupies the last quarter of Ovid's first book—the interlocked tales of Io, Argus, and Syrinx—highlights how Ovid's strategies of keeping the reader at once aware of the external reality of his text and absorbed by the reality it describes are thematized within the story and reciprocally linked to the emergence of distinctive internal points of view. Two specific features of the poem especially further this play between the positions of internality and externality available to the reader: the subject matter of metamorphosis itself and what seem to be extratextual exhortations toward skepticism delivered by figures within the narrative. By suggesting how a Roman reader's approach to such issues would be colored by different assumptions about the role and nature of poetic fiction, we can attempt to historicize our reading further.

I. IO AND SYRINX

The account of how Jupiter transforms Io into a cow to conceal her from his jealous wife, of her experiences in her new form, and finally of how Mercury rescues her by slaying her hundred-eyed guard Argus takes up roughly the last third of the poem's first book. I have chosen it as an introduction to the complexities of the poem's narrative because Ovid himself uses it to train his readers to balance a connoisseurial awareness of the poem's elaborate verbal texture with an empathy for the characters that allows them to penetrate the surface of the text and "enter" into the story it tells. The tale of Io also provides a useful starting place because it is just the kind of episode that has over the past several decades provoked antithetical critical responses to Ovid's work. One reading focuses on the kind of close psychological observation that gives Ovid's portrayals of suffering a verisimilitude almost unique in Latin literature; the other presents the poet as a verbal gamester for whom even the greatest suffering offers only an occasion for the display of wit and a forensic cleverness.

Here is Ovid's account of the moment when Juno hands Io over to be guarded by Argus:

*Centum luminibus cinctum caput Argus habebat:
inde suis vicibus capiebant bina quietem,
cetera servabant atque in statione manebant.
constiterat quocumque modo, spectabat ad Io.
ante oculos Io, quamvis aversus, habebat.
luce sinit pasci; cum sol tellure sub alta est,
claudit et indigno circumdat vincula collo.
frondibus arboreis et amara pascitur herba
proque toro terrae non semper gramen habenti
incubat infelix limosaeque flumina potat.
illa etiam supplex Argo cum bracchia vellet
tendere, non habuit quae bracchia tenderet Argo,
et conata queri mugitus edidit ore
pertimuitque sonos propriaque exterrita voce est.*
(1.625–38)

Argus's head was girded with a hundred eyes, which slept in pairs while the others guarded her and remained at their post. Wherever he stood, he looked at Io: he had Io before his eyes even when he turned away. By day he lets her graze; when the sun goes beneath the deep earth, he shuts her in and encloses her undeserving neck with a chain. She feeds on the leaves of trees and bitter grass and in place of a couch, reclines on the earth—and that not always even covered with sod—and drinks from slimy rivers. Even when she wished to stretch her arms to Argus as a suppliant, she found that she had no arms to stretch out to him. When she tried to lament, she gave forth a moo; she feared the sound and was terrified by her own voice.

Io's terror at her own voice reproduces, as a classic article of the 1970s pointed out, a clinically observed effect of the experience of rape.¹ It is one of the more telling psychological touches in the poem, conveying the full horror of Io's situation. But the passage as a whole seems hardly the place to look for such horror. In fact, the girl's baffled attempt at communication becomes part of a set of human endeavors rendered impossible by her new form, the kind of clever catalog that has made Ovid infamous. Each human pleasure yields a new bovine discomfort: grass replaces food (and here Ovid makes his narrative fulfill the prediction

made in an earlier Latin treatment of Io);² earth takes the place of a bed, and muddy rivers provide her drink. Argus's physical peculiarity gives rise to another witty figure of thought, the paradox that he gazes at Io even when he turns away. The very lines are also elaborately patterned: like Argus's eyes they work in pairs, with the description of cow cultural practices—signaled by the enjambed *incubat*—marking the only three-line unit. Descriptions also tend to end with a pleonastic doubling: *in statione manebant* amplifies *servabant*, *indigna ... collo* does more or less the same for *claudit*, and the pattern continues even in the account of the girl's pathetic self-alienation, where the second half of the hexameter restates the first.

Another level of literary self-consciousness appears in the description of Argus. The language describing the grotesque monster comes very close to the traditional depiction of the lover in Latin love elegy. The persistent lover must endure all sorts of hardships, encamped on his beloved's threshold; Argus would prove remarkably well equipped for such a lifestyle, able to snatch sleep while remaining "at his post," a conventional transposition of military language to describe amatory "warfare." His ocular endowments also mean that, like the lover, he keeps the image of Io always before him. Indeed, when line 630 begins, the reader may be tempted to assume that *luce* is an ablative of means and that Argus will feast his eyes on the image of his beloved. This invocation of the genre in which Ovid made his literary reputation can serve to amplify by contrast precisely the horrific aspects of Io's plight. If only Argus were merely a lover, if only he were subject to the sympathy that the elegiac lover traditionally feels for his beloved's misfortune,³ if only the entire grotesque situation were susceptible to the stock descriptions of elegiac convention. But at the same time, for the informed reader who has followed the invitation issued in the poem's preface to pay attention to the interaction between epic and the slighter genres, there is a delightful appeal in seeing elegiac conventions foisted back on precisely the kind of mythological scenes that earlier love poets had used to provide ironic foils to their own fictive affairs. And, as an alternative to interpreting the depiction of Argus as lover as a technique for highlighting the pathetic content of the episode, we can see the self-referential literary game as determining even Io's terror of her own voice. Her discovery that she can only moo offers a parallel for the poet's own witty advertisement of the fact that his elegiac language has been strangely distorted into an epic roar. Io wants to lament, *queri*, the very task of an elegist, in fact the programmatic one,

¹ Curran 1978.

² Calvus, fr. 9 Courtney: *a virgo infelix, herbis pascetur amaris*. See Barchiesi 2005.219.

³ Cf., e.g., Gallus imagining Lycoris's tender feet hurt by Alpine ice (Verg. E. 10.48).

because elegy as a genre was believed to derive from lamentation. So too, the moo that comes out instead recalls the hollow rumblings conventionally used to disparage windy epic utterance.

It should be clear that my point is not to privilege one of these readings over the other—though it should also be clear how trivial, not to say offensive, the reduction of Io's silence to merely another literary sport will be to critics with a serious interest in Ovid's portrayal of the victims of the god's sexual imperialism and conversely how strained this alternative reading might seem to critics interested above all in Ovid's poem as a showpiece of sophisticated generic play.⁴ Rather I want to stress that the narrative makes both responses available to the reader and indeed correlates them with the perspective from which Io's plight is viewed. For the humor that comes from the narrative derives from another kind of superficiality than simply the attention to the obtrusive effects of the narrative surface. Here, as elsewhere in Ovid, it is the visual overexplicitness with which the poet describes the unusual forms of the two nonhuman figures as they are measured against the standard of conventional human behaviors that produces the cleverness.⁵ **The many-eyed giant who keeps Io in his sight resembles the elegiac lover except when we remember those hundred eyes, in which case the metaphorical meaning of the phrase "he had her always before his eyes" becomes quite literal. Similarly, as long as we, like Argus, keep Io's bovine form before our eyes, the incongruity of the cow acting as a human amuses.**

But not the least important of the passage's doublings comes when Io's own perspective emerges in counterpoise to that of the watcher Argus. As the repetition of the name Io at the end of the line and at the following caesura marked the account of Argus's response to Io (1.628–29), so her actions toward Argus call forth a symmetrical pattern of repetition (Argo at line end, 636; Argo at caesura, 635). This mirroring within the text reminds us how different things look when viewed from out of the cow's eye, and how disorienting our experience of the narrative becomes when such a possibility enters into it. Io, unlike Argus, does not take her cow form for granted; she acts as though she were human and finds that her form baffles and frightens her and frustrates her intentions.⁶ We have been reading a narrative that similarly seemed to present fantastic forms as commonplace, but once we measure these fantastical forms subjectively, against our own expectations of experience, as Io's perspective on her form invites us to do, a kind of recognition makes us feel the full

⁴ Fränkel 1945.79–80.

⁵ See Galinsky 1975.179–84 and Hinds 1987b on overexplicitness.

⁶ On this discrepancy between psychological state and external appearance, see esp. Rosati 1983.109–14.

strangeness of this fantastic world. We heard without demur that Argus "had" a hundred eyes; Io raises her arms, in the natural assumption that she possesses them, only to discover that she "has" none. Between the beginning and the ending of the passage, we have moved from the distant perspective of the watcher, for whom any fantastical image can be marveled at with equanimity, to that of the participant for whom this fantasy has become all too vivid.

Our discovery in this passage of an overlap between the reader's experience and the alternative perceptions of the characters within the poem receives confirmation when in the very next scene a written text makes possible the recognition of Io. The transformed Io arrives at the stream of her father, the river god Inachus. Lacking a human voice, she first tries to make her identity known through gestures. She acts as a daughter by following after her father and sisters, by allowing herself to be touched, by licking and kissing his hand, and by weeping. Yet although such gestures provoke astonishment (*admirantibus*, 1.644), they are interpreted through her bovine form and, in the absence of language, cannot convey a human identity within it. A friendly cow may be uncanny, but precisely because it is a cow. Finally, she resorts to the expedient of writing, an intrinsically human activity.⁷ The act of tracing her name with her feet at once reveals her identity, draws attention to the remarkable ingenuity of the poet, and, appropriately for such a doubly valent gesture, brings to the fore problems of reading and interpretation. The very letters that make up Io's name have in Greek another signification; they mean "alas," and such an expression of sorrow is perfectly suited to her situation. In fact, one might say that to recognize Io necessitates the cry *alas*. Lest anyone miss this point, Ovid works another clarifying transformation on the inscribed text, translating written Greek into spoken Latin in the reply of Inachus—*me miserum*! Inachus's words here reveal fully what is at stake in recognizing Io, not just the acknowledgment of her identity but a kind of sympathy that literally makes him the vehicle for her voice. *Me miserum* not only translates bovine Greek into comprehensible Latin—making clear for Ovid's reader's what Io has written; it also conveys Inachus's own emotional response to the discovery. Inachus intends *me miserum* to represent his own suffering; however, in context the *me* is Io.⁸ But this optimistic reading of reading as a way by which writing literally restores a lost identity is unfortunately only part of the story. For Inachus's subsequent speech reveals that it is very much his own sor-

⁷ See Santini 1998.

⁸ *me miserum* as a translation of *io* has now also been observed by Barchiesi 2005.221. As P. Hardie points out to me, *per litteras*, the other "transformation" Io's text has undergone is one of gender, for Inachus *me* is grammatically masculine: "Even in the act of self-reflection the male reader is inevitably distanced from the female subjectivity."

rows that are on his mind. Far from empathizing with Io's misfortune, Inachus is interested only in what his daughters new form means for him. Like any demigod—or Roman father—on the make, he had hoped to advance his status through his daughter's marriage. Now, however, the opposite will be the case: his son-in-law will be a bull, and his grandchildren cattle—just the kind of humor we have already seen to depend on an inability to penetrate Io's form.

Not surprisingly, Ovid signals the parallel between this first representation of reading in the poem and the audience's task of interpreting his work as text. Io's writing is described as the sign of her new form, *corporis indicium mutati*, a citation of the poem's definition of its subject matter in lines 1–2. Indeed, the closely related word *index* can itself mean the title or summary of a literary work, a point that gives a further level of self-referentiality to Io's "citation," because the poem as a whole might well be indexed as something like *mutata corpora*.⁹ If *indiciu*m makes us think of the actual label hanging on a book roll, that will not be the only reminder of the materiality of Ovid's text in the passage. For the word *corpora* itself has already been subject to change here. What Io sees when she looks at herself reflected in the stream is new horns, *nova cornua*. Not only is this a variant for the poem's opening theme—where *corpora* is also modified by *nova* and occurs at the same emphatic position in the line—but *cornua* were themselves the wooden knobs at the ends of the papyrus role.¹⁰ But beyond the suggestion that Io herself, transformed into a book roll, becomes a real presence to every reader, the scene where Io sees herself mirrored in the stream introduces an even greater level of reflexivity between the various levels of audience. For the mirror through which Io sees herself is in a very literal sense none other than the reader of her words. The stream is the Inachus, and Inachus is the very river god who, in crying out *me miserum*, mirrors Io's own writings. This moment of self-recognition as a cow, then, comes when she literally sees herself as others see her, and those others are her readers, and yet the very same device makes the reader himself a reflection of Io, and so gives access to her experience as perceiving subject.

What this passage shows above all is how closely the question of narrative form is bound up with the changing "forms" that make up the poem's content. A loose parallelism between the two has been a staple of Ovidian criticism: as the universe it describes is constantly in flux, so

⁹ OLD s.v. *index* § 3. Ovid himself will use the tag phrase, *corpora versa*, at Trist. 2.64 to refer to the *Metamorphoses*. See Horsfall 1981.104.

¹⁰ A pun elsewhere observed by Barchiesi 1997a.187, and with particular panache by Wheeler 1999.92–93 in reference to the horns of the bull that carries away Europa, see the introduction to chapter 6.

the tone and configuration of Ovid's poem oscillates before the readers eyes, veering between the comical, the grotesque, the tragic, and the philosophical. His interest in form has also been connected to an Ovidian impulse to "change the shape" of the narratives that he inherits from earlier authors, introducing comic elements into an epic narrative, for example.¹¹ Here though, the way the characters themselves respond to Io's changed shape offers a model for precisely the kind of ambiguity that the surface of the text produces: as the narrative of the poem generates two apparently incompatible readings, so Io's own form constitutes a puzzle or problem, capable of eliciting divergent responses from characters depending on how and from whence they view it.¹² And as Io's shape alone can suffice to categorize and define her, so too the poem's linguistic play, the attention it attracts to its own form, can seem to take over the narrative content, partly, in the sense we have seen, in that the story that is told can seem to be so self-referential that it does nothing but provide an allegory for the style of the narrative itself. But that is not all there is to the relationship between narrative form and the form of the characters. The problem of Io's changed form offers more than a paradigm for how the reader can interpret the text of the Io story. His own understanding of Io's form plays a crucial role in determining the reader's response to the narrative itself: to focus on Io as cow opens up one possibility for reading; to be aware of her humanity, quite another. Put another way, as the reader enters into each level of narration—in this case by moving from an awareness of his role as reader of the Ovidian text to an interest in and acceptance of the perspective of Argus, he encounters another enigma that juxtaposes the same potentials for external wonder and sympathetic identification as the first. And the two levels of interpretation required influence one another reciprocally—thus the reader fascinated by the poet's wit will perhaps be less inclined to achieve the final identification with Io; conversely, it is precisely Argus's conviction that Io is just a cow that is required to appreciate the humor of the poem.

Argus's role as a model, or foil, for the reader's interpretation of the narrative serves as a preparation for the next episode, in which Argus quite explicitly becomes the audience for a typically Ovidian narrative. After Io has encountered and been recognized by her father, Jupiter can at last no longer endure her misfortunes. (Perhaps he himself has come to adopt a different perspective on Io; at any rate, his response here seems

¹¹ Galinsky 1975.4–6, citing AA 2.127–28, where Ovid has Odysseus tell Calypso the story of the fall of Troy over and over again always varying it, *referre idem aliter*. See also Galinsky 1975.62–63.

¹² Cf. again Rosati 1983.109–114.

directly opposite to the last time he saw [*viderat*] Io departing from her father's stream, when he was impelled to rape her, thus beginning her misfortunes.) He sends his son Mercury off to kill Argus, and the divine messenger, after a quick change of costume, appears before Io's guardian as a shepherd. After much conversation, the god attempts to put Argus to sleep by playing on the panpipes. Argus asks the origin of this strange instrument, and is rewarded with the story of Pan's desire for the nymph Syrinx. Halfway through the tale however, Ovid abruptly changes from the direct report of the god's words into indirect discourse, through which he completes the tale of the nymph's transformation into reeds to escape Pan's pursuit. What has happened, of course, is that Argus has fallen asleep while listening to Mercury's words, and the god wastes no more time but immediately slits his throat and hurls him from the rock he sits on.

Here Argus literally hears the same story as Ovid's audience, but his failure as a listener to be absorbed by the narrative results from just the kind of "superficial" interest that distinguished his response to Io.¹³ David Konstan has argued that Argus's fascination with the pipes points out his responsiveness to the artistry of the god's song and to the music of his performance, in contrast to his utter lack of interest "in the human narrative that lies behind [the instrument the poet uses]."¹⁴ He then goes on to locate the alternatives of mere admiration for the technical skill of the narrator, of his *ars*, and the kind of absorption possible when the narratee recognizes himself in the narrative in ancient theories of aesthetic response, going back as far as the *Odyssey*. In Plato's *Ion*, for example, the rhapsode's ability to enter sympathetically into the Homeric poems he performs differentiates him from the philosophical listener or, more precisely, watcher (*theates*), a term that perhaps suggests the distance required for the thoughtful analysis of the poem's content. Indeed, Konstan suggests that Argus, who is, as we have seen, all eyes, can "almost" be read as a parody of the philosophical spectator, who tunes out when his quite technical question about the origin of the pipes turns out to provide no material to engage his interest. Aristotle's account of the emotions roused by tragedy also hinges on the capacity of those in the audience to perceive themselves in the position of the character whose suffering they see represented. Thus, for example, pity depends on some perceived likeness between the character depicted and the audience, while genuine fear comes when we fully accept an identification

¹³ Galinsky 1975.174 treats Argus not as a foil for the reader but as a reminder of precisely the response demanded of the Syrinx story, which is merely the transposition of the narrative of Daphne and so all too well known to the audience.

¹⁴ Konstan 1991.19.

with such characters to the point of identifying a danger to them as a danger to ourselves.¹⁵

But to return to the question of what sort of audience Argus provides, and how and why he differs from the poet's own audience, we can begin by noting the trust he places in appearances and in artifacts. Again, the ground is laid for Argus's fatal lapse of attention when the creature fails to recognize the god Mercury, assuming that he is a fellow shepherd because of the attributes he bears. In the same way as Konstan points out, the artifact of the panpipes and the physical sensation they produce work upon him, just as the same artifact prompts his request for the tale of its origins. The song, as it were, takes priority over and generates its narrative content. But once the story begins—or, more specifically, once the god's narrative comes to introduce other characters who perceive—Argus loses interest entirely.¹⁶ The beginning of the story is entirely descriptive; when the figure of Pan ceases to be described and begins actively to see (*videt*) and to speak (*verba refert*), Mercury can stop narrating because his audience is asleep.

Is Ovid then inviting his audience to go beyond Argus's limited perceptions? To the extent that he continues telling the story of Syrinx, he presumably expects them to be more interested in it than Argus was. On the other hand, the way the narrative is continued, the elaborate game of putting the rest of the story in indirect discourse, advertises the artfulness with which the poet has contrived his own narrative structures. The audience, if it is expected to be interested in the narrative itself, is also supposed to be awake to the function it fills within the poet's own artifice. For if we accept Argus as the model of the reader who sees only the surface of the narrative, there is another model interpreter within the narrative complex who makes the opposite set of cognitive mistakes, the god Pan himself. As Argus mistook a god for a shepherd because of his staff, so Pan initially seems to mistake a nymph for a goddess, despite the telltale difference in their attributes. Similarly, later in the story Pan hears the same sound as Argus, the wind playing through the reeds, and is similarly "captivated" by it. As opposed to Argus, though, who can

¹⁵ Another connection between the way Ovid has constructed the role of the reader here and this tradition of ancient narratological theory comes when Io's changed form becomes a figure for the narrative's own deceptive surface. Not only do strange or incredible appearances become a defining feature of *fabulae*, but these narratives themselves are sometimes figured as presenting a strange or implausible "form" to the reader. Thus, Quintilian defines *fabulae* as narratives remote even from the form of truth (*a forma veritatis*, 2.4.2).

¹⁶ Indeed, his incapacity to identify with the perspectives of either of the characters in the Pan and Syrinx story is precisely what qualifies him to act as Io's guard. He can neither recognize or identify with the metamorphosed object of the god's desire nor, like Pan, can he desire her himself. He can only watch.

respond only to the instrument itself and cannot hear whose “voice” it is, the god makes the mistake of overly subjectivizing what is really just a clump of reeds. He hears the wind moved by his sighs passing over the reeds¹⁷ and, because the resulting sound resembles a lament, interprets it as the expression of the vanished nymph, even though it is nothing other than the transformation of his own voice, and assumes that it will make possible a “conversation” (*conloquium*) that it has in fact prevented.

Argus’s function in constructing the reader’s response to Ovid’s narrative, then, is not so simple as an injunction to “absorption” in the inner narrative. For Argus is guilty not only of a lack of interest in the story but also of a lack of awareness of his present circumstances, of the context in which the tale is told. Falling asleep, after all, is hardly the connoisseur’s response to a poet’s technical craft. He fails in both the aspects of the task that Ovid has set for his reader of being at once inside and outside the story. Thus, Argus’s failure to enter into the narrative comes not simply from a lack of psychological engagement with the narrated events but also from the passive assumption that he is outside or beyond the reach of the narrative, when in fact the tale of Syrinx is very much a part of his story. What is so shocking when the report of his death finally comes is the reminder of the connection between the various levels of narrative.¹⁸ One effect of the way Ovid has deferred the climax of Argus’s story is that his own reader becomes so absorbed in the narrative that, like Argus in a different sense, he loses an awareness of the larger story and sees the terrible risk an audience runs for not recognizing the reciprocity between the tale and its telling, between audience and narrated event.

But are we justified in using a term like risk, or is the “punishment” of Argus such a grotesque exaggeration of the consequences of bad reading that it can be read only as a joke that further separates Ovid’s readers from the characters he describes?¹⁹ After all, the poet is not still lurking

¹⁷ So Anderson 1996.217 interprets lines 1.707–8: *dumque ibi suspirat, motos in harundine ventos / effecisse sonum tenuem similemque querenti*. Contra Hardie, *per litteras*, who sees the passage as an allusion to Lucr. 5.1382–85, where it is precisely the natural effect of the wind blowing over reeds that teaches man the use of the panpipes. The juxtaposition of the (onomatopoetic) *suspiria* with the description of the wind as “moved,” however, makes me think that here Ovid is reversing rather than following the Lucretian model.

¹⁸ As Anderson 1996.216 points out, the shift between levels is initially blurred at the juncture when Ovid resumes telling the story. *Restabat verba referre* certainly marks an interruption, but who has been interrupted? Is the one who has left his words unfinished Pan, who has been prevented from delivering his speech, perhaps by the flight of the nymph? (After all, the reader has already seen Apollo unable to finish his address to Daphne on account of her precipitous departure [*plura locuturum timido Peneia cursu / fugit cumque ipso verba imperfecta reliquit*, 1.525–26]). Or is it, as later proves to be the case, Mercury?

¹⁹ Cf. Thiem 1995, esp. 243, on how such writers use the fiction of the reader absorbed into the text to reject reading that is merely ludic.

around the corner with his curved sword. What such momentous effect can a narrative, and a narrative whose very subject matter marks its distance from the world of actuality, possess for the reader’s experience of reality? That is the question that the book as a whole will try to answer, but we can make a start by looking at one last element of this elaborate set of tales, the panpipes themselves. This instrument first offers an apt image for the Ovidian text itself, with its unequal lengths welded into a harmonic whole by the skill of the artist.²⁰ In another sense as well, they return the reader to the generic issues we met in the introduction. For, as an archetypal symbol of the bucolic genre, they represent a distorting intrusion into the epic fabric of the poem. And as before, the generic question is part of the larger issue of the relation between the tale and the telling, for the whole Syrinx tale can be read as a rustic modulation of a story the poet has already told, the tale of Daphne and Apollo. As we have seen too, the very nature of the artifact focuses attention on this relationship between the telling and the tale, between the voice of the speaker and the voices of the figures whose stories he tells. The sound of the syrinx comes literally from the voice of the artist, but at the same time the music makes us hear voices. Like Pan, we can hear the nymph’s lament in what the poet then pointedly reminds us is simply the sound of the god’s own sighs played through the reeds. And, as in the earlier account of Io’s sufferings, the question of which frame of reference we adopt plays a large part in how we answer that question, whether we hear the story through the real object, or whether we grant priority to the fabulous narrative the god tells, and then allow it to change perceptions of reality. Is it the syrinx, an object that forms part of the inner audience’s (viz. Argus’s) experience of the real, as Ovid’s own artifice exists as text in the real world, that prompts and generates the story, or does the story form an action that explains and interprets reality, so that the syrinx really does bring Syrinx into the present? Within the narrative, the story itself is offered as an explanation, as though it were a true account, but the suggestion arises that Mercury and/or Ovid may quite literally have spun the tale out of the instrument. This is in fact the earliest surviving account of the tale of Pan and Syrinx, and even if Forbes-Irving is right in assuming that Ovid did not simply invent it, we can certainly say that it was far from being an uncontested or canonical explanation for the origins of the instrument.²¹ Not only does the syrinx lie at the cusp of all these questions but, correspondingly, it is this instrument that forms the bridge be-

²⁰ *disparibus calamis compagine cerae inter se iunctis nomen tenuisse puellae* (1.711–12). Note the resemblance to another artisanal product with programmatic overtones, the wings of Daedalus, which are explicitly compared to panpipes (8.189–95).

²¹ Forbes-Irving 1990.277–78.

tween the three levels of narration: it is present to Pan in Mercury's story, to Argus in Ovid's, and, if we accept it as a figure for the poem itself, it also confronts the poet's audience outside the tale. The instrument acts as a kind of narrative firebreak, the material legacy of an earlier story that, by its very presence, seems to mark that story as complete, and yet the set of pipes, precisely because it still exists, reminds us that none of the stories is over and that no audience can ever be truly outside their embrace.

II. METAMORPHOSIS

The narrative of the Io episode has shown how the changed body of Io figures at the center of the interpretative complexities of the episode. In a manner already predicted by the poem's first lines, where the text's form and its subject matter are subject to change, reading Io's own "changed body" becomes at once a metaphor, and a very real starting point, for reading the narrative about her. The transformative power of metamorphosis for the reader's experience of the text demonstrates the multiple ways in which the phenomenon itself links the inside and the outside of the poem's narrative. From outside, that is to say from the set of expectations a reader brings to the poem, metamorphosis becomes a narrative element that compels a reexamination of the "form" of the text before one. Is it an epic poem or something much slighter? Is it the kind of narrative that should be read as true or that one can approach with the comfortable distance of self-acknowledged fiction? Does metamorphosis function as a kind of natural law that different philosophical systems can make sense of? Does its presence correspondingly signal that Ovid's work is to be understood as in some way an allegorical account of the nature of things? The cognitive problems that any story about metamorphosis raises, especially given its associations for an ancient reader, mirror and accentuate the hermeneutic puzzle that the metamorphosed figures within the poem pose for an inner audience and often for themselves. And here, too, the problem becomes one of surface and depth. **Is the new form as it appears from the outside all that matters? Or can we identify, and identify with, some essence within the new figure that preserves traces of the old? As I argue, no law of metamorphosis diminishes the impact and puzzlement of each new change, which will have to be made sense of on its own terms.** This power of metamorphosis to draw the reader into the narrated experience of the poem, and simultaneously to project the poem's influence outward into the real in turn, drives the work's ideological engine, for assumptions made about the nature of change and its resulting products translate directly, though never simplistically, into an understanding of the kind of world the work portrays and the role it

claims within it. **This fundamental ambiguity of metamorphosis will thus be at the center of my reading of the poem because it at once reflects, and helps bring about, the transformation of Ovid's text into a dynamic locus for defining and codifying political and social roles.**

The large functional claims I am making for metamorphosis must be defended at the outset against **two strong tendencies in modern scholarship, one of which treats metamorphosis too lightly, whereas the other takes it too seriously.** Karl Galinsky's 1975 study of the poem has provided an influential formulation of the first of these tendencies. Galinsky finds a double link between the poem's theme and its literary form: the emphasis on change mirrors the poem's own shifts in language, tone, and subject matter as well as its relentless pursuit of novelty in retelling well-known tales in new ways. Indeed, no small proof of Ovid's narrative virtuosity is his bending over backward to include accounts of transformation in tales where it would seem to have no place. The occasionally tangential nature of the metamorphosis element in Ovid's narratives leads to Galinsky's second, more fundamental claim about its role in the poem. Metamorphoses help establish the poem's "imaginative and tonal qualities,"²² by wresting myth away from the kind of serious moral investigations prompted by the tragic potential of the tales he tells. Not only does transformation provide a soft option to death and annihilation as a closural element; more significantly, it translates myth to a realm of fantasy that loosens our engagement with the issues it raises. The idea of metamorphosis as a way of draining off the moral qualities of myth also featured in Joseph Solodow's 1988 book on the poem, although in a move that anticipates my own interpretation, he points out that the poem's very refusal to pin down the moral consequences of transformation—whether it is a punishment or a reward, and, in either case, whether it is deserved—can invite the audience to examine precisely these issues.²³

The tradition of using the metamorphosis theme to emphasize the poem's essential lack of seriousness begins with Ovid himself, who in a later work tells us that his tales of transformation were "not to be believed" (*Trist.* 2.64), a claim that highlights the first assumption a contemporary reader might bring to any such story. The rhetorical categorization of narrative took metamorphosis tales as exemplary of stories removed even from the appearance of reality. But against the assumption that the pres-

²² Galinsky 1975.61.

²³ Solodow 1988.170–72. Two key features differentiate my interpretation of metamorphosis from Solodow's: first, my emphasis on the transformed image itself as the generator of hermeneutic ambiguities and, second, my attempt to interpret those ambiguities not only in terms of what happens inside the text (whether, for example, Daphne's transformation should be seen as a reward or punishment) but also as a way in which the poet positions his poem in relation to the world outside it.

ence of metamorphosis offered an escape to fantasy that automatically programmed a particular response in the reader, perhaps the multiple ways in which metamorphosis is construed in the poem, the many literary genres in which it is at home, and the many intellectual models available for understanding changes of shape, from skeptical disbelief to allegorization, make it something that opens the text to reevaluation rather than shutting it down. The authorial tendency to dismiss metamorphosis as by its nature unbelievable, always of course an available option, becomes also a foil that raises the stakes of not abiding by its prescriptions. In this case, we may also be guided by our own responses to fantastic elements in modern literature, where, as Todorov powerfully shows, their effect is to demand speculation, on the part of those within the narrative and of its audience, about the nature of the experience described, precisely because of their assumptions about the way things happen in the real world: "The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event."²⁴

As a first demonstration of how Ovid uses metamorphosis to keep the reader alert to the essential ambiguities of his text, we can turn to the question of literary genre. The claims to alternative generic allegiances in the poem's first lines open up very different possibilities for understanding the choice of metamorphosis as a subject. If we are to read the work as a series of discrete, refined narratives such a topic would seem entirely appropriate.²⁵ Although their works are almost completely lost, Ovid's most important predecessors for building tales of metamorphosis into larger poetic units seem to have worked very much in the tradition of Callimachean brevity. In the second century BC, for example, Nicander of Colophon, whose only surviving works are a pair of didactic poems about snakebites and antidotes, produced the *Heteroioumena* (Transformations), in which he collected what seem to have been particularly obscure metamorphoses associated with the monuments and rites of far-flung cities and usually featuring local rustic divinities rather than the Olympian gods. While we are not in a position to tell what kind of larger structures Nicander used to organize his material, it is fairly clear that the poem was on a significantly smaller scale than Ovid's: five books, probably, as opposed to fifteen. Nothing can be said for certain about the scope, or even the date, of another source and antecedent of the *Metamorphoses*, the *Ornithogonia* (Bird Origins) of Boios, but his apparent aim of demonstrating that every species of bird was at one time a man

²⁴ Todorov 1975.25.

²⁵ For a general discussion of the treatment of metamorphosis in earlier literature and detailed accounts of Nicander and Boios, see Forbes-Irving 1990.7–37. See also Hardie 1999 for a discussion of metamorphosis as a way of commenting on the representational strategies of earlier epics.

again indicates a much more restricted canvas than Ovid's universal history. The entirely lost *Metamorphoses* of Parthenius of Nicaea, a Greek poet brought to Rome as a slave and an important influence on the development of Roman poetics in the first century BCE, was probably an important influence in Romanizing this tradition.

By contrast to its suitability to these catalog poems, the fabulous aspect of metamorphosis tales made them very difficult to reconcile with the aesthetic principles of serious epic, where supernatural solutions to human problems are pointedly avoided. In the Homeric poems, for example, stories of metamorphosis occur either in Odysseus's account of his wanderings, a narrative space reserved for all sorts of miraculous figures, or in passages whose very strangeness marks them out as communications from the gods, like the serpent and the bird's nest turned to stone mentioned in *Iliad* 2.301–29. And even these examples do not form a part of the poet's own narrative; they are described and interpreted by characters within the poem.²⁶

In the works of Ovid's immediate epic predecessor Vergil, the phenomenon of metamorphosis assumes a more prominent but deeply ambiguous role, one that in many respects looks ahead to its complex function in the *Metamorphoses*.²⁷ On the one hand, Vergil seems to give an ideological dimension to Homer's reticence about transformation stories. Beyond raising questions about the plausibility of the narrative, metamorphosis suggests a world of unstable ephemerality that can only be at odds with the poem's motion toward the foundation of Rome as the center of a stable cosmos and indeed comes to be associated with the dehumanizing violence and immorality of Rome's civil wars. The bleeding bush that manifests the presence of Polydorus, a Trojan prince murdered by an avaricious and impious Thracian king, at the beginning of book 3 and the howling of the bestialized inhabitants of Circe's realm (*Aen.* 7.10–24) signpost regions where neither Aeneas's mission nor Vergil's narrative should go.²⁸ Vergil swerves just shy of metamorphosis in another sense when one of the poem's final similes figures Aeneas and Turnus, in the climactic duel that decides the fate of Italy, as battling bulls (*Aen.* 12.715–22). Animal rage and undifferentiated violence are hardly the stuff from which the reader expects the tapestry of Roman history to be woven. But because this is just a figure of speech, it can always be read as but a partial, imprecise image of the combatants, or even as a foil to them. However, metamorphosis within Vergil's poem is not merely the

²⁶ On the avoidance of the miraculous in Homer, see Griffin 1977.

²⁷ For a fuller treatment of metamorphosis in the *Aeneid*, see Hardie 1992.

²⁸ For the reemergence of these Circean dangers later in book 7, see Putnam 1995.100–120.

avored *modus operandi* of the forces of darkness and dissolution. On the contrary, the victory of Aeneas—and, by implication, the emergence of Roman order from the chaotic final books of the poem—is in a sense a tale of metamorphosis, requiring the hero's transformation from the last remnant of a city doomed to fall to the founder of a civilization fated to endure. And in one important instance, his account of how the goddess Cybele saves the Trojan ships from destruction by turning them into nymphs (*Aen.* 9.77–122), Vergil highlights his inclusion of a miraculous transformation to make clear the special status of his epic. The passage has jolted Vergil's readers since antiquity, and even within the poem characters struggle to make sense of it.²⁹ The poet himself seems to hold the story at arm's length, presenting it as a legend, yet the transformation as an event is anchored in the plot of his epic.³⁰ But rather than regard Vergil's treatment of the episode as either halfhearted or misjudged, we can take it as a self-conscious deployment of the vexed status of metamorphosis within epic, alerting readers all too ready to dismiss the tale as fantasy that Aeneas's divinely guided foundation of Rome requires a different poetics than the exploits of Homer's mortal heroes. As Ovid will later, Vergil here makes metamorphosis an occasion to reorient his readers' expectations of the poem.

If metamorphosis generally marks the limit of what is consistent with the moral seriousness of heroic epic, this is the line on which *Metamorphoses* dances. The poem's meter, size, and incorporation of the Trojan and Roman subject matter of epic invite the reader to view the poem in its entirety as a rival to those earlier works. Should we read metamorphosis through epic eyes, with an even greater awareness of its essential unbelievability and trivializing effect? Can the epic form even save the *Metamorphoses* from itself by transfiguring its fabulous subject matter into a grand history of the Augustan world, just as Vergil allows metamorphosis a new role in his poem? Or is the work fundamentally an anti-epic, lending the gravity of the Homeric and Vergilian form to an anti-theoretical vision of man's place in the cosmos? Or, a final alternative, should we simply avoid the question by allowing the poem to decompose itself into a Hellenistic assemblage of separate tales? Because Ovid often posi-

²⁹ Thus, Servius Danielis mentions two slightly different objections to the passage: one implies that the poet should never make up anything so remote from truth (*Ad Aen.* 3.46), and the other, though allowing poetic fictions, insists that they should have some precedent in earlier authors (9.81). On the episode of the nymphs, see esp. Fantham 1990.

³⁰ The verb *fertur* ("it is said," 9.82) provides the most obvious sign of this authorial distancing—although even that can be treated as a learned reference to an earlier poetic authority. According to Servius Danielis, "some have objected to this '*fertur*' because it denies authority to the tale; others have praised it as a sign that the poet was unwilling to lend authority to an unbelievable event" (*Ad Aen.* 9.81).

tions metamorphoses at the end of episodes, the transformations within the narrative tend to occur precisely where the structure of the work as a whole is most up for grabs. In deciding whether each metamorphosis marks an ending, or merely a transition, readers are continually confronted with the question of what kind of work they are reading.

But it is not only the alternative genres of continuous epic and Hellenistic narrative catalog that react with the phenomenon of metamorphosis. If metamorphosis initiates a cognitive challenge for both reader and internal figure, demanding a matching between appearance and reality, surface and depth, then it is appropriate to think of that other literary experience in which recognition plays a crucial role, tragedy. Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos in a series of articles soon to be united in a book, have gone a long way toward rebutting the characterization of the *Metamorphoses* as essentially untragic, by showing how closely and explicitly the poem refigures central concerns and themes of the genre of Attic tragedy.³¹ In a discussion of Actaeon's transformation into a deer and subsequent dismemberment by his own hounds, they link the pronounced discrepancy between the way Actaeon thinks of himself and the stag's appearance that makes him unrecognizable to the performative medium of tragedy, where the actor's masked impersonation of the other creates a similar gulf between seeming and reality. What makes this performance practice meaningful is the analogy it creates between the form and plot of tragedy, for the latter too, as Aristotle points out, ideally centers on a moment of recognition. The recognition of Sophocles' Oedipus, to take the classic example, as the murderer of his father shocks largely because it requires the protagonist's own acceptance of the fact that the sacrilegious monster he knows through the speech of others and the pious king he thinks himself to be are one in the same.³²

Both the epistemological problem created by metamorphosis and the way that this problem links audience and character in a similar bind thus recall the operation of tragedy. More important still, this capacity for those in the audience to recognize themselves in the figures they see on the stage not only provides the key effects of tragedy on its audience, pity and terror, but also arguably provides a link between the aesthetic workings of tragedy and its ability to evoke such ritual experiences as sacrifice. The ritual dimension of tragic recognition marks a difference in emphasis between my own approach to the parallels between tragedy and metamorphosis and the work of Gildenhard and Zissos. Whereas they stress how Ovid's narrative self-consciously signals its incorporation and as-

³¹ Gildenhard and Zissos 1999a.

³² Gildenhard and Zissos 2000b invoke a similar account of the Oedipus in their discussion of its relevance to the episode of Narcissus.

simulation of the defining concerns of the tragic genre and, in the case of the allusions to the Oedipus play in the Narcissus episode, show how the narrative draws attention to the fundamentally Ovidian problem of intertextual adaptation, I explore how the inclusion of tragic modalities expands our understanding of the effects of Ovid's poem on its own audience. Specifically, I argue for a close link between metamorphosis and sacrifice which reveals metamorphosis as a potential narrative equivalent for tragedy's dramatic evocation of ritual practice (see chapter 3).

If recognition in the case of Oedipus at once reveals a tragic instability of human aims and undermines the roles and relationships that ground human society, recognition in comedy performs the opposite function of reestablishing the status quo by restoring the lost or enslaved child to his or her legitimate place in the social order. The tale of Io shows how the dynamics of recognition necessitated by metamorphosis gain from being read against the capacity of comic recognition to highlight a sameness between the new and the old. The tale of Io, in fact, is a pure new comedy plot, from the rape occasioned by the casual sight of a maiden venturing from her home, to the miscalculated use of disguise and deception to conceal its effects, to the deployment of a clever servant to get round the girl's fearsome guardian.³³ Here though, the father's recognition of his long-lost daughter in the guise of a cow has precisely the opposite consequences of the usual comic resolution: there will be no marriage to an equal in status, and no legitimate offspring—rather than return to her old status, this lost maiden is stuck in her new role as cow. While obviously evocation of the supremely realistic genre of new comedy at this point adds humor to the passage, it also points out more significant differences between this story and the conventional comic plot. Even when Io returns to her human form, there can be no marriage here because, fundamentally, unlike comedy, this is not an encounter between social equals, and while Io may be granted divine status, she is never returned to her native land but remains by the Egyptian Nile, as opposed to the paternal stream (*patrio flumine*, 1.588) from which she was returning when seen

³³ The catalog of comic features could be continued to include the role of Juno as the comic wife interfering with her husband's plans for erotic amusement, noted by Anderson 1996.208—a plot feature that further casts Io in a low-status role, for the husband's plans, because they cannot ever result in a legitimate marriage, always involve an (apparent) slave, and are never consummated. The exception to the rule against the successful seduction of a freeborn woman who is not available to become a bride is a telling one: Jupiter's adulterous impregnation of Alcmena in Plautus's *Amphitruo*. Note too that as in Plautus's comedies the deception of the pimp frequently invites metatheatricality, as the clever slave practices his deception through "playacting," so here Mercury uses narrative, indeed a specifically Ovidian story, to overcome Argus. Though again the parallel raises new questions, because Mercury's victory ends in a kind of violence unthinkable on the comic stage.

by Jupiter.³⁴ So too, though the violated maiden in comedy is often an equally silent character, the genre relies on an assumption that she does indeed love and will happily marry her violator, an assumption that is much more difficult to make in Ovid's rape narratives. The capacity to recognize a maiden beneath a new form imposed by metamorphosis also involves comic resolution in the earlier Daphne episode, where the ability for the new tree to count as a spouse equivalent depends upon the recognition of Daphne within its bark.

New Comedy's focus on an essential sameness of identity that can survive any series of misfortunes and changes of state brings me to the second general approach to metamorphosis I want to challenge. So far we have seen, by a brief account of some of the genres that can color a reading of a metamorphosis narrative, that the very presence of a miraculous change of shape does not automatically reduce any tale that contains it to a merely entertaining fiction. The opposite tendency is a too-confident generalization about the nature of Ovidian metamorphosis, a generalization that often then provides the basis for a political reading of the poem. Metamorphosis is a topic that cannot help but engage reflection on larger political issues in the climate of Augustan Rome, an era that had witnessed enormous, sometimes violent, social change and the enforced idealization of stability. And so it is no surprise to find that previous attempts at defining Ovid's politics have relied heavily on the significance of the metamorphosis theme and have offered very different views of what matters in a metamorphosis narrative. In general, readers inclined toward an anti-Augustan view of the work have focused on the process of metamorphosis more than the product: the poem displays a world where appearances are deceptive and where, in the words of the problematic figure Pythagoras, "everything changes," though "nothing perishes" (*omnia mutantur, nihil interit*, 15.165). This law of universal mutability calls into question not only Rome's own claims to eternity, especially when it is none other than Pythagoras who reports the foundations of Rome as a proof that Troy has not entirely vanished, but also the Augustan project of establishing boundaries, for classes, provinces, even the empire itself, and then supporting these boundaries as natural.³⁵ Pythagoras's contrasting insistence that nothing perishes can also be read as establishing an opposition between the soul and the material world that provides scope for an individual resistance to the imposition of external authority. Such a reading gains force when the poet ends his work with

³⁴ Complementing this theme, the following tale, Phaethon, focuses on a return to the lost father.

³⁵ This is admittedly very much a shorthand account of a much broader interpretation of Augustan ideology. For the coalescence between natural history and Roman history, the best starting point is Hardie 1986.

the assertion that his better part will survive no matter what the “anger of Jove” and other destructive forces may do to his body.

Those who see the poem as supportive of Augustan ends place the emphasis rather on what results from metamorphosis: change is something that happened in the past and has brought about the comprehensible, ordered, normal world in which we live, or, as Habinek puts it, “from the standpoint of the poem the only changes that matter are those that produce the world as currently configured.”³⁶ Karl Galinsky has suggested a new parallel between Ovid’s view of metamorphosis and the emperor’s account of his own societal goals by pointing out that Augustus himself emphasizes the newness of his laws and institutions.³⁷ Galinsky’s summation of Augustus’s political and religious program as the use of the new to revitalize the old accords well with a common view of Ovidian metamorphosis as a change that preserves, a process that ends up with an immutable new manifestation of some essential quality of the being that has been transformed.³⁸ My objection to such readings, those which picture Ovid either as an oppositional figure or as consummate Augustan, comes neither from their move outside the poem to the realm of politics nor from the equations they make between the consequences of metamorphosis in the poem and the external political system. Many of these connections are plausible and productive. Rather, my resistance stems from these critics’ initial assumption that the poem articulates a specific view of what metamorphosis is and what matters in it. On the contrary, the process of defining metamorphosis continues throughout the reading of the work, and to readapt the language of Habinek, the poem offers many different standpoints on change, and what matters in each metamorphosis depends very much on which the reader adopts. Thus, the political impact of the poem comes not through recognizing metamorphosis itself as a monovalent political allegory but as a narrative device that by its nature makes available shifting ways of construing a highly charged term. Carolyn Walker Bynum has recently explored the many different accounts of change constructed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as the product of a period when “concepts of change itself tended to change.”³⁹ In a similar way, I contend that Ovid’s poem emerges in a political context where the concept of change itself becomes central to a configuration of the political world and one’s place in it and that Ovid’s poem will put competing views about change in dialogue with each other.

³⁶ Habinek 2002.52.

³⁷ Galinsky 1999.105 citing the programmatic *legibus novis* at *Res Gestae* 8.5.

³⁸ Such a parallel between the nature of Augustus *imperium* and Ovid’s poetics also features in Wheeler 1999. For metamorphosis as clarification, see Solodow 1988.174.

³⁹ Bynum 2001.21.

Before more explicit demonstrations of how Ovid’s narratives of transformation activate these contrasting understandings of the poem’s political function and further comments on the social significance of change in this period, let me first develop my assertion that the poem offers no clear prescription for understanding the phenomenon of metamorphosis. Galinsky’s account of change in the poem as a clarification of some preexisting quality, already present in the old form but more sharply revealed in the new, is here based directly on a specific reading of the poem’s first lines developed by Lothar Spahlinger,⁴⁰ but it is similar to other optimistic efforts to define some positive law of change. Solodow for example, directly defines metamorphosis as a process of clarification,⁴¹ and Dörrie, in a particularly influential article, connected the workings of metamorphosis in Ovid with the doctrine of identity developed by the stoic Posidonius: all things have a kind of substance that is destroyed by material change, but “peculiarly qualified individuals” (e.g., individual persons) also possess a substance that endures despite alterations to their physical makeup—for example, Socrates is still Socrates even if he gains weight. Ovidian metamorphosis reveals this second kind of abiding existence.⁴² Many of these interpreters cautiously limited the applicability of their formulations. But rather than measure the success of any theory of metamorphosis by the number of examples it fits, as though this were a scientific problem, we might rather stress that metamorphosis throughout the poem is something that must be continually reimagined. Any “key,” whether derived from the language of the poem itself or taken from a preexisting philosophical debate, will be refined and challenged by the reader’s experience of the poem, rather than simply providing a template to solve its problems. Thus, for example, all the existence of the Posidonius passage really proves is that the relationship between identity and material form was important in Hellenistic philosophy and that this formulation was available as a model for understanding what happens in metamorphosis. There were also, of course, others, and someone reading the poem with, for example Aristotelian or Epicurean assumptions about the nature of physical change might be more inclined to question the survival of a distinctive identity after metamorphosis.

But does Ovid himself offer a theory of metamorphosis that ought to guide us in how to read what follows? In his interpretation of what he takes as the programmatic definition of metamorphosis in the first two lines of Ovid’s poem, *in nova ... mutatas dicere formas ... corpora*,

⁴⁰ Spahlinger 1996.28–29.

⁴¹ Solodow 1988.176–83.

⁴² Dörrie 1959.

Spahlinger tries to differentiate *forma* and *corpus*, arguing convincingly that the two terms are not juxtaposed simply to avoid repetition: the latter, he says, connotes the material reality of a body, in terms of both its physical dimensions and its substance. *Forma*, by contrast, suggests the outward appearance of an entity as a defining characteristic of a person or object, especially with reference to its function or role, the surface of an entity as apprehended or defined by others through perception or use, or the shape or pattern in and of itself, a “form” with or without content. On the basis of this distinction, Spahlinger assumes that what happens in metamorphosis is that “an individual being with a distinctive *forma* obtains through transformation a new body, is thus changed in his physical presence, respecting his externally visible material appearance, without any effect to his psychic existence, his individual mental make-up.”⁴³ His interpretation depends then, on the reader having a strong enough sense of this particular distinction, to assume that everything that defines a *forma* against a *corpus* (i.e., its particularizing, defining capacity) is unaffected by the change. Yet, if such a reading is possible, it is by no means inevitable. The Latin does seem strongly to suggest that it is in fact the *forma* that undergoes change (*mutatas formas*), and therefore is precisely what does not survive to preserve the distinctive character of the prior being. An emphasis on the loss of *forma* might in turn shift attention to the distinction between identity as defined by external features and by inner perceptions; thus Actaeon, to take a classic example, retains an awareness of who he is but has lost the outward signs that make him recognizable to others.

The emphasis on permanence and preservation in Spahlinger’s formulation, even more apparent in the use Galinsky makes of it,⁴⁴ also relies heavily on one particular reading of words with a wide range of meanings. If, for example, we stress that forms are turned *into* bodies, then other kinds of distinctions become relevant. *Forma* can also be used very much in the sense that we use form, to define a pattern or type that can exist in the mind independent of any physical manifestation. It was in fact the word Cicero chose to render Platonic “forms” into Latin.⁴⁵ *Corpus*, by contrast, despite its suggestions of solidity, can also denote the softer and inherently changeable parts of the human body, the “flesh” as opposed to both the bones and the spirit.⁴⁶ When forms become bodies,

⁴³ Spahlinger 1996.29.

⁴⁴ Galinsky 1999.105.

⁴⁵ Cic. *Orat.* 10.

⁴⁶ Lewis and Short s.v. B. 2 suggest that *corpus* can, in poetry, mean just the opposite of a body without the spirit, a spirit without a body. They cite two lines of Vergil 6.303 and 306, where the term *corpora* is used of the shades of the dead being carried across to the underworld in Charon’s bark. But this is very much the exception that proves the rule. The

they can both take on a presence and immanence they would otherwise lack and, at the same time, move from the stability and unchangeability of pure images to the more labile and transitory world of actual existence. Both kinds of transition have relevance to Ovid’s representation of metamorphosis.

That the poet’s own definition of change is itself changeable finds support in the well-known story of Pygmalion and his statue. The transformation of the ivory statue of an ideal maiden into a flesh and blood creature makes one look again at what can happen during a metamorphosis and, in particular, at the very language used to describe transformation in the poem’s first lines. Here the metamorphosis involves no change whatsoever to the statue’s outside shape but only to its substance. To put it another way, we might say that here a form has not been obliterated but literally changed into substance. In fact, the terms in question figure largely in the episode. The statue is *formosa* (10.266), and Pygmalion gives it a “*forma* with which no woman was ever born” (10.248–49)—a phrase that, beyond employing the word in its specialized sense of beauty, also connotes the world of Platonic “forms” or models that no single manifestation ever perfectly reproduces. Ovid describes the moment of metamorphosis itself, or rather the moment when Pygmalion recognizes that a metamorphosis has taken place, with the phrase *corpus erat* (10.289); and this realization recalls the sculptor’s earlier uncertainty about the “content of the form,” his question about whether the statue really was ivory or flesh (*corpus*, 10.255). Shapes abide, but what they consist of, what they denote, can change, and this change very much depends on the eye of the beholder, who has only the *forma* to go on. My purpose in introducing this reading is not, of course, to supply a new paradigm for all metamorphoses—one might argue for instance that this passage becomes all the more engaging precisely because it reverses the standard protocols—but to suggest the fluidity of how the process can work and the importance of the reader’s awareness of this fluidity and of the constant attention required to make sense of each change.

The poem’s very first account of the transformation of a human being into an animal, the tale of Lycaon (1.209–43), provides a sense of what is at stake ideologically in the differing responses to metamorphosis offered by the poem. This story follows after the poem’s account of the formation of the cosmos, a process that involves not the creation of new substances out of nothing but rather the sorting of elements already present in the confused mass of primordial chaos into an ordered hierarchy. At first, this

weightlessness of the “*corpora*” of the dead here contrasts with the living body of Aeneas, whose mass makes the boat groan and leak (6.413–14). The *corpora* of the dead are bodies that are no bodies.

story will seem to further the suggestion that metamorphosis itself serves as a tool for imposing a familiar, stable order on things, as opposed to signifying a world in a state of unaccountable flux. Jupiter has heard of the impious behavior of human beings, and in hopes of finding the story is false, he disguises himself as a mortal and descends from Olympus to investigate. When he enters Lycaon's realm, he gives signs of his divinity and begins to receive the worship of the people. The king however refuses to acknowledge Jupiter as divine and plots to prove him mortal by killing him in his sleep. He also kills a hostage and attempts to serve his cooked limbs to the god. In punishment, the god destroys the palace, and Lycaon is driven into exile, at which point "he wails and tries in vain to speak. His countenance takes upon itself all his madness; he turns his innate love of slaughter against sheep and even now rejoices in blood. His clothes turn into hair; his arms into legs. He becomes a wolf and preserves the traces of his old form. There is the same grayness, the same violent countenance. His eyes still gleam, and the appearance of bestiality remains" (1.233–39).

Jupiter's account suggests that Lycaon has been quite literally put in his place. He had violated human norms by murdering a hostage and even attempted to usurp Jupiter's prerogative here by imposing his own test on the god. He subsequently undergoes a transformation that seems at once to punish his attempt to take on the god's role in the story and to express his own innate bestiality. (Notice that Jupiter never claims responsibility for the transformation, which appears to happen spontaneously.) Just as the creation of the world involved the separation of the lighter elements from water and earth, so here this wild beast that had somehow been grouped among men has finally been returned to his rightful category. The change that has taken place is merely one of form. And Lycaon's new shape not only more clearly reveals his essence but also manifests and enforces the cosmic hierarchies he has violated. The wolf itself becomes a reminder of the consequences of behaving as either a beast or a god. There is also a more narrowly political significance to the metamorphosis. Before recounting this story, Jupiter had been compared to the emperor Augustus, and the assembly of gods he addresses takes on the form of the Roman Senate. The little epiphany of order that results from his metamorphosis, in which the natural world as we know it becomes a sign of the proper distribution of authority of gods and men, also serves as a reminder of the specifically Roman order that now, as Augustan artistic imagery so often implied, had embraced the cosmos itself.⁴⁷ The very name Lycaon means wolf in Greek, again suggesting

that metamorphosis is above all a clarification of who he really is⁴⁸ and that, because of metamorphosis, even verbal signs now more clearly represent the world. But, of course, in Ovid's text, Lycaon has not become a wolf but a *lupus*: metamorphosis as cosmic clarification depends on the translation of Greek into Latin.

Such readings as this have produced a sense that the real emphasis in Ovid's poem of changes should be on stability, the view represented by Habinek's suggestion that metamorphosis in the past results in a firm natural and political order in the present. And, indeed, by narrating stories of this type, Ovid seems to be contributing to the semantic clarification and revelation that Jupiter sets in motion, by offering a world whose natural elements, like wolves, become transparent to human qualities and divine actions. But the very neatness of this interpretation results precisely from the tale's univocality and from the erasure of alternative points of view. Indeed, this is the one story in the poem narrated by Jupiter himself, the ultimate representation of authority in the epic universe. But the very metamorphosis that seems to provide such unanswerable closure in fact allows competing readings back into the text precisely because it makes the shutting down of alternative points of view so explicit. The first thing that happens to Lycaon is that he loses his power to speak—precisely the eloquence that allows Jupiter to tell his version of events. The last body parts mentioned are Lycaon's shining eyes, eyes that are depicted only as seen, not as seeing. Points of view opposed to Jupiter's would have been ready to hand for an informed reader of the text. For, as nearly as we can tell, no other account of Lycaon is so relentless in its condemnation of the king. Greek versions in fact present a highly ambivalent figure whose outrageous treatment of the gods is balanced by his role as a civilizing hero, an institutor of religious practices, whose name would be preserved not just by the wolf but by the cult of Zeus Lykaeos, which he founded.⁴⁹ Even within Ovid's Jovian account, the boundaries between gods, humans, and animals seem dangerously permeable. Jupiter sets the plot in motion by his own shape shifting, the assumption of human form—a disguise that anticipates the paradox of the final metamorphosis by simultaneously masking and revealing his divine nature. Indeed, it might even be argued that Lycaon's outrage results less from his attempt to deprive the gods of the honor due them than from his scrupulous belief in the reality of appearances and his efforts to use those appearances to distinguish different orders of being. His very plot to kill Jupiter shows

⁴⁷ For a good introduction to this pattern of imagery in the visual arts, see Zanker 1990.183–92 and Nicolet 1991.29–56, and for an example of its development in literature, see Hardie's (1986.336–76) reading of the Vergilian shield of Aeneas.

⁴⁸ Solodow 1988.174 defines "clarification" as the central function of metamorphosis.

⁴⁹ For earlier accounts of the Lycaon story, see Forbes-Irving 1990.90–15 and 216–18; see also Barkan's (1986.24–17) integration of the legend of Lycaon the sacrificer with Ovid's story. See also chapter 3, section 1.

that he has taken his disguise seriously: far from attempting to dishonor the god, he assumes that the figure before him is a mortal impostor. And if Lycaon's error is really a failure to recognize that gods can disguise themselves as men, his experience is very relevant to Ovid's own readers, who are making their first acquaintance with anthropomorphized gods in the work.⁵⁰ If they attempt to apply the same criterion of truth to their reading, then the entire epic machinery that underlies the moralizing or politicizing interpretation of the story would be called into question. To expose the gods as mere projections of human authority is to shortcircuit their political use to glorify any individual human potentate—a central issue in Augustan iconography.⁵¹

Another tale from the first book reveals even more clearly how interpretation of the poem's thematic emphases hinges on the reading of a metamorphosis. When the nymph Daphne realizes that she will never win the footrace against Apollo and will forfeit her virginity, she prays to be transformed and so to lose the external form (*figura*) that has caused her downfall by arousing the god's desire: "Scarcely had she ended her prayer when a heavy sluggishness took possession of her limbs; her soft breast clothes itself in thin bark. Her hair grows into leaves, her arms into branches. Her foot once so swift cleaves to sluggish roots. A bough holds her face; only her beauty remains" (1.548–52). Here the relationship between the new shape and the old becomes much more complicated. Far from fixing her in a state that permanently expresses her essential qualities, Daphne's metamorphosis strips her of the swiftness by which she has been characterized in the narrative; Ovid figures the transformation itself as a process of occlusion and possession. To read this metamorphosis according to the Lycaon paradigm by stressing the persistence of her beauty raises new problems, for it was her external attractiveness that warred against her desire to remain a virgin (*uotoque tuo tua forma repugnat*, 1.489). Indeed, if anything has been preserved of Daphne it is the tragic discrepancy between her inner will and outer appearance. To read her metamorphosis as a clarification, then, implies that her essence lay in what she seemed to others to be rather than recognizing her as subject in her own right.

Such a reading is put forward by the divine interpreter within the poem, none other than Apollo himself, the god who pursued her on account of her form: "Though you cannot be my wife, you will be my tree. My locks will always possess you, laurel, so will my lyre and my quiver.

You will accompany the Latin chiefs when the joyful voice sings 'Triumph' and the Capitoline witnesses long (triumphal) processions.... And as my youthful head is perpetually unshorn, so you will always retain the honor of leaves" (1.557–65).

Apollo's response to Daphne's metamorphosis in a sense completes the processes of the transformation by converting her form into a symbol, yet a symbol that recalls not so much who Daphne was as who Apollo is. It is his hair that her leaves are now made to recall, not her own once disordered tresses. Apollo's strategy also bears on the question of the poem's genre: by placing Daphne's transformation in an extensive historical context, recalling the broad temporal sweep proclaimed in the poet's prologue, and converting her into an instrument of praise, Apollo epicizes her story.⁵² In doing so, he fits it into the continuum prepared by the poet himself, who introduced the story as an explanation for how the laurel tree came to be the sign of victory in the games that celebrated Apollo's conquest of the Python. Thus, the tale that might have been thought to show how the god lost an archery contest with Cupid and was forced to shed his typical attributes by assuming the role of a lover, becomes instead a celebration of his once and future triumphs. For Daphne, though, does her metamorphosis mark the beginning of her epic significance, or is it in fact the end of the story? Again her changed form holds the key. The final lines at first appear to close the gap between Daphne's perspective and Apollo's by suggesting that Daphne herself consented to the role Apollo offered her by nodding her bough "as if it were a head." But perhaps the bough is just a bough. In other words, perhaps Daphne's will has been masked completely by her new form, and the attempt to claim her participation in this future as though she were still there marks merely the final stage in her possession.

The readings offered so far suggest that the event of metamorphosis in Ovid mobilizes two coherent interpretations of the poem and that the choice between them depends on the point of view adopted on the transformation itself. First, to focus on the new shape, which is often a form familiar from the actual experience of the reader, in several senses normalizes metamorphosis, subordinating a manifestly unbelievable process to an undeniably real product. The world is, reassuringly, not a place where metamorphosis happens every day, and the very stories Ovid tells about wolves and laurel trees give them a new significance as the representations and preserving exempla of cosmic and political order. In depicting metamorphosis from this perspective, not only is Ovid in several senses doing the lord's work, but he is also making his poem function

⁵⁰ For another adversarial reading of Jupiter's account of Lycaon, see Anderson 1989; for the balance between contrasting readings in the story, see Wheeler 1999.171–81.

⁵¹ For a discussion of how Ovid's hyper-anthropomorphized gods undercut imperial religious innovations, see Feeney 1991.205–24.

⁵² For an introduction to the sophisticated pattern of generic play in this story, see Nicoll 1980 and the discussion in chapter 2, section 2.

like Vergilian epic, granting legendary events a privileged function for explaining the here and now, and conversely exalting the here and now by linking it to the grand sagas of past myth.⁵³ The reader's distance from the narrative, his recognition that this story by its nature must be a fiction, becomes anything but a disadvantage. Lycaon's tale, for example, readily lends itself to allegorization, an interpretative strategy that allows the dubious motives of Jupiter as character to fade from view. The alternative, to continue to recognize the human subjects of metamorphosis, dissolves the epic structure of the poem by making metamorphosis seem ultimately both inexplicable and very much the end of the story. Each transformation appears less a stage in the history of the cosmos than the shutting down of an individual consciousness, locked in opposition to the ordering forces of the universe. Here, far from retaining a comfortable position in the world after metamorphosis, the reader is drawn back into the unstable past, entering into the fiction rather than marking it off as such.

The pair of internal *Metamorphoses* that Ovid places at the beginning of his sixth book, in which the goddess Minerva and her human rival Arachne assemble stories of transformation for the two tapestries they weave in competition with each other, enshrine these polar alternatives for interpreting the process, for again the ideological differences between the two "texts" result not just from the discursive use each artist makes of metamorphosis but from the perspective they present on the process itself (6.1–145).⁵⁴ Minerva depicts four tales of metamorphoses, designed explicitly to warn Arachne of the dangers of rivaling the gods, symmetrically at the corners of a tapestry whose centerpiece depicts her own triumph in a contest with Neptune for possession of Athens. In each case, only the name of the victim and the final form they have assumed are indicated. By contrast the gods themselves are depicted in forms that, like the disguise Jupiter assumes in the Lycaon tale, are at once anthropomorphized and authentic. "His own appearance marks each god: Jupiter's is the image of a king" (6.73–4). In answer to Athena's use of metamorphosis as a warning against human presumption, Arachne presents a catalog of the animal forms the gods have used to deceive the victims of their lust. Here, rather than being final, metamorphosis appears as a fleeting mechanism of deception, proof not only of the crimes of the gods but of the unreliability of appearances. The artist freezes each story at the moment when the god's bestiality is exposed and enshrines the human countenances of the victims (in contrast to the many rape victims the

poem presents who end up transformed into other shapes).⁵⁵ So too, her realistic descriptive technique—or rather Ovid's technique for presenting her depiction as narrative—works to draw the viewers into this world of deceptive fictions, which is significantly the same thing as granting them access to the victim's point of view: thus, in describing how the god Jupiter took on the form of a bull to abduct Europa, he comments that "you would think it was a real bull," as if "you" were Europa.

While the metamorphic subject matter of the poem helps to energize the possible responses of its readers, much more was at stake for an ancient audience in entering into the world of transformations it offers than might be immediately apparent to us. As Maurizio Bettini points out in an essay on Plautus's *Amphitruo*, perhaps Latin literature's most extensive pre-Ovidian treatment of shape changing, the possibility of surreptitious transformation figures rather largely in ancient anxieties about witchcraft. Thus, a curse tablet from Portugal calls down vengeance on anyone who steals an article of clothing by "transforming" it.⁵⁶ And in contrast to modern clinical experience, which suggests that dreams about being the victim of transformation are practically restricted to cases of psychosis, ancient texts on dream divination devote a proportionately much greater amount of space to dreams about changes of shape. This may however be simply because such dreams were so good to think with, allowing the interpreter to adduce any number of interpretations based on the properties of men, women, or animals, rather than indicating that such dreams were actually more common in antiquity.⁵⁷ But the most compelling and extensive proof of a wide-ranging and definitive link between metamorphosis and magic in the ancient world comes from the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius, where shape changes of a very Ovidian kind feature as the most glamorous deeds of the Thessalian witch who has become the host of the hero Lucius, and it is his desire to experience precisely such marvels that lures him into the disastrous error that turns him into an ass. None of this should be taken as proving that metamorphosis was after all less fantastic to Ovid's original audience because of their beliefs in magical forces really out there ready to change the shape of their victims. What it does suggest, though, is that even if no one thought such stories were true—and it is suggestive to note in Apuleius's narrative how much the will to believe involves a desire to move beyond the intellectual horizons of an upper-class education by going native—their prominence in the Roman imaginary gives metamorphosis some cultural significance

⁵³ On etiology in Ovid, see Graf 1988.62.

⁵⁴ Leach 1974, Vincent 1994, Feeney 1991.190–94, and now Oliensis 2004 offer particularly stimulating readings of this much-discussed episode: see also chapter 2, introduction.

⁵⁵ *omnibus his faciemque suam, faciemque locorum | reddidit*, 6.121–22.

⁵⁶ *Immudavit*, CIL 2.462, discussed by Bettini 1991.29–30.

⁵⁷ Bettini 1991.36–37 citing Artemidorus *On*. 1.50 for the ancients against Devereux 1976.xxv–xxvi for the moderns.

as the definition of what it is that we do not believe is out there, just as one can learn much about contemporary U.S. culture through its obsession with UFOs.

But to speculate on what was so threatening about shape changing will bring us back to more tangible historical forces. The broad social changes of Augustus's half century of dominance manifested themselves on an individual level by the potential for considerable changes in status, especially for the Italian upper classes from which Ovid came, as did many other prominent literary figures. At the same time, the class structure itself was being made more rigid and more publicly conspicuous through an increasing imperial concern for legislating who was entitled to what rank and creating more contexts for its display. A preeminent example of such institutionalized status display was Augustus's theater legislation, which established new and more elaborate patterns of reserved seats for the upper orders at public festivals. This was a period, in other words, where forms were at once more subject to change and assumed an increasing role in defining who one was. Transformation begins at the top, and it is no accident that one of the most convenient shorthands for writing the history of the Augustan regime is to chronicle the various transformations undergone by the *princeps* himself, as he takes on new names and titles, while preparing for the ultimate change that would perpetually validate his regime, apotheosis. On a slightly more mundane level, personal transformation figures largely in the way that poets of the great generation before Ovid's construct their own poetic autobiographies.⁵⁸ From a freedman's son in the *Satires*, Horace will become nothing less than a *princeps* in the *Odes*. And as Ovid's poem will always put us on the lookout for identity as well as difference between the new and the old, so "Vergil's" proem to the *Aeneid*—if indeed the apocryphal lines were already current in Ovid's day—assures us that it is "the very same I who once composed to the graceful pipe, and having left the forest compelled the neighboring fields to obey the farmer, howsoever greedy, a gratifying work for the husbandman, now sing the terrifying arms of Mars and the man." Ovid himself was among the most metamorphosed of poets: his first efforts were afflicted by the god Cupid who stole one foot away from every second hexameter, rendering epic love elegy, and that collection later became three books instead of five. But, more important, his political persona undergoes changes in status equivalent to these literary transformations. *Tristia* 4.10 describes Ovid's life even before the momentous

⁵⁸ On the autobiography in the *Tristia* as modeled on the life story of the *princeps*, and possibly alluding to the *Aeneid* preface, see Fairweather 1987, esp. 191–96. For Ovid's persistent references to the *Aeneid* "prologue," see now Farrell 2004.

relegation to Tomi as a series of changes of state and draws special attention to the visible markers of his shifting fortune. Thus, when at the age of manhood he stakes claim to the status of a senator, an advance over his ancestral rank of knight, the poem portrays this by noting the broad stripe on his tunic, while again insisting that, despite the new form, his enthusiasm for poetry remained: *induiturque umeris cum lato purpura clavo / et studium nobis, quod fuit ante, manet* (*Trist.* 4.10.29–30). A few lines later his reassumption of the earlier status manifests itself in a corresponding change of form: the measure of his stripe contracts (*Trist.* 4.10.35).

The well-known importance of outward appearance as a marker of status in Roman culture, acquiring as it did even more prominence thanks to Augustus's reforms, in and of itself both gives an additional cultural resonance to the dichotomy between identity and its external manifestations we have found in the poem's transformations and hints at why such transformations become so suitable for engaging questions of power and one's place in a larger hierarchy. Such suggestions are not by their nature provable, but a glance back at an earlier transformation text, Plautus's *Amphitruo* again, will provide further material for examining how responses to changes of shape themselves varied according to social status. Three orders of character are separated from their recognizable appearance in the play: the gods who, as they do in Ovid, change shape at will to gratify their own desires at the expense of mortals, the slave Sosia, and his high-status master Amphitruo. Neither of these latter is actually transformed, though Sosia assumes that he has "lost his *forma*," but the effect is the same in that they are expelled from their places in the household by the gods who have assumed their appearances. This is, of course, a disconcerting experience for the slave Sosia, who spends many lines trying to prove his identity to his new double. But the encounter remains very much within the bounds of comedy. The slave's identity was always a changeable property, because his only role in society was as the possession of his master, who may well have given him his very name. The physical violence that could be inflicted on a slave, in contradistinction to the ideal untouchability of the citizen, takes on its own metamorphic quality thanks to Plautus's exuberant tropes. Thus, Mercury, who has literally taken the shape of Sosia, says in a stage aside to himself that "the person you skim with your fist ought to take on another form" (*Amph.* 316), which Sosia later translates into the realization that Mercury wants to "de-bone me like an eel" (*Amph.* 319), with an assonantal pun on the word for face (*os*). But even after Sosia inevitably fails to reclaim his identity from the god, he can console himself with the prospect of a further metamorphosis. If no one recognizes him, he can simply shave his head

and take on the cap of a freedman. In contrast to Sosia's easy acceptance of a world of shifting identity, his master Amphitruo has much more at stake in keeping control over his appearance. He wages war with his own double by an appeal to all kinds of visible proof, seals and witnesses, ultimately invoking a judge whose very name means Mr. Eyelid. The divergence in treatment between the two cases of mistaken identity reminds us that a high-status Roman might well read the poem with a much more sharply defined sense of how closely outward appearance and position were linked and the consummate importance of maintaining control over one's own face.⁵⁹

III. BEYOND BELIEF

Ovid claimed in a later poem that "unbelievability" was a programmatic element of the *Metamorphoses*, whose subject he defined as *in non credendos corpora versa modos* (*Trist.* 2.64). This dense phrase at once simply recapitulates the miraculous nature of metamorphosis and also, if we remember that "*modos*" can mean poetry as well, hints at unbelievability as a special quality that Ovid himself has bestowed on previously substantial "bodies" by turning them into verse.⁶⁰ Earlier, though, I argued that such claims acted more as a provocation than a description. Now I want to develop that point by looking briefly at Roman conceptions of the nature and function of fiction and how Ovid consistently throughout his works turns the traditional demotion of fiction on its head, giving a new power to fiction precisely because of its unbelievability. The issue of believability is raised in the *Metamorphoses* itself, in the much-studied response to the river god Achelous's account of the miraculous origins of the islands near his mouth. Discussion of this passage shows how the text uses the questions of belief to highlight the contrast between the internal and external points of view defined earlier and, at the same time,

⁵⁹ For a different way of relating metamorphosis to the fact of slavery, see Fitzgerald 2000.87–114. Fitzgerald focuses on how the changeability of the slave's fortune and the fundamental question of what happens when one becomes a slave—does the mind become servile?—address anxieties about the nature and limits of ethical decision making on the part of the masters. Like Ovidian metamorphosis then, the process of enslavement raises the issue of the recognizability of a true self that survives the change into the legal equivalent of a beast, and this issue in turn has the power to draw every individual who confronts it into an evaluation of the natural stability of his own position in the face of external circumstances. The stoic assertion that the true self of a wise man could never be enslaved—and, correspondingly, that real virtue was always recognizable, never more so than when the brave man withstood enslavement itself—provides a kind of insurance against precisely the circumstances of *Amphitruo*.

⁶⁰ OLD s.v. 8b, as opposed to 11c, the primary definition of *modus* in play here.

gives this contrast a new role in defining the distinctive kind of authority Ovid's fictional discourse takes upon itself.

As an introduction to first-century BCE Roman views on the nature of poetic fictions, how they were to be read and what kind of representation they offered, we can consider a conversation, itself fictional, depicted at the beginning of the *de legibus* as taking place on the country estate of the ex-consul Cicero, in the highlands of southern Latium, some ten years before Ovid's birth. Cicero's brother Quintus and brother-in-law Atticus are discussing a scene in the poem *Marius*, written by Cicero himself, where the statesman Marius was encouraged by the propitious omen of an eagle flying off to the east after defeating a serpent. Atticus begins the conversation with the assertion that the oak tree he sees before him is the very one where Marius saw his omen. Quintus responds that the poetic oak tree "endures and will always endure, for it was sown by genius. No farmer's care can plant a tree as long-lived as that sown by a poet's verse" (1.1.). He then turns to the example of the olive tree in Athens, or the palm on Delos, claimed to be the very one that Ulysses saw on his voyage. Because of the poetic fame of these trees, there will always be some actual tree that will be pressed into service as a real-world corollary. At this point, Atticus addresses the poet himself, and the issue of the tree's authenticity emerges as the prologue to a broader question about the veracity of poetry: "Did your verses really sow that tree, or are you passing down a story you heard about Marius?" (1.2). In other words: were we right to define the tree merely as a poetic tree, or was there some real, historical tree that provided the basis for your description? Given that this is for us such a natural thing to ask of a "historical fiction," as Cicero's *Marius* was, the response is striking. For Cicero claims not simply a poet's license to embellish and elaborate; he also asserts that only inexperienced readers would even ask about the truthfulness of any datum presented in a poem: "They betray their ignorance when in such a case they demand the truth of a poet, as they would of a witness.... In historical writings all things are evaluated according to their truth, in poetry according to the pleasure that they give" (1.4).

The privileging of the poet's ability to create fictions thus goes together with, in fact depends on, the corollary discrimination of the poet's world from the real world. The poet is given the power to sow the tree, and his own tree granted epistemological priority over any existing tree, only on condition that we remember that the tree Ulysses saw is not in fact really present. For Cicero, the response to poetry by skilled readers therefore becomes an unproblematic receptivity to fictions, unproblematic because the question of the actual truth of what is being described is literally rendered out of court. But the interest of the Cicero passage for a reading of Ovid is that Ovid's poem systematically undercuts the founda-

tions of this normative view of how poetry is to be read.⁶¹ As we have already seen from our reading of the Syrinx passage, Ovid's text calls into question Cicero's neat dichotomy between real "this" and poetic "that" by suggesting much more powerful connections between representation and reality. Correspondingly, the easy acceptance of fictions that results precisely from not considering the question of veracity is one that Ovid deliberately shuts off for his readers.

Also essential to Cicero's claim, and to Ovid's response to its implications, is the link between the fictionality of an utterance and its social status. Cicero deliberately exempts the poet from the economies of truth and authority that obtain in significant social settings where the truth matters, like court cases, in which the prestige of the "witness" determines whether his account is to be believed. Such a move makes perfect sense in a culture where our concept of "serious fiction" would have been felt as an oxymoron. As we have seen, the nature of their subject matter, neither factually true nor resembling truth, would have put Ovid's narratives of metamorphoses in the category of *fabulae*.⁶² But not only were *fabulae* at the greatest remove from actual reality; in the hierarchy of narrative types, they were also to be separated from the major prose genres of oratory and history, where the truth content or at least the plausibility of the stories told at once depended on and enhanced the credibility of the narrator. A speaker or historian whose words were self-evidently false fell into the same category as the actor, a mere impersonator, whose utterances were *levis* (light), lacking the *gravitas* that conferred authority. The word *fabula*, which could be used equally of an incredible narrative and of a stage play, points to a conceptual overlap, between fiction and the

⁶¹ I am not arguing that Ovid's overturning of the limits of fiction responds specifically to Cicero's formulations. However, it is interesting that Feeney 1999.23–24 points to another case where Ovid seems to play with Ciceronian definitions about how far fiction can go. At *Rep.* 2.28, one of the characters in the dialogue asks about the legend that the Roman king Numa had known Pythagoras. Scipio responds that such a story is not only a fiction (*fictum*) but an ignorant and ridiculous fiction (*imperite absurdeque fictum*). Yet Ovid allots five hundred lines of his final book to Pythagoras's instruction of Numa.

⁶² Ovid himself explicitly alludes to the generic distinction in an earlier poem (*Amores* 3.12) where he protests that poets should not be treated as if they were witnesses in a courtroom (19–20). He then proves his point that the "license of poets" is not constrained by the criterion of credibility that applies to the genre of history (*historica fide*, 42) by cataloging the miraculous mythological stories to be found in their works. In most of these tales, the unbelievable element is precisely metamorphosis. Yet the context of the poet's plea not to be believed undercuts its ostensible message: Ovid has portrayed his (fictional) mistress in such terms that now everyone is in love with her and he himself is jealous. He therefore demands that his readers understand his praise of her as false. For the poem's manipulation of the rhetorical categories of believable and unbelievable stories, see McKeown 1979.

realm of the theater, and this overlap became more and more apparent in the early empire as mythological pantomimes, drawing on a repertoire of subjects very like those of the *Metamorphoses*, became a major theatrical form.⁶³ Those who wanted their voices to matter in the Roman polity often defined their work against the category of *fabulae*; thus the orator, however much he employs the techniques of the stage, is emphatically no actor, and historians relegate *fabulae* to the entertainment of children and mere thrill seekers.⁶⁴ Tellingly, the theoretical defenses of fiction in antiquity, if they can be called that, take the form of paradox: Gorgias, speaking of tragedy, which, relying as it does on verisimilitude, is very different in effect from the overt incredibility of Ovidian fiction, calls it a "deception where the one who deceives is more just than the one who does not and the one who is deceived is wiser than the one who is not."⁶⁵

The very terms of this defense play off against a common ancient association between producing veristic representations of false events and deceptive and unjust behavior.

Though it assumes such a negative perspective on this kind of representation, Gorgias's statement also recalls the associations of the poetic tradition with justice and wisdom, and above all reminds us of the uncanny persuasive capacity of fiction, which can invert and reconfigure moral and epistemological assumptions. And in Roman culture, fiction and play develop an enormous prestige, outside of the realities of power but linked to it by both likeness (the actors played at being kings and gods) and association (they were specially connected to the real centers of Roman social power, particularly the imperial family). Thus, the reminder that the poet is writing incredible stories and injunctions to place his work in that category of *fabulae* tends to diminish and trivialize the social value and seriousness of his project; on the contrary, the absorption into fiction itself testifies to the poet's power, absolute in the manipulation of his created world.

The tension between the external definition of poetic fiction, represented by Cicero, as valuable only when it makes no claim to truth, and the internal claim to significance—internal both because it is made from within the poetic tradition and, I would argue, because it requires a capacity to enter into the perspective of the poetic representations itself—repeatedly informs Ovid's construction of his own poetic identity. An excellent example of this comes in the "autobiographical" poem, *Tristia*

⁶³ See Galinsky 1996.265–66 and 1999.103–4, with Habinek 2002.52–54.

⁶⁴ For orators, see Edwards 1993.117–19; for historians cf. Sempronius Asellio, fr. 2 Chassignet.

⁶⁵ Plut. *Mor.* 348c. See Feeney 1991.24.

4.10, written after Ovid's banishment to the Black Sea. First comes the question of language itself: every time Ovid tried to write in the respectable medium of prose, the training necessary for social and monetary advancement, the words miraculously came out verse. Ovid then describes how he was on the verge of entering the Senate but was temperamentally unsuited to the strains of political competition: "My body was not tough enough; my mind unfit for labor, and I shunned troublesome ambition. The Muses urged me to seek out safe tranquility, which was also my own predilection" (*Trist.* 4.10.37–40). But this traditional image of poetry as a haven from the storms of politics acquires ironic overtones in a poem written from exile. Far from offering him a safe refuge, poetry would cause him to undergo labors far more taxing than running for office, and this reluctant politician ends by presenting himself as a new Aeneas, tossed by trouble on land and sea (*Trist.* 4.10.107–8; note the play between *fugax* and *fuga*), even a new Augustus presenting posterity with an account of his *acta* (4.10.92).

A similar manipulation of audience expectations about the powers of fiction, on a smaller scale, comes in *Amores* 3.12. In this poem, the speaker ironically laments the power of his own poetry to make all his readers fall in love with Corinna; the poets, precisely because they can describe things that never existed, take on the punishing power of the gods: "We stretched out Tityos to measureless extent, and we gave three faces to the snaky dog." Whenever poets go beyond the credible, breaking the links that bind their representations to the standards of an external reality, they become the masters of their fictional domains. Nor does their dominion remain confined to the text because the point about these two examples in particular is the immense coercive power that images of divine punishment have really exercised in human history, making it all the more fitting that the poet himself should now be punished by jealousy for making his readers believe in his fictions. Thus, the fiction-making capacity of poets is itself a slippery property, offering at once the refuge of unbelievability and lack of weight and at the same time a claim precisely to transform impressions of the world "out there."

As we have seen, Ovid parades the *Metamorphoses*' fictional status before the reader: "bodies transformed in incredible ways" (*in non credendos corpora versa modos*, *Trist.* 2.64). Yet the very point Ovid is making in the passage where this line occurs, part of a justification of his poetic career addressed to no less a person than Augustus, is not that the poem is negligible or irrelevant because fictional. On the contrary, unlike Cicero, who will not demand of poets the same kind of truth as he does of witnesses, Ovid uses the poem precisely as testimony of his

loyalty toward the regime. The emperor in the midst of all the miracles will find many "presages of your fame, and pledges of my intention," all of which the poet invites him to read as true. Yet what is particularly interesting about this claim is that what is true in the poem, the signs of the real-world relationship between the poet and the emperor, are those that maintain Ovid in the subservient status of loyal subject, whereas, as we have already seen and shall consider more fully in the next chapter, the fictions, which he here explicitly points out as such, change the balance of dominance. Perhaps a hint of this comes here in the reminder that the *Metamorphoses* was still "without end": as every reader of the *Aeneid* knew, the absence of a limit was the ideal condition of Rome's own empire (*imperium sine fine*, *Aen.* 1.279) and a defining characteristic of the power of the gods within the poem.

But the most explicit and complex way in which the poem problematizes its own status as fiction comes through its manipulation of narrators and audiences within the poem. We have already seen in the Io and Syrinx stories, a series of "readers" within the text from Inachus to Argus, whose attempts to distance themselves from unbelievable transformations conspicuously fail. Elsewhere in the poem, characters within the narrative will baldly state that a tale is unbelievable—and be chastised or punished for their incredulity. The most famous of these dramas of disbelief comes in the very center of the poem. When at a banquet the river god Achelous has described how the islands that form the background to the scene were in fact once nymphs, one of his guests, Pirithous, whom the narrator presents not as skeptical but indeed as impious, bridles and treats the god's tale as unbelievable, only to be cautioned against such scoffing by the sage Lelex:

*Amnis ab his tacuit. 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."
obstipuerunt omnes nec talia dicta probarunt,
ante omnesque Lelex animo maturus et aevo,
sic ait: "immensa est finemque potentia caeli
non habet, et quicquid superi voluere, peractum est."
(8.611–19)*

The stream fell silent, and the astonishing deed moved all listeners: but the son of Ixion, a spurner of the gods and fierce in his mind, mocked the believers: "Fictions is what you are telling, Achelous, and you reckon the gods to be too powerful, if they give and take

away shapes." Everyone was aghast and rejected such words. Above all, Lelex, as mature in his mind as he was by age, spoke like this: "The power of heaven is unmeasurable and has no limits. Whatever the gods will is accomplished."

Typical of the poem are both the voice of the narrator, weighing in strongly on the side of the "old believer" Lelex, and the sense that by the mere fact of raising the issue of credibility, and of taking a position so much in keeping with contemporary assumptions about the kinds of tales being told, it is Pirithous whose position ought to be more sympathetic to the poem's actual audience and author.⁶⁶ One response to the seemingly contradictory injunctions toward skepticism and belief is to resolve them in favor of one or the other possibility, with skepticism usually predominating because internal admonitions toward credulity can easily be read as ironic.⁶⁷ Graf's model of an essentially skeptical author manipulating a credulous narrator has been adopted as a particularly satisfactory way of creating coherence in the work. However, when the issue is put in terms of effects of the narrative rather than the attitudes and intentions of the author, coherence has come to seem a less desirable goal. More recent treatments of belief and disbelief in Ovid's poetics, especially those of Feeney, Barchiesi, and Wheeler, no longer attempt to resolve the conflict but rather argue that the important thing in Ovid's narrative is to experience the tension between the alternative reading strategies that the work makes available. Moreover, all three critics have found in the problem of the reader's belief a crucial connection between the narrative dynamics of the poem and its contemporary political effectiveness. For Feeney, the continual formulation of poetic assertions in a medium whose changeability and unreliability stand in such high relief inspires a constant interrogation of the power of the literary tradition to make belief. And all three writers present the emperor Augustus's own assimilation of himself to a god as the ultimate test case for the reader's willingness to accept fictions.⁶⁸ Indeed, Wheeler finds in the poet's construction of an audience sternly recalled from invitations to disbelief by authorial reminders of the criminality of such views a model for the actual experience of his

⁶⁶ Graf 1988.

⁶⁷ Skepticism: see esp. Galinsky 1999; a notable exception is Spahlinger 1996, who argues that the emphasis on belief delineates an Ovidian ideal of the pious artist.

⁶⁸ Cf. esp. Feeney 1991.224: "Deeply engrained attitudes towards the power of the gods are questioned and explored by the movement of the *Metamorphoses*. At the climax, the currents of this questioning flow into the organization of the contemporary world, to cap the poem's repeated confrontation of human and divine power. The princeps is as august, and as mighty, as the gods he has made his own." Also crucial to this discussion has been Hinds 1987b.23–29.

own audience, which is forced to decide for itself how much to disbelieve under the policing eye of the emperor.⁶⁹

My own emphasis in discussing the effects of these provocations toward skepticism is on the process of reading they stimulate rather than on the ends of intellectual decision making. Thus, in place of arguing that the skepticism generated by the poem is eventually directed toward some external reality, a figure, ideology, or narrative that demands to be taken as authentic by its audience, like the divinity of the emperor, I concentrate on the ways in which explicit challenges to the credibility of internal narratives sharpen the double vision that I have described whereby the planes of reception generated by internal narratives veer away from conventional expectations of fictionality. This complication of the audience's understanding of what they are doing when they read the poem has at least as many consequences for their view of Ovid as of Augustus. It is another striking example of how his narrative breaks the bounds that ought to contain it. And while it is true that crucial programmatic passages in the poem, the Lycaon and Daphne story in book 1 and the complex ending of the work, do bring the emperor directly on stage, in the vast majority of metamorphoses narratives, there is no specific Augustan element in the content of the story. Whether we believe that Io was turned into a cow or Syrinx into a reed will only in the very broadest sense bear on our interpretation of the imperial regime. To argue either that the programmatic links to political issues are sufficient to code every unbelievable narrative as a test of our faith in the empire or that these other episodes are hermeneutic dry runs for more ideologically charged narratives would be to distort the work in the quest for political relevance. A more important point is that in the politics of fictional belief it is not always clear on which side believers and nonbelievers should stand. Thus, for Wheeler, rejecting the tales of an Achelous can be connected with an impious failure to believe in "official fictions."⁷⁰ A contrary position might be that the refusal to enter into fictions at all, to be duped by a trickster poet, represents a clearheaded unwillingness to let go of an actuality in which the emperor is fully in charge.⁷¹ Thus, if we do agree that working out what is to count as true within the poem becomes a political exercise, this is not only because it challenges assent to fixed articles of faith but precisely because it involves a more radical refiguring of the very terms under debate, opening up a hall of mirrors

⁶⁹ Wheeler 1999.165–77.

⁷⁰ Wheeler 1999.181.

⁷¹ Thus, for Barchiesi 1997a.181, it is the voice of the "credulous" reader who has been tricked too many times that sounds suggestively "imperial"; see discussion in Wheeler 1999.166–67.

where emperor and poet stand now on one side, now on another, now together, now apart.

As an example of the many ways in which the issue of belief, far from simply inviting the audience to question its own credulity, exposes the multiple paradoxes of Ovid's fiction and the reader's position in relation to it, I want to take a closer look at the Pirithous episode. The first question to ask is just what it is that Pirithous is disbelieving. Achelous, a classic "split divinity"⁷² who appears in the narrative both as a personification and as the actual river that bears his name, has just told two quite similar stories in very different ways. The first describes the Echinades, a group of nymphs who forget to sacrifice to Achelous as a god. "I swole with rage, and as great as ever when I am at my full, enormous both in my spirit and in my waves, I ripped forest from forest and field from field and together with the place itself, I hurled the nymphs—who didn't neglect me then—into the sea. And my waters and those of the sea, eroded the soil and little by little divided them with channels into as many Echinades as you see" (8.583–87). The transformation in this case is not miraculous at all; in fact, the god seems at pains to offer a rationalization for a possibly unbelievable metamorphosis. The nymphs are carried away in a flood that has created a new set of islands, and the god's power and wrath take the form of a purely natural phenomenon operating in ways familiar to us from observable experience—a flooding river breaking new channels. What challenges belief here comes from assuming that some personal presence, an angry river god, lies behind these natural phenomena; and indeed the punning language, by which the same word can without strain express both the influx of rage and the swelling of a river, exposes Ovid's audience to just such a conundrum.⁷³ The issue is not in fact that different from the one that Atticus faces at the beginning of *de legibus*: he sees a tree and wants to know whether that actual tree has a corollary in some miraculous narrative. Indeed, the entire tale is spun out of a simple request for information about a feature of the landscape that is literally before the audience's eyes (*subiecta oculis*, 8.574): Theseus asks the name of the island he sees in the distance, but at the very moment of asking his question, the perils of relying on simple autopsy emerge. Just as Achelous wants to make natural islands signifiers of something much more than can be seen—the emotions of anthropomorphic gods—so too channels open up within the scene, and the one island, as it had seemed when Theseus began his question, becomes many—so does "separation cheat discernment." Seeing does not always equal believing, in a world where barrier islands can conceal such divine wrath.

⁷² For the phrase, see Solodow 1988.96.

⁷³ See Hardie 2002c.230–31 and Tissol 1997.18–26 on syllepsis.

If the Echinades story challenges us by, to pick up one of Ovid's own puns, animating the immanent, the contrasting story of Perimele, a nymph whom Achelous loved, raped, and, when her father has punished her by casting her off a cliff, persuaded Neptune to save by changing her too into an island, works in precisely the opposite direction. Here the actions of the god within the story are such that they can be performed only in human guise—we may imagine a river falling in love as well as being angry, but having sex and speaking require some measure of human form. The transformation here, though it contains elements of the same pathetic fallacy in the image of the land "embracing the limbs" of the maiden, is genuinely miraculous. There is no question of natural phenomena—the nymph's limbs are changed. Human actions are now clothed in immortal guise, and in contrast to a real natural feature providing the space for the exploits of anthropomorphic gods, a miraculous tale struggles toward actuality by leaving a physical trace, as the nymph's own limbs acquire *gravitas* by becoming an island. Indeed, the god himself offers authenticating strategies equivalent to autopsy to establish the reality of the second story. First comes the absurd introduction of witnesses to establish the name of the island ("sailors call it Perimele") where surely he is the best authority,⁷⁴ and then the etymological play of the final lines, where the changed limbs of the nymph as the island accrues around them recall her Greek name "Peri-mele." In growing into the island, she also grows into the name that now comes to validate her story. Or, if we think how autopsy and argument from observable facts were thrown into doubt by the Echinades story, she calls it into question. And it may be that this *factum mirabile*—a highly ambiguous expression that suggests both reality and incredibility⁷⁵—is what prompts Pirithous's dissent, when he was perfectly able to cope with the first narrative.

Except, in a curious way the second story of a god in love would perhaps be at least as credible to the internal audience as that of the river in flood. For Theseus and his fellow travelers have themselves encountered the stream in two irreconcilable guises that correspond to his modes of action in the different stories. First, the river Achelous itself, in flood as it happens, has blocked their return from Calydon; then, the same river in personified form emerges as a courtly host to welcome them to a banquet. If we consider, then, the second half of this encounter, and remember that it is this anthropomorphic figure who is equally before the eyes of the audience, then the transformation involved in this story, told, as it is, as a miracle, may be at least as easy to accept as the mental transformation of their gentle narrator into the cross natural phenomenon described

⁷⁴ So Hollis 1970.102.

⁷⁵ As noted by Feeney 1991.230.

in the Echinades story. Not only is the god in the second narrative a remarkably human figure, who finds himself in a situation that, for example, the human hero of a new comedy might well encounter. He is also an extraordinarily powerless one, and like so many human lovers in the poem, Pygmalion and Iphis, for example, he has recourse to prayer to a god to bring about his miracle. The effect of this doubling is not just to cast doubt on any strategies of evidence and rationalization we might use to make fictions more plausible, or to point out the dramatic incongruity in Ovid's own narrative, and in many other epics, of setting a river god beside his own stream. Beyond this, the effect of Pirithous's question is to make us remember the difference between what is believable to us and what is believable to the audience within the narrative and in this more nuanced way as well both to explicate and to confuse the perspectives of those within the story and those outside it. The first story assumes a perspective that is perfectly harmonious with that of the poem's real-world audience—we could go to the mouth of the Achelous today and see just that scene—but tries to make us believe that appearances conceal supernatural events. The second story will seem incredible to us, unaccustomed as we are to dining with river gods, but to the internal audience it might be initially more credible, involving as it does both the human narrator that they see before them and correspondingly a distinctively human set of problems and solutions.

If reflection on the content of the two stories makes the poem's audience think about how deeply they have penetrated into the poem's fictional structures, the river Achelous in a different sense as well flows from the realms of fiction into fact. That is, when Pirithous's question is voiced, we are perhaps initially unsure what level of narration it is describing. Though addressed to Achelous, will it also be heard as a criticism of Ovid himself? After all the gods' giving and taking away, *figurae* is the self-proclaimed subject of the entire poem. So too, Perimele and the Echinades are not the only examples of changed form involved here; Achelous himself, just as he appears in irreconcilably different guises within his own stories, is a notorious mythological shape changer.⁷⁶ Thus, in this case to ask about the veracity of the narrative is simultaneously to ask about the narrator as well; content and narration blend into one another, and this blending, given the way Pirithous's language recalls the proem, extends to that of the actual narrator of the *Metamorphoses*. Here then, at the very moment that Pirithous himself tries to shake both audience and Ovid's readers outside the narrative by reminding both of the difference between fiction and reality, comes a reminder of how inextricably

⁷⁶ The reading of Achelous himself, the raging river, as a poetological metaphor for epic further conflates the teller and his tale.

the two are intertwined. And this reminder contains a final twist if we look back at the proem itself. We have been interpreting the scene so far in terms of real literary phenomena, in which Ovid the author creates the character Achelous. But in the proem it is the gods in their transforming capacity who are made responsible for the changes Ovid's poem undergoes: from that perspective it is Achelous who is responsible for Ovid rather than the other way around.⁷⁷

One argument that has sometimes seemed to give extratextual authority to the case against Pirithous comes from the charge, made both by the character Lelex and by the narrator himself, that his skepticism is an act of impiety. By characterizing Pirithous as a "spurner of the gods," Ovid has been taken to be trying to alienate the sympathies of his audience from the character, discouraging us from reading as he does. While the connection between disbelief and impiety may be self-evident to us, to some ancients the claim that to disbelieve poetic fictions about the gods was irreverent would have appeared as a very paradoxical one. In his discussion of poetic representations of the gods, the first-century BCE Roman scholar Varro strikes a note very familiar in ancient theology: "In this [poetic system of representing the divine] many things have been made up [*ficta*] contrary to the dignity and nature of the immortals. For it describes how one god is born from a head, another from a thigh, and another from drops of blood: it describes how the gods have grown angry, how they have committed adultery, how they have been enslaved to men. In sum, everything that can befall not only a man but a very base man is attributed to the gods."⁷⁸

Measured against Varro's statement, Lelex's caution about slighting gods who are at once unnatural and hyperhuman is very much piety through the poetic looking glass. It assumes that the gods of poetry are the real gods and, to that extent, keeps the reader's perspective grounded within the text's fictions.

Denis Feeney has similarly interpreted the debate between Pirithous and Lelex as articulating the "two possible audience reactions to the divine stories of the *Metamorphoses*" in a manner that complements the reading offered here.⁷⁹ Against those who had argued that Ovid endorses either skepticism or credulity, Feeney agrees with the theorist of fictions Robert Newsom that a kind of divided belief, with half our consciousness anchored in the real world and half surrendered to the narrative, describes the ideal state of all readers of fiction. To be fully receptive readers

⁷⁷ For a different interpretation of book 8 as a whole, and this passage in particular, as an invitation for the reader to reflect on her experience of the narrative, see now Boyd 2006.

⁷⁸ Varro *Ant. Div.* fr. 7.

⁷⁹ Feeney 1991.229–32.

of the poem, Feeney argues, we must play both Pirithous and Lelex. But such a double reading may prove harder to achieve than Feeney's analysis suggests. For Newsom's argument about the operation of fictions is more important for clarifying what Ovid's narrative does not do. He is speaking of the effect of veristic fiction that never reminds the reader of its own fictionality.⁸⁰ What he attempts to describe is the paradoxical state of the little boy at a horror movie who can scream in terror but continue eating his popcorn. This is not the conscious choice or continuous oscillation between perspectives that Ovid's poem seems to demand but a living with ambiguity that relies essentially on a failure to make explicit the logical processes involved. Thus, where Feeney presents a constructive response to the Pirithous story, in which the exposure to polarized alternatives reminds us that both perspectives are required of the reader and so becomes an injunction toward the ideal double vision Newsom describes, I see the effect as more destabilizing.⁸¹ Ovid allows us to sink comfortably into the attitude of neither a Pirithous nor the other members of the audience who willingly suspend their disbelief. It is not Newsom's passive acquiescence in paradox that the passage encourages but an active grappling with the different perspectives available on the poem and its subject matter, which can exist neither together nor apart.

My reasons for stressing the difficulty of what Ovid seems to require of his audience here take us back to the Cicero passage with which this section began. On the basis of the account of reading offered there, it would seem that the problem Ovid or any other Roman recounter of *fabulae* faces is not to coax readers into entering into the fiction in the first place. This is easy for such readers as Cicero wants to construct; they are reading for pleasure, and this knowledge makes it possible to let themselves go because their reading has no consequence. On the contrary, the challenge for Ovid is to get his audience to suspend disbelief without such trivializing distancing. By continually holding up the real-world categories that define his text as mere *fabulae*, and inviting the audience to entertain the perspectives of all manner of credulous audiences within the fiction, Ovid destabilizes these assumptions in two related ways. First, he makes it impossible to settle comfortably into the role of poetic audience that Cicero defines precisely by continually reminding the audience of

what it is doing and where it is. In this way, the transformation between internal and external perspectives is never hermeneutic business as usual but appears as the powerful manipulation that it is.⁸² Alternatively, if we allow such conscious manipulations of audience response to open a gulf between internal and external audience, to provide the reader with a perch from which to observe the operations of fictions without being himself subject to them, and indeed to regard any claims for the potency of mere stories as ironic, then that reader encounters an equally novel reading experience, precisely by continuing in the real-world perspective that sees the actual mechanics of poetic fictions. Returning to the address to Augustus in the *Tristia*, we might now claim that the emperor's capacity to recognize the poem as testimony of the poet's loyalty and as a presage of his own power comes from a reading that refuses to entertain its fictions. Although it is by no means addressed to the emperor, the *Metamorphoses'* concluding prediction of the *princeps's* own future greatness allows the poem as an artifact to be seen as a component of the "traffic in praise," anchoring literary production to real-world exchanges of duties and favors that defined status. But in this sense as well the continual shifting between external and internal perspective makes it less certain which aspect of the poem matters, the actual text irrespective of its content, that transparently participates in defining the power of Augustus even if it does so in a way that emphasizes the subordination of the poet, or the fictional space it promises to create, where the poet can seem either to break free of the secondariness that necessarily subjects his work to imperial evaluation or simply to have fallen back into the expected behavior of an author who can never make any such claims because he has adopted a self-evidently trivial form of expression, fiction.

⁸⁰ Cf. Newsom's (1988.108) comment: "Fictions whose fictionality is plain are bad fictions."

⁸¹ Feeney's (1993.238) formulation of the tensions involved in ancient responses to fiction even more closely anticipates the position I take here, for there he views Newsom's "duality" as "one way of coming to terms with the apprehension that art is something crafted and emotionally compelling or immediate." Yet here too his emphasis is on how these different levels of awareness can work together in their effect on the reader. My emphasis, by contrast, is on what happens when they do not.

⁸² This is not, of course, to claim that the destabilization of a fictional narrative by drawing attentions to the real-world conditions in which it is produced and experienced is a uniquely Ovidian phenomenon. An anonymous reader highlights, as two of many possible examples, the introduction to Plato's *Symposium* and "the Roman poets' use of the epistolary form." Both of these examples, however, do help define by contrast the effect I am describing in the *Metamorphoses*. For in the case of the *Symposium*, a veristic narrative highlights its own potential distance from reality through being staged as a memory of a memory. In Ovid's case, the material he narrates is by its nature impossible to read as anything but imaginary. And in the case of epistolary form, the conventions of reception—this is a letter of x to y—can itself easily be read as part of the fiction as well: thus while the device certainly raises questions about the limits of fiction, it does not in my view generate such a starkly external perspective.

Playing Gods

OVID'S METAMORPHOSES AND
THE POLITICS OF FICTION

Andrew Feldherr

11

SIENA COLLEGE LIBRARY

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON AND OXFORD

Copyright 2010 © by Princeton University Press

Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton,
New Jersey 08540

In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 6 Oxford Street,
Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX20 1TW

press.princeton.edu

All Rights Reserved

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Feldherr, Andrew, 1963–

Playing gods : Ovid's Metamorphoses and the politics of fiction / Andrew Feldherr.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-691-13814-5 (hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Ovid, 43 B.C.–17 or 18 A.D.
Metamorphoses. 2. Fables, Latin—History and criticism. 3. Politics and literature—
Rome. I. Title.

PA6519.M9F45 2010

873'.01—dc22

2010010198

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

This book has been composed in Sabon and Caslon Open Face

Printed on acid-free paper. ∞

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1