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Richard Tarrant

Roads Not Taken:

*Untold Stories in Ovid's Metamorphoses**

THE title of this paper calls for an explanation, if not an apology. The reactions it provokes are, I suspect, not unlike those generated by the title of Henry Bardon's famous work *La littérature latine inconnue*; discussing untold stories would appear to be as paradoxical, or even absurd, as writing about unknown texts. In fact the comparison to Bardon is an apt one, in that each of our titles is somewhat more dramatic-sounding than our actual subject: just as his attention was directed to works that do not survive intact but have left some trace of their existence (*la littérature perdue* but not literally *inconnue*), so my focus is not on stories that make no appearance whatever in the *Metamorphoses*, but rather on stories or versions of stories that Ovid declines to relate in detail but whose existence is in one way or another signalled in his narrative.¹ It is natural to think of the *Metamorphoses* in terms of narrative abundance rather than exclusion, both because of the poem's comprehensive scope and also because Ovid's narrative manner is usually described in terms that highlight presence rather than absence, terms such as vividness, color, plasticity, and so on. So my first objective is simply to point out the extent to which the withholding or curtailing of stories operates within Ovid's poem, while a second purpose is to suggest some of the artistic effects achieved by such silences or partial narratives. Another way in which the parallel with Bardon

* This article has a story of its own, which for the sake of those who have helped bring it into being should not remain untold. In an early form it was given to the Classics Faculty Seminar at Cambridge in 1992, where it was received with more courtesy than it may have deserved. The following year a revised version was delivered in Italian at the Universities of Pisa, Florence, Verona and Padua and in English at UCLA. Among the many people to whom I am grateful for advice and suggestions I wish to thank in particular Alessandro Barchiesi for improving my attempt at an Italian text and Gian Biagio Conte for the initial invitation to speak on this topic and for the friendly but inexorable persistence that has finally elicited the present revision.

1. In fact there might be something to be said about certain stories that are completely absent from the *Metamorphoses*, such as Agamemnon's murder by Clytemnestra and its aftermath, but that is not my present concern.

holds true is that his comments on the 'unknown literature' of his title filled two generous volumes, and I soon discovered that the main problem raised by this topic was not one of finding enough to say but of keeping it within manageable limits.

The *Metamorphoses* contains several episodes that feature narrators or storytellers, so it is not surprising that my chosen theme appears within the text itself; that is, at several points in the poem we see narrators selecting a particular story from a large repertory, often after raising and rejecting alternative possibilities. One such scene comes from the episode of the Minyides in Book 4, where the first of the group to perform settles on the story of Pyramus and Thisbe only after three other potential themes have been briefly mentioned (43-54):

illa quid e multis referat (nam plurima norat)
 cogitat et dubia est, de te, Babylonia, narret,
 Derceti, quam uersa squamis uelantibus artus
 stagna Palaestini credunt motasse figura,
 an magis, ut sumptis illius filia pennis
 extremos albis in turribus egerit annos,
 Nais an ut cantu nimiumque potentibus herbis
 uerterit in tacitos iuuenalia corpora pisces,
 donec idem passa est, an, quae poma alba ferebat,
 ut nunc nigra ferat contactu sanguinis arbor.
 hoc placet; hanc, quoniam uulgaris fabula non est,
 talibus orsa modis lana sua fila sequente.

In addition to dramatizing the act of narrative choice, this passage illustrates one type of 'untold story' as I am proposing to use that term: the stories of Dercetis, her daughter Semiramis, and the unnamed Naiad are rejected as subjects of extended treatment but nonetheless figure as presences in the narrative. One might call this tactic a narrative version of *praeteritio*, given that explicitly to exclude a subject requires naming it and thus confers on it at least a degree of emphasis. This first example already begins to suggest the range of effects Ovid produces from this type of narrative situation: the fleeting reference to myths not elaborated in detail is one of several devices by which Ovid displays his *doctrina* and at the same time enriches the texture of his narrative, creating the illusion that below the surface of the text there exists a world of other *metamorphoses*.² There is also a mild

2. The most striking example of this technique is the catalogue of metamorpho-

irony in the narrator's rejection of the tales of Dercetis and the others as *uulgares*, since as far as we can determine they were no more familiar to Ovid's audience than the story that is chosen in preference to them.³

A more complex variation on this technique is used by Orpheus in Book 10 as he introduces his catalogue of unhappy loves: he recalls that on earlier occasions he has frequently celebrated Jupiter's power, and in particular has sung of his victory over the Giants, but claims that the present circumstances call for a lighter theme (148-154):

'ab Ioue, Musa parens (cedunt Iouis omnia regno),
carmina nostra moue. Iouis est mihi saepe potestas
dicta prius; cecini plectro grauiore Gigantas
sparsaque Phlegraeis uictricia fulmina campis.
nunc opus est leuiore lyra; puerosque canamus
dilectos superis inconcessisque puellas
ignibus attonitas meruisse libidine poenam.'

Here the Gigantomachy functions as an 'untold story', denied a full narration but **significantly present** in the text. This example calls for further comment because of the literary associations of the myth in question and the reason for which it is passed over. Rejecting a theme typical of the high style (*plectro grauiore*) in favor of one in a lighter vein inevitably recalls the motif of *recusatio* as found, for example, in Virgil's sixth *Eclogue* or in Horace *Odes* 1.6, but here the lofty theme is one that the poet claims to have handled already, rather than one too great for his talent. Ovid may have altered the usual motif simply for the sake of variety, but it is tempting to see an **additional level of wit** in Orpheus' claim to have treated the Gigantomachy before, since at this point in Ovid's own poem the episode has in fact figured twice. It first appears in Book 1 as a bridge passage between the account of the Four Ages and the reaction of Jupiter

sis stories that forms the geographical underlay to Medea's flight from Thessaly to Corinth in 7.351-393; for another function of this passage see below, 7.

3. The three rejected myths and the story of Pyramus and Thisbe (which share a strong oriental coloring) probably derive from the same source, «die unserem Dichter über einen (auch hier wieder) nicht näher zu bestimmenden hellenistischen Autor (vielleicht aus Antiocheia am Orontes) vermittelt worden sei» (Bömer 1976, p. 12). The discussions of Ovid's sources and of variant forms of the myths he narrates are one of the most valuable components of the mammoth commentary of the late Franz Bömer († January 27, 2004).

to the pervasive depravity of mankind as epitomized by Lycaon (151-162):

Neue foret terris securior arduus aether,
 adfectasse ferunt regnum caeleste Gigantas
 altaque congestos struxisse ad sidera montes.
 tum pater omnipotens misso perfregit Olympum
 fulmine et excussit subiectae Pelion Ossae.
 obruta mole sua cum corpora dira iacerent,
 perfusam multo natorum sanguine Terram
 immaduisse ferunt calidumque animasse cruorem
 et, ne nulla suae stirpis monumenta manerent,
 in faciem uertisse hominum; sed et illa propago
 contemptrix superum saeuaeque audivissima caedis
 et uiolenta fuit; scires e sanguine natos.

It reappears in Book 5 as the theme chosen by the nine daughters of Pierus who rashly challenge the Muses to a contest of song (318-331):

tum sine sorte prior quae se certare professa est
 bella canit superum falsoque in honore Gigantas
 ponit et extenuat magnorum facta deorum;
 emissumque ima de sede Typhoea terrae
 caelitibus fecisse metum cunctosque dedisse
 terga fugae, donec fessos Aegyptia tellus
 ceperit et septem discretus in ostia Nilus.
 huc quoque terrigenam uenisse Typhoea narrat
 et se mentitis superos celasse figuris:
 “dux”que “gregis” dixit “fit Iuppiter, unde recuruis
 nunc quoque formatus Libys est cum cornibus Ammon;
 Delius in coruo, proles Semeleia capro,
 fele soror Phoebi, niuea Saturnia uacca,
 pisce Venus latuit, Cyllenius ibidis alis”.

Now I would want to argue that both previous occurrences of the Gigantomachy theme themselves qualify as ‘untold stories’, in the sense that the reader is led to experience them as curtailed and/or distanced rather than fully narrated.⁴ In the passage from Book 5 the distancing is created partly by the fact that we are hearing a Muse’s hostile account of their opponent’s song, and therefore much of the action is related in indirect speech, and

4. I am grateful to Simon Goldhill for challenging me on this point; I may not have succeeded in meeting his objections, but the attempt to do so has certainly strengthened my argument.

partly by the pointedly heterodox version of events that the song transmits; the result (fully intended by the anti-Olympian singer) is a travesty of the traditional story. The lines from Book 1 do not involve an internal narrator, which makes it all the more striking that Ovid twice uses the verb *ferunt* (152, 158) to remove the story from his own narrative voice and attribute it to unspecified sources, with the similar syntactical result that the bulk of the passage consists of indirect discourse. The fact that the Gigantomachy is the first episode in the poem to be treated in this way lends support to the view that we are meant to regard it as a story alluded to rather than related in full. If that contention is accepted, the humor of the Orpheus passage becomes still more richly ironic: the theme that Orpheus claims often to have treated in the past has indeed made its way into Ovid's poem several times (almost in fact at regular intervals), but has never succeeded in winning for itself a proper telling.⁵ The reason for such playfulness is not far to seek: the Gigantomachy was a taboo subject for all good Callimacheans, and Ovid's way of flirting with it while ultimately preserving his virtue is characteristic of his lighthearted dealings with the orthodoxies of Roman Callimacheanism.⁶

One category of 'untold story', then, comprises potential topics that are mentioned only to be set aside. I would regard as another variety those places where Ovid's narrative becomes so radically compressed as to reduce the material of an extended episode into the space of a few lines – a procedure that VCR users will naturally call the 'fast forward' mode. I cite four examples: from Book 7, the four lines into which Ovid condenses Medea's murder of Jason's new wife and her own children (394-397),

sed postquam Colchis arsit noua nupta uenenis
flagrantemque domum regis mare uidit utrumque,
sanguine natorum perfunditur impius ensis
ultaque se male mater Iasonis effugit arma,

5. My interpretation assumes that at this point Orpheus can be regarded as an *alter ego* of Ovid; it is therefore worth noting that the words of Orpheus under discussion are spoken precisely as he assumes the role of the poem's primary narrator.

6. Orpheus' claim would apply even more closely to Ovid if we took *Amores* 2.1.11-18 literally: *ausus eram, memini, caelestia dicere bella eqs.*, but that aborted Gigantomachy is probably no more real than the military epic cut short at line 2 by Amor in *Amores* 1.1; cf. McKeown 1998, pp. 10-15 for admirably full and judicious discussion.

from Book 8, the stories of Theseus and the Minotaur, Theseus and Ariadne, and Ariadne and Bacchus (169-177),

quo postquam geminam tauri iuuenisque figuram
clausit, et Actaeo bis pastum sanguine monstrum
tertia sors annis domuit repetita nouenis,
utque ope uirginea nullis iterata priorum
ianua difficilis filo est inuenta relecto,
protinus Aegides rapta Minoide Dian
uela dedit comitemque suam crudelis in illo
litore destituit. desertae et multa querenti
amplexus et opem Liber tulit...⁷

and from Book 14, the notorious digests of *Aeneid* 4 and 6 (78-81 and 116-119 respectively),

excipit Aenean illic animoque domoque
non bene discidium Phrygii latura mariti
Sidonis, inque pyra sacri sub imagine facta
incubuit ferro deceptaque decipit omnes.
paruit Aeneas et formidabilis Orci
uidit opes atausque suos umbramque senilem
magnanimi Anchisae. didicit quoque iura locorum,
quaeque nouis essent adeunda pericula bellis.

In each case the story in question would have been familiar to Ovid's readers from a well-known earlier Latin rendition, which makes the effect of Ovid's miniaturization all the more obvious: in addition to the Virgilian antecedents of the passages from Book 14, the Medea story had been treated by Ovid himself in his lost tragedy, and Ariadne's abandonment had been memorably portrayed by Catullus and again by Ovid himself in *Heroides* 10. The effects of such drastic foreshortening are complex and various. Choosing not to relate at length a story made famous in an earlier form could be a form of modesty, a gesture of deference toward a canonical predecessor; this motive may be at work in the instances of Medea and Ariadne, with the amusing corollary that the masters thus honored include Ovid himself. When dealing with Virgilian material, however, Ovid is far less respectful: his treatment of the Dido story is so pointedly different from Vir-

7. At this point Ovid relaxes the narrative tempo to describe the catasterism of Ariadne's crown (177-182), a detail that naturally appeals to him as an instance of metamorphosis with links to other catasterisms (e.g., that of Julius Caesar's *anima* in 15.843-851).

gil's in its view of the events (in particular the relationship between Dido and Aeneas) as to constitute a rejection of Virgil's outlook, and he rushes through Aeneas' visit to the Underworld and his meeting with Anchises to linger over a literally marginal episode that exerts greater appeal for him, Aeneas' conversation with the Sibyl on the return journey (14.120-153).⁸

In the case of Medea, the compression of this phase of the narrative is, I believe, a form of implicit comment on the development (or more precisely the degradation) of Medea's character over the course of the first half of Book 7: at the start of the book, the naive young girl who first sees and falls in love with Jason (the 'Apollonian' Medea, one might call her) is shown in extreme close-up, her vacillating thoughts elaborated in a long soliloquy (11-71) and her reactions to Jason's ordeals carefully registered (134-138, 144-148).⁹ But as Medea's career progresses and the use she makes of her magical powers becomes increasingly destructive, the narrative's concentration on her thoughts and motives dwindles correspondingly, until in the lines under discussion the tragic conflict portrayed by Euripides (and presumably by Ovid himself in his *Medea*) is reduced to the banal shorthand *ultraque se male mater*. The abbreviation of Medea's revenge and filicide is Ovid's most striking way of withholding narrative attention from her at this point, but the passages that precede and follow perform a similar function. The geographical-mythological account of Medea's route from Thessaly to Athens (351-393), as well as comprising a dazzling display of arcane learning, serves as well to deflect emphasis from Medea, who is now less interesting than the places over which she passes in her flight. In the mini-episode of Medea's arrival in Athens and her failed attempt on the life of Theseus, her part is constantly being upstaged, either by other characters or by the narrator's willful shifts of focus, e.g., the mannered apostrophes in 399-401 and the excursus on aconite in 408-419.

8. I say little about Ovid's abbreviation of episodes from the *Aeneid* because they have been well treated by others; cf., e.g., Hinds 1998, pp. 104-122. From a formal point of view Ovid's Virgilian digests foreshadow the several sets of verse *argumenta* of books of Virgil composed in late Antiquity, some of which – e.g., *Anth. Lat.* 1 and 2 Riese – are actually ascribed to Ovid in the manuscript tradition. On this material see Senis 1984.

9. Both passages contain interpolated or suspect lines – 146-145 are, I think, clearly spurious, and 135-136 probably so as well – but even without them Ovid's close attention to Medea's emotions remains clear, especially in his narrator's apostrophe to her in 144, 147-148.

Whatever the particular effect produced, these examples are akin in demonstrating in an especially pointed way the narrator's control over the story. In other words, the technique of presenting part of a story in a drastically speeded-up form is one of many ways in which the reader of the *Metamorphoses* is made aware of narration as the product of conscious art, as something constructed and fashioned rather than natural or given. That point is made most forcefully when the narrator's choice comes closest to being purely whimsical, as it appears to be in the case of Theseus, Ariadne, and Bacchus: Ovid scurries rapidly over this series of events (as mentioned earlier, the subject of one of his *Heroides*) only to spread himself at length on the following story of Daedalus and Icarus (8.183-235), which he had also treated in an earlier elegiac work, the second book of the *Ars Amatoria* (2.21-96).¹⁰ When two episodes each with a prior Ovidian treatment are juxtaposed and then handled in such contrasting ways, it is hard to avoid feeling that Ovid wants his reader to observe that, had he wished, he could easily have reversed the narrative balance and dealt in detail with Theseus and Ariadne while dispatching Daedalus and Icarus in a few lines. But the reader who draws that inference might be led after further reflection to see that inverting the narrative emphasis in that way would have produced a less successful result in terms of thematic coherence: the Daedalus-Icarus episode, with its focus on a destructive parent-child relationship, is far more relevant to a recurring motif of Book 8 (seen as well in the episodes of Scylla, Althaea, and Erysichthon) than a Theseus-Ariadne episode could have been. Here, as elsewhere in the *Metamorphoses*, the scrutiny of its own composition that the poem invites reveals it to be both arbitrary, in the sense that it could have been otherwise, and at the same time inevitable, in the sense that no conceivable alternative would be as artistically satisfying.

That conclusion will be reinforced by the group of passages I wish to discuss in the remainder of this paper. For this purpose I need to give yet another twist to my increasingly elastic definition of 'untold stories', since now I shall be considering not en-

10. The two accounts, though carefully differentiated in tone and emphasis, share many elements, several partly or nearly identical lines, and two identical hexameters, *Ars* 2.77 ~ *Met.* 8.217 and *Ars* 2.89 ~ *Met.* 8.227; a third apparent example is the result of *Met.* 8.216's having been interpolated from *Ars* 2.73; cf. Tarrant 1982, p. 360.

tire stories that are in various ways excluded or withheld but rather rejected versions of stories that Ovid does relate at length. I shall try to show that in several places Ovid embeds a reference to such a rejected version in his text, and that these references serve to highlight a fundamental change in the way Ovid has chosen to present the story. In other words, it is by rejecting an alternative version of events that the Ovidian form of the story acquires its own identity. Even more specifically, in the cases I shall discuss Ovid places the allusion in the mouth of a central character and uses it to define an essential feature of that character's ethos. Since many of the pre-Ovidian versions of episodes in the *Metamorphoses* are entirely unknown, our ability to recognize such allusions is restricted and to an extent fortuitous, but the similarity of technique in the examples I wish to consider is strong enough to suggest a genuine pattern rather than a series of coincidences.

In verbal terms there are two obvious ways of signalling a story's departure from a variant form of itself. One is to note that «X did not do such and such», when in the version being alluded to X did in fact do so, and the other is to observe that «X might have done such and such», when the action in question did take place in another form of the story. So far I have noted two instances of each form in the *Metamorphoses*. I begin with a case that is in one respect clearer than the others, since the version to which Ovid alludes is extant. Ovid's Orpheus, having secured the release of Eurydice, had nearly reached the boundary of the Underworld when, «fearing that her strength might be failing and longing to see her», he turned back to look at his wife and thereby lost her a second time. The narrator pointedly remarks that Eurydice made no complaint of her husband's action and asks rhetorically «for of what could she complain except of having been loved?» (10.56-61):

hic ne deficeret metuens auidusque uidendi
flexit amans oculos, et protinus illa relapsa est,
bracchiaque intendens prendique et prendere certans
nil nisi cedentes infelix adripit auras.
iamque iterum moriens non est de coniuge quidquam
quæsta suo (quid enim nisi se quereretur amatam?).¹¹

11. Polle's deletion of 58-59 has something to commend it, but that issue does not affect the point under discussion.

The reaction so carefully excluded is precisely that of Virgil's Eurydice in *Georgics* 4.494-498, who at the corresponding moment complains bitterly to Orpheus in terms that at least implicitly accuse him of *furor* (echoing the *dementia* attributed to Orpheus by Virgil's narrator at 488):

illa «quis et me» inquit «miseram et te perdidit, Orpheu,
quis tantus furor? en iterum crudelia retro
fata uocant, conditque natantia lumina somnus.
iamque uale: feror ingenti circumdata nocte
invalidasque tibi tendens, heu non tua, palmas».

Of course Ovid's account of Orpheus' loss of Eurydice departs from Virgil's at many points, but this is the only place in which Ovid signals an omission on his part, and as such it carries particular weight.¹² Just as Virgil attributes to Eurydice his own anguished response to the power of emotion (for each it is a kind of madness), so Ovid posits in his Eurydice a resigned acceptance of excess and even of loss as inseparable from the experience of being loved. Eurydice's excluded complaint – absent yet powerfully present in Ovid's text – is the means by which Ovid signals his reinterpretation of her response and thus of her character. The absence of an outburst from Eurydice is also connected to Ovid's larger relocation of the story's emotional core, away from Eurydice's death(s) and toward the dismemberment of Orpheus by the Thracian women.¹³

Negation serves a similar purpose in one of the stories Orpheus tells to assuage his grief for Eurydice, that of Pygmalion.¹⁴ Revolted by the shamelessness of the women he sees around him, Pygmalion creates an ivory statue of a woman whose beauty is surpassed only by her modesty. Pygmalion's attraction to his own creation draws him into a courtship at once ardent and hopeless, charming yet also unsettling. Ovid's narrative makes it

12. For a detailed comparison of the two versions see Anderson 1982, though I do not share Anderson's view of Ovid's Orpheus as «a performer, egotistic, calculating, self-dramatizing» (p. 47).

13. A sign of Ovid's shift of emphasis is his use of the emotive anaphora of *te*: in Virgil it describes Orpheus' lament for Eurydice (*G.* 4.465-466 *te, dulcis coniunx, te solo in litore secum, / te ueniente die, te decedente canebat*), but in Ovid it dramatizes nature's grief for the murdered Orpheus (*Met.* 11.44-46 *te maestae uolucres, Orpheu, te turba ferarum, / te rigidi silices, te carmina saepe secutae / fleuerunt siluae*).

14. This intriguing episode has attracted a good deal of critical attention in recent years. My focus here is different from, but not in conflict with, discussions such as those of Liveley 1999 and Hardie 2002, pp. 186-193.

clear that, despite the desire Pygmalion experiences for the statue (252-253 *haurit ... simulati corporis ignes*), his gestures of affection remain chaste: note in particular lines 267-269, which follow a reference to the statue's beauty when unclothed: *conlocat hanc stratis concha Sidonide tinctis / appellatque tori sociam acclinataque colla / mollibus in plumis tamquam sensura reponit*. We might expect that the action of line 267 is the prelude to intercourse, but Pygmalion remains content with a purely nominal union (*appellatque tori sociam*).¹⁵ His restraint is made explicit when, at a festival of Venus, he makes a personal request of the goddess: not daring to ask that the ivory maiden become his wife, he prays for a wife 'like' his ivory maiden (275-276 "*sit coniunx, opto*", *non ausus "eburnea virgo" / dicere Pygmalion "similis mea" dixit "eburnae"*). Returning to his studio, he embraces the statue and, to his astonishment, feels in it signs of warmth and life. The story ends with the neatest of closures, as the now fully human *uirgo* opens her eyes and sees at once the sky and her lover (294 *pariter cum caelo uidit amantem*). Pygmalion's prayer to Venus is clearly the focal point of the story, and that prayer is introduced with a prominent negation: «not daring to pray that the ivory maiden herself become his wife». By chance we know that in a Hellenistic source that in all likelihood provided Ovid with the starting-point of his story, the *Cypriaka* of Philostephanus,

15. Ovid's care in depicting Pygmalion's repressed desire is not as apparent as it should be because of an interpolation earlier in the passage (254-258):

*saepe manus operi temptantes admouet, an sit
corpus an illud ebur, nec adhuc ebur esse fatetur,
[oscula dat reddique putat loquiturque tenetque]
sed credit tactis digitos insidere membris
et metuit pressos ueniat ne liuor in artus.*

In the surrounding lines the focus is on Pygmalion's touching the statue, and in fact the lines on either side of 256 form two parts of a connected thought: «he is not yet willing to admit that the maiden is made of ivory rather than flesh, but instead believes that his fingers are sinking into her limbs etc.» (for the contrast between the halves to register properly, we need to make the slight change of *et* to *sed* in 257). Into this carefully constructed sequence of ideas 256 inserts a jumble of unrelated actions, which interrupt both the immediate thought and the step-by-step progress of the narrative in the first part of the episode (250-269). It is interesting that if 256 is removed, Pygmalion does not kiss the statue until line 281, where his kiss is met with an apparent response. This line belongs to a subcategory that can be called 'anticipatory interpolations', elaborations of Ovid's text that reveal themselves as unoriginal because they disrupt a carefully arranged narrative sequence with elements drawn from a later stage of the same episode. Another likely example is 3.415 and 417.

the Pygmalion character (a ruler of Cyprus rather than a reclusive artist) did in fact have sex with a statue, a cult statue of Venus.¹⁶ As with Eurydice's complaint, the conspicuously excluded action is central to Ovid's revision: the obvious implication is that it is precisely Pygmalion's restraint that prompts Venus to grant his request.¹⁷

If we were to stop there, we would conclude that Ovid has dignified an originally sordid story and has signalled his alteration by alluding negatively to the rejected version. But it is possible to make out a further level of significance in this narrative negation. Within the poem, Pygmalion's story is told by the grieving Orpheus; as has often been noticed, the episode stands out in Orpheus' song since it conspicuously fails to correspond to the topics Orpheus announces in his proem, boys loved by gods and women struck by forbidden passion (10.152-154).¹⁸ That fact, coupled with Pygmalion's identity as a supremely gifted artist, suggests that his story carries a special meaning for its internal narrator. In that light, the stress placed on Pygmalion's restraint and the success it brings him in gaining possession of an apparently impossible love can be readily interpreted as Orpheus' wishful retelling of his own story, since it was precisely lack of restraint that cost Orpheus the woman he had saved from death by his art. Seeing the episode as a fantasy of wish-fulfillment helps to explain a number of its curious features (which I do not have scope to consider here); in particular it reveals the complexity of the moment of negation which is my present focus of interest. As we have seen, what is explicitly negated can be said to be both absent and present in the narrative. Here that duality takes on a special psychological aptness, since it is evident from Ovid's description of Pygmalion's behavior toward the statue that his physical restraint does not exclude strong sexual attraction. In other words, the desire that was actualized in Philostephanus' account has not been eliminated or rechanneled; it is still present, but is not acted

16. For details see Otis 1970, pp. 418-419, Bömer 1980, pp. 93-97.

17. The centrality of Pygmalion's wish and Venus' interpretation of it is underscored by the close parallel to the corresponding moment in the immediately following story. Myrrha, in love with her father and asked by him what sort of man she would wish for a husband, replies «one like you» (364 *«similem tibi»*). Unlike Venus, who correctly interprets Pygmalion's unspoken wish (277-278 *sensit ... uota quid illa uelint*), Myrrha's father Cinyras fails to grasp her meaning and so praises her for her *pietas* (365 *non intellectam uocem conlaudat*).

18. Cited above, p. 67.

upon. Pygmalion's repression of desire is verbally paralleled in the wording of his prayer: he does not dare to utter his true wish, but replaces it with an acceptable substitute. His cagily phrased request is matched by the ingenuity of Venus' response: she grants the literal meaning of his prayer, since Pygmalion's future bride is not the ivory statue, but a living woman who exactly resembles it (*similis ... eburnae*), but in so doing she makes possible the sexual union for which Pygmalion had not dared to ask.¹⁹

A second verbal means by which an Ovidian story can point to a variant that has not been adopted is a hypothetical expression, a reference to what might have happened under other circumstances. One such case is that of Byblis in Book 9. Byblis has been seized with love for her brother Caunus, and the first part of Ovid's account describes her increasingly feeble attempts to resist this illicit passion. Byblis' internal struggle is dramatized in a long soliloquy, in which the promptings of virtue are countered point for point by the sophistic justifications of desire. The passage relevant for my purpose comes at the end of this monologue, and marks the point at which Byblis moves from reflection to action, i.e., writing a letter to Caunus in which she declares her love. The argument that turns the scales is first presented in a conditional sentence: if the roles had been reversed and if Caunus had been enamored of Byblis, «perhaps I might have felt able to indulge his mad passion»: *'si tamen ipse mei captus prior esset amore, / forsitan illius possem indulgere furori'* (511-512). That hypothetical possibility then serves as the foundation for a pseudo-logical inference: «so, seeing that I would not have rejected him if he had sought me, let me seek him!»: *'ergo ego, quae fueram non reiectura petentem, / ipsa petam!'* (513-514). The humor of this adroit self-deception is increased for the reader who recalls that in at least one of Ovid's sources for this episode the roles were indeed reversed and Caunus was the pursuer of the reluctant Byblis. (So Parthenius in the *Erotika Pathemata*, reporting Nicaenetus).²⁰ But, as in the Eurydice and Pygmalion passages discussed earlier, the allusion to a rejected form of the story is more than a learned footnote or a knowing wink to the informed reader; it is also a key to what is distinctively Ovidian in this particular conception of the myth. Ovid's account is built around three lengthy

19. I am grateful to Anita Nikkanen for this observation.

20. See Otis 1970, pp. 415-417; Bömer 1977, pp. 411-412.

speeches (or speech-equivalents) given by Byblis: her first soliloquy (474-516), her letter to Caunus (530-563), and her second soliloquy following his rejection of her (585-629); together they make up more than half of the episode. The voice that dominates the story is thus that of Byblis: Caunus, by contrast, speaks only three lines (577-579), in which he furiously repels Byblis' advances. Byblis' rhetoric of persuasion, whether directed at herself or her brother, relies heavily on conditional and hypothetical arguments, since the only way she can keep her hopes alive is by imagining what might happen if circumstances were otherwise or if she had acted differently. In the first part of the episode, these expressions employ the present subjunctive, implying that a longed-for state of affairs is at least potentially realizable: 477 *possim, si non sit frater, amare*, 487 *si liceat mutato nomine iungi*; in the latter passage the unreality of the ensuing fantasy is evident (487-488 *poteram ... poteram*, 490 *omnia di facerent essent communia*, 491 *uellem generosior esses*), but the introductory *si liceat* nonetheless clings to a faint hope of possibility.²¹ After Byblis has learned of Caunus' rejection, however, her language becomes more openly contrary-to-fact: 603-609 (603 *uidisset lacrimas, uultum uidisset*, 608-609 *fecissem ... potuissent*), 618 *si facta mihi reuocare liceret*. In this context the words with which Ovid has Byblis entertain the thought of a reversal of roles are especially significant, since they syntactically combine past and present, possibility and impossibility in a way that encapsulates Byblis' characteristic language at a critical moment in her story: *si tamen ipse mei captus prior esset amore, / forsitan illius possem indulgere furori*. The tragedy of Ovid's Byblis is that the only person she succeeds in persuading with such verbal sleight-of-hand is herself.

A hypothetical argument that entails an allusion to an 'untold story' is employed for a precisely opposite effect in the episode of Cephalus and Procris that ends Book 7. The story is narrated by Cephalus himself, a fact that will be crucial to the following discussion. In Cephalus' account, he had been blissfully happy in his marriage to Procris for a year when he was seen and carried off by the dawn-goddess Aurora. He harped so constantly on his love for Procris that Aurora eventually sent him back to her, avenging herself for the slight by planting suspicions in him that

21. Lines 532-534 similarly betray an implicit awareness that what Byblis wishes for cannot actually happen: *si quid cupiam quaeris, sine nomine uellem / posset agi mea causa meo, nec cognita Byblis / ante forem quam spes uotorum certa fuisset*.

Procris might have been unfaithful in his absence. With Aurora's help Cephalus disguises himself and attempts to seduce Procris. After many futile approaches he offers all his possessions in return for one night with her, which causes her to hesitate; he then reveals himself and denounces her for faithlessness. In shame and anger Procris leaves him and becomes a follower of Diana; Cephalus is overcome with longing, makes an abject confession, and begs for pardon. He admits that he might have reacted as she did if he had been offered gifts of the same sort he had offered her (7.748-752):

orabam ueniam et peccasse fatebar
et potuisse datis simili succumbere culpae
me quoque muneribus, si munera tanta darentur.
haec mihi confesso, laesum prius ulta pudorem,
redditur et dulces concorditer exigit annos.

The two are then reconciled, and to seal their renewed union Procris gives Cephalus a preternaturally swift hunting dog she had received from Diana and also a magical spear that unerringly hits its target. The story then continues with the parallel suspicion of Cephalus by Procris – while hunting he is overheard murmuring endearments to 'Aura', according to him a cooling breeze but interpreted as a mistress by Procris – which results in the accidental death of Procris at Cephalus' hands, using the spear she had given him. A pathetic tale, it would seem, of devoted but singularly unlucky love.

Now alongside Ovid's version we know of another (actually more than one) with a markedly less edifying tone.²² In the version preserved in pseudo-Hyginus (*fab.* 189), which in essential points agrees with what Ovid and his readers would have found in Nicander, Procris actually sleeps with the disguised Cephalus and then avenges her deception by a precisely parallel deceit: she disguises herself as a young man and offers Cephalus the gifted dog and the magical spear on condition that he allow himself to be sodomized by her (or, in pseudo-Hyginus' only slightly more delicate words, «give what boys are accustomed to give»): '*sed si utique*' ait '*perstas id possidere, da mihi id quod pueri solent dare*'

22. Otis 1970, pp. 410-413 conveniently collects details of the several versions of the myth.

(189.7).²³ Only after he has agreed does she reveal her true identity and return to Cephalus as his wife.

The straightforward conclusion would be that Ovid has elevated his source material (as he did in the case of Pygmalion) by replacing the homosexual reverse seduction with the scene of Cephalus' confession. On this view Cephalus' hypothetical admission («I might have reacted as you did had I been tempted as you were») points to the version in which he was in fact similarly tempted and made to humiliate himself, but at the same time decisively sets Ovid's story apart from that version. Unlike Byblis, who appeals to the «might-have-been» to justify behavior she knows is wrong, Cephalus uses it to demonstrate a new-found awareness of his own fallibility and of the unjustness of his temptation of Procris.²⁴

That conclusion is, I believe, fundamentally correct, but in order to reach it we must confront a passage earlier in the story that is in apparent conflict with it.²⁵ The episode is introduced obliquely, as a digression in Cephalus' mission to Aeacus, ruler of Aegina, to ask for support in Athens' struggle with Minos. Cephalus and his companions come early in the morning to call on Aeacus, but find him still asleep. The king's son Phocus receives them in an entrance hall and, to pass the time, asks Cephalus about the unusual spear he carries with him (7.675-680):

‘sum nemorum studiosus’ ait ‘caedisque ferinae;
qua tamen e silua teneas hastile recisum
iamdudum dubito. certe, si fraxinus esset,
fulua colore foret; si cornus, nodus inesset.
unde sit ignoro, sed non formosius isto
uiderunt oculi telum iaculabile nostri’.

23. Pseudo-Hyginus' account of the story is remarkable for its use of direct speech: in addition to the words of Procris cited in the text, Aurora tells Cephalus, who has protested his loyalty to Procris, ‘*nolo ut fallas fidem, nisi illa prior fefellerit*’ (189.3), and Diana orders Procris to leave her entourage with the words ‘*mecum uirgines uenantur, tu uirgo non es; recede e coetu*’ (189.4). The jejune wording of these quotations is not likely to resemble anything in pseudo-Hyginus' sources, but their presence suggests that pseudo-Hyginus' outline faithfully reproduces the main events as related in those sources.

24. So Segal 1978, p. 176.

25. I have elsewhere discussed this passage in more detail, especially in its textual dimension; cf. Tarrant 1995. That article also contains references to other critics' views that will not be repeated here.

Before Cephalus replies, one of his companions jumps in to explain that the spear is even more remarkable than it appears, since it infallibly hits whatever target it is thrown at and then returns to its owner. This new information naturally prompts Phocus to ask for all the details of its history: why and how was it given to Cephalus, who was the source of such a gift? At this point the manuscript tradition presents a uniquely divided set of verbal alternatives, but a consistent sense: Cephalus responds to Phocus' inquiry, but he remains silent about «the price at which he obtained it» (*qua tulerit mercede*), a silence that is somehow connected to his sense of shame (*pudor*):

<i>quae petit, ille refert et cetera nota pudori,</i>	687
<i>quae patitur pudor, ille refert et cetera narrat;</i>	687a
<i>quae petit, ille refert; ceterum narrare pudori</i>	687b
<i>qua tulerit mercede, silet tactusque dolore</i>	688
<i>coniugis amissae lacrimis ita fatur obortis</i>	689 ²⁶

Despite the textual uncertainty of the passage, it is obvious that reference is being made to the version of events found in pseudo-Hyginus (and earlier in Nicander), and that the «price» in question is Cephalus' agreement to be used sexually by the disguised Procris. On this reading of the lines (and no other seems possible), the version of the story involving the homosexual seduction of Cephalus remains very much present in Ovid's account: Cephalus as narrator may decline to reveal it, but his silence and its motive are explicitly noted in the text.

We may seem to have uncovered an especially interesting example of Ovidian allusion to a story that remains 'untold' in his text, especially interesting in part because in Cephalus' censoring of his own past it offers an unambiguous instance of the 'unreliable narrator' beloved of contemporary narrative theory. On closer inspection, though, the unreliability of Cephalus proves so radical and so uncontrollable as to raise doubts as to the soundness of this reading.

The first point to note is that if Cephalus «is silent about the price at which he obtained the spear», then his account of his reconciliation with Procris in lines 748-752 is not simply incomplete or tactfully vague, but radically false. It will not do to say, as did Wilamowitz, that Ovid had to pass over the most shameful de-

26. For details of manuscript readings and a selection of conjectures see my *apparatus criticus* (in Tarrant 2004, ad loc.).

tails because Cephalus is telling the story;²⁷ the story we are given there is a different story, and if the statement in 687-688 is assumed to be true, then what we are told there must be a lie.

In itself that inference may only heighten our interest in Cephalus as a biased and self-serving narrator, but the consequences for Ovid's presentation of the story are serious enough to make us (or at least me) pause. We would have to conclude that in 687-688 Ovid refers in explicit terms to a version of events that his readers are meant to have in mind as they read his text, but which he nowhere relates. That such a procedure is not typical of Ovid's way of alluding to other versions of the stories he tells has been made sufficiently clear by my previous examples: in none of the passages discussed is it necessary for an allusion to an untold variant to be recognized in order for the story as told to be rightly understood. Furthermore, if Ovid had wanted to alert his readers to a suppression of embarrassing facts by Cephalus, he had a far simpler way of doing so. In Book 11, Peleus is exiled from his homeland for the murder of his brother and seeks asylum with Ceyx in Trachis (as briefly narrated in lines 266-270); when asked his name and his ancestry he responds, but conceals his crime and lies about the reason for his flight (278-281):

copia cum facta est adeundi tecta tyranni,
uelamenta manu praetendens supplice qui sit
quoque satus memorat, tantum sua crimina celat
mentiturque fugae causam.²⁸

To call the introduction to the Cephalus-Procris story narratologically anomalous would therefore be an understatement. Can it be a coincidence that these lines are also textually confused to a degree unmatched elsewhere in the poem? None of the three transmitted forms of 687 yields an acceptable wording, and even

27. Wilamowitz 1883, p. 425 n. 2: «das ärgste muss Ovid verschweigen, weil bei ihm Kephalos selbst erzählt». Otis 1970, pp. 179-180 offered a more chivalrous variant of this view: «what Cephalus tells is not really the true or full story but an edited version of it, a version chastened and corrected by his respect for Procris' memory and by his continuing devotion». The concept of 'editing' that underlies this statement is deeply disturbing. See further Tarrant 1995, p. 102. Labate 1975, p. 104 n. 4 rightly observes that an allusion in 751 to the Nicandrian version of events as having taken place «sarebbe in contrasto con quanto detto nel verso immediatamente precedente e inoltre sarebbe assurdo nel quadro che Ovidio ... ci presenta dei nostri personaggi».

28. Cf. Tarrant 1995, pp. 104-105 for other examples in Ovid of allusive references to events previously narrated.

Heinsius was able to elicit from them only a contorted approximation to Ovidian Latin: *quae petit ille refert, sed quae narrare pudori, / qua tulerit mercede, silet* etc. In addition, no conjecture – Heinsius' included – has addressed another problem of the transmitted text, which is that *ille* in 687 should refer to the most recently named speaker, who is one of the sons of Pallas (*Actaeis e fratribus alter*, 681) rather than Cephalus. In other words, we miss a clearer sign that Cephalus has entered the conversation.²⁹

All these factors have led me to suggest that the problems of 687-688 are due to interpolation rather than corruption: the blatant yet mystifying reference to the «price» Cephalus paid for the spear is better understood as a knowledgeable reader's comment on a detail omitted by Ovid than as a uniquely inept Ovidian reference to another form of his story.³⁰ Bentley had reached a similar conclusion, and had proposed a typically incisive solution, which has the added merit of naming Cephalus as the respondent: *quae petit ille, refert Cephalus tactusque doloris / coniugis amissae lacrimis ita fatur obortis*. My main reason for not accepting his reworking is that the shift in emotional tone from an almost jaunty briskness (*quae petit ille, refert Cephalus*) to heavily weighted sorrow (*tactusque dolore eqs.*) is too abrupt to be plausible. My own tentative approach starts from the assumption (which I share with Bentley) that interpolation has affected the first half of 688 as well as 687; I further suggest that the silence in question does not describe part of Cephalus' story, but rather his first reaction to Phocus' inquiry. Several times in Ovid characters react to an

29. I am also inclined to doubt whether a formula like *quae petit ille refert* can properly introduce an extended narrative rather than standing in for such an account, as a comparable expression does in the closest Ovidian parallel, 4.766-770 *cultusque genusque locorum / quaerit Lyncides moresque animumque uirorum. / quae simul edocuit ... Cepheus*. See further Tarrant 1995, pp. 104 n. 12, 109.

30. I believe that another textually disputed passage, 1.544-547, has a similar explanation. Daphne, about to be caught by Apollo, cries for help, and the manuscript tradition preserves two forms of her appeal: to her father, the river god Peneus ('*fer, pater*' inquit '*opem, si flumina numen habetis; / qua nimium placui, mutando perde figuram*') and to Tellus ('*Tellus*' ait, '*hisce, uel istam / quae facit ut laedar, mutando perde figuram*'). Pace some critics, I think a double appeal is highly unlikely; since Ovid has stressed Daphne's abnormally close bond with her father, it seems much more plausible that she should turn to him for deliverance than to Tellus, who has played no previous part in the story. The appeal to Tellus has been explained on the grounds that in some late (i.e., 4th-5th centuries AD) sources she is the mother of Daphne; even if that version was known to Ovid – which is far from certain – alluding to it in such a crude and unmotivated fashion is, as we have seen, not typical of his manner.

awkward or painful question with a distressed silence; I will cite just one example, that of Lucretia after her rape when asked the reason for her mournful demeanor (F. 2.819-820): *illa diu reticet pudibundaque celat amictu / ora*.³¹ In the part of Book 7 set on Aegina innocent questions that arouse bitter memories have already figured twice: in lines 478-481 Aeacus asks Minos the reason for his coming and thereby reminds him of the loss of his son (480 *admonitus patrii luctus*), and in 515-517 Cephalus remarks that he misses seeing many whom he remembers from an earlier visit, which prompts Aeacus to tell him the story of the devastating plague (517 *Aeacus ingemuit tristisque ita uoce locutus est*). It is therefore highly appropriate for Cephalus himself to respond at first with silence when asked the origin of his hunting spear.

With these considerations in mind I suggest that the original sense of the passage can be restored as follows:

ipse diu reticet Cephalus tactusque doloris
coniugis amissae lacrimis ita fatur obortis.

My textual reconstruction can only be offered *exempli gratia*, but I hope to have shown that the transmitted text of 687-688 is unacceptable on both textual and narrative grounds.³²

After that lengthy excursus, let us return to the one place in the episode where an allusion to the Nicandrian reverse seduction is unmistakable, namely, Cephalus' admission in 748-750 that he might have succumbed to temptation if he had been offered gifts like the ones he had offered Procris. In light of the foregoing discussion it will be obvious that I interpret this statement as Ovid's way of signalling his departure from the earlier version, not as a hint that Cephalus is concealing what actually took place. That reading must in turn affect our understanding of the following words (751-752): *haec mihi confesso, laesum prius ulta pudorem, / redditur*. The reference to Procris «avenging her wounded sense of shame» might seem so strongly to evoke the Nicandrian version of events as to constitute a sort of Freudian slip on Cephalus' part, but if my overall view of Ovid's allusions to untold stories is sound, Cephalus' words constitute instead a particularly bold example of Ovidian reinterpretation. The vengeance that Procris

31. For other examples see Tarrant 1995, pp. 109-110.

32. It is too soon to tell how this proposal, which now appears in my Oxford text, will be received; the only reaction known to me is from Fantham 2004, who writes (p. 85) that «the line [i.e., 7.687] has been suspected by scrupulous editors».

achieved in Nicander by sexually humiliating her husband is now obtained by purely verbal means, through Cephalus' admission of fault and humble plea for forgiveness.³³ As we have seen, Ovid's allusions to un-narrated variants typically serve to highlight an essential quality in his characters; in the case of Cephalus, that characteristic would be belated self-awareness and a sense of fallibility that pervades his recollections of a loving but ultimately destructive relationship.³⁴

I have concentrated on ways of alluding to untold versions of stories that can be shown to recur and that can be firmly localized in the text, but Ovid's procedures are more diverse than my sample indicates. I cannot discuss here all the relevant examples (or even claim to have registered them), but will briefly consider one more episode, the story of Ceyx and Alcyone, in which several aspects of Ovid's account take on additional meaning if we see them as pointers to a rejected alternative.³⁵ Ovid's Ceyx and Alcyone are conspicuous for their marital love and for their piety. The first trait seems to be part of their myth in all its forms, the second certainly not: in a version of the myth that may go back to Hesiod, the couple were punished either for giving themselves the names of Zeus and Hera or for boasting that they were their equals.³⁶ Ovid has preserved this motif but has transferred it to another member of Ceyx's family, his niece Chione, who incurs divine retribution for boasting that she is more beautiful than Di-

33. The tenderness of the scene as described by Cephalus reminds me of the sublime moment at the end of Mozart's *Nozze di Figaro* in which the Count begs for and receives forgiveness from his wife. In Ovid's story, however, the final act is yet to come, and both partners will play a role in bringing about a tragic ending.

34. On the prominence of retrospective insight in Cephalus' narrative, see Segal 1978, pp. 178-183. Labate 1975 acutely contrasts the stress placed on the conjugal love of Cephalus and Procris with the strongly elegiac language that surrounds Cephalus' suspected affair with 'Aura'. In one respect I would slightly modify his reading, to suggest that the intrusion of elegiac motifs is not limited to the 'Aura' episode. The *mutua cura* and *amor socialis* (7.800) of Cephalus and Procris is matched – and in the end overcome – by their mutual suspicion, and Ovid underscores the symmetry of their doubts by means of corresponding gnomic statements: 719 *cuncta timemus amantes* and 826 *credula res amor est*. Although both remarks speak of *amor* in general, suspicion of the kind manifested by both characters is especially at home in the twilight world of elegiac relationships; one might also consider whether Cephalus' tempting of Procris through the offer of lavish gifts makes him resemble the *diues amator* who often threatens the affair of the elegiac lover-poet.

35. My analysis builds on observations made by Otis 1970, pp. 231-234 and Fantham 1979.

36. See Otis 1970, pp. 421-423; Fantham 1979, pp. 333-334; Bömer 1980, pp. 343-348.

ana (11.321-322). Ceyx and Alcyone, on the other hand, are portrayed as scrupulous in their reverence for the gods, and to sharpen the contrast with the earlier form of the story, it is their piety rather than their lack of it that causes them misfortune:

Ceyx drowns on a perilous sea voyage undertaken to consult Apollo's oracle at Claros, and after his death Alcyone's constant prayers to Juno for his safe return provoke the goddess into sending Morpheus to inform her that her husband has drowned. The story ends with what appears to be another Ovidian innovation: the corpse of Ceyx washes up on the very shore where Alcyone stands recalling his departure, and as she leaps from a breakwater to join him she is transformed into a bird that embraces the lifeless body with its wings (11.728-738). At this juncture Ovid introduces an audience of onlookers, who are uncertain whether (or who doubt whether) Ceyx had actually responded to Alcyone's embrace or whether they were merely seeing his face bobbing on the waves: *senserit hoc Ceyx an uultum motibus undae / tollere sit uisus, populus dubitabat* (11.739-740); this uncertainty is then dispelled by the narrator, who assures us that Ceyx had indeed felt Alcyone's touch, and at that point, with the gods finally taking pity on the couple, the two are transformed into halcyons, who maintain their love and their marital bond in their changed form.³⁷ The most remarkable feature of this *dénouement* is surely the sudden appearance of the dubious *populus*, a development both unexpected and unnecessary. The striking emphasis placed on their reaction may arise from the fact that in earlier versions of the myth Ceyx was not reunited with Alcyone, let alone reanimated by her embrace. Ovid may therefore be dramatizing a mo-

37. In their combination of unbreakable marital devotion and religious piety, Ceyx and Alcyone resemble two other couples earlier in the *Metamorphoses*, Deucalion and Pyrrha and Baucis and Philemon. In describing the transformation of Ceyx and Alcyone, Ovid makes new use of a motif that had figured in both earlier stories. Deucalion and Pyrrha and Baucis and Philemon are shown favor by the gods because of their devout and upright behavior toward them, the first in being spared from the universal Flood (1.318-329, note especially 327 *cultores numinis ambo*) and the second in being exempted from the miniature flood that will engulf their neighbors and being allowed anything they wish (8.689-693, 703-705, note especially 704-705 *'iuste senex et femina coniuge iusto / digna'*). The piety of Ceyx and Alcyone, as noted above, brings them no divine favor; the pity of the gods toward them is manifested only at the last moment, in apparent response to their reunion (11.741 *tandem superis miserantibus*). The relocation of the gods' pity makes the human devotion of Ceyx and Alcyone even more prominent and moving.

ment of hesitation or resistance on the part of his own audience in the face of a novel outcome to a familiar story.

To conclude, let me return to the Minyeides and Orpheus, with whom I began. Their concern to select from a vast repertory only what is pleasingly novel and apt for its context obviously mirrors Ovid's own strategy in the *Metamorphoses*. At one level, therefore, narrative selectivity – which entails a sense of what not to relate – forms part of the poem's definition of competent narration. To ensure that the point is taken, Ovid has taken the helpful but risky step of including a couple of inept narrators/expositors – Nestor in Book 12 and Pythagoras in Book 15 – whose striving for completeness produces a sense of overload and tedium. He also introduces, in the Pan-Syrinx episode of Book 1 and Argus' somnolent reaction to it (713-714), a narrative joke that plays on the constant danger of monotony in a poem made up of many stories dealing with metamorphosis.³⁸

The techniques considered here, and in particular Ovid's habit of alluding to versions of stories that he has chosen to omit, also serve other purposes. One of these is to demonstrate the validity (or even superiority) of his particular narrative choices, both of adoption and rejection. Another is to create an added dimension of metamorphosis at the textual level: in making rejected variants contribute by their absence to the formation of a new version, Ovid produces a narratological equivalent of the Pythagorean dictum that all things change, but nothing perishes utterly: *omnia mutantur, nihil interit* (15.165).

But at still another level the phenomena we have been examining imply a commentary on the nature of narration itself. It may be difficult to escape the belief that there exists somewhere a single 'true' version of events or 'true' portrayal of a character, but if any literary text could disabuse us of that notion, it would be the *Metamorphoses*. Paraphrasing Oscar Wilde, one might say that for Ovid there are no true or false stories, only stories told well or poorly. Put in less epigrammatic terms, truth in narration is a construct, a function of such artistic qualities as emotional coherence, vividness, plausibility, and so on. Defining truth in this way

38. A strictly logical reader might object that Argus has not heard the preceding stories of Daphne and Io, and so cannot experience boredom at the prospect of another story with the same basic plot; to this objection one might respond that every internal hearer of a story in the *Metamorphoses* is at least a potential counterpart for Ovid's audience.

does not lessen its importance: Ovid clearly thinks that there are better and worse narratives (which could be called 'truer' and 'less true' in the sense just defined), and that only the best merit the kind of permanence that he so confidently claims for his poem of change. It does, however, mean that to evaluate the artistic truth of a narrative one must have, at least implicitly, a sense of how else it might have been told; that is why what Ovid does not narrate – and shows that he is not narrating – is as vital to the success of his poem as what he does.

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