

The Muses' Playground: Narrative and the *Metamorphoses*

A) narration

- important in the *Metamorphoses*

e.g. communication important in metamorphosis myths and characters (Apollo misuses language; Mercury good at language)

e.g. a third of the poem (including about 60 episodes) narrated by c. 40 internal narrators

- stories reflecting upon each other and the wider narrative: e.g. Pan-Syrinx (1.689-712) = doublet of Apollo-Daphne story (1.452-567) (male pursues female who turns to reed/ laurel)

e.g. Lapith-Centaur battle (at wedding of Pirithous and Hippodame) told during Trojan war (doublet: cf. violation of hospitality and abduction of a bride); also cf. wedding of Peleus and Thetis previously mentioned by Nestor (which > Trojan war)

1) “Many a centauress would be his mate, / But one had gained his heart, Hylonome. / In the high woods there was none comelier / Of all the centaur-girls” (*Met.* 12.404-6)

2) “The idealized conjugal love of Cyllarus and Hylonome ...provides a stark contrast to, and commentary on, the lust-inspired rapes that disrupt marital relationships and lead to war in the outer narrative layers of *Met.* 12.” (DeBrohun 2004: 448)

- precedent for stories within stories: Alexandrian poets (e.g. Callimachus) and Neoterics (see e.g. Catullus 64)

- But VERY complicated inset narratives in Ovid: e.g. *Metamorphoses* 5.250-678 (Minerva's journey to Helicon) (see Barchiesi)

- Ovid narrates (5.250-678) that

Pallas (Minerva) visits the Muses and one of them (5.268) narrates (5.269-678) that

Calliope in a singing contest, refereed by a group of Nymphs (5.316) sings that

Ceres loses Proserpina and finds her again (5.341-662), and Arethusa (5.572-642) narrates her own story to Ceres... (Barchiesi)

3) “Whither so fast?’ It was Alpheus’ voice, / Calling me from his waters” (*Met.* 5.599, Arethusa)

B) Context

- Don’t neglect individuality of narratees and internal narrators and specific circumstances surrounding each narrative act

4) “The primary narrator’s voice is omnipresent” (Barchiesi 2001: 55)

5) “... between frames and inserted stories mutual implications may arise, interconnections only hinted at, but integral to the creation of meaning. For example, an internal audience’s reception of a story can suggest to the reader a model of interpretation (which in turn may be adopted or dismissed). In other cases, the identity of the narrator can have an implicit relation to a theme, or even to the style of the narrative entrusted to him or her” (Barchiesi 2001: 50)

- look at how internal narratee receives the story:

example of Argus in Book 1 (killed while sleeping to Mercury’s story) > moral= pay attention!

- example of Pythagoras' speech, 15.75-478 (doctrine of metempsychosis and eternal flux of souls)
Pythagoras= Ovid? But promoting vegetarianism. Didactic style but Pythagoras (a teacher) not successful in converting others. Numa as listener (who institutes animal sacrifice) > narratee reveals speaker not persuasive.

6) "In all creation / Nothing endures, all is in endless flux" (*Met.* 15.177-8, Pythagoras)

7) "He was the first to ban / As food for men the flesh of living things: / These are the doctrines he was first to teach. / Wise words, though wisdom powerless to persuade" (*Met.* 15.72-4, Pythagoras = first vegetarian)

8) "With these and other precepts taught and trained / Numa returned, it's said, to his own land; / Entreated by his people, he assumed / The reins and guidance of the Latin realm" (*Met.* 15.479-81)

9) "[Numa] taught them modes of sacrifice" (*Met.* 15.483, i.e. animal sacrifice)

- consider characterization/background of narrator (e.g. Pythagoras as teacher; Nestor: long-winded as *Iliad*, from epic)

- Knowledge of audience's background illuminating: e.g. Theseus moved by tale of Baucis and Philemon in *Met.* 8 (in previous mythic life guest of an old woman); *Met.* 11 story of female-to-male Caenis/Caeneus of interest to Achilles previously disguised as a girl on Scyros

10) "I myself saw years ago / Caeneus of Thessaly with a thousand wounds / Unharm'd ... what makes it more miraculous, he had been born / A woman" (*Met.* 12.171-5, Nestor telling of Caeneus)

11) "let us hear .../ who Caeneus was / And why his change of sex" (*Met.* 12.179-81, Achilles)

- Tailoring speech to internal audience: cf. *Met.* 5: song contest between Muses (represented by Calliope) and Pierides (one of whom sings of giant v gods), with (divine) nymphs as judges. Calliope emphasizes defeat of Typhon

12) "in contemplating any tale told in the *Metamorphoses* by a character within the work, we must consider not only what Ovid wishes to suggest to us but what the secondary narrator seeks to suggest to his audience." (Ahl 1985: 202-203)

13) "let the judgement of nymphs decide" (*Met.* 5.314, nymphs judge Muses/Pierides contest)

14) "[one of Pierides] sang of the great war in heaven, / Ascribing spurious prowess to the giants, / Belittling all the exploits of the gods: / How Typhon, issuing from the earth's lowest depths / Struck terror in those heavenly hearts, and they / All turned their backs and fled.." (*Met.* 5.319-323)

15) "The huge three-angled isle of Sicily / Lies piled upon the body of the giant, / Typhon, whose hopes had dared heaven's palaces" (*Met.* 5.346-348, Calliope tells of defeat of Typhon)

- Calliope bears judges in mind: erotic story attractive to nymphs; prominence to nymphs in story (Zissos) e.g. 90 lines of direct speech (in *Fasti* version and the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* nymphs say nothing); active participation of Cyane and Arethusa= Ovidian innovation. Reason for Sirens' transformation (i.e. abandoning Proserpina) = tactfully treated/revised

16) “But Saturn’s son restrained / his wrath no longer. Urging on his steeds, / His terrible steeds, and brandishing aloft / His royal sceptre in his strong right arm, / He hurled it to the bottom of the pool. / The smitten earth opened a way to Hell / And down the deep abyss the chariot plunged” (*Met.* 5.420-4, i.e. symbolic rape of Cyane)

17) “Now Ceres had regained her Proserpine / And, light at heart, enquired of Arethusa / The reason of her flight” (*Met.* 5.572-3 > focus on Arethusa who has narration of her own attempted rape)

18) “Was it not because, / When Proserpina was picking those spring flowers, / They were her comrades there, and, when in vain / They'd sought for her through all the lands, they prayed / For wings to carry them across the waves, So that the seas should know their search, ... /... suddenly / Saw golden plumage clothing all their limbs?” (*Met.* 5.554-60)

- tailoring of Calliope story (to female nymphs) clear in feminine slant (e.g. rape survivor's testimony); "feminization" of the myth e.g. more power to female deities compared to *Homeric Hymn*. Jupiter = schemer in *Homeric Hymn*; Venus plots rape to extend her sway. Rather than sulking, Ceres goes to Olympus to complain (and gets own way). Proserpina more powerful figure than in *Homeric Hymn* (lies; turns Ascalaphus into owl)

- Other listeners of this tale: e.g. virgin goddess Pallas (who destroys tapestry showing rapes): hearing tale of Arethusa's escape from rape. Muses= virgins (who escaped rape by Pyreneus). Tale told in way which will please Pallas?

19) “‘No, to be sure’, said Pallas; ‘sing your song, / Sing it right through” (*Met.* 5.335, Pallas to one of the Muses)

20) “Incensed at such / Success the warrior-goddess ... / Tore up the tapestry, those crimes of heaven” (*Met.* 6.130-1, Pallas tearing Arachne's tapestry)

21) “Do you not see how Pallas and Diana, / ... have deserted me” (*Met.* 5.375-7, Venus complaining of chastity)

22) “Ovidian narrative is not free from the traces left by a multitude of narrative voices” (Barchiesi 2002: 195)

C) unreliable narrators

- e.g. Nestor manipulating material (despite claim of reliability)

23) “when she saw him lifeless, she moaned words / That in the uproar failed to reach my ears” (*Met.* 12.426-7, Nestor doesn't repeat Hylonome's dying words)

24) “I don't remember their wounds; / I noted names and number” (*Met.* 12.461, of the Centaurs killed by Caeneus)

25) “I am surprised, my lord, that you've forgotten / The feats of Hercules. Why, many a time / My father used to tell me how he quelled / The cloud-born centaurs” (*Met.* 12.539-41, Tleopolemus son of Hercules to Nestor)

26) “Why force me to remember evil things, / And open griefs that time has healed, the wrongs / Your father did, and how I hated him?” (*Met.* 12.542-4, Nestor to Tleopolemus. Hercules killed his brothers)

- unreliable narrators: cf. 1.163-252: Jupiter telling of Lycaon's depravity to justify planned destruction of mankind (bias?)

27) "So one house died; but not one house alone / Deserves to die; in the whole world sin reigns" (*Met.* 1.240-41, Jupiter, planning to destroy mankind)

28) "Jupiter has elicited precisely the effect he had intended for his propagandist narrative, with the council reacting as an ideal audience to his 'dodgy dossier' of evidence against mankind" (Liveley 2011: 23)

- theme of truth: Ovid going back to sources? Stories suggest truth not an absolute fact

29) "Through the technique of storytelling, Ovid teaches us to recognize that doubt regarding the pretense of the truth of every story is legitimate. and that truth is ... negotiable, the creation of a particular narrator under particular circumstances" (Rosati 2002: 291)

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