

## THE RAPE OF PROSERPINA IN OVID *MET.* 5.341–661: INTERNAL AUDIENCE AND NARRATIVE DISTORTION

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The Proserpina narrative in the *Metamorphoses* has not lacked for critical attention in the twentieth century. The presence of an apparently contemporaneous<sup>1</sup> “companion” version in Ovid’s *Fasti* (4.417–620) has inevitably prompted comparative studies, often along generic lines.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I shall follow the recent trend towards narratological readings of the *Metamorphoses* episode,<sup>3</sup> with the aim of demonstrating a fundamental difference between the two narratives. In particular, I will show that the presence of a particularly influential internal audience in the *Metamorphoses* version profoundly affects the telling of the tale, prompting a radical departure from all other known versions of the Proserpina myth.<sup>4</sup>

As Ahl (1985: 202–203) has observed, “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.” The Proserpina narrative, an entry in a poetic contest, is an obvious case in point. The narrator here is the Muse Calliope,<sup>5</sup> who has been challenged to a story-telling contest by the Pierides. The stakes are high, since if Calliope loses the challenge she and her sisters must surrender control of the Heliconian fount (*cedite victae / fonte Medusaeo et Hyantea Aganippe*, 5.311–312), the mythical source of poetic inspiration. So clearly the gloves are off, and the Muse is playing for keeps. But the critical detail is that nymphs are designated as the judges of the contest: *dirimant certamina nymphae* (5.314). With this in mind, Calliope selects her narrative and, more importantly, alters story-line and emphasis to gratify the

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary of viewpoints, see Hinds 1987: 10–11.

<sup>2</sup> I.e., studies attempting to “distinguish between an epic narrative manner in the *Metamorphoses* version of the rape and an elegiac narrative manner in the *Fasti* version” (Hinds 1987: xii). See Heinze 1919; Otis 1966. More recently Hinds (1987) has effectively reopened the debate by rejecting the rigid generic formalism of Heinze in favour of a more nuanced and subtle approach to genre.

<sup>3</sup> Rosati 1981; Nagle 1988. An interesting political analysis of the episode is found in Johnson 1996.

<sup>4</sup> A useful “Homeric” precedent for this approach is Doherty 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Actually, there is a further level of indirection, since Calliope’s tale is being quoted by one of her sisters to the goddess Minerva. For an excellent discussion of the complex narrative “layering” of the episode, see Rosati 1981.

panel of judges.<sup>6</sup> Though she narrates the Rape of Proserpina, the more familiar version found in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* of awesome divinities whose actions decisively transform both divine and mortal realms is entirely recast.<sup>7</sup> In obvious and shrewd acknowledgment of the audience, both gods and humans are consistently displaced from prominent roles in order that nymphs be afforded the narrative limelight. It is this narrative legerdemain, this ability to adapt her tale to suit her audience, that demonstrates Calliope's skill and shrewdness as a story-teller and accounts for her ultimate victory.

#### CYANE

Calliope's principal narrative strategy, then, is simply to ascribe an absurdly prominent role to various nymphs,<sup>8</sup> operating on the (clearly correct) assumption that the judges will react favourably to the glamorization of their own kind. This essentially humorous narrative ploy is most easily seen in the roles played by the two nymphs Cyane and Arethusa. The active participation of the two nymphs in the Proserpina tale appears to be an Ovidian invention.<sup>9</sup> Their prominence is

<sup>6</sup>In a recent analysis, Johnson (1996: 141) has suggested that "the concerns of the Heliconian nymphs are directly addressed" by Calliope's narrative. For Johnson these concerns are the threats to the nymphs' chastity and "anxiety over the expansion of the empire of Eros" rather than, as I more cynically suggest, the desire to hear a story in which other nymphs figure prominently. Cyane's mention of her own happy courtship and marriage ("*et me dilexit Anapis, / exorata tamen, nec, ut haec, exterrita nupsi*," 5.417–418) suggests that the "expansion of the empire of Eros" is not necessarily a concern of the nymphs *per se*. Cyane's objection is to Dis' method rather than to the underlying erotic impulse ("*roganda, / non rapienda fuit*," 5.415–416, discussed below, 99). Nonetheless, Johnson's observation that Calliope targets her audience in some way is fundamentally sound, and is the starting point of my analysis. Cf. Nagle 1988, which makes a number of useful points, but surprisingly, after raising the issue of the internal audience in the introduction, fails to discuss it with respect to the central narrative. That is, she discusses the internal audience: Athena listening to the unnamed Muse in the outer frame, and Ceres listening to Arethusa, but not the nymphs listening to Calliope narrating the Rape of Proserpina. Rosati (1981: 302) focuses primarily on Ovid's treatment of the *mode* in which a successful narrator performs to the audience ("*come il racconto debba sapersi offrire al suo destinatario*"), rather than addressing the issue of narrative content *per se*.

<sup>7</sup>Hinds (1987: 51–98) argues convincingly for Ovid's close intertextual engagement of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* in both the *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* narratives. Foley (1994: 152–153) rightly notes that there was no canonical version of the Rape of Persephone, but agrees with Hinds that Ovid "responded to the *Hymn*" in both his accounts.

<sup>8</sup>We might consider, as a very crude indicator of the prominence of nymphs in the *Metamorphoses* version, the amount of direct speech granted them. In this version, nymphs are afforded ninety lines of direct speech as opposed to thirty-four for gods and mortals combined. By comparison, in the *Fasti*, *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, and Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae* nymphs simply do not speak at all.

<sup>9</sup>Thus Kenney 1986: 406, noting further that in other versions Cyane's pool does not predate the narrative. Cicero (*Verr.* 2.4.107) and Diodorus (5.4) mention a pool named Cyane created by the penetration of Dis' chariot into the Earth, but not the nymph. On Cyane and Arethusa, see Bömer 1976: 332 and 351 respectively. While the possibility of an unknown source can never be ruled out, the evidence suggests that Ovid's overall handling of the Proserpina myth in the *Metamorphoses* is pointedly revisionary.

prefigured by the narrator's bizarre use of their respective springs geographically to locate Cyane herself:

*est medium Cyanes et Pisaeae Arethusae,  
quod coit angustis inclusum cornibus aequor:  
hic fuit, a cuius stagnum quoque nomine dictum est,  
inter Sicelidas Cyane celeberrima nymphas.* (5.409–412)

By locating Cyane with respect to her eponymous pool, Calliope manages to repeat the nymph's name within the space of four lines. Cyane is pointedly described here as *celeberrima*; later the Muse will refer to her solemnly as a *magnum* . . . *numen* (5.428).<sup>10</sup> Clearly, Calliope is sparing no effort in order to feature prominently and flatteringly the two nymphs.<sup>11</sup>

The first major innovation in the Rape narrative is the insertion of a heroic but ultimately disastrous attempt by Cyane to save Proserpina. Following a relatively brief account of the goddess's abduction, Cyane, displaying a breathtaking if futile courage, stands up before Dis and rebukes him:

*gurgite quae medio summa tenus extitit alvo  
agnovitque deam: "nec longius ibitis!" inquit,  
"non potes invitae Cereris gener esse: roganda,  
non rapienda fuit. . . ."* (5.413–416)

Cyane then attempts to dissuade the god, arguing perhaps somewhat impudently by analogy to her own circumstances, and then physically obstructing his path:

*" . . . quodsi componere magnis  
parva mihi fas est, et me dilexit Anapis,  
exorata tamen, nec, ut haec, exterrita nupsi."  
dixit et in partes diversas brachia tendens  
obstitit.* (5.416–420)

This is a remarkable scene: Cyane is lecturing the lord of the Underworld in the etiquette of courtship. The nymph's resort to moral argumentation (*roganda, non rapienda fuit*), citing her own situation as an *exemplum*, is quite unprecedented in its boldness. Given that we have arrived at the climactic moment in the narrative of the *raptus*, it is quite remarkable that this otherwise unknown nymph has somehow been allowed to steal the limelight from both Pluto and Proserpina. She is the only figure whose speeches are actually presented, and also the only one resisting the abduction.

There is here a significant distortion of the tale, granting startling narrative prominence and even moral authority to the nymph Cyane. But, in the scene's *dénouement*, Calliope's tale goes even further. It seems clear that the symbolic

<sup>10</sup> Of course the solemnity is operative on the level of the internal narrative. From the perspective of Ovid's readers, the effect is comic.

<sup>11</sup> Line 409 further hints that the nymphs are to be taken as a complementary pair. This is of course borne out by the subsequent narrative. See Segal 1969: 55; Kenney 1986 on 5.409 and 5.487.

moment of rape occurs when Dis plunges his chariot into Cyane's pool. Given the narrative context of a *raptus*, the reader does not need Freud to grasp the symbolic import of Ovid's account.<sup>12</sup>

*... haud ultra tenuit Saturnius iram  
terribilesque hortatus equos in gurgitis ima  
contortum valido sceptrum regale lacerto  
condidit; icta viam tellus in Tartara fecit  
et pronos currus medio cratere recepit.* (5.420–424)

As Segal (1969: 54) notes, "the 'inconsolable wound' which Pluto inflicts on the lake and its inhabitant is also a sexual wound which symbolically parallels the rape itself." This interpretation is soon confirmed, for it is in this very pool that Ceres will find her daughter's cast-off girdle:

*signa tamen manifesta dedit [sc. Cyane] notamque parenti,  
illo forte loco delapsam in gurgite sacro  
Persephonès zonam summis ostendit in undis.* (5.468–470)

But who has been raped here? There is a conflation of the experience of goddess and nymph: since Cyane is both struck and forcefully penetrated by the *raptor* Dis, she must also be considered a victim of the rape. As Richlin (1992: 162–163) observes, because Ovid's rapes are generally not sexually explicit, violence in a sexual context sometimes "stands in for the sexual, as most vividly in the story of Philomela (6.424–674)." Usually, as in the case of Philomela, the same woman is victim of both the non-sexual violence and the rape. The crucial feature of the present passage is that the victim of the symbolic violence is not the "actual" rape victim: the representation of the rape involves two victims. Moreover, Calliope describes only the brutalization and suffering of the nymph: after the rape has been metaphorically enacted, we do not learn the reaction of Proserpina, but instead get an elaborate thirteen-line account of the "bizarre and unexampled" metamorphosis<sup>13</sup> into water of the grief-stricken nymph herself:

*at Cyane raptamque deam contemptaque fontis  
iura sui maerens, inconsolabile vulnus  
mente gerit tacita lacrimisque absumitur omnis  
et, quarum fuerat magnum modo numen, in illas  
extenuatur aquas: molliri membra videres,  
ossa pati flexus, ungues posuisse rigorem,  
primaque de tota tenuissima quaeque liquescunt,  
caerulei crines digitique et crura pedesque:*

<sup>12</sup> Even a symbolic rendering of the rape in this manner would come close to offending epic decorum, given the overtness of the symbolism. Note that such a treatment is not found in the account in the *Fasti*, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, or Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae*.

<sup>13</sup> As Kenney (1986) remarks on 5.409, "metamorphosis into springs is a recurrent theme (6.312 Niobe; 7.371 Hyrie; 13.885ff Acis; 15.547ff Egeria), but the total resolution of a water-nymph into water is both bizarre and unexampled."

*nam brevis in gelidas membris exilibus undas  
transitus est; post haec umeri tergiusque latusque  
pectoraque in tenues abeunt evanida rivos;  
denique pro vivo vitiatas sanguine venas  
lympha subit, restatque nihil quod prendere posses.* (5.425–437)

There is an evident slippage in pathos from Proserpina to Cyane, from goddess to nymph. Cyane has not only been symbolically raped, but has become the primary victim of the rape in the narrative. Given that this rape is the central event of the myth (which is, of course, generally referred to as the *Rape of Persephone*) this is a notable appropriation. Moreover, it is clear that in the context of Calliope's narrative the effective substitution of Cyane for Proserpina as rape victim constitutes a kind of "elevation" of the nymph.<sup>14</sup>

Cyane has been curiously obtruded into the *Metamorphoses* narrative. By contrast, in Ovid's *Fasti* version she is mentioned only fleetingly, as part of a geographical catalogue.<sup>15</sup> She does appear with some slight prominence in Claudian's much later work, the *De raptu Proserpinae*, where the poet "appears to refer obliquely to her heroic stand against Pluto" in the *Metamorphoses*.<sup>16</sup> However, in Claudian it is the goddesses Athena and Diana who are actually depicted resisting the abduction (*DRP* 2.204–246). Thus, in spite of the obvious dependence of Claudian on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* narrative, it is clear that the later poet was uncomfortable with Cyane's prominent role in the defense of Proserpina. He therefore transformed this defense into a more typically "epic" scene, by giving the dignity and scale of a clash of Olympian gods—and more or less eliding the role of Cyane. It appears, then, that the prominence of Cyane is a mythological novelty, and one that was apparently not embraced with enthusiasm by the later tradition.

Calliope's unparalleled emphasis on the nymph Cyane in the *Metamorphoses* version suggests that the Muse is catering to her audience. The myth is adapted in order to appeal to the judges, and Calliope's narrative strategy of fictively emphasizing the role played by various nymphs becomes the dominant "artistic" principle of her performance. This is confirmed by a second and even more important protagonist, the nymph Arethusa.

<sup>14</sup>The motif of the rape is of course secondary to Calliope's narrative strategy; it is the substitution of nymph for god that is the critical element. From the perspective of many modern readers, the scope of my analysis at this point may well be deemed inadequate since it does not address the issue of rape itself. As Richlin (1992: 159) rightly observes, "A text about rape may also be about something else, but it is still a text of rape."

<sup>15</sup>*iamque Leontinos Amenanaque flumina cursu / praeterit et ripas, herbifer Aci, tuas; / praeterit et Cyanen et fontes lenis Anapi / et te, verticibus non adeunde Gela* (*Fasti* 4.467–470). As Hinds (1987: 82) suggests, the words *praeterit et Cyanen* must be an intertextual nod to the nymph's prominence in the *Metamorphoses*.

<sup>16</sup>Gruzelier 1993: 173. Claudian's parenthesis *Cyane totum supereminet agmen* (2.61) may well constitute a sly acknowledgment of Ovid's narrative ploy, since the verb *supereminet* might be expected to apply to the leader of the expedition (cf. *Aen.* 1.501).

## ARETHUSA

As with Cyane, the Muse narrator manages to insinuate the nymph Arethusa into the narrative, but now in two episodes rather than one. Indeed, this nymph is not only afforded a significant narrative role, but is also granted the status of internal narrator in her own right. In the aftermath of the rape sequence, a wrathful Ceres punishes the world by withdrawing her bounty, thereby making the land barren and consigning to death both man and beast:

*... terras tamen increpat omnes  
ingratasque vocat nec frugum munere dignas,  
Trinacriam ante alias, in qua vestigia damni  
repperit. ergo illic saeva vertentia glaebas  
fregit aratra manu, parilique irata colonos  
ruricolisque boves leto dedit arvaeque iussit  
fallere depositum vitiatque semina fecit.* (5.474–480)

In this dire situation Arethusa quite literally saves the world by her intervention. Following the precedent of Cyane, Arethusa admonishes the divinity and points out the injustice of her actions. This time, however, the interceding nymph has a more receptive audience, and uses more diplomatic language:

*tum caput Eleis Alpheias extulit undis  
rorantesque comas a fronte removit ad aures  
atque ait: "o toto quaesitae virginis orbe  
et frugum genetrix, immensos siste labores  
neve tibi fidae violenta irascere terrae.  
terra nihil meruit patuitque invita rapinae  
...."* (5.487–492)

The rebuke of the nymph constitutes an assertion of moral authority vis-à-vis the goddess, whose actions are discreetly characterized as unfair (*neve tibi fidae violenta irascere terrae*). At the same time, like Cyane,<sup>17</sup> Arethusa manages to slip in a measure of autobiographical information during the course of her speech:

*"... huc hospita veni.  
Pisa mihi patria est et ab Elide ducimus ortus,  
Sicaniam peregrina colo, sed gratior omni  
haec mihi terra solo est: hos nunc Arethusa penates,  
hanc habeo sedem."* (5.493–497)

In terms of the *Hymn* version, however, Arethusa's most significant function is to reveal the whereabouts of Proserpina to her distraught mother:

*"ergo dum Stygio sub terris gurgite labor,  
visa tua est oculis illic Proserpina nostris."* (5.504–505)

<sup>17</sup> 5.416–420, quoted above, 99.

As Hinds rightly observes,<sup>18</sup> this role of informer (and that word is meant in its positive sense here) is clearly taken over from the god Helios in the version found in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (75–87). Moreover, Ovid follows the Homeric Hymn in this respect for his account in the *Fasti* (4.581–584). The substitution of a nymph for a god in the *Metamorphoses* version is thus a clear act of mythological revisionism—and one that Ovid would have expected his audience to notice. Given the conscious *νυμφόληπτος* pose of the internal narrator, this must be seen as a deliberate evocation of the Hymn (and, of course, the *Fasti*), with programmatic *variatio*—in other words, another flattering gesture to the contest judges.

The purposeful reworking of the Homeric Hymn narrative by Calliope is also seen in a second instance of role usurpation. In the Hymn, there comes a moment after Zeus and Demeter have reached their initial settlement, when Proserpina is asked by her mother to recount the details of her underworld sojourn (*Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 393–404). This is cited by Richardson (1974: 286) as an extended instance of “epic repetition” and serves to sum up events as a prelude to Zeus’ final division of the year. As Hinds (1987: 92–93) ingeniously observes, Arethusa’s account of her rape serves a role equivalent to Proserpina’s recapitulation of her recent experience with Pluto.<sup>19</sup> But of course this is just another amusing element in Calliope’s programme: the substitution of Arethusa’s digressive account of her attempted rape by Alpheus is a further case of Calliope pandering to her nymph judges. The goddess Proserpina is again displaced from the narrative in order to focus on a nymph. Furthermore, this gratuitous epyllion actually suspends the completion of the myth proper, as Ceres is made to sit back and listen to the nymph’s tale before fulfilling her traditional duty by supplying humankind (via Triptolemus) with the gift of agriculture.<sup>20</sup> The rape sequence is described by Arethusa in full and vivid detail, and with heightened pathos:

“... *nec me velocius ille;  
sed tolerare diu cursus ego viribus impar  
non poteram, longi patiens erat ille laboris.  
per tamen et campos, per opertos arbore montes,  
saxa quoque et rupes et, qua via nulla, cucurri.  
sol erat a tergo: vidi praecedere longam  
ante pedes umbram, nisi si timor illa videbat*  
....”

(5.609–615)

A question arises as to whether the rapist Alpheus succeeds or fails. In attempting to elude Alpheus, Arethusa transforms herself into water, but so does

<sup>18</sup> Hinds 1987: 87, where he convincingly demonstrates the influence of the Homeric Hymn on this passage.

<sup>19</sup> Segal’s observation (1969: 55) that “Ovid has Arethusa tactfully postpone her story until Ceres is better prepared to receive it” misses the structural correspondence to the Hymn narrative.

<sup>20</sup> Foley (1994: 99) notes that numerous versions of the myth, including the Homeric Hymn, describe the origins of agriculture.

her pursuer and, as Segal (1969: 56) observes, the sexual symbolism becomes stronger than anywhere else in the episode:

*"in latices mutor. sed enim cognoscit amatas  
amnis aquas positoque viri, quod sumpserat, ore  
vertitur in proprias, ut se mihi misceat, undas."* (5.636–638)

For Johnson (1996: 143) the implication of this passage is that Arethusa appears to be become the victim of an actual rape. It is, however, more likely that Ovid deviates from the traditional version in having the rapist fail.<sup>21</sup> Although, as Segal rightly notes, the language of "mingling" (*misceat*) has an unmistakable erotic connotation,<sup>22</sup> it seems clear that at the crucial moment, the goddess Diana intervenes to provide a means of escape:

*"Delia rupit humum, caecisque ego mersa cavernis  
advehor Ortygiam, quae me cognomine divae  
grata meae superas eduxit prima sub auras."* (5.639–641)

Arethusa's language, through its emphasis on the singular in both pronoun and verb (*ego* . . . *advehor*), suggests that she has left her pursuer behind. As noted above, Arethusa's account of her rape serves as a kind of "epic repetition," recapitulating the earlier rape sequence. The parallelism of the two sequences is underscored by the fact that both gods strike the earth to afford a passage through it. But whereas Dis struck the earth to perpetrate a rape, the goddess Diana here does likewise to prevent one. The failure of the rape attempt in Arethusa's narrative is clearly a more satisfactory outcome according to the perspective articulated earlier by Cyane: *roganda, non rapienda fuit* (5.416, quoted above, 99).

If Arethusa's rape narrative is afforded startling prominence, it is fully matched in splendour by the prelude to the tale, which is given a rather overblown epic treatment:

*exigit alma Ceres, nata secura recepta,  
quae tibi causa fugae, cur sis, Arethusa, sacer fons.  
conticuere undae, quarum dea sustulit alto  
fonte caput viridesque manu siccata capillos  
fluminis Elei veteres narravit amores.* (5.572–576)

Just as with the previous description of Cyane as a *magnum* . . . *numen*, Calliope is evidently currying favour here in referring to Arethusa as *dea*.<sup>23</sup> Of course, the humour of such glamorization lies largely in the contrast with the short shrift

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Kenney (1986: 407): "In the familiar form of the story as we get it in Pindar and Virgil (*Aeneid* 3.694ff.) he [*sc.* Alpheus] followed her [*sc.* Arethusa] and achieved his purpose. In Ovid's account it seems to be implied that she made her getaway."

<sup>22</sup> Segal 1969: 56–57. Kenney (1986: 407) notes the same play on *misceo* in Polyphemus' wishful thinking at 13.866. For the erotic connotation of *misceo*, cf. *TLL* 1087.43.

<sup>23</sup> The surprising use of *dea* is enhanced by the word order, which does not make clear that Ceres is not, in fact, the referent until the following line.



that is generally afforded nymphs in epic narrative. They are the proverbial bit-players in narratives in which they are not themselves central figures. They are rarely named,<sup>24</sup> let alone individuated in any significant way. For example, though the wood-nymph who takes Ceres' message to Famine at *Met.* 8.784–813 is, objectively speaking, as significant a narrative figure as Arethusa, we are told absolutely nothing about her.

The result of the “superimposition” of the nymph Arethusa, then, is a significant distortion of the Hymnic version of the Rape, as both Helios and Proserpina are displaced from narrative prominence so that Calliope may make her tale more appealing to the presiding nymphs.

#### THE SIRENS

Though Calliope's story is designed to appeal to her audience on a number of levels, it is clear that the glorification of Cyane and Arethusa is her most arresting ploy. But the selection of the Proserpina tale also presented the sensitive narrator with a rather delicate problem, namely, the Sirens. The Sirens were sea-nymphs,<sup>25</sup> daughters of Achelous, who were traditionally depicted luring sailors to their death by their singing. Unfortunately for the Muse's present purposes, no less an authority than Homer had established that they were a thoroughly bad lot.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Apollonius Rhodius had specifically identified them as the attendants of Proserpina prior to the abduction:

... αἴψα δὲ νῆσον  
καλὴν Ἀνθεμόεσσαν ἐσέδρακον, ἔνθα λίγειαί  
Σειρῆνες σίνοντ' Ἀχελώιδες ἡδείησι  
θέλγουσαι μολπῇσιν ὅτις παρὰ πείσμα βάλοιτο.  
τάς μὲν ἄρ' εὐειδῆς Ἀχελώϊα εὐνηθεῖσα  
γείνατο Τερψιχόρῃ, Μουσέων μία, καὶ ποτε Διοῦς  
θυγατέρ' ἰφθίμην, ἁδμήτ' ἔτι, πορσαίνεσκον  
ἄμμιγα μελπόμεναι ... (Ap. Rhod. 4.891–898)

Soon they saw the lovely island of Anthemoessa where the clear-voiced Sirens, daughters of Achelous, destroyed all who moored beside them with the enchantment of their sweet

<sup>24</sup> There are numerous instances in the *Metamorphoses* of nymphs described, either singly or in groups, without being named. They are typically depicted partaking in collective states (mournfulness or wonderment, for example) which add emotional tone to a passage. However, they often remain anonymous even when their numbers are small and they rise above the status of background ornament. Two notable instances of this are 8.577–589 (several nymphs transformed into islands by Achelous) and 8.784–813 (a wood-nymph delivering Ceres' message to Famine).

<sup>25</sup> For example, Kenney 1987: 479.

<sup>26</sup> *Od.* 12.39–46: Σειρῆνας μὲν πρῶτον ἀφίξεις, αἳ ῥά τε πάντας / ἀνθρώπους θέλγουσιν, ὅτις σφέας εἰσαφίκεται. / ὅς τις αἰδρεῖη πελάση καὶ φθόγγον ἀκούσῃ / Σειρήνων, τῷ δ' οὐ τι γυνὴ καὶ νήπια τέκνα / οἴκαδε νοστήσαντι παρίσταται οὐδὲ γάνυνται, / ἀλλὰ τε Σειρῆνες λιγυρῇ θέλγουσιν αἰοιδῇ, / ἥμεναι ἐν λειμῶνι· πολὺς δ' ἄμφ' ὀστεόφιν θίς / ἀνδρῶν πυθομένων, περὶ δὲ βροτοὶ μινύθουσιν.

songs. Beautiful Terpsichore, one of the Muses, bore them after sharing Acheloos' bed, and once they looked after the mighty daughter of Deo [*sc.* Demeter], while she was still a virgin, their voices mingled in song. (tr. R. Hunter)

And to make matters worse, Hyginus attests to a tradition—of which Ovid (and by implication his internal narrator Calliope) was evidently aware—in which these sea-nymphs were transformed into their hybrid form as a punishment for failing Proserpina in her hour of need:

*Sirenes . . . Proserpinae raptu aberrantes ad Apollonis terram venerunt, ibique Cereris voluntate, quod Proserpinae auxilium non tulerunt, volaticae sunt factae.* (Hyg. *Fab.* 141.1)

If she was not to offend the judges, Calliope obviously had to be very careful about how she treated these troublesome members of the nymph set.<sup>27</sup> Her solution is a model of tact, and involves yet another act of mythological revisionism on Ovid's part. To begin with, she asks (rhetorically) why the Sirens underwent transformation at all:

*. . . vobis, Acheloides, unde  
pluma pedesque avium, cum virginis ora geratis?* (5.552–553)

Calliope then alludes discreetly to the conventional reason for their metamorphosis (i.e., it was punishment for “abandoning” Proserpina) by asking a second question that casts the whole business in the most favourable light possible—especially when punctuated with the respectful vocative, *doctae Sirenes*<sup>28</sup>—without explicitly altering the tradition:

*an quia, cum legeret vernos Proserpina flores,  
in comitum numero, doctae Sirenes, eratis?* (5.554–555)

The impact of these two questions is nothing short of astounding. Under immense pressure not to offend, Calliope, the most learned of the Muses, the source of inspiration for epic narrative itself, suddenly disavows narrative omniscience. She now follows with an elaboration which, while managing to keep some of the uncertainty of her opening questions, is nonetheless a blatant reversal of tradition. Instead of punishment, the transformation is vaguely presented as a sought-after boon which demonstrates the Sirens' fidelity to their mistress:

*quam postquam toto frustra quaeisistis in orbe,  
protinus, ut vestram sentirent aequora curam,  
posse super fluctus alarum insistere remis  
optastis facilesque deos habuistis et artus  
vidistis vestros subitis flavescere pennis.* (5.556–560)

<sup>27</sup> The delicacy of this situation is perhaps comically enhanced by the fact that the Sirens' mother was generally held to be the Muse Melpomene (as Apollonius attests at 4.895–898, quoted above, 105), making them nieces of Calliope.

<sup>28</sup> Surely *doctae* is a particularly forceful compliment here, coming as it does from the *doctissima musa* herself. Cf. 5.255, where the poet refers to the Muses as *doctas . . . sorores*.

Finally, Calliope concludes the passage (5.561–563) by mentioning that the Sirens nonetheless retained their tuneful voices, so sweet to the ear, while tactfully omitting the use to which they were put. Taken as a whole, this passage is a masterful blend of studied vagueness, tactful omission, and, where necessary, blatant falsehood. It is perhaps here more than anywhere that the reader can see just to what lengths Calliope was willing to go in order to win the poetic contest.

## FEMALE SUPREMACY

It will not be unprofitable to return briefly to the narrative of the rape of Arethusa. The broad observation has already been made that in its subject matter this passage is a typical example of Calliope's flattery of the presiding nymphs. But a closer examination will reveal that there is, in addition, an evident feminine slant to the entire account.<sup>29</sup> To begin with, it is very significant that here at last a rape sequence is described from the perspective of the victim.<sup>30</sup> More significantly, Arethusa appeals not to a male divinity for help, but to a female one:

*fessa labore fugae: "fer opem, deprendimur," inquam,  
"armigerae, Diana, tuae, cui saepe dedisti  
ferre tuos arcus inclusaque tela pharetra."* (5.618–620)

In effect, the Arethusa rape sequence suggests that, beyond the narrower "nymphic" viewpoint, there is a more broadly feminine perspective to Calliope's narrative. This is obviously a sensible strategy: nymphs are, after all, female and it would be only natural for the Muse to appeal to them as nymphs first, but as women second. This two-pronged approach is evident throughout the narrative.

The most striking "feminization" of the myth is discernible in the respective roles of the Olympian gods themselves. In relation to the Homeric Hymn, the female deities are emphasized and empowered at the expense of their male counterparts. This is most evident in the role of Venus.<sup>31</sup> In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* it is Zeus who assumes the role of universal schemer, or divine mastermind, an almost unseen presence who casts a shadow over every episode. There are frequent intimations that he is behind the unfolding of events,<sup>32</sup> in addition to the blunt declaration of Helios:

... οὐδέ τις ἄλλος  
αἴτιος ἀθανάτων εἰ μὴ νεφεληγερέτα Ζεὺς,

<sup>29</sup> As before, we might consider, as a very crude indicator of the prominence of females in the *Metamorphoses* version, the amount of direct speech granted them. In this version, females are afforded 114 lines of direct speech as opposed to a mere ten for males. By comparison, in the *Fasti*, females are afforded thirty-one lines of direct speech as opposed to fifteen for males. Thus females account for ninety-two per cent of the direct speech in the *Metamorphoses* versus sixty-seven per cent in the *Fasti*.

<sup>30</sup> The rapist's perspective dominates the accounts of rapes of Daphne and Io in Book 1, Callisto and Europa in Book 2, and even Hermaphroditus in Book 4 (a rare instance of a female aggressor).

<sup>31</sup> See now the discussion by Johnson 1996: 125–128.

<sup>32</sup> For example, Διὸς βουλῇσι, 9; Διὸς ἐννεσίησι, 30; etc.

ὅς μιν ἔδωκ' Ἀΐδην θαλερὴν κεκληῆσθαι ἄκοιτιν  
 αὐτοκασιγνήτην . . . (Hymn. Hom. Cer. 77–80)

No other immortal is responsible save cloud-gathering Zeus, who gave her to Hades, his own brother, to become his flourishing bride.

In the *Metamorphoses* version, however, Jupiter is an entirely unwitting force, an easily-swayed monarch with no grand design, save to take the path of least resistance in presiding over his fellow divinities. As Johnson (1996: 128) observes, it is Venus who is cast as the universal mastermind, and who conceives a scheme to extend her dominion to the Underworld through her obedient son and assistant Cupid:

*"tu superos ipsumque Iovem, tu numina ponti  
 victa domas ipsumque regit qui numina ponti.  
 Tartara quid cessant? cur non matrisque tuumque  
 imperium profers? agitur pars tertia mundi!"* (5.369–372)

One of the results of this female empowerment, then, is that Venus assumes moral and intellectual responsibility for the abduction of Proserpina. Gone is the masculine conspiracy of Zeus and Hades as described in the Homeric Hymn.<sup>33</sup> Ovid's Jupiter is clearly unwitting, and Pluto is reduced to the status of a mere utensil in Venus' hands. The automatic, unthinking manner in which he fulfills the goddess's will is nicely brought out by Ovid's humorously abrupt description of the abduction:<sup>34</sup>

*paene simul visa est dilectaque raptaque Diti;  
 usque adeo est properatus amor.* (5.395–396)

A further indication of Pluto's reduction to a mere instrument is the fact that Calliope never grants him a speech. Hence we never get his perspective, and can barely conceive of him as a "character" in the usual sense. Once the abduction is accomplished, he disappears from the narrative altogether.

Like Venus, Ceres is empowered in relation to Jupiter. When she learns of Proserpina's fate, she does not sulk on the earth's surface like her counterpart in the Homeric Hymn, nor does she refuse to set foot on Olympus. On the contrary, once she has recovered from the initial shock, she heads directly to Olympus and rebukes Jupiter for his lack of fatherly concern—even though this Jupiter, ironically, did not mastermind the abduction. In spite of the oratorical veneer, it is immediately apparent that Ceres has Jupiter wrapped around her finger, and, after a half-hearted protest, he readily, to the extent that he is able, grants her wish:

<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, Claudian conflates the two motifs, so that Jupiter and Pluto conceive of the abduction, but they enlist Venus' help in order to carry it out.

<sup>34</sup> The rather suggestive language may well be in addition a comically disparaging remark on Pluto's sexual performance. Cf. the less suggestive wording in the corresponding scene in the *Fasti*: *hanc videt et visam patruus velociter aufert / regnaque caeruleis in sua portat equis* (4.445–446).

"... non hoc iniuria factum,  
 verum amor est, neque erit nobis gener ille pudori,  
 tu modo, diva, velis. ut desint cetera, quantum est  
 esse Iovis fratrem! quid quod non cetera desunt,  
 nec cedit nisi sorte mihi? sed tanta cupido  
 si tibi discidium est, repetet Proserpina caelum  
 ...." (5.525-530)

The shift in the relative prominence of the sexes is also very much apparent in the informant's accounts of the fate of Proserpina to her mother. It has already been shown that Calliope significantly substituted a nymph for a male god in the role of informer. An examination of the actual content of the informer's report reveals that the narrator has in addition moved away from the Homeric Hymn's emphasis on Pluto (*Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 83-87), and laid the stress heavily on Proserpina's status as queen of the Underworld:

"sed regina tamen, sed opaci maxima mundi,  
 sed tamen inferni pollens matrona tyranni." (5.507-508)

Moreover, a transformation of Proserpina from the passive victim of the Hymn to a more active protagonist is demonstrated by her final actions. Unlike her counterpart in the Homeric Hymn, this Proserpina is evidently willing to attempt to thwart the edicts of Fate by simply not telling the truth about her repast in the Underworld. When her deceit is foiled by the informant Ascalaphus, she vindictively transforms him into an *ignavus bubo* (5.550).<sup>35</sup>

#### PLAYING TO THE CROWD

On the outer level, then, through the framing narrative of a poetic contest, Ovid suggests that the successful story-teller must be alert to the preferences of the audience.<sup>36</sup> Calliope defeats the Pierid challenger precisely because of her sensitivity to the preferences of the presiding nymphs,<sup>37</sup> which contrasts strongly with the indifference of the challengers. The Proserpina myth, even in a more conventional form, would be rather more appealing to the nymphs than the gigantomachy chosen by the Pierides.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, at the

<sup>35</sup> This punitive action seems to associate Proserpina with Diana, who earlier cruelly transformed Actaeon into a stag (3.177-205), and Ceres, who spitefully changed a rude boy into a lizard (5.446-461). Ovid links these three episodes in three different ways. First, all involve powerful goddesses vindictively inflicting a punitive metamorphosis on a helpless male; second, all leave some suggestion that the punishment may be over-severe; and third, all involve the goddesses angrily splashing water in the face of their victims prior to inflicting the metamorphosis.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Doherty 1991.

<sup>37</sup> A similar sensitivity to the audience can be seen in her sister's polite inquiry to Athena in the framing narrative: *sed forsitan otia non sint?* (5.333).

<sup>38</sup> Barchiesi (1994: 17) points convincingly to the scene of Cyrene recounting the *divum... amores* to her attendant nymphs in Virgil's Aristaeus epyllion as evidence of the type of tale that nymphs are likely to enjoy (*G.* 3.345-347).

opening of the Muse's tale there is a subtle adaptation which further demonstrates her great sensitivity. The story told by the Pierid is essentially a gigantomachy in which the giant Typhoeus routs the gods and sends them fleeing in panic:

*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.* (5.319–324)

This narrative is unlikely to be palatable to the nymphs both because of its martial epic content, and its conclusion with the Olympian gods in disarray.<sup>39</sup> By representing the impious giants as heroes the singer is “asking for trouble.”<sup>40</sup> After all, the nymphs are part of Jupiter's universe, and they are not completely devoid of recognition in it.<sup>41</sup> They are not likely to be pleased with the universal upheaval caused by the giant Typhoeus in the narrative of the Pierid challenger. Grasping this, Calliope makes an ingenious emendation in the opening of her narrative. By starting her story with an account of Typhoeus imprisoned under Sicily, and Dis, the brother of Jupiter, acting almost as prison-master, the Muse tactfully brings to its proper conclusion the offensive and indeed “revolutionary” narrative of the Pierid:

*vasta giganteis ingesta est insula membris  
Trinacris et magnis subiectum molibus urget  
aetherias ausum sperare Typhoea sedes.* (5.346–348)

In this manner Calliope cleverly puts the judges at ease, and immediately wins their favour. It is this sensitivity to the audience, this willingness to adapt or distort her narrative, that accounts for Calliope's victory.<sup>42</sup> The suggestion of Hinds (1987: 130) that Calliope wins the contest because of her neoteric finesse is consistent with the above analysis: Calliope's quirky, distorted Hymn is certainly not without neoteric elements. The artistic merit of the Pierid account is of course impossible to assess. Since that narrative is told mostly in summary form, and at second hand by the rival's own sister, it is difficult to draw any conclusions as to

<sup>39</sup>In his discussion of this passage, Hinds (1987: 128–133) comes very close to making this point, but focuses on the reaction of the Muses, rather than the nymphs.

<sup>40</sup>Kenney 1986: 404.

<sup>41</sup>When Jupiter contemplates the destruction of humankind in Book 1, he names the nymphs first as those who must be saved: “*sunt mihi semidei, sunt rustica numina, Nymphae / Faunisque Satyrique et monticolae Silvani, / quos, quoniam caeli nondum dignamur honore, / quas dedimus certe terras habitare sinamus*” (1.192–195)

<sup>42</sup>Cf. Hinds 1987: 129, depicting the stance of the Muse as one of moral rectitude. Surely this is merely a pose of the artistically-compromised narrator.

its quality. Whatever their artistic standing, the Pierides are depicted as losing because they are out of touch with the audience.<sup>43</sup>

Calliope's victory over the challengers is complete: the Pierides not only lose, but ultimately undergo punitive metamorphosis. But there is a hint of regret over the winning strategy; the opening of the Muse's tale suggests that she is not altogether happy with her performance. The narrative starts with a traditional hymnic invocation:

*prima Ceres unco glaebam dimovit aratro,  
prima dedit fruges alimentaue mitia terris,  
prima dedit leges: Cereris sunt omnia munus.  
illa canenda mihi est.* (5.341–344)

This is very much in the hymnic manner: there is a catalogue of the goddess's boons to humankind, anaphora of *prima* at the beginning of three consecutive lines, repetition of the goddess's name, and the declaration that she is to be the subject of the hymn. But in Calliope's case, the conventional hymnic opening is the only moment in which she adheres to the usual form. This she acknowledges herself in the unusual comment that follows:

*... utinam modo dicere possim  
carmina digna dea! certe dea carmine digna est.* (5.344–345)

This is rather more than a simple declaration of *pietas* and modesty, or a kind of *captatio benevolentiae*.<sup>44</sup> Hinds perceptively notes the similarity to a fragment of Cornelius Gallus, and suggests that this constitutes, *mutatis mutandis*, a statement of epic aspiration.<sup>45</sup> I would add a further shade of meaning: the epic Muse is lamenting the *impossibility* of living up to her aspirations. She knows full well the compromised course her narrative must take to assure victory in the contest; it is part of her strategy to substantially reduce Ceres' prominence, to make nymphs the focal point of her tale. Calliope would like nothing more (*utinam modo*)<sup>46</sup> than to sing a song worthy of Ceres, but she cannot afford to, since she must win the contest at any price. In short, the Muse laments that Ceres' epic dignity must be sacrificed to present material necessity.

The impossible wish *utinam modo*, then, marks the effective transition from the proper hymnic content of the opening to the distorted account that constitutes the bulk of Calliope's narrative. As Nagle (1988: 108) observes, by the time Calliope finally returns to the theme of Ceres' gift of agriculture, as promised in the hymnic preface (*prima dedit fruges*, 5.342), this vital event "seems almost an

<sup>43</sup> Indeed the Pierides are portrayed as behaving in a generally abrasive manner, as when their representative starts her tale without drawing lots to determine order (5.318–319).

<sup>44</sup> Thus Rosati 1981: 302.

<sup>45</sup> Hinds 1987: 122–127, quoting *tandem fecerunt carmina Musae / quae possem domina deicere digna mea* (Gallus, *P. Qaṣr Ibrīm* 6–7).

<sup>46</sup> For the use of *utinam modo* in the expression of an impractical wish, cf. Cic. *Att.* 3.15.6: *utinam modo agatur aliquid!*

afterthought and anticlimax because of all the insertions and embedding which have intervened." Similarly anticlimactic is the abrupt elision of Ceres' search for her lost daughter:

*quas dea per terras et quas erraverit undas,  
dicere longa mora est. . . .* (5.462–463)

Evidently, the goddess's wanderings—by any reckoning, a crucial component of the myth—were deemed unappealing to the nymphs, and were therefore removed from the narrative. By contrast, the considerably shorter version in the *Fasti* devotes a full fourteen lines to the search (*Fasti* 4.561–574), including an elaborate geographical catalogue.<sup>47</sup>

In general it may be said that Ovid's account in the *Fasti* is a much more straightforward and conventional narrative, told by the poet in his own voice. Indeed, the brief introduction to the *Fasti* version—surely meant to bear on its rival account in the *Metamorphoses*—seems deliberately to underline its neutral poetic motivation:

*exegit ipse locus, raptus ut virginis edam.* (*Fasti* 4.417)

As Otis (1966: 50) observes, "The story starts for no good reason except that the calendar demands it." By contrast, the *Metamorphoses* version, as demonstrated above, is a complex and often humorous examination of narrative distortion, motivated by the desire of an internal narrator to gratify an unusually powerful internal audience.

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<sup>47</sup> In like fashion, the Muse excises the passage describing the goddess's attempted immortalization of Demophoon (or Triptolemus in the *Fasti* version)—no doubt because it was deemed uninteresting to the nymph judges. In its place Calliope substitutes the more light-hearted tale of the rude boy transformed into a lizard. This passage is unquestionably one of the most significant alterations of the Homeric Hymn narrative. A comparison of the two accounts of the goddess entering the home of her human host offers a sense of both Ceres' lost dignity, and Calliope's assessment of the nymphs' interest in such scenes:

ἡ δ' ἄρ' ἐπ' οὐδὸν ἔβη ποσὶ καὶ ῥα μελάθρου  
κῦρε κάρη, πλῆσεν δὲ θύρας σέλαος θείοιο.  
τὴν [sc. Μετάνειραν] δ' αἰδῶς τε σέβας τε ἰδὲ χλωρὸν δέος εἶλεν.  
(*Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 188–190)

... cum tectam stramine vidit [sc. Ceres]  
forte casam parvasque fores pulsavit: at inde  
prodit anus divamque videt lymphamque roganti  
dulce dedit . . . . (5.447–450)

The utter banality of the Ovidian account is quite remarkable: the goddess's dignity and religious stature are sacrificed to the gratification of the presiding nymphs.



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