ALLUSION AND RHETORICAL WIT IN OVID, METAMORPHOSES 13

Nicolas P. Gross
Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Delaware
Newark, Delaware 19716, USA

Abstract. This article attempts to show that Ovid has created a parody of speeches from three major periods of ancient Greek literature and of a speech from the Metamorphoses as well. Thereby the poet binds together the entire book and suggests to his audience his literary game by his very clear allusion to Horace, Odes 3.13.

Allusions are so manifold, so many and various in Metamorphoses 13 that, despite scholarly endeavor, Ovid’s poetic game still requires attention. Indeed, attempting to define Metamorphoses 13 with a single label such as the “little Aeneid” (Met. 13.623-14.608), though formerly a common approach, does not sufficiently illuminate either the complexity of this book or the poet’s design. As Otis has observed, Ovid’s treatment of the Aeneid within book thirteen is highly elliptical with Aeneid 1-3 receiving a mere thirteen line precis and serving essentially as a framework for Ovidian narrative. Ellsworth, also

---

1 My thanks to two anonymous readers for Scholia and to Barbara Gold of Hamilton College for making many suggestions that greatly improved this paper. Any errors that remain are the author’s fault.


dissatisfied with the label, “little Aeneid,” adduces Odyssean allusions and prefers to name the book “Ovid’s Odyssey.” And to be sure, the debate between Ajax and Ulysses (Ovid’s name for the hero) contains at least one specific Homeric allusion, but to the Iliad. Clear reference to the Odyssey can, however, be found in the Polyphemus episode within the tale of Galatea (Met. 13.749-897). Yet this narrative also includes an undeniable borrowing from Horace, Odes 3.13: splendidior vitro (“more shining than glass,” Met. 13.791), and although the allusion appears out of context (Latin lyric amid literary references that are Greek and epic/tragic), Ovid nonetheless makes a significant effort to weave this Horatian allusion into the text. Of course, the label “Ovid’s Horatian ode” is certainly a misnomer for Metamorphoses 13. Similarly the dominant literary allusions in Galatea’s story as narrated in the comic and rhetorical love song of Polyphemus, find their primary source and tone in Theocritus’ eleventh Idyll. Again given the obvious references to Euripides’ Hecuba that also crowd the book, “Ovid’s pastoral” offers little help to the struggling reader.

Is there a unity behind all this diverse multiplicity? In Metamorphoses 13 there appears to be a consistent, perhaps insistent, pattern of literary allusion rendered rhetorically ridiculous. Significant orations are to be found throughout, even to the very end of the book. If one divides book thirteen into three sections, each defined by a major address, the debate between Ajax and Ulysses (1-398), Polyxena’s plea within the story of Hecuba (399-575) and Polyphemus’ attempt to seduce Galatea (749-897), the dominant, intertextual web joining these sections then becomes the Homeric epics, Euripides’ Hecuba and Theocritus’ eleventh Idyll—examples drawn from three major periods of ancient Greek poetry. By line count, the sections that contain these three speeches constitute more than three quarters of book thirteen and provide it with a coherence defined by Ovid’s unique parody of Greek myth and literature, an intellectual playfulness characterised by rhetorical and visual incongruity. Though he is by no means entirely bound to Greek literature within book thirteen, playful evocation of literary allusions is congenial to the Roman poet.


6 The many connections between Polyphemus’ speech and Horace, Odes 3.13 have been elucidated in a paper entitled “Ovid’s Polyphemus Narrative (Metamorphoses 13.738-897) and Horace’s Description of the Fons Bandusiae (Odes 3.13): Odium et Amor in the ‘Resisting’ Galatea.” This unpublished paper was written by Judith Hallett’s seminar (spring 1990) students: T. Cavanaugh, B. Kang, L. Schatten, G. C. Stern, M. E. Sullivan and D. Waldman and presented at the 1990 fall meeting of The Classical Association of the Atlantic States at Princeton.
and certainly to be looked for, if not to be expected, in a book dominated by a seemingly interminable debate over Achilles’ arms.

I

In the “Iliadic” exchange between Ajax and Ulysses, Ovid employs a variety of rhetorical techniques designed to undermine the Homeric hero’s dignity. The narrator mentions, for example, that before responding to Ajax’s speech Laertes’ son looked briefly at the ground: *donec Laertius heros / adstitit, atque oculos paulum tellure moratos* (“then the hero, son of Laertes, stood and [raised] his eyes which dwelt on the ground for a little,” *Met.* 13.124f.). This allusion to *Iliad* 3.217 describes the hero’s typical stance prior to speaking and, as W. B. Stanford has argued, a seemingly diffident gesture that is in fact rhetorically significant and designed to disarm the audience, a visual *captatio benevolentiae*, if you will. By imitating the stance along with its rhetorical implications, Ovid deftly compels his reader to recollect the Iliadic hero’s persuasiveness, yet with *sustulit*, (“he raised his eyes,” 126), Ovid immediately undermines the allusion. Recall, however, Homer’s full description of Odysseus’ eloquence:

\[\text{ἀλλ’ ὤτε δὴ πολύμητις ἀνοιξεῖν Ὄδυσσεὺς, στάσκεν, ὑπὲρ δὲ ἱδέοις κατὰ χθονὸς ὄμματα πήξας, σκῆπτρον δ’ οὕτ’ ὄπισθ’ οὔτε προπηρίνες ἐνώμα, ἀλλ’ ἀστειμφές ἔχεσκεν, ἡλίδρει φωτὶ ἐουκός· φαίνει κε ξάκοτον τε τιν’ ἐμμεναι ἀφρόνα τ’ αἵτως. ἀλλ’ ὤτε δὴ ὅπα τε μεγάλην ἐκ στήθεος εἰς}

\[καὶ ἔπει ηφάδεσσιν ἐουκότα χειμερίης, οὔκ ἐν ἔπειτ’ Ὅδυσση ἦ’ ἐρίσσειε βροτός ἄλλος’ (II. 3.216-23)

But when that other drove to his feet, resourceful Odysseus
he would just stand and stare down, eyes fixed on the ground beneath him, nor would he gesture with the staff backward and forward, but hold it
clutched hard in front of him, like a man who knows nothing.
Yes, you would call him a sullen man, a fool likewise.
But when he let the great voice go from his chest, and the words came
drifting down like the winter snows, then no other mortal
man beside could stand up against Odysseus.\(^8\)

In contrast to the dignified Homeric warrior, Ovid’s hero pretends to wipe tears from his eyes while speaking of Achilles: *manuque simul veluti lacrimantia tersit / lumina* (“and at the same time with his hand, as if weeping, he rubbed his

\(^7\) W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme* (Oxford 1963) 14f., 71f.

\(^8\) R. Lattimore (tr.), *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago 1962) 106.
eyes,“ Met. 13.132f.,” thus removing himself from the realm of the heroic to the rhetorically manipulative and absurd. Ulysses also baldly asserts that he will employ his gift of eloquence for his own advantage (135-9), here the very antithesis of a captatio benevolentiae. Shamelessly he refers to his own “eloquence” as facundia (137), a noun whose adjectival form Ovid stresses in his editorial comment prior to Ulysses’ speech: neque abest facundis gratia dictis (“nor was gracefulness absent from his eloquent words,” 127).

Consistent with this post-Homeric view of Ulysses as the crafty orator, the Ovidian hero initially appears rhetorically adroit, if slippery. In response to Ajax’s argument from noble and indeed divine ancestry, Ovid’s Ulysses replies with two familial arguments. Like Ajax, he possesses divine ancestors on both sides of his family; however, he discredits this familial argument by stating that if hereditary endowments are the basis for determining who gains Achilles’ arms, then they should be given to Pyrrhus, Achilles’ son (155). In presenting his genealogy, Ajax refers to his father, grandfather and great-grandfather. By contrast, Ulysses, in his argument from noble ancestry, mentions only his immortal great-grandfather, Cyllenius (Mercury) on his mother’s side, (146). Given the length of the speech, it seems unlikely that the hero fails to mention Laertes and Autolycus for the sake of brevity. Rather he deliberately avoids reference to Autolycus lest he elicit any dubious connotations that might cling to his maternal grandfather. Certainly a reader familiar with the Odyssey cannot miss the disingenuous nature of this omission, since reference to Ulysses’ identity (revealed by his scar) and to Autolycus appears in a celebrated digression (Od. 19.390-466), a passage even discussed by Aristotle (Poetics 1451a). Ulysses’ purposeful oversight, however, exposes his clever, though less-than-admirable, skill at evading a potential weakness in an argument based on his own noble heritage.

Once Ulysses has demonstrated his capacity as a clever speaker, however, Ovid immediately works to undercut the hero’s rhetorical prowess. To defend himself from Ajax’s charges, he must, so he says, fully explain all the good services he has rendered to the Greeks (Met. 13.159-61). If brevity is the soul of wit, then Ulysses is more than twice the dunce he claims Ajax to be, for his oration more than doubles the latter’s 118 lines. With little thought to their propriety, Ulysses includes such topics as his “diplomatic” expedition to Troy, his restraining of the Greek troops about to abandon the war, the Doloniea and, in the latter half of his speech, an attempt to refute Ajax’s criticisms of his conduct. In discussing the Iliadic Odysseus’ rhetorical skills, Martin illustrates the Homeric hero’s ability “to put himself in the position of the audience.” But far from being concerned with creating rapport, Ovid’s Ulysses inflexibly

---

follows an exhausting arrangement he should never have chosen. Having stated
that he will “explain everything,” he seems unable to control himself. As he
moves from his argument on noble lineage to the “good deeds” he has
accomplished for the Greeks, he includes the discovery of Achilles and his
appeasement of Diana’s anger. In both of these examples, Ulysses’ own
arguments work against him. Having discovered Achilles, he assumes that all
the hero’s deeds now accrue to him: ergo opera illius mea sunt (“therefore his
deeds are mine,” 171)—a patently ridiculous claim that both exposes Ulysses’
greed and emphasises his considerable deficiency in conventional martial
exploits.

In a similar vein, Ulysses’ further attempts at self-laudation produce
similar results. In revealing his role in contriving Iphigeneia’s death so that the
Greek fleet might sail from Aulis to Troy, Ulysses must know he is open to
criticism, for he immediately apologises to Agamemnon: nunc equidem fateor,
fassoque ignoscat Atrides (“now indeed I confess and may the son of Atreus
pardon me having confessed,” 189). If he is careful to conceal Autolycus’
unseemly reputation, surely he could have omitted his own involvement in
Iphigeneia’s sacrifice. But apology, far from mitigating his duplicitous
behavior, only re-enforces his insidious role in procuring the Greek princess’
death. Odysseus mentions Aulis (181-95) because he said he would narrate all
his good services to the Greeks (159-61), and that is compulsively what he does.
Whereas self-control, versatility and careful choice of topics are the hallmark
of the Homeric Odysseus, in Ovid’s Metamorphoses the hero rhetorically defeats
himself by his very lack of adaptability. Ovid thereby awards Achilles’ arms to
Ulysses as a prize for a speech far more humorous than eloquent.

Immediately after his failure to gain Achilles’ arms, Ajax commits suicide, the
precursor to Polyxena’s noble death. Here, too, a similar pattern of literary
allusion rendered rhetorically ridiculous can be found in Ovid’s borrowings
from Euripides’ Hecuba. In both accounts of the young woman’s death,
Polyxena delivers a speech and is then murdered. To conclude the story of
Polyxena’s tragic sacrifice above Achilles’ tomb, Ovid translates, in so far as
Latin apparently will allow, the parallel excerpt from the Greek:

πολλὴν πρόνοιαν εἶχεν εὐσχῆμων πεσεῖν,
kρυπτοὺς καὶ κρυπτεῖν ὄμματ’ ἀρόποιοι χρεῶν.
(Eur. Hec. 569f.)

She took great care (lit., “had much thought”) to fall in
a seemly fashion hiding from the eyes of men what it is necessary to
hide.
tune quoque cura fuit partes velare tegendas
cum caderet, castique decus servare pudoris.

(Ov. Met. 13.479f.)

Then also when she fell she took care to cover those parts that ought to be covered
and to protect the renown (honor) of her chaste modesty.

Despite superficial similarities at the conclusions of the scenes, a close reading of each speech and its context reveals significant Ovidian transformation of the Greek narrative. In the Euripidean drama, for example, Polyxena and Hecuba appear together on stage and know in advance that the young woman’s death is imminent. When given the opportunity to speak, Polyxena convinces herself she will be dying a noble death and so enjoins her mother to accept her fatal destiny (Hec. 342-78). By contrast, Ovid’s Polyxena, taken by the Greeks from her mother, rapta sinu matris (Met. 13.450), does not appear in the narrative until immediately before she arrives alone at the site of sacrifice. Unsurprisingly her speech is extemporaneous and (thanks to Ovid) quite unsettling and peculiar.

Contradiction and incongruity characterise the Ovidian Polyxena’s perplexing, if nobly motivated, address. After laying bare her upper body (Met. 13.459), she awkwardly states to the assembled Greek warriors that she wishes her mother would know nothing about her death (mors tantum vellem matrem mea fallere posset, “I only wish that my death could escape the notice of my mother,” 462) because Hecuba’s grief will diminish her joy in dying (mater obest minuitque necis mihi gaudia, “my mother stands in the way and the joy of my death diminishes,” 463). She then says that she wants no man’s hands to touch her virgin body (466f.) and concludes by asking that her remains be returned to her mother for burial in exchange for a ransom of tears (471-73). If Polyxena means she is concerned about the grief her mother will feel, why mention being ransomed by tears? If fallere (“escape the notice”) is to be read, as it often is, that Hecuba should be deceived and not know of her daughter’s death, why does Polyxena want her body returned? Polyxena’s speech is not just confused, it is filled with deliberate non-sequiturs.

During this scene both the Euripidean and Ovidian princesses appear nude to the waist. Yet again the young women and the passages in which they appear differ strikingly. Indeed the speech of Ovid’s Polyxena becomes a rhetorical parody of her Euripidean counterpart’s address as reported by the

---

In Ov. Met. 13.462 Polyxena is aware that her mother will learn of her death. That is grammatically the condition is contrary to fact but translators as early as Golding and as recently as Miller render the line as if the princess wanted her mother deceived. See A. Golding, Metamorphosis (London 1567; repr. Carbondale 1961) 262; F. J. Miller (tr.) Ovid, Metamorphoses 2 (Cambridge, Mass. 1916; repr. 1964) 261.
herald, Talthybius (Hec. 542-70). Euripides’ princess speaks twice. Boldly she commands the Achacans, whom Neoptolemus has ordered to seize her, not to touch her body. She will die of her own will and not live a slave (548-52). Consistent with her words, when the crowd approves her statement and Agamemnon requests that she not be sacrificed (553ff.), Polyxena, ever in control, rips her garment from her shoulder to her waist and urges Neoptolemus to proceed with her execution. It is here that the messenger who is relating the speech comments editorially on her beauty (560ff.). The young woman then goes down on her knees in order to die. Despite the great sympathy of Agamemnon and the surrounding Greek crowd, Polyxena immediately enjoins Neoptolemus to strike her through the bosom or throat with his sword. Neoptolemus chooses the latter and kills her as if she were a sacrificial animal, thus avoiding the sexual overtones implicit in stabbing her in the breast.11

By contrast Ovid’s Polyxena initially urges Neoptolemus to strike her through the bosom or throat with his sword (Met. 13.457-59). She then rips her garment prior to delivering her major speech (457-73). Unlike Euripides’ messenger, Ovid does not comment on the beauty of Polyxena’s bosom; he does not need to. He has already stated that Neoptolemus is looking intently at her just before she rips her garment (456).12 We can assume that the rest of those in attendance were doing likewise. There is a vast, indeed comical, contrast between Euripides’ Polyxena forbidding any man to touch her body (when they were about to do so) while her garment is yet unrent (Hec. 548ff.) and Ovid’s princess speaking virtually the same line with her upper body exposed (Met. 13.466ff.), and particularly so since the text contains no indication that she is about to be seized.

To a modern audience, the pose of Ovid’s Polyxena might suggest an ancient Greek erotic dance. For students of rhetoric (and certainly Ovid was a student of rhetoric), the particular rhetorical stance Ovid’s Polyxena assumes may well recall Hyperides’ defence of Phryne, the famous courtesan and model


12 The text says that Neoptolemus is looking at her “face” (vultu) before she rips her garment. It would take incredible self-discipline not to look down after she has ripped it—indeed that is doubtless part of the darkly humorous incongruity of the scene.
for the Aphrodite of Cnidos. According to George Kennedy, Hyperides appealed to extra-rational proof in revealing Phryne’s bosom to the jurors. And just in case the reader has missed the entire point of the contrast between the Euripidean and Ovidian scenes, Neoptolemus, faced with the choice of bosom or throat, decides not on the throat, as did his Euripidean counterpart, but on the “offered breast” (praebita praecordia, 476). Unlike the kneeling Euripidean princess, moreover, Ovid’s Polyxena stands, as the poet hastens to emphasise by his description of her fall: defecto poplite (“with knee(s) failing,” 477). Though willing to reveal her bosom to the assembled Greek warriors, in death she falls to the ground from a standing position while modestly covering her body. Indeed Ovid further emphasises the difference between the two versions of Polyxena’s death in his translation of the Greek. While the Greek, κρύπτων ἑ κρύπτειν (“hiding what ought to be hidden”) is clearly impersonal, Ovid’s Latin equivalent, partes, possesses undeniable sexual connotations (cf. Ov. Ars Am. 2.584, 618).

The horrifying/amusing effect of the visual/verbal humor implicit in the melodramatic death of Ovid’s Polyxena is typical of the Metamorphoses; recall the description of Philomela’s severed tongue as it jumps its way back to its mistress’ feet (6.553-60). By his deft comparisons to Euripides’ Polyxena, Ovid transforms the noble Euripidean heroine into a preposterous vamp who presides over a grisly comedy.

3

In the last of the three speeches, literary allusions abound: Homer’s Odyssey, Theocritus’ Idylls, Vergil’s Eclogues, and even Horace’s Odes. Once again the Roman poet manipulates the rhetoric of an earlier literary tradition to create a Polyphemus and an address both reminiscent of their predecessors and humorously original. The unusual qualities of the Cyclops and his address are foreshadowed in Galatea’s introduction. Before Polyphemus sings, Galatea explains that she and Acis are in love, and both are listening to the giant’s love song while hidden from his view. Love has apparently tamed the Cyclops, though he is initially conceived as brutal and oafish in accord with Odyssean


tradition (13.760ff.). In his amorous state, however, he is concerned about his appearance (764-68) and even tries to shave his beard and comb his hair although, as Farrell has pointed out, the oaf’s instruments for grooming are hardly conventional. Interested in his image because of his love for Galatea, idiomatically Polyphemus jests about Telemus’ prophecy of the horrific loss of his single eye (771-73). In fact, the oaf replies to the prophet with a pun—another has already captured his eye (775). The brutal blinding (the Odyssean Cyclops remembers the prediction only subsequent to disaster) is described by Homer in gruesome detail (Od. 9.508-12). By allusion Ovid juxtaposes the real loss and the joke thereby creating a play of scene and allusion nearly as excessive and grotesque as the murder/sacrifice of Polyxena.

In addition to its horrible/amusing tone, Polyphemus’ speech (730-897) mimics the essential topics and arrangement of the eleventh Idyll. The Ovidian Polyphemus’ amatory appeal (789-869) includes sections of praise and blame (789-837), self-laudation (his wealth and praise of his own appearance, 838-53), and an appeal to pity (854-58). And there is even an extremely violent outburst of rage against his rival, Acis (859-69), that may seem only Odyssean but, in fact, also recalls the Theocritean oaf’s drolly obtuse outburst at his mother’s failure to give birth to him with gills, the breathing apparatus necessary for submarine life, (Id. 11.67-71). While assigning him comparable means of persuasion, Ovid also endows the Cyclops with the same acuity of perception possessed by both his Homeric and Hellenistic counterparts—little or none. By the Idyll’s conclusion, the Hellenistic Polyphemus finally comprehends that no relationship is possible with the sea-nymph since she is a marine creature and he terrestrial. Such an insight is beyond the competence of Ovid’s giant.

Ovid does not baldly duplicate his literary antecedents. On the contrary, the poet constructs a Polyphemus who is a model of literary incongruity. On the one hand, the Roman oaf is as intellectually dense as his Homeric or Theocritean predecessor, but rhetorically he is a virtual magician. Indeed the musical equipment that the Cyclops brings for accompaniment foreshadows his verbal precocity, for his reed pipe is no mere no-frills, seven-reed variety, but a deluxe model of one hundred reeds. This giant makes a fool of himself not by doltishness or oafishness, but by excesses of rhetorical virtuosity. Instead of Theocritus’ three comparisons in praise of Galatea, Polyphemus begins with thirty comparisons: fifteen of praise and fifteen of blame. This Polyphemus has obviously taken a seminar in epideictic oratory. Although the Cyclops undeniably overindulges, individually each comparison is deft and concise, for

---

17 On other sources of Polyphemus’ comic aspect, see Tissot [3] 49.
the entire passage is only nineteen lines long. In this ironic, literary turnabout, the Cyclops rhetorically defeats the Ovidian Ulysses through his conciseness. Technically the Cyclops proves himself a master rhetorician albeit a ridiculous one.

Indeed Ovid deftly maintains this disjunction between the oaf’s facile oratory and his almost complete lack of insight and self-awareness. Theocritus’ Cyclops, for example, offers his wealth as compensation for his strange physiognomy—particularly his single eye. Ovid’s verbose oaf possesses no such inhibitions about his appearance; rather, he devotes an entire section of his speech to his “attractiveness” (Met. 13.840-53). Aware that he is unattractive, Theocritus’ Cyclops offers to let Galatea burn off his very shaggy hair (Id. 11.50-54). The Ovidian Polyphemus, however, notes that trees without leaves and horses without hair are truly ugly (Met. 13.847f.). His eye is the size of large shield (851f.), and even the sun possesses but a single eye (853). Although this defence may be rhetorically adroit, like Polyphemus himself, it further defines the poet’s ability to create humorous incongruity.

In Tissol’s view, however, Ovidian incongruity represents a sequential (that is, parody of Theocritus, then Homer) rather than integrated manipulation of literary sources. Far from considering the discontinuity in Polyphemus’ words as a consistent mixture of both Homeric and Hellenistic models, he believes that Polyphemus’ concluding outburst of anger against Galatea’s lover finds its source only in Homer and is unconnected with Theocritus. 18 To be sure, Polyphemus’ anger finds parallels in the Odyssean Cyclops’ demeanor as adumbrated in Galatea’s earlier description of his change from brutal to amorous, but it also derives from the Theocritean oaf’s misguided and droll wrath at his mother.

Anger alone does not characterise Polyphemus’s final words. And his concluding, rhetorical questions again find their sources both in Theocritus and Homer. Here the Cyclops vacillates between his fear of Galatea’s affection for Acis and his own hope of being loved by her. These questions recall Theocritus since the enquiries the Hellenistic oaf makes to Galatea are central to his growing awareness of the impossibility of a relationship between the two. The awkwardness of the Ovidian Cyclops also recalls the choppy phrased questions of the Homeric Polyphemus on first discovering Odysseus and his men in the cave (Od. 9.252-55). In short, the Ovidian oaf is not simply angry and, like his wrath, his rhetorical questions are located in more than a single source.

In the context of the Metamorphoses, the primary subject of the Ovidian giant’s indecisive words is Galatea’s love of Acis.

---

Acin amas, praefersque meis conplexibus Acin?
ille tamen placetque sibi placetque licebit,
quod nollem, Galatea, tibi:

(Ov. Met. 13.861-3)

Do you love Acis? Do you prefer Acis to my
embrace? Let him be pleased with himself and pleasing,
though I do not wish this, to you, Galatea.19

While furious at Acis, Polyphemus simultaneously pleads with Galatea. The
Ovidian Cyclops’ appeal to pity and the content of the speech, as derived from
both Homeric and Theocritean traditions, is integral to this concluding entreaty.
These lines, like the rest of the speech, form a simultaneous imitation of both
Homerian and Theocritean elements20 and thereby foster the continuous
discontinuity in Ovid’s presentation of Polyphemus.

4

Nor does Ovid’s playfulness in Metamorphoses 13 extend only to Theocritus,
Euripides and Homer. On the contrary, he is quite willing to parody his own
poetry and at the same time to suggest his unwillingness to be rigidly confined
by the Greek literary canon. Metamorphoses 13 concludes with yet another
speech, Glaucus’ attempt to seduce Scylla. The Cyclops, an ugly terrestrial
creature, had attempted to woo a sea-nymph. Glaucus, now an unattractive sea-
creature, addresses Scylla, who at this moment is a terrestrial being. Herein
Ovid pointedly imitates words from the first book of the Metamorphoses in the
same sequence. The three very common Latin words non (“not”), ego (“I am”),
and sum (“I am”) appear together in single lines in the Metamorphoses only at
Met. 1.513 and 13.917—Apollo to Daphne and Glaucus to Scylla.21

This repetition all but begs the reader to compare Apollo’s speech (1.504
-24) to that of Glaucus, (13.917-65, within the Scylla story, 897-968). In
addition to the unique verbal repetition, the contexts of both speeches are
virtually identical—each lover attempts to seduce the fleeing object of his

19 This translation is a variant on the Penguin translation with the phrases deliberately
rendered more closely to the Latin word order in the hope of capturing the awkward and
pleading sense of Polyphemus’ words. See M. M. Innes (tr.), The Metamorphoses of Ovid
(London 1955) 308.

20 As such, this section, although Farrell [3] 235-68 does not refer to these lines,
demonstrates his thesis that the mixture of genres is inextricable from the Polyphemus
of the pastoral genre, Idyll 11 and Eclogue 2 outside of the conclusion.

21 I confirmed my suspicion about this singular repetition within the Metamorphoses by
means of David Packard’s Ibycus program. Gratiat tibi ago, O Ibyce.
affections. Similarly the speeches contain like means of persuasion: each lover speaks of his own realm and identity in attempting to impress the beloved addressee, and each concludes with an appeal to pity based on that identity. Although he is the god of medicine, Apollo can find no cure for his passion for Daphne. Glauces considers his recent transformation from mortal to divine useless if Scylla does not care for him. Ovid’s self-parody goes beyond contextual and verbal imitations. In expounding upon his own exceptional appearance, Glauces turns to explain (as well he might) how he became a sea-creature. In short, the new sea-god’s seduction address becomes (is metamorphosed into) a narrative of his metamorphosis. Consequently, the poet makes as much literary fun of himself as he does of Homer, Euripides and Theocritus.

Just as Ovid’s self-parody suggests his deliberately provocative, artistic impudence, so, too, the allusion to Horace, Odes 3.13, heretofore entirely separate from Polyphemus, implies to his audience that such literary and rhetorical playfulness is the dominant aspect of the book and not limited to Greek literature alone. I believe that the literary “wake-up” call, if you will, is splendidior vitrum (“more shining than glass”). The phrase, found in the oaf’s extravagant praise of Galatea (791), calls extraordinary attention to itself by being completely out of literary context—a Latin allusion among those dominantly Greek and pastoral.22 Its source, moreover, makes the phrase all the more outrageous, hence emphatic, by juxtaposing the cerebral Horace with the idiot Cyclops. So, too, these words derive from a poem about poetic creativity.23 With this Horatian phrase, Ovid challenges his audience to discover his sparkling poetic game in Metamorphoses 13.

---

22 Vitrum (glass) is also emphatic for the unique qualities it introduces into the Cyclops’s list. Unlike the rustic and natural items to which Galatea is compared, glass is urban, artificial and dependent on a developed technology to which Polyphemus would not have had access.