CHAPTER EIGHT

OVID AND OVID

In these narratives Ovid is conducting a dialogue not only with Virgil, Livy and other predecessors but also with himself, and self-imitation is yet another part of the intertextual richness and complexity. Here too Ovid has fun and tests and parades his ingenuity, but this time in connection with his own writings, as he plays on associations of his own earlier poetry and redeployes, modifies, contradicts and tops himself. Improving on Ovid must represent a really major challenge, especially for Ovid himself. It also shows that, engagingly, the poet did not take himself too seriously and did not regard his own work as sacrosanct. Scholarly attention so far has focused mainly on those stories which are told in both the Fasti and the Metamorphoses. This chapter will take a fresh look at them, and then will move on to other areas of self-reference in the Fasti (most of them largely or totally neglected).

Doublets in the Fasti and Metamorphoses

There are eight such doublets—the tales of Lotis, Hippolytus, Europa, Ino, Romulus’ deification, Marsyas, Callisto and Persephone. Obviously

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1 On Classical self-imitation in general see Cairns 18, Murgatroyd 1979 160, 279ff., 1994a 70, 238ff., West-woodman 143ff. and Pucci.

2 See the works cited below. On Ovidian self-imitation apart from these stories see e.g. West-woodman 121ff., Ginsberg 9ff., Miller 1993, Woytek and Watson in Boyd 2002 147.

3 Heinze’s untenable theory that Ovid used two distinct narrative techniques (one elegiac and one epic) in the Fasti and Metamorphoses has bedevilled criticism of these doublets for far too long, and it is now time to move on to a broader analysis and more fruitful aspects. Bernbeck (especially 127ff.) and Little (in Zinn 64ff.) have undermined most of Heinze’s claims; note also that asymmetrical stress on parts of the story (said to be an elegiac characteristic) is found in the narratives on Europa and Ino at Met. 2.836ff. and 4.416ff., and lengthy speech (supposedly an epic feature) occurs in the lines on Ariadne in the Fasti (3.471ff.), not the Metamorphoses (8.172ff.). In fact what Ovid is trying to do in these doublets (and in the other narratives in the two poems) is to be surprising and unpredictable rather
such extensive doubling is not accidental, and where he produced versions of a myth in both the Fasti and Metamorphoses Ovid will have intended us to read one account with an eye to the other. When we realize that the poet is returning to an anecdote, we are drawn in, to see what alterations we can detect, to savour the subtlety, cleverness etc. Such pairs also add to the lively variety in the Fasti and Metamorphoses as a change from the norm of tales told only once by Ovid, and as such a vitalizing device they are widely separated across the two works, so as not to overdo things. They represent an entertaining twist to the Ovidian rewriting of others’ narratives, as here he rewrites his own (not yet ‘published’) narratives and uses himself as a quarry (for variation, inversion, capping etc.). The fact that Ovid is not just modifying someone else’s tale but telling one differently from the way in which he himself had already told it really highlights the protean nature of myth, the infinite flexibility of narrative and the fact that there is no definitive version, no single way to open, close etc. Above all Ovid was a raconteur at the height of his powers, revelling in the story-telling process and his own feats of narrative gymnastics, delighting in his virtuosity and inventiveness, as he presented a different version of the same myth again and again (on a full eight occasions), employing a wide variety of techniques to ensure the differences. He is like the obviously admired Ulysses of Ars Amatoria 2.128 who was asked repeatedly about the fate of Troy by Calypso: ille referre aliter saepe solebat idem ‘he was often accustomed to tell the identical tale in a dissimilar way’. It is this sustained and dazzling exercise in renarration by Ovid that the rest of