Ovidian epic promises what is potentially important evidence about the evolution of the bucolic genre after Virgil. The setting is a propitious one. After the instant success of the *Eclogues*, and while Theocritus as well as Moschus and Bion were still important poetic voices in Rome, bucolics must have been accepted, for the first time in the Western tradition, as an institutionalized genre. On the other hand, Ovid is the quintessential ‘post-generic’ poet: his epic presupposes a fully formed system of genres, substantially the very system that would be canonized and transmitted to the European tradition. The *Metamorphoses* constitute an encyclopaedia of genres and so (implicitly) of literary criticism. It is not by chance that Ovid is the first important Roman author who does not construct (implicitly or explicitly) his own work, programme, or persona, as the repetition of an individual Greek model (whether the new Menander, Homer, Theocritus, Hesiod, Callimachus, Alcaeus, Aratus, Apollonius and so on). This is surely because he will be competing with all of them and more—and also because by now, in Augustan Rome, it would make even more sense to be appraised as the ‘new Tibullus’ or the ‘new Virgil’. An equally important point (related to the previous one) is that, when the *Metamorphoses* were composed and published, Virgil had already been constructed as a model of a *poetic career*. This factor has consequences for the evolution of the pastoral genre. The career model is based upon the ‘ascendant’ and ‘rising’ pattern, and the effect is predicated on a growing sense that a natural hierarchy of genres exists, and that pastoral is in many ways the right way to start before ‘upgrading’ oneself to the next level. (Some features of traditional bucolic poetry are now especially important, because they function as badges of ‘humility’: the positioning of shepherds in the social hierarchy of labour; elements of style; the brevity, lightness, humour, variety and sexual innuendo of the poems; the country/city opposition, which for a Roman entails the Supercity
of Rome as a counterweight to idyllic *rusticitas*). Two more factors, concomitant but not secondary, are that Virgilian pastoral must, by 8 AD, have already been the object of teaching, parody, and scholarship, and that Theocritean exegesis of the kind we still have access to in the scholiastic tradition is, we may presume, already in place. Therefore, the ‘constructive’, system-oriented practice observed by Greek interpreters of Theocritus is now at work in both languages: the tradition of saying “this is really bucolic”, “this detail needs interpretation as belonging to the world of the shepherds” and so on must be based on reading practices that were already available by the time of Ovid, both in Greek and in Latin.

However, in the first sentence of this paper, the word “evidence” coupled with “Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*” must have been enough to generate immediate disbelief, and the following sentences have served as an invocation of mitigating circumstances. For everyone knows that Ovid’s poem is not an encyclopaedia of genres, unless one likes unruly encyclopaedias where lemmata are contested by their own definitions and entries tend to bleed into each other. The poem is not a witness to a system of shared generic expectations: it is a participant (and a cheating, tricky one at that) in a shifting conversation about generic norms and their validity: at every turn and twist, we can expect a reassertion of conventions, or a defamiliarizing effect, or a spoof. Think about the relationship between epic and bucolic as it is established at the level of reader reception in this work: in many cases the allusion can be interpreted as a pointer to similarity or difference between genres; more difficult still, it might mean that epic and bucolic are compatible, or fundamentally alien to each other; even worse, it could imply that believing in generic essences is a useless task, since both epic and bucolic are impure and even illusory ideas.

We will have to proceed with some caution. To make sure that my examples have some specific relevance, I will stick to episodes in which we can easily recognize not just some pastoral detail, allusion, or

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1 A word, we should remember, never attested before Ovid (*Am. 1.8.4*, etc.).
2 Cf. Fantuzzi’s contribution to this volume, pp. 235ff.
3 Numitorius’ *Antibucolica* (*FLP* p. 284) is often accused of having been a silly and pedantic spoof, but when Numitorius targets the expression *cuium pecus*, “who owns the flock?” (*Ecl. 3.1*) and its Latinity he may well be drawing attention to the specifics of a bucolic ‘alternative world’, in full awareness of Greek learned discussions of Theocritus: that bit of Virgilian *rusticitas* is in fact a sophisticated play on a Theocritean model, as demonstrated by Wills (1993).