



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Facing Dionysus: The Metamorphosis of a story from 'Homer' to Ovid

de Jong, I.J.F.

Publication date

2020

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Scienze dell'antichità

License

Article 25fa Dutch Copyright Act (<https://www.openaccess.nl/en/in-the-netherlands/you-share-we-take-care>)

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

de Jong, I. J. F. (2020). Facing Dionysus: The Metamorphosis of a story from 'Homer' to Ovid. *Scienze dell'antichità*, 26(2), 31-42.

<https://www.nardecchiadigital.it/index.php?journal=ScAntic-QR&page=article&op=view&path%5B%5D=1432>

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

SAPIENZA UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA
DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE DELL'ANTICHITÀ

SCIENZE DELL'ANTICHITÀ

26 – 2020

Fascicolo 2

EDIZIONI QUASAR

DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE DELL'ANTICHITÀ

Direttore
Giorgio Piras

Comitato di Direzione

Anna Maria Belardinelli, Carlo Giovanni Cereti, Cecilia Conati Barbaro, Maria Teresa D'Alessio, Giuseppe Lentini, Laura Maria Michetti, Francesca Romana Stasolla, Alessandra Ten, Pietro Vannicelli

Comitato scientifico

Graeme Barker (Cambridge), Martin Bentz (Bonn), Corinne Bonnet (Toulouse), Alain Bresson (Chicago), M. Luisa Catoni (Lucca), Alessandro Garcea (Paris-Sorbonne), Andrea Giardina (Pisa), Michael Heinzelmann (Köln), Mario Liverani (Roma), Paolo Matthiae (Roma), Athanasios Rizakis (Atene), Avinoam Shalem (Columbia University), Tesse Stek (Leiden), Guido Vannini (Firenze)

Redazione

Laura Maria Michetti
con la collaborazione di Martina Zinni

SAPIENZA UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA
18 MAGGIO 2018

RACCONTO NEI TESTI, RACCONTO NELLE IMMAGINI

La narratologia come approccio alla letteratura e all'arte antiche

Atti della Giornata di Studi tenutasi presso il Museo dell'Arte Classica
il 18 maggio 2018,
a seguito della pubblicazione di Irene J.F. de Jong,
I classici e la narratologia. Guida alla lettura degli autori greci e latini

a cura di
Andrea Cucchiarelli

INDICE

A. Cucchiarelli – R. Nicolai – M. Tulli, <i>Considerazioni introduttive</i>	1
A. Cucchiarelli, <i>Racconto, immagine, immaginazione: una giornata di studi e un metodo di ricerca</i>	1
R. Nicolai, <i>Letteratura greca e narratologia: un rapporto dialettico</i>	7
M. Tulli, <i>La narratologia: un Wegweiser per la produzione letteraria greca</i>	11
G. Lentini, <i>Homeric Speakers between Narratology and Pragmatics</i>	17
I.J.F. de Jong, <i>Facing Dionysus: the Metamorphosis of a Story from ‘Homer’ to Ovid</i>	31
G. Paduano, <i>Il racconto a teatro: I Persiani di Eschilo, Alceste di Euripide</i>	43
L. Battezzato – L. Mariani, <i>L’alibi di Oreste: l’Andromaca di Euripide, Didimo Calcen- tero e Ditti Cretese</i>	51
M. Papini, <i>Storie scolpite a rilievo e narrazioni a confronto: gli stylopinakia di Cizico e il fregio di Telefo a Pergamo</i>	69
F. Ghedini – G. Salvo, <i>La costruzione del racconto nelle arti figurative: dai quadri di III stile al repertorio iconografico della media e tarda età imperiale (sarcofagi e mosaici)</i>	91
A. Stramaglia, <i>How to Paint a Fictional Prologue: a Test Case from the Villa della Farne- sina</i>	109
R. Kirstein, <i>Narratologie und Biographie: Suetons Vita Augusti</i>	115

IRENE J.F. DE JONG

FACING DIONYSUS: THE METAMORPHOSIS OF A STORY FROM 'HOMER' TO OVID

The purpose of this special issue is to demonstrate how narratology can enrich the interpretation of classical texts. For my demonstration I have chosen a well-known story that has been told by many authors and that has been graphically depicted by many artists¹: Dionysus who is taken captive by pirates but frees himself by a series of miracles and then transforms the pirates into dolphins. I will focus on two versions: the oldest one we have, which is found in the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* (probably to be dated in the sixth century BC)², and the version of Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* 3. 572-691.

The story in three ways is an interesting test-case for a narratological analysis. First, in its hymnic version it involves a god who converses with mortals in various shapes. Such an encounter between god and mortal asks for a careful analysis of focalization or point of view: who is seeing what and how does he interpret what he sees³. Second, in the Ovidian version the metamorphosis of the Tuscan pirates into dolphins is recounted at great length with focalization again being an important factor. Third, there is the metamorphosis of the story itself from its hymnic to its Ovidian version. This offers me the opportunity to show how narratology can also be an instrument of intertextual analysis⁴.

The Homeric Hymn to Dionysus

The Homeric Hymns are a collection of 33 poems, of which at least one had been ascribed in antiquity to Homer and which therefore became known as the Homeric Hymns. They resemble the Homeric epics in style and language, but probably none actually is the work of that poet. The poems are called hymns because they deal with the power and deeds of gods and as such resemble the cultic hymns that played a major role in Greek society. But whereas cultic hymns were sung by a chorus while it was walking in a procession or standing around an altar, the Homeric hymns were recited by one person only, during a festival or at a symposium (the occasion of the hymns is debated). They recount important moments in the life of the god hymned, either when he (re-) acquires his power or when he wields it at a moment of crisis⁵. Our story of Dionysus and the pirates belongs to this last category⁶.

¹ For overviews of literary and graphic renderings, see e.g. JAILLARD 2011, pp. 144-145 and PALEOTHODOROS 2012, pp. 456-459.

² For discussion of the date, see JAILLARD 2011, p. 133, note 2.

³ See my analysis of the focalization in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* in DE JONG 2014, pp. 135-166. Note that JAILLARD 2011, p. 136 uses the narratological term focalization incorrectly: "the almost exclusive focalization on the epiphany of the god"; focalization does *not* mean emphasis but filter or lens.

⁴ For the combination of narratology and intertextuality, see the collection of studies in BÄR - MARAVELA 2019.

⁵ A good recent introduction to (scholarship on) the Hymns is FAULKNER 2011.

⁶ The Hymn is included in the commentary of CASSOLA 1975. The only full recent study is JAILLARD 2011.

The narrative starts immediately after the introductory formula of the hymnic narrator (1-6a):

Of Dionysus, glorious Semele's son, I will make remembrance: how he appeared (ἐφάνη) by the shore of the barren (ἄτρογέτοιο) sea, on a jutting headland, in the likeness of a youth in first manhood; fine dark (κράνεια) locks waved about him, and he had a purple cloak about his strong shoulders⁷.

The opening scene presents us our first view of Dionysus, which right away consists of an interesting mix of focalizations. It must be the omniscient hymnic narrator who can inform us that the young man actually is Dionysus. Hymnic narrators are external primary narrators, that is to say that they do not play a role in their own story. Like the Homeric external primary narrator they are omniscient in that they can penetrate the mortal disguises of the gods, their omniscience being due to the Muses, who are regularly invoked in hymns (e.g. *HHerm.* 1, *H. Aphr.* 1). His omniscience further appears from his reference to Dionysus as “Semele's son”, which, as JAILLARD 2011, p. 139 points out, anticipates Dionysus' epiphanic speech (“I am Dionysus ... born to Cadmus' daughter Semele”: 56). But the verb ἐφάνη already hints at the god being seen also by characters inside the story: “he appeared” implies that he appeared *to someone*. Indeed, as will soon become clear, he is spotted by pirates sailing at sea. It is for this reason that the narrator adds the detail that Dionysus found himself “on a jutting headland”; this way he is visible even from a distance. The pirates see no god, however, but a beautiful young man wearing a purple cloak. His costly clothing⁸ leads them to believe that he is a rich man and hence attractive booty (6b-12a):

Right away (τάχα) men from a galley came speeding (θοῶς) over the wine-faced (οἴνοπα) sea, pirates from Tyrrhenia,⁹ led on by an ill doom (κακὸς μόρος). Having seen him they nodded to one another, and at once (τάχα) leapt out, quickly (αἶψα) seized him, and set him aboard their ship, exulting, for they reckoned he was the son of a Zeus-fostered (διοτρεφέων) royal family.

On account of ἐφάνη Jaillard suggests that already in the opening scene of the hymn we are dealing with an ambiguous epiphany of Dionysus which is typical of that god: “Dionysus reveals himself while also hiding himself, and shows himself while rendering himself invisible to those who are not capable of seeing him” (2011, p. 140). Gods in epic and hymns *always* appear to mortals in mortal disguise (think of Athena appearing to a sleeping Nausicaa in the guise of a Phaeacian girl and friend in *Odyssey* 6 or Aphrodite conversing with Anchises in the guise of a young Phrygian princess the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*)¹⁰, but Dionysus typically reveals himself by assuming all kind of shapes. Such a dionysiac epiphany is also known from Euripides *Bacchae* where Dionysus, appearing to Pentheus in the disguise of a Lydian stranger, both reveals and hides himself.

This is an attractive suggestion. However, when Jaillard writes “the pirates are both unaware of and at the same time recognize the affiliation of the young man with Zeus” (2011, p. 140), I would phrase things slightly differently. The pirates see a rich young man (“the son of a Zeus-fostered royal family”) but at this stage have no idea who he really is. *Only we*, the narratees who have been informed by the narrator, know that the young man actually is Dionysus. *Only we* can appreciate the ambiguity of the stock epithet διοτρεφέων which is used in general of high-placed

⁷ My translation is based on WEST 2003, with adaptations.

⁸ For purple as an indication of high status, see REINHOLD 1970.

⁹ The exact reference of Τυρσηνοί is debated. See WEST 1966, ad 1016, who concludes: “these Tyrsenians are an Italian people, and...the Etruscans...alone were important enough to the Greeks in the archaic period to be attached to a Greek mythical genealogy”. Ovid, too, as we shall see, takes the pirates to be Tyrrhenian.

¹⁰ For recent discussions of the gods' mortal disguises see e.g. TURKELTAUB 2007 and PETRIDOU 2015, pp. 32-42.

persons who are not literally bred by Zeus but here is applied to Dionysus who *is* a son of Zeus. *Only we* can notice the aptness of the stock epithet “wine-faced” of the sea: soon the sea will *indeed* become the realm of the god of wine Dionysus¹¹. Perhaps we may even see a special significance in the first epithet of the sea, ἀτρογέτοιο, which Greek listeners are likely to have associated, correctly or not, with harvesting (Greek: τρυγάω) or wine most (Greek: τρύζ); soon ivy, berries and grapes *will* grow at sea.

The omniscient narrator informs us right away through his use of a prolepsis (“led on by an ill doom”) that the pirates’ confrontation with the god is going to end badly for them. Against this background we can interpret their joy (“exulting”) as ominous. To increase this feeling of doom the narrator emphasizes the speed of their actions: “right away” (τάχα), “speeding” (θοῶς), “at once” (τάχα), and “quickly” (αἶψα). The pirates are looking for quick profit but will meet with quick disaster¹². This is what they do (12b-15a):

And they wanted to bind him with grievous (ἀργαλέοισιν) bonds; but the bonds would not contain him, and the osiers fell clear away from his hands and feet, while he sat there smiling with his dark eyes (ὄμμασι κυανέοισι).

Dionysus here displays the first of a series of marvels that will reveal, step by step, his divine identity to the pirates. He has the power to make the fetters made of twigs fall from his hands and feet. He does this without any effort as his smile reveals, and ease is a characteristic of divine action. I also draw attention to his “dark eyes” (ὄμμασι κυανέοισι). Earlier we had already heard that the young man has “dark locks” (ἔθειραι κυάνεαι). κυάνεος is the divine equivalent of mortal μέλας¹³: both words mean “dark”, but the first is mainly used in connection with divine beings and the second with mortals. Thus Poseidon and Hades have κυάνεαι locks too and Zeus nods κυανέησιν ἐπ’ ὄφροσιν, “with his dark eyebrows” (e.g. *Il.* 1. 528). The narrator’s use of this colour term in our hymn thus once more reminds the narratees that the young man actually is a god.

One of the pirates, the helmsman, understands, at least partly, what is going on and warns his fellow pirates that the young man is a god (15-24):

When the helmsman saw it, he at once (αὐτίκα) cried out to his comrades: “Madmen (δαμόνιοι), which of the gods is this (τόνδε) that are you binding after having seized him, a strong one; and our ship though well-built cannot support him. This (ὄδε) is either Zeus, or silverbow Apollo, or Poseidon; for he does not resemble mortal men, but the gods who dwell on Olympus. Come on, let’s put him ashore straight away (αὐτίκα) on the dark land, and don’t lay hands on him, or he may be angered and raise grievous (ἀργαλέους) winds and tempest.”

We see that in the mouth of the helmsman the speed of the action acquires a tone of urgency: he “at once” warns his fellow pirates and advises them to put ashore their catch “straight away”. He fears ἀργαλέους winds, which the primary narratees may understand to be the god’s retaliation of the ἀργαλέοισιν bonds with which the pirates tried to bind him. He underscores the force of his words by pointing at the young man (as the deictic particles τόνδε and ὄδε suggest) and urging them to take a close look at him: this is no mortal but a god. The helmsman mentions three possible divine candidates: the young man might be Zeus, Apollo or Poseidon. He does not mention

¹¹ I thus disagree with CASSOLA 1975, ad 7 that the epithet is here “esornativo”.

¹² JAILLARD 2011, p. 147 draws attention to the references to speed in the *entire* hymnic narrative, which he interprets as a sign of the accelerated temporality of the divine. In my view the temporal indications have different functions at different moments of the story.

¹³ See WEST in his commentary on Hesiod’s *Theogony* (1966, ad 406).

Dionysus and this indicates that he has no full understanding of the god they are dealing with yet. The situation resembles that in the *Hymn to Aphrodite* where Aphrodite appears to Anchises in the guise of a young girl. Her appearance is so dazzling, however, that Anchises still thinks her a goddess, though he does not know exactly which one: “greeting, Lady, whichever of the blessed ones you are that arrive at this dwelling, Artemis or Leto or golden Aphrodite, high-born Themis or steely-eyed Athena; or perhaps you are one of the Graces come here...” (92-95). Aphrodite who wants to go to bed with Anchises denies that she is a god.

In the *Hymn to Dionysus* it is not the god who denies that he is a god but the helmsman’s comrades (25-31):

So he spoke, but the captain rebuked him with a harsh (στυγερώι) speech: “Madman (δαίμονι), you watch the wind; help me hoist the sail, catch all the sheets together. Leave this fellow (ὄδε) for men to worry about. I fancy he will get to Egypt, or Cyprus, or the Hyperboreans, or beyond, and in the end he’ll speak out and tell us his kinsmen and their possessions and who his brothers are, seeing that a god/fortune (δαίμων) has thrown him among us.”

The captain rejects the, as we know, sound advice of his helmsman and the narrator openly disqualifies his speech by calling it στυγερώι, “harsh”. He reciprocates the helmsman’s qualification “mad men”: not the pirates are mad (δαίμονιοι), but the helmsman himself (δαίμονι). Instead of putting ashore their catch he gives orders to hoist the sail and move away from the shore. He echoes the helmsman’s use of deictic ὄδε, but in a rejoinder which suggests that the helmsman is a coward while the other pirates are real men. They will sail with the young man to Egypt, Cyprus, the Hyperboreans or even further until he tells them who he is and thus allow them to get a large ransom for him from his family. When the captain concludes by saying that a δαίμων has thrown the rich youth among them, the primary narratees may note the dramatic irony: they know that a god literally is among them and that what the captain considers their good fortune actually is their “bad doom”.

At this stage the captain still is in charge of events and his men obey him (32-42):

With these words he turned to hoist the mast and sail. The wind blew full into the sail, and they tightened the sheets at the sides. But soon (τάχα) miraculous (θαυματά) works appeared (ἐφαίνετο) before their eyes. First of all, wine gushed out over the dark swift ship, sweet-tasting and fragrant, and there rose a smell ambrosial (ἀμβροσίη), and the sailors were all seized with astonishment (τάφος) as they saw it. At once (αὐτίκα) along the top of the sail there spread a vine in both directions, hung with many grape clusters. About the mast dark ivy was winding, all flowering, and pretty berries were out on it; and all the rowlocks were decorated with garlands.

When the pirates execute the order of their captain (as is emphasized by the narrator through verbal echoes: ἰστίον ἔλκετο νηός ... ὄπλα κατάνυσαν ≈ ἰστίον ἔλκεο νηός ... ὄπλα λαβών), the god performs a second miraculous action to reveal his divine identity (note ἐφαίνετο, which like earlier ἐφάνη suggests a dionysiac epiphany). Wine gushes over the ship, vines spread along the sail, ivy winds around the mast, and garlands cover the rowlocks. All these elements point in the direction of the god of wine and the symposium, Dionysus. The narrator’s unique qualification of the smell of the wine as ἀμβροσίη, lit. “immortal”, which is the typical qualification of divine food, is another reminder, comparable to his use of κῶανος, of Dionysus’ divine nature. The speed with which the events takes place also points at divine presence: it signals, as Jaillard (2011, p. 147) writes, “the accelerated temporality in which the god produces marvels (...) and phenomena that conflict with the ordinary rhythm of time”. Gods typically act swiftly: thus in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* we hear how Hermes “was born in the morning, by midday was playing the lyre and in the evening stole the cattle of Apollo” (4. 15-19).

All pirates now understand that “miraculous” (θαυματά) things are taking place, and they react with the in such contexts typical “astonishment” (τάφος). They start to do what the helmsman had advised them to do earlier, to return to the shore (37b-53a):

When they saw this, then they did start calling on the helmsman to take the ship to land. But the god became a lion in the ship, a terrible (δεινός) one in the bows, and he roared loud (μέγα δ' ἔβραχεν); and amidships he made a shaggy-maned bear, showing (φαίνων) signs of his power. Up it reared in fury, while the lion at the top of the deck stood glaring fearsomely (δεινόν). They fled to the stern, and about the prudent-hearted (σαόφρονα θυμὸν ἔχοντα) helmsman they halted in terror. Suddenly (ἐξαπίνης) the lion sprang forward and seized the captain. The others all leapt out into the sea when they saw it, to avoid an ill doom (κακὸν μόρον), and they turned into dolphins.

This is the third manifestation by Dionysus of his divine identity (note φαίνων, which picks up earlier ἐφάνη and ἐφαίνετο). This time he does not give vegetal signs, vines, ivy and garlands, but animal ones: he himself changes into a lion and he also creates a bear. All gods can assume animal shapes in both epic and hymn (think of Athena who leaves Nestor’s palace “like a sea-eagle” in *Od.* 3. 371-372 or Apollo transforming himself into a dolphin in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 400)¹⁴. But animal shapes are especially typical of Dionysus: in Euripides *Bacchae* Pentheus, when struck by maenadic frenzy, seems to see a bull (920-922) and the chorus of maenads ask Dionysus to “appear to them as a bull, a snake or a fire-blazing lion” (1017-1019). The lion’s roaring also suits the ἐριβρομος, “mighty-roaring”, Dionysus (JAILLARD 2011, p. 142, note 26). We experience this stage of the story via the frightened focalization of the pirates, as appears from δεινός and δεινόν.

When their captain has been attacked and we may assume killed by the lion, the other pirates leap into the sea “to avoid an ill doom”; κακὸν μόρον ἐξάλουτες echoes the earlier prolepsis of the narrator (τοὺς δ' ἦγε κακὸς μόρος: 8) and signals its fulfilment. The pirates escape death but change into dolphins. The significance of this metamorphosis has been brilliantly explained by Eric Caspo in a study from 2003. Greek culture from archaic times onwards knows dancing dolphins both in literature (e.g. Eurip. *El.* 435-436 where we hear about a “pipe-loving dolphin”) and visual art (e.g. the tondo of a siana cup: Villa Giulia 64608). These dancing dolphins, which on vases are even often depicted with with human feet, “symbolize the power of choral dance”, in particular the choral dance of the dithyramb which is devoted to Dionysus. The metamorphosis of the pirates into dolphins in our hymn thus means that they are transformed into followers of the god they at first refused to respect. The hymnic narrator does not indicate whether this is a punishment or a blessing, but the first option seems the most plausible one.

This is suggested by the contrast with the fate of the “prudent-hearted helmsman” (53-59):

But as for the helmsman, the god took pity on him and held him back, and made him most blessed (πανόλβιον), saying: “Have courage (θάρσει), good mariner (?), dear to my heart. I am mighty-roaring Dionysus, born to Cadmus’ daughter Semele in union of love with Zeus.” Hail (χαίρε), child of fair Semele; there is no way to adorn sweet singing while heedless of you.

The fact that Dionysus pities the helmsman and keeps him from jumping into the sea (and becoming a dolphin) suggests that the pirates’ metamorphosis is a punishment¹⁵. The hymn thus

¹⁴ For such instances of “zoomorphic epiphany” (and the problems in deciding whether or not we are dealing with real transformations or mere comparisons), see e.g. PETRIDOU 2015: 87-98.

¹⁵ We may compare Odysseus’ companions who, though changed into pigs by Circe, keep their human mind (*Od.* 10. 240) and hence deplore their metamorphosis.

recounts a theoxeny: a god appears to mortals in disguise and tests their piety; those who are respectful are saved, those who are not, punished¹⁶.

The *Hymn* ends, as most Homeric Hymns do, with a full epiphany of the god who reveals his name to the helmsman. The situation resembles that at the end of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, where Apollo at first appears to Cretan sailors in the shape of a dolphin, then changes into a star but finally converses with them “in the likeness of a young and strong man, in his first prime, his hair falling over his broad shoulders” (3. 449-450) and in that shape reveals his divine identity to them: “I am Zeus’ son, I declare myself Apollo” (480).

Dionysus’ speech is not capped by a verb of speaking but instead we hear someone saying “hail, child of fair Semele”. For a brief moment we may think that it is the helmsman saluting Dionysus, since χαῖρε is the typical greeting by mortals of gods (cf. e.g. *HApbr.* 92). But when the verse continues we realize that we are dealing with the typical envoi of the hymnic narrator (cf. *HAp.* 545-546, *HHerm.* 579-80, *HApbr.* 292).

Looking back at the whole narrative we see that it is completely devoted to the epiphany of Dionysus: first he appears to the pirates in the mortal disguise of a young man, then he performs miracles (escaping from his bonds and making vines grow on the ship), then he changes into a lion, and finally he reveals his name¹⁷. Epiphany is a central element in all Homeric Hymns. As Platt’s illuminating study *Facing the gods* (the inspiration for my own title “Facing Dionysus”) argues, humans in the real world can only know how the invisible gods look by means of verbal or visual representations. The hymns telling about the epiphanies of gods to mortals are important specimens of such verbal representations. In our hymn both the bad guys and the one good guy witness the acts of the god and thereby testify to humans in the real world how Dionysus manifests himself. In this respect I would like to stress once more the importance of the proximal deictic pronoun ὃδε in our hymnic narrative: the pirates see the god before their very eyes and by proxy the narratees of the hymn also “see” the god¹⁸. This also explains why the characters in the *Hymn to Dionysus* are anonymous and why the location of the story is not specified: this makes it easier for all of its narratees to connect the events to themselves. If we cannot face Dionysus in real life, we can at least face him in our imagination by listening closely to the story of his gradual epiphany in the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*.

Ovid Metamorphoses 3. 572-691

The *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* was among Ovid’s models in writing his version of the story of Dionysus and the pirates. This was demonstrated convincingly by John Miller in a detailed and illuminating analysis of Ovid’s creative intertextual rewriting of the story¹⁹. My narratological analysis will both supplement and take issue with (parts of) his study.

One important narratological difference with the hymnic version is that the story now is an embedded story, which means that it does not stand alone but forms part of a larger narrative.

¹⁶ Cf. JAILLARD 2011, p. 148: Dionysus “appears seemingly without cause, deceives and lures the Tyrsenian pirates with the promise of a marvellous ransom. It is thus the initiative of the god, whose appearance induces the wild and impious act of the pirates”.

¹⁷ I argue for a gradual epiphany and recognition by the pirates. Conversely, JAILLARD 2011, p. 142 speaks of the pirates’ “powerful blindness *that has continued to grow*” (my italics).

¹⁸ PLATT 2011. Cf. also GARCIA 2002 who argues that the epiphanies in hymnic narratives symbolize the epiphany that the performance of the hymn is supposed to bring about (just as in cletic hymns the god is supposed to come and accept the song as a gift), and JAILLARD 2011, p. 145: “The narrative thus constructs a poetic epiphany of the divinity, both invoked and evoked, in a scene which crystallizes the figure of the god and the details of his activity.” For the function of deictic pronouns to increase the reality effect of epic narrative, see DE JONG 2012.

¹⁹ MILLER 2016. The connection between the two texts was not obvious to all, see his discussion of the debate on p. 96, note 6.

That narrative is the confrontation between Pentheus and Bacchus in Thebes, best known from Euripides *Bacchae*. Pentheus wants Bacchus to be taken captive but instead his servants bring him one of the god's followers, a priest whose name is Acoetes²⁰, whose homeland is Maeonia (which is Tyrrhenian territory in Ovid) and who is no other than the helmsman of the *Homeric Hymn*. This narrative context will turn out to be crucial since it turns the story of Dionysus and the pirates into a warning for Pentheus (more on which below).

Another major difference is that this time the story is told not by an external narrator but by an internal narrator: the helmsman is himself involved in the story he tells²¹. This means that we will throughout look at Bacchus via his focalization. After a brief biographical introduction of himself (582-596), Acoetes recounts how he first set eyes on Bacchus. He and his fellow sailors have been driven off course to Chios (famous for its wine!) and spend the night on that island. In the morning his companions bring with them a person they have caught while fetching water (605-614)²²:

“Lo, here we are!” cried Opheltes, first of all the men, bringing with him a prize (*praedam*) (so he considered it) which he had found in a deserted field, a little boy (*puerum*) with form beautiful as a girl's. He seemed to stagger, as if overcome with wine and sleep, and could scarce follow him who led. I gazed on his garb, his face, his walk; and all I saw seemed more to me than mortal. This I perceived, and said to my companions: “What divinity is in that mortal body I know not; but assuredly a divinity is therein. Whoever you are, be gracious unto us and prosper our undertakings. Grant pardon also to these men.”

Giving his first view of Bacchus Acoetes suppresses his *ex eventu* knowledge and describes what he saw and understood at the time: he sees a beautiful boy who seems to have drunk too much and therefore can barely walk. On account of the boy's walk, garb and face the helmsman right away concludes that they are dealing with a divinity though he does not know yet which divinity. Like in the *Homeric Hymn*, his perceptiveness contrasts with that of the other sailors, who merely think the boy a prize, *praedam*, which they can sell (cf. their greed for booty, *praedae*, in 620)²³. The parenthetic “so he considered it” (*ut putat*) should therefore be interpreted in the first place as part of Acoetes' focalization (who points up the misguided interpretation of his fellow sailors), rather than that of Ovid, as ANDERSON 1997, ad 658-661 suggests (“Ovid uses *ut putat* as a parenthetical note of ironic foreshadowing...the sailors wrongly believe that they have found an easy captive for ransom”).

Commentators have different opinions concerning the helmsman's early recognition that the youth is a god: ANDERSON 1997, ad 608-610 calls it “simpleminded credulity”, while MILLER 2016,

²⁰ Whereas the pirates in the *Homeric Hymn* are anonymous, Ovid gives the protagonists of his version names. According to BÖMER 1969, p. 596, this makes the story “lebendiger”, according to ANDERSON 1997, p. 398, it is the result of Acoetes being an internal narrator (“Ovid, letting one of the crew narrate the event can justify naming many of them”). Ovid probably derived the idea to give names from a lost Hellenistic work between the *Homeric Hymn* and Ovid, which most scholars assume to have existed. See MILLER 2016, pp. 97-99.

²¹ MILLER 2016, pp. 104-105 points out that “to put the tale into the mouth of the helmsman is a key manoeuvre for here creating a distinctly Ovidian aesthetic”, “a relatively marginal character in the tradition is given centre stage, being allowed to upstage the story of his own life”. In this way Ovid writes a sequel to the *Homeric Hymn*: “whatever happened, Ovid asks the literary tradition, to that helmsman rescued by Dionysus after the rest of the crew were mutated into dolphins?” I would add that Ovid in particular seems to have taken up the hint contained in the πανόλβιον of the *Homeric Hymn* (54), which is the typical word used of religious followers, cf. *HDem.* 480: ὄλβιος ὃς τὰδ' ὀπωπεν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων.

²² I quote the translation of MILLER (1916) 1977, with adaptations.

²³ According to MILLER 2016, pp. 99-100, this contrastive reaction is one of the two clearest allusions to the *Homeric Hymn*.

p. 99 speaks of “a greater insight” than that of the helmsman in the Homeric Hymn, who only reaches this conclusion after the miraculous falling away of the bonds. I would concur with Miller and see the alert focalization of the helmsman in a positive light: he is respectful right from the beginning²⁴ and this marks him out to become a follower of Bacchus, as he will at the end of the tale.

ANDERSON 1997, pp. 608-610 remarks that although our narrator refers to the garb and face of the youth he does not describe them (“precisely what Acoetes saw, he does not say”). My suggestion is that this is not necessary since somewhat earlier, in the context of the framing narrative of Pentheus and Bacchus, the Theban king had already given a description of the god: Bacchus is a boy (*puero*) with scented locks, soft garlands, and clothes with purple and gold woven in it (553-556). When Bacchus in Ovid is a boy rather than a young man, as he is in the *Hymn*, this reflects the way in which he is usually depicted in Roman art.

Just as in the *Hymn*, the helmsman’s fellow sailors reject his suggestion that they may have caught a god and when he tries to prevent his comrades from entering the ship with their prey he is nearly strangled. Throughout this section the negative focalization of his fellow sailors stands out: they are led by a “blind greed for booty” (*praedae ... caeca cupido*: 620), their kidnapping of the boy is a “violent act” (*violari*: 621), and the crew that applauds “the most reckless man” (*audacissimus*: 623) of the crew who nearly strangles the helmsman is called “godless” (*impia turba*: 629). To bring home their impiety Acoetes now refers explicitly to the god as a god (*Bacchus (Bacchus enim fuerat)*: 629-630) rather than a boy, and he will continue to do so (cf. *Liber* in 636 and *deus* in 650 and 689). He has either by now realized which god they are dealing with or he uses his hindsight knowledge²⁵. When Bacchus asks the sailors where they are taking him, one of them answers that they will bring him to whatever port he wishes. He mentions as his home Naxos (an obvious signal that he is Bacchus for readers of Ovid’s *Heroides* 2 or Catullus 64!), and all other “treacherous” (*fallaces*: 638) fellows swear an oath to convey him there. But soon it turns out that they do not intend to do this at all and when the helmsman²⁶ notices this he refuses to hold the helm any longer and says that he will have no part in their “wicked scheme” (*sceleris*: 645). When the god wakes up from his alcoholic stupor and detects their “faithlessness” (*fraudem*: 650), he gives them a last chance to change their behaviour, asking them why they are doing this to him, grown men to a little boy (*puerum*). Acoetes is weeping but “the godless crew” (*manus impia*: 656) mocks his tears and continues its journey.

But then the god has had enough and he starts revealing his identity through a miracle (658-69):

Now by the god himself I swear to you (for there is no god more present than he) that what I tell you is the truth, though far beyond belief. The ship stands still upon the waves, as if held dry in dock. The surprised sailors redouble their striving at the oars and make all sail, hoping thus to speed their way by twofold power. But ivy twines and clings about the oars, creeps upward with many a back-flung, catching fold, and decks the sails with heavy, hanging clusters. The god himself, with his brow garlanded with clustering berries, waves a wand wreathed with ivy-leaves. Around him lie tigers, spooky lynxes and the fierce bodies of spotted panthers.

The miracles are by and large the same as in the *Homeric Hymn*, except that here the ship comes to a standstill through the ivy clinging about the oars, and we find tigers, lynxes and pan-

²⁴ See BÖMER 1969, ad 609: “vom ersten Augenblick an müht sich der Dichter, auf den Helden kein Schuld fallen zu lassen”.

²⁵ I fail to understand ANDERSON 1997, ad 629-631: “*Bacchus*: Acoetes tells his story with total naivety. So far, he has in no way proved that the boy is divine. When he names the god, he does so from his bias, a slant that would understandably irritate Pentheus.”

²⁶ Called *demens* by his companions (641), an echo of the Hymn’s δαιμόνι’.

thers instead of lion and bear. These are the animals which became especially associated with Bacchus in Hellenistic times when the god was linked with India.

There follows the most spectacular metamorphosis by Ovid of the hymnic narrative, in that he turns its ultra brief “they turned into dolphins” into a prolonged narrative of the sailors’ metamorphosis (670-689):

The men leap overboard, driven on by madness or by fear. And first Medon’s body begins to darken all over and his back to be bent in a well-marked curve. Lycabas says to him: “Into what miraculous creature (*miracula*) are you turning?” But as he speaks his own jaws spread wide, his nose becomes hooked, and his skin becomes hard and covered with scales. But Libys, while he seeks to ply the sluggish oars, sees his hands suddenly shrunk in size to things that can no longer be called hands at all, but fins. Another, catching at a twisted rope with his arms, finds he has no arms and goes plunging backwards with limbless body into the sea: the end of his tail is curved like the horns of a crescent moon. They leap about on every side, sending up showers of spray; they emerge from the water, only to return to the depths again; they sport like a troupe of dancers (*in chori speciem*), tossing their bodies in wanton sport and drawing in and blowing out the water from their broad nostrils. Of but now twenty men – for the ship bore so many – I alone remained. And, as I stood quaking and trembling with cold fear, and hardly knowing what I did, the god spoke words of cheer to me and said.

I think we can all agree that Ovid has here masterfully captured the behaviour of dolphins who jump in and out of the water²⁷. The idea that the dolphins become a chorus of dancers, still implicit in the *Homeric Hymn*, is now made explicit (*in chori speciem*). Once again the “doubting Thomas” sailors are thus turned into followers of Bacchus after all. And again we may ask ourselves whether this is a blessing or a punishment. ANDERSON 1997, ad 685-686 writes: the metamorphosis is “not cruel, tragic or ugly. The fish [*sic*] register no pathos”²⁸. Likewise, MILLER 2016, p. 107 contends that “any sense of retribution evaporates in the metamorphic display. Those transformed do not suffer so much as experience a paradoxical condition”. Both scholars, therefore, do not think that a punishment is involved. At this point paying close attention to focalization becomes relevant again: the men do “register” the metamorphosis. Thus Lycabas reacts to the sight of Medon’s metamorphosis with the outcry “into what miraculous creature are you changing?”; Libys sees his hands changing into fins; and above all there is Acoetes himself who watches the whole scene “trembling with cold fear” until the god encourages him (as MILLER 2016, p. 100 notes, another clear intertextual allusion to the *Homeric Hymn*, with *excute... corde metum*, “dispel the fear from your heart”, echoing θάρσει: 55). These reactions, in particular the last one, suggest to me that the metamorphosis in Ovid is a punishment too.

Acoetes ends his tale with referring to Pentheus’ question to which it forms an answer: spurred on by Bacchus he went to Naxos and there joined his rites which he now continues to attend (*Baccheaque sacra frequento ≈ ede ... morisque novi cur sacra frequentes*: 581). Thus, the whole story has been working towards this denouement of the bad sailors being punished by the god for their impiety, the good one being saved and becoming one of his followers.

This brings me to my concluding remarks about Ovid’s version. We have seen how the story told by the internal narrator Acoetes consistently presents a negative view of his companions. This turns his story into an implicit warning of Pentheus who in the framing narrative has given orders to take Bacchus captive²⁹: just as the sailors tried to seize Bacchus but were punished by being turned into dolphins, Pentheus should realize that seizing Bacchus might become fatal to

²⁷ Although his reference to scales (675) is a strange slip.

²⁸ But elsewhere (ad 652-655 and 673-675) he does speak of “punishment”.

²⁹ Cf. ANDERSON 1997, p. 396 (“a second major warner”).

him. Acoetes' story, thus, serves the same function as the story of the first messenger in Euripides *Bacchae*. Not to revere and respect the god Bacchus is bad and dangerous. Acoetes' (implicit) warning in fact is the second one that Pentheus receives. For just before his meeting with the helmsman, Pentheus had been warned explicitly by the seer Tiresias who had told him that the new god Bacchus would come and that if he failed to worship him he would be torn into thousand pieces (517-525).

Acoetes nowhere explicitly calls his tale a warning (which leads MILLER 2016, pp. 105-106 to the conclusion that it is no warning at all) but in my view the barrage of negative qualifications of his fellow sailors and their deeds discussed earlier (of which Miller mentions only two: *impia turba*: 629 and *manus impia*: 656) speaks volumes and should not be downplayed as mere signs "of a lively raconteur of the frightful adventure" (MILLER 2016, p. 106). Miller also claims that the tale of Acoetes is so long that "the tense atmosphere of his confrontation with the angry Pentheus seems to drop away". Here I would like to draw attention to lines 658-660, where just prior to the climactic part of his tale, the god's miracles and ensuing miraculous metamorphosis of the sailors, Acoetes briefly interrupts his narration and addresses his narratee Pentheus: "Now by the god himself I swear *to you* (for there is no god more surely near than he) that what I tell *you* is the truth, though far beyond belief"³⁰. This makes clear that Acoetes wants to convince Pentheus of the existence of the god Bacchus and wants to warn him that what happened to his companions could happen to him³¹. ANDERSON 1997, ad 658-661 rightly notes the use of the present tense (*est*) in the parenthesis "for there is no god more present than he", which reminds Pentheus that Bacchus already *is* in Thebes (as was described in 528: *Liber adest*). Ovid is here once again displaying narratological intertextuality since exactly the same technique of a narrator turning at a crucial moment in his narrative to his narratee is found in the first messenger speech in Eurip. *Bacchae*: "If *you* had been there and seen this, *you* would have approached in prayer the god *you* now disparage" (712-713) and "their covering of flesh was torn in pieces faster than *your* majesty could blink *your* royal eyes" (746-747). Acoetes' message is clear enough, one would say, but Pentheus disqualifying his story as "long and rambling" (*longis ambagibus*: 692)³², fails to heed it and soon afterwards will go out to the mountain to meet death at the hands of his mother.

Conclusion

A narratological analysis, in particular an analysis of focalization, can sharpen and enrich our interpretation of the two – intertextually connected – versions of the story of Dionysus and the pirates in the seventh *Homeric Hymn* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In the *Homeric Hymn* there is the effective alternation, juxtaposition and sometimes combination of the focalization of the omniscient external narrator, who is in the know about Dionysus' identity from the very beginning, of the helmsman, who is the first to suspect the youth's divinity, and of the other pirates who remain blind until the very end. We, the primary narratees, follow in our imagination the various epiphanies of the god which culminate in his epiphanic speech that seems addressed as much to the helmsman as to us and is, on our behalf, answered by the hymnic narrator.

In Ovid's version, the internal narrator Acoetes' constant negative focalization of his companions and their treatment of Bacchus is an important argument to consider his tale, *pace* MILLER 2016, a warning. Another argument is the fact that at a crucial point in his narrative he

³⁰ Unfortunately, the double *tibi* is left out by the translator of the Loeb, F.J. Miller.

³¹ The Thebans will understand the warning exemplum of Pentheus' death (732-733).

³² Somewhat surprisingly, MILLER 2016: 96 and 101 also calls Acoetes' story "rambling". Pentheus may call it thus (suggesting that the captive helmsman protracts his story in order to postpone the moment of his execution) but looking at it with narratological eyes the story is extremely well structured.

addresses Pentheus and reminds him that the god he is narrating about is the same one which is now present in Thebes. If in the *Homeric Hymn* it is the textual epiphany which helps narratees to imagine Dionysus, in Ovid his depiction rather reflects figurative art; hence he is a boy rather than a youth and he is associated with lynxes and panthers rather than lion or bear. I have argued that in both cases the metamorphosis of the mortals into dolphins is a form of punishment or at least revenge of the insulted god, who turns his former adversaries into a "chorus" of dancing followers.

Irene J.F. de Jong
University of Amsterdam
I.J.FdeJong@uva.nl

Bibliography

- ANDERSON 1997: W.S. ANDERSON, *Ovid's Metamorphoses Books 1-5*, Norman-London 1997.
- BÄR - MARAVELA 2019: S. BÄR - A. MARAVELA (eds.), *Narrative, Narratology and Intertextuality: New Perspectives on Greek Epic from Homer to Nonnus*, in *SymbOslo* 93, pp. 1-11.
- BÖMER 1969: F. BÖMER, *P. Ovidius Naso Metamorphosen I-III*, Heidelberg 1969.
- CASSOLA 1975: F. CASSOLA, *Inni omerici*, Milano 1975.
- CSAPO 2003: E. CSAPO, *The Dolphins of Dionysus*, in E. CSAPO (ed.), *Poetry, Theory, Praxis: the Social life of Myth, Word, Image in Ancient Greece: Essays in Honour of William J. Slater*, Oxford 2003, pp. 69-98.
- FAULKNER 2011: A. FAULKNER (ed.), *The Homeric Hymns: Interpretative Essays*, Oxford 2011.
- GARCIA 2002: J.F. GARCIA, *Symbolic Action in the Homeric Hymns: The Theme of Recognition*, *CA* 21, 2002, pp. 5-39.
- JAILLARD 2011: D. JAILLARD, *The Seventh Homeric Hymn to Dionysius: An Epiphany Sketch*, in A. FAULKNER (ed.), *The Homeric Hymns: Interpretative Essays*, Oxford 2011, pp. 133-150.
- DE JONG 2012: I.J.F. DE JONG, *Double Deixis in Homeric Speech: on the Interpretation of ὄδῃ and οὐτός*, in M. MEIER-BRÜGGER (ed.) *Homer, gedeutet durch ein grosses Lexikon*, Göttingen 2012, pp. 63-83.
- DE JONG 2014: I.J.F. DE JONG, *Narratology and Classics. A Practical Guide*, Oxford 2014 (italian transl. by A. CUCCHIARELLI, with a new chapter: Rome 2017).
- MILLER (1916) 1977: F.J. MILLER, *Ovid Metamorphoses I (Books 1-8)*, Cambridge, MA-London (third edition, revised by J.P. GOOLD).
- MILLER 2016: J.F. MILLER, *Ovid's Bacchic Helmsman and Homeric Hymn 7*, in A. FAULKNER - A. VERGADOS - A. SCHWAB (eds.) *The Reception of the Homeric Hymns*, Oxford 2016, pp. 95-108.
- PALEOTHODOROS 2012: D. PALEOTHODOROS, *Dionysus and the Tyrrhenian Pirates*, in V. BELLELLI (ed.) *Le origini degli Etruschi: storia, archeologia, antropologia*, Roma 2012, pp. 455-485.
- PETRIDOU 2015: G. PETRIDOU, *Divine Epiphany in Greek Literature and Culture*, Oxford 2015.
- PLATT 2011: V. PLATT, *Facing the Gods. Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion*, Cambridge 2011.
- REINHOLD 1970: M. REINHOLD, *History of Purple as a Status Symbol in Antiquity*, Brussel 1970.
- TURKELTAUB 2007: D. TURKELTAUB, *Perceiving Iliadic Gods*, *HSCPh* 103, 2007, pp. 51-81.
- WEST 1966: M.L. WEST, *Hesiod Theogony, edited with commentary*, Oxford 1966.
- WEST 2003: M.L. WEST, *Homeric Hymns, Homeric apocrypha, Lives of Homer*, Cambridge-London 2003.

ABSTRACT

Il contributo consiste in un'analisi narratologica della storia di Dioniso e i pirati per come è raccontata nell'*Inno Omerico* a Dioniso e in Ovidio, *Metamorfosi* 3. 572-691. Nell'*Inno Omerico* si osservano, efficacemente alternate, giustapposte e, talvolta, mescolate, la focalizzazione del narratore esterno onnisciente, cui l'identità di Dioniso è ben nota fin dall'inizio, quella del timoniere, il primo a sospettare la natura divina del giovane, e quella, infine, di tutti gli altri pirati, che restano completamente ignari fino alla vera e propria conclusione. Nella versione di Ovidio la focalizzazione del narratore interno Acete, per il fatto di essere costantemente molto critica sul modo in cui i suoi compagni trattano Bacco, trasforma la narrazione secondaria (*embedded narrative*) in una ammonizione implicita a Penteo (che è infatti direttamente chiamato in causa in un punto cruciale della storia): come i marinai, per aver tentato di catturare Bacco, sono stati puniti con la trasformazione in delfini, così Penteo dovrebbe rendersi conto che imprigionare Bacco può risultargli fatale.

Edizioni Quasar di Severino Tognon s.r.l.
via Ajaccio 41/43 – 00198 Roma
tel. 0685358444, fax 0685833591
www.edizioniquasar.it

per informazioni e ordini
qn@edizioniquasar.it

ISSN 1123-5713

ISBN 978-88-5491-091-1

Finito di stampare nel mese di novembre 2020
presso Global Print – Gorgonzola (MI)