

Ovid *Metamorphoses* 6.43-145
“The Weaving Contest”

Jack Nouch

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“cur non ipsa venit? cur haec certamina vitat?”
tum dea “venit!” ait formamque removit anilem
Palladaque exhibuit: venerantur numina nymphae
Mygdonidesque nurus; sola est non territa virgo, 45
sed tamen erubuit, subitusque invita notavit
ora rubor rursusque evanuit, ut solet aer
purpureus fieri, cum primum Aurora movetur,
et breve post tempus candescere solis ab ortu.
perstat in incepto stolidaeque cupidine palmae 50
in sua fata ruit; neque enim Iove nata recusat
nec monet ulterius nec iam certamina differt.
haud mora, constituunt diversis partibus ambae
et gracili geminas intendunt stamine telas:
tela iugo vincta est, stamen secernit harundo, 55
inseritur medium radiis subtemen acutis,
quod digiti expediunt, atque inter stamina ductum
percusso paviunt insecti pectine dentes.
utraque festinant cinctaeque ad pectora vestes
bracchia docta movent, studio fallente laborem. 60
illic et Tyrium quae purpura sensit aenum
textur et tenues parvi discriminis umbrae;
qualis ab imbre solent percussis solibus arcus
inficere ingenti longum curvamine caelum;
in quo diversi niteant cum mille colores, 65
transitus ipse tamen spectantia lumina fallit:
usque adeo, quod tangit, idem est; tamen ultima distant.
illic et lentum filis inmittitur aurum
et vetus in tela deducitur argumentum.
Cecropia Pallas scopulum Mavortis in arce 70

pingit et antiquam de terrae nomine litem.
 bis sex caelestes medio Iove sedibus altis
 augusta gravitate sedent; sua quemque deorum
 inscribit facies: Iovis est regalis imago;
 stare deum pelagi longoque ferire tridente 75
 aspera saxa facit, medioque e vulnere saxi
 exsiluisse fretum, quo pignore vindicet urbem;
 at sibi dat clipeum, dat acutae cuspidis hastam,
 dat galeam capiti, defenditur aegide pectus,
 percussamque sua simulat de cusptide terram 80
 edere cum bacis fetum canentis olivae;
 mirarique deos: operis Victoria finis.
 ut tamen exemplis intellegat aemula laudis,
 quod pretium speret pro tam furialibus ausis
 quattuor in partes certamina quattuor addit, 85
 clara colore suo, brevibus distincta sigillis:
 Threiciam Rhodopen habet angulus unus et Haemum,
 nunc gelidos montes, mortalia corpora quondam,
 nomina summorum sibi qui tribuere deorum;
 altera Pygmaeae fatum miserabile matris 90
 pars habet: hanc Iuno victam certamine iussit
 esse gruem populisque suis indicere bellum;
 pinxit et Antigonem, ausam contendere quondam
 cum magni consorte Iovis, quam regia Iuno
 in volucrum vertit, nec profuit Ilion illi 95
 Laomedonve pater, sumptis quin candida pennis
 ipsa sibi plaudat crepitante ciconia rostro;
 qui superest solus, Cinyran habet angulus orbem;
 isque gradus templi, natarum membra suarum,
 amplectens saxoque iacens lacrimare videtur. 100
 circuit extremas oleis pacalibus oras
 (is modus est) operisque sua facit arbore finem.
 Maeonis elusam designat imagine tauri
 Europam: verum taurum, freta vera putares;
 ipsa videbatur terras spectare relictas 105
 et comites clamare suas tactumque vereri
 adsilientis aquae timidisque reducere plantas.
 fecit et Asterien aquila luctante teneri,
 fecit olorinis Ledam recubare sub alis;
 addidit, ut satyri celatus imagine pulchram 110

Iuppiter inplerit gemino Nycteida fetu,
 Amphitryon fuerit, cum te, Tiryntia, cepit,
 aureus ut Danaen, Asopida luserit ignis,
 Mnemosynen pastor, varius Deoida serpens.

te quoque mutatum torvo, Neptune, iuvenco 115
 virgine in Aeolia posuit; tu visus Enipeus
 gignis Aloidas, aries Bisaltida fallis,
 et te flava comas frugum mitissima mater
 sensit equum, sensit volucrem crinita colubris

mater equi volucris, sensit delphina Melantho: 120
 omnibus his faciemque suam faciemque locorum
 reddidit. est illic agrestis imagine Phoebus,
 utque modo accipitris pennas, modo terga leonis
 gesserit, ut pastor Macareida luserit Issen,

Liber ut Erigonen falsa deceperit uva, 125
 ut Saturnus equo geminum Chirona crearit.
 ultima pars telae, tenui circumdata limbo,
 nexilibus flores hederis habet intertextos.

Non illud Pallas, non illud carpere Livor 130
 possit opus: doluit successu flava virago
 et rupit pictas, caelestia crimina, vestes,
 utque Cytoriaco radium de monte tenebat,
 ter quater Idmoniae frontem percussit Arachnes.

non tulit infelix laqueoque animosa ligavit 135
 guttura: pendente Pallas miserata levavit
 atque ita “vive quidem, pende tamen, inproba” dixit,
 “lexque eadem poenae, ne sis segura futuri,
 dicta tuo generi serisque nepotibus esto!”

post ea discedens sucis Hecateidos herbae 140
 sparsit: et extemplo tristi medicamine tactae
 defluxere comae, cum quis et naris et aures,
 fitque caput minimum; toto quoque corpore parva est:
 in latere exiles digiti pro cruribus haerent,
 cetera venter habet, de quo tamen illa remittit
 stamen et antiquas exercet aranea telas.

Arachne's tale is rich pickings for the literary critic. It centres on an artist figure with some similarities to the poet himself, and her extraordinary craftsmanship. She is a weaver, telling stories on cloth in a way we only have a dim memory of through the Bayeux Tapestry and other museum pieces. But weaving is one of the great metaphors of poetry, and Ovid exploits the metaphor to the full. As he does so through a contest between the lowly Arachne and the divine Pallas Minerva, themes of societal influence, deceit, and arbitrary authority are spun round into the weave again and again. And since Ovid gets the chance to tell an *ekphrastic* set of stories within the two tapestries, he also reels off a couple of dozen vignette metamorphoses to blend in with his wider epic poem.

42–52: Minerva discovered

At the end of Arachne's speech, Minerva is still disguised as the *anus* that the young mortal has just castigated. But her taunts precipitate the goddess' epiphany and lead into an epic metaphor of Arachne's blush. Through her supposed hubris, her distance from other women in society, and through the surprising epic metaphor, Arachne comes across as a lone, singular figure.

42 *cur... vitat?* Arachne repeats the challenge she made at l. 25, but now she mocks the goddess' prowess with rhetorical questions. The anaphora with ***cur...? cur...?*** is oratorical, but note the poetic plural of ***certamina***: a reminder that Arachne, like all the *Metamorphoses'* other characters, is speaking in Ovidian verse. There are also literary connotations of the word; rivalry between poets was at least as old as Hesiod, and it was an important theme in Augustan poetry (e.g. the numerous rival songsters and explicit competitions in Vergil's *Eclogues*).

42–3 *venit... venit* Arachne's latest speech had run on for six verses, but Minerva replies with a single, cutting word. Arachne had called attention to the absence of the goddess with the use of an open, present-tensed ***vēnit*** in her rhetorical question. Minerva takes the word and merely lengthens the vowel (***vēnit***) to turn it into a factual, perfect tense. It is an arresting start to their duel. ***formamque removit anilem*** Minerva had been in disguise as an old woman, ostensibly to warn Arachne of her hubris. But the deceit of the gods in disguise is the very theme of Arachne's tapestry (see ll. 103–128).

44–5 *nymphae* | *Mygdonidesque nurus* Mygdon was a king of Phrygia (neighbouring Lydia), and Pausanias says explicitly that his name became a poetic demonym (10.27). At ll. 15–6, the word *nymphae* almost certainly described semi-divine nymphs who had come to admire Arachne's craft, since they were described as having left their natural habitats of the *vineta Timoli* and *suas... undas*. But here, the word might be taken rather more loosely to indicate young

unmarried women. The collocation with *Mygdonidesque nurus* supports this reading, to indicate a group of women representing the womanhood of their society. In this way they also show the proper societal response to Minerva's appearance—awe and worship (*venerantur*). Niobe will be similarly shown up by the women of her city for not honouring the new goddess Latona at 6.162ff. Arachne is *virgo*—as of course is Minerva—and this continues the attention to the marital and societal status of the women. But Ovid separates her not only by how she responds to the goddess (*sola est non territa*), but also in that where her compatriots are described with the Greek term *nymphae*, she is given the Latin term *virgo*. It is as if Arachne has a different culture from her compatriots. (For another key use of parallel Greek and Latin terms, see n. 145.)

46 *notavit* brings out the implication that Arachne has done something morally shameful, since it is also the legal term for the censor's reprimand. The connotation is fitting since the blush, like the censor's *nota* visibly brands the citizen for going against the *mos maiorum*.

47–9 *ut solet... ortu* The metaphor comparing Arachne's blush to the colours of dawn is more than mere "pictorial"¹ decoration. Considering her lowly heritage and societal position (7–13), it is a surprise for Arachne to be honoured with an epic simile of *Aurora*. Perhaps the most famous blush of Latin poetry is the princess Lavinia's in Verg. A. 12.64ff., and at *Met.* 3.183ff. Ovid describes the goddess Diana's reddening like the dawn sky. Neither share Arachne's humble origins. But Ovid has already stated that Arachne's art more than makes up for her humble birth (ll. 7–8 *nec origine gentis clara, sed arte*). Indeed, an epic simile is an appropriate honour for an artist, and this one fits Arachne well with its focus on colour (*erubuit... rubor*)—especially *purpureus*, the colour of the dyes she and her father dealt in (cf. ll. 9 and 61). A further natural simile at ll. 64–7 will describe the richness of the tapestries' colours.

Ellen Oliensis also sees this simile as drawing a likeness between Minerva and the "divine rapists on Arachne's tapestry by compounding the element of deception with a hint of sexual violation."² This certainly fits with the emphasis on Arachne as a *virgo*, of which the unwilling (*invita*) blush is an extended metaphor.

50–1 *perstat... in sua fata ruit* This is as close as Ovid comes to calling Arachne hubristic. She is certainly stubborn, and perhaps somewhat silly; *stolidae... palmae* opines on the worthlessness of winning the contest. The contradictory idea between the verbs *perstat* and *ruit* gives the expression a tragic feel, perhaps one of inevitability, strengthened by *fata*.

¹Anderson, William S., ed. *Ovid's Metamorphoses, books 6-10*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972, p. 156, n. 46.

²Oliensis, Ellen. 'The Power of Image-Makers: Representation and Revenge in Ovid *Metamorphoses* 6 and *Tristia* 4'. In: *Classical Antiquity* 23.2 (2004), pp. 285–321, p. 289.

53–69: Start of the contest

Ovid gives a concise and precise description of the weaving process, and this receives the bulk of commentators' attention. (Anderson³ and Rosati⁴ both explain the terminology involved, and Bömer⁵ invents some practical concerns around where the weaving frames have come from, and how Arachne has the strength to set it up.) But there is some lovely poetry in the section, with metapoetic implications. Ovid fully exploits the weaving metaphor and its rich vocabulary.

53–4 *haud mora... telas* The two lines canter along in identical rhythm, and **54** is kept light with the high *i* vowels throughout. The effect is a delightful, quick set of lines that reflects the explicit *haud mora*. **54** is also a golden line, and its *gracili... stamine* suggests the resemblance between weaving and subtle Hellenistic poetry.

55 *tela... harundo* The vocabulary is technical for the weaving process (see the figure on p. 7)—the *iugum* is the upright loom's crossbeam (at the top of the image), the *stamen* is the vertical warp, the *harundo* is a rod separating the warp (which Circe is holding). But several of the words have a military feel about them, strengthened by the context of Minerva and Arachne's *certamen*.⁶ *tela* is in fact homonymous with the more common word in epic poetry meaning "weapons, missiles", although the latter is neuter plural and cannot be literally taken; *vincta est* suggests the audibly similar *victa est*; *harundo* "reed, shaft" is used for several things, but it is a common poetic term for an archer's arrow. The echoes of battle presage a bitter competition.

57 *quod digiti expediunt* The elision is suitable for describing the swiftness of their hands.

58 *percusso... dentes* A neat and onomatopoeic line; the alliterative *p*'s and other plosives imitate the action of patting down the cloth. Rosati also notes that the crossed-over adjective-noun pairs reflects the process of interweaving threads.⁷ *paviunt* is emended by Gruter for the manuscript's *feriunt*, which is widely accepted for describing a more appropriate action ("tapping" rather than *feriunt*'s "striking"), and for the strengthening of the alliteration.

61–2 *illic... umbrae* The two lines are heavily metonymic—*textitur* "is woven"

³Anderson (1972).

⁴Rosati, Gianpiero, ed. *Metamorfosi. Volume 3, Libri 5-6*. Roma/Milano: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 2009.

⁵Bömer, Franz, ed. *P. Ovidius Naso, Metamorphosen*. Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1969.

⁶It is "a duel of skill in which the artistic process and its product are the weapons for a poetic and epic battle." Ahl, Frederick. *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets*. Cornell University Press, 1985. 352 pp., pp. 225–6.

⁷Rosati (2009), p. 256, n. 58.



Fig. 4.

Circe's loom from the *Vergilius Vaticanus*

defines the *purpura* and the *tenuēs... umbrāe* as the wool which is dyed (here described with the gentle *sensit*) in a vessel for that purpose (*aenum*). The grammatical complement with *Tyrium* is *aenum*, but by sense it describes the expensive purple dye colouring the wool. This subtlety of expression is a reflection of the two weavers' art.

63–7 *qualis... distant* Another epic simile, also of the natural world, but this time describing the colours of the wool. When describing the colour given to clouds and rainbows, Seneca (*QNat.* 1.512) gives the example of dyeing cloth to show that though not innate, the colours are certainly real. Ovid uses an analogous idea, of the rainbow dyeing (*inficere*) the sky. Interestingly, Seneca also notes that some dyes, such as *purpura Tyria*, are best seen at a distance, as for a rainbow.

66 *transitus... spectantia lumina fallit* With *fallit* the theme of deception is maintained, as it will be through the Arachne episode. But as well as describing the blend of shades in the rainbow, the line has a metapoetic comment on the nature of metamorphosis—for which *transitus* is a synonym. Ovid sometimes goes into great detail about the steps involved in a metamorphosis (and this will be the case for Arachne over 141–5), but it is true that the changes he describes deceive the eyes with a logic-defying wonder.

68 *lentum... aurum* Weaving gold into fabric is of obvious expense (cf. the robe Dido made, *Verg. A.* 11.72: *vestes auroque ostroque rigentes*). Like the dye, it demonstrates that the weavers' materials are of the highest quality.

69 *et vetus... argumentum* Another metapoetic line, likening weaving to the

subtle art of poetry. The term *deducitur*, programmatic since Hellenistic poetry, is usually used in verse metaphorically, but here its primary sense is the technical sense of drawing out the thread. Rosati notes that *vetus... argumentum* has an ideological implication of Augustan order and *pietas*, of the kind that will feature prominently in Minerva's tapestry.⁸

70–102: Minerva's tapestry

Minerva's tapestry serves a definite purpose—to teach Arachne a lesson. But her artistry is not limpid. Classical, balanced, serious, the scenes Minerva depicts are the definition of good taste. They are also marked by their verisimilitude, a sign of the artist's ability, which is, after all, what the competition is all about. In Ovid's description of the two tapestries, his poetry attempts to reflect their respective skill as weavers.

70 *Cecropia... in arce* Cecrops was supposed to be the first king of Athens, and is hence used to locate the story of Minerva's tapestry in that city. (Ovid similarly uses the adjective for scene-setting at 6.446, 11.93 and 15.427.) But the mythical king is also apposite for the goddess' tale because he founded the court of the Areopagus (or, in a Latin calque, *scopulum Mavortis*), and acted as judge in Minerva and Neptune's dispute. (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.141–2 argues against the idea that Cecrops was judge, saying that the Olympians were the final arbiters. But even in his account their judgment was based on Cecrops' testimony that Minerva had been the first to plant the olive.)

Minerva's central scene has often been compared to the West Pediment of the Acropolis, which depicts the same *antiquam... litem*. The tapestry has even been considered a "double ekphrasis (of the Parthenon groups as well as of the fictive tapestry)".⁹

71 *pingit* can be used, as here, for weaving just as it is for painting. The verb makes the ekphrasis explicit, and Ovid will repeatedly draw attention to the "madness" of the scenes with such verbs. See also **74 *inscribit***, **76 *facit***, **78–9 *dat... dat... dat***, **80 *simulat***, **85 *addit***, etc.

72 *bis sex caelestes* Anderson and Bömer infer that the Minerva and Neptune stand in the foreground of the picture, whilst the other gods sit.¹⁰ In which case, the "twelve" Olympian gods must be taken loosely, since Minerva and Neptune would normally be included in the canonical set. (Though "es ist ein alter Streit, ob Ovid an die klassische Dodekas... der griechischen Götter... oder auch der

⁸Rosati (2009), p.257, n. 69.

⁹Vincent, Michael. 'Between Ovid and Barthes: "Ekphrasis", orality, textuality in Ovid's "Arachne"'. In: *Arethusa* 27.3 (1994), pp. 361–386, p. 367.

¹⁰Anderson (1972), p. 161, n. 72; Bömer (1969), vol. 2, p. 28

römischen Götter... gedacht hat.”¹¹) However, it might be that Minerva and Neptune are depicted in more than one place on the tapestry, so that they can both be seated in all the *augusta grauitate* of the Olympians, and carrying out their activities explicitly mentioned afterwards.¹² Arachne certainly depicts the gods in multiple places in the same tapestry.

73 *augusta grauitate* The adjective, used only here, at 9.270 and 15.145, “is never innocent in the Augustan poet Ovid.”¹³ Certainly its appearance aligns Minerva’s well-ordered composition with the Augustan authority of the Principate.

73–4 *sua... facies* Minerva’s art has clarity and is based upon verisimilitude, which Ovid conveys with a neat metaphor of *inscribit*; the different forms identify the gods as if they had inscriptions - implying that the images were strong enough by themselves.

75 *pelagi longoque... tridente* Neptune is depicted with his characteristic trident and the sea, by which he may be identified. It is another visual cue by which Minerva shows her skill at communicating through images clearly and unambiguously.

76 *vulnere* A personification of the rock, by which Ovid shows in words the lifelike nature of Minerva’s pictures; again realism is the important factor. Similarly **77 *exsiluisse fretum***.

78–9 Minerva’s own ‘visual vocabulary’ is military. She has her *clipeum*, *hastam*, *galeam*, and *aegide*. They not only identify her but display her in martial prowess, but this is an overzealous self-aggrandizement when her primary audience is the lowly Lydian Arachne.

80 *simulat* Here, despite the emphasis on Minerva’s realism, the narrative verb reminds Ovid’s audience that the scene is a fiction. The same verb had been used at l. 26 when she disguised herself as an old woman, and deceived Arachne.

82 *operis Victoria finis* Victoria is the Roman name for the Greek Νίκη who is also present in the scene on the Parthenon’s West Pediment. The poetry continues to imitate the mode of Minerva’s art. In addition to marking the victory of the goddess, *finis* marks off a formal end to the scene, in the same way that it ends the line.

83 *ut... laudis* The purpose clause makes explicit what may have been read in the preceding lines—that Minerva is fashioning her art to have a moral for

¹¹Bömer (1969), loc. cit.

¹²Leo Curran views Jupiter as being seated with six other gods and goddesses on either side, as a further demonstration of orderliness. Curran, Leo C. “Transformation and Anti-Augustanism in Ovid’s ‘Metamorphoses’”. In: *Arethusa* 5.1 (1972), pp. 71–91, p. 84.

¹³Hardie, Philip. ‘Contrasts’. In: *Classical Constructions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 141–173, p. 150.

her opponent (*aemula*), even to teach her a lesson.

87–114 After the central scene, Minerva adds the *certamina quattuor* around it in a balanced composition. Each story concerns a mortal who is transformed by a deity as a punishment for some trespass. As such they serve not only as warnings for Arachne, but they continue Ovid's project of cataloguing myths of metamorphosis.

87–9 *Theiciam... deorum* Rhodope and Haemus; the origin and specifics of this story have defeated scholars. We know little more than is clear from the telling here—that calling themselves by the names of Jupiter and Juno (*summorum... deorum*), they were transformed into the mountains which carry their names in Thrace. Nor is it clear how well known the story was in Ovid's day; it does not appear in the usual mythographers, but Lucian does imply that the story was known in his day in pantomime (*Salt.* 50). Presumably Jupiter, or perhaps more likely the prone-to-jealousy Juno, effected the metamorphosis, but this is absent from Minerva's scene. Instead the emphasis is on the mortals, who are the subject of the only verb *sibi qui tribuere*; and the contrast of their transformation from *mortalia corpora* to *gelidos montes*.

90–2 *altera... bellum* The story of the Pygmaean mother is also told by Antonius Liberalis (*Met.* 16) and Aelian (*NA* 15.29), who name the Pygmy as Oinoe or Gerana. *certamine* makes a direct parallel with Arachne's position, as does her *fatum miserabile*, which picks up ll. 5 and 51.

93–7 *pinxit...rostro* The story is of the Trojan Antigone. **95–6** *nec profuit Iliion illi Laomedonve pater* Antigone's high position does not aid her against the punishment of the god, and it is implied how much less will Arachne benefit, with her humble background (ll. 7–13).

97 *ipsa sibi plaudat crepitante ciconia rostro* The alliteration of the unvoiced stops (p, t, c) bring out an onomatopoeic quality to the line for the ugliness of the noise made by the transformed Antigone. Also ugly is the vanity implied by the self-aggrandisement (*ipsa sibi plaudat*), though the irony is that Minerva could be accused of the same charge, as maker and subject of the main scene in her tapestry (ll. 72–82).

98–100 *Cinyran* We do not need to be quite so pessimistic as other commentators have been in considering the story of Cinyras lost to us. (Bömer, Rosati and Anderson all consider the story obscure and the first two doubt any connection with Cinyras father of Myrrha told in 10.298ff.¹⁴) The transformation of Cinyras' daughters into a temple is a telling detail, and Lucian (*Syr. D.* 9) describes a temple to Aphrodite (Venus) founded by Cinyras in Lebanon. Apollodorus meanwhile (*Bibl.* 3.143) names three daughters of Cinyras—Orsedice,

¹⁴Bömer (1969), p. 34; Rosati (2009), pp. 262–3, nn. 98–100; Anderson (1972), p. 164, n. 98

Laogore and Braesia, but no Myrrha— who suffered the wrath of Aphrodite for cohabiting with foreigners, and ended their life in Egypt. Clearly the geography does not match up, but it seems entirely sensible to suppose that either or both of these stories are related to the Cinyras Ovid refers to.

98 *qui superest solus* is neatly two-sided. Taken with *angulus* it introduces the final element of the tapestry, marking clearly, as has been seen throughout, the composition of the piece. But taken with *Cinyran*, it amplifies and describes the heartache of his grief (*orbum*).

100 *videtur* The last word of the tale of Cinyras reminds the audience that the pictures are narrative artifice.

101–2 *circuit... finem* The olive branches with which Minerva borders her tapestry are only ironically peaceful (*pacalibus*), given the implied aggression of the stories she has depicted, and the physical violence she treats Arachne to after the contest (l. 133). She also gave herself in the main scene a martial aspect (ll. 78–9).

102 *operisque sua facit arbore finem* Like at l. 82, the final line of the line, sentence, and story, brings about a formal close. The artist's intention is strongly felt in the final lines too, since Minerva is subject to *facit* and the olive tree she uses as her final motif is described as *sua*.

103–128: Arachne's tapestry

103–14 Arachne's tapestry launches into a catalogue of sexual outrages committed by the (male) gods. Matching Minerva's *augusta gravitate*, Jupiter is given the dubious honour as the first and lengthiest account. Nine tales tell of his promiscuity, each of which see him, not the mortal, transformed into a base form, usually an animal, to carry out his sexual violations.

As Ovid/Arachne weaves the tales, they are told faster and faster. But, even when they comprise only two words, they all include the name of the female victim and Jupiter's disguise.

103–8 Europa; Ovid has previously told the story in 2.833–75, from Jupiter's perspective. Here, like the ekphrasis of Catullus 64.50ff., Ovid's tells the story from the female perspective.

103 *Maeonis* Another demonym, here describing Arachne; Maeonia was a city in Lydia. The term may remind the audience of Arachne's lowly origins. ***elusam*** The deception theme plays on, as an attack on the gods generally, and Minerva in particular, for their deception of mortals through disguise. ***imagine tauri*** contrasts directly with the *regalis imago* Jupiter is given in Minerva's tapestry (l. 74).

104 *verum taurum, freta vera putares* Ovid is fond of the potential subjunctive to tempt the audience with what is not actually the case. (See also l. 23 *scires a Pallade doctam*, which was the beginning of this whole contest.) And since such emphasis was laid on Minerva's realism, it is striking that an onlooker would think Arachne's figures were real, as this clearly shows her own ability in realistic imagery. But there is something quintessential to Arachne's web that convinces the audience of the true state of affairs—that it is not real.

108–14 *Asterien... Ledam... Nycteida... Tirynthia... Danae... Asopida... Mnesomosen... Deoida* The women are all named, and all in the accusative case, object of Jupiter's desire. The stories are listed in apposition to one another, catalogue-like. Likewise, Jupiter appears in each instance in metamorphosed form: *aquila... olorinis... satyri celatus imagine... Amphitryon... aureus... ignis... pastor... serpens*.

114 *Deoida* the “daughter of Deo” is Proserpine, Deo being an equivalent name, not that uncommon, for Ceres. But like at 118 it may be necessary to refer to Proserpine indirectly, since she was also the daughter of Jupiter, and this rape therefore adds incest to his criminality. *varius* is double-meaning, both referring to the different colours of the snake, and the fickle nature of the god hiding in that form.

115–22 Six stories are attributed to Neptune's philandering, and the narration continues very elliptically. It is not always clear which mythological figures are referred to, partly due to the scant details given, partly to the obscurity of the tales themselves. Obscurity is seen as a positive attribute at 4.53, when one of daughters of Minyas—those other weaver-story-tellers—chooses to tell the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe to her sisters because it is not well known (*haec quoniam vulgaris fabula non est*).

115–8 *te... tu... te* The poet addresses Neptune directly, in a mock hymn of praise.

115–6 *te... posuit* The “Aeolian virgin” (*virgine... Aeolia*) implies the daughter of one of the several Aeoluses in Greco-Roman mythology. Canace, daughter of Aeolus deity of and keeper of the winds, is a likely identification, since she also appears as the writer of Ovid's *Her.* 11. Callimachus also names her and Poseidon as mother and father of Triopas in his *Hymn 6* 96ff..

116–7 *tu... Aloidas* The patronym *Aloidas* indicates Aloeus, but continues the theme of deception, since he was only the supposed father of the giants Otus and Ephialtes, whereas—as is clear from Ovid's telling—Poseidon was their true father. Apollodorus lists Aloeus as the son of—wait for it—Canace and Poseidon (*Bibl.* 1.74), compounding the outrage committed by the god. Unlike the stories about Jupiter, Ovid makes no reference to Neptune's victim, the mother the two giants.

117 aries Bisaltida fallis Another story is touched on with only three words, still addressed to Neptune in the second person, and relying on *visus* to qualify *aries*. This time the god's deception is made explicit with *fallis*, and a patronymic name for the female victim. *Bisaltis*—"daughter of Bisaltes"—identifies Theophane, whom Hyginus describes in fuller detail (*Fab.* 188). Hyginus adds that Theophane, also changed into a ewe, gave birth to the golden-fleeced ram whose fleece was the object of Jason's voyage.

118–9 et te... equum As Anderson notes,¹⁵ Ovid uses a circumlocution rather than naming Demeter outright. But in addition to the alliteration, this develops the pattern in which the female victims becoming increasingly sidelined throughout the catalogue, named either indirectly or not at all. Moreover, by his euphemism Ovid maintains her honour as a goddess, even though she is a victim.

119–20 sensit... sensit... sensit The anaphora is euphemistic, but for all its understatement, the sexual violence is only heightened for its absence.

119–20 sensit... volucris Medusa is identifiable even by a modern audience, but less well known is that she gave birth to Pegasus (*mater equi volucris*; see 4.785 and 4.798ff.).

121–2 omnibus... reddidit Through Ovid's choice of words Arachne clearly references back to the verisimilitude of Minerva's gods (73–4), particularly with the repetition of *faciemque*. But whilst Minerva's skill was in making clear the representations of the gods by means of the common attributes, Arachne is the better artist because, even though they are transformed out of their usual form, the audience still understands which gods are which. *locorum*, in addition to its meaning of geographical place, also has a literary sense of literary passages or sources (see OLD *locus* 23, 24), bringing attention to the erudite skill of Arachne, who clearly knows some very obscure tales. (Ovid is not above congratulating himself too for his own erudition and a job well done.)

122–4 est illic... Issen Arachne's shuttle now comes to Apollo. Only one of his victims is named—*Issen*—but the emphasis on deceptive transformation remains. In turn he was *agrestis imagine*, and he wore *accipitris pennas... terga leonis*, and he became *pastor*. But it is the final verb *luserit* which repeats the deceit underlying all the gods' metamorphoses.

125–6 Liber... creavit The final escapades described are of Liber (Bacchus) and Saturnus, grammatically dependent, like the myths of Apollo on **122 est illic**. That Arachne's tapestry is a sheer list of stories is in stark contrast to Minerva's classically balanced and ordered composition.

127–8 ultima... intertextos The final element of the tapestry is also in direct comparison with Minerva's. Where the goddess bordered her cloth with the

¹⁵Anderson (1972), p.166.

olive, Arachne chooses blooming ivy (*flores hederis*), a garland fit for a winning poet. The plant is interwoven (*intertextos*) into the tapestry, but is she weaving real ivy or just the threads that look like it? The verb is merely *habet*, whose subject is the web, not Arachne herself. But it can't be discerned which is meant, just as one looking at Arachne's finished masterpiece wouldn't be able to tell.¹⁶

129–145: Arachne's metamorphosis

129–30 There is no doubt that Arachne's tapestry wins the contest—**130** *successu*. The anaphora of *non illud... non illud...* precludes even her opponent from criticising the wonderful web, and another usually prejudiced judge, *Livor*, can find no fault either. But Minerva now makes good her earlier depiction of strength (see ll. 78-9) as she becomes the martial *virago*. She will use the *radium* (132) not as an artistic instrument, carved out of the fine boxwood for which Mt. Cytorus was famous, but as a bludgeoning weapon.

131 *caelestia crimina* In apposition to the *pictas... vestes*, this describes the artwork of Arachne that so offends Minerva. But it is double-edged, and is also a comment on the unjust iconoclasm Minerva wreaks upon that artwork.

134–5 *non tulit... guttura* Arachne's attempted suicide is sudden, precipitated by the enjambment into *guttura* which suddenly reveals what the action is. Famed examples of Roman suicide (Cato the Younger, for instance) were celebrated less for escaping immediate suffering, than to maintain one's honour in the face of living in unthinkable debasement. From this perspective, Arachne's act is consistent with her previous character—obstinate to the last and unbowed. But Minerva's response to let her live (**136** *vive quidem... improba*) is the last laugh, and a final insult to the young mortal woman.

137–8 "*lexque... esto!*" The legal vocabulary and the future imperative make Minerva's pronouncement like a judicial condemnation. Certainly it is hard to find any pity in the goddess' demeanour.¹⁷ The legal language allowing a measure of life instead of death also betokens a sentence of exile, and Arachne has been justly considered "a prototype of the exiled poet."¹⁸

139–40 *sucis Hecateidos herbae... medicamine* It is unusual for Minerva

¹⁶Also, Curran sees the words *nexilibus* and *intertextos* as contrasting with the classical *modus* and *finis* of Minerva's tapestry. Curran (1972), p. 84.

¹⁷Brooks Otis in fact sees the opposite as true: "The metamorphosis... is thus a consequence of Arachne's misery, not of her crime (which has already been punished). Actually it is an act of pity, even though of curiously limited pity." Otis, Brooks. *Ovid as an epic poet*. Cambridge: CUP, 1966, p. 146.

¹⁸Harries, Byron. 'The spinner and the poet: Arachne in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*'. In: *PCPS* 36 (1990), pp. 64–82, p. 65.

to be connected with the elements of magic. But the reason may lie in Ovid's continued portrayal of the goddess as vengeful. Consider **141 *defluxere comae***: in *Am.* 1.14 Corinna loses her hair, whose beauty was compared to the delicateness and lightness of spider's thread (ll. 7–8). Moreover in that poem Ovid cautions Corinna not to blame the *cantatae... paelicis herbae*, or the doings of an *anus*, or envious (*invida*) tongues. In contrast, these are exactly what Arachne *can* blame. Minerva is given the role of the old, witchy hag. (For a parallel discussion of the poetic aspects of such metaphors in *Am.* 1.14, see Zetzel, James E. G. 'Poetic Baldness and Its Cure'. In: *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 36 (1996), pp. 73–100.)

141–4 *comae... naris et aures... caput... corpore... digiti pro cruribus... venter* Like other metamorphoses, Ovid focusses on the bodily transformation. (See also Niobe at 6.303–5 and the Lycian farmers at 6.377–81.) Consistent with her artistry in life as a human, Arachne's spider legs are formed from her fingers (*exiles digiti*). Interestingly, Ovid imagines the transformation as shrinking Arachne's head and her body becoming all one big torso, whereas, etymologically speaking, the now archaic word spider in English 'cob' is supposed to be derived from a word meaning 'head'.

145 *stamen et antiquas exercet aranea telas* A rich final line to the tale of Arachne. The technical term for warp *stamen* has now become the spider's thread, just as the webs (*tela*) have now unwound their metaphor and become the literal cobweb of a spider. The cobwebs are *antiquas*: familiar to her, as the craft she has always practised; old, in that she and her descendents have been condemned to always weave by Minerva (**137–8**). Lastly, Arachne's name is itself transformed. It was the Greek word for spider, and now it is translated to the Latin term, etymologically related, and neighbour in sound: *aranea*. Her story and the stories she and Minerva wove were full of names, especially Greek names, metonymically and euphemistically referring to various women. Now she is known by a new metonym—the spider itself recalls the myth of Arachne.

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