

**From *Calathos* to *Carmen*: Metapoetics in the Story of the Daughters of Minyas
(Ovid *Metamorphoses* 4)**

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Introduction

In this chapter, I will revisit two passages from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, both of which are often read as using weaving as a metaphor for Ovid's own writing. I am interested in potential influences of elegiac verse on Ovid's story of the stubborn daughters of Minyas, and will consider the different methods by which Ovid dramatises the conflict between welcoming of Bacchus as a new god and the traditional worship of Minerva in this story.¹

Ovid's description of the Minyides is very different from that of the more famous weaving contest between the mortal Arachne and Minerva later in the *Metamorphoses* (Ov. *Met.* 6.1-145). In the sixth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Arachne and Minerva set up their looms and prepare in the same way, with an initial emphasis on the twin looms and later, the description of one loom as well as how the contestants perform the same actions in tandem (Ov. *Met.* 6.53-69):

*haud mora, constituunt diuersis partibus ambae
et gracili geminas intendunt stamine telas;
tela iugo uincta est, stamen secernit harundo,
inseritur medium radiis subtemen acutis,
quod digiti expediunt, atque inter stamina ductum
percusso pauunt insecti pectine dentes.
utraque festinant cinctaeque ad pectora uestes
bracchia docta mouent, studio fallente laborem.
illic et Tyrium quae purpura sensit aenum
texitur et tenues parui discriminis umbrae,
[...]
illic et lentum filis immittitur aurum
et uetus in tela deducitur argumentum.* (Ov. *Met.* 6.53-69)

They both set up the looms in different places without delay and they stretch the fine warp upon them. The web is bound upon the beam, the reed separates the threads of the warp, the woof is threaded through them by the sharp rods which their busy fingers ply, and when shot through the threads of the warp, the notched teeth of the hammering slay tap it into place. They speed on the work with their mantles close girt about their breasts and move back and forth their well-trained hands, their eager zeal beguiling their toil. There are inwoven the purple threads dyed in Tyrian kettles, and lighter colours insensibly shading off from these. [...] There, too, they weave in pliant threads of gold, and trace in the weft some ancient tale.

We might say that in the Arachne episode as a whole, the focus is on the artistic composition, on the choices made by two artists using the same tools. The practicalities of weaving are less

¹ Translations from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are based on Miller's translation in Goold 1999, with some adaptations. Other translations are my own. For the Latin text of the *Metamorphoses*, I use the OCT of Tarrant 2004.

important, too, as both the image by Minerva and that by Arachne are presented to the audience as finished works of art (Ov. *Met.* 6.70-128). This is supported through verbal reminiscences of other *ekphrases*, for instance that of Thetis' coverlet in Cat. 64, or that of Aeneas' shield in Verg. *Aen.* 8.² This means, as Oliensis has shown, that the difference between them is developed only through the images they create within a given medium.³ The differences between the two designs have often been read as outlining two different ways of writing epic poetry – epic poetry with different artistic programmes, but epic poetry nonetheless.⁴

When weaving is used in a metapoetic context earlier in the *Metamorphoses*, this is not yet the case. To my mind, Ovid uses the story of the daughters of Minyas and their weaving to consider not so much the product created as the tools used for the composition of the *Metamorphoses*. Throughout this episode, Ovid emphasises the sequence and different aspects of wool work (roving, spinning and weaving, *Met.* 4.34f; spinning, 36 and 54; passing the weft through the loom, 275).⁵ The reader is prompted to consider individual elements of a weaver's work as the sisters work and tell their tales, and later as the transformation of the sisters into bats is first heralded by the metamorphosis of their looms into vines and plants: loom, weft, yarn, and warp change in turn.⁶ The creation of fabric, stressed through the large incidence of technical vocabulary in the episode,⁷ itself implies the combination of different elements into a new, coherent whole, and the most recent critical commentary on the episode points to Ovid's use of the metapoetically significant phrase *leni pollice deducens* (drawing out the thread with light thumb, 4.36), connected to the programmatic *carmen deductum* (lit. a drawn-out song), as a crucial starting point for such readings.⁸ The position of the Minyides as the first human internal narrators of the *Metamorphoses* might be sufficient to suggest that their weaving (and their stories) should indeed be taken to illustrate the methods or aims of the external author or the text as a whole.⁹ This allows the work of the Minyides to function as a parallel for Ovid's *Metamorphoses* at large, incorporating stylistic features, topics and themes from different literary genres¹⁰ into an innovative, new type of epic.

I would like to add to the already extensive discussion of metapoetics in this passage by suggesting that Ovid not only uses the Minyides to sign-post his willingness to engage with other genres, but that he has also included within this episode a concrete example of one of the many ways in which this happens across the *Metamorphoses*. My concern, however, is not initially with the adoption of elegiac themes in the sisters' stories, nor with their use of elegiac

² Harries 1990, 65-69. See also the chapter by C. Alfaro in this volume on Cat. 64.

³ Oliensis 2004, 293.

⁴ E.g. Leach 1974, 103-104.

⁵ Rosati 1999, 243. Ov. *Met.* 4.33-37 are cited in full below; spinning in 4.54 is described as the wool following the spinner's thread (*lana sua fila sequente*). In 4.54, Ovid also uses the verb *orior*, connected to the setting up of the loom, see n. 7 below. Ov. *Met.* 4.275 reads *quae radio stantis percurrens stamina telae* (as she [Alcithoe] ran through the warp of the standing loom with a rod. *Radius* is often translated as 'shuttle' (cf. *OLD* s.v. *radius* 3b) but probably rather refers to an elongated, rod-like narrow implement put to diverse uses. Cf. Ov. *Met.* 6.56 (cited above) and *ThLL* s.v. *radius* II C 3.

⁶ Ov. *Met.* 4.394-398 with the following stages: *telae* (weft, 394), *uestis* (cloth, 395), *fila* (threads, 396), *stamen* (warp, 397). Cf. Anderson 1997, 457.

⁷ Heath 2011, 89-93 offers a most valuable discussion of the high incidence of technical vocabulary and its metapoetic connotations, indicating also the often-overlooked technical meaning of *orsa est* (she began, *Met.* 4.54; 167), referencing the setting up of a loom, which closely links the Minyides' storytelling with their weaving. Cf. also Rosati 1999, 244-245.

⁸ The phrase alludes to the proem's promise of a *carmen deductum*, which is commonly held to indicate the text's commitment to Callimachean aesthetics. Cf. e.g. Barchiesi and Rosati 2007, 252; Jouteur 2001, 71; Myers 1994, 79-80, Leach 1974; Rosati 2002, 275f, and, in passing, Liveley 2011, 56. On the proem specifically, Wheeler 1999, 8-30.

⁹ Barchiesi and Rosati 2007, 242-243; Heath 2011, 86-88; Janan 1994, 427; Rosati 1999.

¹⁰ See below for allusions to and interaction with erotic elegy. Keith 2002, 256-263 highlights the interactions with tragedy in the Minyides episode.

vocabulary. Instead, I am interested in stylistic features, supported by but not inherently dependent on the medium of elegiac verse or metre. One such stylistic convention found in elegy is what I will loosely call stichic organisation of content,¹¹ which to my mind is present in Ov. *Met.* 4.32-41.

Use of the Elegiac Distich

I need to preface the discussion of the transference of such stylistic features to the *Metamorphoses* and the detailed analysis of the Minyeides episode with a few comments on their use in erotic elegy. I am particularly interested in two features of elegiac verse: first, the often-observed tendency of the elegiac distich to prompt the containment of syntactical units within each distich,¹² which places additional emphasis on the opposition between the metrically contrasting hexameter and pentameter lines, and secondly, the employment of metrical *aptum* within the elegiac distich. The latter merits consideration in some detail.

Because of the alternation of hexameter and pentameter lines in elegiac verse, the elegiac distich affords authors the opportunity to create and utilise tensions arising from expectations of content based on metrical *aptum*. It has been suggested that content in elegy may be organised according to a principle where different content is presented in different lines, agreeing with (or breaking) metrical *aptum*.¹³ For example, erotic elegy may use such differences between hexameter and pentameter content to underscore the specific perspective of the elegiac lover: This is the case when Penelope describes rumours from Troy in Ov. *Epist.* 1.13-22, where the hexameter lines recount events familiar from Homer but the pentameter lines detail Penelope's emotional reaction.¹⁴ Propertius 2.22a.29-34 provides another example, which manipulates, rather than accepts outright, the notion that certain content should be presented in a particular metre or in a particular part of the elegiac distich. Propertius' playful allusions to notions of metrical *aptum* in this passage shows that the ancient reader could be expected to recognise and appreciate this type of stichic organisation of content in a range of different realisations. The Propertian narrator compares his own prowess in lovemaking with the powers of Hector and Achilles in warfare, but ostensibly introduces the mythological *exempla* to the elegiac sphere as lovers as well as soldiers: their valour was not diminished by their prowess as lovers.¹⁵

*quid? cum e complexu Briseidos iret Achilles,
 num fugere minus Thessala tela Phryges?
 quid? ferus Andromachae lecto cum surgeret Hector,
 bella Mycenaeae non timuere rates?
 ille uel hic classis poterant uel perdere muros:
 hic ego Pelides, hic ferus Hector ego.* (Prop. 2.22a.29-34)

Did the Trojans flee any less before the spears of Thessaly because Achilles came from the embrace of Briseis? Did the fleet from Mycenae fear the war any less because the ferocious Hector rose from Andromache's bed? The former could destroy navies, the latter city walls: here, I shall be Achilles, here, I shall be the ferocious Hector.

¹¹ Cf. Morgan 2012, 205, stressing the literary effects of continual manipulation and transgression of such literary or indeed metrical conventions.

¹² Barsby 1973; Heinze 1919, 75-76; Kenney and Clausen 1982, 455; Morgan 2010, 347; Morgan 2012, 207.

¹³ Jacobson 1974, 252; Spoth 1992, 38-39; Barchiesi 1997, 21-23; Miller 1997; Morgan 2000; Morgan 2010; Morgan 2012. For the importance of alternation between perspectives, cf. also Sharrock 1990.

¹⁴ Jacobson 1974; Spoth 1992, 38.

¹⁵ Whitaker 1983, 117-118, Neumeister 1983, 70. Cf. also Dué 2002, 110-111.

The metre reinforces the impression that love and war are intertwined as the metrical *aptum* is overturned: the traditionally heroic hexameters describe lovers arising from the beds of their beloveds, the soft pentameters their performance as warriors.¹⁶ The narrator proceeds to place the heroes of old in a sphere distinctly different from his own, describing first their military tasks of overthrowing city walls and naval forces in a hexameter line (2.22a.33), but in the pentameter line (2.22a.34), he locates his own intention to emulate their prowess exclusively within the area of elegiac love through the emphasis placed on the anaphor of *hic ego...* (here, I...). Lines 33 and 34 restore the metrical *aptum* and the division of *militia* (warfare) and *amor* (love), thus ensuring the effectiveness of the metaphor of *militia amoris* (lover's warfare).

I have highlighted examples from erotic elegy. However, when considering the potential influence of elegiac conventions on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, it is helpful to bear in mind that the type of content organisation outlined in the two instances above is by no means exclusively connected with erotic elegy; indeed, a recent discussion by Llewelyn Morgan cites further examples from more broadly themed works, such as Propertius' fourth book, Ovid's *Fasti*, and the *Corpus Tibullianum*.¹⁷

Thus far, my concern has been with content organised in a pattern, which alternates in agreement with the distinct parts of the elegiac distich. The final half of this paper will suggest that this pattern has exercised at least some influence on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and that, although the pattern is realised in the *Metamorphoses* without the motivation or support of explicit metrical alternation, it is available to Ovid as one of many ways in which he might engage with elegiac intertexts within the epic framework of the *Metamorphoses*. Similar to the function of such stichic content organisation in elegiac verse, a stichic pattern is employed in *Met.* 4.32-41 in order to emphasise differences between two opposing value systems. We return now to Ovid's narrative of the daughters of Minyas, who stubbornly reject Bacchus in favour of their old goddess, Minerva.

Stylistic Patterns in Ovid's Tale of the Daughters of Minyas

In telling the story of the daughters of Minyas in *Met.* 4 immediately after the cautionary tale of Pentheus in *Met.* 3, Ovid creates a tension between two competing ways of life and worship. He varies the description of the Minyeides by adapting a stichic pattern, which expresses positive and negative value judgements on their behaviour in alternate lines in *Met.* 4.32-38. This pattern is effective in making the reader consider the situation of the Minyeides more carefully despite a strong initial condemnation of their impiety, which I will indicate presently, and the reader's own knowledge of the eventual punishment of the sisters by Bacchus. The first lines on the Minyeides point clearly to their impiety:

*at non Alcithoe Minyeias orgia censet
accipienda dei, sed adhuc temeraria Bacchum
progeniem negat esse Ionis sociasque sorores
impietatis habet. [...]* (Ov. *Met.* 4.1-4)

But not Minyas' daughter Alcithoe; she will not have the god's holy revels admitted; nay, so bold is she that she denies Bacchus to be Jove's son! And her sisters are with her in the impious deed.

¹⁶ Ovid refers repeatedly to the rules of metrical *aptum*, cf. programatically in *Am.* 1.1.17-28; *Rem.* 371-386.

¹⁷ Morgan 2012, 212-215.

The alliteration of *at* (but) and *Alcithoe* (1) is combined with an emphasised contrastive conjunction (*at*)¹⁸ in order to highlight Alcithoe and her sisters' deviation from the behaviour expected of them.¹⁹ Subsequently, both *adhuc temeraria* (so bold, 2) and *impietas* (impious deed, 4) indicate that the subsequent punishment of the sisters is justified. Underlining this, a similar phrase recurs in 4.389 just prior to the transformation of the sisters and the conclusion of their tale.²⁰ Thus, obvious expressions of condemnation bracket the story of the transformation of the Minyeides, which in turn brackets the stories presented by the sisters themselves:

*finis erat dictis, et adhuc Minyeia proles
urget opus spernitque deum festumque profanat [...]* (Ov. *Met.* 4.389f)

There was an end to her story; but still did the offspring of Minyas ply their tasks, despising the god and profaning his holy day [...].

The two passages are linked not only through the return to the framing situation but also through the placement of *adhuc* (still) in the same position in both lines. Furthermore, common to both framing passages is the reference to ancestry and familial ties across generations. Alcithoe questions Bacchus' divine ancestry at the opening of the book (2f), and the sisters together are described as *proles* (offspring) of Minyas in 389.²¹ Ovid's ring composition supports the teleological drive of the overarching narrative of the emerging Bacchus worship by serving to emphasise the condemnation of the sisters. The references to continuity of family lines, which thus bracket the Minyeides episode, further contribute to this emphasis.

However, the intervening passage gradually puts forward a more nuanced view of the daughters of Minyas. In 4.5 the focus shifts to the Theban women, then to their performance of Bacchus' rites. Newlands has shown that there are unsettling hints in Ovid's description of the Theban women. They are described as *matresque nurusque* (mothers and young wives, 4.9) immediately before abandoning the tasks evoked by these value-laden words in order to take up the thyrsus-staff and the *tympanum*.²² Ovid, however, does not exploit this uneasiness at once. From 4.11 through to 4.31 Ovid illustrates the Theban acceptance of Bacchus by alluding to, and finally adopting fully, the form of invocation and hymn to the god (4.18-31).²³ Only when Ovid returns to description of the Minyeides themselves in *Met.* 4.32-38 does he address fully the ambiguity of the moral and religious issues inherent in such a ready acceptance of the new god.

In the following, I will suggest that the sense of ambiguity surrounding the Minyeides' actions (whether they illustrate piety or impiety) is heightened by a stichic pattern, which relies on content division. Several comments are made below on metrical features, which place further emphasis on particular aspects of the content. Importantly, this is not intended to suggest that there are any purely metrical similarities with elegiac verse. Instead, the pattern of content organisation here consists of a pronounced alternation between negative and positive modes of describing the Minyeides present in the narrative of 4.33-37:

¹⁸ Bömer 1976, 14.

¹⁹ Barchiesi and Rosati 2007, 244-245.

²⁰ But cf. Leach 1974, 111, noting that the punishment imposed on the Minyeides in Ovid's version is less harsh than those exacted in parallel versions of Nicander and Aelian. Cf. Ael. *VH* 3.42 and Nic. 55.

²¹ With the exception of the patronymicon *Minyeides*, occurring in Ov. *Met.* 4.32 (cf. Anderson 1997, 410 and Barchiesi and Rosati 2007, 245), Ovid consistently refers to the Minyeides as *sorores* throughout the intervening passage. This might serve to highlight their affinity and loyalty to Minerva by placing them in a context of female social networks. But cf. also Nikolopoulos 2004, 146-147, suggesting that the Minyeides through their actions 'align themselves with a particular masculine construction of the feminine ideal'.

²² Newlands 1986, 147.

²³ Bömer 1976, 16; Danielewicz 1990; Anderson 1997, 411.

*Placatus mitisque' rogant Ismenides 'adsis',
 iussaque sacra colunt; solae Minyeides intus
 intempestiua turbantes festa Minerva
 aut ducunt lanas aut stamina pollice uersant
 aut haerent telae famulasque laboribus urgent.
 E quibus una leui deducens pollice filum
 'dum cessant aliae commentaque sacra frequentant,
 nos quoque, quas Pallas, melior dea, detinet' inquit (Ov. Met. 33-37)*

'Oh, be thou with us, merciful and mild!' the Theban women cry; and perform the sacred rites as the priest bids them. The daughters of Minyas alone stay within, marring the festival by toiling out of time, plying their household tasks, either spinning wool, or thumbing the turning threads, or hang on to the loom, and press their maidens with work. Then one of them, drawing out the thread the while with light thumb, says: 'While the other women are deserting their tasks and thronging this so-called festival, let us also, whom Pallas, a truer goddess, keeps [...]

While on the whole the alternation between positive and negative descriptions of the Minyeides' situation is organised in a stichic pattern, the first sense unit focussed on the Minyeides does contain an enjambment; it commences in 4.32 and ends in 4.33: *solae Minyeides intus / intempestiua turbantes festa Minerva* [...] (the daughters of Minyas alone stay within, marring the festival by toiling out of time [...]). The words associated with the Minyeides in 33 are exclusively negative. First, the Minyeides' isolation is illustrated through the metre by the placement of *solae* (alone) after the penthemimeral caesura in 32, which in terms of word placement separates the sisters from the women of Thebes, the subject of the immediately preceding *colunt* (perform).²⁴ This isolation and their insistence on their craft are described in negative terms, with the adjective *intempestiua* (out of time) emphasised both due to its initial position in the line and due to the ensuing penthemimeral caesura in 33. Metrical parallels also suggest condemnation of the sisters: Bömer notes that series of spondees such as *intempestiua turbantes* commonly occur in passages describing doubt and deliberation.²⁵ As a result, the Minyeides appear in stark contrast to the women of Thebes who attend to the rites ordered, *iussaque sacra colunt* (they perform the sacred rites as the priest bids them), in the first half of 4.32. There, the word order suggests that the Theban women follow a logical progression from the god's demand to their fulfilment. The reader might expect Bacchus' vengeance on the Minyeides to follow swiftly. Instead, line 34 defers the reader's condemnation of the Minyeides; the sense of pause is strengthened by the spondees prevalent in the first half of the line: *aut ducunt lanas aut stamina pollice uersant* (either spinning wool, or thumbing the turning threads). As the rhythm of the line shifts to dactyls in the second half of the line, it comes to reflect the pattern of the women's work: the slow and careful extending of the wool, followed by the quick turning of the thread and the spindle.²⁶ Far from condemning the sisters, the line connects them to ideal paradigms of matronly virtue.²⁷

²⁴ Barchiesi and Rosati 2007, 251 suggests that Ov. *Met.* 4.31-32 re-establish the opposition between the Theban women and the Minyeides first seen in Ov. *Met.* 3.773 and Ov. *Met.* 4.1.

²⁵ Bömer 1976, 265 and cf. Ov. *Met.* 5.171.

²⁶ Such mimicking of textile working processes through metre and sound-play occurs surprisingly often in Latin poetry. For example, when used in hexameter verse to mean 'with the thumb' in the context of spinning, the word *pollice* is consistently placed in the fifth foot dactyl – the most reliably fast-moving part of the line – in order to illustrate the speed of the spinner's hand motion as she twists the spindle. When used in other contexts, the placement of *pollice* across the hexameter verse is considerably more varied (e.g. Ov. *Met.* 11.17 on music; Prud. *Apoth.* 1026 on pottery). This applies to hexameter texts from the Republic through to Late Antiquity.

²⁷ For wool work as a paradigmatic activity, cf. Barchiesi and Rosati 2007; Bömer 1976, 25-26.

The pattern of alternation between praise and condemnation of the Minyides emerges fully when Ovid returns to describing the sisters in negative terms in 4.35. Here, the use of *haero* (hang on to) and *urgeo* (press) give a strong negative colour to the Minyides' work, as both words imply resistance.²⁸ Both words are emphasised by their position in the hexameter. The sisters' over-persistence on their craft, and, through the mention of the harassed slaves, its detrimental effect on others emerges clearly.²⁹

Line 36 continues the pattern of alternation, presenting the reader once more with the image of the Minyides as quietly working their wool in the fashion of ideal *matronae*. Moreover, here a sense of community amongst the sisters is implied by *e quibus una* (one of them). In this line, the verse once more runs lightly, perhaps suggestive of the women's pleasure and light-handedness at their work, thus reinforcing their positive portrayal.³⁰

The pattern of alternation is sustained in line 37. While the unnamed daughter of Minyas reproaches the women of Thebes for lacking devotion to duty,³¹ she also singles out herself and her sisters as non-participants in the religious ritual celebrated by the others. The isolation first made apparent through *solae* (alone, 4.32) implicitly recurs in this line, reminding the reader of the condemnation of the Minyides initially suggested in 4.1-4.

Line 38 describes the Minyides as faithful to their goddess alone and, in contrast to line 37, provides a positive motivation for their behaviour. However, negative undertones intrude: first, through *detinet* (keeps) with a semantic reach from the innocuous to the negative.³² Similarly, while the internal speaker surely intends *melior dea* (a truer goddess) as praise of Minerva, the comparative firmly establishes Minerva and Bacchus as contestants,³³ bringing to mind of stories of Minerva not taking lightly challenges to her superiority, a topic to be exemplified by Arachne in *Met.* 6.³⁴ Again, the text forebodes the tragic outcome for Minerva's loyal followers here.

As the focus shifts from the description of the sisters and their impending misfortune to the story-telling situation in 4.39, the alternating pattern seen in lines 33-38 is abandoned. However, in the following lines the text retrospectively reinforces the reader's awareness of its presence by drawing attention specifically to modes of discourse: The reader's interest in the tales told by the sisters is built up gradually through a series of lines establishing the premise of their narration (4.39-41), and a tantalising *praeteritio* of rejected stories (4.42-54) before the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe is introduced in 4.55. Interestingly, lines 4.39-41 may be understood metapoetically as discussing differing types of discourse:

²⁸ On the connotations of *haero* (hang on to), Barchiesi and Rosati 2007, 252, who emphasise the voluntary seclusion of the sisters indicated through *intus* (within, 32). Bömer 1976, 27, also notes the similarities with *Ov. Met.* 4.390 (quoted above), which further strengthens the negative associations of *urgeo* (press) here. Cf. also *TbLL* s.v. *haero* 1 B; *OLD* s.v. *urgeo*.

²⁹ Cf. also Barchiesi and Rosati 2007, 252, suggesting an opposition between the Minyides' treatment of their servants and the egalitarian character of the Bacchus worship described in *Ov. Met.* 4.4-9.

³⁰ The metapoetic associations of *leni pollice* (light thumb, 37) are repeatedly noted, connecting the Minyides to Callimachean or elegiac aesthetics, cf. Barchiesi and Rosati 2007, 252; Jouteur 2001, 71; Myers 1994, 79-80, and, in passing, Liveley 2011, 56.

³¹ The reproach is heightened by her phrasing: *cesso* (to desert) may imply the abandonment of an appointed task (cf. *TbLL* s.v. *cesso* 1; Bömer 1976, 27, thus connecting to the problematic description of the Theban women as *matres nurusque* (mothers and young wives) in *Met.* 4.9. Furthermore, though it is often used with *sacra* (e.g. *Ov. Met.* 3.581; 691; 732; 10.436), *frequentato* (to throng) may refer to the movements of an unorganised throng (cf. *TbLL* s.v. *frequentato* D and *Ov. Fast.* 3.251; *Sil.* 13.783; *Tac. Ann.* 5.10).

³² Cf. *TbLL* s.v. *detineo* A and B respectively. Bömer 1976, 27, notes *detinet* (keeps) as unpoetic.

³³ But cf. also Barchiesi and Rosati 2007, 253.

³⁴ Cf. also Newlands 1986, 150f.

*'utile opus manuum uario sermone leuemus
perque uices aliquid, quod tempora longa uideri
non sinat, in medium uacuas referamus in aures.'* (Ov. *Met.* 4.39-41)

[let us also] lighten with various talk the serviceable work of our hands, and take turns to bring something, meanwhile, to ears unoccupied, so as to beguile the time.

Exploration of the metapoetic allusions of this passage will retrospectively support the presence of an alternating pattern borrowed from elegy in the description of the Minyides. It furthermore places the stories the sisters tell in an elegiac context. It is heralded by the phrase *leni pollice* (with light thumb) in 4.36, which – as mentioned – alludes to Callimachean aesthetic preferences.³⁵ The use of *leuemus* (lighten) in 4.39 might be taken as a reference to epic discourse being lightened to suit the *Musa leuis* (light-hearted Muse) of elegiac verse³⁶ in correspondence with the elegiac themes developed in the stories told by the Minyides.³⁷ The *utile opus* (serviceable work, 41), which the sisters wish to alleviate through their story telling, is on one level their weaving. On another, the phrase references the didactic thrust of epic poetry,³⁸ which is to be broken up by *uario sermone* (various talk), referring to a varied discourse. This phrase is often used neutrally to refer to a discussion or narrative combining many different topics,³⁹ but in a stricter, technical sense, it is also applicable to elegiac verse.⁴⁰ The emphasis on taking turns (*per uices* (take turns) in 4.40) supports this interpretation.⁴¹ Thus, the sustained pattern of alternation in lines 4.32-38 is preceded by the intrusion of a different form into the epic narrative through the hymn to Bacchus (4.18-31), and succeeded by allusions to a different form or discourse in 4.39-41, both features, which draw the reader's attention to Ovid's manipulation of epic discourse.

Through its allusions to elegiac organisation of content, the passage on the Minyides draws the reader's attention to Ovid's play with the conventions of the elegiac genre. These factors combine to make the daughters of Minyas better placed as internal narrators of tales with strong elegiac associations, some of which have already been explored in scholarship.⁴² Moreover, several recent readings of their narratives emphasise the presence of paradox and contradiction in the tales told.⁴³ The sequence of stichic alternation between extremes in *Met.* 4.33-38 heightens the reader's perception of such dichotomies. More importantly, the alternating structure of 4.33-

³⁵ Barchiesi and Rosati 2007, 252.

³⁶ Cf. Prop. 2.12.22.

³⁷ Readings highlighting elegiac elements in the Minyides' tales include Due 1974, 126-127; Keith 2001; Perraud 1983; Robinson 1999, 222.

³⁸ Cf. *TbLL* s.v. *opus* 1.IV for the suggestion that *opus* (work) commonly refers to epic. But cf. also *TbLL* s.v. *opus* 1.IV.B.2 for references to a variety of genres.

³⁹ Barchiesi and Rosati 2007, but cf. Anderson 1997, 415, who relates it to the Alexandrian demand for novelty and variety.

⁴⁰ Admittedly, few metapoetic associations can be detected in Ovid's use of *sermo* (talk) elsewhere. Exchanges between lovers in Ovid's amatory works are sometimes loosely described as *sermo*, e.g. Ov. *Am.* 2.5.19; *Ars* 1.467; 569; 3.480. More helpful is in Verg. *Aen.* 1.748f: *nec non et uario noctem sermone traherat / infelix Dido longumque bibebat amorem*. This passage introduces a similar intrusion of elegiac themes in epic. Jouteur 2001, 72 understands *uario sermone* as referring not to elegiac verse itself but to Ovid's combination of elegiac themes and epic form in the tales subsequently told by the Minyides.

⁴¹ I also wonder whether the placement of the (syntactically unconnected) words *in medium uacuas* (4.41) on either side of the penthemimeral caesura might not be suggestive of the emptiness or pause arising from the strong diaeresis of the elegiac pentameter line in precisely this position.

⁴² Cf. Due 1974, 126-127; Keith 2001; Perraud 1983; Robinson 1999, 222; Knox 1986, 35-37.

⁴³ Janan 1994, focusses on the contradiction between female desire and normative society; Shorrock 2003, on diverging versions of the story simultaneously accommodated through its metaphors. Cf. also Leach 1974, 110 for the stories told by the Minyides as illustrating both 'a vicarious experience of passion and a justification of withdrawal'.

38 mirrors the ambiguity with which Ovid describes Bacchus-worship in *Met.* 3 and 4,⁴⁴ and offers the possibility to understand the Minyeides as victims undeserving of the punishment described in *Met.* 4.389-415. The allusions to a form of alternation between options familiar to his readership from elegy allow Ovid to ‘pause’ temporarily the teleological drive of his epic verse and examine in detail their specific situation.

Conclusions

To conclude: we have seen that Ovid in his story of the Minyeides uses tools associated not only with metapoetic discourse generally but specifically with other literary genres. I hope that I have added to the ongoing discussion of the inclusion and transformation of non-epic elements in the *Metamorphoses* and how they contribute to Ovid’s shaping of his own, post-Vergilian, epic. Comparing the story of the Minyeides to that of Arachne, the Minyeides episode in my reading prompts a discussion of formal features of literary genres and the potential transferability of such features to the new text. The Arachne episode, with its twin looms, is concerned with the artistic disposition of a material within a given framework, that is, with the shaping of content rather than the selection of form. By considering not only the content but the sequence of Ovid’s descriptions of weaving women, we can extend our understanding not only of individual passages and their potential interpretations, but also of how Ovid gradually expands on the tantalising statements from the proem, where the combination of epic themes with the aesthetics of the elegiac *carmen deductum* is first suggested. It is only when both episodes are considered together that we trace the full process of the weaving of the *Metamorphoses*, from *calathos* to *carmen*.

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⁴⁴ For which cf. Newlands 1986, 147; 150-151 and, in passing, Leach 1974, 107-108.

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