

## The Metamorphosis of Callimachus: Poetic Program(s) in *Met.* 5.250-678

Most scholars agree that Ovid's depiction of the contest between the Muses and Pierides in *Metamorphoses* 5 is in some way a metaliterary examination of competing poetic programs. What stance each side represents and how their poetic product should be viewed remains in dispute. For example, Calliope's song can and has been interpreted as everything from long-winded, poor poetry (Anderson 1997) or a jealous, tyrannical defense of her version of the truth (Johnson 2008) to a skillful adaptation of her material to the taste of the internal audience (Zissos 1999). Stephen Hinds (1987) made important strides in this discussion by analyzing how Ovid plays with the epic and elegiac genres here and in the *Fasti*. In this paper I analyze the Pierides' and Muses' speeches in terms of their use of Callimachean or anti-Callimachean principles, not as markers of genre but of poetic aesthetics within the epic genre. Focusing especially on lines 250-345, I examine how each group receives the other's poetry, particularly where their poetics shift or become ambiguous. Ultimately I argue that we should move away from defining either group as followers of the opposing "grand" and "Callimachean" schools of epic composition, and instead look at how they combine and adapt these two poetic programs. This, in turn, sheds light on Ovid's own poetics throughout the *Metamorphoses*.

The poetic competition takes place on Mt. Helicon, a place with well-known literary associations already exploited by Hellenistic poets signaling their relationship with Hesiod. Ovid plays up the Hesiodic element of the place; the Pierides' address to the Muses at 308-9 even alludes to the *Theogony* and indicates that Ovid is depicting Hesiod's Muses (*desinite indoctum vana dulcedine vulgus fallere*; cf. Hes. *Theog.* 27-8). The Pierides' speech reveals not only that they are excessively arrogant about their art, but also ignorant about their own poetic program. This ambiguity continues in their song: they seem mostly to be following the tradition of weighty epic, yet Alexandrian touches are scattered here and there as they attempt to subvert the Hesiodic Muses. For instance, their subject matter, the Gigantomachy, marks their poetics as anti-Callimachean, but they attempt to give a Hellenistic sort of Gigantomachy by giving a series of learned *aetia*. Furthermore, they appear to be rewriting the *Theogony*, thereby cleverly subverting the poetry of their competitors (Hesiod's Muses). Calliope's proem and song are equally ambiguous, containing both epic and Callimachean features.

Thus, both the Pierides and the Muses combine features of the two poetic styles. Rather than try to force each into a particular camp, I suggest we should read this ambiguity and multiplicity of possible readings as deliberate on Ovid's part. Both songs exemplify the way in which Ovid, rather than opposing the *deductum carmen* and *perpetuum carmen*, combines the two into a seamless whole. The difference is that the Muses do it correctly, the Pierides badly. Unlike the Pierides, Calliope is able to create a seamless fusion of elements of both poetic programs, using each where they fit her material. While the Pierides twist the literary tradition with a lack of subtlety and refinement, the Muse is able to absorb and transform it into something that is new, yet still retains qualities of her sources in an appropriate way. Likewise, Ovid's work incorporates all the defining features of weighty epic (battles, gods, heroes, etc.) in many thousands of lines, but maintains a finely spun style. The two are no longer at odds with each other, which frees the poet to fit the style to the material in each story. By forcing

Callimachean aesthetics to undergo their own metamorphosis, Ovid has created his own new form of epic.

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