

"White from Black and Black from White":

The Chione Myth in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 11.301-327

The story of the princess Chione in Book 11 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is not usually discussed among the work's most resonant myths. However, with its themes of divinely-instigated rape, retaliation from divinities for damaged egos, and the loss of speech, Chione fits perfectly as a vessel for Ovid's goals as an author. In this paper, I examine Ovid's telling of the Chione myth in the context of the myth's historical development, from the earliest Greek sources mentioning it to Roman writers drawing from Ovid himself. Ovid alters the story from these Greek sources primarily by changing the protagonist from a woman named Philonis, for whom the circumstances of her twins' birth is not concretely established as consensual or nonconsensual. Considering a commentarial examination of Ovid's passage, textual analysis of the myth's various tellings, and the etymologies of the protagonist's two names, I argue that Ovid changes the name and parts of the plot in order to emphasize the tale as one not of consensuality or ambiguity, but of rape. Ovid's telling sets itself apart from those before and after it by establishing rape as a form of moral and spiritual metamorphosis, turning the pure princess to a defiled mother and leading to her death at the hand of the goddess Diana.

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CAMWS Southern Section Meeting 2014

Metamorphoses 11.301-327 (Latin Text)

nata erat huic Chione, quae dotatissima forma
mille procos habuit, bis septem nubilis annis.
forte revertentes Phoebus Maiaque creatus,
ille suis Delphis, hic vertice Cyllenaeo,
305 videre hanc pariter, pariter traxere colorem.
spem veneris differt in tempora noctis Apollo;
non fert ille moras virgaque movente soporem
virginis os tangit: tactu iacet illa potenti
vimque dei patitur; nox caelum sparserat astris:
310 Phoebus anum simulat praereptaque gaudia sumit.
ut sua maturus conplevit tempora venter,
alipedis de stirpe dei versuta propago
nascitur Autolycus furtum ingeniosus ad omne,
candida de nigris et de candentibus atra
315 qui facere adsuerat, patriae non degener artis;
nascitur e Phoebō (namque est enixa gemellos)
carmine vocali clarus citharaque Philammon.
quid peperisse duos et dis placuisse duobus
et forti genitore et progenitore nitenti
320 esse satam prodest? an obest quoque gloria multis?
obfuit huic certe! quae se praeferre Dianae
sustinuit faciemque deae culpavit, at illi

ira ferox mota est "factis" que "placebimus" inquit.

nec mora, curvavit cornu nervoque sagittam

325 inpulit et meritam traiecit harundine linguam.

lingua tacet, nec vox temptataque verba sequuntur,

conantemque loqui cum sanguine vita reliquit;

Metamorphoses 11.301-327 (English Translation)

This man had a daughter Chione who, most endowed with beauty,
had a thousand suitors, marriageable at fourteen.

By chance Phoebus and the one born from Maia, turning back,
the former from his Delphi, the latter from the Cyllenian summit,
saw this girl together, took on a complexion together.

Apollo put off his hope of sex into the time of night;
the other cannot bear delays, and with a wand provoking deep sleep
he touches the face of the virgin: from the powerful touch she lies down
and suffers the force of the god; the night had strewn the sky with stars:

Phoebus pretends to be an old woman and takes up his forestalled delights.

As her ripe womb completed its time,
the cunning offspring from the stock of the wing-footed god
is born, Autolycus, suited for all trickery,
who was used to making
white from black and black from white, not unworthy of his father's craft;
born from Phoebus (for she gave birth to twins) is
Philammon, famous for his melodious song and lyre.

Why, is it useful to be the offspring
from both a strong father and brilliant ancestor,
to have begotten two and to have pleased two gods? Or does glory hurt many?

It certainly hurt this one! Who continued to prefer herself to Diana
and reproached the beauty of the goddess, but in that one,

fierce anger was moved, and she says, "I will be satisfied with actions."

And no delay, she bent horn and from the string, an arrow

she drove forth, and she pierced the deserving tongue with the shaft.

Her tongue is silent, and her voice and attempted words do not follow,

and with blood her life left her behind trying to speak.

Commentary on Metamorphoses 11.301-327

301 Chione] Ovid appears to have the first usage of this name in famous myth. Chione is a Greek name meaning "snow-white," related to the Greek word for snow: χιών, χιόνος (Donnegan 1379). Earlier Greek versions of the myth use the name Φίλωνις instead, which is related to the verb Φιλέω, "to love." In his work *Epistulae Ex Ponto*, Ovid uses the adjective *Chionides* (son of Chione), but this refers to a different Chione, the daughter of Boreas rather than Deion/Daedalion (Oxford Latin Dictionary; *Tristia Ex Ponto* 3.3.41).

dotatissima forma] Abl. of respect.

nubilis] Can simply mean "of an age suitable for marriage," but can also mean "nubile" — that is, not only young, but sexually attractive (Oxford Latin Dictionary). The second definition provides context for the *mille procos* who seek Chione's hand, and the sudden interest from Apollo and Mercury later.

303 Phoebus] i.e. Phoebus Apollo.

Maiaque creatus] i.e. Mercury, whose mother was Maia the daughter of Atlas (Oxford Classical Dictionary).

304 ille suis Delphis, hic vertice Cyllenaeo,] Delphi was the location of the oracle of Apollo.

Mount Cyllene is the mountain where Mercury was born (Oxford Classical Dictionary).

Geographically, the two are fairly close, which might account for how both saw Chione *pariter* in line 305.

306 veneris] Metonymy of the goddess Venus, used here to refer to sexual intercourse. This usage is attested to in book 2 of Ovid's *Amores* and books 3 and 10 of the *Metamorphoses* (Oxford Latin Dictionary).

307 virgaque movente soporem] Mercury is sometimes depicted as carrying a magic wand; here, he uses it to put Chione into a deep sleep (Oxford Classical Dictionary).

308 virginis] Similar to *nubilis*, *virgo* usually just denotes "a woman of marriagable age."

However, it also commonly applies to "a woman who is sexually intact" (Oxford Latin Dictionary). Both uses are attested to in Ovid, and combined with *nubilis* the word *virgo* likely refers to her sexual virginity. Yet *virgo* can also refer to a state of perpetual virginity, often in divinities like Diana who appears later in the passage.

310 Phoebus anum simulat] In his article "Tremuloque gradu venit aegra senectus: Old Age in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," A.D. Nikolopolous discusses how Apollo is one of four divinities in the *Metamorphoses* to disguise him/herself as an old woman — the others being Juno, Pallas, and Vertumnus (Nikolopoulos 52). The disguise of an old woman allows Apollo "freedom of movement in public" because of his perceived harmlessness and trustworthiness (53).

313 Autolycus] This name is Greek — αὐτολύκος means "the wolf itself." One of the earliest placements of the character Autolycus appears in Homer's *Odyssey*, living in Parnassus, the grandfather of Odysseus, and a friend of Hermes (19.392-427). It is interesting to note that although "Hermes befriended him with a ready heart," he is not specifically called Autolycus' father (Homer 257). Autolycus also has special mythological significance as the grandfather of Jason, and one of the original members of the Argonauts (Apollodorus' *The Library* 1.9.16).

314 candida de nigris et de candentibus atra / qui facere adsuerat,] i.e. Autolycus can change the appearance of the items he steals. Variations of the phrase "turning black into white" were fairly common in Roman times, and usually referred to a more political deception (cf. Juvenal, Satire 3.30).

317 Philammon] This name is Greek — Φιλάμμων has no direct denotation, but is also related to the verb Φιλέω. The etymological connection between Φιλάμμων and Φιλωνίς further cements

their connection mythologically, as some traditions place Philammon as the daughter of "Leuconoe, daughter of Lucifer" (cf. Hyginus' *Fabulae*, section 161).

318 peperisse duos et dis placuisse duobus] Through the almost synchysistic nature of the alliteration in this clause, Ovid highlights the duality that recurs throughout the passage: raped by two gods who are brothers, Chione gives birth to two sons.

321 quae se praeferre Dianae / sustinuit faciemque deae culpavit,] Harkening back to a common trope in Greco-Roman mythology, a mortal woman claims superiority over a goddess who retaliates. Compare this, for example, with the story of Niobe — whose children are slain by Apollo and Artemis (cf. Homer's *Iliad* 24.602-617). Interestingly, although Apollo and Artemis/Diana are twins, and work together in their massacre of Niobe's children, Diana seems to not care that Chione is the mother of her two nephews — and Apollo does nothing to stop her retaliation.

323 "factis" que "placebimus" inquit.] Oddly, Ovid inserts a *-que* into the middle of a quotation, which happens only a few other times in the whole *Metamorphoses* (cf. 3.644).

326 lingua tacet, nec vox temptataque verba sequuntur,] A common theme occurring in the *Metamorphoses* is loss of speech, such as when Actaeon is turned into a deer, and Philomela's tongue is cut out by Tereus (cf. 3.201, 6.574). Here, as with Philomela, the loss of speech is not due to a physical metamorphosis but an act of retaliation and dominance.

Ovid's Chione myth in Book 11 is a highly unique one: it stands out both from other rape scenes in the *Metamorphoses* and from the established mythological tradition preceding it in several ways. Primarily, Ovid repurposes these traditions and makes them his own in order to fit the themes of the *Metamorphoses*. This is most evident in the name of the myth itself: the earliest versions use the name Philonis for the protagonist. Hesiod, for example, writing around the 8th and 7th centuries BC, discusses the story and its characters in his *Catalogue of Women*:

] and rosy-[armed
] godly Philonis,
who bore Autolycus and Philammon, glorious for his voice,
the one overpowered by far-shooting] Apollo,
the other, mingling with Hermes in loving] desire,
she bore, Autolycus, to the Cyllenian] killer of Argus.
(Hesiod Fr. 65.13-18)

Hesiod has several references to Philonis and her sons, but some are undoubtedly lost: the *Catalogue of Women* only exists in fragments and references to it by other authors. The next main source appearing chronologically is in the Greek *Scholia on Homer's Odyssey*, a collection of the earliest existing commentary on the eminent work. Commenting on Autolycus' appearance in Book 19, a historian named Pherecydes (most likely referring to Pherecydes of Athens, though Pherecydes of Syros is also possible) sums up the story:

Φιλωνίς ἢ Δηϊόνος θυγάτηρ οἰκοῦσα τὸν Παρνασσὸν ἐν αὐτῷ
παρελέχθη καὶ Ἀπόλλωνι καὶ Ἑρμῇ· εἶχε γὰρ τὸ κάλλος ἐράσμιον
ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ὥστε καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς ζηλοτυποῦντας κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ
θελῆσαι μίσγεσθαι. εἶτα ἐκ μὲν τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος γίνεται Φιλάμμων,
ἄνθρωπος σοφιστής, ὃς καὶ πρῶτος ἐδόκει χοροὺς συστήσασθαι παρθένων,
ἐκ δὲ τοῦ Ἑρμοῦ Αὐτόλυκος, ὃς οἰκῶν τὸν Παρνασσὸν πλεῖστα κλέπτων
ἐθησαύριζεν. εἶχε γὰρ ταύτην τὴν τέχνην παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς, ὥστε τοὺς
ἄνθρώπους ὅτε κλέπτοι τι λανθάνειν, καὶ τὰ θρέμματα τῆς λείας ἀλλοιοῦν
εἰς ὃ θέλοι μορφῆς, ὥστε πλείστης αὐτὸν δεσπότην γενέσθαι λείας. ἢ δὲ
ἱστορία παρὰ Φερεκύδη. ("ΟΔΥΣΣΕΙΑΣ Τ" 680-681)

[Philonis, the daughter of Deion, lived in Parnassus, in which she lay down with both Apollo and Hermes; for her beauty had a loveliness so great that even the jealous gods wanted to mingle with her. Then, on the one hand, Philammon was born out of Apollo, a man skilled in his craft,

and the first who thought to bring together the dances of maidens; on the other hand, Autolycus [was born] out of Hermes who, living in Parnassus, hoarded, stealing most things. For he had this skill from his father, to conceal that which he stole from men, and to change the domesticated animals of his plunder into a form that he wishes, so that most of the plunder becomes the master himself. This is the story according to Pherecydes.]

Pherecyde's version is very similar to that of Hesiod, and is slightly more recent chronologically (c. 5th century BC), but is also slightly more detailed. These two sources are the primary ones written before Ovid. After the *Metamorphoses* was published sometime between 2 and 8 AD, the next major references to the myth appear in the next two centuries and use Ovid's terminology. Juvenal alludes to Ovid's Chione myth in his third *Satire*, written approximately 110-112 AD (Juvenal 3). While discussing life in Rome, Juvenal uses her name as that of a high-class prostitute:

divitis hic servo cludit latus ingenuorum
filius; alter enim quantum in legione tribuni
accipiunt donat Calvinae vel Catienae,
ut semel aut iterum super illam palpitet; at tu,
cum tibi vestiti facies scorti placet, haeres
et dubitas alta Chionen deducere sella.
(Juvenal 3.131-136)

[Here, the son of natives closes the side of a rich man's slave; for the latter gives to Calvina or Catiena as much as tribunes in a legion receive, so that he might throb once or again on top of her; but you, when the face of a dressed-up whore pleases you, you hesitate and hold back from taking down Chione from her high throne.]

Finally, Hyginus mentions the Chione story in his work *Fabulae*. A collection of myths by an unknown author named Hyginus, the *Fabulae* was traditionally (and falsely) attributed to a C. Julius Hyginus — a freedman librarian in the Palatine Library who would have been contemporary with Ovid, making chronological analysis of the Chione persona difficult (Hyginus 1). However, scholars now agree that it was most likely written between 100 and 207 AD (1). Hyginus' section seems to be a conglomerate of earlier sources, including the Greek sources and Ovid:

Apollo and Mercury are said to have slept the same night with Chione, or, as other poets say, with Philonis, daughter of Daedalion. By Apollo she bore Philammon, and by Mercury, Autolycus. Later on she spoke too haughtily against Diana in the hunt, and so was slain by her arrows. But the father Daedalion, because of his grief for his only daughter, was changed by Apollo into the bird Daedalion, that is, the hawk. (Hyginus 154)

Hyginus' use of both Chione and Philonis suggests this line of tradition stretching back chronologically. His placement of Chione's name as the primary one also implies that Hyginus was primarily influenced by Ovid, which is perfectly compatible with the chronology presented here. He also includes the detail that Chione slept with Apollo and Mercury in the same night, which only appears in Ovid and not the Greek sources.

When compared with these many sources, Ovid's Chione character is distinct in two main ways. Firstly, Juvenal's choice to mention Chione as a *vestiti...scorti* (dressed-up whore) in Satire III is an interesting one considering Ovid's treatment of her (Juvenal 3.135). In the *Metamorphoses*, Chione is directly referred to with *virginis* (virgin) (Ovid 11.308). The word *virgo* can simply mean an unmarried woman, but its accompaniment of *nubilis* suggests that Chione is not only young and sexually untouched, but sexually desirable. This interpretation is further corroborated by Pherecydes' mention of Chione's appearance: *εἶχε γὰρ τὸ κάλλος ἐράσμιον ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ὥστε καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς ζηλοτυποῦντας κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ θελῆσαι μίσγεσθαι* (for her beauty had a loveliness so great that even the jealous gods wanted to mingle with her) ("ΟΔΥΣΣΕΙΑΣ Τ" 680-681). It is perfectly possible, then, that Juvenal deems her a whore to highlight the *mille procos* (thousand suitors) who are drawn to her attractiveness (11.302). However, another underlying meaning may be present. Chione's budding sexuality in Ovid's myth is also somewhat ironic: although she has many suitors wanting her hand in marriage, she nevertheless remains a *virgo* until she is raped by gods. Juvenal could be playing on this irony by

overstating Chione's intercourse with two gods, even to the level of prostitution. Other myths in the *Metamorphoses* represent rape — specifically rape done by gods — as a form of transaction. In Book 3, for example, Jupiter promises a gift of unlimited possibility to Semele after impregnating her: *cui deus 'elige!' ait 'nullam patiere repulsam* (To whom the god says, 'Choose, you will suffer no resistance) (3.289). Playing upon these tropes, Juvenal could be establishing Chione in the same tradition. Yet even this idea has more layers to it. Ovid's Chione myth is very distinct in that her rape is not a transaction. After the short rape scene in lines 307-310, neither Apollo nor Mercury appear in the story anymore. Chione gets nothing from the gods except her *gemellos* (twins), who are most likely the source of her perceived superiority to Diana and her eventual death (11.316).

Chione does not only stand in comparison to other rape stories in Ovid, but in comparison to her mythological equivalent, Philonis. The Greek stories of Hesiod and Pherecydes are mainly different from Ovid's Latin one in that rape is not totally explicit. Pherecydes, for example, simply states that *παρελέχθη καὶ Ἀπόλλωνι καὶ Ἑρμῇ* (she lay down with both Apollo and Hermes) ("ΟΔΥΣΣΕΙΑΣ T" 680). Hesiod's description is mixed: while Philonis is "overpowered by far-shooting] Apollo," she sleeps "with Hermes in loving] desire" (Hesiod Fr. 65.15-16). And although Hesiod establishes a rape tradition in the myth via Apollo, Philonis' intercourse with Hermes is oddly consensual. Therefore, when Ovid rewrites Philonis to fit the *Metamorphoses*, he makes a definitely establishment of the story not as one of "loving desire," but the opposite: *virgaque movente soporem / virginis os tangit* (and with a wand provoking deep sleep / he touches the face of the virgin) (Ovid 11.307-308).

This repurposing of the Chione myth is also reflected in the fact that Ovid changes the protagonist's name from Philonis to Chione. While the Greek Φιλωνίς is related to the verb

Φιλέω, "to love," Chione comes from the noun χιών and means "snow-white." It is possible that Φιλωνίς has a literary connection to the ἐρατῇ] φιλ[ό]τητι (loving desire) that brought her together with Hermes (Hesiod Fr. 65.16). Therefore, if Philonis corresponds to love and consensuality, Chione most likely corresponds to the rape aspect of the myth. But in what way? Chione's name change, in light of Hermes' newfound rape tradition, is related to the story of their son Autolycus. Ovid refers to Autolycus as someone *candida de nigris et de candentibus atra / qui facere adsuerat* (who was used to making white from black and black from white) (11.314-315). In accordance with the earlier Greek sources, this refers to Autolycus' ability to physically change the colors of things that he stole: εἶχε γὰρ ταύτην τὴν τέχνην παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς, ὥστε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ὅτε κλέπτει τι λανθάνειν, καὶ τὰ θρέμματα τῆς λείας ἀλλοιοῦν εἰς ὃ θέλοι μορφῆς (For he had this skill from his father, to conceal that which he stole from men, and to change the domesticated animals of his plunder into a form that he wishes) ("ΟΔΥΣΣΕΙΑΣ Τ" 681). However, in Roman times, this phrase had another significance. Variations of the phrase "making white from black and black from white" were fairly common, and often referred to moral or political corruption and deception. For example, Juvenal uses it in *Satire 3* to describe corrupt bureaucrats living in Rome: *cedamus patria. vivant Artorius istic / et Catulus, manean qui nigrum in candida vertunt* (Let us withdraw from our homeland. Let Artorius and Catulus live there, let those remain who turn black into white) (Juvenal 3.29-30). Ovid's quote, then, is a play on both senses of the phrase; this usage is rooted in the fact that the word *candida* (white) can denote a state of being "morally pure, [or] innocent" (Oxford Latin Dictionary).

Combining the two senses of "making white from black and black from white," Chione's name gains a moral connotation illuminated by the phrase's usage for her son. Chione is "snow-white" because she has moral purity and innocence as a virgin who maintains her sexual

intactness, even among her suitors. When she is raped by Mercury, Chione is changed from white to black — that is, from pure to defiled. Conversely, Chione's situation is turned from black to white when its immoral defilement produces a good: her two sons that cause her to pridefully place herself above Diana. This change from white to black becomes especially significant in the larger context of the *Metamorphoses*. Through his retelling of the Philonis myth, Ovid is presenting the act of rape itself as a form of metamorphosis, irrevocably changing its victim from innocent to tainted. Through Chione, Ovid is once again able to take established myth and make it his own — a kind of literary metamorphosis.

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