Abstract — The Ovidian story of Apollo and Daphne is read in the light of absence and desire: absence linked with sexual frustration; desire linked with aspiration which is found everywhere but never fulfilled except, perhaps, in the allegorical ideal of poetic triumph. Although the spark that ignites this first erotic myth of the Metamorphoses on the unattainability of love is attributable to Cupid’s dart and to his malicious envy, the depth of the symbolic import of the wound inflicted upon Daphne must not be underestimated. Daphne’s flight is not simply a flight from Apollo but from the very name of a lover, or “nomen amantis”, in a flight not from one male but from every male. Thus construed, the “eternal” virginity granted to Daphne by her father Peneus can be read as a “pathology” which could mean not just the end of sexual and social relations but rather, the end of sexuality and of society itself, if taken to its extremes.

Keywords: Ovid, Apollo, Daphne, metamorphoses, pursuit, flight, pathological virginity, poetic fame