Tragedy and Transformation: Generic Tension and Apotheosis in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

by

Sarah A.C. Prest
Bachelor of Arts (Hons.), Dalhousie University, 2005

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This study considers the role of tragedy in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as demonstrated in four different episodes, those of Cadmus, Hercules, Hippolytus, and Medea. I have identified two main themes that the episodes share, namely, generic tension, particularly between epic and tragedy as emphasized by intertextual allusion to Virgil's *Aeneid*, and the use of apotheosis as a means of not only transforming the character in question, but also signalling a generic shift, more appropriate for Augustan Rome. However, Ovid's treatment of tragedy varies dramatically from one narrative to the next. Cadmus' civic foundation is plagued with tragic themes and his apotheosis occurs only by later substitution. Hercules and Hippolytus achieve relatively standard deifications by pushing past the boundaries of their tragedies, but their refashioned selves are called into question. And the apparent apotheosis of Medea is even less straightforward, as she appears forever preserved in tragedy through meta-literary self-consciousness.

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In loving memory of my Mum-Mum

Note on Texts and Translations

I have used the Oxford Classical Texts for Aristotle, Herodotus, Homer, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Virgil; the Loeb Classical Library Texts for Apollodorus, Apollonius Rhodius, Bacchylides, Cicero, Euripides, Horace, Ovid's *Amores*, *Fasti*, and *Heroides*, Quintilian, Sophocles, and Statius; Jocelyn (1967) for fragments of Ennius; Ribbeck (1897) for fragments of Ovid's *Medea* and of Pacuvius.

The following published translations have been used in this study:

CICERO: *Epistulae ad Familiares* and *Pro Sestio*. trans. Mario Erasmo, in *Roman Tragedy: Theatre to Theatricality*. University of Texas. 2004.
ENNIUS: *Medea* (fragment 13). trans. Mario Erasmo, in *Roman Tragedy: Theatre to Theatricality*. University of Texas. 2004.
EURIPIDES: *Heracles.* trans. David Kovacs, in Loeb Classical Library. Harvard. 1998.; *Hippolytus*. trans. David Kovacs, in Loeb Classical Library. Harvard. 1995.; *Medea*. trans. David Kovacs, in Loeb Classical Library. Harvard. 1994.; *Andromache*. trans. John Frederick Nims, in Grene and Lattimore (eds.) *The Complete Greek Tragedies: Euripides I*. Chicago. 1959.; *Phoenissae*. trans. Elizabeth Wyckoff, in Grene and Lattimore (eds.) *The Complete Greek Tragedies: Euripides II*. Chicago. 1959.
HERODOTUS: *The Histories.* trans. Robin Waterfield. Oxford. 1998.
HOMER: *Iliad*. trans. E.V. Rieu. Penguin Books. 1963.
OVID: *Medea* (fragments I & ii). trans. A.J. Boyle, in *An Introduction to Roman Tragedy*. Routledge. 2006.; *Metamorphoses*. trans. A.D. Melville with notes E.J. Kenney. Oxford. 1986.; *Heroides and Amores*. trans. Grant Showerman, in Loeb Classical Library. Harvard. 1977.
PACUVIUS: *Teucer* (fragment). trans. Mario Erasmo, in *Roman Tragedy: Theatre to Theatricality*. University of Texas. 2004.
SOPHOCLES: *Phaedra* (fragments). trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, in Loeb Classical Library. Harvard. 1996.; *The Women of Trachis*. trans. Michael Jameson, in Grene and Lattimore (eds.) *The Compete Greek Tragedies: Sophocles*. Chicago. 1959.
STATIUS: *Thebaid*. trans. A.D. Melville. Oxford. 1992.
VIRGIL: *Aeneid*. trans. Robert Fitzgerald. Vintage Classics. 1983.

Where translations are my own, they are indicated as such.

Chapter 1

Breaking the Generic Boundaries: Ovid and the Roman Tragic Tradition

servare potui. perdere an possim rogas?

"I could save. You ask if I can destroy?"

feror huc illuc ut plena deo.

"I'm tossed here, there, like a woman filled with god."

So speaks the famous Medea, the words written into her mouth by the Augustan poet Ovid. The rest of the play, the remainder of Ovid's only attempt at formal tragedy, is regrettably lost. Fortunately for modern readers, however, Ovid's *Medea* is not his only tragic poetic venture. Traces of tragedy can be found throughout Ovid's poetry; notably, his elegiac *Heroides* and *Amores* both show tragic colouring. My intention in this particular study is to consider how Ovid uses tragedy in his great epic, the *Metamorphoses*.

But before we can begin to discuss Ovid properly, before we can understand what tragedy meant for Ovid, we must first place him in the greater literary context, at the end of a long line of Roman poets. But the task is problematic. To trace accurately the development of tragedy as a Roman institution is nearly impossible; the literary evidence just does not exist. We no longer possess a single extant work of tragedy from either the Roman or Greek tradition since the works of Sophocles in the late 5th century BCE until

those of Seneca nearly thirty-five years after Ovid's death.[1] That is not to say, however, that tragedy was obsolete in Roman culture or even insignificant. Performance was intrinsic to the city's identity; from its earliest Etruscan origins through the thriving years of the Republic and on into the Empire, Rome provided the backdrop for public celebration. Sacrifices, religious rites, political speeches, trials and executions, triumphs, all were staged throughout the city before an audience of the Roman public (Boyle 2006: 3). But with the influx of the Greek literary tradition by way of exposure to the tastes of Sicily and southern Italy, Rome's pre-existing culture of performance embraced and incorporated a more textual focus (10).

While we have no intact tragic texts, the sheer number of titles and fragments that survive in the accounts of contemporary historians attests to the prolific nature of dramatic authors and the importance of tragic performance in Rome. The use and manipulation of dramatic productions both in staging and in the very texts by individuals of civic prominence suggest the significance of tragedy in the political life of the city. Furthermore, the influence of tragedy is apparent throughout the Latin literary tradition, across genres, in the works of dramatic and non-dramatic authors alike. Much scholarly criticism attributes a far greater artistic weight to the tragedy of 5th century Athens than to that of Republican and Imperial Rome due to its intimate participation in the social experience of the *polis*. The suggestion that Roman drama did not engage with its social environment arises only from direct comparison of Greek tragedy with the so-called closet drama of Seneca, and our lack of evidence regarding the methodology of public performance. But one need only to examine the writings of contemporary historians and

[1] The precise dating of Seneca's tragedies is not definitive; see the introduction in John G. Fitch's translation for the *Loeb Classical Library* (2002: 10-14).

the contexts in which plays were staged to recognize that the influence of Roman tragedy resonated throughout the civic, political, and literary life.

The origins of Roman drama, both comedy and tragedy, lay in the early importation of both Greek and Etruscan models,[2] but it was not until the mid-3rd century that, according to classical Romans themselves, the first tragedy was staged, signifying the beginning of the Roman dramatic tradition proper (Conte 1994: 31). In 240 BCE, Livius Andronicus[3] presented a *fabula*, or play, the title of which is unknown, at the *ludi Romani* in honour of the end of the first Punic War. While the plot is also uncertain, the play was an adaptation of a Greek original (Erasmo 2004: 10). A native of Tarentum in southern Italy and himself a Greek-speaker, Livius laid the foundation for future tragedians, engaging the Greek tradition and making his plays more palatable for a Roman audience by adapting elements involving both dramatic form and content (10). Of the eight plays of Livius whose names we possess,[4] at least five are based on the Trojan cycle; titles include the *Achilles*, *Equos Troianus*, and *Aiax Mastigophorus* (Conte 1994: 39).

Gnaeus Naevius (c. 270 – c. 199 BCE) was a contemporary of Livius Andronicus, presenting his first *fabula* in 235 BCE (Boyle 2006: 37). Naevius took up many of the changes his peer had made to the genre, but his tragedies became increasingly Romanized. He, too, wrote tragedies concerning the Trojan cycle (like Livius, he wrote

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[2] Livy (7.2.3-13) relates that Roman performance came from Etruria in the 4th century BCE, and cites numerous terms found in Rome that have Etruscan origins (ie. actors were called *histriones* in Latin, from the Etruscan *ister* meaning "player"). Recent scholarly consensus following the examination of vase- and tomb-paintings suggests that drama came ultimately to Rome from Greece but via Etruscan association during the 6th or 5th centuries (Boyle 2006: 8-9).

[3] Livius' dates are unknown but he was active between first and second Punic Wars (Boyle 2006: 34).

[4] The number of tragedies composed by Livius is also unclear. A.J. Boyle counts at least ten, and possibly eleven (2006: 28).

an *Equos Troianus*) but some titles (*Danae* and *Lycurgus*) suggest Naevius went a step further to interweave plots from two or more originals for a single play; this practice was called *contaminatio* (Erasmo 2004: 15). This innovation would continue throughout the Roman dramatic tradition and would be adopted by non-dramatic authors like Ovid himself.[5]

Quintus Ennius (239 – 169 BCE), while best known for his historical epic the *Annales*, was also a composer of tragedies. *Semigraecus* (Suetonius *Gram*. 1.2), or half-Greek, like Livius,[6] Ennius, more so than his predecessors, depicted an increasingly Roman world in his Greek adaptations, but both cultures are still discernible. In a fragment of his *Medea exul* ('Medea the Exile'),[7] Ennius writes (F 239-240):

> *asta atque Athenas anticum opulentum oppidum*
> *contempla et templum Cereris ad laevam aspice.*
>
> [Stand and] look upon Athens, an ancient and wealthy city,
> and look to your left upon the Temple of Ceres.

In these two lines, Ennius brings together elements of both Greek (Athens) and Roman (the temple of Ceres) tradition; in addition, he may be providing an example of the *contaminatio*, which his predecessor Naevius brought into practice (Erasmo 2004: 27). But perhaps this engagement in his tragedies with both traditions is not so surprising. Indeed, Ennius' more famous work, the *Annales* follows much the same pattern in terms of bringing together cultural references from both Greece and Rome. The epic spanned the defeat of Troy (the ancestors of the Romans) by the Greeks up to and including the

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[5] Gnaeus Naevius also established another dramatic genre, the *fabula praetexta*, or historical drama. This genre, while significant in Rome, will not play a great part in my discussion. For more on the development and the role of the *fabula praetexta*, see Conte's *Latin Literature: A History* (1994: 29-38).

[6] After serving a post in Sardinia during the second Punic War, Ennius was brought to Rome from southern Italy by Cato in 203 BCE (Boyle 2006: 58).

[7] It is possible that this fragment is from a second play by Ennius about Medea. See Boyle (2006: 27).

Battle of Pydna in 168 BCE, at which Rome defeated the last Macedonian king (Conte 1994: 79). The *semigraecus* had a tendency, not only in his tragedy, for adapting his Greek roots to be more appealing for a Roman audience. While beginning with an event that hearkened back to a time of Greek supremacy, Ennius continued the narrative to include Pydna, the greatest Roman victory to date, and in doing so, determined irrevocably the rightful Roman dominance of the region. In addition, Ennius set a precedent for epicists after him; like the *Annales*, both Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* extend from Greek times into Roman, and both poets, like Ennius before them, see tragedy woven into their epics.[8]

Thus, with Ennius' dramatic works and even within his epic, Roman tragedy assumed a character which was more socially and politically conscious. His historical drama *Sabinae* ('The Sabine Women'), which dealt with the rape of the Sabine women by the Romans under Romulus, was staged just after the second Punic War. Boyle observes that the staging of the play coincides with a time of heated political debate over the role and treatment of women in Rome (2006: 85-6). The political overtones in tragedy were reflecting the increasing social discord which accompanied the influx of Eastern ideas and culture following the first and second Punic Wars and the widening class divide in the 2nd century (60). The governing bodies, however, reacted in kind to what appeared ever more to be a threat to social stability. In 186 BCE, with the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus*, the senate harshly repressed the worship of the Bacchic cult, a cult that, by the nature of its deity, Bacchus the patron of the theatre, was closely connected to the dramatic arts. Given its association with the essential deity Bacchus (or Dionysus, his

[8] Taking his cue from Ennius, Horace famously places Roman political victory and artistic excellence side-by-side in his letter to Augustus: *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes / intulit agresti Latio*, 'Greece, the captive, made her savage victor captive, and brought the arts into rustic Latium' (*Epist*. 2.1.156-7).

Greek counterpart), like the theatre of 5th century Athens, Roman theatre was an institution not only of civic, but of religious significance as well.[9] In 151 BCE, the senate also ordered the destruction of a nearly completed stone theatre, presumably to curtail the public's access to performance (250, n. 17). Despite the efforts of the senate, however, the engagement of dramatic writers with the political and social realities of their time was not quelled.

Marcus Pacuvius (220 – 130 BCE), the nephew of Ennius, continued the tragic tradition of incorporation and innovation. Pacuvius was admired by Cicero, Quintilian, and Horace, who called him *doctus* or learned for the depth of his knowledge of Greek literature and his convoluted writing style;[10] for these same reasons, he was lampooned repeatedly by Roman satirists such as Lucilius (Erasmo 2004: 36). He was notorious for his neologisms,[11] and also known for his inventive plots; many of his tragedies suggest the fusion of two or more familiar plots and some cannot be traced to any known Greek originals at all (Boyle 2006: 88-91). True to form, however, Pacuvius also absorbed elements of current events into his works; fragments of his tragedies indicate a deep interest in Stoicism and Epicureanism, philosophies that were then making their way through Roman intellectual circles (91). In addition to philosophy, Pacuvius was

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[9] Wiseman (1998) provides further examples to support the 19th century German scholar Ranke's argument that some Roman religious traditions stem from dramatic conceptions, thus suggesting the possible religious significance of dramatic festivals (15-16).

[10] Hor. *Epist*. 2.1.56, Quint. *Inst*. 10.1.97.

[11] In his play, *Teucer*, Pacuvius describes a group of dolphins by calling them *Nerei repandirostrum incurvicervicum pecus* ('the flat-snouted humpnecked herd of Nereus') (Erasmo 2004: 36).

following the literary trend of incorporating a more introspective tone and exploring human emotion in his characters via his use of the tragic soliloquy (99).[12]

Lucius Accius (170 – c. 86 BCE), the last of the great tragedians before the textual trail goes almost entirely cold until the time of Nero, developed even further the tragic style set forth by his predecessors. And with his production of at least forty-six *fabulae* (112), Accius set the bar as far as what constituted good Roman tragedy. Like those before him, his plots were based on Greek mythic tradition, and the influence of past Roman tragedians is clear: Accius, too, added contemporary cultural elements to the mix. The peak of Accius' writing fell directly into the period of revolutionary violence and class upheaval, between the assassination of the Gracchi in 133 and 122 and the Social War of 91 to 89 BCE (110). Accordingly, the myths that provided the sources for Accian tragedy took on new significance in the changing political climate and subjects such as tyrannicide and references to civil war acquired new weight (Conte 1994: 107). Tragedy in Accius' time became an expression of the crisis and violence that was permeating contemporary Roman society. And despite the Greek mythological sources, the tragedies served to illuminate and explore subjects pertinent to Roman social realities. Stylistically, Accius, like Pacuvius before him (Boyle 2006: 92), fostered his audiences' taste for spectacle and the dramatic (Conte 1994: 107). Tragedy became characterized by pathos and novelistic plotlines; shipwrecks, ghosts, madness, and treachery, could often be found in late republican tragedy (107). Roman audiences wanted their entertainment, and they wanted it ripe with "blood and obsession" (107).

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[12] Pacuvius, by no means, invented the tragic soliloquy; indeed, Sophocles had illustrated the convention with Ajax's famous speech in play of the same name. But Pacuvius certainly explored further the use of the soliloquy in his dramatic writing.

We have seen that Roman tragedy, throughout its development from the adaptations of Livius Andronicus to the innovative and spectacular plots of Accius and Pacuvius, interacted with its social and political backdrop; and we have also seen, with the suppression of the Bacchic cult in 186 BCE and the razing of the stone theatre some thirty-five years later, that those in power took pains to manipulate the direction and production of Roman tragedy. Yet there are still more explicit examples of the ways in which there was interplay between Roman tragedy and civic reality, and the use of tragic performance for political purposes is significant; after all, as "culture informs theatre, theatre permeates society".[13]

In 55 BCE, Rome obtained its first permanent stone theatre. The massive theatre of Pompey was built as part of a larger edifice that included a Temple of Venus Victrix (Venus the Conqueror), gardens, galleries, and an assembly hall or *curia*; not until the theatres of Marcellus and Balbus of 13 BCE would Pompey's structure be rivalled (Erasmo 2004: 83). Pompey celebrated the opening of his namesake with extravagant celebrations which included the presentation of at least two tragedies, handpicked by Pompey himself: Accius' *Clytemnestra* and the *Equos Troianus* of either Livius Andronicus or Naevius.[14] Cicero writes, in a letter to M. Marius, his weariness at the lavishness of the plays (*Fam*. 7.1.2):

> *quid enim delectationis habent sescenti muli in Clytaemnestra aut in Equo Troiano craterarum tria milia aut armatura varia peditatus et equitatus in aliqua pugna?*

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[13] Erasmo (2004: 82). I owe much of the following discussion to an excellent exploration of the interaction in Erasmo's chapter entitled 'Creating Metatragedy' (2004: 81-121).

[14] There is some debate as to what the third play might have been, but it is likely that is was a *praetexta*. See Erasmo (2004: 86-87).

> What pleasure, indeed, can 600 mules in the *Clytemnestra* or 3000 bronze craters in the *Trojan Horse* or various armed battles of infantry or knights offer you?

Why such an extraordinary display? Evidently, Pompey wished to illustrate his wealth and power by parading it before the city. But there is a greater motivation here. While we know little about the precise plotlines of these two tragedies, it is safe to say that they focused on the happenings of the Trojan War, the destruction of Troy by the Greeks and the events that follow. The use of 600 mules in the *Clytemnestra* likely refers to Agamemnon's kingly procession as he returns home to his wife after the war (87). The 3000 craters of the *Equos Troianus* reflect the spoils of a sacked city (90). For Pompey, however, this pageantry signals a reference to his own great triumph of six years previous, when he had subjugated his third continent, and for Pompey's audience, the allusion may have been evident (87). Hence, much in a similar vein as Ennius' *Annales* and the focus on the Roman victory over the Greeks at Pydna, Pompey's production with all of its spectacle at once uses a Greek model of triumph and outshines it by an over-the-top performance stressing Roman prominence over the Mediterranean world.

Yet, a problem arises when one considers further the implications of Pompey's staging of a particular play, in this case, Accius' *Clytemnestra*. Judging by the parade of mules, Pompey wished to be associated with Agamemnon himself, a triumphant king returning home after his victories. But in the play,[15] soon after his return, Agamemnon is murdered by his wife. If the Roman audience was to identify Pompey with the Greek king, at what point does that identification cease (89)? When does Agamemnon no longer represent Pompey and when does he become merely a king about to be slaughtered by his

[15] As seen in the remaining fragments, Erasmo (2004: 88-89).

wife? The ambiguity is evident, and Pompey's choice of tragedy begins to seem rather inappropriate. But, Erasmo remarks that with this display,

> Pompey removed the barrier between actor and audience through dramatic allusions, with the result that a fixed dramatic text was made topical…by emphasizing scenes that the audience could understand both in the specific context of the play and in the more general context of the occasion of its restaging. (90-91)

Pompey's theatre opening was not the only occasion, however, at which tragedy was used in an allusive manner to interact with contemporary reality. Most gruesome perhaps is Plutarch's report of a presentation of Euripides' *Bacchae* before a Parthian audience in which the head of Pentheus, the prop, was replaced with the actual head of the general Crassus following his defeat in Parthia (Boyle 2006: 157). But it was the *Brutus* of Accius that was used on two different occasions (and attempted a third time) for the purposes of promoting reputations and commenting on political events.

Accius' *Brutus* relates the story of the man who avenged the rape of the chaste Lucretia and expelled the tyrannical Tarquin kings from Rome, thus founding the republic. Brutus Callaicus commissioned the play in an attempt to align his own accomplishments with those of his illustrious predecessor while still reiterating the prior excellence of his family (Erasmo 2004: 92).[16] In 57 BCE at the *ludi Apollinares*, following Cicero's exile, the play was again presented and the script was manipulated accordingly. The actor Aesopus, while in the midst of his performance altered his lines to express his displeasure at Cicero's expulsion (94-95). Cicero himself writes that, *nominatim sum appelatus in Bruto* ('in the *Brutus* I was mentioned by name' [*Sest*. 58]). While it is more likely that it was the actor who inserted Cicero's name, and not Accius

[16] The date of this restaging is unknown (Erasmo 2004: 91-92).

himself, the implications are evident. The significance of a particular tragedy, or indeed of particular lines, varied depending on the realities of the political climate, and the play itself could be manipulated to better reflect those realities.

In 44 BCE, following the murder of Julius Caesar, Marcus Junius Brutus, one of his assassins, attempted to have a restaging of the *Brutus* take place in his absence, but Gaius Antony prevented the performance by replacing the play with another of Accius', the *Tereus* (98). Like Callaicus, M. Brutus was attempting to put his own deeds on par with those of the Brutus of the play. He wanted, like his predecessor, to be considered a regicide, the liberator of a city from a tyrant (Boyle 2006: 158). But the *Tereus*, too, recounted the punishment of an ineffective tyrant; M. Brutus achieved his goal to a certain extent, albeit with a slightly more veiled allusion.

The myth of Thyestes and the house of Atreus saw no fewer than nine dramatic versions composed by various Roman tragedians,[17] but it was Varius Rufus' rendering that was performed on a most notable occasion. After his defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at Actium in 31 BCE, Octavian (later Augustus) commissioned Varius' *Thyestes* as part of his celebratory games (Erasmo 2004: 102). The play presumably recounted Thyestes' adultery with his brother Atreus' wife and effort to take his power, and Atreus' subsequent vengeance by feeding to Thyestes his own children (101). It may give one pause to consider that after conquering Antony and becoming the sole ruler, Octavian would commission a tragedy about a tyrant who is punished by his brother by horrendous means. Into what light might such a performance throw the new conqueror? If Octavian overthrew a potential tyrant, Antony, does that identify him with Atreus and his perverse

[17] Ennius, Accius, Gracchus, Cassius Parmensis, Varius Rufus, Seneca, and Maternus all wrote a *Thyestes*; both P. Pomponius Secundus and Mamercus Aemilius Scaurus wrote an *Atreus* (Erasmo 2004: 101).

actions? The allusion seems dangerous. But, like Pompey and the *Clytemnestra*, the extent of the allusion depends on the audience's interpretation, and plays of mythological subjects can be especially ambiguous (109-110). Such is the risk of the reception of allusion; interpretation is based on opinion, and thus Octavian's supporters are likely to have gained a very different message than his opponents, one that complemented their political loyalties. Octavian or Augustus as an avenger, however, is an association made throughout his reign (111).[18] As an alternative that may not be entirely mutually exclusive, Boyle argues that since he requested specifically this play despite the outright repulsiveness of the mythical events, Octavian likely used the play as a "negative paradigm", as a depiction of a tyranny in which he would never participate (2006: 62). Matthew Leigh is especially convincing in his presentation of the well-established association of the tyrant with cannibalistic tendencies, using examples stemming from across the classical world (1996: 171-197).[19] From Leigh's perspective, Octavian's use of Varius' *Thyestes* was a clear allusion to Antony as the offender and tyrant, as Thyestes himself (188-189). Further, perhaps Augustus was aligning himself with examples set in the past; the republican era, as we know with Accius' plays in particular, saw its share of dramatic representations depicting the severe criticism of tyranny, and Augustus, keen to be perceived as a defender of the republic, perhaps upheld this tradition. In any case, it is clear from this example and from those above that tragedy and reality engaged in relationship of give and take; tragedy could reflect the political dynamics of its time, and those with political investments could use tragedy to further their own agendas.

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[18] Erasmo goes on to relate the connections made between Augustus and Orestes in the literature and art of the Augustan period (2004: 111-112).

[19] Leigh cites examples including Plato, from his *Republic*, indicating the tyrant-cannibal association in a general sense, as well as Cicero, from his *Philippics*, in which the association is made with Antony specifically (1996).

We have already said that the literary tradition of Roman tragedy is practically non-existent, that we have no full text of a single tragedy until Seneca. While the latter statement remains true, the former should perhaps be qualified here in light of a literary continuum of sorts. The literature of Rome did indeed bear the marks of the tragic tradition, but those marks were left on genres other than tragedy itself, and many of these instances have been well documented. Catullus (84 – 54 BCE), with poem 64, composed an epyllion, or mini-epic, which, among other things, recounts the myth of Ariadne, her abandonment by her lover Theseus, and her subsequent rescue by the god Dionysus. Already, with the appearance of the god of the theatre, the connection with tragedy can be seen, but scholars such as Robert Thomas (1982) and R.J. Clare (1996) have indicated more specific allusions of Catullus to tragedies by Euripides and other dramatic versions of the mythical tradition.[20]

This is the point at which our discussion may turn rightly to the poet in question. Publius Ovidius Naso (43 BCE – AD 17) was the author of a variety of genres, which, at first, appear to be opposing in nature: his elegy, his didactic, his epic, all seem to occupy their discrete places in the literary tradition. Much of Ovid's appeal lies in his poetic style of genre-fusion, combining elements of one genre in the composition of another. What results, however, is not a seamless blend of genres. Instead, the generic elements can be seen as in a sort of tension with one another. And much of the energy of Ovid's poetry derives from this antithetical relationship between the poetic genres. Most famously, the *Amores* begins with a capricious narrative in which Ovid retells his attempt *arma gravi numero violentaque bella… / edere, materia conveniente modis* ('to sound forth arms,

[20] Catullus 64 can also be seen to be a model for Virgil's composition of Dido, as a mix of the Apollonian and Euripidean Medea (Clare 1996: 74 ff.).

and the violent deeds of war in weighty numbers with matter suited to the measure' [*Am.* 1.1.1-2]), that is, to compose epic subjects in an epic meter. Cupid, however, foils his endeavours by filching one of his metrical feet, essentially making elegy of his epic efforts. But both genres remain in the *Amores*, although they do not do so comfortably; the poem is essentially made up of the agonistic relationship between the genres. The generic interplay between elegy and epic continues into the second book (*Am.* 2.1.11-18; 2.18): so too among other poetic genres.[21] In particular, Ovid possessed a proclivity for tragic allusion within his poems. His *Heroides*, a collection of letters written from jilted women to their lovers, adopts tragic material in the style of Roman love poetry. These women include such characteristically tragic figures as Deianira and Medea, and even Dido, inspired by Virgil's own tragic conception of the Carthaginian queen. An innovative examination of this phenomenon in the *Heroides* is Casali's 1995 article on the fourth letter, from Phaedra to Hippolytus. In a detailed reading of the poem, Casali posits that by having Phaedra address Hippolytus as *viro Amazonio* ('the Amazon's son'), "Ovid reveals himself to be an attentive reader of Euripides" (2); Euripides' Phaedra also refers to her stepson in the same manner (ὁ τῆς Ἀμαζόνος [*HS* 351]). But the irony, of course, is that Ovid's Phaedra speaks as an elegiac character, while looking ahead to her tragic future.[22]

Further, Ovid himself composed a tragedy, the *Medea*, of which we now possess only the two short fragments quoted above. Quintilian remarked that the play was an illustration of the literary excellence the poet could achieve if he would only put his mind

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[21] See Harrison (2002: 79-94).

[22] Conte (1986) argues that Euripides' *Hippolytus*, in particular, had a significant influence on the development of Roman elegy (120-121). The idea that Virgil's tenth *Eclogue* was so influenced by Euripidean tragedy supports Ovid's combination of the genre into his own elegy.

to his poetry (*Inst.* 10.98). In his elegiac *Amores*, Ovid describes his own foray into the tragic tradition (*Am.* 3.1.7-14):

> *hic ego dum spatior tectus nemoralibus umbris –*
> *quod mea, quaerebam, Musa moveret opus –*
> *venit odoratos Elegia nexa capillos,*
> *et, puto, pes illi longior alter erat.*
> *forma decens, vestis tenuissima, vultus amantis,*
> *et pedibus vitium causa decoris erat.*
> *venit et ingenti violenta Tragoedia passu:*
> *fronte comae torva, palla iacebat humi;*
> *laeva manus sceptrum late regale movebat,*
> *Lydius alta pedum vincla cothurnus erat.*
>
> Whilst I was strolling here enveloped in woodland shadows, asking myself what work my Muse should venture on – came Elegy with coil of odorous locks, and, I think, one foot longer than its mate. She had a comely form, her robe was gauzy light, her face suffused with love, and the fault in her carriage added to her grace. There came, too, raging Tragedy, with mighty stride: her locks o'erhung a darkling brow, her pall trailed on the ground; her left hand swayed wide a kingly sceptre, and on her foot was the high-bound Lydian buskin.

Confronted by the two women, Elegy and Tragedy, both of whom demand the poet's attention, Ovid chooses Elegy, the less weighty of the two and the one that will make his love immortal (*Am.* 3.1.64-70). That is not to say, however, that his use of the tragic ended with this inclination. Indeed, his *Heroides* proved otherwise. But Ovid's use of tragedy was not limited to a melding of the genre with his elegy. And despite the regrettable loss of his *Medea*, we can look elsewhere, namely to his most famous work, to find further marks of the tragic tradition on Ovid's poetry.

The *Metamorphoses*, a monumental poem of fifteen books that traces the history of Rome from the foundation of the universe to the deification of Julius Caesar, has secured Ovid's place among the great classical Roman poets. The epic draws heavily on the mythical traditions of Greece and Rome and is dense in poetic reference.

Accordingly, there is no shortage of tragic allusion in the poem. I have chosen to consider four individual episodes from various points of the *Metamorphoses* in which the theme of transformation is closely linked to that of tragedy, often resulting in the transformation of tragedy itself. Each episode finds in its literary past a foundation in the tragic genre, and this, for the most part, is where I begin each examination. But before I sketch, chapter by chapter, the structure of the following study, I must first explain a few theoretical applications that will illuminate the basis from which I have directed my approach.

I look to the extant Greek literary tradition for much of Ovid's tragic textual allusion, given the fragmentary nature of Roman tragic texts. But the composition and development of Roman tragedy is paramount to understanding what tragedy meant for Ovid. The importation of Greek material and the setting of that material against a contemporary Roman backdrop had become the norm in Roman tragedy, and the Roman poetic tradition at large. More specifically than by the greater literary tradition, however, Ovid's own view of tragedy is mediated significantly by the work of another author, namely Virgil (70 – 19 BCE). It is for this reason that, unless stated otherwise, the epic tradition to which I refer throughout the course of this study is the Roman epic tradition, more specifically, that which Virgil established with his exemplary *Aeneid.* In Ovid's time, the *Aeneid* had already assumed its role as the quintessential Roman epic, to which any epic poem written thereafter would inevitably be compared.[23] This view of tragedy through the lens of the *Aeneid* is all-important to this study; even when Ovid's poetry makes explicit reference to a specific Greek tragic text, the example set by Virgil in his

[23] In his *Thebaid*, Statius makes explicit reference to Virgil's influence on the epic tradition. In his sphragis, he writes: *vive, precor; nec tu divinam Aeneida tempta, / sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora,* 'Live! That is my prayer, / Nor try to match the heavenly Aeneid / But follow from afar and evermore / Worship its steps' (*Theb*. 12.816-817). Statius himself places his own epic in terms of Virgil's canonical poem before him.

incorporation of tragedy into his poetry helps to shape Ovid's own poetic style. And it is to Virgil's *Aeneid* and the role of tragedy in that epic that we must look first in order to better understand the literary tradition in which Ovid finds himself in the composition of his *Metamorphoses*.

Other authors have used tragic allusion in their epic poetry,[24] but Virgil's use, in particular, sets the poetic genres against one another; what Philip Hardie calls a form of "dualism" (1993: 71). This dualism is present also in Ennius' *Annales*, which may have provided the paradigm for the *Aeneid* in this respect (Hardie 1997b: 323). It is important to note that in the *Aeneid* one genre does not necessarily win out in the end – after all, both tragedy and epic are written long after Virgil's death – but Virgil is clear to illustrate that the two genres do not co-exist comfortably, and this is precisely where Ovid takes his cue, and where my discussion begins. But first, in an attempt to indicate how tragedy and epic appear to be held in tension with one another, I shall look to Virgil.[25] I shall consider a few key examples of tragedy in the *Aeneid*, some of which will be examined in further detail later on in the study. My inclusion of what incidents can be identified as tragic as they pertain to the present study is wholly indebted to David Quint's 1993 discussion of generic form in Virgil. The trajectory of the *Aeneid* is essentially linear. From the outset of the poem, we know generally the direction the narrative will take: according to Jupiter's will, Aeneas and his men will travel to Italy and found the new Roman state. And, for the most part, this is exactly what unfolds. However, various persons and events intermittently interrupt Aeneas's fate, and consequently the movement of the narrative.

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[24] For example, in the *Argonautica*, Apollonius uses elements of Euripides in his Medea; I will be discussing this character briefly in Chapter 5.

[25] See Philip Hardie (1997b) for a brief delineation of relevant studies of tragedy in the *Aeneid* over the past century (313 f.).

Juno's storm and the resulting diversion to Carthage, Dido's desire for Aeneas, and Juno's fury in Book 7, all serve to obstruct the protagonist from realizing his own fate of founding Rome. And all of these elements can be associated with tragic material. Quint identifies epic as in contention with the "regressive repetition" of elements of the narrative; and these elements coincide with those that I would distinguish as tragic. His argument derives from psychoanalytical terms and Freudian theory of how individuals deal with traumatic experiences (51); Quint uses Freud's theories, and Peter Brooks' interpretation of them, to map psychological constructs onto literary ones. Quoting Peter Brooks, he writes, "repetition and return are perverse and difficult, interrupting simple movement forward" (51). Accordingly, in the broadest terms, in the *Aeneid*, tragedy is what serves to impede the simple forward movement of the epic.

Quint explains the notion of repetition as a hindrance of the epic by considering Book 3 as an essentially tragic book.[26] A formal feature of the book is its essentially circular structure, but the presence of tragedy is signalled overtly early on in the book, when Aeneas and his men arrive in Thrace and come upon the bleeding shrub that is Polydorus' grave marking, an explicit reminder of Euripides' *Hecuba*. Later they encounter a grieving Andromache, who was also the subject of a Euripidean tragedy, at Buthrotum. Neither of these locations is suitable for settlement: Aeneas cannot found his city on the site of a tragedy. Quint's argument is reinforced by the continuing presence of these Troy look-a-likes and their subsequent failure as suitable locations for foundation as evidence that a return to their past is not what the Trojans need in order to fulfil their allotted fate; they must move beyond their tragic beginnings in order to establish their

[26] This particular example will be given greater attention in the following chapter as it pertains to epic foundations.

epic futures (1993: 53-65). But perhaps the most famous example of tragedy in the *Aeneid* is Book 4. Pobjoy (1998) has laid out many of the tragic motifs that Virgil uses in this particular part of the poem: descriptions of civic settings in Carthage that resemble theatres (42-47); Venus delivering a prologue and appearing in costume, even so far as donning a pair of *cothurnae*, the stock footwear of tragic actors (43-44); Dido behaving as a bacchant and described as if she is wearing a mask (56-57). Furthermore, it is widely held that Virgil's Dido is a rewrite of tragic characters including, but not limited to, Phaedra, Medea, and Ajax.[27] It is also a popular assertion that *Aeneid* 4 can be seen as a tragedy within the greater epic.[28] But Virgil places the tragic themes in the poem in tension with those of epic, and this deliberate opposition creates a literary dissonance between the high genres. The Dido episode, with all its tragedy of forbidden love and suicide, amounts to little more than an obstruction on Aeneas' journey to found Rome. Dido herself is sacrificed for the greater cause of Aeneas' fate, for the movement of the epic poem. Her character does not progress past the repetitive nature that is the reality of tragic figures; after she falls on Aeneas' sword, she descends into the underworld, only to roam sadly without speech as when Aeneas sees her in Book 6. She is doomed to be left behind by Aeneas, by the poem itself, because her tragedy cannot comfortably exist within Aeneas' epic reality. Moreover, the curse that Dido utters on her deathbed is one that will contest Roman dominance later in history; the *aliquis ultor* ('some avenger' [*Aen*. 4.625]) to whom Dido refers is Hannibal, who will threaten Rome's future in the 3rd

[27] See also Panoussi (2002). The Phaedra-Dido goes further to present this tragedy-epic exchange: Virgil's epic Dido is a rewrite of Euripides' tragic Phaedra from the play of the same name, but Seneca would use the same Dido as the archetype for his own Phaedra some years later. Thus, from tragedy to epic back to tragedy. The characterisation of Dido will become more important in Chapter 5.

[28] See Pobjoy (1998).

century BCE. Thus, in the *Aeneid*, the powers that inhibit the movement of the epic, and of Roman history, are those that can be identified with tragedy.

But even apart from the wanderings of Book 3 and the Trojans' respite in Carthage in Book 4, still other elements of the *Aeneid* can be seen as having tragic colouring. Juno, throughout the entire poem, is characterized by her inability to reconcile the fate of Aeneas and the Trojans in the founding of Rome. At every opportunity, she attempts to halt the movement of the Trojans, and consequently, of the poem itself. Over and over, Juno is linked with concepts of beginnings and cyclical rage; she is "mindful of the past and blind or violently resistant to the future" (Oliensis 1997: 303) (*Aen.* 1.8-11):

> *Musa, mihi causas memora, quo numine laeso*
> *quidve dolens, regina deum tot volvere casus*
> *insignem pietate virum, tot adire labores*
> *impulerit. Tantaene animis caelestibus irae?*
>
> Tell me the causes now, O Muse, how galled
> In her divine pride, and how sore at heart
> From her old wound, the queen of the gods compelled him –
> A man apart, devoted to his mission –
> To undergo so many perilous days
> And enter on so many trials. Can anger
> Black as this prey on the minds of heaven?

Juno's madness expressed in her raging grudge against the Trojans and the extremes to which she will go to impede their future has its own tragic associations, in particular, with her role in the tragedies of Hercules.[29] But her greater role as a female is a perpetually significant factor in the movement of the epic. Oliensis writes (1997: 303):

> Virgil associates the feminine with unruly passion, the masculine with reasoned (self-) mastery. In narrative terms, this tends to mean that women make trouble and men restore order. The *Aeneid*

[29] Juno's relationship with Hercules and Aeneas will figure prominently in Chapter 3. See Hershkowitz (1998) for an examination of the madness of Juno in the *Aeneid* (95 ff.).

> tells repeated versions of this story, most often with the goddess Juno in the role of instigator.

Thus the opposition of tragedy and epic can also be seen as an opposition between female and male; generic opposition parallels gender opposition in the *Aeneid*.[30] Taking both Quint's and Oliensis' arguments together, in general terms, women appear cyclical and tend to look backwards in time, while men appear linear and look forwards to the ends of their efforts (Oliensis 1993: 303-304). In this way, women reflect the nature of tragedy, while men reflect epic. And modern scholars are not the first to identify Virgil's characterisation of Juno as tragic. With respect to Seneca's tragedy the *Thyestes*, Schiesaro (2003) writes that the tragedian

> … situates his tragedy in a tradition of Juno-inspired poems (and actions) whose authoritative model he traces back to Virgil: these poems are characterized by the violent subversion of an ordered world structure guaranteed by Jupiter, and allied with the chthonic (and, crucially, female) forces of 'irrational' passions and desires. (35)[31]

Juno's anger is a tragic motif most famously depicted in Euripides' *Heracles*. Further, this anger manifests itself throughout Virgil's poem, but is especially evident in Book 7, when Juno renews her anger against the Trojans and her resolve to prevent their foundation of the Roman city by sending the fury Allecto to infect the women of Latium. And it is not a coincidence that Book 7 is saturated with tragic references.[32] The fury alone is enough to signal that we are in the presence of tragedy; Euripides uses a fury, too, in his *Heracles*.[33]

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[30] Gender and genre will factor predominantly in Chapter 4 as it pertains to Hippolytus.

[31] Putnam (1995) also stresses Seneca's debt to the *Aeneid* in his tragedies (246 ff.)

[32] Book 7 of the *Aeneid* will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

[33] Schiesaro (2003) writes, with reference to the fury of Seneca's *Thyestes*, that she is "a direct descendant of the Virgilian Fury responsible for bringing the second half of the *Aeneid* into existence. An epic Fury, she

Virgil continues his use of tragedy until the very end of the epic. Book 12 exhibits elements of the tragic even in its last lines. Jupiter, who has opposed Juno's anger throughout the narrative, ends the poem by sending a fury of his own, and one with stormy tendencies at that (*Aen.* 12.855); this is no doubt a mirroring of Juno's own storm sent to obstruct Aeneas in Book 1, and can be seen as an allusion to the use of the Furies in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (Hardie 1997b: 315). The nature of Aeschylus' Furies varies considerably from Virgil's, however; in the *Oresteia*, the Furies are assimilated at the end of the play, suggesting that the horror of tragedy is necessary in the proper functioning of the city. Virgil never quite makes this compromise; the tragedy suggested by the fury's presence does not fit comfortably in the epic. The final act indicates as such.[34] The anger Aeneas demonstrates just prior to his slaughter of Turnus merely repeats that of Juno; he becomes enraged at the sight of Pallas' belt in the possession of Turnus, a reminder of his protégé's death; he is no more forgetful of the past than Juno.

Thus, while it may seem that tragedy is abandoned throughout the course of the *Aeneid* – the Trojans do found their city, Dido and Carthage are left behind, and Juno's anger is quelled by Jupiter – and are assimilated into the epic narrative, Book 12, and specifically Turnus' death, inevitably raise questions as to tragedy's role. For example, what are the political repercussions of Virgil's use of tragedy and epic in this way given the political context in which he lived? Hardie writes the following regarding Virgil's place in Rome as opposed to Ennius before him, both of whom wrote according to their

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coherently invokes epic models, although she is herself closely connected in turn with a tragic precedent, Euripides' Lyssa." (84).

[34] The slaughter of Turnus has also been considered an example of the sacrifice motif that Virgil uses throughout the *Aeneid*. See Hardie (1993) on the sacrifice of Turnus (19-23). See also O'Hara (1990) on human sacrifices elsewhere in the poem (19 ff., 107 ff.).

contemporary social realities. In doing so, Hardie aptly sums up the Augustan perception of the Roman world (1997a: 141):

> The tensions were even more acute for the poet of Augustus, a ruler who sought to legitimate his power largely through what one might call an "ideology of timelessness": the claim to have ended once and for all the interminable sequence of civil wars, to have brought about a return to the stable social and moral values of a mythical Roman past, in short, to have introduced in the present a Golden Age, that dream of a state of perfection before history, before time. In Virgil the literary question of narrative closure is inextricably linked with the Roman emperor's problem, as stage manager of history, of bringing down the curtain on the turmoil of the past.

Quint continues in this vein (1993: 52):

> The negative and positive forms of repetition in the two halves of the epic correspond to the double message of Augustan propaganda: the injunction to forget the past of civil war (so as to stop repeating it), and the demand that this past be remembered and avenged (and so be repeated and mastered).

Further, he explains that due to the pervasive Augustan ideology in Virgil's time, one must read the *Aeneid* as asking "whether the new political foundation that the regime promises will be an escape from or merely a repetition of Rome's history of civil war" (53). I shall not elaborate further on Virgil's political attitudes or affiliations; I include Quint's response only to suggest that I believe Ovid explores this same question in the *Metamorphoses*, and that by using tragedy and epic in a similar way to Virgil, to impede the overall movement of the epic, Ovid questions the political direction of his time.[35] Like his literary predecessors, and like Virgil in particular, Ovid's poetry folds Greek tragic material into a Roman epic context, and in doing, he establishes both generic and political dissonance. Poetry, especially the high genres of epic and tragedy, had become

[35] Ovid's pro- or anti-Augustanism has been explored at length. See Barchiesi (1997).

more and more politically significant under Augustus. And despite the *princeps'* attempt to keep constant tabs on the political expression of poetry in his realm, the agonistic relationship between the genres, and thus the questioning of Augustan political realities, continued. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with its generic discontent, persists and emphasizes the social anxieties of his time as expressed by Virgil in his own great epic.

Now that we have established the literary tradition that Ovid inherits via Virgil and a broad overview of the political climate in which he writes, we can turn finally to the present study. The following four chapters consider the role of tragedy in Ovid's epic *Metamorphoses*, each of which focus on one of four individual episodes, those of Cadmus in Book 3, Hercules in Book 9, Hippolytus in Book 15, and Medea in Book 7, and how Ovid uses their tragic sources in the greater epic context. The episodes are connected by the themes of tragedy and transformation; and moreover, by the transformation of tragedy itself. In each chapter, I will discuss the tragic intertextuality of the episode, as well as its relationship to Virgil's *Aeneid*. Further, in each episode, as in the *Metamorphoses* as a whole, the main figure (Cadmus, Hercules, Hippolytus, and Medea, respectively) is changed. And in the case of the four tragic figures in question, their metamorphoses signal an escape of sorts from the tragic milieu (by extension, in the case of Cadmus). More specifically, things appear less tragic and more epic by the end of each episode, and the genres appear to have undergone a resolution. But this 'escape' does not occur in the same way for each character, nor is it as straightforward as we would perhaps wish. For Hercules and Hippolytus, their metamorphoses are manifested

as apotheoses, the former on a pyre and the latter via a corporal reconstitution,[36] and, at first glance at least, they are transformed from tragic figures into more epic ones. This is made more explicit by Ovid's very writing of their apotheoses; in doing so, he not only changes their stories, but also moves beyond the tragic boundaries established with their deaths in the Greek plays. Despite the character's vast literary history,[37] in his Cadmus episode, Ovid encourages us to think particularly of the *Aeneid* by means of numerous Virgilian references. Cadmus, unlike Hercules and Hippolytus, is changed into a snake in his final moments, the same type of monster with whose slaughter began the tragedy that surrounds the city he founds. It is not until the apotheosis of Aeneas in Book 14 that Cadmus' story achieves reconciliation between its tragic and epic elements. Thus, in considering Cadmus in the *Metamorphoses*, we must keep the *Aeneid* and all of its influence and implication close at hand. Lastly, Medea undergoes a more subtle type of apotheosis; and just as literary history has always depicted her, Medea's transformation is not easily classified nor reconciled. With her own anticipation of her apotheosis, Medea in the *Metamorphoses* asserts herself as a self-consciously meta-literary figure.

Despite the thematic similarities of transformation and generic interplay, however, Ovid does not use tragedy in the same way in all four episodes. Thus, I am interested less in why Ovid uses tragedy in the *Metamorphoses*; instead, my interest lies in how Ovid uses the genre, how its assimilation into the epic context of the poem occurs in each case, and what we might ascertain as to the political implications of this fusion of genres. It would be unOvidian to reuse the same manner and degree of generic

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[36] Considerable scholarship attests to the close association between the human body and the textual body, especially in Ovidian poetry, and all of the poetic consequences that follow. See, for example, Gildenhard and Zissos (1999) and Theodorakopoulos (1999).

[37] Apollodorus, for example, discusses Cadmus' history (*Bibl.* 3.1.1).

transformation in four unrelated episodes, and so we must expect nothing less than variation.

Chapter 2

Tragedy and Epic Foundation: Cadmus and the anti-*Aeneid*

From its opening lines, *Metamorphoses* 3 promises to be a reminder of that *other* Roman epic, the one to which Ovid and his literary descendents are forever indebted. Like the *Aeneid*, Book 3 begins with an account of the foundation of a great city by an exile, only in this case, that exile is Cadmus rather than Aeneas, and the city founded is Thebes, not the future Rome. The Virgilian allusions are beyond question, however, and with the fundamental differences in setting and protagonist, serve to place Ovid's Theban foundation and the *Aeneid* in direct parallel with one another; Ovid's episode at once opposes and imitates Virgil's. In truth, this chapter is entirely beholden to Philip Hardie's now canonical article on the Theban narrative as an anti-*Aeneid.* But rather than restate his argument, I will use Hardie's discussion as a springboard of sorts, from which I attempt to concentrate on the elements of tragedy present in the episode and their relation to Thebes' destruction. My interest lies less in the fact that the Thebes of Book 3 "tells of a *ktisis*[38] that goes wrong" (224), which Hardie has already argued convincingly; instead, I wish to explore *how* the foundation goes wrong, and what bearing the "how" has on the nature of the literary tension between epic and tragedy later in the *Metamorphoses*.

As Cadmus disembarks with his companions on the shore of unexplored land, the similarities between his quest and that of Aeneas are numerous and deliberate.[39] In both poems, the third book begins with their respective protagonists wandering, each as a

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[38] From ἡ κτίσις, meaning "a founding" or "settling" (Liddell & Scott 1977: 396).

[39] The following examples of intertextuality are taken from Hardie's (1990) subsection, "Foundation" (226 f.).

profugus or 'refugee' (*Met.* 3.7; *Aen.* 1.2), in search of a new city.[40] Banished from his Phoenician home by his father, Cadmus receives a prophecy from Apollo to found his city where he observes a reclining *bos… / nullum passa iugum curvique immunis aratri* ('cow that never wore a yoke nor toiled to haul a curving plough' [*Met.* 3.10-11]); in a dream, the river god Tiberinus bids the exiled Aeneas to search out an *alba sus* ('white sow'), lying beneath oak trees suckling her young (*Aen*. 8.41-45). Upon discovery of these pristine animals, both leaders attempt to perform a sacrifice in gratitude (*Met.* 3.24-25; *Aen.* 8.84-85). The extended allusion continues in the Cadmus episode, though corresponding with a passage later in *Aeneid* 8: Cadmus engages in a spectacular contest with a giant serpent that has attacked his men. A struggle ensues with a great monster in Virgil, too, only in this case, the opponents are Hercules and a serpent-like Cacus (*Aen.* 8.184-305); and while the episode is embedded within the speech of Evander, the context allows that it be seen as a requisite monster-extermination before a proper settlement can be made, as in Cadmus' ordeal (Hardie 1990: 227).[41] But beyond the similarity in players, Hercules and Cadmus are purposefully compared by two particular references regarding battle equipment: the famous Herculean lion-skin, which Cadmus dons in the struggle (*Met.* 3.52-3, 81), and the use of the word *molaris*, or millstone, to strike the monster (*Met.* 3.59; *Aen.* 8.250). As Hardie notes, the term *molaris* is used in both the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses* at only these two points (227).[42]

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[40] Ovid's Cadmus is his protagonist only for this particular episode and its complement at the closing of the Theban narrative (*Met.* 4.563-603).

[41] Bömer illustrates, in detail, the particular correspondences between the Cadmus episode and that of Hercules and Cacus (1969: 464 ff.).

[42] Similarities between the *Aeneid* and the remaining Theban episodes (ie. Semele, Pentheus, etc.) in Books 3 and 4 are noted in the remainder of Hardie's article.

But there is something wrong with Cadmus' foundation. His destruction of the resident serpent is followed not by a parallel to the *Aeneid*'s praise of Hercules and his apotheosis (*Aen.* 8.301), but by another ominous prophecy, foreseeing Cadmus' own metamorphoses: *quid, Agenore nate, peremptum / serpentem spectas? et tu spectabere serpens* ('Why, Cadmus, why stare at the snake you've slain? You too shall be a snake and stared at' [*Met.* 3.97-98]). This isn't supposed to happen; if we suppose Aeneas' mythological tradition as a model, should not Cadmus become the renowned founder of a thriving city? As the audience continues to read through the third book and into the next, through the episodes of Actaeon, Narcissus, and Pentheus, to name a few, it becomes increasingly clear that this is not the case.[43] Theban after Theban is violently destroyed, until Cadmus, looking upon the utter ruin of his descendants, finally abandons the city altogether. Clearly something is amiss. The difficulty here is that the Cadmus episode, while in isolation not very tragic, is fraught with tragic elements. And those elements predispose the reader to the violent and piteous tragedies that are to befall the rest of Cadmus' family in the following books and, in the end, cause Thebes to collapse upon itself.[44]

The tragic intertextuality in the Cadmus episode is suggested both in thematic terms and also in the form of tragic markers. First and foremost, Thebes, by its literary nature, is a tragic city. When first introduced to the episode, readers would likely recall Thebes' reputation in Athenian tragedy. As Froma Zeitlin (1990) remarks, "Thebes… provides the negative model to Athens' manifest image of itself… [The city] consistently supplies the radical tragic terrain where there can be no escape from the tragic in the

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[43] *Met.* 3.138-252, 3.339-510, 3.511-733, respectively.

[44] See Lada (1993) for a discussion of audience response in tragedy.

resolution of conflict" (131). Thebes was the Athenian 'other', a parallel place at which to depict the most horrible events in a manner that would cause audiences to experience the play, but in a context that would keep Athens itself untainted by tragic affiliation. Instead, Athens often served as the place of curing; it seemed that the play must move beyond the boundaries of its original setting (so often Thebes) in order to overcome the tragedy associated with it, and beyond those boundaries lay Athens. Several well-known Greek plays demonstrate this, including Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, and Euripides' *Heracles*. Consequently, the repertoire of Athenian tragedy set in the city of Thebes is considerable, and includes some of the most famous extant plays, among them Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, Sophocles' Theban series (*Oedipus Tyrannos*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone*), and Euripides' *Bacchae*. Ovid makes reference to another of Euripides' plays throughout the Cadmus episode. The second choral ode (*Phoen.* 638-689), in particular, of Euripides' *Phoenissae* is dominated by the description of the very foundation that Ovid explores in Book 3, and it is clear that Ovid was familiar with the play.[45] The first strophe begins (*Phoen.* 638-644):

> Κάδμος ἔμολε τάνδε γᾶν
> Τύριος, ᾧ τετρασκελὴς
> μόσχος ἀδάμαντος πέσημα
> δίκε τελεσφόρον διδοῦσα
> χρησμόν, οὗ κατοικίσαι
> πεδία νιν τὸ θέσφατον
> πυροφόρ' Ἀόνων ἔχρη…
>
> Tyrian Cadmus came to this land.
> Here the heifer bent her legs and fell,
> proved the oracle, told him here to build
> his house on the fertile plain…

Ovid's lines are reminiscent of Euripides' (*Met*. 3.14-16, 22-23):

[45] Bömer's (1964) account of the intertextual allusions here is exhaustive.

… Cadmus…
incustoditam lente videt ire iuvencam
nullum servitii signum cervice gerentem…
atque [bos] ita respiciens comites sua terga sequentes
procubuit teneraque latus submisit in herba.

Cadmus saw…
A heifer ambling loose that bore no sign
Of service on her neck.
… then, her big eyes looking back
Upon her followers, she bent her knees
And settled on her side on the soft grass.

Compare also the poets' corresponding descriptions of the giant snake as both a serpent of Mars (the Roman Ares) and as visually distinctive by a crest (*Phoen.* 657-8, 820; *Met.* 3.32):

ἔνθα φόνιος ἦν δράκων
Ἄρεος…

And there the bloody dragon [of Ares] was…

… ἀπὸ… φοινικολόφοιο δράκοντος

… from… the crimson-crested monster

Martius anguis erat, cristis praesignis et auro…

There dwelt a snake, a snake of Mars. Its crest
Shone gleaming gold…

But Zeitlin's suggestion of Thebes as the Athenian 'other' can also be extended to include Ovid's Thebes as a Roman 'other'. Ancient audiences appreciated this parallel; Statius' *Thebaid*, composed during the reign of Domitian (AD 51-96), is heavily indebted to Ovid's Theban narrative.[46] But, more importantly, Statius, too, saw Thebes as an alternative to Rome as a subject for his epic (*Theb.* 1.16-18, 21-24, 32-34):

[46] See especially Keith (2002a).

limes mihi carminis esto
Oedipodae confusa domus, quando Itala nondum
signa…
aut defensa prius vix pubescentibus annis
bella Iovis teque, o Latiae decus addite famae,
quem nova mature subeuntem exorsa parentis
aeternum sibi Roman cupit…
tempus erit, cum Pierio tua fortior oestro
facta canam: nunc tendo chelyn satis arma referre
Aonia…

The troubled house of Oedipus shall set
The limit to my lay, since I'll not dare
As yet to hymn the standards of Italy...
[or how] Jove saved from war's assault
When boy had scarce reached man, and thee, the grace
And glory given to the Latin name,
Youthful successor to thy father's fresh
Achievements, prince whom Rome would fain possess
For ever...
A time shall come when I shall hymn they deeds
Emboldened by the Muses' spur; but now
It is enough to tune my lyre to tell
Of Theban arms...

Although he shies away from writing an epic about Rome, merely by mentioning Rome in his proem, he sets the city side-by-side with Thebes, so that they may be readily compared. And given his Ovidian allusions throughout the *Thebaid*, it is possible that Statius made this implicit comparison based on Ovid's own Thebes as an anti-Rome, and thus, like Zeitlin's Thebes, Ovid's is a ready setting for the tragedy that is to come.

More so than in specific intertextual references with the likes of Euripides' *Phoenissae*, however, the tragedy in the Cadmus episode is evident in the themes introduced throughout the Theban foundation. These themes are stereotypically tragic in that they form the bases for many of the existing ancient tragedies, and many of the themes that are alluded to in this first episode are explored more thoroughly in the

upcoming stories in the following books. Perhaps most obvious is the distinct contrast between nature and the city, a theme most famously explored in Euripides' *Bacchae*. As Hardie notes, the establishment of a city is the enforcement of civilization upon nature (1990: 224), a process that sets nature and the city in diametric opposition to one another. In the *Bacchae*, this theme manifests itself in Pentheus' outright rejection of Dionysus and the women whom the god has possessed into Bacchic fury on the mountain. In the Cadmus episode, the Phoenician confronts nature head-on in his violent struggle with the serpent of Mars (*Met.* 3.50-94). And although Cadmus ultimately kills the giant snake, the nature that he has apparently subdued with this victory continues to be a significant character in the lives (and deaths) of his descendants. The three most significant episodes in the Theban narrative are those of Actaeon, Narcissus, and Pentheus, and all three characters become victims to their fascination with their natural environments: Actaeon, a hunter who is destroyed by his own dogs because he glimpses Diana bathing in a pristine glade; Narcissus, a youth so infatuated with his own reflection in a pond that he is changed into a flower; and Pentheus, a domineering leader whose destruction is modeled closely on Euripides' account in the *Bacchae*. Pentheus himself is the son of Echion, or "viperman" (Hardie 1990: 225), and his speech urging the worship of the Martian snake illustrates that the forces of nature remain in the city. In fact, the nature that the founder is supposed to have suppressed with the death of the serpent and the founding of Thebes is a sufficiently dominant force that Cadmus himself is metamorphosed into a snake in the closing lines of the Theban narrative (*Met.* 4.563-603), bringing full circle the tragic motif and signalling the final destruction of the tragic city. Cadmus' own metamorphosis also fulfills the prophecy set forth by Minerva that he 'too shall be a snake and stared at'

(*Met.* 3.97-98). These words demonstrate another pervasive tragic theme: sight and observation, and the transition from protagonist as observer to participant and observed. The theme of sight (and its contrary, blindness) is significant particularly in *Oedipus Tyrannos*, where Oedipus transitions from active seeker to the blind object of his own seeking, but also manifests itself throughout the Theban narrative. The central characters of the following episodes are all obsessed with observing – Actaeon with a bathing Diana, Narcissus with his own reflection, and Pentheus with the bizarre Bacchic behaviour of the Theban women – and for each in turn, this observation leads to their tragic downfall and shift from subject into object – Actaeon as that of his own hounds, Narcissus as he realizes he is the object of his own gaze, and Pentheus as that of his own family as they tear him to pieces. In addition to the theme of sight, Minerva's words also signal a *deus ex machina* of sorts, one that alludes directly to Dionysus' similar prophecy to Cadmus in the *Bacchae* (1330) (Keith 2002b: 263). We are clearly in the midst of a tragic world.

Somewhat less obvious is the theme of incest, present in the sowing and birth of the Spartoi. After the death of the monster, Minerva orders Cadmus *supponere terrae / vipereos dentes, populi incrementa futuri* ('to plant the serpent's teeth, from which a future people should arise' [*Met.* 3.102-103]). From these seeds grow a race of men, fully armed, which includes the future inhabitants of Thebes, Cadmus' fellow civilians. The men are autochthonous, born of the earth. But autochthony itself has connotations of incest as Zeitlin expresses briefly, referring to the "analogy that obtains between mother and earth" (1990: 141 n. 9); in other words, just as the earth is also the mother, the teeth

that grow into the Spartoi are also the very substances that fertilize the mother; at once, both son and lover, both father and offspring.

The incest theme coincides with a number of other tragic patterns that are discernable in the Cadmus episode and throughout the narrative, but allude to a cycle of myths that are noticeably absent. Zeitlin breaks the Theban tragedies into three sets of myth: the stories surrounding Cadmus and his foundation; those regarding the family of Laius, including Oedipus; and those about Dionysus and his relations with Pentheus.[47] Ovid writes of Cadmus and Pentheus in the course of the Theban narrative, Books 3 and 4, but what of Oedipus? What of that most (in)famous of Thebans, who slaughters his father and marries his mother, and whose sons declare war upon each other? Gildenhard and Zissos (2000) argue that Oedipus is present throughout the narrative of Narcissus, who, although not strictly a member of Cadmus' family, makes his way into the middle of the Theban accounts.[48] In addition, however, I argue that shadows of Oedipus, or at least of those tragic motifs that are so easily associated with Oedipus and his family, are also present in the ventures of Cadmus. We have already discussed the theme of incest, which suggests Oedipus' relations with his mother, via the autochthonous Spartoi, but the earth-born brothers also signify both civil war and fratricide.[49] And it is not a coincidence that their birth is written with an elaborate metaphor describing the raising of a curtain during a stage performance (*Met.* 3.106-114):

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[47] Gildenhard & Zissos (2000) sum up the "three principal clusters of myth" in the introductory material of their article on allusions to Oedipus in the Narcissus episode (130).

[48] Gildenhard & Zissos (2000) establish intertextuality between Ovid's Narcissus and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* with Tiresias' presence in the narrative (131 ff.), plot parallels (134-140), and the use of Echo as an intertextual marker (141 ff.). See also Hardie (2002) for a similar exploration of the tragic Narcissus with a focus on "issues of absence and presence" (165 ff.).

[49] Moreau (1979) examines exhaustively the mythological tradition and finds that the themes of incest, parricide, and cannibalism tend to appear together.

inde (fide maius!) glaebae coepere moveri
primaque de sulcis acies apparuit hastae,
tegmina mox capitum picto nutantia cono,
mox umeri pectusque onerataque bracchia telis
exsistunt, crescitque seges clipeata virorum.
sic, ubi tolluntur festis aulaea theatris,
surgere signa solent primumque ostendere vultus,
cetera paulatim, placidoque educta tenore
tota patent imoque pedes in margine ponunt.

The tilth (beyond belief!) began to stir:
First from the furrows points of spears were seen,
Next helmets, bright with nodding painted plumes,
Then shoulders, chest and weapon-laden arms
Arose, a growing crop of men in mail.
So, when the curtain at a theatre
Is raised, figures rise up, their faces first,
Then gradually the rest, until at last,
Drawn slowly, smoothly up, they stand revealed
Complete, their feet placed on the fringe below.

Such a metaphor places Ovid's readers firmly in the audience of a play.[50] If readers did not pick up on the prior tragic marker, the *deus ex machina* of Minerva, Ovid is reiterating the point with the stage allusion. Cadmus too becomes an audience-member of the Spartoi and the events to come. After they emerge from the earth, the Spartoi begin to fight each other, but not before warning Cadmus, *ne cape… nec te civilibus insere bellis* ('Lay down your arms! Take no part in civil strife' [*Met.* 3.116-117]).[51] While Melville's translation indicates 'civil strife', the words *civilibus bellis* are more appropriately translated as 'civil wars'. The notion of civil war is one that arises

[50] See Hardie (1990) n.14, for a similar argument.

[51] The passage brings to mind a similar sentiment expressed by Anchises in Book 6 of the *Aeneid* (6.832-833): *ne, pueri, ne tanta animis adsuescite bella / neu patriae validas in viscera vertite viris* ('Sons, refrain! You must not blind your hearts / To that enormity of civil war, / Turning against your country's very heart / Her own vigor of manhood'). The *Aeneid* passage has a particularly sombre undertone: Anchises plea is futile – the *pueri* whom he addresses are Pompey and Caesar, and these men will nevertheless engage in a war that will devastate Rome and change the course of history.

frequently in tragedy; much of Greek tragedy deals with only a handful of families,[52] and that the curses that permeate these families do so across generations. Consequently, the conflicts that arise are those among blood relatives. In a similar vein, the ensuing battle of the autochthonous race results in the deaths of all but five of the Spartoi, all of whom die by the hand of another brother. The war and fratricide present in the episode bring to mind the similar themes explored in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* in the power-struggle between Oedipus' sons Eteocles and Polynices over the rule of Thebes upon their father's exile. Like their father, neither Eteocles nor Polynices are directly explored in the *Metamorphoses*, but with the violence and killing that occurs between the autochthonous brothers and co-founders of Thebes, the themes which characterize their literary identities are nevertheless present in the Cadmus episode. The apparent absence of tragic material relating to the house of Laius in Ovid's Theban narrative now seems more than evident. The tragic-ness of the themes of incest and civil war lies in their suggestion of repetition, that their very manifestation is a symptom of persistence through self-destruction and vice-versa. Characteristic of tragedy, the themes are cyclical in their self-preservation.

The closing lines are also reminiscent of the tragedy that pervades the episode and prepares Ovid's readers for the tragedy to come (*Met.* 3.133-135):

> *sed scilicet ultima semper*
> *exspectanda dies hominis, dicique beatus*
> *ante obitum nemo supremaque funera debet.*
>
> But yet in truth one ever must await
> A man's last day, nor count him fortunate
> Before he dies and the last rites are paid.

[52] Arist. *Poet.* 1454a.

The cliché is perhaps best known from the account of Croesus and Solon in Herodotus,[53] but the Greek tragedians were also known to include adapted versions in their plays. In the prologue of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, Deianira declares (*Trach.* 1-3):

> λόγος μέν ἐστ' ἀρχαῖος ἀνθρώπων φανείς,
> ὡς οὐκ ἂν αἰῶν' ἐκμάθοις βροτῶν, πρὶν ἂν
> θάνῃ τις, οὔτ' εἰ χρηστὸς οὔτ' εἴ τῳ κακός.
>
> It was long ago that someone first said:
> You cannot know a man's life before the man
> has died, then only can you call it good or bad.

See too Andromache's lines in Euripides' play of the same name (*Andr.* 100-102):

> χρὴ δ' οὔποτ' εἰπεῖν οὐδέν' ὄλβιον βροτῶν,
> πρὶν ἂν θανόντος τὴν τελευταίαν ἴδῃς
> ὅπως περάσας ἡμέραν ἥξει κάτω.
>
> It's vain to say that any man alive
> Is in the true sense happy. Wait and ponder
> The manner of his exit from this stage.

The lines in Sophocles and Euripides are placed at the beginnings of the plays and serve to help introduce the forthcoming events. Thus, it is perhaps appropriate that Ovid includes the cliché at the end of the opening episode that initiates a series of tragedies. Like Minerva's *deus ex machina* and the elaborate curtain metaphor, the anecdote is yet another marker to readers of the tragedy present in the Theban narrative.

It is not an accident that Ovid chooses Thebes as the city of his epic foundation myth, a city that is inundated with tragic associations. As an anti-Athens, Thebes provides the setting for some of the most horrendous storylines in the tragic repertoire. And the Cadmus episode in the *Metamorphoses* serves to introduce some of these tragedies with its own series of tragic references. But amongst those allusions are

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[53] πρὶν δ' ἂν τελευτήσῃ, ἐπισχεῖν, μηδὲ καλέειν κω ὄλβιον ἀλλ' εὐτυχέα. ('But until he is dead, you had better refrain from calling [a man] happy, and just call him fortunate' [*Hist.* 1.32]).

reminders of the *Aeneid*, and of the role of the episode as a parallel foundation epic to that of Virgil and Rome. Thebes is evidently not Rome, nor is Cadmus Aeneas. So why does Ovid deliberately remind his reader of the *Aeneid*, which so often emphasizes the future accomplishments of Rome, while systematically annihilating Theban citizens until the city itself is destroyed and its founder again exiled? Why use a tragic cycle to mirror a well-known epic foundation?

Ovid takes his cue from Virgil. The use of tragedy in an epic context as a means of setting the two poetic genres in opposition to one another is a literary motif that Virgil explored in his *Aeneid*. And Virgil's use of this motif is such that we are suspicious when tragedy makes its way into a foundation myth. By example in the *Aeneid*, the way to write civic failure is in terms of tragedy. As we have said, the problems and situations that hinder Aeneas and his crew in their reaching Italy are marked with tragic elements, and it is the tragedy that the Trojans must overcome in order to establish a future Rome.

The first six books of the *Aeneid* have long been described as Odyssean in their scope, followed by the Iliadic books 7 through 12. Within the Odyssean books, Book 3 potentially takes shape as a microcosm for the entire first half of the poem (Quint 1993: 56). Misread oracles, mistaken foundations, and perpetual wandering characterize the book, and the Trojans find themselves encountering their pasts over and over, meeting Polydorus and Andromache, for example; and many of the islands at which they land turn out to be replicas of the recently destroyed Troy. Aeneas' father Anchises determines that Crete is a suitable location for the Trojan refugees because of its history as the *gentis cunabula nostrae* ('cradle of our people', [*Aen.* 3.105]); Aeneas even names this colony 'Pergamum' (*Aen.* 3.133). And Andromache's Buthrotum presents itself as a true mini-

Troy, a *simulataque… Pergama* (an 'imitation Pergamum' [*Aen.* 3.349-350]) complete with figures from Aeneas' Trojan past. All of these pseudo-Trojan locations, however, are problematic, and Aeneas must move beyond them in order to found his fated city: "With its parade of replica Troy… the fiction of Book 3 insists that this future can only be reached if the Trojans relinquish their past and its memories, if they can escape from a pattern of traumatic repetition" (Quint 1993: 61). This pattern is analogous with the notion of tragic circularity, a notion that continues from Book 3 into Book 4 and the Dido narrative.

The greatest hindrance for the journey of the Trojan fleet and Aeneas, in particular, is their sojourn in Carthage, and Aeneas' relationship with Dido. And scholars have long described the Dido episode as one that is plagued with tragic elements. Dido herself is a tragic character, modeled on the figures of Medea, Ajax, and Phaedra, among others. In their role as tragic, Dido and Carthage serve to delay the fleet, but more significantly, they stand in the way of Aeneas' Roman foundation and impede the epic journey that fulfills the fate of the Trojan refugees. But tragic obstacles are not limited to the Odyssean books. Book 7 serves as a renewal of the epic: it begins with re-invocation of the Muses and a reestablishment of the poet's goals (*Aen.* 7.37-45). It also signals the beginning of the Iliadic books and thus an apparent movement away from the wandering of the previous half of the epic. Yet, despite the Trojans' arrival on their fated Italian soil, the foundation of the city is hindered by events that demonstrate their own tragic allusion. Following the second proem, Virgil continues to reuse motifs that he established in the first book (a repetition of the literary past of the poem, perhaps?); the scene switches to Olympus and Juno's anger at the prospective Trojan settlement (*Aen.* 7.321-322):

> "*quin idem Veneri partus suus et Paris alter,*
> *funestaeque iterum recidiva in Pergama taedae.*"
>
> "So it is
> With Venus' child, a Paris once again,
> A funeral torch again for Troy reborn!"

Juno's irrational rage and fixation on the past indicates that we are far from reconciling the tragedy present in the epic. And this point is driven home by Juno's subsequent actions and their consequences. In her anger, the queen of the gods summons Allecto, a chthonic deity who descends upon Latium and infects first Queen Amata and then the other women with a madness characteristic of followers of Bacchus, the divine patron of theatre. She cries out, *euhoe Bacche*, an untranslatable exclamation of Bacchic possession (*Aen.* 7.389), and retreats out of the city to the woods (*Aen.* 7.385-387). Latium's women follow her, donning Bacchic garments of fawnskin and waving *thyrsi* or Bacchic wands (*Aen.* 7.395-396).

The tragedy continues with the onset of the civil war that will pervade the remaining books, a theme we have already seen to be an emblem of the Greek tragic tradition and one explored by Ovid in the Cadmus myth. In the *Aeneid*, the civil war between the Latins and the Trojans is spurred by Ascanius when, in a hunting expedition, he kills a stag belonging to Silvia, the daughter of Latinus' herdsman (*Aen.* 7.496-502). The wounded stag is reminiscent of the similar description of Dido, first struck by her love for Aeneas, which begins her own tragic downfall (*Aen.* 4.68-73).

In depicting Books 3 and 4, the books in which Aeneas is utterly off-course, and Book 7 in which Aeneas has finally arrived on Italian soil, as encompassing tragic elements, Virgil places tragedy and epic at odds, and emphasizes the literary tension between the genres. When tragedy appears in the *Aeneid*, it hinders the epic's

progression. The poem cannot proceed simply when confronted by tragedy. Their movements are in opposition with one another: while Virgilian epic suggests linearity and perpetual forward movement, tragedy in the *Aeneid* is characterized by a cyclical preoccupation with the past and a tendency to repeat it. Book 3 illustrates this tendency, and Book 4 reiterates the tragic propensity for stagnation while also showing various allusions to existing tragedies and tragic markers. The themes that are considered characteristically tragic – incest, for example – provide a parallel for the cyclical movement of tragedy as a literary genre; they are, by nature, self-preserving in their self-destruction, and self-destructing in their self-preservation. Accordingly, by representing the false foundations in Book 3 and the obstacles of Books 4 and 7 as tragic in character, all of which prevent Aeneas from establishing the new Trojan settlement, Virgil associates tragedy with civic failure. It seems that Aeneas, however, is able to move beyond this tragedy; in Book 4, upon receiving orders from Jupiter via Mercury that his fate cannot be fulfilled at Carthage, Aeneas sails immediately for Italy, leaving Dido and the tragedy affiliated with her behind. This is problematic of course: as we know, the epic fate that Aeneas pursues will not come to fruition until after more tragic allusion, a lengthy civil war, and several more books. But in any case, Virgil suggests that the success of the Roman civic foundation hinges upon Aeneas' ability to transcend the boundaries of his past, the boundaries of tragedy, and pursue his epic future.

In contrast, however, there is Cadmus and Thebes. And Ovid, by Virgil's example, writes the failure and collapse of Thebes in tragic terms. Tragedy is evident in the introductory episode in the Theban narrative – this much we have seen. But the repetition and the preoccupation with the past are also present with motifs introduced

during Cadmus' exploits. The serpent that Cadmus slays at the beginning of the narrative continues to manifest itself in the lives of his descendants. Pentheus, in particular, evokes repeatedly the image of a snake. As we have said, he is the son of Echion, the "viperman", who sprang from the Cadmean serpent's teeth. In addition, Pentheus' reaction to Bacchus' arrival in Thebes is a tirade in which he elevates the giant snake at the Theban foundation from a resident monster to be exterminated to what Janan refers to as a "Theban *beau ideal*" (2004: 132). At the end of the Theban narrative, Ovid repeats the serpent motif yet again in the final transformation of Cadmus and Harmonia. With their metamorphoses into snakes, and the coinciding collapse of the city, the tragic past has become the tragic present, and vice-versa. In Statius' *Thebaid*, the hero Theseus acts as a sort of *deus ex machina*, haphazardly impressing a resolution on the perpetual bloodshed that had typified the poem by means of a truce (Braund 1996: 1-3). In contrast, at its very destruction, Ovid's Thebes has reverted to its foundation and identified itself as a series of tragedies. Ovid makes clear this civic failure by using a tragic cycle for his anti-*Aeneid*, an example set by Virgil in his 'tragic' books.

Although Ovid wipes out his Thebans and destroys the city that would be the parallel to Virgil's Rome, he does provide a consolation. After all, if he intends to match Virgil, then his epic also requires a successful civic foundation. And Ovid writes one – the same one as Virgil, in fact. That is, Ovid's successful foundation is that of Aeneas and Rome in the form of a 'little' *Aeneid*. But unlike Virgil's, and unlike the Theban narrative, Ovid's *Aeneid* is utterly devoid of tragedy or tragic elements. Instead, it appears almost as a fast-forwarded, abbreviated version of Virgil's epic, and one in which "direct confrontation with Virgil is skillfully avoided" (Kenney 1986: 451). Of the two

books of the poem that the 'little' *Aeneid* straddles (*Met.* 13.623-14.622), only a fraction of the total number of lines are devoted to the story of Aeneas rather than the embedded tales of Acis and Galatea (*Met.* 13.750-899), Scylla and Glaucus (*Met.* 13.730-749, 13.900-14.74), and Picus and Canens (*Met.* 14.320-440). Ovid writes a foundation epic completely purged of tragedy and leading directly to the apotheosis of Aeneas, the most important consolation for the Theban failure. Apotheosis implies permanence, and with his apotheosis, Aeneas achieves a permanent place in the future of Rome, immortality in the eyes of future generations of Romans, a role Cadmus did not secure in Thebes. This transition is unlikely in a tragic cycle, for the cyclical nature of tragedy suggests a perpetual repetition and eventual collapse, illustrated by Ovid's Theban episode, not progress nor a true future, as implied by the progression of Virgil's epic. In providing a tragic-less epic foundation in the 'little' *Aeneid*, Ovid reconciles the total destruction of Thebes with its deliberate tragic *Aeneid*-ness. His anti-*Aeneid* does not necessarily hold up as a foundation narrative, but his abbreviated version seems to clean up the mess left behind by the civic failure of Thebes.

What, then, are the implications of composing such an anti-*Aeneid*, with its tragic elements and failed foundation? Perhaps, by placing his own narrative in such direct parallel to Virgil's, Ovid means to question his predecessor's epic in its potential representation of a movement away from the civil bloodshed that typified Augustus' rise to power. In other words, perhaps the Theban narrative is meant to suggest that the violence has not been stifled completely under the emperor; in which case, the 'little' *Aeneid* may still hold up as a consolation of sorts, with greater political significance. On the other hand, if we are to see Ovid's Thebes as a Roman 'other', a stage on which to

depict terrible things that *could* happen to Rome, the narrative could function as a type of Augustan cautionary tale, much like his staging of Varius' *Thyestes*, and an advertisement as to what will not happen under his power. This is problematic, however, given the dangers of audience (or reader) interpretation. It is likely that Ovid intended to be ambiguous, and that he expected the reception of the episode to be varied. What we do know for sure is that both tragic and Virgilian allusions are present throughout the Cadmus narrative, and that by setting the genres in contention, Ovid suggests an uncertainty about his own political climate and the Augustan ideal.

Chapter 3

Tragic Heroism? Hercules and the Ambiguity of Apotheosis

Moving away from Cadmus and the foundation narrative, we come now to Hercules, a character whose tragic resonances can be pinpointed to specific dramatic representations. The only true Panhellenic hero (Galinsky 1972b: 113), Heracles was depicted differently in various Greek literary genres from Homeric epic to the comic stage.[54] Roman authors, in turn, took up the long-standing tradition in their own poetry. Accordingly, the nature of his literary treatment has been complex and varied. In contrast to much of his artistic representation, the literary Hercules is not merely a pillar of strength (Galinsky 1972a: 7 n. 1); Greek and Latin literature has presented the famed hero as a much less one-dimensional figure. He was one of the most popular characters in satyr plays (81), and comic authors portrayed him as a bumbling buffoon, "a monstrous glutton, bully, and nitwit" (Galinsky 1972a: 88). On the other hand, he was also the subject of numerous tragedies by all three of the great Greek dramatists, all of whom treated his character in a different manner, often altering their depictions among plays.[55] In Latin literature, Hercules was a particular foil for the elegiac poets.[56] The complexities related to the literary representation of Hercules are associated with his distinctive identity as a transgressive figure; Hercules also crosses boundaries of morality, not only

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[54] Galinsky (1972a), *passim*, surveys the representation and reception of Heracles throughout literary history, Greek, Roman, and into modern times. He includes discussion of lyric poetry, philosophy, comedy, tragedy, epic, and elegy, all as vehicles for the transmission of the Heraclean tradition. Consequently, his is the discussion to which I will be referring most frequently.

[55] Galinsky (1972a) describes the varied approach of Sophocles to the character of Heracles from both the *Philoctetes* and the *Trachiniae* (46 ff.).

[56] For example, Propertius 4.9, and Ovid himself in *Her*. 9.

of genre, and this transgression is such that even his heroism is called into question. Hardie (1997b) describes Hercules' liminality with respect to his characterization in both the *Aeneid* and Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. In Virgil, Hercules' seemingly heroic defeat of Cacus is undermined by the frenzy he is under at the time of Cacus' destruction: "the hero of civilisation and future god falls below the level of humanity into a semi-bestial passion" (319). So too in the *Trachiniae*, in which Hercules is described in battle as morphed nearly into a bull (320). The debate over the nature of Hercules' heroism is even formalized in Euripides' *Heracles* in a dispute between Lycus and Amphitryon. Lycus begins (*HF* 157-164):

> ὁ δ' ἔσχε δόξαν οὐδὲν ὢν εὐψυχίας
> θηρῶν ἐν αἰχμῇ, τἄλλα δ' οὐδὲν ἄλκιμος,
> ὃς οὔποτ' ἀσπίδ' ἔσχε πρὸς λαιᾷ χερὶ
> οὐδ' ἦλθε λόγχης ἐγγὺς ἀλλὰ τόξ' ἔχων,
> κάκιστον ὅπλων, τῇ φυγῇ πρόχειρος ἦν.
> ἀνδρὸς δ' ἔλεγχος οὐχὶ τόξ' εὐψυχίας
> ἀλλ' ὃς μένων βλέπει τε κἀντιδέρκεται
> δορὸς ταχεῖαν ἄλοκα τάξιν ἐμβεβώς.
>
> Heracles, though worthless, has acquired a reputation for courage by fighting with beasts, though in other things he is not brave at all. He has never strapped a shield on his left arm, never faced the spear point. He had a bow, basest of weapons, in his hand and was ready to run away! A bow does not show a man's courage: that is done by standing your ground, looking straight at the swift swathe cut by enemy spears, and holding ranks.

Amphitryon replies (*HF* 188-189, 195-203):

> τὸ πάνσοφον δ'εὕρημα, τοξήρη σαγήν,
> μέμφῃ· κλυών νυν τἀπ' ἐμοῦ σοφὸς γενοῦ...
> ὅσοι δὲ τόξοις χεῖρ' ἔχουσιν εὔστοχον,
> ἓν μὲν τὸ λῷστον, μυρίους οἱστοὺς ἀφεὶς
> ἄλλοις τὸ σῶμα ῥύεται μὴ κατθανεῖν,
> ἑκὰς δ' ἀφεστὼς πολεμίους ἀμύνεται
> τυφλοῖς ὁρῶντας οὐτάσας τοξεύμασιν
> τὸ σῶμα τ' οὐ δίδωσι τοῖς ἐναντίοις,
> ἐν εὐφυλάκτῳ δ' ἐστί. τοῦτο δ' ἐν μάχῃ

> σοφὸν μάλιστα, δρῶντα πολεμίους κακῶς
> σῴζειν τὸ σῶμα, μὴ ’κ τύχης ὡρμισμένον.
>
> You find fault with that cleverest of inventions, the bow. Here then what I have to say and learn wisdom! ... the man who is skilled with the bow has this one great advantage: when he has shot countless arrows, he still has others to defend himself from death. He stands far off and avenges himself on his enemies by wounding them with arrows they cannot see even though their eyes are open. He does not expose his body to the enemy but keeps it well protected. This is the shrewdest thing in battle, to hurt the enemy and save your own life, being independent of fortune.

Given the uncertain nature and depth of Hercules’ heroism, as demonstrated by Lycus’ and Amphitryon’s debate, it is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the character would fit so suitably in the lower genre of elegy.

And in elegy, the complex representation of Hercules is also exploited. Matthew Fox (1999) details Propertius’ use of Virgilian references in his poem regarding the hero’s establishment of the exclusively male rites at the Ara Maxima. But due to his literary history, the use of Hercules is heavy with implication. Fox describes further Hercules’ liminality in his transgression of the boundaries of gender (162 ff.), and the problematical inferences of using such a figure in the greater Augustan political context (169 ff.). Ovid himself depicted Hercules in his own elegy, albeit indirectly. In *Heroides* 9, Deianira writes to her husband Hercules, having heard by rumour (*fama*) that he has fallen in love with Iole. As established in the elaborate metaphor in Book 4 of the *Aeneid*, *fama* is an entity manifested in multiple forms with multiple mouths. And Ovid’s use of *fama* as the vehicle of news of Hercules’ affections in both the *Heroides* and the *Metamorphoses* reflects the nature of the inherited literary tradition of Deianira. She, too, is a character composed of multiplicity. In Bacchylides, she is represented as a ferocious man-killer, spurned by jealousy (16.30 ff.), and it was Sophocles who ingeniously layered

on top of this characterization one of a loving, honourable, guiltless housewife.[57] Ovid is indebted, too, to the tragedian's depiction of this figure. Barchiesi (1993) elaborates on the tragic irony present in *Heroides* 9: as Deianira, the elegiac woman, mentions the river in which Nessus was killed, she "unconsciously 'writes' [Hercules'] death" (341), and proceeds to deliver her tragic lament of sorts (342).

In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid continues to exploit the multiplicities of the character. Sophocles' Deianira is characterized as suppressing passions that she suspects other women would feel in her position. She repeats that while others may be angry, she is not; but by the repetition of her docility, Deianira brings attention to the anger of a scorned woman nevertheless. Ovid emphasizes this complex motif, and adds a further tragic dimension. Hearing of Hercules' affair with Iole, Deianira delivers what appears to be a tragic soliloquy (*Met.* 9.143-151):

> *"quid autem*
> *flemus?" ait "paelex lacrimis laetabitur istis.*
> *quae quoniam adveniet, properandum aliquidque*
> *novandum est,*
> *dum licet et nondum thalaous tenet altera nostros.*
> *[conquerar an sileam? repetam Calydona morerne?*
> *excedam tectis an, si nihil amplius, obstem?]*
> *quid si me, Meleagre, tuam memor esse sororem*
> *forte paro facinus, quantumque iuiuria posit*
> *femineuque dolor, iugulata paelice testor?"*
>
> 'Why do I weep?' she said, "Those tears
> Will gladden that girl's heart. Since she must come,
> I must make haste, devise some strategem
> While time allows, before that paramour
> Is settled in my bed. Shall I protest?
> Shall I be dumb? Go back to Calydon?
> Or wait here? Leave the house? Or stand at bay,
> If nothing better? Why, remembering

[57] The question of Deianira's guilt, whether or not she knew the robe was poisoned when she sent it to Hercules, has been explored at length by many scholars, especially in the context of the *Trachiniae*. See, for example, Carawan (2000).

> I'm Meleager's sister, why not plan
> Some deed of doom, and strangle her and prove
> The power of pain, the power of slighted love?'

Deianira eventually changes her plan and sets her thoughts upon the love charm (*Met.* 9.152-155), but for the duration of her speech, she sounds a great deal like an authentic tragic female. Before she speaks, she laments her situation (*Met.* 9.141-142). But as she continues to speak, Deianira begins to remind the reader more and more of Euripides' Medea. In the *Trachiniae*, Deianira does not deliver such a speech in which she wrestles with her options, nor does she plot onstage the gift of the robe; instead, she swears to the absence of anger (ie. *Trach*. 438, 461 f., 552 f.). Medea, on the other hand, expresses nearly identical sentiments over the course of several separate speeches; she delineates where she might go as her husband Jason has chosen a new bride (*Med.* 502 ff.), but quickly turns to how she might be rid of her rival altogether and make Jason suffer (*Med.* 772 ff.). Thus, by emphasizing Deianira's repressed passions through allusion to a tragic female other than her own role in the *Trachiniae*, Ovid highlights in both his elegy and his epic the various layers of Deianira's characterization throughout her literary history.

Hercules, too, possesses this complex layering in his literary representation, but his multi-formed character and the nature of his heroism are much more bound up with genre. We have discussed his legacy throughout Greek and Latin generic forms; consequently, at the time he was composing the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid inherited an elaborate and extensive Herculean literary tradition, and his decision as to how to go about portraying him amounted to a smorgasbord of generic choices. In the *Metamorphoses*, we can distinguish in Hercules elements of epic and tragedy, for the most part, but also present are elements of elegy and comedy.

The Hercules episode (*Met.* 9.1-272) is generally divided into two parts, the contest with Achelous (*Met.* 9.4-88) and the hero's death and apotheosis (*Met.* 9.101-272), which can be described as epic and tragic, respectively, and appropriately so: "the tale of [Hercules'] heroic exploits is followed by that of his terrible doom; the epic career by the tragic denouement" (Otis 1966: 197). More specifically, the first section details Hercules' defeat of Achelous, both rivals for Deianira, and demonstrates Ovid's deliberate and ongoing engagement of Virgil's *Aeneid.* The second represents not just a disastrous end to the hero, but is a relatively faithful rewrite of Sophocles' tragedy, the *Trachiniae*, with Hercules' apotheosis at the episode's close serving as a purposeful departure from the tragic model.

As we know, Ovid's epic exists forever in the shadow of the *Aeneid*, and Ovid makes the most of the situation, using relevant references to illustrate the complexities of the *Metamorphoses*' generic layers. The Hercules episode shows little difference in this respect. The frequent *Aeneid* allusions establish the epic-ness of the first part of the episode, but the nature of many of the allusions, the aspects of the *Aeneid* to which they refer, lend to the complex layering of epic and tragedy that is present.[58]

As Achelous narrates his appeal to Deianira's father for her hand in marriage, he attempts to discredit Hercules as a potential suitor (*Met.* 9.19-22):

> *nec gener externis hospes tibi missus ab oris*
> *sed popularis ero et rerum pars una tuarum.*
> *tantum ne noceat quod me nec regia Iuno*
> *odit et omnis abest iussorum poena laborum.*
>
> [I am]
> No stranger son-in-law from foreign shores,

[58] Galinsky (1972b), in a more developed version of a chapter from 1972a, gives the Virgilian references in extensive detail (94-105).

> But one of your own folk, your own affairs.
> Let it not damage me that royal Juno
> Does not detest me, that no toils imposed
> Have ever punished me!

This argument is precisely the same one, as applied to Aeneas, which proves the most disconcerting for Turnus upon Aeneas' arrival in Latium. Line 9.19 is most reminiscent of Latinus' words describing the prophesied newcomers (*Aen.* 7.270):

> *... generos externos adfore ab oris*
>
> Foreign sons-in-law will arrive from the coast.[59]

Aeneas too is an *externus vir* ('foreign man' [*Aen*. 7.68 f.]), one of those who will rule over Latium. In addition, Achelous' description of Hercules as one whom *regia Iuno odit* ('queen Juno hates'), referring to his many labours ordered by Juno, suits Aeneas as well; Juno's grudge against the Trojans and Aeneas in particular is the catalyst for much of the movement of the epic. Hercules' retaliation is a claim in Jupiter's divine parentage (*Met.* 9.24), a lineage with which Aeneas is also affiliated (*Aen.* 7.219 f.).[60] The struggle between Hercules and Achelous is focused upon Deianira, a *pulcherrima virgo* ('a most lovely girl' [*Met.* 9.9]); Turnus and Aeneas vie for the hand of Lavinia, also a *pulcherrima virgo* (*Aen*. 7.72; 11.479-480; 12.64-70, 605-606). Hercules is quick to anger (*accensae non fortiter imperat irae*, 'failing to control his flaring rage' [*Met.* 9.28]), much like Aeneas (*furiis accensus et ira*, 'blazing up and terrible in his anger' [*Aen*. 12.946]), and both heroes and their adversaries are compared to bulls in the midst of their brawl (*Met.* 9.46-49; *Aen*. 12.715-724).

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[59] This particular translation is my own.

[60] Galinsky (1972b) outlines Virgil's deliberate parallels between Aeneas and the mythological Hercules, with emphasis on the word *labor*, a term with clear Herculean associations, to describe Aeneas' fated journey and foundation (106 ff.).

Despite the obviously convoluted mythological and literary traditions from which he was able to select, the text to which Ovid is most indebted for the overall tone and plot of the second part of the Hercules episode is Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. Like Sophocles before him,[61] Ovid is concerned less with Hercules' famed labours, and more so with his relationship with his wife Deianira and the circumstances surrounding his death. Ovid remains relatively faithful to Sophocles' plot: upon discovering that Hercules has fallen in love with another woman,[62] Deianira attempts to renew her husband's love for her with a robe smeared with what she believes to be a love potion (*Trach*. 552 ff.; *Met*. 9.152 ff.).[63] The substance is actually a poison, and the cloak begins to consume Hercules alive (*Trach*. 759 ff.; *Met*. 9.159). In his poison-induced madness, Hercules violently kills Lichas, his herald, whom he accuses of orchestrating the plot (*Trach*. 771; *Met*. 9.211). In addition to plot points, a few specific references will suffice to demonstrate the intertextuality between the two texts.

The lines most suggestive of Ovid's Sophoclean echoes are those that recount Hercules' speech after donning the poisoned robe.[64] Sophocles' Heracles describes the sensation in a lengthy oration to his son Hyllus (*Trach*. 1053-1057):

> πλευραῖσι γὰρ προσμαχθὲν ἐκ μὲν ἐσχάτας
> βέβρωκε σάρκας πλεύμονός τ' ἀρτηρίας
> ῥοφεῖ ξυνοικοῦν, ἐκ δὲ χλωρὸν αἷμά μου
> πέπωκεν ἤδη, καὶ διέφθαρμαι δέμας
> τὸ πᾶν, ἀφράστῳ τῇδε χειρωθεὶς πέδῃ.

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[61] Galinsky (1972a) gives an overview of Sophocles' approach to the Hercules myth (46 ff.).

[62] The manner of discovery differs: in Sophocles, Iole is brought to Deianira's home (229 ff.), while in the *Metamorphoses* (and in *Heroides* 9 before it), Deianira hears the news by word of mouth (*fama* [*Met.* 9.137; *Her.* 9.119]).

[63] Again, see Carawan (2000) for a refutation of some scholars' arguments that Sophocles' Deianira is, indeed, entirely innocent.

[64] The account of Hercules' suffering can also be compared to that of the messenger in Euripides' *Medea* (1166 ff.). The poison seems to affect Glauke and Creon in the same manner.

It clings to my sides, it has eaten away
my inmost flesh; it lives with me and empties the channels
of my lungs, and already it has drunk up
my fresh blood, and my whole body is
completely killed, conquered by these unspeakable fetters.

Ovid evokes similar sentiment in his description of Hercules' suffering (*Met.* 9.170-173):

ipse cruor, gelido ceu quondam lammina candens
tincta lacu, stridit coquiturque ardente veneno.
nec modus est, sobent avidae praecordia flammae,
caeruleusque fluit toto de corpore sudor…

Why, as the poison burned, his very blood
Bubbled and hissed as when a white-hot blade
Is quenched in icy water. Never an end!
The flames licked inwards, greedy for his guts;
Dark perspiration streamed from every pore...

But perhaps even more similar is the rhetorical device of addressing his own body, a device that Heracles/Hercules employs in both accounts of the pain (*Trach*. 1089 ff.):

… ὦ χέρες, χέρες,
ὦ νῶτα καὶ στέρν', ὦ φίλοι βραχίονες,
ὑμεῖς δὲ κεῖνοι δὴ καθέσταθ'…

O my hands, my hands,
O my back, my chest, O my poor arms, see
what has become of you from what you once were.

Compare Ovid's Hercules (*Met.* 9.186):

vosne, manus, validi pressistis cornua tauri?

[Was it for this…]
That you, my hands, forced down
The great bull's horns…

Both protagonists go on to recount some of their labours, reminiscing about their heroic pasts (*Trach.* 1091 ff.; *Met.* 9.182-198). Clearly, Ovid has used Sophocles' play as a

model for his own text, but it is in his manipulation of themes originally explored by Sophocles that Ovid illustrates his partiality to the *Trachiniae*.[65]

Much of the scholarly controversy that surrounds the *Trachiniae* is based on Sophocles' ambiguous characterizations of both Deianira and Heracles. As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, the literary depictions of the hero have been varied, and Sophocles takes up this tradition by representing Heracles in an ambivalent fashion. Knowing his mythological exploits, one would expect Heracles to be depicted as a heroic figure whose strength of body and mind overcome all obstacles; instead, Sophocles concentrates on Heracles' love life – his concubine Iole and wife Deianira and the way in which their love triangle leads to his downfall. Consequently, Heracles comes off as lovesick: the renowned monster-slayer is done in by a woman, because of a woman.[66] In addition, Heracles' speech style negates the sympathy of an audience watching him suffer: he boasts his own victories, rather than having another commend him,[67] and appears relatively unconcerned about the suicide of his wife, even after he has heard that Deianira did not intentionally poison the cloak (*Trach.* 1144 ff.).

Ovid exploits Sophocles' approach with full force. His own Hercules is wrought with ambiguity. Ovid's hero cannot be taken entirely seriously; Galinsky indicates as much with reference to the Nessus part of the episode, describing it as "lighthearted" (1972b: 98),[68] but the complex characterization of Hercules continues in the final part of

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[65] As far as we can tell, Sophocles is to be credited with at least some of the innovative changes to this complex literary history.

[66] It is this particular characterization by Sophocles that inspired so many elegiac poets to use Hercules as a primary figure in their own works.

[67] As in Euripides' *Heracles* (Galinsky 1972a: 51).

[68] A good example of this rather amusing Hercules is in the river scene. As the centaur Nessus attempts to violate Deianira, and her shrieks fill the air (*coniugis… vocem,* 'the voice of his wife' [*Met.* 9.119]),

the episode, the part based primarily on Sophocles' tragedy. In his own rewrite of the play, Ovid undermines even further the tragedy of the myth with punctuations of flippancy. Nowhere is this more evident than in the poet's representation of Hercules' apotheosis.

In the closing scene of the *Trachiniae*, Heracles entreats his son Hyllus to build a pyre on Mount Oeta and observe as his body is burned (*Trach.* 1193-1202). Hyllus protests but Heracles pleads with him, telling him that he alone is his healer (μοῦνον ἰατῆρα τῶν ἐμῶν κακῶν, 'the only physician who can cure my suffering' [*Trach.* 1209]). Hyllus agrees, and at the conclusion of the play, we are left with a suffering Heracles who is clearly on the verge of death. Despite the undercurrent of doubt as to the heroic nature of the protagonist, the play ends in tragic fashion. Ovid's rewrite, however, follows the mythological rather than the tragic tradition with a real-time account of Hercules' apotheosis. And in doing so, Ovid moves beyond the tragic boundary established in Sophocles' play. The Heracles we last see in the *Trachiniae*, even with his ambiguities, is a tragic character; the Hercules in the *Metamorphoses*, at the same point of suffering as his Sophoclean counterpart, is decidedly not. Not only is his final oration even less tragic than in Sophocles, Ovid's dying Hercules does not even require assistance to build his own funeral pyre (*Met.* 9.229-231, 234-238):

> *at tu, Iovis inclita proles,*
> *arboribus caesis, quas ardua gesserat Oete,*
> *inque pyram structis arcum…*
> *dumque avidis comprenditur ignibus agger,*
> *congeriem silvae Nemeaeo vellere summam*

Hercules is oblivious as he swims across the river, sure to pick a challenging spot to cross to demonstrate the extent of his abilities (*Met.* 9.113 ff.).

sternis, et inposita clavae cervice recumbis,
haud alio vultu, quam si conviva iaceres
inter plena meri redimitus pocula sertis.

Then Jove's illustrious son cut down the trees
That clothed steep Oeta's side and built a pyre…
And, as the flames
Licked the great timber pile, he spread the skin
Of the Nemean lion high on top,
And, pillowed on his club, lay there at ease,
As at a feast with friends he might recline,
Flower-garlanded amid the flowing wine.

As the poisoned cloak is devouring his body, he manages to fell a few trees and climb on top, but not before spreading out his famous lion skin and club "as a quilt and a pillow" (Galinsky 1972b: 103), no less. As he lays himself out on the pyre, Ovid compares his posture to that of a dinner guest. Perhaps the characterization of Hercules as a "monstrous glutton" (Galinsky 1972a: 88) is not so far off the mark; it is certainly one of which Ovid makes use. He then goes on to describe Hercules' burning and subsequent apotheosis; events only alluded to in the *Trachiniae*. So what does Ovid accomplish with this alteration of the tragedy to which he is so indebted?

With Hercules' burning and apotheosis, Ovid takes his revision of Sophocles one step further, providing a consolation of sorts for the state in which the audience is left at the end of the play. In doing so, Ovid moves beyond the boundaries of tragedy established in the *Trachiniae* in his own epic poem, similar to the function of the 'little' *Aeneid* to the Cadmus episode. Both Sophocles and Ovid describe Hercules' agony as he is poisoned by the cloak as a type of burning;[69] given that the cloak is a failed love charm, it is as though Hercules is consumed by the flames of love gone wrong. Such a lovesick hero is more suited for elegy, not for the epic subjects to come. Accordingly,

[69] *Trach.* 1082; *Met.* 9.159, 161, 172, etc.

Ovid alters the tragic Hercules we are left with at the end of the *Trachiniae* through deification, a process by which any trace of his mortal, and tragic, self is ostensibly erased (*Met.* 9.262-265, 268-272):

> *interea quodcumque fuit populabile flammae,*
> *Mulciber abstulerat, nec cognoscenda remansit*
> *Herculis effigies, nec quicquam ab imagine ductum*
> *matris habet, tantumque Iovis vestigia servat…*
> *sic ubi mortales Tirynthius exuit artus,*
> *parte sui meliore viget, maiorque videri*
> *coepit et augusta fieri gravitate verendus.*
> *quem pater omnipotens inter cava nubila raptum*
> *quadriiugo curru radiantibus intulit astris.*
>
> Meanwhile whatever parts the flames could ravage
> Mulciber had removed; of Hercules
> No shape remained that might be recognized,
> Nothing his mother gave him, traces now
> Only of Jove…
> So Hercules, his mortal frame removed,
> Through all his finer parts gained force and vigour,
> In stature magnified, transformed into
> A presence clothed in majesty and awe.
> The Almighty Father carried him away,
> Swept in his four-horsed chariot through the clouds,
> And stationed him among the shining stars.

The burning on the pyre serves as a corrective burning to that of Hercules' passions represented by the effects of the robe. Gone are any traces of mortality – even his resemblance to his mortal mother is expunged – and thus gone are the irrational passions of his mortal character. His soul is purged and made ready to join the other gods, including Jupiter his father. He is divine now, and the impure mortal bits of his soul have been burned off on the pyre – on the surface, at least.

Hercules' apotheosis introduces a new type of metamorphosis in the poem, and one that predisposes the audience to the deifications of very important figures in the upcoming books, namely Romulus, Aeneas, and Julius Caesar. Given the significance of

such figures to the movement of Roman history, Ovid's treatment of Hercules, their poetic precursor, sets the stage for how their apotheoses might be read. But here is where the episode becomes even more problematic: the apotheosis differentiates Ovid's version from Sophocles', that is, from the tragic. And in the next five books, with the deification of all those important Romans, Ovid will establish apotheosis as a significant process for the Roman future. But in the Hercules episode, like the hero's literary history in general and Ovid's approach throughout the Achelous and Nessus narratives, things are not as simple as they seem. Hercules is deified, but the process is riddled with elements that undermine its tone of respectability, and thus his suitability for permanence in the Roman world.

We have already established the rather comic quality attributed to Ovid's comparison of Hercules on the pyre to Hercules at a feast, indulging his voracious characterization (not to mention that of a drunk: *merum* [*Met.* 9.238]). But the function of the apotheosis is problematic as well. Hercules' corrective burning on the pyre is such that it erases his mortal shortcomings – his lustfulness, his insatiability, his madness – but who is to say that these characteristics are really gone with Hercules' new immortal form? After all, Ovid writes that Hercules now exhibits only *vestigia Iovis*, 'traces of Jove' (*Met.* 9.265). But are those traces any better than those of Hercules as a mortal? Jupiter himself is renowned for his unquenchable sexual appetite,[70] thus having only the qualities of his father does not lend Hercules the gravitas that it might at first imply. And his father himself does not seem to take his son's apparent suffering too seriously: as he

[70] See for example the stories of Io (*Met.* 1.568-750), and Europa (*Met.* 2.833-875), and Arachne's list of Jupiter's romantic indiscretions (*Met.* 6.103-114).

watches the funeral pyre with the other gods, noticing their troubled reactions, Jupiter, *laeto ore*, 'well content' (*Met.* 9.242), consoles them (*Met.* 9.243-246, 251-256):

> *'nostra est timor iste voluptas,*
> *o superi, totque libens mihi pectore grator,*
> *quod memoris populi dicor rectorque paterque*
> *et mea progenies vestro quoque tuta favore est…*
> *nec nisi materna Vulcanum parte potentem*
> *sentiet. aeternum est a me quod traxit, et expers*
> *atque inmune necis, nullaque domabile flamma.*
> *idque ego defunctum terra caelestibus oris*
> *accipiam, cunctisque meum laetabile factum*
> *dis fore confido.'*
>
> 'These your fears
> Are my delight. Gladly do I rejoice
> With my whole heart that you, my grateful people,
> Call me your lord and father, that my issue
> Finds the protection of your favour too…
> He'll not feel Vulcan's power
> Save in his mother's part. What he derived
> From me is everlasting, stands beyond
> The sting of death, unscathed by any flame.
> That part, now done with earth, I shall receive
> On heaven's shores, and I am confident
> My action will give joy to every god.'

Anderson distinguishes the speech as arrogant (1972: 433); Jupiter is entirely unconcerned with Hercules' state – he seems to be enjoying himself. He is much more preoccupied with his own perceived place among the gods and the promotion of his imparted immortality in Hercules; the fact that as his son is dying he is congratulating himself (*mihi grator* [*Met.* 9.244]) indicates the full extent of his egoism. Moreover, Jupiter's speech, with its numerous self-references, is beginning to sound much like his son's some fifty or so lines earlier. Hercules begins the part of his oration in which he lists his own exploits with *ego*, 'I' (*Met.* 9.182), and continues with several other indications of himself (*nec me* [*Met.* 9.184], *nec mihi… nec mi* [*Met.* 9.191], *ego* [*Met.*

9.199]). Perhaps Hercules was not so different from his immortal father even in his mortal form. Further, Hercules ends his soliloquy in exasperation: *et sunt, qui credere possint / esse deos?* ('And men still believe in gods!' [*Met.* 9.203-204]); on the verge of joining them himself, Hercules questions the very existence of the gods. He seems less and less like a suitable candidate for immortalization. Ovid is taking his cue from the hero's tradition of literary representation, but going even further to undermine at every opportunity the gravity of his deification.

But perhaps the most damaging element of Ovid's description to the earnestness of the subject of apotheosis is the comparison of Hercules' metamorphoses to that of a snake (*Met.* 9.266 ff.):

> *utque novus serpens posita cum pelle senecta*
> *luxuriare solet squamaque nitere recenti,*
> *sic, ubi mortales Tirynthius exuit artus…*
>
> And as a snake will slough
> Age with its skin and revel in fresh life
> Shining resplendent in its sleek new scales,
> So Hercules, his mortal frame removed…

Galinsky (1972b: 104 n. 28) disregards the possible significance of this image, citing only that the cult and mythology of Hercules was closely affiliated with the snake. I, however, am inclined to agree with Anderson (1972: 435). The snake's importance in the *Aeneid*, for example, is ambiguous, and thus fits in very well with Ovid's characterization of the hero in this episode. Serpents are both revered in worship and feared as bringers of devastation.[71] And the image has been repeated far too many times in the Hercules episode not to be of some literary significance. In his struggle with Achelous, among the

[71] Anderson gives examples of such contrasting views in literature contemporary to Ovid: the snake at the Sicilian altar at *Aeneid* 5.84 ff., and the snake that invades the heart of Amata representing her hatred for Aeneas (*Aen*. 7.346 ff.) respectively.

many forms the shape-shifter assumes, one is the snake (*Met.* 9.63). Hercules boasts of his history as a serpent-destroyer: *cunarum labor est angues superare mearum* ('Mastering snakes is child's play' [*Met.* 9.67]); a baby Hercules slaughtered two snakes sent by Juno (Kenney 1986: 426). He continues: *et ut vincas alios, Acheloe, dracones, / pars quota Lernaeae serpens eris unus echidnae?* ('Achelous! Yes if you were champion serpent, how could you compare with Lerna's Hydra, you a single snake?' [*Met.* 9.68-69]). He has already killed the hydra, the fiercest of snakes – it is an event to which he refers again even as he is dying (*Met.* 9.192-193); Achelous is not even considered a challenge in comparison.[72] Irony, however, prevails in the end. The cloak, that failed love charm of Deianira, is smeared with the hydra's poison, which had been used on Hercules' arrows to kill Nessus and apparently infects his blood. Not only is Hercules brought down by the deeds of a woman, but also by the monster he is so quick to boast that he defeated. Thus, the comparison of Hercules at his most illustrious time to a serpent is a thoroughly loaded image. The repetition of the snake motif is akin to tragic circularity, and reminds us of Cadmus' metamorphosis six books before: both heroes become what they so famously destroyed.[73] And so the question becomes, is this new metamorphosed deified Hercules really any better than he was in human form? Perhaps Ovid means to be vague about Hercules, to maintain the literary tradition of representation, to layer genre-representative depictions of tragedy and epic, and the image of the snake adds still further uncertainty as to how to perceive this 'heroic' figure. Not surprisingly then, the episode

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[72] Not at all coincidentally, the episode also has its parallels with the Hercules-Cacus episode in *Aeneid* 8. See my discussion in the preceding chapter.

[73] Knox (1950) describes the comparison of snake imagery and flame imagery in Book 2 of the *Aeneid*. He argues that flames and snakes can represent both destruction and rebirth, and that in the *Aeneid* specifically, they go from representing "Greek violence and Trojan doom" to "[announcing] triumphantly the certainty of Troy's rebirth" (381). Perhaps, then, it is unsurprising that both are manifest in the event of Hercules' apotheosis.

ends with another tragic motif: a *deus ex machina* in true Euripidean form (Galinsky 1972a: 160) imposed by Jupiter himself: *omnia qui vincit, vincet quos cernitis ignes* ('He who has conquered all will conquer too the fires you see' [*Met.* 9.250]).[74]

The apotheosis gains still greater significance as a symbol of Hercules' victory over the anger of Juno. The basis of Juno's grudge against Hercules was the possibility of a child of Jupiter by another woman taking a place among the gods.[75] Her anger was part of the mythology surrounding Hercules, but its manifestation as a form of madness cast upon the hero was a theme brought out most famously by Euripides in the *Heracles* (Galinsky 1972a: 58). In Euripides, it was this madness that caused Heracles to kill his wife and children, and it is this variation in plot that Virgil exploited in the *Aeneid*: in Book 7, Juno sends a Fury to enflame the hearts of Amata and the women of Latium, who are then compared to Bacchic worshippers. And, in Book 12, a type of Fury also affects Turnus (*Aen* 12.665-671). All of these forms of madness were sent by Juno as part of a greater plan to prevent Aeneas from realizing his fate, from founding the Roman race and achieving fully the purpose of the epic poem. And it is here that the significance of Ovid's use of Hercules and his apotheosis can be more clearly recognized. Like Aeneas, Hercules is triumphant over Juno's wrath; he is deified. So too, however, is Aeneas – not in the *Aeneid*, but in the *Metamorphoses* in Ovid's 'little' *Aeneid* – and with his apotheosis, Aeneas' epic future is realized and his future in the Roman world is secured.

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[74] The apotheosis of Hercules is dramatized decades later in the *Hercules Oetaeus*, attributed to Seneca, in which Hercules delivers what amounts to a voice-over following his death on the pyre. Larson (1991) has described, with reference to Seneca's own philosophical writings, Hercules' depiction as a Stoic *sapiens*, taking up a well-established connection in Roman philosophy. One such example describes Hercules' upright posture on the pyre as indicative of a stoic mind (42). In contrast, Ovid's Hercules continues to rest on his quilt and pillow in the face of the flames, perhaps suggesting yet another Ovidian play with the traditional Herculean representation.

[75] Another tradition has Hercules' labours imposed upon him as punishment for the murdering of his children (Galinsky 1972a: 58).

Given the association between Aeneas and Hercules, the latter's apotheosis, despite its ambiguous tone in the poem, can perhaps be seen as a triumph, albeit an uncertain one, over his tragic past, and a precedent for the upcoming apotheoses of notable Roman figures.

Of the Hercules episode in the *Metamorphoses*, Otis writes, "this is a tragedy that altogether misfires" (1966: 201). He may very well be correct in that assertion: given the ambiguous tone of the episode, Ovid is not entirely successful in establishing a uniform tragic rendering. But this is not likely to have been his intention. We are in the midst of an exploration of a tragic subject in an epic poem, and Ovid's treatment is ideal for the milieu. In Book 9, he represents Hercules and Deianira in such a manner that what results is a complex episode of genre-fusion, indebted to the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides, but modified for an epic setting and topped off with an apotheosis, while still maintaining the intricacies of the traditional characterizations of the poet's literary predecessors.

The theme of apotheosis, introduced formally here with that of Hercules, continues to gain significance throughout the final five books of the poem, with the subsequent deifications of Romulus, Aeneas, Julius Caesar, and even an implied apotheosis of Augustus with Ovid's *sphragis* (*Met*. 15.869) (Theodorakopoulos 1999:152). But the apotheoses have a greater contextual significance given the repeated placement of this type of metamorphosis so late in the poem, moving into the so-called 'Roman' pentad. Theodorakopoulos writes that the apotheoses function in two ways: "first, they work towards allowing Ovid to conclude with what appears to be a stable view of the history of Rome. Secondly, they make it possible for the poem to get out of

the Russian doll structure, onto a more linear track" (152). Thus, apotheosis serves to separate the post-deified figure from the pre-deified one, and establish the new version as one more 'linear', more suitable for Augustus' Rome. But we have seen with the apotheosis of Hercules that the idealized Augustan version is not necessarily as improved over his former self as one would expect. We will see a similar process with another formal apotheosis, that of Hippolytus, in the following chapter; Hippolytus' deification, adds also the element of gender to the mix, but Virbius, Hippolytus' reincarnated self, seems to be an ostensibly more suitable Roman figure.

Chapter 4

Gender and Genre: The Romanization of Hippolytus

As we have said, with the story of Hercules, Ovid introduces properly the theme of apotheosis; and while Hercules' deification sets the standard for those illustrious Romans to come in the following books, in yet another episode, apotheosis is used as a means of generic transformation, that of Hippolytus/Virbius. Ovid's retelling of the Hippolytus myth in Book 15 of the *Metamorphoses* is surprisingly short, numbering little more than fifty lines (*Met.* 15. 492-546). The placement of the episode is also unexpected; after all, the story of Hippolytus is one of the most famous Greek myths, one that had no less than three dramatic incarnations in classical Athens, and Book 15 is perhaps the most Roman of the last pentad, the books in which Ovid is to fulfill his early promise to write *prima origine mundi ad mea… tempora* ('from the first origin of the world up to my time' [*Met.* 1.3-4]), that is, to the Roman age. However, upon further examination, the role of the Hippolytus story in Book 15 is less problematic. In fact, if one looks closer at the manner in which Ovid reinvents the myth, his treatment of his literary sources, and the poetic context in which he places the episode, one can see that Hippolytus, or Virbius as he comes to be called, could not be more Roman.

The myth of Hippolytus, his illicit relationship with his stepmother, the betrayal of his father, and his subsequent gruesome death by dismemberment enjoyed a long literary history before the time of Ovid, one rich in revision.[76] The basic principles of the story remain essentially unchanged throughout that history: Hippolytus is the son of

[76] See W.S. Barrett's (1964: 1 ff.).

Theseus and an Amazon, not of Phaedra, daughter of Minos, to whom Theseus is married. As Hippolytus becomes a young man, he devotes himself to the worship of Artemis or Diana, the virgin huntress, and as such, he takes a vow of chastity. Meanwhile, however, Phaedra finds herself enamored by the youth, and many of the myth's literary manifestations focus on her character as she wrestles with whether to express or repress her affections for her stepson. Phaedra's inclinations are revealed to Hippolytus (authors differ on just how) and his outright rejection of her desires leads to her suicide, but not before she formally accuses Hippolytus of attempted rape and the betrayal of his father's bed. Theseus curses his son and Hippolytus is torn to pieces after becoming entangled in the reins of his chariot as he flees his father's wrath.

Two Greek tragedians are known to have differed in their take on the famous Phaedra. Both Sophocles and Euripides wrote plays regarding the myth; the latter, in fact, wrote two, amending his initial approach after the first play's failure at competition. Euripides' *Hippolytus Kaluptomenos* portrayed Phaedra as a lustful character, purposefully seducing Hippolytus and reproaching him only when her husband had discovered her secret. Sophocles' *Phaedra*, likely produced in the interim of the Euripidean plays, depicted the titular character killing herself out of remorse for her seductive thoughts, rather than simply because they were exposed. Our understanding of these two plays is cursory, however, as both are now fragmentary. Yet it seems that Euripides modified drastically the character of Phaedra for his second (and successful) rendition, *Hippolytus Stephanias* or *Stephanephoros*, produced in 428 BCE.[77] This play has come down to us intact, and is celebrated for its innovative examination of Phaedra's

[77] Hereafter the *HS*.

conflicted character: what she delivers to the audience and other characters as opposed to what she expresses as her inner dialogue.[78] A victim of Aphrodite, Phaedra is resistant to her erotic inclinations and condemns herself for desires she knows to be reprehensible. In addition, the character of Hippolytus is characterized as somewhat asexual: a virginal youth, who has reached the traditional age at which he would be considered a man, but shuns this transition in favour of remaining rather genderless. Theseus is the dominant male figure, and thus Hippolytus' sexual ambiguity contributes to his role as the subordinate male in the play. This Euripidean version seems to have become somewhat canonical, as the more repentant Phaedra is the tradition taken up by many subsequent authors. Ovid himself looks to Euripides' *HS* as a model for the Phaedra who appeals to her stepson in *Heroides* 4.[79]

But in the *Metamorphoses*, Phaedra, so often explored by earlier poetic tradition and by Ovid himself, is not even mentioned by name: Ovid calls her only *Pasipheia*, "Pasiphaean" or "daughter of Pasiphae" (*Met.* 15.500). Her identity is determined by her family relationships, and those relationships are such that they evoke the theme of incest that will hang so threateningly over the story. Ovid, however, chooses to examine the myth in terms of its male protagonist, Hippolytus/Virbius, and in doing so, firmly establishes his retelling as fundamentally different from those of his tragic predecessors. Ovid introduces the character in the grove of Aricia, where the nymph Egeria has been weeping over the recent death of her husband, Numa. Virbius, in an attempt to outdo Egeria's misfortune, recounts the story of his own death and reawakening in a manner

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[78] Chris Gill (1987) makes a similar point regarding Medea in a comparison of her "monologues of self-division" in Euripides and Seneca.

[79] Again, I refer to Casali's exceptional 1995 article on Phaedra and the relationship between Euripides' *HS* and Ovid's *Heroides* 4.

completely other than tragic. Indeed, while past dramatic representations of the myth are perceived easily through overt reference in the episode, the metamorphosis of Hippolytus into Virbius, signaled by his apotheosis, underscores the character's absolute transformation into a Roman.

The Hippolytus/Virbius story in the *Metamorphoses* serves as a very tidy bookend for the presence of tragedy in the epic. As Curley points out, Ovid makes clear reference to the "inaugural… incest story of the poem" (1999: 200) in Virbius' opening lines (*Met.* 15.500-501, 504):

> … *me Pasipheia quondam*
> *temptatum frustra patrium temerare cubile…*
> *damnavit.*
>
> [Daughter of Pasiphae] in days gone by
> Tried to tempt me – in vain – to violate
> My father's bed…

The phrase *patrium temerare cubile* ('to violate my father's bed') echoes explicitly the words of the Crow when explaining Nyctimene's illicit affair in Book 2 (*Met.* 2.592-593):

> *non audita tibi est, patrium temerasse cubile*
> *Nyctimenen?*
>
> Have you never heard… how Nyctimene
> Outraged her father's bed?

That these words are repeated, nearly word-for-word, no less, is not surprising. In addition to the plot similarities between the stories,[80] that of Hippolytus provides an effective reply to the poem's opening tragic story, and an appropriate one at that: the

[80] Both offspring risk breaching the boundaries of family by defiling their fathers' beds, albeit with Hippolytus doing so more indirectly through relations with his father's wife.

episode is the last in the entire poem to have tragic association.[81] Ovid's verbal echo closes the book, so to speak, on tragedy in the epic.

The presence of tragedy nonetheless reverberates in the Virbius episode before the protagonist becomes sufficiently Roman via his metamorphosis. The opening lines of Virbius' speech to Egeria, quoted above, are fragmented; the narrative is densely interlocked, relating the youth's sordid familial history within only nine lines (*Met.* 15.497-505). Furthermore, in the ensuing description of the fatal chariot crash, Ovid pays homage to the myth's existing literary tradition by making reference to the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles. Many scholars have pointed out the similarities between Virbius' narrative and the messenger's speech in the *HS*.[82] Take, for example, the emergence of the bull from the churning waters (*Met.* 15.508-511):

> *cum mare surrexit cumulusque immanis aquarum*
> *in montis speciem curvari et crescere visus*
> *et dare mugitus summoque cacumine findi;*
> *corniger hinc taurus ruptis expellitur undis.*
>
> … when the sea rose
> And a fantastic mound of water swelled
> And towered mountain-high, with a loud noise
> Of bellowing, and then its crest split wide
> And out there burst, as the wave broke, a huge
> Horned bull…

Many of the words and phrases parallel Euripides' own description (*HS* 1210-1216):

> κἄπειτ' ἀνοιδῆσάν τε καὶ πέριξ ἀφρὸν
> πολὺν καχλάζον ποντίῳ φυσήματι
> χωρεῖ πρὸς ἀκτάς, οὗ τέθριππος ἦν ὄχος.
> αὐτῷ δὲ σὺν κλύδωνι καὶ τρικυμίᾳ

[81] Curley argues that by repeating the Crow's words, Virbius is appropriating the incest tragedy and asserting himself as the victim. As such, he transforms the programmatic "heroine" tragedy into an "ephebe" tragedy (1999: 199-200). An interesting argument, no doubt, but not immediately relevant for my purposes. What is relevant is the bracketing effect of tragedy in the poem the repetition provides.

[82] Charles Segal (1984) has described sufficiently the points at which Euripides' *HS* and Ovid's account are comparable.

κῦμ’ ἐξέθηκε ταῦρον, ἄγριον τέρας·
οὗ πᾶσα μὲν χθὼν φθέγματος πληρουμένη
φρικῶδες ἀντεφθέγγετ’…

And then as the sea-surge made it swell and seethe up much foam all about, it came toward the shore where the four-horse chariot was. With its very swell and surge the wave put forth a monstrous, savage bull. The whole land was filled with its bellowing and gave back unearthly echoes…

The notions of a mountain of water and of a bellowing sound accompanying the event are shared between the texts. In addition, both texts engage in a purposeful juxtaposition between water and land, marine and terrestrial (Segal 1984: 319). But in particular, the phrase *taurus ruptis expellitur undis* (more precisely translated ‘a bull was sent out from the broken waves’ [*Met.* 15.511]) is merely the passive inversion of Euripides’ κῦμ’ ἐξέθηκε ταῦρον (‘the wave put forth a bull’ [*HS* 1214]) (319).

Note as well Ovid’s description of the driving of the chariot (*Met.* 15.518-520):

ego ducere vana
frena manu spumis albentibus oblita luctor
et retro lentas tendo resupinus habenas.

In vain
I fought to hold [the horses] with the foam-flecked bit,
And leaning backwards strained at the strong reins.

Compare Euripides’ *HS* (1220-1222):

ἥρπασ’ ἡνίας χεροῖν,
ἕλκει δὲ κώπην ὥστε ναυβάτης ἀνήρ,
ἱμᾶσιν ἐς τοὔπισθεν ἀρτήσας δέμας·

[He] seized the reins in his hands and pulled them, as a sailor pulls an oar, letting his body hang backwards from the straps.

Segal goes on to outline a synchronized movement between the descriptions of the chariot scene in Euripides’ *HS* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, by highlighting a parallel

progression of climaxes (1984: 321-323).[83] First, the bellowing sounds in both Ovid and Euripides are quickly followed by the appearance of the bull (*Met.* 15.510; *HS* 1215-1216). Second, the wave from which the bull emerges first swells and then is split in both cases (*Met.* 15.509-510; *HS* 1210-1214). Third, both narratives progress relatively swiftly throughout the final lead up to death, punctuated by Hippolytus trying to gain control of the chariot, the chariot accident itself, and his entanglement in the reins (Segal 1984: 322) (respectively, *Met.* 15.514-520, 521-523, 524-528; and *HS* 1219-1231, 1232-1235, 1236-1239).

Bömer (1986) supports Ovid's purposeful allusion to the *HS* with specific reference to lines describing the crash of the chariot (*HS* 1234-1235):

> … σύρριγες τ'ἄνω
> τροχῶν ἐπήδων ἀξόνων τ'ἐήλατα…
>
> … until it upset and overthrew it, striking its wheel rims on
> a rock…

Compare *Met.* 15.522-523:

> *ni rota, perpetuum qua circumvertitur axem,*
> *stipitis occursu fracta ac disiecta fuisset.*
>
> … had not a wheel, striking its hub
> Against a stump, been smashed and wrenched away.

[83] Segal's article is written with the intention of distinguishing the differences between the *Phaedra* of Seneca, written half a century after and heavily influenced by Ovid, and the accounts of Ovid and Euripides. While his motivations are not the same as mine, it is useful to indicate where Ovid and Euripides are similar in their descriptions in an effort to show where they differ from Seneca.

He proposes that Ovid's use of *circumvertitur* at line 15.522, a rare term meaning "to turn around", is the only instance in classical Latin poetry. Further, the term, he suggests, was coined by Ovid while studying Euripides' version of the myth.[84]

In addition, Ovid may be participating in a dialogue with Sophocles' fragmentary play. The description of the bull emerging from the water, while noteworthy for its similarities to the *HS* (Curley 1999: 200) also bears a likeness to a fragment of the *Phaedra*. Compare Ovid's description (*Met.* 15.512-513):

> *corniger hinc taurus ruptis expellitur undis,*
> *pectoribusque tenus molles erectus in auras*
> *naribus et patulo partem maris evomit ore.*
>
> And out there burst, as the wave broke, a huge
> Horned bull, that reared breast-high into the air,
> Its great wide mouth and nostrils spouting brine.

with the following line from the *Phaedra* (F 687a):

> γλώσσης ἀπαυστί στάζε μυξώδης ἀφρός.
>
> An unclean foam dripped continually from its mouth.

This particular connection between the two passages may be tenuous given the fragmentary nature of the latter source, but in any case, it seems clear that Ovid was fully aware of, and purposefully alluding to, the plays of both the tragedians.

As we have said, Virbius' speech shares much in content and expression with the messenger's speech in Euripides' *HS*. We might now say that Virbius himself acts as his own messenger, reliving the events of his own demise; thus he can be identified as

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[84] Bömer is not entirely clear why he makes this assertion (Buchs XIV-XV, p. 392). I am inclined to support his argument that Ovid was reading Euripides while composing his own poetry (preceding and subsequent pages make that point undoubtedly evident), although I would have preferred to see more concrete proof.

protagonist and tragic victim, together with messenger.[85] As Curley argues, the speech possesses all the characteristics of a messenger speech in Athenian drama: it is active and lively, full of details, and delivered after the fact (long after, in this case). In addition, it provides its audience with a first-hand account of the tragic events (1999: 201). But therein lies the problem: this messenger is not merely a witness to the events, he is a participant. He is *the* participant. The words of the spectator are the words of a dead man. The very fact that Virbius speaks of his own death is testament to the episode's divergence from the tragic mode. While it is true that the Hippolytus of Euripides' *HS* lives to speak after the chariot crash (*HS* 1347 ff.), the final scene of the play is not nearly so tongue-in-cheek as Ovid's rendition. Euripides' Hippolytus dies onstage (*HS* 1458), and although uncommon in Greek tragedy, the death was surely meant, in part, to draw feelings of pity from the audience. In contrast, it is difficult for Ovid's readers to experience the same degree of pity: as Segal writes, "even the bloody details gain a certain grim humor when told as first-person present-tense by the deceased" (1984: 314). Virbius' blatant and bizarre self-awareness and his detachment from the pain and suffering of death announce this deviation from the tragic literary tradition. Ovid has moved beyond the tragic boundaries of Euripides' play by re-establishing the tale as one of transformation by apotheosis.[86]

Indeed, despite the overwhelming presence of tragedy throughout the episode, and the considerable debt Ovid pays to his tragic literary predecessors, the genre is kept in an

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[85] An assertion supported by many scholars. See Segal (1984) and Curley (1999), for example.

[86] The fact that Virbius recalls the events of his own death is reminiscent of the literary motif in which the hearkening back to a memory often signals the presence of intertextual reference. Although Ovid does not use any specific terms to indicate memory or recollection, the phenomenon is no doubt taking place. As Virbius looks back upon the chariot crash and the events leading up to it, he is also recalling both his mythological and literary history. Ovid's use of this motif, however, is made even more interesting given that the character doing the remembering is the character who has ceased to exist.

antithetical relationship to Ovid's task at hand, to compose an epic poem that stretches from the beginning of the universe to the present. Thus, he must keep the narrative moving swiftly; it would not do to get caught up in the details of a Greek tragic figure. He omits from the poem the scene from the *HS* that makes the play most tragic: the reunion of Theseus with the broken body of his son (*HS* 1347 ff.). In the *Metamorphoses*, the chariot disaster is followed not by an emotional reconciliation between Hippolytus and his father, but by an immediate journey to the underworld (*Met.* 15.527-529, 531-532):

> *... fessamque videres*
> *exhalari animam nullasque in corpore partes*
> *noscere quas posses, unumque erat omnia vulnus.*[87]
> *... vidi quoque luce carentia regna*
> *et lacerum fovi Phlegethontide corpus in unda…*

> I breathed
> My shattered soul away; no part was left
> That you could recognize – all one huge wound
> … Then too the lightless realm
> I saw and in the waves of Phlegethon
> I bathed my mangled body…

Not only has Ovid successfully excluded the reunion scene that makes the myth tragic, but by doing so, the episode falls short of evoking any significant sense of sympathy from the audience. Virbius has suffered, yes, and the description of his dismemberment is graphic, but look at him now! He is mended again, enjoying his immortality as a companion and follower of Diana in her sacred wood (*Met.* 15.534, 538-540, 545-546).

> *reddita vita foret…*
> *utque forem tutus possemque inpune videri,*

[87] Ovid's description of Hippolytus as 'one huge wound' is reminiscent of Marsyas' demise in Book 6: *nec quicquam nisi vulnus erat*, 'the whole of him was one huge wound' (6.388). Theodorakopoulos (1999) argues that the inability to express the nature of the bodily remains lends to the fact that Marsyas himself leaves nothing behind after his death, no creative product; instead, it is the onlookers' tears that form the spring, the tale's aetiology (156 f.).

addidit aetatem nec cognoscenda reliquit
ora mihi…
hoc nemus inde colo de disque minoribus unus
numine sub dominae lateo atque accenseor illi.

I gained my life again…
And that I might be seen unscathed and safe
[Diana] added to my years, and left my face
Unrecognizable;
… Thenceforth my home
Is in this grove: one of the lesser gods,
Unseen beneath my Mistress' power divine,
I serve her ministry and tend her shrine.

Ovid's ability to make a transition from the scene of the crash to the underworld and then back to the grove at Aricia is facilitated by the nature of epic. Unlike tragedy, epic is not limited to exposition in a single setting, but can take full advantage of several different scenes (Curley 1999: 202). And the graphic nature of the chariot scene itself is suggestive of its epic character. Again, unlike tragedy, which relegates any violent events to offstage, epic authors do not hesitate to relish such vivid descriptions. And though the events of Virbius' speech have already occurred, the fact that it is he who describes them lends to the account's contemporaneous feeling – Virbius brings the past into the present even more effectively than an archetypal tragic messenger.[88]

Furthermore, with the transition to the underworld, Ovid has effectively removed Hippolytus/Virbius from his tragic context and placed him firmly in an epic one; Virbius joins the ranks of those other great heroes, not least Aeneas, who have made their own

[88] The graphic description of Hippolytus' death may also refer to what Glenn Most has termed the "rhetoric of dismemberment" (1992). With particular reference to Seneca and other Neronian poets, Most examines authors' use of violence and mutilation as, among other things, "not only a subject matter for literary discourse, but also a way of talking about its style" (407). What follows is a discussion of the "dismemberment of the body of the sentence" (407). By extension, and with specific reference to Hippolytus, one could identify the reconstitution of Hippolytus' body (ie. the gathering of his limbs which receives only cursory allusion in Ovid, but is accorded considerably more emphasis in Seneca's *Phaedra*) as an allusion to the fragmentation and subsequent reconstitution of texts with Hippolytus and his tale as the subject. See also Theodorakopoulos (1999) and Gildenhard and Zissos (1999).

requisite expeditions into the underworld and returned fully restored (Curley 1999: 208).[89] It is not a coincidence that Aeneas, too, has been granted immortality not seven hundred lines before in Ovid's 'little' *Aeneid* (*Met.* 14.441-622).[90] Nor that Aesclepius, Caesar, and Ovid himself will be apotheosized within the following two hundred lines.[91] Following the example set by Hercules in Book 9, Hippolytus/Virbius is included among a long list of celebrated Romans who are accommodated in Rome's future through apotheosis.

We have established that although Ovid's interpretation of the Hippolytus myth is based on tragic sources, the poet considers the story beyond its tragic context. And we have seen that while moving away from the tragic tradition, Ovid simultaneously employs epic conventions. But in doing so, Ovid also brings into play the work of Virgil. The *Metamorphoses*' 'little' *Aeneid* is testament enough for this statement, but Virgil's influence and Ovid's Virgilian reference can also be seen in the Virbius story of Book 15. Most noticeably, Virgil, too, writes of a Virbius in his catalogue of warriors fighting on the side of Turnus and the Rutulians (*Aen.* 7.761-782), but this Virbius is the son of the reincarnated Hippolytus of whom Ovid writes. More than merely the repetition of a character's name and family, however, the nature of Ovid's treatment of the Hippolytus myth, his break with tragedy at the expense of epic, mirrors a similar movement in the *Aeneid*.

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[89] In the *Frogs*, Aristophanes also writes a scene featuring Euripides, Aeschylus, and Herakles, set in the underworld. The significance for our purposes, however, is emphasized by Aeneas' journey in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*.

[90] Aeneas' apotheosis is described in similar terms to that of Hercules. As he ascends to the stars, *pars optima restitit illi*, 'the best part of him remained' (14.604). (This translation is my own.)

[91] *Met.* 15.734-744, 15.843-851, 15.871-879, respectively.

In the same catalogue of warriors in which Virbius is mentioned for the first time, Camilla, the famed female fighter is introduced (*Aen*. 7.805-807):

> *bellatrix, non illa colo calathisve Minervae*
> *femineas adsueta manus, sed proelia virgo*
> *dura pati cursuque pedum praevertere ventos*
>
> a warrior-maiden, who had not turned her woman's hands
> to Minerva's distaff and wool-baskets, but rather was
> accustomed, though a maiden, to endure hard battles and
> outstrip the winds in the footrace

Keith stresses Virgil's use of "gender-marked diction" to indicate Camilla's proper feminine identity (2000: 27): *bellatrix* ('warrior-maiden'), *femineas* ('woman's'), *virgo* ('maiden'). Yet the perversity of Camilla's nature is made clear in these same lines; she does not participate in those activities suited for women, but crosses gender lines to the exploits of men. A famous passage from Homer's *Iliad* is explicit: Hector directs his wife Andromache: ἀλλ' εἰς οἶκον ἰοῦσα τὰ σ' αὐτῆς ἔργα κόμιζε… πόλεμος δ' ἄνδρεσσι μελήσει πᾶσι ('go home to your wool-working… and leave the conduct of war to men' [*Il.* 6.490, 492-493]).[92] Camilla's nature violates long-established gender norms and transgresses boundaries of the propriety of the sexes, and she dies without great consequence to the narrative: Virgil has her cut down by a minor warrior – she is not even granted the distinguished role of being killed by Aeneas himself (Oliensis 1997: 307).[93]

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[92] The significance of weaving and wool-working to women in classical literature has been aptly explored by many scholars. Take, for instance, Ann L.T. Bergren's "Language and the Female in Early Greek Thought" (1983).

[93] Despite Camilla's apparent inconsequential death, Alison Keith (2000) elaborates on the length and depth of the description of her demise in her chapter entitled "Over Her Dead Body". Only Camilla (*Aen.* 11.799-835) and Dido (*Aen.* 4.663-705), two women, receive such attention with respect to their death scenes. On the subject, Keith suggests, "by depicting the death-agonies… in such lavish and graphic detail Virgil presents the beautiful woman as the erotic and aesthetic object of his readers' prolonged gaze" (117). In doing so, Virgil makes distinct the male figures in the poem, both those who observe the women's deaths, and those who themselves die, with comparatively little distress (117).

Virgil's Virbius, introduced among the same catalogue of warriors as Camilla, can also be seen as thwarting gender roles. Before Virbius' name even appears, his lineage has already been given (*Aen.* 7.761-762):

> *ibat et Hippolyti proles pulcherrima bello,*
> *Virbius, insignem quem mater Aricia misit*
>
> And the most handsome offspring of Hippolytus marched to war,
> Virbius, whom, distinguished, his mother Aricia sent.[94]

What follows is a brief description of Hippolytus' death and reincarnation (*Aen.* 7.765-780), abbreviated much like Ovid's own treatment, and no doubt a significant influence as Ovid was composing the episode in question. But more to the point, Virgil's Virbius is distinguished not by his own traits, by his own identity, but by that of his father. And with the mention of this Hippolytus who is so well known for his role in Euripides, Virbius becomes his father, embodying all the traits that are evocative of the tragic character. Consequently, Virgil brings to mind Hippolytus' (and by extension, Virbius') traditional association with gender and sexual ambiguity, and with playing the role of the subordinate male.[95] And this role places the Virbius of the *Aeneid* among the ranks of other feminine and feminized characters, those who impede the movement of epic, including Dido and Camilla.[96] Thus, it should not be surprising that Virbius does not survive the length of the poem and the founding of the Roman state. Virbius has tragic associations, both because of his familial ties and because of his asexual attributes, and as

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[94] This particular translation is my own.

[95] For a more detailed discussion of this characterization of Hippolytus, in particular, his association with a cult of young virginal brides, see Barrett (1964: 6 ff.).

[96] Don Fowler (1987) discusses the slaughter of both female and virginal male characters as defloration throughout Latin poetry. Included in the section on the *Aeneid* is Camilla, but also a short list of virginal males (Euryalus, Pallas, Lausus, Turnus) (196). One could add the character of Virbius, given his sexually ambiguous associations discussed in this chapter, to that list, and expect that his death in the poem could bring about the same pathos that Fowler examines, that of horror at the close associations between violence and virginity.

such, he is sacrificed for the greater cause of the poem: there is no room in the epic or in the future of Rome for an effeminate man and tragic figure.

The Virbius of Ovid follows in a similar manner, with important discrepancies. The subordinate male of the episode, the Greek tragic Hippolytus, is quickly written out of the story, along with his tragic associations. Replacing him is his metamorphosed counterpart, a fully restored Roman Virbius who is suited to epic and can be taken up for the Roman future. And there is no mistaking this figure for a sexually ambiguous one – the etymology of his name speaks for itself: *vir*- ('man'), -*bis* ('twice'). Twice-born into two different identities, the name is appropriate.[97] With the very term *vir* in his name, how much more associated with manliness could one be? The episode's aetiology attests to Virbius' newfound Roman-ness. The Greek aetiology of Euripides has been discarded completely; nowhere is the cult of virginal maidens that Artemis establishes in lieu of her dying devotee (*HS* 1423-1430):

> σοὶ δ', ὦ ταλαίπωρ', ἀντὶ τῶνδε τῶν κακῶν
> τιμὰς μεγίστας ἐν πόλει Τροζηνίαι
> δώσω· κόραι γὰρ ἄζυγες γάμων πάρος
> κόμας κεροῦνταί σοι, δι' αἰῶνος μακροῦ
> πένθη μέγιστα δακρύων καρπουμένωι·
>
> To you, unhappy man, I shall grant, in recompense for these sorrows, supreme honors in the land of Trozen. Unmarried girls before their marriage will cut their hair for you, and over the length of ages you will harvest the deep mourning of their tears.

Instead, Virbius' tale signals the establishment of the Roman institution of the cult of Diana at Aricia, where Virbius serves as the male priest to balance her divine

[97] Servius *ad Aeneid* 7.761: *Diana… eum Virbium, quasi bis virum, iussit vocari*, ('Diana ordered that he be called Virbius, as though twice man').

femininity.[98] In fact, as Diana deliberates where to assign the newly-born Virbius, she first considers Greek territory (*Met.* 15.540-544):

> *... Cretenque diu dubitavit habendam*
> *traderet an Delon: Delo Creteque relictis*
> *hic posuit nomenque simul, quod posit equorum*
> *admonuisse, iubet deponere, 'qui' que 'fuisti*
> *Hippolytus' dixit, 'nunc idem Virbius esto!'*
>
> … [she] pondered long
> Whether for my new home to give me Crete
> Or Delos. Crete and Delos put aside,
> She placed me here and bade me put away
> The name that might recall that team of mine,
> Declaring, "You who were Hippolytus
> Shall now be Virbius."

She wonders if she should place him in Delos or Crete, but finally settles on *hic*, 'here', in Italy, where this very Roman, very masculine, very epic Virbius can be preserved, and his Greek counterpart, Hippolytus, dismissed.[99]

The metamorphosis of Virbius does not fully obscure tragedy in this episode, but the conclusion is much the same. Virbius is introduced in the context of attempting to console the nymph Egeria at the death of her husband, Numa. The lamenting Egeria is an archetypal tragic female. A wailing woman is characteristic of tragedy, and Egeria herself demonstrates traits that are reminiscent of another tragic female we have already discussed: Phaedra. The addition of Egeria as the transitional figure between the episodes of Numa and Hippolytus/Virbius creates a familiar gender triangle: a distressed woman,

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[98] In *The Golden Bough* (1922), an exhaustive study behind the grove and cult at Aricia, Sir James George Frazer gives an overview of the role of the ruling deities Diana and Virbius. He compares Virbius' relationship to Diana as Adonis' to Venus; each had their male counterpart, especially important in this case, as Diana was the goddess of fertility and childbirth (8).

[99] The aetiology of the Virbius story, along with most in the final pentad of the epic, is very reminiscent of the aetiologies contained in Ovid's later work, the *Fasti*, nor is it a coincidence that Ovid also includes a version of Virbius' rebirth in that very poem (*Fast.* 6.733-762). For more information on the aetiological significance of the Virbius episode in the context of Book 15, see Myers (1994).

an absent husband, and a youthful confidante, the same roles played by Phaedra, Theseus, and Hippolytus, respectively, in the tragic tradition. And when one recognizes the parallels between Egeria and Phaedra, Virbius' attempted consolation becomes even more significant.[100]

As we have said, the Virbius episode is the last in the *Metamorphoses* with clear tragic connotations, and as such, it serves to close the poem's treatment of tragedy. In the same manner, Egeria is effectively the last tragic heroine (Curley 1999: 203).[101] But just as Dido and Camilla were sacrificed in the *Aeneid*, and just as Hippolytus must be fundamentally changed into a completely different individual, so too Egeria – the poetic genre calls for it. Thus, Egeria is not preserved in the poem in her original form; instead, her weeping causes her to dissolve into a fountain, in which form she is doomed to lament perpetually (*Met.* 15.547-551):

> *non tamen Egeriae luctus aliena levare*
> *damna valent, montisque iacens radicibus imis*
> *liquitur in lacrimas, donec pietate dolentis*
> *mota soror Phoebi gelidum de corpore fontem*
> *fecit et aeternas artus tenuavit in undas.*
>
> Yet others' tragedies cannot avail
> To staunch Egeria's sorrow. As she lies
> At the hill's foot, she melts away in tears,
> Till, pitying her grief and loyal love,
> Dian dissolved the nymph into a pool,
> A spring that flows forever clear and cool.

As in the *Aeneid* before it, when all is said and done, there is little room for a tragic female in this epic. Virbius attempts to quell Egeria's sorrow, to defuse her tragedy by

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[100] Horsfall's commentary of *Aeneid* 7 indicates that Silius Italicus (4.380) "understood Egeria as the instrument of Hipp./Virbius' deflowering" (503).

[101] Curley (1999) writes: "Egeria's *gemitu questuque* ('laments and complaints' [*Met.* 15.489]) are shorthand for the elegiac tragedy that heroine after heroine in Ovid's poem experiences" (202-203).

retelling his own: *num potes aut audes cladi componere nostrae, / nympha, tuam?* ('Now can you, dare you, set your tragedy, Nymph, against mine?' [*Met.* 15.530-531]). Given Virbius' reconstitution into his new identity, he seems to be saying to Egeria, "My tragedy was more horrible than yours, and I got over it. I'm epic now, why can't you be?" Clearly, she cannot, so is his consolation successful? Maybe not for Egeria – she's a fountain now – but with this episode, the tragedy of the poem is ostensibly resolved: Hippolytus, a paradigmatic Greek tragic figure, is metamorphosed into his more epic, more virile, and more Roman counterpart. Virbius is a figure now suited for the epic tradition of Rome. And perhaps that is the consolation.

The fact that Hippolytus is not only apotheosized, but also corporally reconstituted into Virbius after a gruesome death, adds another dimension to the function of deification in these late books of the *Metamorphoses*. Not just signalling the end of tragedy in the poem, Virbius "may also stand for the restorative function of Rome, since it is within the Italian landscape of an early and wholesome Italy" (Theodorakopoulos 1999: 151). On apotheosis in general, Theodorakopoulos describes some of the greater political implications:

> Rome's permanence, the Golden Age as the end of history, when physical boundaries simply cease to be significant, must be sought outside the world of changing *corpora*... If transformation must finally work to ensure continuity without the danger of decay or mutability, deification is the only way out... the poem begins to deal with the difficulty of how to end the poem and arrive at a stable interpretation of Rome, by settling on apotheosis as the final version of metamorphosis. (148)

Hippolytus' apotheosis into Virbius is particularly evocative of this notion. Unlike Hercules, Virbius *is* represented as a new and improved version of himself. Thus, with Hippolytus' apotheosis, the possible questioning of the Augustan ideal is less explicit

than in the Hercules episode. This seems appropriate, given the company Virbius shares in the final books; Romulus, Aeneas, and Julius Caesar all undergo an apotheosis in which their bodies are physically removed. And by eliminating the possibility of bodily suffering by eliminating the bodies themselves, the apotheoses of these notable Romans suggest stability in the Roman future.

Chapter 5

Meta-Medea: The Anticipation and Self-Consciousness of a Tragic Heroine

Given the subject of his only exploration of the tragic milieu, and the generic interplay with tragedy and elegy in his depiction of Medea in *Heroides* 12, we might suspect that Ovid would approach the character of Medea in his epic with a keen eye to tragedy.[102] But if we look closely at the first half of Book 7 and Ovid's depiction of this famously tragic female, we notice that the poet does not follow the Euripidean version of events surrounding Medea. In fact, Ovid glosses over the affairs of Euripides' play in only four lines (*Met.* 7.394-397):[103]

> *sed postquam Colchis arsit nova nupta venenis*
> *flagrantemque domum regis mare vidit utrumque,*
> *sanguine natorum perfunditur inpius ensis,*
> *ultaque se male mater Iasonis effugit arma.*
>
> But when her witch's poison had consumed
> The new wife, and the sea on either side
> Had seen the royal palace all in flames,
> Her wicked sword was drenched in her son's blood;
> And, winning thus a mother's vile revenge,
> She fled from Jason's sword.

But perhaps we should not be surprised at Ovid's apparent exclusion of a tragic Medea. After all, he has done this before: Oedipus is explicitly absent from the Theban narrative,

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[102] Medea also figures heavily in *Heroides* 6, a letter to Jason from Hypsipyle whom he betrayed when he took Medea as a wife. Hinds points out that Hypsipyle's letter is "more about Medea than it is about Hypsipyle herself" (1993: 27). She appears to follow Medea's example in her resolve to seek revenge against Jason, modelling herself, and herself modelled, on her famous rival. Furthermore, Hypsipyle declares that, had she had the opportunity, she would have killed Medea as Medea had Creusa: *Medeae Medea forem*, 'I would have been Medea to Medea' (*Her*. 6.151].

[103] Euripides is most famous for first suggesting that Medea murders her children as vengeance for Jason's betrayal. Knox (1977: 194) shares this opinion, while Hunter (1996) seems considerably more sceptical.

but as we have seen, his presence is felt in themes and motifs explored elsewhere.[104] So, too, for Medea; her tragic identity resonates in the narratives framing her own epic one. Instead, the lengthy episode seems more indebted to the happenings surrounding Medea found in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, the best-known account of the Medea myth, apart from Euripides' tragedy.

The Medea narrative in Book 7 can be broken into four roughly separate episodes: Medea meets Jason (*Met.* 7.1-158); Medea revives Aeson, Jason's father (*Met.* 7.159-296); Medea deceives the daughters of Pelias, claiming to revive him but murdering him instead (*Met.* 7.297-390); and Medea kills her children in Corinth and flees (*Met.* 7.391-403). A significant epic quality of this narrative is its chronological and geographical span (Curley 1999: 39). Unlike tragedy, which is relatively limited in its scope to the present, epic permits movement in time and space – the "here-and-now" versus the "there-and-then" (1999: 33). In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid covers the entirety of Medea's career, and indeed, the long list of regions to which she has been linked in myth.

The first part of the Medea narrative in the *Metamorphoses* is perhaps the most Apollonian in terms of its subject. Ovid actively engages Book 3 of the *Argonautica*, first briefly describing the Argo's journey and then reconstructing the meeting scene between Medea and Jason (Curley 1999: 40). But, as Curley points out, the Apollonian connection becomes increasingly complex (40); Apollonius himself established Medea as a character in epic looking to "her tragic future in Euripides" (40). As the Argonauts are pursued by the Colchians following their attainment of the Golden Fleece, Jason suggests that Medea return to assuage some of their anger; Medea replies, enraged, and longs to set fire to the

[104] See page 34 f.

ship (*Arg*. 4.355-393), a response indicative of the fiery passion that will erupt when she learns of Jason's infidelity later in her chronological story but earlier in her literary history. Apollonius' Medea anticipates the raging, destructive woman she will become in her eponymous tragedy by Euripides. In the *Argonautica*, the manifestation of Medea's rage, the murder of her children, will not be realized; the narrative ends before she and Jason reach Corinth. But considering Apollonius' Medea with knowledge of Euripides' play, one knows what will happen when she arrives in Corinth, and might therefore see a bit of the tragic figure in her passionate speech. What we have here is what Hershkowitz (1998) calls an "intertextual, inter-generic chain" of Medeas (61). She then draws out this chain, indicating the rich and complex literary and intertextual tradition of the character: Euripides' Medea – Apollonius' Medea – Catullus' Ariadne – Virgil's Dido – Seneca's tragic Medea – Valerius' epic Medea (61).[105] The myth of Medea is exchanged among authors and poetic genres, in which her story is reoriented, refashioned or expanded, but she takes along with her her entire literary past, often discernible in the particular work.

A situation similar to the Medea of Apollonius anticipating the Medea of Euripides arises when we consider Virgil's Dido. Damien Nelis (2001) has established, in significant detail, the allusions to Apollonius' *Argonautica* in Virgil's epic through the figures of Medea and Dido.[106] Like the Medea of the *Argonautica*, Dido too is a foreign woman faced with the arrival of a crew seeking refuge.[107] She too falls in love with the leader of these men, and in doing so, betrays a vow to a significant male figure in her

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[105] Conspicuously absent, of course, are Ovid's Medeas (there are three in total, two intact), and I will discuss those as the chapter develops.

[106] Nelis includes discussion of hunting motifs, sisterly relationships, and the roles of goddesses, among other things, as evidence for Virgil's use of Medea as a model for Dido. His study is considerably detailed, far more than is necessary for this sort of cursory survey.

[107] Foreign in relation to the poems' protagonists, that is.

life.[108] Her lover abandons her at a time when she is particularly vulnerable.[109] Throughout Book 4 of the *Aeneid*, Virgil writes Dido as using magical charms. For example, in her resolution to kill herself, she erects a funeral pyre of Aeneas' belongings, uses poison and love charms, and invokes Hecate (*Aen.* 4.505-531).[110] Medea herself is famous for her association with the world of sorcery. But unlike Dido, Medea's magic is successful: she succeeds through her sorcery in helping Jason to secure the Golden Fleece and to dispose of his enemies. Dido's attempt at magic, on the other hand, is utterly ineffective; despite her efforts, Aeneas leaves her and Carthage behind. Thus, in terms of driving the plot, Dido's magic is somewhat redundant. Perhaps the inclusion of the lengthy description is for the sake of allusion, for the most part: Dido resembles Medea, but because of her failure at sorcery, cannot manage to attain Medea's spectacular vengeful success, the ending to her tragedy. And with her suicide, Dido takes on attributes of another tragic figure, Ajax.[111] Thus, in being likened to Apollonius' Medea, Virgil's Dido also seems to anticipate the Medea of Euripides. But Virgil takes it one step further: he fulfills what Apollonius anticipates. Dido *does* rage as Euripides' Medea does; she *does* follow through on her threats of violence, like Medea does, in commiting

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[108] Medea's aiding of Jason in his quest is a betrayal of her father; in admitting her love for Aeneas, Dido betrays the oath she took to her deceased husband Sychaeus.

[109] Jason deserts Medea after she has returned to Corinth with him and born him children; Dido's admitted love for Aeneas puts her at odds with her own city as well as other potential suitors, leaders of kingdoms surrounding Carthage.

[110] It is also not a coincidence that just prior to the revelation of Dido's plan, she is compared to famous tragic figures: *,,, Eumenidum veluti demens videt agmina Pentheus / et solem geminum et duplices se ostendere Thebas, / aut Agamemnonius scaenis agitatus Orestes, / armatam facibus matrem et serpentibus atris / cum fugit ultricesque sedent in limine Dirae*, 'as Pentheus gone mad / [she] Sees the oncoming Eumenides and sees / A double sun and double Thebes appear, / Or as when, hounded on the stage, Orestes / Runs from a mother armed with burning brands, / With serpents hellish black, / And in the doorway squat the Avenging Ones' (*Aen*. 4.469-473).

[111] See Panoussi (2002: 101 ff.).

suicide. Where Apollonius' Medea merely nods to her tragic future, Dido, as Medea-like, realizes it.

Where does Ovid come in? Simply put, in the composition of Medea in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid inherits and elaborates on this intertextual, inter-generic chain. He looks to Apollonius who both looks to Euripides in his characterization and is a model for Virgil's Dido. Virgil, too, keeps the tragic Medea close, in themes of rage and violence, while writing Dido, and in doing so, fulfills the tragedy that Apollonius expected in his own Medea. And Ovid is influenced heavily by the stylistic choices of Virgil, and has all three authors' Medea characterizations from which to draw. Thus the literary tradition of Medea that Ovid inherits is one of numerous intertextual and generic layers of epic and tragedy. But perhaps the most noticeably epic feature of the *Metamorphoses*' Medea narrative is the fact that it is decidedly *not* tragic. It is true that this epic Medea seems self-consciously aware of her own tragic future; in her opening speech, she asks herself (*Met.* 7.38-41):

> *prodamne ego regna parentis*
> *atque ope nescioquis servabitur advena nostra*
> *ut per me sospes sine me det lintea ventis*
> *virque sit alterius, poenae Medea relinquar?*
>
> Shall I betray my father's throne,
> And by my aid preserve some nameless stranger,
> Who, saved by me, without me sails away
> To win another wife across the sea
> And I, Medea, am left to pay the price!

But, as we noted above, Ovid's only explicit reference to the most familiar (and tragic) depiction of Medea is completely self-contained in four lines.[112] It is safe to say his

[112] One could also read into a short reference a possible allusion to the infanticide (*Met.* 7.123-142). After Jason plants the teeth of the slaughtered dragon, a band of earth-born brothers grow from the earth (just as in the Cadmus episode) and challenge him. The description of their formation, however, is likened to that of

readers would be expecting a Euripidean climax to his account of Medea, and the fact that this climax is realized in so few lines is in itself compelling. So how does the tragedy play a role in this account of one the most famous tragic characters in ancient literature? Perhaps Ovid felt his treatment of her in both *Heroides* 12 and his dramatic *Medea* were sufficiently tragic and that he desired a varying approach for Book 7. While this may be true, it does not explain the number of female figures in the *Metamorphoses* who bear striking resemblances to the Euripidean character in question. So we must look elsewhere for signs of this figure. It is in the surrounding narratives, particularly in the stories of Deianira in Book 9 (134-158), Procne in Book 6 (424-676), and Scylla in Book 8 (1-151), that Ovid explores the tragic, particularly Euripidean, Medea figure. We have already discussed Deianira in a preceding chapter, so I will proceed to the Tereus and Procne narrative.

The story of Tereus was the subject of at least two tragedies, one written by Sophocles and another by Accius (Larmour 1990: 133), although we possess only fragments of them today. In any case, the plays were based on the myth that developed as follows: Tereus marries a foreign woman, Procne, and takes her home to Thrace where she bears a son Itys to him. In order to ease her loneliness, Tereus fetches Procne's sister Philomela, but on the journey home, he rapes her, cuts out her tongue to prevent her from revealing his crime, and hides her from his wife, claiming she died on the voyage. Procne discovers the treachery of her husband, and with the help of Philomela, she murders and dismembers Itys and feeds him to Tereus in revenge. Larmour (1990) explores this

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a baby in a mother's womb, and the moment they spring from the ground, in their earliest moments on earth, they are confronted by someone intent on their destruction, and every last one is destroyed.

episode in his article on tragic *contaminatio*. He explains Ovid's use of the motif as the poet "[focusing] briefly on a particular aspect [of the story] and then [transferring] other elements of the tale to a different episode somewhere else… parts of one story [are] woven into another" (132). As he points out, the story of Procne and Tereus comes not long before the Medea narrative; audiences would have just recently finished reading Itys' slaughter by his mother as vengeance for his father's betrayal when they turn to the deeds of Medea. And Procne's story would have seemed particularly evocative of a Euripidean Medea.

Procne exacts vengeance against her husband for a marital infidelity by killing her offspring. The parallels with Medea are without question. And like Medea to Jason, Procne is foreign only in comparison to her husband. Procne and her sister are, in fact, from Athens, and it is the Thracian Tereus who is the quintessential *barbarus* (*Met.* 6.515). Ovid inverts the Greek/barbarian theme by having the male figure be the intruder and the female the native Greek. But, as it turns out, Procne's contemptible actions indicate that she is actually an equal to her violent and destructive husband (Larmour 1990: 133). She and her sister have "trade[d] murder and dismemberment of the child for rape and mutilation of the woman" (Joplin 1991: 49). Joplin points out that the audience will remember the end of the story, the infanticide and perverse feast, more so than the initial crime of rape (49). Further, Ovid's description of Procne at the time of the infanticide recalls her husband at the time of the rape (*Met.* 6.636-638):

> *nec mora, traxit Ityn, veluti Gangetica cervae*
> *lactentem fetum per silvas tigris opacas;*
> *utque domus altae partem tenuere remotam*

> Then – with no pause – she pounced on Itys, like
> A tigress pouncing on a suckling fawn

In the dark jungle where the Ganges glides,
And dragged him to a distant lonely part
Of the great house.

Compare Tereus and his own victim (*Met.* 6.520-522, 524-530):

... cum rex Pandione natam
in stabula alta trahit, silvis obscura vetustis
... fassusque nefas et virginem et unam
vi superat, frustra clamato saepe parente,
saepe sorore sua, magnis super omnia divis.
illa tremit velut agna pavens quae saucia cani
ore excussa lupi nondum sibi tuta videtur,
utque columba suo madefactis sanguine plumis
horret adhuc avidosque timet quibus haeserat ungues.

And then the king drags off Pandion's daughter
Up to a cabin in the woods, remote
And hidden away among dark ancient trees…
[He] ravished her, a virgin, all alone,
Calling and calling to her father, calling to
Her sister, calling, even more, to heaven above.
She shivered like a little frightened lamb,
Mauled by a grizzled wolf and fast aside,
And still unable to believe it's safe;
Or as a dove, with feathers dripping blood,
Still shudders in its fear, still dreads the claws,
The eager claws that clutched it.

And the relative equivalence of the crimes is indicated further by the punishment of the figures. All three undergo metamorphosis into birds (*Met.* 6.667-674): bearing forever the bloodstains of their crime (*Met.* 6.670) and thus preserved in their guilt, the sisters are chased perpetually by their avian pursuer.

Unlike Procne, who seizes the opportunity to butcher her son in vengeance without delay (*nec mora* [*Met.* 6.636]), Medea wrestles morally with her decision to kill her children (Eur. *Med.* 1069 ff.). Nevertheless, Jason describes Medea in a similar manner as Ovid had Procne (Eur. *Med.* 1339-1343):

οὐκ ἔστιν ἥτις τοῦτ' ἂν Ἑλληνὶς γυνὴ

ἔτλη ποθ', ὧν γε πρόσθεν ἠξίουν ἐγὼ
γῆμαι σέ, κῆδος ἐχθρὸν ὀλέθριόν τ' ἐμοί,
λέαιναν, οὐ γυναῖκα, τῆς Τυρσηνίδος
Σκύλλης ἔχουσαν ἀγριωτέραν φύσιν.

No Greek woman would have dared to do this, yet I
married you in preference to them, and a hateful and
destructive match it has proved! You are a she-lion, not a
woman, with the nature more savage than Scylla the
Tuscan monster!

And Ovid, too, takes up the motif with respect to Medea herself (*Met.* 7.32-33):[113]

hoc ego si patiar, tum me de tigride natam,
tum ferrum et scopulos gestare in corde fatebor.

If I permit such things, I'll surely own
A tigress was my dam and in my heart
I nurture iron and stone!

Both of these heroines are portrayed as possessing animalistic, beast-like characteristics, and what is more, they are both likened to large female cats, known for skill in the hunt and merciless slaughter of their victims.

But further to the similarities in circumstance and depiction, Procne even speaks like Medea in her resolve to act in retribution (*Met.* 6.611-619):

'non est lacrimis hoc' inquit 'agendum,
sed ferro, sed si quid habes, quod vincere ferrum
possit. in omne nefas ego me, germana, paravi:
aut ego, cum facibus regalia tecta cremabo,
artificem mediis immittam Terea flammis,
aut linguam atque oculos et quae tibi membra pudorem
abstulerunt ferro rapiam, aut per vulnera mille
sontem animam expellam. magnum quodcumque paravi;
quid sit, adhuc dubito.'

'This is no time for tears,
But for the sword,' she cried, 'or what may be
Mightier than the sword. For any crime
I'm ready, Philomela! I'll set on fire

[113] Ovid's lines can also be perceived as an allusion to Dido's accusation of Aeneas (*Aen*. 4.366-367).

> These royal roofs and bury in the blaze
> That scheming fiend. I'll gouge his wicked eyes!
> I'll pluck his tongue out, cut away those parts
> That stole your honour, through a thousand wounds
> I'll sluice his guilty soul! Some mighty deed
> I'll dare, I'll do, though what that deed shall be,
> Is still unsure.'

Procne is steadfast in her desire for revenge. In addition, however, she describes herself in very heroic terms: her actions are *magna* or mighty, and she reacts to avenge the dishonouring of her sister. Euripides' Medea is well known for her heroic persona. Knox describes, "her language and action, and well as the familiar frame in which they operate, mark her as a heroic character, [as] one of those great individuals [with an] intractable firmness of purpose" (1977: 197). With her words, Procne also resembles the Medea of Ovid's *Heroides*. In *Heroides* 12, Medea, too, seems unable to express the extent and manifestation of her revenge: *nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit!* 'I do not know for certain what greater thing my mind urges!' (*Her.* 12.212).[114] Procne's inability to pinpoint her own vengeful act (*Met.* 6.618-619) is comparable, and equally ominous.

Like Procne and Medea before her, Scylla in Book 8 exemplifies the woman deceived in marriage.[115] And like Medea, Scylla must betray the wishes of her father in order to secure the affections of a foreign man she loves; she gives to Minos a lock of her

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[114] This translation is my own. I will discuss this line again further on in the chapter with respect to Medea as a meta-literary figure (page 102).

[115] We should perhaps not be surprised that a Scylla would figure in a discussion of Medea, given that her name has already been mentioned in both the *Metamorphoses* (7.65) and *Heroides* 12 (123-124), in the context of the Argo's journey. This Scylla, of course, is not the one that we will discuss in the following pages, but nevertheless, her name brings to mind that of the betrayed betrayer of this episode. See Hinds (1993: 27 ff)) for a discussion of the two corresponding Scylla references and their significance in the debate over the authenticity of *Heroides* 12.

father's hair to indicate her loyalty to him. As she brings it to Minos, she declares her love (*Met.* 8.90-95):

> *'suasit amor facinus; proles ego regia Nisi*
> *Scylla tibi trado patriaeque meosque Penates.*
> *praemia nulla peto nisi te; cape pignus amoris*
> *purpureum crinem nec me nunc tradere crinem,*
> *sed patrium tibi crede caput' sceleratagque dextra*
> *munera porrexit.*
>
> 'Love led me to this deed.
> I am King Nisus' daughter, Princess Scylla.
> I offer you myself, my home, my country;
> I ask for no reward except yourself.
> Take for my love's sure proof this purple tress
> And know I give you – not my father's tress –
> I give his head!' And in her guilty hand
> She offered him the tress.

As Newlands (1997: 197) explains, and Ovid makes explicit with Scylla's words, the surrendering of Nisus' lock is tantamount to parricide. And Minos reacts in kind (*Met.* 8.95-100):

> *Minos porrecta refugit*
> *turbatusque novi respondit imagine facti:*
> *'di te submoveant, o nostri infamia saecli,*
> *orbe suo, tellusque tibi pontusque negetur.*
> *certe ego non patiar Iovis incunabula, Creten,*
> *qui meus est orbis, tantum contingere monstrum.'*
>
> But Minos shrank
> In horror from the gift, that monstrous gift,
> And answered: 'You disgrace of our fair age!
> May the gods purge you from their world! May land
> And sea be barred to you! My land of Crete,
> The isle that cradled Jove, I swear shall never
> Feel the contagion of so foul a fiend!'

He too recognizes the audacity of such an act, and condemns Scylla to be rejected by the civilized world – to be inhuman. Scylla resembles Medea in the *Metamorphoses*, in that, after essentially sacrificing her father for her potential husband, she is betrayed in an

apparent marriage; and while the infanticide that typifies Medea's tragic tradition is absent in Scylla's story, the compromising of her father and her country is enough to have her distinguished by Minos as something beast-like, a trait known to be a characteristic attribute of Medea. Nor is it a coincidence that, apart from her own self-directed question (*Met.* 7.38-41), the betrayal of her father is not explored. Instead, Ovid represents the act with that of Scylla. The deplorable actions of Euripides' Medea come to represent the pinnacle of the danger of woman. Accordingly, Ovid need not include every known detail of her story in order to bring her to the minds of his readers; instead, he uses tragic *contaminatio* to exhibit the likes of Medea through other characters. It would not be like Ovid to leave out the most famously despicable acts of such a tragic figure.

Ovid takes his exploration of Medea one step further by juxtaposing models of so-called 'good' wives just before and after her narrative. Between the episodes of Procne and Medea lies a short tale of Orithyia (*Met.* 6.675-721), a woman taken as a wife, by force, by the god Boreas. But unlike the union in the previous story, the marriage between Boreas and Orithyia is successful; Ovid emphasizes that they are rewarded with sons who grow to manhood and resemble both their parents, but not taking on their father's qualities until their transition into men (*Met.* 6.712 ff). This is in stark contrast to the young Itys, whose resemblance to his father was a significant factor in his mother's decision to slaughter him (*Met.* 6.621-622). It becomes clear, however, that the reason for the marriage's success is the passivity of the wife; unlike Procne, Medea, and Scylla, she does not thwart male authority in the least. Indeed, she does not even speak throughout the entire episode. The narrative is told from the perspective of Boreas, and Orithyia's

point of view is omitted completely; we know only that she was fearful when Boreas swept her away (*pavidam metu* [*Met.* 6.706]). Given that just before and after Orithyia's story are examples of disastrous marriages, the stark change in the role of the wife in this episode seems to be the key to the marriage's success.

Ovid concludes the lengthy Medea narrative with a description of her final flight (*Met.* 7.398-401):

> *hinc Titaniacis ablata draconibus intrat*
> *Palladias arces, quae te, iustissima Phene,*
> *teque, senex Peripha, pariter videre volantes*
> *innixamque novis neptem Polypemonis alis.*
>
> Her dragon team,
> The Sun-god's dragons, carried her away
> To Pallas' citadel, which once had seen
> Phene, so righteous, and old Periphas
> Winging together, and the granddaughter
> Of Polypemon floating on new wings.

The granddaughter of Polypemon is Alcyone, on whom Ovid prefers to elaborate in Book 11 (410-748). Alcyone, too, exhibits traits of a 'good' wife, that is, one who is obedient to her husband and does not resist his authority. When Ceyx sets sail, she devotes herself to watching the ship until it disappears and then condemns herself alone to her empty bed (*Met.* 11.471-472). She worships Juno and prays for his return (*Met.* 11.578-582), not yet knowing of his death, and as a reward for her devotion, the gods change both her and Ceyx into seabirds so that they may spend their lives together, their love enduring (*Met.* 11.741-744). Alcyone provides a blatant contrast to Procne, Medea, and Scylla: in no way does she commit a betrayal of her husband. She stands firm in her loyalty and does nothing to show disrespect. Accordingly, although she is transformed like Procne and

Scylla, her metamorphosis is one with a very 'happily-ever-after' ending. The nature of Medea's, however, requires considerably more investigation.

Throughout this study, I have established apotheosis as a theme connecting the episodes in question. The Medea of the *Metamorphoses* proves to be a little more complicated. At the end of the narrative, she is not technically deified. Unlike Hercules, Hippolytus, and Aeneas who appears to resolve the lack of apotheosis in the civic foundation episode of Cadmus, Medea is not explicitly transformed into a candidate appropriate for permanence in the Roman world. Nevertheless, apotheosis is present in the episode – more than once, in fact – although its reasons, and implications, are much less straightforward.

The metamorphosis of Medea is subtler than many of the other transformations represented in the poem. She does not turn into a bird or a tree at the closing of her narrative, nor is she transformed into a god or constellation. Instead, she shifts gradually from human to non-human, the steps of which transformation are marked by her involvement in incidents of apotheosis. At the beginning of Book 7, Medea is very much portrayed as a naïve young girl who inappropriately falls in love with an enemy of her father. It is in this episode, that of her meeting of Jason, that Medea delivers her only soliloquy (*Met.* 7.11-71), the one place where we have a revelation of her inner thoughts. In addition, the episode is devoid of any real divine or magical involvement (Newlands 1997: 184). The initial reactions of Medea and Jason towards one another are not dictated or enhanced by the gods; whereas the meeting in the *Argonautica* is influenced by the plans of Aphrodite (1997: 185), and so too the meeting of Aeneas and Dido, that same

event in the *Metamorphoses* is played out completely on the human plane: the epic convention of divine agency is conspicuously absent.[116]

By the second episode in the narrative, however, the rejuvenation of Aeson, Ovid does not continue to write Medea's character as a simple human girl; instead, he begins to emphasize her identity as a sorceress. But the transformation is relatively restrained. When Medea agrees to revive Aeson, she does so in Jason's interest, but with a focus on the skillfulness of her art (*Met.* 7.174-178):

> *'sed isto,*
> *quod petis, experiar maius dare munus, Iason;*
> *arte mea soceri longum temptabimus aevum,*
> *non annis renovare tuis, modo diva triformis*
> *adiuvet et praesens ingentibus adnuat ausis.'*
>
> 'But more than your request, a greater boon,
> I'll aim to give; not with your years I'll dare
> The attempt by my arts, to win again
> Your father's years long gone, if but her aid
> The three-formed goddess gives and with her presence
> Prospers the bold tremendous enterprise.'

As the narrative continues, however, her sorcery comes to the forefront. Ovid is explicit as to the significance of her magic in this episode, seeing as the ingredients of her potion take a full fifteen lines to detail (*Met.* 7.262-278). And after Aeson is brought back to life, Medea's contact with Jason is no longer a subject of the poem. Everything she does from now on is done completely of her own volition. This is evident in Ovid's version of the (false) revival of Pelias. Other sources, namely *Heroides* 12, have Medea murder Pelias at the behest of Jason; in the *Metamorphoses*, she does so out of pure malice, without any apparent motive (Newlands 1997: 188). But at the same time that Medea's humanity

[116] That is not to say, however, that Ovid does not nod subtly to the gods' roles in earlier literary tradition. At 7.12, Ovid alludes to Aphrodite's influence in the *Argonautica*, without implicating her in the event, and Ovid's words at 7.84 describing Jason's appearance can be seen as a parallel to Venus' improvement of Aeneas' looks in order to catch Dido's attention (*Aen*. 1.589 ff.).

figures increasingly less in the poem and her role as a sorceress comes to the fore, she becomes more so an agent of apotheosis. Rather than Aeson and Pelias being reborn by divine agency, it is Medea that is credited with the responsibility. Yet the process is distorted. Pelias, after all, is not reborn. He is murdered, and his death is witnessed and aided by his own daughters. And with Pelias' death, essentially at the hands of his children, Medea actively restages before her own eyes the crime that she herself committed, the slaughter of her brother Absyrtus. It seems that she is doomed to rehearse the atrocities of her past; it was this act that allowed Jason to escape, and signaled the outright betrayal of Aeetes, her father. And it is at this moment in the mythology of Medea that she transitions from innocuous girl into something to be feared. So too, does the death of Pelias signal Medea's deadly capabilities.[117] Medea had promised to rejuvenate their father but instead uses their desperation as an opportunity to exercise her manipulation and her mastery of false apotheosis. Pelias' demise is apotheosis gone very wrong.

At the end of the Medea narrative, this false apotheosis achieves another dynamic. After the brief account of the murder of her children, Medea escapes Corinth in a chariot sent by her grandfather, Helios. The event is one that has earned considerable scrutiny in Euripides' play, where the proposed staging would have her suspended above Jason with the corpses of her children before she escapes unscathed to Athens as a refugee. In Ovid, while Medea escapes Corinth in a similar manner, she has been traveling in that divine

[117] Pelias' death is also played out in a classic tragic theme. Death by *sparagmos* is present, for example, in Euripides' *Bacchae* and his *Hippolytus*, and also Ovid's version of events about the same character. The *sparagmos* in Ovid's Hippolytus episode, however, functions differently than here. Whereas Ovid's Hippolytus is reconstituted into a better form of himself, one more suited for his Roman future, the *sparagmos* of Pelias and the fact that he is not brought back to life serve to emphasize Medea's power and identity as someone between human and divine.

chariot since she searched out the ingredients for the potion for Aeson (*Met.* 7.219). And the chariot indicates further her disconnect from the human world: it is drawn not by horses, but by giant snakes, whose ability to rejuvenate themselves by shedding their skin (*Met.* 7.236-237) can be seen as a type of immortality, and thus lends itself to Medea's own transition. In her metamorphosis from young, lovesick girl at home in Colchis to bold, malevolent witch in Corinth, Medea has herself undergone a sort of quasi apotheosis. Knox, in his discussion of Euripides' *Medea,* calls her at the point of her famous exit a *theos* (1977: 208). She is removed from the possibilities of human judgment and placed in a realm of apparent divine sanction – the chariot, after all, is that of her grandfather, a god. Her susceptibility to human reasoning is no longer applicable: she has escaped without punishment and there is no indication that she will be faced with any punitive measures in the future. In fact, her children are later honoured with a type of hero cult (Eur. *Med.* 1381 ff.). And given that she possesses the ability (whether using it legitimately or not) to bring someone back from the dead, her power rivals that of an Asclepius or equivalent lesser god. Her 'apotheosis', or dramatic escape, is such that she is depicted as utterly other than her former human state, and she is somewhere in between the realm of humans and gods.

But if, as I have discussed with reference to the other episodes, apotheosis serves to signify the transformation of tragedy in each particular narrative, what does Medea's quasi apotheosis mean? The audience feels no sense that Medea has been reborn into a role in which she exhibits a more benevolent manner, or that her more deplorable characteristics have been repressed in order to achieve some level of deification. Instead, we are left thinking, what else is she capable of? And although the famously tragic part of

the myth, the slaughter of her children, is confined to only four lines in the narrative, the event is fresh in our minds, thanks to the surrounding parallel stories of Procne and Scylla, and the image we are left with is one of a murderous woman who has not been condemned for her heinous deeds. And while we have seen that Ovid explores both her epic and tragic characteristics in the *Metamorphoses*, there is no sense of resolution to Medea's story.

So what can we make of Medea's transformation? We know from very early on in the episode that apotheosis is precisely what Medea intends to accomplish: *et dis cara ferar et vertice sidera tangam* ('I shall be called beloved by the gods: I shall touch the stars with my head!' [*Met.* 7.61]).[118] But this line assumes greater significance when one looks to its meaning in its specific context as compared to its intertextual source and what the character actually achieves. The Medea who utters these words so early in the episode is a young, lovestruck girl who boasts of one day becoming an ideal wife and lover in a happy marriage, essentially, an elegiac *puella*. She will, indeed, take on this role, in Ovid's *Heroides*. And the elegiac Medea of *Heroides* 12 anticipates her own tragic future when she states, *nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit!* 'I do not know for certain what greater thing my mind urges!' (*Her.* 12.212). This 'greater thing' not only refers to the vengeance she will enact against Jason, but also functions as a verbal signpost of a generic shift: Medea will ascend the literary ranks from elegiac woman to tragic heroine, from low poetry to something greater, to the Medea so famously depicted in tragedy, and perhaps even to the Medea in Ovid's epic. Accordingly, when she kills Pelias without an

[118] This translation is my own.

apparent motive, she is actually a victim of her own literary past, and condemned to restage her own mythology as explored in other poetic works.

Moreover, when Medea declares *vertice sidera tangam*, 'I shall touch the stars with my head!' (*Met.* 7.61), she reminds us of Horace's famous affirmation at *Carmina* 1.1.36: *sublimi feriam sidera vertice*, 'I shall strike the stars with my eminent head'.[119] Horace refers to the immortality the distinction of his poetry will secure for him. Not only does Medea declare her intention to achieve apotheosis, which will be realized later in the episode, but she is determined to obtain poetic immortality as well. She is self-consciously meta-literary, and thus takes her place among Hershkowitz's intertextual, inter-generic chain, looking backwards and forwards among her various generic manifestations in literary history, and recognizing her own dominance as a literary subject. And by composing his Medea in such a manner, with an eye to her own enduring presence in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid strengthens his own appeal for apotheosis through poetic immortality (*Met.* 15.875-879):

> *parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis*
> *astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum;*
> *quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris*
> *ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama*
> *(si quid habent veri vatum praesagia) vivam.*
>
> ... I'll be borne,
> The finer part of me, above the stars,
> Immortal, and my name shall never die.
> Wherever through the lands beneath her sway
> The might of Rome extends, my words shall be
> Upon the lips of men. If truth at all
> Is established by poetic prophecy,
> My fame shall live to all eternity.

[119] This translation is my own.

Conclusion

In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid explores his own social and political realities through the use of generic tension, a precedent set by Virgil before him. Following the recent civil wars and the Social War of the previous generation, the *Aeneid* had cast uncertainty upon the current Augustan regime, and in doing so, became the literary model of political questioning, and one to which Ovid would look in presenting his own reservations. By associating tragic elements with the *Aeneid*'s forces of obstruction and destruction, Virgil established a rather antithetical relationship between tragedy and the narrative's purpose to establish a stable Rome. Thus, we are suspicious when tragedy emerges in an epic context, as it does rather openly in the narratives of Cadmus, Hercules, Hippolytus, and Medea in the *Metamorphoses*. Nevertheless, Ovid uses apotheosis as a means of ostensibly metamorphosizing the tragedy that appears in these episodes, and the process serves to reconcile the tragic figures into ones more suitable for a stable Roman future. Yet, as we have seen, the resolution of the generic dissonance is not quite so straightforward, nor does it occur in the same manner in each narrative. While the very apotheoses of both Hercules and Hippolytus indicate the departure from their respective tragedies, only Virbius appears as an appropriate figure for inclusion in Augustan Rome; Hercules deified is represented equally as questionable as his mortal self. Cadmus' tragic fate is never fully reconciled until the apotheosis of Aeneas; with Aeneas' deification, and thus the suggestion of a successfully founded Rome, the failed foundation of Thebes appears resolved. Despite Hippolytus' Romanization, however, given the ambiguous tone of Hercules' apotheosis and the fact that Cadmus himself never

actually escapes his own tragedy, it is clear that Ovid continues to emphasize the social anxieties of his contemporary political climate.

It proves more difficult, however, to determine the implications of the Medea episode. Unlike the narratives of the three preceding protagonists, the depiction of Medea does not appear to be bound up with the greater interests of Rome, and thus the suggestion of political dissidence is minimal. Instead, Medea is more closely associated with generic exchange and poetic self-consciousness. And while she too undergoes a form of apotheosis, her transformation is less about reconciliation, and more about her development into the monstrous figure so notorious in her tragic literary history, and, like her author, the realization her own poetic immortality.

Ovid's use of tragedy in the *Metamorphoses* is most accurately described as ambiguous. And so the potential political implications of the themes of tragedy and transformation depend entirely on whether or not the reader believes that the apotheoses achieved by the figures discussed in this study, and by Romulus and Julius Caesar and Ovid himself, actually signal the existence of a secure Roman state, or if, as I have suggested, the question mark always remains.

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