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Evan Drake December 8, 2020

Tragicae Electiones: Treason, Incest and Filicide

In the Middle Books of the Metamorphoses

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Abstract

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These three essays examine the stories of five well-known protagonists in the middle books of the *Metamorphoses*. Medea, Scylla, Byblis, Myrrha, and Althaea each speak to readers of the poem through soliloquies, which are a main focus of these essays because they reward close engagement with the Ovidian text. The first essay examines the poem's depiction of the decisions by Medea and Scylla to betray their fathers and their homelands. The essay locates in the soliloquies' texts justifications for those decisions that are significantly influenced by the positions of the *regiae virgines* within the patriarchy. The second essay turns to Byblis and Myrrha. It assesses the poem's development of the mental stress experienced by Byblis and Myrrha as they struggle with incestuous desire. The essay considers whether the soliloquies of Byblis and Myrrha and the surrounding events present coherent narratives, in which each woman's struggle and its outcome might be plausible. The second essay credits Byblis' story with narrative coherence. The essay largely concurs with the an earlier commentary that reads Myrrha's struggles as a story told for dramatic effect rather than to achieve narrative coherence. The third essay examines the story of the Calydonian Boar Hunt, the murder by the leader of the Hunt, Meleager, of his two uncles, and the decision of his mother, Althaea, to take Meleager's life in order to avenge the death of her brothers. The essay reads Ovid's mock-heroic depiction of the Boar Hunt as a narrative strategy to engage the reader in the events that follow in Calydon. The essay's examination of Althea's soliloquy establishes that the text does not support a reading in which Althaea's internal struggle includes any strong element of maternal affection for Meleager. The essay concludes that the text of her soliloquy demonstrates that Althaea's decision-making depends primarily on her perception of her position in the patriarchy.

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INTRODUCTION

The author of an undergraduate thesis on the *Metamorphoses* does well to remember that Ovid needed only four verses to introduce the *carmen perpetuum*. This introduction aims to be plain and concise, though it cannot achieve the brevity of Ovid's prologue. The three essays presented here examine five stories in the middle books of the *Metamorphoses.*[1] Each essay attempts to treat the text of the poem as autonomously as possible, in the belief that the *Metamorphoses* can be read and enjoyed without dependence on a specific historical context, and without searching for moral relevance. For such an approach the essays take encouragement from the comment of E. J. Kenney that the *Metamorphoses* does not "state a case; rather it asks questions, exploring and analyzing for the most part without comment or commitment."[2]

Freed from a search for what Ovid might have meant in the stories of interest here, these essays take seriously the advice of Stephen Hinds, who urged readers not "to hang back from the close, word-by-word and line-by-line engagement which any Ovidian text deserves."[3] Examination of the text of the poem of course includes the study of poetic technique. Kenney reminded readers that in Attic Greek "[t]he word 'poet' … means literally 'maker'; poets saw themselves as craftsmen."[4] As Garth Tissol has observed, "in the *Metamorphoses* all elements of

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1 As William S. Anderson has written, it is in the middle books of the *Metamorphoses* that the poem "begins to leave the conflict between gods and men" and "to concentrate on the relations among human beings … in psychological and moral terms" (Anderson 1972, 9).

2 Kenney (1986) xviii.

3 Hinds (1987) xi.

4 Kenney (2013) 145.

style and substance are ultimately inseparable … style shapes the reader's understanding of the work and embodies its meanings in the reader's experience."[5]

Kenney also wrote, "People, and how they react under stress, were what interested Ovid."[6] This study examines Ovid's depiction of five well-known female protagonists in the middle books, and their responses to stress. Four of them — Medea, Scylla, Byblis and Myrrha — enter the poem as young unmarried women caught between the expectations of the patriarchy and their own perceptions of happiness, bound up in attraction to an inappropriate man.[7] The fifth woman studied here, Althaea, is the queen of an ancient kingdom who has discovered that her son has killed his uncles, who were her brothers. Like the others, Althaea must make a choice. But unlike the choices facing the others, neither of Althaea's options promises happiness, real or perceived.

Each of the five women considers their choices in soliloquies, which reward close attention to style, including word choice, meter, mood, and all the ornament of which Ovid was a master craftsman. In the soliloquies Ovid's heroines explain to themselves, and sometime deceive themselves about, their choices. The audience listens.[8] It is in those soliloquies that they join other women from the middle books of the *Metamorphoses* as "the great orators of the poem," in Dan Curley's words.[9] If one credits Alison Sharrock's suggestion that "the poem empathizes more

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5 Tissol (1997) 3.

6 *Ibid.*

7 "Patriarchy," a term that appeared in Ovidian scholarship in the twentieth century, is used in these essays to refer to the cultural expectations and duties that governed the important choices made by or for daughters in Roman families of property. An outline of some of those expectations and duties, in a period partially overlapping with the writing of the *Metamorphoses*, appears in Fantham (1994) Ch. 11, "Women, Family and Sexuality in the Age of Augustus and the Julio-Claudians." For a type of case study in the use of the concept of patriarchy in a commentary on the *Metamorphoses*, see McAuley (2016) 114-166. Of course, there is no magic in the use of terminology: for earlier examination of culturally-based attempts by men to control the women of the *Metamorphoses* that is free from critical jargon, see Joplin (1991) 43-44.

8 These essays refer both to "the audience" and to "readers," inasmuch as the *Metamorphoses* was meant to be declaimed or sung to listeners as well as to be read by others.

9 Curley (2013) 137.

with women than with men,"[10] then the soliloquies of the women in the stories examined here may reveal enough about the women to understand them and how they make choices. Some but not all of the five women who are the subject of these essays say enough about themselves, or otherwise respond to the stress in their stories, to make themselves understandable. But all five display eloquence and an intensity of emotion that make their stories enjoyable.

1. Medea and Scylla

Sharrock cites "the well-known psychological soliloquies of Medea and Scylla" as examples of the *Metamorphoses'* predominant empathy for women,[11] and Medea and Scylla are the subject of the first essay presented here. Medea[12] enters Book VII as a princess in a "barbarian" kingdom on the edge of the world. Her story is familiar. When a handsome adventurer named Jason arrives to obtain the Golden Fleece from her father, Medea sees an opportunity for a better life than what otherwise might lie ahead for her, if she can persuade Jason to carry her away with him to Greece and to marry her there. In Book VIII a Greek princess named Scylla[13] lives in a walled city besieged by forces under the leadership of Minos of Crete. Scylla becomes infatuated with Minos, based on his appearance in martial garb and his warlike ostentation below the city's walls. Scylla convinces herself that surrendering is in the best interests of the besieged city and will also induce Minos to take her away as his consort.

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10 Sharrock (2020) 42.

11 *Ibid.*

12 In addition to occupying nearly the first half of Book VII in the *Metamorphoses,* Medea was also the subject of a tragedy written by Ovid, and she speaks through two epistles collected in the *Heroides.* "Medea" in this essay means the Medea of the *Metamorphoses* unless otherwise indicated.

13 Scylla is the name of the young woman whose story opens Book VIII, and also that of the better-known sea monster who surfaces later in Books XIII and XIV. Ovid and before him Virgil chose to permit "the conflation between the two figures," a practice that had "begun with the Greeks" (Tsitsiou-Chelidoni 2003, 196 n. 6) and that has become a subject of critical interest, but not one examined in these essays. In Book VIII of the *Metamorphoses,* Scylla is the daughter of Nisus, the king of Megara, and she is the only Scylla of current interest.

Medea and Scylla cannot achieve their personal goals without betraying their royal fathers. After different degrees of deliberation about the rewards of treachery, each is able to justify betrayal of the patriarchy, and each goes forward with her plans. The general critical consensus is that Medea and Scylla are one- or, at best, two-dimensional figures engaged in a simple choice between their duties to the patriarchy and their desire for the men who have arrived on their shores. When she is not being called a "cardboard figure of evil" who "arouses neither sympathy nor revulsion,"[14] Medea is treated as a "love-struck girl" employed by Ovid as "a model for what will be a series of women in love."[15] The next figure in the women-in love series fashioned by the critics out of the *Metamorphoses,* the Megarian princess Scylla, has endured an even worse reception. The critics brand Scylla as a "childish [and] unsophisticated"[16] example of the "young, beautiful and somewhat dumb"[17] women in the poem who fall victim to male disloyalty, their own bad judgment, or both.

Gendered readings of the *Metamorphoses*, including those of Mairéad McAuley and Patricia Klindienst Joplin,[18] invite a reader to consider the subservience of Medea and Scylla to the expectations of their royal households. Such an approach in turn calls attention to the portions of each young woman's soliloquy in which she disparages the head of the household (her father), and in which she considers asserting herself in a way that is inconsistent with their subordinate

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14 Newlands (1997) 179-80.

15 Fantham (2004) Kindle ed. loc. 900.

16 Hollis (1970) 38. Like others, Hollis finds that Ovid "makes little attempt at realistic psychology" in the poem's depiction of Scylla. *Id*. at 35.

17 Graf (1997) 24. One important exception to the general view that Scylla lacks any psychological depth is found in the work of Ellen Oliensis (2009), offering a type of Freudian perspective informed by a close reading of Scylla's narrative. Another exception is Patricia Salzman-Mitchell's reading of Scylla's story; see note 33 below.

18 See p. 2 note 7 above. McAuley, Joplin and others suggest a method for reading the stories of Medea and Scylla, based on consideration of how the choices of Medea and Scylla are shaped by patriarchal expectations. Based on the works read to prepare this study, the specific application of that approach to those stories presented in these essays does not appear elsewhere, except as noted.

status. Medea, for example, makes it clear that she believes her father to be cruel and barbarous; on that basis, Medea finds grounds in addition to Jason's courage and good looks for betraying her father. Likewise, by one reading of Scylla's soliloquy — a "serious" one, and a reader can never be sure whether to take any part of a story in the *Metamorphoses* entirely seriously nor to assume a purely comedic intent[19]— Scylla decides to second-guess the military decision to defend Megara rather than to declare it an open city. From Scylla's perspective, the only person with a clear interest in not capitulating to Minos appears to be Scylla's father, Nisus. Scylla also decides that Minos has good reason to attack Nisus, who is an ally of Athens, where Minos' son had been killed. If her soliloquy can be taken seriously, Scylla cannot be called "somewhat dumb," after all.

One commentator has written that Medea and Scylla each represent "a woman engaged in an anguished interior monologue in which she debates whether to take an action that she initially believes to be amoral, but to which she is driven by passion."[20] But, if what they say to themselves should be given any possibility of being sincere, then "initially" neither Medea or Scylla believe the actions they are considering to be "amoral." They have found reasons other than passion for Jason or Minos to side with their fathers' enemies; and that is the reading of their stories offered in the first essay presented here.

2. Byblis and Myrrha

Efrossini Spentzou has called Scylla one of the poem's three "innocent daughters of 'good families' taken to extremes by the force of inappropriate passion."[21] The other two are Byblis and

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19 As Anderson has observed, "Most of the best stories" in the *Metamorphoses* "are combinations of seriousness and playfulness" (Anderson 1972, 12).

20 Nugent (2008) 159.

21 Spentzou (2013) 392.

Myrrha, whose stories in Books IX and X are the subject of the second essay. Byblis and Myrrha are not attracted to dangerous foreigners. Their transgressions arise from desires that are too close to home.[22] In Book IX, Byblis uses two soliloquies to convince herself that she should seduce her twin brother, Caunus. She humiliates herself in awkward and fruitless attempts to do so. Myrrha's narrative in Book X opens with a different predicament. Myrrha's father, Cinyras, has brought eligible bachelors to his court so that Myrrha can choose one to be her husband — but Myrrha wants to sleep with Cinyras. Ashamed of her incestuous thoughts, Myrrha decides at the end of her soliloquy that her only proper course is to commit suicide. A twist in the narrative aborts Myrrha's attempt at suicide; it is there the narrative exchanges any pretense of verisimilitude for ingenuity. Myrrha sneaks into Cinyras' bedchamber, and is able to deceive him into believing that he is sleeping with a girl his daughter's age but not his daughter. After Cinyras discovers the deception he tries to kill Myrrha. Now pregnant, Myrrha flees into the wilderness, expresses remorse, and is transformed into a tree. A handsome baby boy (Adonis) thereafter emerges from the bark, and the Myrrh-tree secretes a precious eponymously-named resin, used inter alia to embalm the dead.

Myrrha is the one Ovidian protagonist in the five stories studied here whose decisions cannot be readily understood based on her narrative and the soliloquy embedded within it. As sung by Orpheus in Book X, Myrrha's story may not have been written with narrative coherence in mind; that is the view of at least one commentator, Gianpiero Rosati,, though he may give this

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[22] Leonard Barkin has written that "the whole career of love in the middle books of Ovid's poem revolves around versions of endogamy," in which the tales of Byblis and Myrrha represent a forbidden turn inward to family members as sources of sexual gratification. Barkin explains that Ovid balances the stories of Byblis and Myrrha "against such examples of exogamy as Scylla and Medea." (Barkin 1986, 91). See also Nugent (2008) 172, in which the stories of Medea and Scylla and those of Byblis and Myrrha are called "extreme end points along an axis of exogamy and endogamy."

specific aspect of her story less attention than the second essay in this study does.[23] Apart from the lesson in humility her story can teach a reader looking for narrative coherence, Myrrha rewards attention to her fine soliloquy, which the second essay examines.

Perhaps because Ovid gives Byblis two soliloquies in which to reveal herself, her narrative in Book IX has a coherence lacking in Myrrha's tale. Byblis' first soliloquy presents her as a particularly repressed daughter of the patriarchy, which makes her incapable of understanding why her efforts to seduce her brother fail, and why they continue to fail. Each time Byblis humiliates herself by attempting to proposition her brother, it becomes easier for her to decide that she has little left to lose in continuing what has now become familiar and what may be her chief source of identity. A merciful insanity follows, sparing Byblis from any remaining sense of shame, before her dehumanization is completed by transformation into a fountain in the wilderness.

3. Althaea

Althaea is not a marriageable young woman trying to choose between the duties of a daughter and a desire for the wrong man. She is the unfortunate queen of a kingdom targeted for divine punishment, for reasons unrelated to anything she has done, thought or said. Althaea was empowered by the Fates at the time of her son's birth to preserve his life or cut it short. Understandably the young mother had chosen to keep her baby alive. Her decision has permitted that son, Meleager to grow into adulthood. After he has murdered her brothers, Althaea has to decide whether to end Meleager's life, as she could have done at his birth.

The third essay tests the general critical consensus that Meleager's murder of his uncles forces Althaea to choose between "two conflicting loves and loyalties, one owed to her male child

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[23] See p. 31 below.

and the other to her male siblings," as one commentator has written.[24] Another has read her narrative as a type of metamorphosis in which "Althaea … transforms herself from loving mother into violent, vengeful sister."[25] To the contrary: Althaea emerges from the text of Book VIII as an austere figure, able to administer punishment when cultural norms require, and hardly as the *exemplum* of a loving mother and sister trapped in a dilemma. Read carefully, Althaea's soliloquy expresses little affection either for her son or her brothers, and the main object of her pity is herself. The poem may leave behind signals of discomfiture with Althaea's stern and cruel course of action, as other readers have suggested. But perhaps the most interesting point is that Althaea leaves the poem with the same moral framework she appears to possess at its start. Within the *Metamorphoses*, and at least among the woman studied here, Althaea may be the most resistant to change.[26]

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[24] Nugent (2008) 157, 161.

[25] McAuley (2016) 135.

[26] Before turning to the essays, reviewers are asked to consider two general points.

First, as noted at the start of the Introduction, the readings in these essays are intended to be as autonomous as possible from any specific historical setting. These are essays about the presentation of myths. An examination of the struggles of Ovid's female protagonists against the cultural expectations created by their birth and their station in life does not conflict with forbearance from any systematic reliance on a detailed historical context. While the narrative settings used in the poem are important, the struggles of the women depicted in the poem are not limited to any particular time. One can imagine a royal princess in another epoch motivated to rebel against a cruel or an inept father. The taboo against incest was not peculiar to Roman families in the Augustan era. Blood-vengeance as a principle of justice did not begin or end with the Greco-Roman traditions familiar to Ovid.

Second, observations in these essays on the poem's use of wit and comedy are not meant to justify the poem's representations of violence against women or what some have reasonably found to be its mockery of women experiencing stress. Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos were surely right when they wrote, "Attempts to negotiate an ethics of reading in the *Metamorphoses* which brings its author in line with modern sensibilities are, as historicist enterprises, highly dubious" (Gildenhard and Zissos 1999, 166 n. 17).

I. *REGIAE VIRGINES* — THE TRANSGRESSIONS OF MEDEA AND SCYLLA

Ovid had to include Medea in the *Metamorphoses*, if only because one of his evident ambitions was to omit no major subject of Greek legend, nor many minor ones, from the poem. Nevertheless, by Ovid's time Medea was "the most central marginal figure in Hellenic culture."[27] According to some critics, that is exactly where Ovid intended to leave her, on the margins. Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos have written that Ovid made no attempt to create for Medea a "coherent psychological portrait;"[28] instead he wrote her into the poem so that he could demonstrate his mastery of the Greek sources, and mainly in order to "deflate" her earlier treatments, including Euripides' masterpiece.[29] Gildenhard and Zissos conclude that the Medea of the *Metamorphoses* is "an interstitial character who lives in the gaps of her own tradition."[30] Such a view carries forward what might be considered the nihilistic tradition in Ovidian scholarship. Hermann Fränkel wrote in 1945 that "[t]he brilliant surface" of the *Metamorphoses* "causes us to wonder how much, or how little, may lie hidden beneath. If we do probe and bore through we shall not always come upon a substantial core."[31]

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27 Hinds (1993) 45.

28 Gildenhard & Zissos (2013) 96.

29 Thus, Gildenhard & Zissos write: "Ovid vitiates and marginalizes the versions [of Medea] of his predecessors" and "ostentatiously reduces the complex storylines of Euripides and Apollonius to a mere handful of verses, thereby creating space for a metamorphic 'rewrite.'" Gildenhard & Zissos (2013) 89. Gildenhard and Zissos then argue that the sheer intricacy of Ovid's integration of the old sources into the first half of Book VII transforms all the prior treatments of Medea into something new, making his version of Medea an exemplar for "a continuous narrative of metamorphosis." *Id.* at 121. Making a somewhat similar point, Ulrike Auhagen observes that in the Medea episode in Book VII, "Ovid is playing with the reader's mythological knowledge," and that Medea's soliloquy "reflects not so much a realistic image of his character's state of mind as it presents an intellectual game that takes into account the refined rhetorical and literary tastes of his contemporary readers." Auhagen (2010) Kindle ed. loc. 7398.

30 Gildenhard & Zissos (2013) 90.

31 Fränkel (1945) 72.

It is at this point that "Ovid deserves to be defended against his commentators."[32] This essay enters the critical discussion by testing the view expressed by S. Georgia Nugent, consistent with other readings of the poem, that Medea's soliloquy is an "anguished interior monologue[s]" in which Medea "debates whether to undertake an action that she initially believes to be amoral, but to which she is driven by passion."[33] The essay argues that, while there can be no question that "crimes" are committed by Medea and Scylla (the other subject of this essay), neither woman's soliloquy reveals to the audience someone who initially believes her conduct to be amoral. To the contrary, Medea and Scylla explain their actions to themselves as justified by circumstances. Each reaches that conclusion in rhetorically different ways, with Medea given more time and space to explain herself and Scylla arguably displaying more eloquence. But both start with an assumption that her transgression should be excused.

The essay begins with Medea, whose soliloquy is the subject of Part I. At the start of her story, Medea's uncertainty about what she guesses might be "what being in love is called" (*Met.* 7.13, *quod amare vocatur,* see p. 13 below) intertwines with something more concrete. Medea decides that her father is cruel and barbaric, that Jason does not deserve an unfair death, that she should not rely on divine justice to save him, and that defiance of her father is therefore necessary. As Medea conceives the situation, rescuing Jason is hardly "amoral;" but she does not go forward until she realizes that her motivations are not fully rational and are not entirely altruistic. Whatever the commentators may say about later events, at the start of her story Medea exhibits an engaging honesty, at least with herself and her listeners. For that reason, it might be correct to say that

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32 Tissol (1997) 14 n. 11.

33 Nugent (2008) 159.

Medea starts with a "coherent psychological portrait" before Ovid makes her carry the baggage of metaliterary tradition around the Aegean.

Medea's father, Aeetes, was cruel and therefore incited resistance. Scylla's father, Nisus, was feeble and therefore invited disrespect, in a world in which a lack of piety was a grave offense. After spending months confined by a siege she observes from the walls of Megara — her watching the battle below the walls being also transgressive[34] — Scylla conceives a "win-win" solution: she will accelerate the just war led by King Minos against her father to its inevitable victorious conclusion, win clemency for Megara, and gain Minos as a handsome and powerful husband. Scylla imagines herself to be the handmaiden of peace as well as an irresistible prize for Minos once she helps him win his war. Lacking Medea's introspection, Scylla has no major hesitations and knows no regrets until she discovers that Minos does not need or want a treacherous bride.

For all its naivety, Scylla's soliloquy is ornate. To Ovid's credit, her soliloquy suppresses as far as possible the stereotypes that might have applied to speeches of a heroine under stress, summarized by Kathryn L. McKinley in this way:

> "No matter how valid the speaker's objections to and appraisal of her predicament, she can voice her thoughts through the only developed discourse sanctioned for female characters in classical literature: the language and rhetoric of emotional excess."[35]

Scylla's soliloquy, which is the subject of Part II of this essay, is arguably technically superior as a work of poetry in comparison with Medea's longer and fully-anguished self-examination. It is not until she experiences Minos' dehumanizing vilification at the end of her story that Scylla conforms to type, and responds in kind to Minos with epithets and other expressions of emotional

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[34] Patricia Salzman-Mitchell has described Scylla's interest in the battle for Megara as an example of "[t]eichoscopia … a curious situation in which women are allowed to look and men who fight become a spectacle for their eyes," which in turn launches Scylla on her efforts "to break limits and transgress her world" Salzman-Mitchell (2005) 109-110.

[35] McKinley (2001) 8.

excess. As would be expected, if one credits Kenney's view that Ovid seems to maintain moral neutrality in the *Metamorphoses,*[36] the conclusion of Scylla's story leaves open the morally-burdened question whether Scylla is entitled to "sympathy,"[37] about which Ovid may be assumed not to have cared. Ovid likewise may have been unconcerned with the question whether Scylla was not only foolish but evil. In sum: *patria potestas* may be alive and well in some modern assessments of her story — why would a foolish girl even think about ending a war that she thought unjustified — but that need not distract attention from Scylla's eloquent self-justification for rebellion against her father.

I.

A. The Debut of the Introspective Heroine

The opening sentences of Book VII announce the Argonauts' arrival at Colchis and the *lex horrenda* (*Met.* 7.8, "terrifying conditions") established by King Aeetes in order for Jason to obtain the Golden Fleece.[38] After Aeetes explains what he expected of Jason, his daughter experiences *validos ignes* (*id.* 7.9, "intense fires"), a passion that she could not overcome by reason; exactly what the fire or passion is, the poem does not yet say. Her soliloquy commences as Medea attempts to understand what she is feeling:

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[36] See p. 1 above.

[37] Carole Newlands, for example, writes that while "[i]nitially unsympathetic, Scylla becomes less so as troubling questions are raised about the responsibility of Minos… . When a woman helps a man by morally culpable means, does he then have any responsibility for her fate?" Newlands (1997) 196.

[38] Although the poem does not explain why Aeetes was setting harsh terms, Ovid's readers would have needed no background on the story of the Golden Fleece, a legend "among the oldest known to the Greeks." Green (2007) Kindle ed. loc. 592. Illustrating Auhagen's point (see p. 9, note 29 above) that the Medea episode in Book VII may have been intended as an "intellectual game," Ovid did not select among the variations in the legend. Apollodorus presents a version in which Jason tricks himself into the quest: when his uncle Pelias asks Jason to suggest a suicide mission for someone whom an oracle predicted would murder Pelias, Jason suggests sending the miscreant on a quest for the Fleece. In another version, attributed to Pindar, Pelias promises to cede his sovereignty over Iolcus to Jason if Jason obtains the fleece, in order to appease Hera, to whom Pelias had shown impiety by killing his stepmother at one of Hera's cult-sites. Green, *ibid.*

> *"frustra Medea, repugnas:*
> *nescio quis deus obstat" ait; "mirumque, nisi hoc est,*
> *aut aliquid certe simile huic, quod amare vocatur.*
> *Nam cur iussa patris nimium mihi dura videntur?"*
> *Sunt quoque dura nimis! Cur, quem modo denique vidi,*
> *ne pereat, timeo? quae tanti causa timoris?*
>
> (*Met.* 7.11-16: "In vain, Medea, you resist: I don't know which god opposes me," said she, "and strange this is, unless it is, or similar to, what being in love is called. For why do the commands of my father seem too harsh? They are too harsh! Why [he], whom only just now I saw, do I fear will perish? What [is] the cause of such great fear?")

Dan Curley has called Medea's "rhetorical debut … anything but tidy,"[39] but the disorder exists mainly to reveal Medea stumbling around the concept of love (*quod amare vocatur*). Though Medea struggles with that concept, on one point she is clear. Medea dislikes her father's harsh position.[40] The start of the soliloquy thus foreshadows much that follows: Medea's attempt to understand *quod amare vocatur*, her conviction that her father is cruel, and her investment in Jason's survival. Embedded in its opening lines is also a degree of introspection only possible in a soliloquy, in which syntax aligns with the speaker's stress. To express wonder about her concern for Jason's safety, Medea might have asked herself, "Why do I fear that he, whom I saw just now, will perish?" Instead, Medea formulates the "untidy," hyperbatonically-structured question in line 15-16: *Cur, quem modo denique vidi, ne pereat, timeo?* Ovid postpones *timeo* to the end of the sentence, as if Medea is fearful about being fearful for Jason.

The next five lines of the soliloquy develop Medea's stresses on two levels, visceral and intellectual:

> *Excute virgineo conceptas pectore flammas,*
> *si potes, infelix!— Si possem, sanior essem.*
> *Sed trahit invitam nova vis, aliudque cupido,*

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[39] Curley (2013) 143.

[40] While Raeburn, Melville, and this essay translate *dura* as "harsh," alternate definitions for *dura* include "pitiless," "unsympathetic," and "oppressive." *OLD s.v. dura.*

> *mens aliud suadet. Video meliora proboque;*
> *deteriora sequor.*
>
> (*Met.* 7.17-21: "Drive out from my maiden's breast the conceived flames, if you can, miserable one! If I could, more sensible I would be. But a strange force drags [me] unwilling, and [my] desire [urges] one thing, [my] mind urges another. I see and approve of the better things; I follow worse things.")

Conceptas pectore flammas deserves the literal translation it is given here. Already in verse 9, the reader has encountered the image of "strong fires… taking hold" in Medea (*concipit interea validos Aeetias ignes*). Although the leading translations of the poem are restrained in their approach to this verse, *conceptio* and *concipio* each have among their definitions not only the concept of being "smitten" (as by love), but physical conception in the womb.[41] Before Medea reveals her transformative powers as a witch, she experiences the sensations of a mortal woman, capable of transforming her own flesh into another person. And, in Medea's case, those mortal sensations make her uncomfortable. *Execute (*18) is imperative, reserved for direct command, used here by Medea to issue an urgent order to herself to get rid of the fire. Realizing that she cannot do so, Medea next insults herself, in the vocative, calling herself a wretched person (19: *infelix*!). But her will is fading. She had accompanied her command *execute* with the phrase *si potes* (19: "if you can"), in the indicative mood. But Medea then tells herself, "*Si possem, sanior essem*" (19: "If I could, I would be more sensible"), in the subjunctive mood, and more specifically uses the subjunctive in a contrary-to-fact condition (incapable of fulfillment), in reference to possibilities that are unlikely to occur. Medea is discovering that there are diminishing chances that she can control her emotions.

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[41] See *OLD s.v. concipio* (1: to receive or draw in; 2: to be smitten with love; 3: to receive in the womb, conceive) and *conceptio* (1: the action of conceiving in the womb.). *OLD s.v. concipio*. Here Ovid's word-choice illustrates what Mairéad McAuley has called his willingness to "exploit[] the metamorphic potential of maternity, its conflation with the boundaries of the body, inside and outside" (McAuley 2016, 118).

B. An Aristotelian Moment?

At this point, there is a brief but remarkable change in the course of Medea's introspection. Medea says to herself, "[My] desire [urges] one thing, [my] mind urges another. I see and approve the better things; I follow the worse things."[42] As S. Gloria Nugent points out,[43] Medea here seems to be tracking this portion of *Nicomachean Ethics*:

> "Both self-control and endurance seem to be good and praiseworthy thing, while incontinence and softness seem to be bad and blameworthy.
> "And the self-controlled person seems to be the same as someone who tends to stand by his calculation, the incontinent the same as someone who tends to depart from it.
> "The incontinent person knows what he does is bad, but does it because of what affects him, while the self-controlled person, knowing that his appetites are bad, because of his reason does not follow them."[44]

Nugent and Curley treat the soliloquy's formulation of the tension between *cupido* and *mens* as a possible attempt by Ovid to channel Medea into a stereotype of "akratic heroines," *akrasia* being "a paralysis of the will, in which a moral agent correctly perceives the 'better' course but fails to act on it."[45] Nugent states that she "do[es] not claim direct Aristotelian influence on the *Metamorphoses.*"[46] But those who would read into Medea's story an effort to recapitulate and deflate Hellenistic tradition might well suggest that, by dropping the text of *Nicomachean Ethics* into her soliloquy, Ovid intended to put *Nicomachean Ethics* into his cross-hairs along with Euripides, Apollonius and others.[47] Perhaps the best that can be said is that if Ovid intended parody in these few lines, it is subtle.

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42 Medea deploys chiasmus (ABBA) to amplify the conflict between *cupido* and *mens*.

43 Nugent (2010) 155.

44 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (R. Crisp trans. 2014), Book VII, ch. I 9-13.

45 Curley (2013) 144 and 176 note 104 (quoting Nugent).

46 Nugent (2010) 157. See also Volk (2010) 65: "Ovid is anything but a philosophical poet."

47 In Euripides' tragedy, the Aristotelian akratic moment comes much later in Medea's story, just prior to her murdering her children: "At last I understand the awful deed I do; but passion, that cause of direst woes to mortal man, hath triumphed o'er my sober thoughts." Euripides, *Medea and Other Plays* (LG Classics ed. 2016) 67.

C. Embracing Transgression

As the soliloquy continues, Medea makes a tentative decision to save Jason. Medea convinces herself if she does not take action, nothing on earth will spare Jason, and (in the ultimate transgression against boundaries) decides to step into the role of gods:

> *Quid in hospite, regia virgo,*
> *ureris et thalamos alieni concipis orbis?*
> *Haec quoque terra potest, quod ames, dare. Vivat an ille*
> *occidat, in dis est. Vivat tamen! idque precari*
> *vel sine amore licet: quid enim commisit Iason?*
> * * *
> *At nisi opem tulero, taurorum adflabitur ore*
> *concurretque suae segetis, tellure creatis*
> *hostibus, aut avido dabitur fera praeda draconi.*
> ***
> *Di meliora velint! Quamquam non ista precanda,*
> *sed facienda mihi*!
>
> (*Met.* 7.21-25, 7.29-31, 7.37-38: Why for the stranger, do you, a royal maiden, burn and fantasize about marriage in another land? Even this land can give what you love. Whether that man should live, or should die, is in gods' [hands]. May he live nevertheless! And to beg this thing even without love, it is permitted: what deed did Jason commit? … But unless I bear aid, by bulls' mouth[s] he will be breathed-on and he will clash with his own seed's earth-created enemies, or to the hungry dragon he'll be given as wild prey. … May the gods wish better things! Such things must not be prayed-for, but they must be done by me.)

In the first set of verses presented above, Medea is still unwilling to answer directly the question why she "burns" and "fantasizes" for a stranger. But she tells herself that even if love were not a factor, she would still think that Jason should be spared by the gods because he has done nothing wrong (25: *quid enim commisit Iason?*). Medea thus demonstrates that she is more comfortable with objective notions of fairness than with her uncomfortable passions.

The syntax used in this key portion of the soliloquy is important. The potential subjunctives, *vivat* and *occidat*, voice uncertainty about whether the gods will favor Jason. The disorder in the sentence beginning with *At nisi* conveys scattered thought and stress, as Medea contemplates the three challenges that Jason must surmount in order to obtain the Fleece. In line

37, Medea reverts to a belief that the gods should intervene. The optative subjunctive *velint* in the clause *di meliora velint* conveys the wish. Medea then takes a strong pause (by means of a strong caesura) before declaring, *Quamquam non ista precanda, sed facienda mihi!* The jussive subjunctive, *velint*, gives way to two stronger passive periphrastic verbs, *precanda* and *facienda*. Equally important, the metrical emphasis is on *facienda,* on what Medea herself must do. *Precanda* is separated from its verse by a weak caesura, while *facienda* is set off by two strong caesuras.

Medea next makes it clear to herself and to readers of the poem that she understands the consequences of her decisions: she must obtain from Jason a promise to take her away with him from Colchis, rather than abandon her to punishment by her father (41: *poenae ... relinquar*). The toughness she displays in hypothetically calling Jason an ingrate (42: *ingratus*) is what would be expected from a practically-minded princess about to transgress the boundaries of patriarchy (38: *regna parentis*). Medea understands that Jason may not find her irresistible for her own sake (in contrast to Scylla, who could not imagine rejection by Minos). Still unwilling to dwell on passion and desire, Medea reverts to condemnation of her father and his realm, particularly in comparison with Greece:

> *Nempe pater saevus, nempe est mea barbara tellus,*
> *frater adhuc infans: stant mecum vota sororis,*
> *maximus intra me deus est. Non magna relinquam,*
> *magna sequar: titulum servatae pubis Achivae*
> *notitiamque loci melioris et oppida, quorum*
> *hic quoque fama viget, cultusque artesque locorum.*
>
> (*Met.* 7.53-58: "Certainly [my] father [is] a savage, certainly my land is barbarous,[my] brother still an infant: standing with me are the prayers of [my] sister, [but] the greatest god is inside me. Not great things will I abandon, great things I will follow: [things such as] the honor of saving the youths of Greece and the knowledge of a place better and towns, whose fame even here is esteemed, [as well] as the cultures and arts of the places.")

"*Relinquam*," in the future active indicative, expresses Medea's confidence that she will not be leaving great things behind in Colchis when she escapes to Greece. In her harshest statements about her current circumstances, she calls her kingdom a "barbarous land" (53: *barbara tellus*) ruled by her "savage father" (*pater saevus*). Her brother has no bearing on her decision because he is still an infant (54: *adhuc infans*).[48] Medea similarly marginalizes her sister in this sentence: *stant mecum vota sororis/ maximus intra me deus est* (54-55: "Standing with me are the prayers of my sister, [but] the greatest god is inside me"[49]). *Vota sororis* is positioned on the periphery of *mecum*, while *me* is enclosed by *maximus* and *deus*. The structure of her sentences make Medea's priorities and values clear: she is going to commit herself to a new life with Jason.

D. Retreat and Advance

In the final portion of the soliloquy, Medea travels backwards. She breaks away from reverie about the adventure that lies ahead at sea with Jason, in which she and Jason withstand danger in fond embraces. Other female protagonists in the middle books of the poem have rightly been called "wholly pre-occupied and blind to the realities of their situation, exploiting the power of language for self-deception;"[50] not so Medea, who is never deceived by "beautiful names:"

> *Coniugiumne vocas speciosaque nomina culpae*
> *inponis, Medea, tuae? Quin adspice, quantum*
> *adgrediare nefas, et, dum licet, effuge crimen!"* (69-71)
>
> (*Met.* 7.69-71: "Do you call [that] a marriage, and impose beautiful-seeming names for your crimes, Medea? Why don't you examine how great a sin you undertake, and, while it's permitted, escape from the crime!")

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48 Fortunately for the infant in Ovid's version of the Medea story, Medea and Jason apparently sail away after the events at Colchis without kidnapping him; in Apollodorus' version, Medea thwarts Aeetes' pursuit of the Argonauts by chopping her brother into pieces that Aeetes must collect form the sea. Apollodorus (Hard ed. 1997, 54).

49 From context, that "greatest god" is presumably Medea's passion to Jason, having first appeared at the start of the soliloquy, as the "opposing god" in line 12. (See E. J. Kenney's notes to the Melville translation of the *Metamorphoses.* Kenney (1986) 414.)

50 Tissol (1997) 149.

With that, the soliloquy ends abruptly, as the narrator declares that Cupid (or *cupido*) "turned his back," apparently on Medea, as *rectum pietasque pudorque* (72: "right, piety and honor") *constiterant ... ante oculo* (72-73: "stood before her eyes"). Medea's capacity for introspection and critical judgment has broken the spell — for the moment.

There next ensues the encounter between Medea and Jason (by one reading, their first actual meeting) in the grove sacred to Hecate. Finally (but only momentarily) emulating the model of a "love-struck" maiden, Medea swoons in the presence of the suddenly and uncommonly handsome Jason, as the intrusive narrator describes him. Once Jason agrees to the marriage-pact, a tearful Medea (91: *lacrimis ... profusis*) agrees to practice Hecate's arts in order to preserve Jason through the ordeals ahead of him. Having made the bargain, Medea regains her composure, and her self-awareness, and she declares:

> *Quid faciam, video, nec me ignorantia veri*
> *decipiet, sed amor! servabere munere nostro:*
> *servatus promissa dato!* (92-94)
>
> (*Met.* 7.92-94: "I see the thing that I am doing, and it's love, not ignorance of the truth, that deceives [me]; You will be saved by the gift of mine: after you're saved, fulfill [your] promises!")

Medea is fatalistic and practical at the same time. Concluding that she has been tricked by love and not by a lack of self-awareness, she insists that after she has saved Jason he must do as he has promised. Medea's words have a pivotal importance in her story: finally understanding fully why she wants to help Jason, Medea is able to banish indecision and move forward. [51]

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[51] In "Multiple Changes in the *Metamorphoses*," in which he explains that metamorphosis in the poem is not always expressed in physical transformation, Anderson also gives great importance to the verses quoted above: "Being deceived by love, as she puts it, is Medea's metamorphosis; for Ovid, it constitutes the deepest change of the story" (Anderson 1963, 14).

Medea's soliloquy had laid the groundwork for her decision to allow her passion to control her fate, and the psychological portrait Ovid has created hardly seems "implausible." Alison Sharrock asks whether, when Ovid is displaying his "remarkable attention to the psychology of female actors … to what extent [can] this attention … be regarded as truly sympathetic and empathetic, and to what extent is it objectifying"?[52] It would be hard to claim that the Medea who saves Jason in Book VII is an Ovidian attempt at objectification. When Medea recovers herself from her tearful moment in Hecate's grove and then explains to Jason that she knows what she is doing and why she is doing it, she surely disappoints the critics who would make her the "poster child for akratic conflict,"[53] or for anything else. But it would be perilous to try to deduce or infer from the poem whether Ovid intended to present Medea as a figure worthy of sympathy or empathy. Ovid's "fundamental irony prevents him from holding a single position too long."[54]

II.

Medea empowers herself by mediating between gods and mortals with a sorceress' arts. Scylla's story shows that simple mortal treachery can defeat magic but does not necessarily empower the person who commits the crime.

As the clouds clear in the opening lines of Book VIII, with Scylla on the walls of Megara, the poem introduces the invasion force led by Minos and the legend of the purple lock:

> *Interea Minos Lelegeia litora vastat*
> *praetemptatque sui vires Mavortis in urbe*
> *Alcathoi, quam Nisus habet, cui splendidus ostro*
> *inter honoratos medioque in vertice canos*
> *crinis inhaerebat, magni fiducia regni*.

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52 Sharrock (2020) 6.

53 Nugent (2008) 15.

54 Volk (2010) 65.

> (*Met.* 8.6-8: "Meanwhile, Minos to the Megarian shores lays waste and tests the strength of his own force of Mars against in the city of Alcathous,[55] which Nisus holds, whose bright-in-purple among white venerable [locks], clinging in the middle on his head lock, was the great kingdom's ground for confidence.")

The sentence structure in those opening verses sets up an important contrast. Minos "lays waste" to city's shores in a lengthy sentence that opens in good order, but that trails away into a hyperbatonic description of King Nisus' purple lock and its importance to Megara's defenses. The disordered wording at the end of the sentence conveys the doubtfulness of a defense based on superstition, especially when balanced against an invasion force with Mars-like (7: *Mavortis*) leadership. The citadel itself seems not so much built for war as for its walls' ability to make pleasing sounds, based on their legendary connection with Apollo:

> *Regia turris erat vocalibus addita muris*
> *in quibus auratam proles Letoia fertur*
> *deposuisse lyram: saxo sonus eius inhaesit*. (14-16)
>
> (*Met.* 8.14-16: "The royal tower had been built upon vocal walls, in which the child of Leto [Apollo] [56] is said to have placed inside a golden lyre; to the rock the sounds of his [lyre] clings").

The description of Megara as *magni ... regni* (8: "the great kingdom") acquires irony from the opening tableau. Even though the narrator says that the outcome of the war was uncertain (12-13), Scylla could not be blamed for thinking otherwise.

When Scylla begins to speak and opens her thoughts to the reader, she asks herself whether she should grieve or rejoice about the war, before finally deciding that the war was welcome

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[55] Megara was founded by Alcathous, the son of Pelops, a son of Zeus who gave his name to the peninsula that was the ancient seat of Mycenae and that had Megara on its isthmus to the Greek mainland. Anderson (1972) 291. Minos attacked Megara because the city refused to join his war against Athens to avenge his son's murder. *Id.* 334.

[56] Apollo returns to the story in an entirely different way, when Scylla imagines Minos to be Phoebus Apollo, flexing his muscles like a divine archer in these lines: *inposito calamo patulos sinuaverat arcus:/ sic Phoebum sumptis iurabat stare sagittis* (30-31: "He had placed the arrow and bended the broad bow, making her swear that she saw Phoebus when he took up his arrows").

because it brought Minos to her attention: *nisi bella forent, numquam mihi cognitus esset* (46: "If there was no war, never to me would he have been known."). Scylla establishes that she is honest with herself, and unembarrassed to admit that she is happy that the war brought Minos to her attention.[57] Yet to be developed, of course, is the irony that while Scylla possesses a degree of self-awareness, she has no insight into the perspective of the other figure of great importance to her story, Minos.

Soon thereafter Scylla uses an anaphoric construction to imagine how she might end the bloodshed if she became Minos' hostage:

> *Me tamen accepta poterat deponere bellum*
> *obside: me comitem, me pacis pignus haberet.*
>
> (*Met.* 8.47-48: "Nevertheless he could end the war after accepting me
> as a hostage: he could hold me as a companion and a dowry of peace.")

Scylla's elegant anaphora is hardly consistent with a judgment that she is "young, beautiful and somewhat dumb."[58] Scylla next begins to marshal the arguments for empowerment. After first wishing that there was some way to end the war and win Minos except *proditione* (56: "by betrayal"), Scylla notes the potential for *clementia* (57: "mercy") if resistance ends and then calls Minos' cause *iusta* (58: "just") because he is avenging his son's murder. The text in which Scylla begins to resolve herself in favor of rebellion warrants study:

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[57] Earlier, the narrator asserted *vix sua, vix sanae virgo Niseia compos mentis erat* (35: "the maiden of Nisus was barely in control of her sound mind"). Once she begins speaking to herself, Scylla shows full control of her thoughts, the point surely being that at least for Scylla and at least at this point in her story, she can use language to clarify and understand the dilemma presented by her situation.

[58] See p. 4 above. It may not be surprising that the treatment of Scylla as insubstantial has persisted. One widely used translation of the *Metamorphoses* turns part of Scylla's deliberations, in which she resolves to rebel against her father (68-73) into this series of trite nostrums that bear virtually no relation to the Latin text: "If wishes were horses … beggars would ride. … Yet God helps those who help themselves, remember, and fortune favors the brave." Raeburn (2004) 297. The first aphorism appears to date from the seventeenth century. Opie and Opie (1997) 513. To complete the assault on Scylla and the Latin text, the Note accompanying the translations then advises the readers, "Here … Ovid introduces sententious clichés into Scylla's rhetoric." Ovid could not be the source of a cliché that originated more than a millennium after his death.

> *Nam pereant potius sperata cubilia, quam sim*
> *proditione potens. quamvis saepe utile vinci*
> *victoris placidi fecit clementia multis.*
>
> (*Met.* 8.55-57: "For let such a wished-for marriage perish, rather than I become by means of powerful betrayal. Although often an appeased conqueror's clemency profits the multitude.")

When recognizing the ethical problem presented by empowerment through betrayal, Scylla speaks to herself in the subjunctive. But when she considers the ethical merits of bringing the fighting to an early end (merciful treatment for Megarians), Scylla shifts to the indicative mood, stating what she believes to be facts. The syntax follows Scylla's drift toward a conviction that betrayal is an acceptable course of action.

Armed with an ethical basis for her decision that she considers solid, Scylla begins to steel herself for the task of rebellion. At this point in her story, Scylla's enemy, the person whom she fears (70-71: *hunc ego solum ... timeo*) has become her father, not Minos. The soliloquy then becomes a revealing attack on what might seem to Scylla to be the entire patriarchal order. Implicitly recognizing that her duty of loyalty to her father has divine sanction (71: *mea vota*), Scylla exclaims that she wishes the gods would make her fatherless (72: *di facerent, sine patre forem!*).[59] She then observes that fathers, or perhaps she means men generally, consider themselves to be gods: *sibi quisque profecto est deus* (72-73).[60] Scylla reasons, not incorrectly, that she does not require the bravery needed to pass through fire and sword (76: *ignes et gladius*); she goads herself to be as brave as any any other woman; and finally she concludes that audacity will make

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[59] That exclamation may be one source of the mistaken reading of Scylla's story in which she not only takes the purple lock from old Nisus' head, but also murders him. Two examples, which do not and could not offer any support for the murder claim in the text of the poem, are Fantham *op. cit.* n. 4 (Kindle ed. location 911) and Tsitsiou-Chelidoni, op. cit. n. 7 199. Both appear to derive the claim from A.S. Hollis's summary of the version of Scylla's story by Aeschylus, in which according to Hollis Scylla is bribed to "cut[] off her father's fateful lock of hair, and so kills him" Hollis (1970) 32.

[60] Thus, as Scylla tells herself, *ignavis precibus Fortuna repugnat* (73: "Fortune repulses idle prayers"). Note that this seems to be the verse that Raeburn renders as "fortune favors the brave." See note 58 above.

her not only happy but powerful (80: *potentem*). She is forthright about what she needs to do and why she wants to do it:

> *Opus est mihi crine paterno.*
> *illa mihi est auro pretiosior, illa beatam*
> *purpura me votique mei factura potentem*.
>
> (*Met.* 8.79-80: "I need the lock paternal. That to me is more precious than gold, the purple that will make me happy and the mistress of my own power.")

Scylla is at least honest in her awareness of her treachery. The anaphora in the two lines above ("*illa ... illa*") can usefully be compared with the anaphoric tricolon in lines 47-48 when Scylla first imagines how she might end the conflict (l. 47-48, see p. 15 above). The anaphora in lines 79-80 differs from the earlier tricolon because they are not comprised of parallel constructions: *illa mihi est auro pretiosior* is an ablative-of-comparison enclosing a finite verb, while *illa beatam purpura me voti mei factura potentem* contains no datives or finite verbs. Just as the elegant parallelism of the earlier anaphora departs from Scylla's rhetorical repertoire, so does Scylla's patience with herself, and the soliloquy soon comes to an end. The narrative resumes with Scylla's nocturnal transgression against her father and the legend of the purple lock, followed by her flight to the camp of the invaders.

The story's dramatic irony comes to a close when, once she meets Minos, Scylla realizes that she had not considered that Minos might be a king like her father, and that he does not need her help. Indeed, Minos is a thoroughly orthodox king at this point in the *Metamorphoses*, before the poem reveals him to be a bloodthirsty tyrant with a dark domestic secret. Minos, a beneficiary of the patriarchal order that Scylla has dishonored,[61] refuses to accept either the purple lock or its

[61] As Minos tells Scylla, she is not welcome in "*Creten, qui meus est orbis*"(99: "Crete, which is my world").

bearer.[62] Before the physical metamorphosis begins, the ruler of Crete starts Scylla's dehumanization, calling her the "disgrace of the age" and a "great monster."[63] Scylla begins to regret her conduct once she realizes that her treachery has failed to accomplish its goal, and debases herself by matching Minos' vilifications with insults directed at him and a frenzied effort to trail Minos home. No longer a princess defined by her royalty, Scylla has become *fatali nata*, a "creature sired by fate" (8.85), soon to become a bird pursued eternally by her predatory, sea-eagle father. Ovid ends Scylla's story by confirming her freedom from the physical boundaries of Megara and from patriarchal control, but not from fear of the patriarch.

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[62] So the poem reads. In a rare departure from the text, Anderson has Minos "accept[ing] the unsolicited gift" but "spurn[ing] the treacherous Scylla." Anderson (1972) 333.

[63] "*Nostri infamia saecli*" (97) and "*monstrum*" (100).

II. Byblis, Myrrha, and the Greater Crime

Daughters of proper Roman families were expected to leave home in marriages arranged by their families, in part so they could produce the patriarchy's next generation, and usually on no other terms.[64] Medea and Scylla violated the rules. They schemed to sail away from their fathers' kingdoms, and with their fathers' enemies, to what they imagined to be better lives. Books IX and X of the *Metamorphoses* present a different set of worst-case scenarios for the social elite of Ovid's time. Book X contains Ovid's version of the story of an Anatolian princess named Myrrha, who rejects her suitors and makes herself unmarriageable by sleeping with her father. Book IX includes the story of Byblis, who unsuccessfully propositions her twin brother, Caunus. After the initial rejection by Caunus, Byblis refuses to give up. The disgusted Caunus flees from the city founded by their father, likely wrecking any orderly dynastic plans. Orpheus, the narrator of Myrrha's tale in Book X, warns his listeners at the start of her story: *scelus est odisse parentem; hic amor est odio maius scelus.*[65]

Orpheus also tells his listeners as he begins Myrrha's story, "If you believe the story, also believe the punishment."[66] Myrrha meets a grim end. In Ovid's version of her legend, Myrrha begins to sleep with her father, Cinyras, while her mother is away from home at a religious festival. On the first night, Cinyras had been given a strong drink, a pitch-black night darkened his bedchamber, and he chose to believe a story told by Myrrha's nurse that a girl his daughter's age desired him. After several nights with the young woman Cinyras brings in a torch, and *vidit et*

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[64] The Emperor Augustus found it necessary to establish penalties for citizens who by specified ages had failed to marry or were childless. See Fantham et al. (1994), Kindle ed. loc. 5663. See also Quintilian, *Declamations Minores* 249.19: "You know without any words of mine that the community is bound up with marriages; children; the passing on of patrimonies, the order of inheritances, domestic security" (quoted in McAuley 2016, 202 n. 4).

[65] *Met.* 10.314-15 ("It is a crime to hate one's father; to love in this way is even worse").

[66] *Met* 10.303: *si credetis, facti quoque credite poenam.*

scelus et natam (10.473-74, "he sees both crime and daughter"). Enraged, Cinyras reaches for his sword — to threaten or kill Myrrha, apparently not to use the blade on himself. Myrrha manages to escape, but by then she is pregnant. Alone, in physical and emotional distress, Myrrha finds herself on a frontier of the known world (Arabia), and can go no farther. Myrrha admits her crime and calls for her punishment. So that no one misses the point of his prologue about the Great Crime, however, Orpheus describes in graphic detail Myrrha's painful transformation into the eponymously-named tree.[67] After Myrrha's human agony ends, her arboreal replacement produces a son, Adonis, who will grow up to trouble Venus. Meanwhile the myrrh-tree will start to produce the dark resin used by mortals to embalm their dead, which in Orpheus' telling are "tears of honor."[68] That graceful benediction does not diminish Orpheus' earlier and close attention to the grotesque scene in which a woman in childbirth finds herself entrapped in a tree.[69] Orpheus seems determined to remind his listeners of the admonitory part of his prologue to Myrrha's tale.

What are readers of the *Metamorphoses* to make of the stories of incest, *conatus* or *completus,* in Books IX and X? Most appear to agree with Kathryn McKinley that the two episodes are more than just examples of "neoteric interest in abnormal sexual relations," but are instead invitations to consider "the nature of human wrongdoing and its resolution."[70] If Orpheus can moralize, so too can the readers of the *Metamorphoses*.[71] Those who are alert to the peril of trying

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67 As Orpheus completes his song about Myrrha (*Met*. 10.489-96), Myrrha's toenails snap while her feet spread into roots; her blood turns to sap; and bark girdles her swelling abdomen. To make matters worse, Myrrha cannot cry for the help of Juno Lucina, the goddess of women in delivery, whom superstition sometimes treated as essential for healthy childbirth. See Johnston (1997) 52-53.

68 *Met.* 10.501-02: *Est honor et lacrimis, stillataque cortice murra/nomen erile tenet nulloque tacelitur aevo* ("And [her] tears have honor, and the myrrh distilled from the bark preserves the mistress' name, and no generation will fail to acknowledge it.).

69 See p. 54-55 below.

70 McKinley (2001) 33.

71 One example of readings that treat the stories of Byblis and Myrrha as parables is a 1983 study by Betty Rose Nagle, who comments, "Morally Byblis is Myrrha's inferior, yet Ovid is able to present her in a far more

to draw lessons from the poem usually cannot abstain from considering whether (and if so, how) the poet intended to create sympathy for the transgressors. Ovid's Byblis and Myrrha are generally treated as complex, well-dimensioned characters; certainly, no one has called either of them a "cardboard figure" that cannot elicit either "sympathy or revulsion."[72]

Perhaps because they are able to find depth in Byblis and Myrrha as personalities, missing from the readings of Ovid's versions of Medea and Scylla in the *Metamorphoses,* many commentators have been attentive to the pathetic elements in the tales of Byblis and Myrrha in the poem. John Dryden, the "hostile but perceptive" early modern critic and translator of Ovid,[73] may have started the trend. In what served as an introduction to his translation of part of the *Metamorphoses,* Dryden may have made this comparison of the relevant parts of the *carmen perpetuum* to the *Aeneid:*

> "OVID images more often the movements and affections of the mind, either combating between two contrary passions, or extreamly discompos'd by one. …On the other side, VIRGIL speaks not so often to us in the person of another, like OVID, but in his own, he relates almost all things as from himself, and thereby gains more liberty than the other, to express his thoughts with all the graces of elocution, to write more figuratively, and to confess as well the labour as the force of his Imagination. Though he describes his DIDO well and naturally, in the violence of her Passions, yet he must yield in that to the MYRRHA, the BIBLIS, the ALTHÆA of OVID; for as great an admirer of him as I am, I must acknowledge that, if I see not more of their souls than I see of DIDO'S, at least I have a greater concernment for them: And that convinces me that OVID has touched those tender strokes more delicately than VIRGIL could."[74]

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sympathetic light by using interjections at key points, by a credulity closely paralleling his character's naiveté, and by presentation of much of this tale of self-delusion in the character's own words" (Nagle 1983, 315).

72 Newlands (1997) 179-80, referring to Medea; see p. 4 above.

73 Tissol (1997) 11.

74 The quoted text was published as an annex to a work entitled *Annus Mirabilis: The Year of Wonders, 1666. An Historical Poem,* available at https://www.bartleby.com/204/5.html. No work that has been reviewed for this essay has questioned its attribution to Dryden, which Wilkinson published in *vid Recalled.* See Wilkinson (1955) 227.

L.P. Wilkinson, one of Ovid's mid-twentieth-century rehabilitators,[75] attributed the passage above to Dryden and agreed that "I … find myself concerned for Myrrha and Byblis and Althaea, despite their occasional conceits."[76]

Other commentators have concurred, to some extent, with Wilkinson. Kathryn McKinley notes Ovid's "remarkably astute explorations of the psychological states of his female characters."[77] But McKinley also comments that "attention to women is not the same thing as respect."[78] Alison Sharrock likewise writes that although Ovid "gives space to a female voice" and "has been called sympathetic to women … many modern feminists would be unhappy about this chivalric designation."[79] Orpheus warns against the Greater Crime. McKinley, Sharrock and others caution against commentaries that may invite as much attention to the commentator as they do for the poem.

Mindful of those cautions, and because it has a different focus, this essay does not examine as a subject of primary interest the dramatic or formally tragic elements in the stories of Byblis

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75 Wilkinson wrote in 1955, "For a century or so it has been axiomatic in England that Ovid has no genuine feeling" (Wilkinson 1955, 227). E. J. Kenney, who started college in 1949, wrote that "[w]hen the present writer was at school, the proposition that Ovid was a better poet than Virgil, or even that the *Metamorphoses* was fit to stand along the Aeneid, would not have been generally entertained" (Kenney 1986, xiii).

76 Wilkinson (1955) 228.

77 McKinley (2001) 13. In one study that is a "self-conscious exercise in practical psychoanalysis," Ellen Oliensis writes that despite Orpheus' stern judgment of her crime, "the self-condemning Myrrha emerges as one of the most sympathetic figures in the poem" (Oliensis 2009, 1 and 56 note 14). As for the poem's generous treatment of Byblis, see for example Nagle, p. 28, note 71 above, who questions and thus necessarily concedes that Ovid presents Byblis in a "sympathetic light." See also Kuhlmann (2017) 194: "the narrator clearly displays his sympathy" for Byblis.

78 McKinley (2001) 12, quoting Leslie Cahoon, "Let the Muse Sing On: Poetry, Criticism, Feminism, and the Case of Ovid," *Helios* 17 (1990) 200.

79 Sharrock (2002) 98. Sharrock there refers to Wilkinson's statement that Ovid "had … a tender side to his nature which gave him an interest in the weaker sex and a certain insight into what their feelings might be." (Wilkinson 1955, 86). Sharrock includes in the same footnote a cringe-worthy quotation from a 1977 essay by another writer: "Ovid actually liked women as a sex" (*ibid.* 106 note 1, referring to Griffin 1977, 59). Nevertheless, Sharrock concludes her footnote in this way: "despite the fact that such statements can look a little condescending in the present day, it seems to me that, with a bit of cultural translation, a valid point is being made."

and Myrrha. The question addressed here, which appears to have received less attention than studies that relate the stories to drama and tragedy, is this: does the poem explain in a coherent manner why Byblis and Myrrha decide to transgress? The beginning of the answer can start with the part of Dryden's praise for Ovid that can stand separately from the element of pathos. In the passage quoted above, Dryden observes that the *Metamorphoses* "images more often" than does the *Aeneid* "the movements and affections of the mind, either combating between two contrary passions, or extreamly discompos'd by one." Dryden there captures one possible meaning for what the poem calls *discordia mentis* — a phrase that within the entire body of Ovidiana exists only in Books IX and X of the *Metamorphoses,* in the stories of Byblis and Myrrha.[80]

In Byblis' story, the moment of *discordia mentis* comes after she has sent a love-letter to Caunus through a servant. After reading only part of the letter, a shocked Caunus tells the messenger to flee while still alive, thus making it clear he finds his sister's suggestion of sexual intimacy repulsive. Now rejected, and having humiliated herself with the most important individual in her life, Byblis decides she has nothing left to lose if she tries again in person. She makes that decision in her moment of *discordia mentis,* when her sense of shame overlaps with an awareness that she could not resist continuing her pursuit of Caunus;[81] having already lost her self-esteem, Byblis loses her self-restraint. Then Byblis finally breaks from the passive role that life has assigned to her, even though her pursuing Caunus "openly" (9.638, *palam*) will destroy her family — which is either her version of the Greater Crime, or its greatest consequence for the patriarchal order. Nearly everything that Byblis has said to that point in the poem, and how she

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80 *Met.* 9.630, 10.445; see Deferrari *et al*. (1939) 495.

81 See *Met*. 9.631 (*[C]um pigeat temptasse, libet temptare* ("while it disgusts [her] to have tried, it's pleasing to try").

has said it, enables the poem to "image" her *discordia mentis*, as Dryden might put it, when *pietas* is "extreamly discompos'd" by self-disgust.

In Book X, Myrrha experiences *discordia mentis* when the Nurse tells her mistress that all the arrangements for the commission of covert incest with her father have been completed. Despite the spirited defense of incest in her earlier soliloquy, Myrrha finds herself mentally unprepared to copulate with Cinyras. The soliloquy and its elegant paradoxes set the words and concepts that define what is expected of a proper daughter "semantically afloat, suggesting the possibility of a new configuration," as Garth Tissol explains,[82] but words alone are insufficient to persuade Myrrha to commit incest. Dryden may capture Myrrha's disconsolate condition on the first night of her affair with her father well in his interpretive translation of *discordia mentis* as the term appears in Book X: "Clogged with Guilt, the Joy was insincere."[83] Aware of her mistress' indecision but still committed to the plan to give Myrrha an alternative to suicide, and appearing well-practiced in her role as an intermediary, the Nurse takes the decision away from Myrrha on the first night. But why does Myrrha return, night after night, until Cinyras discovers that he has been sleeping with his daughter? Orpheus does not try to answer the question, and instead devotes the later part of Myrrha's story to her penitence in the wilderness and her brutal physical metamorphosis. Gianpiero Rosati may be correct in suggesting that Orpheus "is concerned not so much to claim for [the narrative] the character of objective truth as to give it all the details necessary for full dramatic effectiveness." [84] By that view, Orpheus as a poet is expected neither to know nor to provide all the answers that his song presents. He aims instead for emotions, like the pathos he seeks to create at the end of the narrative.

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82 Tissol (1997) 38.

83 Quoted in Hopkins (1985) 798.

84 Rosati (2002) 291.

I. Byblis[85]

A. Life Within "the Shadow of Deceit"

More than physical attraction explains why Scylla and Medea were prepared to break the rules.[86] For Byblis, appearances seem to have been all that mattered — her brother is handsome[87] — and she tries to compete with all the other girls around Caunus, as the narrator explains at the start of her story.[88] The narrator then moves to a concern, other than her appearance, that Byblis confronts every day:

> *Iam dominum appellat, iam nomen sanguinis odit;*
> *Byblida iam mavult, quam se vocet ille sororem*.
>
> (*Met.* 9.466-67: "Now she calls him master, now she hates the name of their blood; now she prefers that he call her "Byblis" rather than "sister.")

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[85] Stories of sibling incest involving a young woman named Byblis were a common subject of Hellenic poetry. See Lightfoot (2013) 232-233. At least one version of the legend, that of Apollonius Rhodius, included metamorphosis. Myers (1994) 22. Lightfoot identifies treatments by Parthenius and Nicaenetus, in addition to Apollonius Rhodius. Lightfoot, *loc. cit.* The Byblis of Book IX appears to have been the first to attempt seduction in writing: "We may be certain that Ovid was the first to exploit [the] letter-writing motif for this narrative" Anderson (1972) 455. Dan Curley calls Byblis the author of "what might be considered Ovid's twenty-second erotic epistle." (Curley 2013, 85). The Byblis of the *Metamorphoses* writes on a wax tablet, not paper; Curley notes that Byblis' name has been "falsely etymologized …as either βύβλος (byblos), the papyrus of which books were made, or βίβλος (biblos), the book itself" (Curley 2013, 94) Ahl includes the erroneous etymology among several others: "[Byblis'] name "obviously suggests the Phoenician city *BYBLos* … not to mention Greek *BYBLos*, 'papyrus,' *BIBLIon*, 'book,' and Phoenician *GIBEL*, 'mountain'" (Ahl 1985, 211).

[86] *Met.* 7.25-26: *Quem, nisi crudelem, non tangat Iasonis aetas/et genus et virtus*? ("Whom, unless cruel, does not Jason's age not move / along with his descent and strength?; 8.28-29: *torserat adductis hastilia lenta lacertis/ laudabat virgo iunctam cum viribus artem* ("he had been hurling with bended arms tough spears / [and Scylla] praised his skill joined with strength.")

[87] In the opening soliloquy Byblis will declare: *Ille quidem est oculis quamvis formosus iniquis // et placet*, *Met*. 9.476-78 ("that man is handsome, even to unfair eyes // and is pleasing.") Having earlier told the audience that Byblis and Caunus were twins, *Met*. 9.453, the narrator had no need to draw attention to the humor in Byblis's attention to her brother's good looks. Nugent observes that the twins' "grandfather is the river Maeander, which, as Ovid reminds us in introducing the tale, continually turns its back upon itself (*totiens redeuntis eodem* [9.451]). This is, of course, just what his granddaughter Byblis has done by directing her passion back upon her own twin rather than outward, resulting in the impasse of incestuous passion … " (Nugent (2008) 174 n .14) .

[88] See *Met*. 9:462-63: *culta venit nimiumque cupit formosa videri,/et siqua est illic formosior, invidet illi* ("she came dressed-up and excessively desires to appear beautiful,/ and if there's any woman more beautiful than her, she envies her.")

Ovid thus begins to represent what it meant to be a young woman growing up inside the patriarchy (at least as he imagined it). In addressing Caunus, the only word Byblis can use as an alternative to the title she hates (*nomen sanguinis*, "brother") is *dominum*,[89] and she wishes he would replace *soror* with the familiar "Byblis." The narrator has also offered a subtle introduction to Caunus, the brother who will later try to display the rectitude expected of a well-born son aware of his own position and relationships with others (and perhaps especially the Other). Much to her dislike, Caunus holds Byblis figuratively at arm's length by addressing her in a formal manner, *soror.*[90]

The narrator of Byblis' story gives readers this assurance at its start: *mendacique diu pietatis fallitur umbra* — "for a long time she is deceived by the shadow of pious deceit."[91] Her opening soliloquy begins to erode the narrator's claim. It commences by appropriating one of the *topoi* of tragic rhetoric, self-interrogation,[92] to Byblis' supposed confusion about what she is feeling, and is followed by an address to Venus and Cupid that will mark the outer limits of Byblis' erotic imagination for the rest of her story:

> *"Me miseram! tacitae quid vult sibi noctis imago?*
> *Quam nolim rata sit! cur haec ego somnia vidi?*
> *Ille quidem est oculis quamvis formosus iniquis*

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89 The second meaning for *dominus* offered by the *OLD*, after "master of the household" is "a son of the head of the household." *OLD* 627.

90 "In odit we observe powerful resentment towards names that define relationships… ." Tissol (1997) 45. The variants of the verb root *odi* make only 14 appearances in the *Metamorphoses.* See Deferrari *et al.* (1939) 1318. Except for Byblis, the poem attributes a verb variant of *odi* to only one other mortal woman. After her rejection by Minos, Scylla laments the consequences of her treachery on his behalf, and declares that "the citizens of Megara deservedly hate me" (*Met.* 8116: *cives odere merentem*). And, except in the opening narrative sketch of Byblis, for no one else, divine or mortal, can *odi* or its verb variants describe dislike for a word — much less for a concept behind a word. Orpheus uses *odio* in his prologue to Myrrha's tale (*Met.* 10.315; see p. 26 and note 65 above); elsewhere in the poem *odi* and its variants are used only by or attributed to gods (Helios, Juno, Apollo, Pallas Athena and Venus in Books II, IX and XIV), by the ocean nymphs who normally help save foundering vessels but who detest the Greeks after the conquest of Troy (Book XIV), by the self-loathing Trojan Aesacus (Book XIV), by Aeacus who is tempted to kill himself after the Plague at Aegina (Book VII) and by Midas who learns to detest what he wished for (Book XI).

91 *Met.* 9.460.

92 See Curley (2013) 147, which traces the "topos of tragic rhetoric" from Euripides' *Medea* to the *Metamorphoses'* Medea. Of Byblis, Curley writes that "[h]er speeches serve the general functions of stage rhetoric, deliberation and (self-) persuasion, in addition to being displays of erotic pathos in themselves" (Curley 2013, 89).

et placet, et possim, si non sit frater, amare,
et me dignus erat. Verum nocet esse sororem.
Dummodo tale nihil vigilans committere temptem,
saepe licet simili redeat sub imagine somnus!
testis abest somno, nec abest imitata voluptas.
Pro! Venus et tenera volucer cum matre Cupido,
gaudia quanta tuli! quam me manifesta libido
contigit! ut iacui totis resoluta medullis!
ut meminisse iuvat! quamvis brevis illa voluptas,
noxque fuit praeceps et coeptis invida nostris.

(*Met.* 9.474-484: "Woe is me! What does the image of the quiet night itself mean? How much don't I want to avoid thinking about this! Why did I see these dreams? That man indeed is handsome even to unfair eyes and I could, if he were not [my] brother, love [him] and of me worthy he would be. But it is damaging to be [his] sister. So long as no such thing I try to commit when I am awake, if it is permitted, may a similar dream return with sleep! A witness is absent from sleep, but not absent is [my] fantasized pleasure. O! Venus and flying Cupid with [your] tender mother: how much joy do I have to report, how much my great pleasure touched me, how I lay weak throughout all my bones, how delightful it is to remember! But brief [was] both our vigorous enterprise and jealous night.")

Byblis here delivers to Venus and Cupid what appears to be a description of intercourse leading to its natural conclusion, as Ovid might think a young woman would imagine it (*manifesta libido contigit // iacui totis resolute medullis)*. This is as steamy as it gets, anywhere in her story, with Ovid's poetic craft on full display: the hyperbaton in verse 484 entangles the brevity of the night with the intensity of its pleasure, which Byblis is bold enough to call *coeptis <u>nostris</u>* ("*<u>our</u> 'enterprise'*), as if Caunus had really been there (if *nostris* can here be treated to mean "our," rather than as poetic usage for "my'). Byblis has obviously enjoyed the dream,[93] even if she has followed

[93] Meter follows meaning in the opening portion of the soliloquy. Verse 480 is entirely composed of dactyls (five dactyls), and thus contains the maximum possible number of syllables (20), forcing the line to be read as slowly as possible. The presence of a caesura in every foot of the line, except the fifth foot, slows down the meter even further. Byblis there is seeking to prolong her dreams about Caunus to be as long as possible. In verse 485, before the strong caesura between "iuvat" and "quamvis," Byblis exclaims how delightful it is to dream about her brother; after the strong caesura, Byblis reminds herself that her dream is too brief, as elation gives way to dissatisfaction.

the narrator's lead by claiming at the start that she does not fully understand it and does not want to.[94]

Byblis may claim confusion, but the soliloquy's vivid description of her dream about Caunus suggests otherwise, as does the narrative that precedes it. Recall how Byblis conducts herself around her brother: *nec peccare putat, quod saepius oscula iungat / qoud sua fraterno cirumdet bracchia collo* (9.458-59: "she does not think it wrong that she kisses him too often, and that she throws her arms around her own brother's neck"). Someone old enough to dream about sexual relations with her brother, and who would "kiss [Caunus] often" or "throw her arms around her brother's neck"[95] cannot really be asking herself, "why do I see these dreams?"[96] The rote invocation of "*Me miseram*!" at the start of the soliloquy, as if Byblis is about to embark on a tragic drama, and the implausibility of Byblis' wonderment about her dream supports a reading of this early part of Byblis' story as the beginning of a parody, a parable to be taken tongue-in-cheek.[97]

Soliloquies sometimes aim to provide a window into the full dimensions of the speaker. The Byblis who reveals herself in her opening soliloquy offers ample reason to believe that her role, at that point, is to create doubt about her own authenticity, that her story will be a jest, and that (as some have written of the Medea of Book VII[98]) she lacks depth. At least some of Ovid's readers would have known versions of the Byblis story in which the girl kills herself, which is the

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94 Thus, *tacitae quid vult sibi noctis imago?* ("What does the image of the quiet night itself mean?") and *cur haec ego somnia vidi* ("why did I see these dreams?"); *quae nolim rata sit!* ("How much don't I want to avoid thinking about this!")

95 9.458-59 (Melville trans).

96 *Met*. 9.477. Such a reading treats as insincere the narrator's claim that "the shadow of pious deceit" (p. 33, note 91 above) existed, so as to permit Byblis to believe that her affection for Caunus was filial. It aligns with the perspective of Alessandro Barchiesi on other parts of the Byblis episode. See p. 40 below.

97 See Barchiesi (2001) 58-59, quoted on p. 40 below.

98 See pp. 4, 9 above.

version that Ovid himself earlier presented in the *Ars Amatoria.*[99] Having been readied for pathos by the narrator at the start of Byblis' story,[100] the reader may be encountering what Sara Mack would call an example of the poem's "neat packaging … cut[ting] into the pathos of the situation and nudg[ing] it toward comedy."[101] As Garth Tissol has explained, Ovid uses "[d]isruptiveness and unpredictability … to induce a loss of narrative bearings on the part of the audience," in order "to promote and encourage engagement."[102] Sometimes condemned for her "self-delusion," Byblis may herself be an instrument of deception. Byblis may or may not succeed in seducing her brother in this version of her story, but Ovid certainly makes her try to get the attention of the audience.

B. The Decision to Write: audacia mixta pudori[103]

Shifting from Venus and Cupid to Caunus, the soliloquy begins to develop the two features of Byblis' character that will lead her to *discordia mentis*: desperation created by the social boundaries that make fulfillment of her dream impossible, and dependence on fantasy. Each limiting element in Byblis' personality is on display in the first lines that she "speaks" to Caunus in her opening soliloquy:

> *O ego, si liceat mutato nomine iungi,*
> *quam bene, Caune, tuo poteram nurus esse parenti!*
> *quam bene, Caune, meo poteras gener esse parenti!*
> *Omnia, di facerent, essent communia nobis,*
> *praeter avos: tu, me vellem generosior esses!*

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99 In Book I of the *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid asks his readers to "[r]emember Byblis, who burned with incestuous love, for her brother, and bravely punished herself with the noose?" A. S. Kline (poetry translation), *Ovid: The Poems* (2001) 135.

100 See *Met.* 9.454: *Byblis in exemplo est, ut ament concessa puellae* ("Byblis is an example that girls ought to love in the manner allowed").

101 Mack (1988) 153. As Tissol observes, the warning in verse 454 (see note 101 above) may be disingenuous, "at least as likely as not to inflame the reader's salacious interest," thus making its ethical seriousness part of the jest. Tissol (1997) 52 n. 77, citing 9.454, shown above in the text.

102 Tissol (1997) 91-92.

103 *Met.* 9.527: "Boldness mixed with shame;" see p. 40 below.

> *Nescio facies igitur, pulcherrime, matrem:*
> *at mihi, quae male sum quos tu sortita parentes,*
> *nil nisi frater eris. Quod obest, id habebimus unum*.
>
> (*Met.* 9.487-494: "O I, if it would be permitted by changing [my] name to be joined [to you], could be how good, Caunus, a daughter-in-law to your father! How good, Caunus, a son-in-law you could be to my father! All things, if only the gods would make it [so], would be common to us, except [our] grandparents: I'd wish you to be better-born than me! I don't know whom you will make, therefore, most beautiful one, a mother: but to me, who unfortunately has shared the same parents whom you [have], nothing except a brother you'll be. We'll have this one thing that stands in the way.")

Garth Tissol's analysis of paradox in the soliloquies of the heroines in the middle books of the *Metamorphoses* includes "Byblis' focus on *nomina consanguinitatis*."[104] Crediting Tissol in her examination of Ovid's "akratic heroines" Nugent observes that "[f]or Byblis … a great deal revolves around the power of names."[105] The important point for this reading of her story is that, at this point in the narrative, Byblis apparently needs to represent sexual intimacy by referring to the roles allowed in the established matrix of the patriarchy — mother, father, and grandparents, along with sons-in-law and daughter-in-law in the wider matrimonial orbit.[106]

As Tissol observes, "Byblis desires semantic slippage" that would move her out of the status of sister to Caunus,[107] but for the moment Byblis cannot configure herself as her brother's lover, in some role other than those created by convention. At this point, any slippage must flow within the channels defined by patriarchal hierarchy. Within those channels, Byblis exhibits verbal dexterity. Consider the first two verses in the passage excerpted above:

> *O ego, si liceat mutato nomine iungi,*
> *quam bene, Caune, tuo poteram nurus esse parenti!*

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104 Tissol (1997) 43.

105 Nugent (2008) 165.

106 Lacking Byblis' inhibitions, Myrrha recognizes one additional role for women, mistress. See pp. 47-48 below.

107 Tissol (1997) 45.

When Byblis fantasizes about jumbling the *nomina consanguinitatis* and privileges attached to each name, she scrambles natural word order in introducing the fantasy: *tuo* is dislocated from *parenti* in verse 487, as is *meo* from *parenti* in the following verse, and nine words separate *ego* from its verb *poteram.* Finally, however, Byblis seems to surrender to the *nomina*, appearing in verses 492-94 to accept as fact that Caunus will someday marry: *nescio quam facies igitur pulcherrime matrem/ at mihi quae male sum quos tu sortita parentes/ nil nisi frater eris*. Byblis uses one future indicative verb, *facies,* followed by another, in *nil nisi frater eris (*"you will be nothing except a brother to me"), as if to signal that she is prepared to give up her struggle against *nomina*.

After musing about incest among the gods,[108] and reverting to the form allowed to distraught heroines,[109] Byblis considers but rejects the one solution to her misfortune allowed by legend — suicide.[110] In doing so, Byblis signals that she is not the *Ars Amatoria's* Byblis who

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[108] Byblis' ruminations on divine incest suggest a retreat from the active and graphic imagination about sexual relations at the start of the soliloquy:

> *Di nempe suas habuere sorores:*
> *Sic Saturnus Opem iunctam sibi sanguine duxit,*
> *Oceanus, Tethyn; Iunonem rector Olympi.*

Met. 9.497-499: "Gods of course held their own sisters: Saturn thusly led Ops joined to himself by blood, Oceanus, Tethys; the ruler of Olympus, Juno." Byblis' word-choice, in which Gods "held" (*habuere*) their sisters, Saturn "led into himself" a blood relation and so did Zeus with Juno (*iunctam sibi sanguine duxit*) leaves much to the imagination. (The ellipsis in verse 499 makes Byblis seem even more discreet.) Readers will encounter in a later soliloquy, that of Myrrha in Book X, a more graphic description of indiscriminate copulation among farm animals.

[109] *Met*. 9.508-09; see p. 29 above. Even though they might support the view that her story is more of a parody than a parable, Byblis' lamentations have subtlety. See, for example, *Met*. 9.509: *Quo feror? Obscenae procul hinc discedite flammae!* (Whence am I being carried? Depart from here, obscene flames!) *Discedite* is a direct command, but the hyperbatonic separation between "*obscenae*" and "*flammae*" weakens it, as if to suggest that despite her pious best intentions she is mandating herself in vain. As for the question that Byblis directs to herself — "whence am I being carried?" — it is not as easy to second-guess herself, as it was when at the start of the soliloquy her questions implied that she did not understand her erotic intentions involving Caunus. Byblis has just convinced herself (and imagined herself to have told Caunus) that there is no marked path out of the *nomen* and roles assigned to them at birth, which is the "one thing" that is obstructing them: *Quod obest, id habebimus unum* (*Met*. 9.494, "We'll have this one thing that is obstructing.).

[110] *Met*. 9.502-04. Anderson offers this commentary on Byblis' moment of suicidal ideation: "Byblis imagines herself dead, stretched out in her bed … and Caunus coming to kiss her. Immediately she ceases wanting to be

"bravely punished herself with the noose."[111] She next reveals that her connection with reality is weakening. After a nod to *pietas,*[112] the soliloquy continues, with Byblis imagining that perhaps Caunus, too, would be interested in incest:

> *Si tamen ipse mei captus prior esset amore,*
> *forsitan illius possem indulgere furori.*
> *Ergo, ego, quae fueram non reiectura petentem,*
> *ipsa petam. Poterisne loqui? poterisne fateri?*
> *Coget amor: potero! vel, si pudor ora tenebit,*
> *littera celatos arcana fatebitur ignis!*
>
> (*Met.* 9:511-514: "If, nevertheless, that man himself had been captured by my love earlier, perchance I might be able to indulge in his passion. Therefore, let me, who had ought to not reject [his] wooing, myself woo [him]. Will you be able to speak? Will you be able to confess? Love will compel [me]: I will be able! Or, if shame holds my lips, secret letters will confess hidden passion!")

Fantasy and *pudor*[113] are now thoroughly mixed in Byblis' thinking. The soliloquy ends, and the narrator takes over: *hoc placet; haec dubitam vicit sententia* ("this way of thinking was pleasing, and it overcame her doubts").[114]

Byblis struggles over the text of the letter. "On her face, boldness was mixed with shame,"[115] as she hesitates to tell Caunus that she seeks "to be more joined" (9.549*, iunctior esse*)

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dead!" Anderson (1992) 454. Byblis' obsessive fantasy about Caunus thus saves her from the noose of the *Ars Amatoria*.

[111] See note 99 above.

[112] *Met*. 9.510: *nec, nisi qua fas est germanae, frater ametur!* ("May a brother not be loved by a sister except as is proper!").

[113] This is *pudor* in the first meaning provided in the *OLD*, "[a] feeling of shame," rather than in the first alternative, "[c]onsciousness of what is seemly, sense of propriety or restraint, decency, scrupulousness, etc." (*OLD* 1666). Curley calls *pudor,* as an ethical principle opposed to *amor* (desire) in Byblis' story "modesty" (Curley 2013, 92).

[114] *Met*. 9. 517. Here the poem uses indicative verbs (*placet* and *vicit)* to demonstrate determination. The unbalanced meter and asyndeton foreshadow Byblis' difficulties in composition.

[115] *Met*. 9.527: *in vultu, est audacia mixta pudori*. Raeburn, Melville and one readily available nineteenth-century translation, by Riley, all render *pudori* as "shame," as does this translation. See Raeburn (2004) 365; Melville (1986) 215, Riley (1851) Kindle ed. 3412. But *pudor* as Ovid uses it in Byblis' story seems really to defy any

to him than she already is. That is the closest she can come to describing to him what she desires. When completed, the letter, suggestive of the writer's immaturity, combines self-pity, a challenge to the values of the patriarchy that must assume Caunus does not consider himself to be one of its members, and what a reader of the letter might interpret as a suicide threat that readers of the poem know to be likely insincere.[116] One commentator seems to give Byblis more credit for her work, and treats her letter-writing as an important indication of the unseriousness of the overall story:

> "The entire story of Byblis is developed in a paradoxical mode, as a salacious contrast between the amorality of the ends and a cool-headed technical analysis of the means. The problem of incest … dissolves into questions of seductive techniques, highly concrete problems of amorous strategy. The heroine behaves as if she were an ideal reader of the *Ars amatoria*. I would agree, in general, with Kenney ([1986] 429ff.): Ovid broadcasts his morals very 'tongue in cheek.'"[117]

With the greatest respect for the commentator, by another reading the poem presents Byblis' thinking as more passionate than cool-headed, and her seductive technique as less strategic than reactive.[118] Putting aside differences in readings of the text, even if one compares Byblis to an

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translation into English that would require a distinction between shame as an emotion and the cultural imperative to avoid shame, *i.e.*, modesty. See note 115 above.

[116] Thus, when Byblis claims *quam ferre puellam posse putes ego dura tuli* (9.544-45: "I have born more harsh things than what you suppose a girl can bear"), she shows that her experience in life is limited, certainly in comparison to the heroines of stories that readers of the poem would have already encountered. See, for example, p. 74 below. Nevertheless, the letter has elegant touches. After mocking the judgment of "the old men" (9.551, *senes*), and suggesting that she and Caunus do not really know what is allowed yet (9.545: *quid liceat nescimus adhuc*), Byblis writes: *cuncta licere credimus et sequimur magnorum exempla deorum* (*ibid*. 545-55, "we believe every example of the great gods is allowed and we follow them") she uses indicative verbs (*credimus* and *sequimur*) to try to inspire certainty in Caunus when he reads the letter. The zeugma in verse 555 (*credimus* and *sequimur* share the direct object *cuncta exempla*) is compact and therefore artful. Some readers who focus on the comedic aspects of her story might treat the stylistic ornament in Byblis' letter as inconsistent with its weak content, and find further evidence not to take seriously the Byblis episode. See the text following above, in which Alessandro Barchiesi argues for the unseriousness of Byblis' story.

[117] Barchiesi (2001) 58. The quotation from Keeney (1986) appears on p. 430 in the paperback publication of the 1986 essay by Kenney.

[118] For example, Byblis does not see the problems in trying to begin her seduction of Caunus by letter-writing until that approach fails. She reacts to that failure, seen by her in hindsight as less effective than a personal approach, by deciding to try to proposition him in person.

expert in love well-versed in the *Ars Amatoria*, and treats her story as a serious narrative skeptically, "most of the best stories [in the *Metamorphoses*] are a combination of seriousness and playfulness."[119] For his part, E. J. Kenney presented (and attributed to Stephen Hinds) this question: "is there a case for taking the fun of the *Metamorphoses* seriously?"[120] Deciding how to answer his question is part of the interest in Byblis' tale, which descends into crisis when her servant returns from delivering her letter to Caunus, and reports her brother's *ferocia dicta* (9.580: "ferocious words") to her.

C. Discordia Mentis

In recounting the unfortunate servant's return to Byblis, the narrator addresses her in the vocative: *palles audita, Bybli, repulsa, et pavet obsessum glaciali frigore corpus* (9.581-82: "you became pale after you heard, Byblis, that you were rejected, and your body trembles, besieged by an icy chill.") In doing so, the narrator seizes not only the attention of Byblis but of his audience as well; not until Byblis experiences physical transformation at the end of her story will the narrator again address her in the vocative. Byblis then begins her second and final soliloquy that begins with self-reproach — not for having tried to seduce her brother, but for having tried to do so in writing, rather than in person. Byblis decides to confront Caunus,[121] so that she can reiterate what she thinks to be her best appeal to him, only at greater length in person, and by literally throwing herself at him:

> *plura loqui poteram, quam quae cepere tabellae!*
> *Invito potui circumdare bracchia collo*

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[119] Anderson (1972) 12.

[120] Kenney (2013) 151.

[121] Confrontation is clearly what Byblis intends: *Vincetur! Repetendus erit, nec taedia coepti ulla mei capiam, dum spiritus iste manebit* (9.616-17: "he'll be conquered! He will have to be attacked again; and without any weariness from the effort I will follow through while my spirit remains.")

et, si reicerer, potui moritura videri
amplectique pedes adfusaque poscere vitam!

(*Met.* 9.604-06: "I could have said more than what the tablets held!
I could have surrounded [my] arms around [his] unwilling neck and,
if I were rejected, I'd be able to seem about to die and to embrace [his]
feet and upon being prostrated [on the ground] to beg for my life!")

Now *pudor,* here meaning modesty or sense of shame, is in full retreat. So, too, is any intention to be forthright and truthful with Caunus, unless the audience is expected to believe that Byblis is now prepared to kill herself.[122] Byblis next demonstrates that she understands one aspect of her situation well enough: even if she does nothing further, she will no longer be considered innocent or blameless (*innoxia*). From that premise, she reasons as follows:

Ut nihil adiciam, non possum innoxia dici.
Quod superest, multum est in vota, in crimina parvum.

(*Met.* 9.628-29: "Even if I do nothing, I cannot be said to be blameless.
As for what remains, there is much to desire for a little more blame.")

Now the narrator steps in again, and addresses the audience and not Byblis. He explains what is happening in this way:

Dixit, et (incertae tanta est discordia mentis)
cum pigeat temptasse, libet temptare: modumque
exit et infelix committit saepe repelli.

(*Met*. 9.629-32: "Said she, and (so great is her mind's discord) she finds
it is pleasing to try even if it disgusts her to have tried, and the miserable girl
goes ahead and commits herself to be rejected again and again.")

Translated precisely into English, "*modumque exit*" means "she goes over the limit," or more literally, "she transgresses." Arguably Byblis has transgressed more than once: first by imagining sexual relations with her brother, then by propositioning him by letter, and then by confronting

[122] Byblis' histrionics at this point seems far from a "cool-headed analysis" of the next steps. See p. 40 above (Barchiesi 2001, 58).

him in person (and suffering repeated rejections). But it is only now, when the narrator regains control of her story, that the narrator declares that Byblis "went over the limit." The narrator seems to treat this as her ultimate transgression: to re-enact her rejection *saepe*, which, in addition to driving her further into shame, will drive Caunus out of Miletus and to found his own walled city, perhaps intended to keep out not only *hostes* but *soror*.

Byblis' story nears its end, with the girl also leaving Miletus to follow Caunus, and engaged in conduct of which others (according to the narrator) would say the following:

> *Tum vero maestam tota Miletida mente*
> *defecisse ferunt, tum vero a pectore vestem*
> *diripuit planxitque suos furibunda lacertos,*
> *Iamque palam est demens inconcessamque fatetur*
> *spem Veneris, siquidem patriam invisosque penates*
> *deserit et profugi sequitur vestigia fratris.*
>
> (*Met.* 9.635-40: "Then indeed they say that the sad daughter of Miletus had completely lost [her] mind, that she tore her robe from her chest and in a frenzy beat herself, and now is openly out of her mind and confesses her forbidden hope for Love, having left her homeland and the household gods she hated, to follow the steps of her fleeing brother.")

Byblis has now completely lost her mind (*tota mente defecisse*), and out of her mind (*demens)* she wanders through Caria for all to see — at least, the women in the Carian town of Bubassos reported by the narrator to have seen her.[123] When the sympathetic naiads of Caria find Byblis in the wilderness, they try to comfort her, but her mind is unresponsive:

> *Saepe etiam nymphae teneris Lelegeides ulnis*
> *tollere conantur; saepe, ut medeatur amori,*
> *praecipiunt surdaeque adhibent solacia menti.*
>
> (*Met.* 9.652-654: Often the Lelegeian nymphs try to lift her up
> with their tender arms; often they advise her on how to remedy her
> lovesickness; and extend solace to her unresponsive mind.)

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[123] *Met.* 9.644: *Bubasides videre nurus*; see Anderson (1972) 462.

Discordia mentis has been replaced by a *surda mens*. Having lost her mind beyond the possibility of recovery, Byblis' dehumanization is completed by her transformation into the fountain.

As noted at the start of this essay, the commentators who take Byblis' story entirely seriously include one who observes a young woman engaged in elaborate self-deception; on that basis, she writes that Byblis is "[m]orally … inferior" to the fully self-aware Myrrha,[124] to whom this essay is about to turn. Setting aside such comparisons, it is fair to say that Byblis enters the poem in a world in which self-deception was the only way to mediate between her unsisterly affection for her brother and her consciousness of the role assigned to her when she and Caunus were born together. The "shadow of pious deceit" keeps Byblis sane, until she begins to understand what she wants (or some might say, admits to it). Each transgression that follows drives her towards madness, and so *Byblis in exemplo est, ut ament concessa puellae.* If Byblis' tale has parodic elements, by its end only the sharpest critics searching for it could claim to find it.

II. Myrrha

A reader who would fault Byblis for self-deception would certainly find differences in Myrrha, who from the start of her story understands that she is attracted to her father as a daughter should not be. Myrrha's soliloquy in Book X also shows her to be unconfused about her options; once she decides that she cannot put aside her passion, she undertakes suicide, by hanging herself, as convention would require.[125] Unlike Byblis, who fantasizes that she has a prospect of seducing Caunus, Myrrha chose suicide because she never expected to be able to sleep with her father. The intervention of Myrrha's nurse, who stops the attempt at suicide, saves Myrrha's life, and changes

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[124] See note 71 above.

[125] *Met.* 10.465. See p. 76 and note 230 below.

it. Myrrha momentarily regains her life, only to yield it quickly to *discordia mentis*, Myrrha's "Joy … Clogged with Guilt" in Dryden's translation, on the first night with her father in the *obsceno lecto.*[126] From that point forward, Orpheus' audience would await the punishment of Myrrha that he had told the audience at the beginning of her story to expect.[127]

After first addressing his audience with the warning about the *maius scelus,* without any pause Orpheus introduces his listeners to Myrrha, by addressing her directly:

> *Undique lecti*
> *te cupiunt proceres, totoque oriente iuventus*
> *ad thalami certamen adest.*
>
> (*Met.* 10:315-17: "And from all sides, carefully chosen princes from throughout the Orient desire you, and vie for your marriage-bed.")

Then he turns back to the audience, to reveal to them Myrrha's shameful secret: despite the attention she is acquiring from her suitors, Myrrha is preoccupied by an "unclean love,"[128] which the audience will by now have gathered has her father as its object. This is skillful staging: the audience meets Myrrha as the world would, as a marriageable princess at the center of attention, and then has a glimpse inward that tells the audience what is really on her mind. Orpheus structures his address to Myrrha so as to suggest that she is trapped: he puts Myrrha (*te*, in line 316) in the middle of the visiting suitors (*lecti*, line 315) who have come from all over the East *(totoque oriente*

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126 See 31 above.

127 The tale of Myrrha and her transgression were well-known before the *Metamorphoses*. The earlier versions of Myrrha's story, which are mainly preserved only in fragments, are identified in Lightfoot (2013) 232-233, Knox (1986) 55-59, Hopkins (1985) 788, Coleman (1971) 477-78, and Galinsky (1975) 88-89, the more detailed summaries being in Lightfoot and Knox. Lightfoot writes that "we cannot tell how much (if at all) earlier treatments anticipated Ovid's lurid sensationalism and tabloid moralizing." The variations in the earlier versions might have mattered to some of Ovid's earliest readers interested in finding out which versions Ovid would choose to appropriate and in what respects Ovid would choose to innovate. The version of Myrrha's story in the *Ars Amatoria* is barely one sentence long and unrevealing: "Myrrha loved her father, but not as a daughter should, and then was hidden by the covering bark: oozing those tears, that pour from the tree as fragrance, and whose droplets take their name from the girl." A. S. Kline (poetry translation), *Ovid: The Poems* (2001) 135.

128 *Met*. 10.319: *Illa quidem sentit foedoque repugnat amori* ("the girl is quite aware of her unclean love and is fighting against it").

iuventus, line 316).[129] To make matters worse, Myrrha is not in control of the outside world any more than she is in control of her inner world: the suitors are *lecti* — "[carefully] chosen" for her, presumably by her father, whom she would pick for herself.[130] Orpheus has introduced a theme of entrapment that will remain under the surface of the narrative until the end, when Myrrha becomes encased and buried in bark.

With the audience members now aware that they are in the presence of someone in trouble and headed towards some type of punishment — or, in other words, with the audience as engaged as Orpheus can make them — Myrrha begins her soliloquy. After complying with the conventions for the discourse of a female experiencing emotional turmoil,[131] Myrrha appeals to the gods and *pietas* to enable her "to resist this crime — if indeed it is a crime."[132] Orpheus' listeners, now Myrrha's listeners, are discovering a suggestion of ambivalence in her attitude regarding the taboo. The listeners of Cinyras' daughter have already seen Byblis decide that incest would be acceptable, if those involved were she and her brother. But Myrrha then distinguishes herself from Byblis. Myrrha's examples of allowable incest are not general references to practices among the gods, but earthy descriptions of how animals copulate, and allusions to the incest being condoned among some "peoples" (*gentes*) that, in her telling, demonstrates more not less familial piety.[133] Byblis

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[129] Moreover, beginning line 316 with *te* may be taboo in itself, by dislocating natural word order.

[130] See *OLD* p. 1114: "*lectus* …carefully chosen, select, picked."

[131] Thus, Myrrha begins with confused self-interrogation (10.320-21: *quo mente feror? quid molior?* ("where is my mind headed? what am I going to do?")), also found in the soliloquies of Medea and Byblis.

[132] *Met*. 10.321-33: "*di …voc prohibete nefas scelerique resistite nostro, si tamen hoc scelus est.*"

[133] The *gentes* of Myrrha's soliloquy would have been the royalty of Egypt and Persia, whose intermarriage was supposed to emulate the incest among their gods. See Adamson (1982) 88. Hellenic (*i.e*., pre-Ptolemaic) culture condemned incest. Antisthenes of Athens "slander[ed] Alcibiades" by saying Alcibiades "coupled with [his?] mother and daughter and sister, like Persians." Prince (2015) Kindle ed. loc. 9591. "Ovid would certainly have known about the reality of the incestuous unions of Persia and Egypt." Hopkins (1985) 792. Likewise, "Ovid could have read about animal incest (if he had not observed it at first hand) in Aristotle (*Historia Animalium,* VI.22, 17ff)." *Ibid.*

knows the legends of her religion; Myrrha displays learning, albeit on a salacious topic. After her soliloquy makes another nod to convention,[134] Myrrha admits to herself that she could not leave her father's kingdom, so strong is her desire for him, and then concludes in this fashion:

> *Ultra autem spectare aliquid potes, impia virgo?*
> *Et quot confundas et iura et nomina, sentis?*
> *Tune eris et matris paelex et adultera patris?*
> *Tune soror nati genetrixque vocabere fratris?*
> *Nec metues atro crinitas angue sorores,*
> *quas facibus saevis oculos atque ora petentes*
> *noxia corda vident? At tu, dum corpore non es*
> *passa nefas, animo ne concipe, neve potentis*
> *concubitu vetito naturae pollue foedus.*
> *Velle puta: res ipsa vetat. Pius ille memorque est*
> *moris — et o vellem similis furor esset in illo!"*
>
> (*Met.* 10.345-55: "Are you able to see anything else, you wicked maiden? How many names and rights do you think you are confusing? Will you be your mother's rival and adulteress with [your] father? Will you be called sister of your son, and mother of [your] brother? And aren't you afraid of the black-snake-haired sisters, whom guilty souls see using fearsome torches to attack their eyes and mouths? Instead, while you haven't let [your] body spread the sin, do not even think of it, and do not defile the powerful laws of nature by having sex with the old man. What you think you want, the very facts themselves forbid. That man is pious and mindful of the law – but O how I wish there the same passion in him!)

In the soliloquy's conclusion Myrrha tries to direct the intensity of her passion for Cinyras against herself, in a desperate effort to rid herself of what she deems *spes interdictae* (10.336: "forbidden hopes."[135]) Once more the poem exposes a gap between Myrrha and Byblis. Byblis constructs

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[134] *Met*. 10.334: *Me miseram, quod non nasci mihi contigit illic* ("woe is me, because it was not my luck to be born there," *i.e.*, in lands where incest was considered pious). Even here, when the soliloquy follows the form and tone established for disturbed female discourse, Ovid interweaves the theme of Myrrha's entrapment introduced in the opening narrative (see p. 46 above): in long syllables over *quod non nasci,* punctuated by strong caesuras that convey the intensity of her feelings, Myrrha laments that she is trapped by birth in a land in which incest was scandalous. Of course, several verses later, Myrrha confesses that her passion for her father would itself make it impossible for her to leave. *Met*. 10.342: *retinet malus ardor amantem* ("the evil ardor retains the lover"). She has traced her physical entrapment to her emotional capture.

[135] In the same section of her soliloquy Myrrha declares *si filia magni non essem Cinyrae, Cinyrae concumbere* possem (10. 338-39: "if I was not the daughter of the great Cinyras, with Cinyras I could lie"), making it clear she is no bashful maiden; she would sleep with him without the benefit of wedlock, prefiguring Cinyras' willingness to sleep with a girl despite his marriage.

paradoxes from the *nomina consanguinitatis* to facilitate her fantasy in which she ceases to be Caunus' sister and can acquire the titles of matrimony. Myrrha deploys the *nomina consanguinitatis* to ridicule how she could be anything other than the daughter of her household.[136] But, by its end, the soliloquy demonstrates that Myrrha cannot overcome her passion: her invocation of the Furies and their flaming torches reverts back to her own furor, directed at her father, whom she assumes is too fine a man to commit incest. Putting aside for a moment the irony regarding her father's scruples, Myrrha has convinced herself that she cannot obtain from her father what she thinks she must have. The sense of helplessness emerging from the end of her soliloquy gives the narrative coherence when Myrrha will later attempt suicide.

Before Myrrha reaches her crisis, however, the poem rebalances itself. Dialogue tinged heavily by irony and having more than a touch of humor relieves the intensity of the soliloquy. The dialogue's dark comedy deepens the poem's depiction of Myrrha's dilemma — what to do about her *spes interdictae* — while diverting the audience with dramatic irony. Cinyras wants to know if Myrrha has selected from the suitors he has chosen for her. Undone by the question, Myrrha cannot avoid tears.[137] Readers familiar with the main features of the legend then follow Orpheus *narrans* through an interview full of both ornament and pathos: Cinyras embraces Myrrha and tries to kiss away the tears, and a cloyingly ironic confusion ensues.[138] Cinyras' outward

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[136] Thus, Myrrha asks herself in verse 346 *quot confundas et iura et nomina, sentis* ("how many names and rights do you think you are confusing"), and calls herself adultera patris ("adulteress with your father") in a tightly-worded self-rebuke built into chiasmus: *tune eris et matris paelex et adultera patris?* ("will you become a rival to your mother and adulteress to your father?") Myrrha uses paradox to remind herself of the dictates of *pietas*; as Tissol notes, Byblis had used paradox to slip herself into "self-deceptive fantasy" (Tissol 1997, 51). See, for example, *Met*. 9.488, in which Byblis jumbled the *nomina consanguinitatis* to muse positively about incest: *quam bene Caune tuo poteram nurus esse parenti!* ("how good of a daughter-in-law I would be to your father, Caunus!")

[137] *Met*. 10: 359-6: *Illa silet primo, patriisque in vultibus haerens aestuat et tepido suffundit lumina rore* ("the girl is silent at first, and fixating on her father's features she is suffused by slow shaking and tears").

[138] See *Met.* 10.364-67: *At ille // non intellectam vocem conlaudat et 'esto tam pia semper' ait. Pietatis nonime dicto demisit vultus sceleris sibi conscia virgo* ("but Cinyras, not understanding what she meant, commended the words

display of joy that he has a daughter whose piety causes her to want a husband *similem sibi*[139] is ironic enough in itself, for Myrrha. The irony is even richer for those in the audience who know, unlike Myrrha, the general contours of the legend. Cinyras' dialogue with his daughter conflicts with his upcoming role as an eager cheat, quite willing to sleep with a young woman while his wife is away. Myrrha, who does not know what is coming, looks away, overwhelmed by her own shame, and at a loss for words.[140] The interview of father and daughter ends by foreshadowing Myrrha's end, when the aborealisation[141] that ends her shame will silence her permanently. For the present, Orpheus has shown another side of Myrrha. The young woman who was just hurling eloquent insults at herself becomes tearful and mute in the presence of Cinyras, who may now have become an object of cynicism for some in Orpheus' audience.

Nec modus aut requies nisi mors reperitur amori.[142] Nearing the final stage of helplessness, Myrrha is ready to take what Curley calls (with some irony of his own) the only "viable" option that her situation permits, to commit suicide.[143] Orpheus moves forward quickly to the nocturnal hanging-scene. Having now attempted to present his heroine in all her dimensions — first as the prototypical distraught female eloquent in the soliloquy, then as the weeping maiden silenced by

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and [said], "may you always be so pious." As a result of his speaking the word 'piety,' the maiden casts down her face, knowing of her serious offense").

139 See *Met*. 10: 363-64: *consultaque, qualem optet habere virum, 'similem tibi' dixit* ("and being asked what kind of man she desires to have, 'a similar one to you,' said she.") Patricia Salzman-Mitchell points out Myrrha's "playful intratextual gesture toward the story of her great-grandfather Pygmalion," who prayed for the invigoration of the marble he created in these words: *sit coniunx ... similis mea ... eburnae* (10.364: "may my wife be similar to the ivory maiden") (Salzman-Mitchell (2005) 115).

140 See *Met*. 10.364-67, note 138 above.

141 Mairéad McAuley's term. See p. 54 note 163 below

142 *Met*. 10.377 ("and no end or rest except death is found for her love").

143 "The hallmark of the topos [of tragic rhetoric] is a series of questions, raised in a state of utter helplessness or *aporia* … which enumerate the speaker's alternatives. In most instances, none but suicide are viable" (Curley 2013, 147).

shame[144] — Orpheus develops the pathos in what lies ahead for Myrrha, comparing her wavering mind to a tree awaiting the final blow that will bring it down, though no bystander knows exactly where.[145] Commentators point to those verses in the nocturnal scene as foreshadowing Myrrha's transformation to a tree.[146] The felling of the tree foreshadows the violence, spiritual and physical, later experienced by Myrrha. More to the point here, Myrrha is about to lose control, to experience *discordia mentis*, and the metaphor of the wounded tree fits her well. Just as the tree has no control over the axes hitting it, Myrrha cannot control her passion for her father; and just as the tree resists the axes for as long as it can, Myrrha resists acting on her passions.

Mors placet.[147] Death may be pleasing, but the poem denies it to Myrrha for the time being. The intervention of the nurse extends her mistress' life, the narrative, and Myrrha's suffering. To the extent the poem could be taken to attribute independent judgment to her, the nurse inhabits the real world, in which some daughters follow their desires and some great men commit adultery. McKinley puts the matter this way: "often … the nurse plays the role of go-between; the difference here is that this nurse becomes the bawd, initially of Myrrha's desire, and then of Cinyras."[148] Any alignment between the nurse and Myrrha appears to diminish when the nurse triumphantly announces that Cinyras, plied with drink and evidently not the virtuous father Myrrha had imagined, is ready for the assignation.[149] Although the nurse clearly considers herself personally

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144 *Met*. 10.457-61

145 *Met.* 10.378-79: *utque secure // saucia trabs ingens ubi plaga novissima restat // quo cadit dubio est omnique a parte timetur* ("and just as a huge timber wounded by an axe is in doubt to where it'll fall and is feared on all sides when the last blow remains").

146 See for example Anderson (1972) 508.

147 *Met.* 10.378 ("death is pleasing").

148 McKinley (2001) 40.

149 See *Met*. 10.442: *Utque domum rediit, "gaude mea," dixit "alumna: // Vicimus*! ("and when she returned home, 'rejoice, my nourished one, we have won!' said she").

invested in the effort,[150] her evident satisfaction with her plan is far from fully shared by Myrrha, who at this point experiences *discordia mentis*:[151]

> *... Infelix non toto pectore sentit*
> *laetitiam virgo, praesagaque pectora maerent,*
> *sed tamen et gaudet: tanta est discordia mentis.*
>
> (*Met*. 10: 443-45: "only in part of her breast does the miserable girl feel joy, and her heart fears what is coming; but even, so she is joyful, so great is the discord in her mind.")

Myrrha's resistance to what is about to happen becomes physical as she makes her way through the darkness, [152] and the nurse has to lead her by the hand into the company of Cinyras. As if *discordia mentis* made her unable or unwilling to oppose her nurse's lead, Myrrha goes forward, and returns each night thereafter until Cinyras, who in Orpheus' telling had been fully deceived,[153] brings in a torch and discovers *et scelus et natam* — "both crime and daughter."[154]

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[150] See note 149 above: *vicimus* is first-person plural. The irony of the nurse's view that "they" have won is clear and comedic, in light of the different roles that she and Myrrha would play in the plot that the nurse had developed. Not so, perhaps, the ironic touches that follow, such as the usage of *filia* and *pater* by Cinyras and Myrrha in the bedchamber, or the happenstance that the wife and mother of the household was away at a festival of Ceres, during which the matrons participating in the ceremonies celebrated "the intimacy of the bond between mother and daughter" and use of the words *pater* or *filia* was taboo (Hopkins 1985, 794; for the taboo concerning *nomina*, see Lowrie (1993) 51 note 3).

[151] As noted above (see p. 30) the phrase *discordia mentis* appears only twice in the *Metamorphoses*, here in Book X (*Met.* 10:445) and in Byblis' story (*id.* 9.629: see p. 42 above). Ovid either may have been unconcerned that Orpheus would appropriate the term introduced by the narrator of Book IX, or wanted to ensure that the readers would try to understand Myrrha's story with Byblis' tale in the background.

[152] *See Met*. 10:457-61: *At illi // poplite succiduo genua intremuere, fugitque // et color et sanguis, animusque relinquit euntem. // quoque suo propior sceleri est, magis horret, et ausi // paenitet, et vellet non cognita posse reverti.* ("but sunken down and bending at the knees, those knees trembled, and both blood and color fled and her senses abandoned her. And the closer she is to her own wickedness, the more she shivers and regrets her daring, and wishes she were able to retreat, having not been recognized").

[153] Until verse 471, when his audience learns that the encounters continued after the first night, Orpheus may have adopted one of the earlier endings to Myrrha's tale in which she perishes that night. How the deception could be maintained night after night under such intimate circumstances may strain credulity. Of course, it is possible that Cinyras decided to continue with Myrrha knowing who she was, and that the outrage on the last night was contrived, but such a view of Cinyras would make him more complex than the unfaithful and lecherous old man whom Orpheus explicitly depicts.

[154] One colloquial meaning of *scelus* in use prior to Ovid's time was in reference not to the crime or curse, but to someone "whose very existence was a crime" (*OLD* 1875, *scelus* definition 3). The enraged Cinyras may been applying such a meaning to his daughter, who in Orpheus' telling had been able to maintain deception in order to start and continue to commit incest.

If Rosati has not offered a complete answer,[155] an attempt to understand why Myrrha returned night after night appears to have only one or two explanations that are coherent with Orpheus' telling of her story. One is that Myrrha feared that her nurse, who was more than complicit in the deception of Cinyras, could reveal her identity; the nurse had already sworn that she was willing to tell Cinyras about the suicide attempt unless Myrrha gave her a full confession (*Met*. 10.416-18). The other requires close attention to the words that Orpheus uses to describe Myrrha's *discordia mentis*. In verses 443 and 444, shown in the excerpt on the preceding page, Myrrha's pleasure and pain are mixed together, but at the end of the sentence, and in a verse of its own, Orpheus sings that despite Myrrha's stress and sense that that misery was coming, "even so, she is joyful, so great is the discord in her mind." Byblis seems to have enjoyed to distraction the unrequited pursuit of her brother; can it be that Myrrha not only feels some pleasure in the prospect of sleeping with her father, but that her disordered mental state enables her to continue after the first time? Such a reading of the poem requires a reader to give a misogynistic intent to the poem,[156] but the text cannot be ignored. In Anderson's mild words:

> "Sometimes human beings wish to change the circumstances of their existence and wish for the impossible, as Scylla, Byblis and Myrrha, who all seek to escape the obligations of *pietas*. Sometimes they mistake their temporary happiness and think it permanent."[157]

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[155] See p. 31 above, quoting Rosati (2002) 291: Orpheus "is concerned not so much to claim for [the narrative] the character of objective truth as to give it all the details necessary for full dramatic effectiveness."

[156] The misogyny arises from the poem's implication that, once a young woman loses touch with *pietas*, she cannot reconnect with it, until some external force shocks her into reconnection. In Myrrha's case, only after Cinyras threatened her life, and she had to flee from her homeland, did she experience remorse arising from her commission of incest.

[157] Anderson (1963) 17.

Though he does not connect his observation to the text of any specific story, Anderson's version of what he calls the "mistake" seems to fit the *discordia mentis* of Myrrha, as the text of Book X presents it.[158]

One point about Myrrha's *discordia mentis* is clear enough. When she is threatened at sword-point by her father, *discordia mentis* does not prevent Myrrha from realizing that she needs to flee from her father.[159] Having shocked her out of the full throes of *discordia mentis*, the fear of death becomes Myrrha's attendant in her growing pregnancy, as she wanders in and out of Arabia.[160] Her mind now experiences a different disorder, as her fear of death (*mortis metu*) competes there with the stress of living (*taedia vitae*).[161] She then asks the gods for relief from both fear and stress by putting her into a new state in which she would be free of emotion: *mutataeque mihi vitamque necemque negate* (10.487: "transform [me] and deny both life and death to me.")

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[158] By this reading, Dryden's translation of *discordia mentis*, in which "Joy … is clogged by Guilt," may be imprecise: Myrrha's joy survives her sense of guilt: see *Met*. 10.445 (*sed tamen et gaudet: tanta est discordia mentis)*. Mack and Robert Coleman also read this part of Myrrha's story in Book X to indicate that her *discordia mentis* may have enabled her to transgress with her father. Mack coins the phrase "Myrrha complex" to complement the notion of the male abnormal personality captured by the concept she calls the "Electra complex," though without specifically referring to the text. Citing the *discordia mentis* text, Coleman comes somewhat closer to the reading of Myrrha's action that the text supports: "Byblis, after frantically pursuing [Caunus] collapses in tears and is changed into a fountain. … By contrast Myrrha is portrayed in the manner of Euripides' Phaedra, wrestling with the desire whose monstrousness she sees all too clearly … but her *discordia mentis* is finally resolved and her desire accomplished by the agency of the Nurse … who devises the trick that gives her Cinyras" (Coleman 1971, 468).

[159] Cinyras' attempt to kill Myrrha may be one of the last partially comic narrative ironies in the story as told by Orpheus. McKinley notes that "Roman laws on adultery allowed the father to slay the guilty parties when they were discovered in his own household," adding that "Cinyras is himself one of the guilty parties" (McKinley 2001, 41). Cinyras leaves Orpheus' version of the story when Myrrha flees, in contrast to earlier versions of the tale in which he kills himself.

[160] Thus in the notes to Raeburn's translation: after leaving Arabia in verse 478, in verse 480 Myrrha is trying to rest in Saba and "is now back in Arabia" (Raeburn 2004, 658 (notes by Feeney)).

[161] *Met.* 10.481-82: *tum nescia voti // atque inter mortisque metus et taedia vitae // est tales conplexa preces* ("then not knowing of [her own] desire, and [caught] between the fear of death and stress of life …").

The transformation Myrrha seeks may be intended to free her from fear and stress, but in Orpheus' graphic description, it entails physical changes so painful that Myrrha hastens the process to its end:

> *Numen confessis aliquod patet: ultima certe*
> *vota suos habuere deos. nam crura loquentis*
> *terra supervenit, ruptosque obliqua per ungues*
> *porrigitur radix, longi firmamina trunci,*
> *ossaque robur agunt, mediaque manente medulla*
> *sanguis it in sucos, in magnos bracchia ramos,*
> *in parvos digiti, duratur cortice pellis.*
> *iamque gravem crescens uterum perstrinxerat arbor*
> *pectoraque obruerat collumque operire parabat:*
> *non tulit illa moram venientique obvia ligno*
> *subsedit mersitque suos in cortice vultus.*
>
> (*Met.* 10.488-98: Some god is open to the prayers; certainly [her] final prayer reached her own gods. For the earth rose over her legs as she was speaking, and from [her] bursting toes a twisted root was stretched, [and] the foundations of the long trunk took strength from her bones, and although [her] interior marrow stayed [the same], blood turned into sap, arms turned into great branches, fingers into twigs, and skin was hardened to bark. And now the growing tree had bound her heavy womb and buried her breasts and was preparing to cover her neck, [so] that one could not bear the delay; and, exposed to the approaching wood, she sank and plunged her own face into the bark).

Tree metamorphoses may have been "one of the commonest kind in the poem,"[162] and many or all may indicate or suggest pain,[163] but in no other is the woman who is undergoing change about to deliver a child. Only after Myrrha has submitted herself to the coup de grace does Lucina, the goddess of childbirth, arrive on the scene to deliver the baby from the now-groaning and weeping tree (*Met*. 10.508-10). By that time, Orpheus has given the mortal Myrrha his valediction: *est honor et lacrimis, stillataque cortice murra // nomen erile tenet nulloque tacebitur aevo.* (10:501-

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[162] Hardie (2002) 82, note 46.

[163] Myrrha's transformation is not the first cruel "aborealisation" (McAuley 2016, 128) in the middle books of the poem. In Book IX, a young mother, Dryope, forfeits her humanity because she picked a blossom for her baby son from a lotus tree, which contained the spirit of the nymph Lotis, who had assumed that form in order to escape from Priapus (*Met*. 9.339-393). The length in chain of events that starts with the obscene behavior of a god and results in Dryope's punishment for an innocent action, despite its potentially comedic complexity, does not diminish its pathetic aspect.

02: “And [her] tears have honor, and the myrrh distilled from the bark preserves the mistress’s name and will not go unremarked by future generations.)” Some commentators, who are perhaps less attentive to the actual physiology of Myrrha’s transformation, find the story’s end to be “stunning and compassionate,”[164] or read her metamorphosis to have “fairy-tale elements” that “distance the reader from the story by neutralizing the tragic and distressing.”[165] Others read the ending differently; Amy Richlin, for example, calls Myrrha’s metamorphosis “particularly horrible” even in comparison with the metamorphoses of “many victims in the poem (mostly female).”[166]

Certainly, it is impossible to ignore his description of Myrrha’s agony at the end. That ending brings to the surface the potential for violence and brutality that runs through the stories of mortal women in Books VI to X of the *Metamorphoses*. The ending also unifies Myrrha with the other transgressive female victims who have preceded her. The remaining essay in this study examines a text from Book VIII that, when read carefully, departs from the theme of victimhood and undercuts the notion that Ovid’s female protagonists who struggle with choice will always choose transgression. The story belongs to the third heroine of the *Metamorphoses* whom Dryden found sympathetic, Althaea.

III. Althaea and the Fall of Calydon: Second Thoughts

Tangit et ira deos.[167] In a legend that predates Homer, a king fails to include Diana in thanksgiving celebrations for the prospect of a good harvest.[168] Diana retaliates by releasing a

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164 Verducci (1985) 191.

165 Feldherr (2002) 164.

166 Richlin (1992) 165.

167 “Even anger touches the gods” (*Met.* 8.279).

168 See Kakridis (1987) 21, 37-41 and pp. 68-69 below.

terrible boar into the countryside to ravage the crops and drive the people into towns. Ovid's version of the legend is set in Calydon. The king is Oeneus, and the prince of the realm, Meleager, leads a hunting party into a dense forest to eliminate the boar. After killing the beast, Meleager resolves a dispute with two other hunters about possession of trophies from the hunt, which Meleager has awarded to Atalanta, a Diana-like huntress who drew first blood from the boar. Meleager, who finds Atalanta attractive, ends the dispute by killing the two male hunters. They are Plexipus and Toxeus, who are his uncles, and the brothers of the queen of Calydon, Althaea. After learning that her son is her brothers' killer, Althaea brings Meleager's life to an abrupt end and commits suicide. Oeneus curses his fate as a survivor; Diana has spared him from death so that he can appreciate fully his impiety and its consequences. Meanwhile, his daughters mourn at Meleager's tomb, in a display of inconsolable grief. The story ends when Diana transforms most of Meleager's sisters into guinea-fowl, either because she has been placated by Althaea's actions, or in further punishment for the seed of Oeneus.

Critical perspectives on Ovid's version of the Meleager legend has produced a range of views, some of them resembling the divine distemper caused by mortal failure to meet expectations that is at the heart of the story. In *Ovid as an Epic Poet*, Brooks Otis calls Ovid's description of Althaea's struggle to decide to punish her son for killing her brothers "skilful enough," but "very incongruous in [its] setting," coming as it does just after the events in the Calydonian forest.[169] Ovid's account of the Boar Hunt is populated by the heroes of Greco-Roman antiquity, but he violates the requirements for their epic presentation, not the least by depicting them as a bumbling and terrified band who prove generally inferior to the boar in courage or ferocity. In his edition of Book VIII of the *Metamorphoses*, A. S. Hollis comments that the Calydonian Boar Hunt is the

[169] Otis (1970) 200.

"most strictly formal piece of epic writing" in the *Metamorphoses*, and credits "Ovid's setting of the scene [as] splendid and visually brilliant as always."[170] Nevertheless, Hollis concludes that Ovid failed "to breathe new life into the old epic tradition of combat," and was instead "reduced to wooing our interest with almost comic accidents" experienced by the hunters.[171] What Otis called Althaea's "soliloquy of conflicting impulses"[172] seems to Hollis as overwrought and "the least satisfactory part of the book."[173] Hollis writes, "By the Augustan period [the] struggle between opposing duties … had become so hackneyed a theme, that to bring it to life called for especial genius," which apparently eluded Ovid; instead, Ovid's "smooth antitheses destroy all illusion of a woman in agony of soul torn between conflicting loyalties."[174] Others fault Ovid for another poor transition from one tableau to another, when the narrative shifts to events at Meleager's tomb. Barbara Pavlock writes that Ovid's account of the Meleagrides' mourning "conveys more bathos than pathos."[175] According to G. Karl Galinsky, the sisters' "mourning degenerates in a totally unepic near-necrophilia," indicating that Ovid was not aiming for a "genuinely sympathetic response."[176]

Other critics whose work now constitutes the critical mainstream, notably Kenney, Anderson, Tissol, and Hardie, find much to praise in Ovid's story of Meleager and Althaea. As

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170 Hollis (1970) 77.

171 *Ibid.*

172 Otis (1970) 200.

173 Hollis (170) 92.

174 *Id.* 89. Published two years after Hollis' work, Anderson's commentary on Book VIII called Althaea's narrative and soliloquy "one of [Ovid's] masterpieces." Anderson also sees a "contrast" between Ovid's "flippant attitude toward the Calydonian Hunt" and the "pathos" in Ovid's "sympathy for Althaea" in the scene that follows in Calydon (Anderson 1972, 372).

175 Pavlock (2009) 75.

176 Galinsky (1975) 136.

will be apparent this essay stands on their shoulders as well as those of others, in suggesting new ways to read the two main parts of the Calydonian narrative.

1. The Calydonian Boar Hunt in Book VIII has been alternately condemned and praised for its lightheartedness. What Otis and Hollis have condemned as non-epic and comedic, Anderson calls a "delicious anticlimax" to the start of the narrative, in which Oeneus' impiety and neglect put his kingdom at grave risk of punishment by an angry Diana.[177] Part I of the essay explains that the Boar Hunt has another narrative function. To the extent it succeeds in "wooing" and winning the audience's interest in its entertaining spectacle, the Boar Hunt prepares (or, more precisely, fails to prepare) the audience for its deadly conclusion, when Meleager ceases to be the leader of a mission to save his father's kingdom, and becomes the murderer of his kinsmen — that is when Ovid's readers experience the shock of violence, along with Plexippus and Toxeus. After more than 100 verses devoted to the "splendid and visually brilliant" fable the Calydonian Boar, the narrative in the forest suddenly turns dark. By its ending the Calydonian Boar Hunt illustrates Ovid's mastery of narrative surprise, or (as Tissol has written of a different narrative) Ovid's ability "to wrench his readers out of their easy entertainment by some shock."[178]

2. The next to experience shock is Althaea, who upon learning of Meleager's crime immediately decides to punish him, but then pauses in order to consider how that punishment would affect her, as his mother. Part II of the essay examines Althaea's engagement with the events in the forest and the choice that she makes. Modern commentators have evinced unease with Althaea's decision, but as explained below, that discomfort may be anachronistic and reveal more about twenty- and twenty-first century norms and expectations than it does about Althaea's

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[177] Anderson (1972) 364.

[178] Tissol (1997) 105.

own understanding of her duties and feelings, as she explains them to herself in her soliloquy. If one reads and respects the poem's text, it is difficult to place Althaea within the "akratic" paradigm that is more easily applied to Medea, Scylla, Byblis and Myrrha. Althaea's story is not one in which piety or reason yield to emotions like love or hatred. Althaea sorrows mainly for herself, and less for her brothers, and not at all for her son. She knows her duty as the daughter of a great house and eventually she does it; her decision is accompanied by regret at the cost to herself of what she considers her son's well-deserved death, a regret that only her own death can end. The comedic element in the final scene in the fall of the house of Oeneus — the transformation of most of his daughters into guinea-fowl — is surely an example of what Andrew Feldherr calls the use of metamorphoses to "distance the reader from the story by neutralizing the tragic and the distressing."[179] To assume that the end-scene could also signal something like an objection by Ovid to Althaea's decision would not only be anachronistic in itself, but would also seem to neglect Kenney's observation that the poem does not "state a case; rather it asks questions."[180]

I.

Like the metamorphosis at the end of the story of Calydon, the lengthy and colorful Calydonian Boar Hunt near its start gives Ovid's audience a respite from the tale's ominous start in which the narrator describes the danger into which Oeneus has placed his kingdom by angering Diana. Ovid's audience is invited to suspend anticipation of whether and if so how the story will come to a grim end. Even so, one event during the hunt might remind some readers of the story's main theme of impiety and revenge. After blasphemously touting his ability to kill the boar even though Diana herself released the scourge on Calydon, a hunter named Ancaeus experiences a

[179] Feldherr (2002) 164.

[180] Kenney (1986) xviii.

gruesome death on the sharp tusks of the boar. Anderson encourages the reader to treat Ancaeus' undoing as "here for our amusement," inasmuch as a tusk enters Ancaeus through the groin, as a contemptuous goddess would like,[181]but that may not be all that the death of Ancaeus accomplishes. In addition to blaspheming Diana, Ancaeus had ridiculed Atalanta, a young huntress who had joined the men in the forest in the search for the boar. As it will turn out, all the men in the forest who refuse to admit that a woman could deserve credit for heroism will meet the same end as the boar. The uneasy claims to masculine virtue encountered by the reader during the Boar Hunt prove to be not only comic but deadly.[182]

Later in the story of Calydon's fall, Althaea will finally bring the narrative of death and violence to a close, after deliberation and in an act of some courage, by punishing the story's chief malefactor, her son Meleager. But the ending, along with the murderous action of Meleager that provokes the display of feminine courage, lies far ahead. The blundering by the "catalogue of heroes" whom Ovid introduces in the Boar Hunt "takes on a momentum and fascination of its own," as Gareth Williams puts it.[183] In Sara Mack's account of the Hunt, "the pre-Homeric generation are made to behave like characters in a slapstick farce."[184] She rightly finds mock heroism in the forest tableau after Meleager fells the boar, when the surviving hunters "all crowd around the beast" that "they are afraid at first to touch."[185] As suggested above, however, there is a pattern and purpose in what Hollis called Ovid's "wooing" of his audience; the poem is wooing the audience to distraction. Kenney described the *Metamorphoses* as "a narrative current" in which

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[181] Anderson (1972) 369.

[182] The writer is indebted to Dr. Jonathan Master for calling attention to the importance of Ancaeus' ridicule of Atalanta.

[183] Williams (2009) 158.

[184] Mack (1988) 127

[185] *Ibid.;* see *Met.* 8.423-424.

"the reader is borne effortlessly along … into a placid pool" before the current "divagates into a picturesque backwater" and then "breaks into rapids and whirlpools. … It is above all variety and surprise that Ovid is trying to achieve."[186] What Tissol called the "easy entertainment" of the Boar Hunt is coming to a conclusion, with one of Kenney's surprises.

When the hunters finally overcome their fear of the boar sufficiently to gather around its carcass, the narrative begins to leave the realm of the safe and comfortable. Fear of touching the animal having receded, the hunters dip their spears in its blood. Then Meleager tries to award the boar's hide and head to Atalanta, who had managed to wound the boar with an arrow before any man was able to touch it, and who attracted the married Meleager's wandering eye upon her first appearance in the forest. Upset by Meleager's decision to reward Atalanta, and goaded by grumbling by the other men, Meleager's uncles, Plexippus and Toxeus, mock the object of their nephew's infatuation, and they try to command her to give up the trophies to them:

> *Illi laetitiae est cum munere muneris auctor,*
> *Invidere alii, totoque erat agmine murmur.*
> *E quibus ingenti tendentes bracchia voce*
> *"Pone age nec titulos intercipe, femina, nostros!"*
> *Thestiadae clamant, "nec te fiducia formae*
> *Decipiat, ne sit longe tibi captus amore*
> *Auctor!" et huic adimunt munus, ius muneris illi.*
>
> (*Met*. 8.432-435: "She was delighted with award and its source. The others envied her and there was a murmur in the entire company. From among them, the mighty sons of Thestius [Plexippus and Toxeus] stretched out their arms and shouted, 'Come on, woman, put down and do not steal our trophies! Don't be deceived by confidence in your beauty, because the one you've captured by love might be far from you;' and dishonoring her and the man who gave it to her, they took away the award as well as the right of the man who awarded it to have done so.")

The uncles' order to Atalanta is not only threatening but overwrought. Within a grammatically complete, direct command *pone nec titulos intercipe nostros* (8.433: "put down and do not steal

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[186] Kenney (2013) 147.

our trophies"), they interrupt themselves with two sputtering additions — *age* ("come on') and *femina* ("woman") — which Ovid's audience might have recognized as surplus, particularly in a poem in which ellipsis and elision were common.

The narrative turns an ominous corner when Meleager puts aside the respect he owes his uncles and warns darkly that his kinsmen will learn *facta minis quantum distent* ("how much deeds differ from threats"). Any aspect of the slapstick farce in the forest is likely long forgotten as events in the forest turn violent quickly. Meleager, now called the *Mavortius* ("the son of Mars") in his alternate genealogy, plunges his sword into the chest of Plexippus without warning:[187]

> *non tulit et tumida frendens Mavortius ira*
> *'discite, raptores alieni' dixit 'honoris,*
> *facta minis quantum distent,' hausitque nefando*
> *pectora Plexippi nil tale timentia ferro[.]*
>
> (*Met.* 8.437-441: "Gnashing his teeth, the son of Mars could not not bear the boastful insolence. 'Learn, you who steal the honor of someone else,' he said, 'how much deeds differ from threats;' and he drained with a wicked thing the chest of Plexippus, who had feared nothing of the kind.")

Ovid uses hyperbaton in order to hide what is coming, just as Plexippus does not see what is coming. In verse 439, Meleager *haustique nefando* ("drained with a wicked thing")—but what is the wicked thing, and what is being drained? A Roman audience who knew earlier versions of the Calydonian story could not themselves have been sure about what was coming.[188] Ovid gives the

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[187] Plexippus was struck without warning *nil tale timentia* (8.440, "fearing nothing of the kind").

[188] The *Library* of Apollodorus first presents an account of Meleager's action and ensuing events that Book VIII follows, but then adds a different version of Meleager's story that appears to be based on the *Iliad*:

> "It is said by some, however, that … The sons of Thestios raised an argument about the hunt, saying that Iphiclos had been the first to hit the boar, and because of this a war broke out between the Curetes and the Calydonians. When Meleager marched out and killed some of the sons of Thestios, Althaia cursed him, which so enraged him that he confined himself to his house. But when the enemy forces were drawing close to the walls, and the citizens approached him as suppliants and asked him to come to their aid, he was persuaded by his wife, though with difficulty, to march out, and after he had killed the other sons of Thestios, he met his own death in the fighting. After the death of Meleager, Althaia and Cleopatra hanged themselves, and the women who wailed over his dead body were transformed into birds" (Apollodorus, Hard trans. 1997, 41).

suspense a metrical element, by separating *haustique* from the rest of verse 439 with caesuras immediately before and after *haustique.* It is not until the end of the next verse that the audience finds out that it was Plexippus' chest that was drained, and that a blade did the draining.[189] Only 11 verses have been read since Meleager tried to award trophies of the Hunt to Atalanta; less than two verses are needed to dispatch Plexippus. Although adding Toxeus to the body count takes four verses, they are also efficient:

> *Toxea, quid faciat, dubium pariterque volentem*
> *ulcisci fratrem fraternaque fata timentem*
> *haud patitur dubitare diu calidumque priori*
> *caede recalfecit consorti sanguine telum.*
>
> (*Met.* 8.441-444: "Toxeus, doubtful of what he should do, and equally wishing to avenge his brother and fearing his brother's fate, was not allowed to hesitate for long; he re-warmed the blade with shared blood from the earlier slaughter.")

Revealing the mixture of anger and terror Toxeus experiences when watching his nephew kill Plexippus, the first two verses illustrate not only Ovid's insight into human instinct (here, a version of "fight-or-flight") but also his ability to convey the insight to readers in short and vivid text. The last two verses put an end to Toxeus with efficient but gory imagery, in which the blood of the two uncles is shared (*consorti sanguine*).[190] By maintaining the lethal symmetry with verse 440, in which *ferro* comes last, verse 444 places that imagery ahead of *telum*, the final word in the poem's account of the Calydonian Boar Hunt.

While connecting the alternative account to Homer (*Il.* 9.547 ff.), Hard notes that "Homer does not say that Meleager was killed" (*id.* 188). Although Homer elsewhere includes "[i]ntra-familial killing" in the *Iliad,* as well as in the *Odyssey*, "[k]in-killing is not explicit in the story of Meleager" presented in the *Iliad* (Alden 2017, 152).

[189] Anderson notes for his readers what he calls "typical" hyperbaton in verses 439-440, and other features of those those verses. Anderson (972) 371.

[190] As Dr. Master noted in comments on an earlier draft, *consorti* is an example of Ovid's densely expressed wit, because the primary meaning of *consors* is a person with whom an inheritance is shared. *OLD s.v. consors.*. Here, the uncles share not an inheritance but, in a literal sense, their blood.

II.

In their commentaries on the Calydon story, Hollis and Anderson each separate the narrative up to verse 444, concluding with the murder of the uncles, from what follows.[191] But such an editorial artifact should not obscure the poem's narrative and thematic continuity. Shock and surprise move quickly from the forest to the court of Calydon. Like the audience, in a "safe and comfortable" place[192] until Meleager slays his uncles, Althaea enters the narrative untroubled, occupied with preparations for a celebration of the hunters' success against the boar, which was to include gifts to the temples for the gods (*Met.* 8.445). Althaea's first surprise is to learn that her brothers have been killed. But that initial shock could be cushioned by observing ritual, which gave structure to grief, and told Althaea what to do: begin public lamentation and exchange gold raiment for black. The second shock, coming with the news that her son was the killer, replaces ritual with rage. This is how Ovid's narrator opens the scene in Calydon:

> *Dona deum templis nato victore ferebat,*
> *cum videt exstinctos fratres Althaea referri:*
> *quae plangore dato maestis clamoribus urbem*
> *inplet et auratis mutavit vestibus atras.*
> *at simul est auctor necis editus, excidit omnis*
> *luctus et a lacrimis in poenae versus amorem est.*
>
> (*Met.* 8.445-450: "With her son as victor, Althaea is carrying gifts to the gods' temples, when she saw the dead brothers being carried back. She fills the city with lamentation and sad clamors, and exchanges gold robes for black. But as soon as the murderer was made known, all mourning recedes, and tears give way to a passion for punishment.")

The heavy meter of the first three verses, dominated by spondees, slow the reading, perhaps to ensure that the audience appreciates the dramatic irony of the passage. The dactylic-dominant

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[191] See Hollis (1970) 88 and Anderson (1972) 371.

[192] The expression was coined by Tissol: some "recent critics … provide safe and comfortable readings of Ovidian wit that make it seem pretty much like 'comic relief,' a pleasant and agreeable interruption of seriousness" (Tissol 1997, 11).

meter in verse 450 and the alliteration at its start (*"luctus et a lacrimis"*) then move the poem quickly into Althaea's first flash of anger, triggering an instinct for vengeance.

Surprise having first been visited on her brothers (along with death) and also on the audience, it has now reached Althaea. A double-shock — the first arriving with the bodies of Plexippus and Toxeus and along with word that they have been murdered, and the second when Althaea receives word that the killer is her son — will drive the rest of her story, and they will make her more than a victim of emotion by turning her into an instrument of more death. By killing herself Althaea avoids judgment of her conduct by those she leaves behind, but she could not spare herself from the commentators. Hollis was a sharp critic of Althaea, and presumed that his view of her was worth explaining. Speaking not only for modern sensibilities but for Ovid himself, Hollis wrote:

> "A woman's preference for her brother over her son is one of the most primitive elements in the Meleager-legend. … But to us the bond between mother and son seems much the more important, as it would have to Ovid as well; this is one reason why the soliloquy does not quite come to life."[193]

Restated, Hollis' argument appears to be as follows: (i) Ovid thought that the Althaea of legend made the wrong choice, and therefore (ii) Althaea's hesitations and ruminations before she ends Meleager's life are disingenuous. In Hollis' view, the greater the surface elegance that Ovid gives to Althaea's soliloquy, the greater Ovid's disapproval of his creature.[194] Thus, Hollis suggests that the famous words in the opening tableau at Calydon, *poenae versus amorem est* (8:450) "implies

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[193] Hollis (1970) 92.

[194] Hollis' critique of Althaea's soliloquy resonated in Papaioannou (2007), who viewed the soliloquy as a "mockery of the female epic lament" and as notable for its irony as well as its deconstruction of the male heroic epic (Papaioannou 2007, 267). McAuley has responded by suggesting that "to see the sole function of Althaea's elaborately expressed passion as simply 'ironic' and 'deconstructive' ignores the rich subjective and emotional content of the speech itself," as well as its connection with other narratives in the *Metamorphoses* (McAuley 2016, 137).

Ovid's own criticism of Althaea."[195] Likewise Hollis sees in Althaea's "lack of consideration" for Oeneus in her soliloquy another "part of the poet's criticism of Althaea."[196] It is unclear whether Hollis disfavors Ovid's depiction of Althaea more than Ovid's Althaea.[197]

Most recent readings of Althaea's story abstain from declaring what the poet thought. Most also do not venture a judgment on Althaea. One notable exception may be Nugent, who as explained above detects Aristotelian resonances in the efforts of Ovid's female protagonists to understand or explain their conduct, and may have done so correctly in the case of Medea.[198] Regarding Althaea, Nugent writes that "we may easily perceive" in "Althaea's case … a kind of flawed syllogism underlying her dilemma."[199] Nugent proposes two such syllogisms, set out below in the margin, "both of which Althaea perceives as applicable to her."[200] Nugent explains, "Aristotle notes that … where two arguments appear to be in contradiction, passion (*pathos*) may lead one to act as if under the influence of madness (*mania*)."[201] In Nugent's typology of "Ovid's

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195 *Ibid.*

196 *Id.* at 93.

197 Hollis was also harsh with Ovid. He called the famous paradox appearing near the close of Althaea's story, *impietate pia est,* an "oxymoron … characteristic of our poet even if not very pleasing" (Hollis 1970, 91). The full sentence on which Hollis commented is as follows:

> *Incipit esse tamen melior germana parente*
> *et consanguineas ut sanguine leniat umbras,*
> *inpietate pia est*.
>
> (*Met*. 8.475-477: "She begins, nevertheless, to be a better sister than parent; and so that she may appease her kindred shades with blood, she is pious through impious means.")

Kenney could not resist responding: "I do not know what Hollis means by calling the oxymoron *impietate pia est* 'not very pleasing.' what are the criteria which an oxymoron must satisfy in order to please?" (Kenney 1973 151 note 198).

198 See p. 15 above.

199 Nugent (2008) 162.

200 In Nugent's study, the first syllogism is, "A mother should not kill her son./I am a mother./Therefore, I should not kill my son," and the second is, "A sister must avenge her brothers./I am a sister./Therefore, I must avenge my brothers" (Nugent 2008, 162.) The "flawed syllogism" that Nugent suggests may have motivated Althaea to hasten Meleager's death is, "A mother should not kill her son./I am not a mother (but a grieving sister)./Therefore, I must kill my son" (*id*.).

201 *Ibid.*

akratic heroines,"[202] Althaea thus joins others as a woman acting from passion, though "in Althaea's story Ovid has taken the physical and rhetorical analogues of passionate dilemma to a new plane."[203] Nugent's Althaea is therefore perhaps the victim of passions that eventually block her from perceiving logical error, much as Scylla's determination to betray her father blinds her from perceiving that no monarch will unhesitatingly welcome a traitor.[204] In contrast to the Medea of Book VII,[205] it is difficult to locate anywhere in the text of the poem any sign (comparable to that suggested in Book VII for Medea) that Althaea ever "perceives"[206] either of the syllogisms that Nugent argues are in use in her soliloquy.[207]

One fundamental issue raised by Nugent's observations on Althaea is similar to the one presented in Hollis' view of Althaea. Each of them appear to believe not only that an ethical system can be imposed on the poem, but also that Ovid's readers can be certain what the poem's ethical system is. In Nugent's case, why is Althaea's faulty logic responsible for an irrational decision to kill her son, if the poem does not assume the existence of the logical rules that Althaea *ex hypothesi has* violated? As for Hollis, Ovid must have possessed and decided to bring to the poem some principles of right and wrong, or at least of proper and improper conduct, if at various

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202 Nugent (2008) 157. In Nugent's version of the *Nicomachean Ethics,* "The akratic individual, Aristotle argues, correctly recognizes the major premise, the general rule, but fails in the formulation of the appropriate minor premise, the application of the universal to the particular.

203 Nugent (2008) 164.

204 See p. 24 above.

205 See p. 15 above.

206 Nugent's term. See Nugent (2008) 162.

207 As indicated earlier, Nugent states that she does not "claim direct Aristotelian influence on the *Metamorphoses*, but [that] the philosopher's analysis of the akratic individual can shed light on Ovid's representation of characters who are driven by their passions to act in a way that they "know" is wrong" (Nugent 2008, 157; see p. 15 above). If Nugent is claiming that a reader's understanding of a poem can be enlightened by reference to a philosophical system that cannot itself be found in the poem, she may be making a difficult argument, as explained in the next paragraph above.

points in Althaea' story Ovid reveals his disapproval of her.[208] McAuley cautions against the risks of importing "today's Western ideal of the nuclear family" into representations of the Roman family written in the Augustan period:

> "The prevalence of wet-nursing, the high instance of divorce, remarriage, and early maternal mortality — frequently in childbirth — meant that maternity, especially in elite configurations, was not primarily associated with exclusive care of small children, and a Roman child was not universally expected to have the kind of close affective bond with the mother expected in today's Western ideal of the nuclear family — although one cannot claim from this that maternal and filial love, however differently it may have been experienced or constructed, was any less psychologically intense or socially significant. A mother's devotion to her son, as depicted in exemplary narratives, was more often demonstrated in moral and educative terms: she was expected to exhort her son on to appropriate distinction in the civic, political, and military spheres."[209]

Meleager was past any moral education by the time he had killed his uncles. Althaea certainly becomes engaged in a "psychologically intense" internal dialectic when she finds out that her son murdered her brothers, but does the dialectic include "devotion to her son?"

If one considers the pre-Hellenic versions of the Meleager legend, recovered by Johannes Kakridis in the middle of the last century, Althaea's enraged first reaction to learning what happened in the forest — which was to take vengeance against Meleager — would have been culturally correct:

> "[A] woman, even after her marriage, remains closely bound to her tribe. For such a woman the brother stands higher than [her] child since in his veins exactly the same blood flows as in hers, whereas in the child's veins half the blood belongs to a stranger, the father. We may accept without difficulty that such a particular attachment of a woman to her tribe prevailed among the pre-Hellenic people of Greece, and has left its traces in the Meleager-legend…. The mother in the pre-Hellenic tale acts in exactly the same blind subjugation to the law of her clan. The mother, who is described as murdering her son to avenge her own blood-kin, is the exponent of the moral creed of an entire epoch."[210]

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[208] See pp. 65-66 above.

[209] McAuley (2016) 38.

[210] Kakridis (1949) 37-38. To his credit, Hollis cites Kakridis, see p. 65 above, before conjecturing that Ovid would have had a modern perspective on Althaea's dilemma and that the poet meant to criticize her. See pp. 65-66.

Of course there is a risk of a type of back-casting anachronism, which would assign the value-system of the old folklore to Ovid's Althaea, just as Hollis and perhaps others have tried to import the modern "Western ideal" to the text of the poem. The ancient legend identified by Kakridis is relevant mainly to demonstrate that the ethical principles one can detect in Hollis and Nugent should not be attributed to Ovid's representation of Althaea.[211] Unlike her legendary antecedents, Ovid's Althaea certainly hesitates before she finally decides to terminate Meleager's life. Once she backs away from her first vengeful impulse, Althaea does not proceed with the "blind subjugation to the law of her clan" that the Meleager-legend expected of a mother. There is no question that Althaea struggles before sending Meleager to his death — but with what does she struggle, exactly? Anderson's commentary finds in verses 449-450 (see p. 64 above) a struggle between "a perverse love of punishment" (a*morem ... poenae*), "[the] killing of her own son, versus a natural maternal love which sensibly lets the dead take care of themselves (even if they are blood relatives and religious taboos demand her action)."[212] Does her final resolution overcome what one reader calls "passionate maternal love,"[213] or require the subordination of the *persona* of a "loving, all-forgiving mother?"[214] It is time to turn to the text.

Althaea's struggle to decide proceeds through two main phases. In the early phase, two tableaux appear, each illuminated by flames. In the first tableau the audience sees Althaea's decisive conduct at the time of Meleager's birth, and in the second, in the present moment, physical

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211 Thus, this essay tries to avoid historicism, without meaning to suggest that the *Metamorphoses* cannot be utilized by historians in understanding the period in which it was written, or than to questions about the poem other than those posed in this study could be informed by the cultural or political history of Ovid's time.

212 Anderson (1972) 372.

213 Hardie (2002) 244.

214 Papaioannou (2007) 266. Others who find maternal love to be represented in Althaea's soliloquy and the surrounding narrative are McAuley (2016) 129, Hill (1992) 231, Paolucci (2016) 53.

irresolution, as Althaea tries four times to take the action that will end Meleager's life. All action stops when Althaea's struggle enters the second phase, which is given over to Althaea's lamentation and self-interrogation. Her decision made, Althaea acts to end Meleager's life and then takes her own.[215]

A. The Tableaux

The first tableau begins with imagery of death and birth. The bodies of Plexippus and Toxeus have been brought before Althaea, presumably so that she can perform the duties of female survivors and prepare the remains for final rites. Like her brothers' prone corpses, all mourning has "collapsed" (*Met.* 8.450 *excidit*) upon Althaea's learning the full story of their deaths. The narrator then explains that the circumstances of Meleager's birth provide a means to punish him for his crime. Having been warned by the Fates, the newly-delivered Althaea had seized a "blazing branch" (456-7 *flagrantem … ramum*) from the fire that warmed her and the infant; if the branch had been allowed to continue burning until fully consumed by the fire, Meleager would have died. Switching to present time, and as if trying to summon the adult son to answer for his recent conduct, the narrator uses direct address to advise the absent Meleager that the branch "having been preserved, your years, young man, it preserved" (459, *servatusque tuos, iuvenis, servaverat anno*s). The polyptoton (*servatusque … servaverat*), the first of several to be encountered on the way to Althaea's final decision, is part of a tight dactylic hexameter scheme.

Turning back to Althaea, the narrator recounts that her next action was to order that a fire be prepared:

> *Protulit hunc genetrix taedasque et fragmina poni*
> *imperat et positis inimicos admovet ignes.*

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[215] Addressing the Medea narrative in Book VII, Dan Curley explains that self-interrogation is part of a paradigm of "utter helplessness or *aporia* (ἀπορία), which enumerate the speaker's alternatives. In most instances, none but suicide are viable" (Curley, 147).

> (*Met.* 8.460-61: "The mother brought out this branch and ordered torches and kindling to be put down, and she moves the hostile flames toward the kindling that had been arranged.")

The hyperbaton in verse 461 (*inimicos admovet ignes*) symbolizes Althaea's consumption with rage. Althaea is the subject of *admovet,* so the word order places her between *inimicos* ("hostile") and *ignes* ("fires"); Althaea is surrounded by burning feelings of hostility toward her son.

To this point, Althaea appears to be ruled by anger. Had Ovid simply followed the folk-tale, Althaea might next have unhesitatingly dispatched Meleager, using the fire she ordered built and the wooden branch that had been "hidden in the lowest part" of the palace, as if in a sepulcher (8.458). But it is here, in the second tableau with Althea facing the flames, that Ovid signals a countervailing feeling. Althaea tries four times to put the fire she has procured to its intended use, but each time she relents:

> *Tum conata quater flammis inponere ramum*
> *coepta quater tenuit. pugnat materque sororque,*
> *et diversa trahunt unum duo nomina pectus.*
> *saepe metu sceleris pallebant ora futuri;*
> *saepe suum fervens oculis dabat ira ruborem,*
> *et modo nescio quid similis crudele minanti*
> *vultus erat, modo quem misereri credere posses.*
> *cumque ferus lacrimas animi siccaverat ardor,*
> *inveniebantur lacrimae tamen.*
>
> (*Met*. 8.462-470: "Then trying to put the branch into the flames, she started and then pulled back, four times. The mother and the sister were struggling, and those two names opposed themselves within her single breast. Her dread about the cursed act she was considering repeatedly caused her [face] to flush and made her eyes red [with tears], and you might imagine that her face, which had looked menacing, seemed pathetic. And whenever her fierce anger dried her heartfelt tears, tears nevertheless reappeared.")

The poem's rhetoric and meter correspond with Althaea's impasse. In verse 462, *conata* ("having tried") is preceded by a weak caesura, underscoring weakness in Althaea's resolve to dispatch Meleager. Althaea's face, that of both *mater* and *soror,* and which one could imagine to be

illuminated by the fire, is alternately flushed and contorted with anger, and then pale with fear *sceleratus ... futuri* (8.465, "of the future crime") she was contemplating and wet with tears.[216] The anaphora in lines 465 and 466 (*saepe ...saepe*) conveys the pulsation of blood as her face alternates with anger and dread. Later, in line 474, Ovid uses zeugma to intertwine Althaea's anger with resistance to it: *inque vices ponit positamque resuscitat iram* ("and by turns she puts down and revives put-down anger"). Her inconsistency is amplified by an asymmetrical meter (*dsddd*) consisting unevenly spaced caesuras: the caesuras in the first three feet are all two syllables apart, but the caesura in the fourth foot is three syllables away from its preceding caesura.[217]

The tableau ends with Ovid's deployment of the image of a boat wavering between wind and tide, which is a subject of general critical attention.[218] Despite her remembrance of the moment when she saved her infant at his birth and her careful storage of the branch that marks his lifespan, and her struggle to control her anger, Althaea evinces no sign of current affection for Meleager. *Amor* appears in the unaffectionate expression "*poenae ... amorem*," and nowhere else in the opening tableaux or the soliloquy.

B. The Soliloquy

Anderson is likely right in seeing in the soliloquy "the slow triumph of Althaea's vengeful feelings as a sister" following "the impasse of the initial dilemma."[219] In apparent reference to the

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[216] Anderson's view is that those tears flow from pity for Meleager (Anderson, 374) based their placement in the alternating imagery of anger and sorrow. In a different reading, the anger and sorrow may each derive at least in part from Althaea's awareness of how events are affecting her. Ambiguity may have been the poem's intention.

[217] The metrical pattern is one of the eight most common in the *Metamorphoses*, but ranks sixth. Duckworth (1969) 73.

[218] For example, see Nugent (2008) 162, Anderson (1972) 374, and Hollis (1970) 91. Anderson notes that the imagery is conventional and comments on its enhancement by the poem's word order and the variations in meter in line 471. It might also be noted that the two spondees between the elision in the fourth foot slow the reading of line 472, inviting the reader to dwell on Althaea's hesitation: *vim geminam sentit paretque incerta duobus* ("she senses the two forces and uncertainly responds to both)."

[219] Anderson (1972) 374.

soliloquy, Nugent suggests that Althaea, in common with the other figures to whom Nugent attributes akratic decision-making, "resorts to the power of language as a means of freeing her from the perceived constraints of her circumstances."[220] The difference between Medea, Procne and the other female protagonists of the middle books, on the one hand, and Althaea on the other, is that Althaea is more aptly said to use soliloquy to accept the constraints of her circumstances. Althaea's pivot away from uncertainty begins in line 475, *incipit esse tamen melior germana parente* ("she begins, nevertheless, to be a better sister than parent") when the three dactyls slow the meter, so that readers can ponder the movement to a decision, but Althaea's progress is, as Anderson states, "slow." The great paradox (or if Hollis were correct in his approach to the poem, the grand conceit) that is so often studied, *inpietate pia est* (8.477, "she is pious by means of impiety") contains at least two signals. As Tissol observes, "when the ethical case is at complete impasse, it finds its appropriate correspondence in semantic impasse."[221] But perhaps the poem wants to be read literally: *pia* is in the nominative case, *inpietate* is an ablative of means, and *inpietate pia est* may be a Roman noblewoman's version of "the end justifies the means."[222] The salient point for the present is that Althaea is concerned with *pietas,* not *amor*.

When paradox next appears in the soliloquy, there is still no indication of maternal affection. In a powerful, concise couplet that deploys a brace of paradoxes, Althaea uses the strongest verb form that could be expected of her, the passive periphrastic:

> *ulciscor facioque nefas. mors morte pianda est:*
> *in scelus addendum scelus est, in funera funus*
>
> (*Met.* 8 : 483-484: "I avenge and I commit a sin. Death by death ought to be atoned:
> to crime must be added is crime, to death, death.")

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220 Nugent (2008)171.

221 Tissol (1997) 14.

222 Compare *Her.* 2.85, *exitus acta probat* ("the outcome justifies the deeds").

Althaea thus conveys both determination and an appreciation of her predicament; she appears to be the main focus of her lament, inasmuch as she is the one who must commit a sin in order to avenge another sin. Her brothers (or their shades) occupy a subordinate position — their deaths are the deaths that must be answered with death — with her son receiving no mention, except as a sinner, a killer and a criminal. The absence of any expression of affection for Meleager is also apparent later in the soliloquy, when Althaea reveals a self-perceived deficiency: she asks *mens ubi materna est*? (*id.* 8.499, "where is [my] mind maternal?") and *ubi sunt pia iura parentum* (*id*., "where are the pious laws of parents?"), but still does not search herself to locate any affection for Meleager as a person, apart from his standing in relation to her as his mother. Next it becomes apparent that Althaea's only regret connected with Meleager is that she suffered through a painful pregnancy and childbirth that prevented Meleager from dying in infancy (8.500-501). Meleager has become *sceleratus*, the "wicked one" (*id.* 496), having earlier been called *mortis .... auctor*, the "author of death" (*id.* 493), surely in reference to deaths of Plexippus and Toxeus and perhaps also to the other deaths that are to follow. Althaea's only expression of regret, other than self-pity, comes in an apology to her brothers, apparently for her hesitation of a mother (*matri, id.* 491) regarding her punishment of "that man who deserved to perish" (*meruisse ... illum cur pereat*, *id*. 492-3).

Prior to averting her eyes and succeeding in casting the branch into the fire, Althaea expresses for one, final time an inability to do what she wants to do:

> *Et cupio et nequeo. quid agam? modo vulnera fratrum*
> *ante oculos mihi sunt et tantae caedis imago,*
> *nunc animum pietas maternaque nomina frangunt.*
> *me miseram! male vincetis, sed vincite, fratres*
>
> (*Met*. 8.506-509: I both desire [to do this] and yet I can't [do this]. What am I to do? Now the wounds of [my] brothers are there before my eyes, along with an image of so

great slaughter as to defeat the spirit, piety and name of a mother. Woe is me! Barely[223] you shall prevail, but brothers, prevail.") [224]

In the end, the text of the soliloquy does not support readings that impute "two conflicting loves and loyalties"[225] to Althaea, or similar juxtapositions of maternal love with something else.[226] Ovid's Althaea ultimately decides to observe the cruel duty found in the old Meleager-legend, without any indication that she anticipated the sensibilities or ethical systems of a later age that might give more importance to maternal love, even in the case of adult murderers. This does not

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[223] It should be noted that *male* in verse 509 need not be given a normative meaning, as in "badly," though this may be another instance of Ovidian wit. This translation gives the adverb the same meaning as "poorly" or "imperfectly," to indicate a degree of lesser accomplishment or completion. Compare with Cicero's *In Catilinam,* iii. 22 (*homines ex civitate male pacata;* "men from a state poorly pacified.").

[224] Two English versions of Althaea's soliloquy, in the translations of Raeburn and Melville, handle the Latin text quite differently from the translation presented above: in one Althaea's "spirit is broken by love" (Raeburn), and in the other "a mother's loyal love rends my resolve" (Melville). Thus, in Raeburn:

> I wish for his death, but am powerless, confused! One
> Moment I picture
> My brothers' wounds and that scene of murderous
> carnage; but then
> ***my spirit is broken by love*** and the name that I own
> as a mother.
> Oh, I am lost! Though your triumph is evil, you win,
> my brothers …

Raeburn trans. 318 (emphasis supplied here). The *OLD* fills more than three columns with definitions for *animus.* "Love" is not among the 14 definitions (not including sub-definitions) that it offers, and none come as close to "love" as the more obvious choices that a Latin poet had. Melville translates the same passage as follows:

> I would, I want – and can't. What shall I do?
> Before my eyes I see my brothers' wounds,
> The picture of that slaughter, yet, again –
> ***A mother's loyal love*** rends my resolve.
> Oh my heart breaks! Your triumph is tragedy,
> Yet take your triumph, brothers!

Melville trans. 186 (emphasis supplied here). In addition to joining with Raeburn in the interpretation of *animus* to mean "love," Melville's translation appears to depart from the Latin text in another way. *Materna* is in the nominative case and is used as an adjective to modify *nomina*; it is not a noun in the genitive case that could apply to *animus*. "Tragedy" for *male* makes an adverb into a noun. Finally, the expression "my heart breaks" would appear to be proper only if *animus* meant "love" in one line and "heart" in another, and if Ovid was employing zeugma in which the common verb would be *frangunt.* In that event, *frangunt* would need to have transitive use in line 508, and then intransitive use in line 509.

[225] Hardie (2002) 244.

[226] See note 216 above.

mean, however, that Althaea shows no regret about the outcome she selects. Ovid reveals her resistance in a soliloquy marked by wit and artifice — the conceits to which Hollis objected as insincere [227] — dominated by paradox, which as Tissol observes "is the preferred form of expression for characters who are unable to act,"[228] at least until some of them decide to act, as Althaea eventually does.

C. *Alta iacet Calydon*[229]

The final section of the story set in Calydon establishes Althaea's difference from the other members of the royal household, reinforces her exceptionalism as a dangerous woman of considerable courage, and after the interlude provided by the Meleagrides hastens the audience forward to a new story. Oeneus, author of the original impiety that has extinguished his line, grieves and curses himself, but neither commits suicide nor is favored with a metamorphosis to relieve his remorse. Althaea, by contrast, dies in a manner that could readily be understood to be heroic, as Segal explains, with a sword rather than noose or poison.[230] She committed suicide in deep despair, but also in apparent mastery of her circumstances and without fear, in the manner approved for patricians. [231] Plexippus and Toxeus earlier exited the story as objects of derision. Meleager himself leaves Book VIII ambiguously, punished for cold-blooded murder through an artifice of which he was unaware, but supposedly bearing his pain with great credit, thinking of the wife whom he was prepared to dishonor in a frolic with Atalanta, and, the narrator adds wryly,

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227 See pp. 57, 65-66 above.

228 Tissol (1997) 14.

229 *Met.* 8.529 ("High Calydon lies [low]").

230 Segal (1999) 328.

231 See Hill (2004) 19. One aspect of the stereotype for honorable suicide to which Althaea may not have been able to lay claim was to have died as "as an exemplary moral witness within Roman society," *id.*, insofar she bore witness mainly to her own suffering and not to Roman morality.

perhaps also of his mother.[232] Althaea thus leaves the poem with a greater claim to the conventions of male self-mastery than the men of her family.

The sisters who weep and torment themselves for Meleager until they are transformed into guinea-hens likewise create an obvious contrast with their mother, who left behind the stereotype of feminine mourning as soon as she learned how her brothers had died.[233] Commentators who have disfavored the final tableau in which most of Meleager's sisters are transformed to guinea-hens as bathetic[234] may not have considered the possibility that Ovid employs the sisters, to deliver what Andrew Feldherr calls the type of metamorphosis that has "fairy-tale elements" that "distance the reader from the story by neutralizing the tragic and distressing."[235] Bathos and diversion may be the point. Certainly the story of Calydon in Book VIII is tragic (in an formal sense) and distressing. McAuley locates in Althaea's story, along with those of other mothers in the middle books of the *Metamorphoses*, exploitation by Ovid of the "motif of terrifying maternal vengeance." in which "to be born of woman also entails one day to die" at the hand of the mother.[236] In that respect, McAuley argues, stories like that of Althaea represent "pervasive patriarchal ambivalence towards mothers."[237] Ovid's depiction of Althaea may also represent ambivalence about the old

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[232] Fratantuono has asserted that "Meleager dies a hero in every respect, with Roman devotion to family and Stoic fortitude in the face of agony" (Fratantuono 2011, 227), but perhaps his heroism would only meet the diminished standards for male courage established in the Calydonian forest. The narrator's wink in suggesting but not affirming that Meleager perhaps thought of Althaea as he died recalls Mack's observation that Ovid's narrator "is seldom totally serious, particularly when he is moving toward a new story" (Mack 1988, 153).

[233] The poem may have intended more specifically African guinea-hens, used in sacrifices at the temple of Isis near Mount Parnassus, kept in the Acropolis, and mentioned in earlier fables of metamorphosis by Nicander. See Thompson (1895) 115.

[234] See p. 57 above.

[235] Feldherr (2002) 164.

[236] McAuley (2016) 133. "And it is always male children they kill" (*id*.). It might be added that Althaea's story shows particular unity between birth and death, and a mother's control over both: it is the brand that Althaea withdraws from the flames when she gave birth to Meleager, introduced by the narrator in the nativity scene in the first tableau, that Althaea returns to the flames in order to bring Meleager's life to an end.

[237] *Ibid.*

Republican notion, still current in his time though perhaps receding, that mothers were expected to be stern and austere, putting the interests of the state before bonds between mother and child.[238] Certainly Althaea presents an extreme version of dispassionate motherhood, in which a mother masters any material emotion and enables herself to act as an executioner. The text of the poem supports a reading in which Ovid intended to create discomfort regarding the ideals of Roman motherhood, by creating an extreme example in Althaea. If that is a question that the poem means to raise, Ovid provides no answer; he may have had other objectives, more closely related to practical aspects of the poetic craft. To refer again to Kenney's work: "The overriding imperative was to hold the reader's attention through a poem of some twelve thousand verses. The secret was to keep the narrative moving and the reader guessing."[239]

[238] See, for example, McAuley (2016) 38, quoted on p. 68 above.

[239] Kenney (2013) 146.

CONCLUSION

Meleager is not the first figure in the *Metamorphoses* to be consumed by an inner fire. Narcissus meets a similar end in Book III, when he fails to understand that the image he sees in the wilderness pool was his own reflection. Mistake also leads to death in Book VII. Cephalus hurls a javelin at a beast lurking in the underbrush, only to discover that he has mortally wounded Procris, who had been spying on him to see if he had a mistress. From those two stories Efrossini Spentzou draws the lesson, "Death lurks behind false readings."[240] From her vantage of reader-response theory, she adds that Ovid presents "a particularly austere and uncompromising version of response-theory: the author does not determine meaning and the reader has the responsibility and must face the consequences of deciding on the meaning of the text."[241]

Of course, the approach to the *Metamorphoses* taken in these essays assumes that reading the poem is not so perilous. Just when he might be about to suggest some serious meaning, Ovid can seem unserious, as when Meleager's sisters become guinea-fowl. The *Metamorphoses* may not be an easy subject for reader-response criticism, if that school creates a "responsibility" to find a meaning.[242] Spentzou might need to leave the *Metamorphoses* to readers like Kenney who concede at the outset that the poem asks questions but avoids answers, and who also believe that the craft exhibited in the text of the poem is worthy of study for its own sake.[243]

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240 Spentzou (2013) 388.

241 *Ibid.*

242 Appearing to take a broader view of reader-response criticism, Irene Peirano Garrison summarizes it as only "insist[ing] that all forms of literature, including poetry, are ultimately an act of persuasion, that is, forms of discourse constructed in order to achieve certain effects on the reader" (Garrison 2019, 11). For example, the poem destabilizes a reader's expectations when it mocks the norms of epic poetry in the Calydonian Boar Hunt. If the Boar Hunt counts as an act of persuasion because it tells the reader that she does not need always to take epic male heroism seriously, then Ovid might be at home with reader-response critics.

243 See, for example, the work of Kenney, Hinds, and Tissol cited on page 1 in notes 3-5. Note, however, that reader-response theory may not be as strict in its requirements as suggested in the quotation from Spentzou, see note 242 above, and that the quotation may not accurately reflect Spentzou's entire position on how readers should engage with the *Metamorphoses*.

Kenney's position that the *Metamorphoses* does not "state a case" but "rather it asks questions, exploring and analyzing for the most part without comment or commitment"[244] aligns him with the students of modern (post-medieval) romantic poetry who warned against what one of them called "the heresy of paraphrase."[245] As if anticipating Kenney's position on what one could expect from the *Metamorphoses*, one famous participant in New Criticism wrote in 1947:

> "A poem does not *state* ideas but rather *tests* ideas. Or, to put the matter in other terms, a poem does not deal primarily with ideas and events but rather with the way in which a human being may come to terms with ideas and events."[246]

Putting to one side the point that the mortals in the *Metamorphoses* are creatures of myth, Brooks' statement could be read to anticipate Kenney's position that "People, and how they react under stress, were what interested Ovid."[247]

Mortal reaction to stress being what interested him, Ovid chose for his poem legends in which stress reached extreme levels. Althaea has to decide how to respond to the murder of her brothers by her son. Myrrha and Byblis experience endogamous obsessions so powerful that they become mad. Before transformation into a sea-bird, Scylla has been deranged by her discovery that Minos has no more tolerance for traitors than her father, whose anger turns him into a bird of prey that will pursue her own transformed self forever. After delivering him from the lethal trials of strength and courage her father had planned for Jason, Medea learns after cutting all ties with her homeland that Jason like her father is cruel, and answers his cruelty with viciousness that will make it impossible for her to alight anywhere in the world. The story of each heroine is unbelievably terrifying and so dark that any fascination that the plot by itself exerts is usually either

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244 Kenney (1986) xviii.

245 Brooks (1947) Kindle ed. loc. 1979.

246 *Id*. at 2765.

247 Kenney (1986) xviii.

morbid or pornographic.[248] And so of course Ovid ornamented each story with the wit and dexterity that engage the reader and usually make them enjoyable to read despite the events they recount.[249] To quote Brooks again: "a poem … is to be judged, not by the truth or falsity as such, of the idea it incorporates," but instead by "its coherence, sensitivity, depth, richness, and tough-mindedness."[250] Myrrha's story may be full of pathos, and constitute effective drama, but at least as it has been read here, its parts do not hang together well; it lacks coherence and may not be what Brooks would call tough-minded. Perhaps the version of her story in the *Metamorphoses* can be read to mock Orpheus, who had the job of presenting her legend in Book X. Stated another way: just as the middle books are full of treachery, perhaps in Myrrha's story the narrative is betraying the narrator.

Particularly if the Ovid of the *Metamorphoses* is treacherous, he is a poet more easily respected than liked, or liked than respected, depending upon whether one likes, or instead only respects, the craft of poetry. The present writer recalls his introduction to Ovid in his sophomore year. At the start, he had been warned against the *Metamorphoses* by the Classics Department's undergraduate tutor, who said that despite her disgust with the poem, she would help him learn

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[248] The poem contains other narratives that are even more extreme. Perhaps the most horrific story in the *Metamorphoses* is that of Procne, Tereus and Philomela in Book VI. Tereus, the husband of Procne and the father of a toddler named Itys, repeatedly rapes Procne's sister, Philomela, before cutting out Philomela's tongue in order to silence her and then abandoning her. When Procne finds out what has happened, she and Philomela kill the bewildered and terrified Itys, who has no idea why his mother and aunt are killing him and would be too young to know what rape is. Procne and Philomela then cook his remains and feed them to Tereus in revenge for what he did to Philomela. *Met*. 6. 412-674. Charles Segal observed that "Tereus … serves as the field upon which can be projected libidinal and aggressive wishes that the (male) Roman audience may be reluctant to accept in themselves" (Segal 1994, 263). The story of Procne, Tereus and Philomela is not included in these essays primarily because Ovid does not give Procne or Philomela a significant speaking role in the form of a soliloquy.

[249] Readers of this text are asked here to remember what is said in note 26 on page 8 above.

[250] Brooks (1947) Kindle ed. loc. 2765. Brooks does not explain in the same part of *The Well-Wrought Urn* what he meant by tough-mindedness, but one can suppose the term to require that each part of the poem make sense in relation to all other parts, which is another version of coherence.

how to read it.[251] Instruction in the classroom made that assistance unnecessary.[252] But her reaction to the *Metamorphoses* is memorable, because it signaled something similar that the writer would discover for himself. At times the wit and elegance of the poem overcome the sorrow in the narratives, but not always. A reader's response to the poem can change from one reading to the next of the same story. Ovid keeps the reader guessing.

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[251] The tutor's warning had the same effect as the warnings to readers at the start of Byblis' and Myrrha's tales, see page 36, note 101 above; it stimulated interest in the poem and the course.

[252] Though she properly finds her way into the acknowledgments at the start of this work, because she had earlier helped the writer learn Latin grammar when he started the study of the language.

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