Monstrous Texts and Textual Monsters
Transgressive Hybridity in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

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Abstract

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Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are a treasure trove for marvellous creatures, hybrids, monsters, and deformed bodies. The text itself is a poetic hybrid combining features from different literary genres, including epic, elegy, pastoral poetry, tragedy, and comedy. Ovid's monsters – Medusa, the Minotaur, Centaurs, or Scylla – embody his poetic program: creating an intricate narrative labyrinth with many heterogeneous components, metareferential puns, and ironic digressions from the well-established classical canon, Ovid follows in the Callimachean tradition that appreciates poetically refined, creative experiments with traditional aesthetics. The monstrous *Metamorphoses* embrace extraordinary corporeality, alterity, and the subversion of norms. Recent critical theories and gender studies provide the conceptual background for the analysis of Ovid's poetics of transgressive hybridity in this thesis.

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1. Introduction: Monstrosity – Disability – Hybridity

Monsters, beasts, freaks, and hybrids of all kinds have haunted literature and arts, fiction and fantasy, myth, science, and theory from antiquity to the present day. "They can be pushed to the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world and in the forbidden recesses of our mind, but they always return," as Cohen argues in the introduction to his reader *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996: 20). In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a treasure trove for extraordinary beings, the irregular and twisting narrative structure provides a labyrinthine frame for the abnormal, impure, uncanny, monstrous, but fascinating and desirable Other. Far from considering hybridity, deformation, and alterity as imperfect flaws, Ovid embraces them intra- and meta-diegetically, as an apt subject of poetry, and as a poetic strategy. The text itself represents a transgressive "hybrid" that evokes and cites different genres, traditions, and myth versions.

Especially since the 1990s (Koenig Woodyard et al. 2018: 2; Geisenhanslüke et al. 2009: 9-15), an increased scholarly interest in unnatural beings beyond Gothic and Horror Studies (Catani 2010: 89-94) can be observed, culminating in the emergence of the interdisciplinary field of Monster Studies.[1] Following the French poststructuralist philosophers Jacques Derrida[2], Michel Foucault, Georges Canguilhem[3], Hélène Cixous,[4] and Gilles Deleuze, cultural and literary studies have adopted a critical stance towards normative gender and power structures as well as a vivid fascination for

1 Foundational texts for the interdisciplinary study of monsters, monstrosity and the monstrous are collected in Picart's and Browning's reader *Speaking of Monsters* (2012). A brief overview of newer *Monster Studies* is given by Koenig-Woodyard, Nanayakkara and Khatri (2018: 1-24) in their reader of the same title, following their panel at the MLA 2018. Lowe (2015) is the first to apply methods and concepts from *Monster Studies* systematically to classical authors, mainly Virgil and Ovid.

2 Cohen discusses Derrida's essay *The Animal That Therefore I am* (first edition in French 2006) and its significance for the study of animals and monsters in detail (2012: 452-464).

3 Helduser analyzes Foucault's and Canguilhem's views on abnormality, monstrosity, pathology and medical ethics in the introduction to his monograph *Imaginationen des Monströsen* (2016: 12-16). He also features an extensive bibliography on monsters, bodily norms, and disability in literature and philosophy (2016: 380-431).

4 In her seminal essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), Cixous advocates for a re-appropriation of the "horrifying" Medusa in order to establish an aesthetics of *écriture feminine*, a way for women to "write themselves and their bodies" (1976: 875) without being afraid of patriarchal judgements on mistakes and non-conformity. Although Cixous speaks of "woman" as a writing subject and of an essentially "feminine" writing, she includes male authors who write against patriarchal cultural norms, e.g. Genet and Kleist. The model, thus, is not limited to biological sexes or social genders, but rather a subversion of patriarchal literary standards.

abysses and margins of imagination, ruptures, and transgressions of seemingly natural boundaries. Divergence from canonical ideals such as the beautiful, healthy, and abled body as default has suddenly been embraced. Foucault's comments on monstrosity and abnormality in his lecture series *Les Anormaux* (1974-1975) have gained especially wide reception.[5] He defines the monster as "the limit, both the point at which law is overturned and the exception that is found only in extreme cases", which "combines the impossible and the forbidden" and, thus, contradicts any norm and law (Foucault 2003: 56). But Foucault continues a discussion begun much earlier: the demarcating, yet permeable, line between humans and animals was a central concern of ancient philosophy. Aristotle and Pliny the Elder both commented on the philosophical problem that extraordinary, unruly creatures would challenge all taxonomic efforts of classifying and organizing the world into clear-cut categories. Depicting, describing or theorizing about creatures in-between provided an opportunity to rethink the question of what it meant to be human (Hughes 2010: 107-9). Since "the human was a fragile and fluid entity and there were different levels and classifications [e.g. citizens, women, foreigners, slaves] of humanness" (Hudson 2017: 15), the tangents and borders between species had to be constantly negotiated.[6]

While the concept of monstrosity for a long time was charged with supernatural, religious, miraculous, ominous, or magical significance, the early 19th century marked a shift in the attitude towards extraordinary creatures: they were moved from the realm of imagination and wonder to that of the emerging medical and the juridical discourse (Foucault 2003: 62), with stigmatization of nonconformity as a result of this paradigm shift which is often referred to as the "naturalization of monstrosity" (Catani 2010: 92-3; Zürcher 2004: 11). The monster discourse has since included

5 See for example Koenig-Woodyard et al. 2018: 4-14, Schmitz-Emans 2010: 110-25, Geisenhanslüke et al. 2009: 9-11, and Overthun 2009: 43-80.

6 The Classics have also shown increased interest in the study of monsters: the collective volumes edited by Farkas et al. (1987) and Atherton (1998) discuss monsters and monstrosity in classical cultures. The volume *Ovide, figures de l'hybride* (2009), ed. by H. Casanova-Robin, collects essays on Ovid's composite creatures and their reception in world literature. Gevaert & Laes provide an overview of milestones in the scholarship on monstrosity and antiquity (2013: 211-214), before they move on to questions of deformation and disability. In his monograph *Monsters and Monstrosity in Augustan Poetry* (2015), Dunstan Lowe analyzes monsters, hybrids, allegorized beings, and embodiments of monstrous femininity (Furies, Harpies, etc.) in Virgil and Ovid. His pioneering application of critical, poststructuralist, and feminist theory, monster studies, and ancient social history of deformation to textual monsters in Augustan epic reinforces my own approach towards Ovidian hybrids.

medical treatises on deformations and birth defects on the one hand, laws against the transgression of "natural" boundaries on the other. Traces of the associative blurring of monstrosity and pathological phenomena are still visible. Studies of extraordinary bodies are often closely connected to the study of physical or intellectual disability (Foucault 2003: 63; Gevaert & Laes 2013: 223-7). The study of disabilities and impairment is, therefore, still an integral part of critical approaches towards the otherness of monstrous creatures. The field of disability studies emerged in the late 1980s, when the humanities and the social sciences started to support contemporary activist campaigns which advocated for disability rights, anti-stigmatization, inclusion, and empowerment of people with disabilities and impairments in the US (Hall 2016: 19-29).[7] Disability studies emphasize the artificiality of normalcy and the temporality of health, and criticize the "compulsory able-bodiedness" in society (McRuer 2018: 190). While the term "impairment" may refer to a specific medical condition, critical disability studies understand the label "disability" as a sociopolitical construct: "Put in stark terms, [this] social model view suggests that wheelchair users might have a mobility impairment, but they are disabled by the lack of […] appropriate access facilities" (Hall 2016: 21). Gender and queer studies share many principles and concerns with disability studies. Beyond the striving for social justice and equality, feminist scholars such as Donna Haraway in her *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) also embrace assistive technology and prostheses as chances for post-human enhancement beyond essentialist binary categories (Hall 2016: 40-7). Especially in literary studies, prostheses are understood in a metaphorical sense to signify concepts of intertextual interdependence, as opposed to the patriarchal ideal of authorial subjectivity (Hall 2016: 63-7). In classical scholarship, the interest in disability and impairment has notably increased over the last twenty years,[8] despite some intrinsic challenges: understood as a social construct rather than a measurable given, the study of

7 More details on the historical and foundational backgrounds of the field can be found in the two collective volumes *Foundations of Disability Studies* and *Emerging Perspectives on Disability Studies*, both edited by Wappett & Arndt (2013).

8 In *The Staff of Oedipus*, Martha L. Rose provides a comprehensive account of newer research on disability and deformation in antiquity (2003: 6-7). Pioneering titles are Robert Garland's *The Eye of the Beholder* (1995) and Daniel Ogden's *The Crooked Kings of Ancient Greece* (1997). More recently, Christian Laes (co-)edited two volumes on the subject: *Disabilities in Roman Antiquity: Disparate Bodies a capite ad calcem* (2013) and *Disability in Antiquity* (2017). Dunstan Lowe's synthetization of monster and disability studies to understand extraordinary bodies in ancient literature (2015: 44-96) is similar to my own approach.

disability in antiquity must be carefully aware of audacious retrospective diagnoses, of authoritative biases in historical accounts on otherness, as well as of intersections with class, age, race and gender (Rose 2003: 2-4; Laes et al. 2013: 1-8; Graumann 2013: 202-4). While my thesis does not join the socio-historical discourses on physical and mental disabilities in antiquity, I do apply concepts and principles from disability studies in a broader, metaphorical way throughout the following textual analysis: "purity" and "natural perfection" are called into question and understood not as a norm, but as unattainable and undesirable impossibilities. Physical oddities, inconsistency, and alterity, in turn, are treated as advantageous rather than as inhibiting impairments. The (in)sufficiency of "normal" human, animal, and textual bodies is pointed out in their dependency on prostheses and artificial augmentation – elements from other literary genres, limbs from different biological species, or instruments and devices entirely extraneous to either kind of *corpus*.

Definitions of monstrosity and hybridity vary significantly, and so do the meanings assigned to these extraordinary beings both in antiquity and today. The Greek τέρατα were largely feared, abhorred, and slaughtered, since any chthonic, wild creature was considered a threat for the civilized patriarchal world (Felton 2012: 104). While the Epic Cycle probably included fantastic θαύματα, the "Homeric restraint in the presentation of the marvellous is well documented", and suggests a devotion to probability and verisimilitude on the poet's side (Nelis 2009: 252). Hybrid and shape-shifting beings, however, were also worshipped, as Emma Aston shows in her trans-disciplinary evaluation of archeological, iconographic and literary sources *Mixanthrôpoi: Animal-human hybrid deities in Greek religion* (2011). Despite its sound and origin, the word "hybrid" was not applied to composite creatures in classical Greek – instead, one or two constitutive elements were precisely named, as in ἡμίονος ("half-donkey" = mule) or τραγέλαφος ("goat-stag"), the latter being, according to Aristotle, a mythical "imaginative animal" (Létoublon 2009: 23). While Roman writers associate cults for theriomorphic deities stereotypically with "oriental" Egypt (Rosati 2009: 273-87), Greek and Roman cultures share with their Near Eastern neighbors (Felton 2012: 104-26) the same taste for "man slaughters beast"-narratives, featuring a male hero's victory over a frightening, ugly, brutal, blood-thirsty, often female, creature (Aston 2011: 34-5). In Roman mythology, more positive

attitudes towards wondrous anomalies can be found as well: etymologically, the Latin *monstrum* relates to *monstrare* (to show) and *monere* (to warn) and refers to divine omens or warning signs, thus closely connected to *prodigium* (Gevaert & Laes 2013: 213-4; Lowe 2015: 8-12).[9] Romans of the late Republic and the early Empire even displayed a morbid fascination for the grotesque freakery, the bizarre strangeness, and the disruptive potential of physical abnormalities (Felton 2012: 127-8; Lowe 2015: 44-69).[10] Depictions of physical oddities and monstrous creatures exist both from Greek and Roman cultures, often in apotropaic contexts, for example on mosaics, cameos, hand mirrors, or cult objects (Trentin 2017: 235-45). Manifold as they are, frequently repeated common traits include morphological deformation, hybridity, extraordinary physical powers, and hostility towards humans (Brittnacher 2009: 154; Felton 2012: 104). Bestiaries and teratological catalogues list countless different monstrous species.[11] Among these, hybrid creatures represent the largest group, including well-known creatures from classical mythology like the Minotaur, Centaurs, Sirens, Chimeras, Sphinxes, Gorgons, and Hermaphrodites. Such hybrid and liminal beings, which combine at least two different normatively acknowledged species, genres or genders, are particularly transgressive: "The too-precise laws of nature as set forth by science are gleefully violated in the freakish compilation of the monster's body" (Cohen 1996: 6-7). Modern scholars of ancient monsters emphasize their significance for the study of human imagination: inexistent

9 Intersexual "hermaphrodites" represent an interesting example of changing attitudes towards extraordinary bodies in Rome: in early Republican times, intersex individuals were interpreted as prodigies for crises that needed to be executed or abandoned; imperial times, however, made them a source of pleasure to be enjoyed by the decadent rich. Anthony Corbeill analyzes this shift in detail in his chapter "The Prodigious Hermaphrodite" (2015: 143-69). I am gratefully indebted to Catherine Connors who brought this point to my attention, alongside with her mild criticism of Corbeill's use of language when talking about the condition of "hermaphrodites" in Rome *per litteras*.

10 Suetonius and Plutarch, for example, mention Roman "monstrosities markets" which probably resembled the carnivalesque "freak shows" in the 19th century CE (Hardie 2009a: 13-4; Felton 2012: 128). Gevaert & Laes mention that gladiatorial games with dwarfs, fools, and women as pugilists were popular in the first century CE (2013: 224-7). For further history of and theory on freak culture, cf. Garland Thomson's introduction to the volume *Freakery* (1996: 1-19), Lowe's subchapter "Imperial Monsters" (2015: 57-69), and the entire volume *Paradox and the Marvellous in Augustan Literature and Culture*, edited by Philip Hardie (2009a).

11 An early and extensive bestiary can be found in Pliny's *Naturalis Historiae*, especially the systematic catalogues of monstrous creatures and deformations in books 6 and 7. Pliny's lists of *mirabilia* and his descriptions of un- or supernatural oddities have also been widely influential for medieval 'monsterology'. Elegant explorations of Pliny's significance for Western perceptions of monstrosity, alterity and normativity can be found, for example, in Lowe 2015: 50-7; Felton 2012: 127; Gevaert & Laes 2013: 217-21; and Hardie 2009a: 11-12. J. J. Clauss noted *per litteras* that Callimachus' collections of strange phenomena in his catalogue of παράδοξα might have influenced later writers' bestiaries.

yet imaginable, hybrids are "créations de l'esprit" and "productions de l'imagination humaine, pour les unes totalement oniriques, pour d'autres, avatars fantasmés de diverses mésaventures de la perception ou de l'entendement" (Jouteur 2009: 43). Hopman explains her fascination with composite creatures in a similar manner: as "mental constructs", monsters "offer a privileged point of entry into the collective imagination of a people" (2012: xii). Hybrids inhabit a limbus between *tremendum* and *fascinans* (Gevaert & Laes 2013: 211; Brittnacher 2009: 155) and have stereotypically been disparaged as the result of "unlawful" intercourse[12] or other "unholy" acts of mixture[13] and are, thus, aligned with "bastards" and "freaks" (Foucault 2003: 63-4; Schmitz-Emans 2010: 118-20; Bartl & Catani 2010: 12), symbols of moral depravity or political turmoil (Lowe 2015: 14-27). Because hybrid monsters deviate from any notion of norm and standard, they call for "a radical rethinking of boundary and normality" (Cohen 1996: 6).

Attempts to ban these unruly beings from the public sphere as well as from artistic and literary representation because of their disruptive potential have been numerous. In his introduction to the volume *Paradox and the Marvellous in Augustan Literature and Culture*, Hardie suggests that Augustus' socio-political measures of moral restoration might have been an "anxious response to the fact that the age of Augustus really was an 'age of the marvellous'" (2009a: 3). While monsters and marvels are commonly situated before or after the notoriously strict "Augustan classicism", the 'marvellous' novelties under Augustus and the swift transformations of the empire's boundaries, Roman architecture, and societal norms redefined the standards for imaginability decisively. Hence, the "Augustan sense of order in both the political and the aesthetic spheres" did not solely attempt to suppress or exclude the monstrous and the marvellous, but rather to limit, contain, and manage these phenomena by imposing stylistic and moral rules (Hardie 2009a: 4). Lucretius' claim for the

12 This idea can also be found outside of the imaginative world of myth. Röttgers, in his introduction to the essay collection *Monster* (2010) analyzes European moral and law texts before the Enlightenment according to which a disabled child's mother could be accused for her immoral motherhood (2010: 10-4).

13 Very recently, the artificial creation of (monstrous) living beings has gained attention within classical scholarship: Rogers, Stevens, and Weiner have collected numerous articles on mythical creators like Prometheus and Pygmalion in their volume *Frankenstein and Its Classics* (2018).

abandonment of impossible hybrid creatures from science and natural philosophy (*DRN* 5.878-924)[14] and Vitruvius' "attack on the taste for monstrous and anti-realist forms" in wall painting (Hardie 2009a: 5; cf. Lowe 2015: 19-23) are part of this restrictive policy, as well as poetic discourses on unity. The latter is most prominently treated by Horace who, in analogy with many didactic treatises on poetry, understands literary works metaphorically as bodies designated for perfection and beauty – values stereotypically equalized with order, harmony, evenness, proportion, and balance (Fischer 2010: 48-51; Schmitz-Emans 2010: 121-2). In the opening lines of his *Ars Poetica*, Horace uses the image of a hybrid creature as a deterrent example for ill-constructed, unmatching texts:

> Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam iungere si velit et varias inducere plumas undique collatis membris, ut turpiter atrum desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne, spectatum admissi, risum teneatis, amici? (Hor. *Ars* 1-5)
>
> To a human head if a painter should wish to join a horse's neck, and make multi-colored feathers grow on limbs gathered from all over, so that horribly in a black fish-tail she ends, a beautiful woman up above, would you, friends let in for a viewing, hold back your laughter? (Trans. Ferriss-Hill)

This aesthetic judgment becomes central for the poetological discourse which praises unity, purity, and clarity, while disparaging narrative and stylistic dissolution. Ancient aesthetics measure unity and consistency of artistic works based on their analogy with nature, "whose unity consists of the reciprocal integration of various parts, each of which is indispensable for the completeness of the whole" (Citroni 2009: 20). Hence, a complex, non-linear, shape-shifting text is, for the prescriptive Horace,[15] equally unnatural, confusing, and ridiculous as a deformed, impaired, female and hence even more monstrous, chimera, "like a sick man's dreams, such that neither head nor foot can be reconciled with a single form" (*Ars* 7). According to the most recent commentary, the hybrid creature "combines all four branches of the ancient animal kingdom" (Ferris-Hill 2019: 39), and evokes creatures from Homer, Hesiod, Plato, Virgil, and Lucretius. The enigmatic disjointedness of limbs is "mirrored and accentuated by the tortuous syntax" (Ferris-Hill 2019: 40). Although *ex*

14 Lucretius' harsh stance against the possibility of hybrid and shape-shifting creatures seems to contrast with Empedocles' accounts on Centaurs, Chimaeras, and Scyllas in his treatise *On Nature*, as far as the fragmentary evidence reveals (Nelis 2009: 253-6).

15 Horace is not alone in this judgment of taste: Up to the 18th century, sets of poetic rules by authorities like Pierre Daniel Huet (*Traité de l'origine des romans*, 1670), Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (*L'Art Poétique*, 1674), Alexander Pope (*An Essay on Criticism*, 1711), or Johann Christoph Gottsched (*Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst*, 1730) referred to the monster-analogy when they advised aspiring authors to maintain cohesion and coherence in their writings (Fischer 2010: 48-51). Resistance against these later didactics about poetry was, for example, waged by Romantic poets who embraced deformation, monstrosity, ambiguity, and generic transgression (Catani 2010: 94-108).

negativo, Horace invites his audience to assemble the pieces "into a coherent whole, since we are, after all, supposed to be looking at a painting". The imaginative process, however, is difficult:

> [S]ome components are missing, we begin to realize, others inadequately explained. That the head belongs to a woman is unexpected (in this Greco-Roman milieu a human head is by default a man's), and this causes us to go back to the beginning/top and start over, readjusting and refining our mental image. […] Of the body, on the other hand, we are told nothing: is it that of a woman (although the neck is equine) or a horse (by extension downwards from the neck), or a bird? […] The need to choose between the possible syntaxes of *collatis membris* must be part of the general illusion: Horace is deft enough a poet that when he creates an ambiguous grammatical construction, and with it an ambiguous image, he typically intends for us to ponder" (Ferris-Hill 2019: 41-2).

Although Horace demands harmony and clarity and demonstrates his familiarity with Aristotle's poetic principles (Citroni 2009: 25-34), his own *Ars Poetica* in parts lacks unity and structure, and his oeuvre repeatedly turns to grotesque aesthetics (Ferris-Hill 2019: 44-6; Pietropaolo 2018: 193n2). Later on in his poem (*Ars* 73-85), he characterizes the well-established poetic genres epic, elegy, iambic poetry, hymn, tragedy, comedy, and satire according to their apt rhythm, style, register, and the emotions they shall evoke in the audience lest the poet wants to be ridiculed. Only comedy and satire can, therefore, feature elements from other genres (Ferris-Hill 2019: 48-51). Nevertheless, in the opening lines, he has himself de*monstra*ted a possible narrative mode for the ekphrasis of impossible hybrid creatures of which neither form nor content can be assigned to a certain generic category – the signifier (distorted syntax) supports the unimaginable signified (the chimeric female monster) which thus becomes, if not natural, at least imaginable. In other works, too, Horace "does not always obey his own injunction" (Hardie 2009a: 10), for instance, when he plays with genres or features witches and marvels like his own transformation into a swan (Citroni 2009: 28-30). His self-subversion reveals an ambiguity which is paradigmatic for Augustan culture: the fear of violating the laws of nature in a manner of hubris on the one hand, the fascination for artistic transgression, god-like creation, and human transcendence through arts on the other (Armstrong 2009: 90-4).

The theoretical discourse on hybrid genres in classical literature was fueled by Wilhelm Kroll's seminal chapter "Die Kreuzung der Gattungen" (1924). Considering the many dialects, meters, and topics in Hellenistic poetry and its Roman heirs, the positivistic German philologist sees a "crossing" of generic boundaries as constitutive for Augustan poetry: issues formerly reserved for certain meters are suddenly dealt with in others, language registers alternate, and new genres are

formed through a combination of others (Kroll 1964 [1924]: 202-9). Using biological and genetic metaphors, Kroll speaks of the "*production* of new literary species by means of cross-breeding" (Barchiesi 2001: 147) or "miscegenation" (145), when he describes Augustan "hybrids" of epic and elegy (Catullus' epyllia; Virgil's *Georgics*; Ovid's *Fasti*), of elegy and rhetorically refined letters (Ovid's *Heroides*), of epic and letter (Horace's letters), or of bucolics and elements from a wide range of poetic genres (Horace's *Odes* and Virgil's *Georgics*). In her summary of Kroll, S. M. Braund focuses on the implications of his biological terminology:

> either texts are pure, or they are hybrids produced by parents of different genres. Such cross-fertilization can, of course, be rich and productive: it resists the dangers of generic 'endogamy', whereby incest will ultimately produce throwbacks (rather as genetic engineering might produce clones). 'Exogamy' is clearly necessary, to provide 'new blood'. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the potential here for implicit value-judgements about generic purity and impurity (2001: 139)

Kroll's underlying assumption is one of generic essentialism – allegedly stable generic categories are mixed in an act of intellectual decadence (Barchiesi 2001: 146-8). But Kroll does not mention Horace's *Ars* or other Augustan statements on rules of genre, but deliberately "occludes" them, as they might have disrupted his theory:

> Roman poets not only avoid advertising *Kreuzung*, they tend to stage programmatic respect to a traditional genre, precisely to be able to dramatize their work as deviation or genre-bending […]. To this end, they need genres to be perceived as strong, pure, and sufficiently unmixed; they practice a reconstructive approach to genre, not a capricious reshuffling (Barchiesi 2001: 156).

If the strategic reference to generic clichés is thus acknowledged, the paradoxical irony of Horace's programmatic becomes readable as an assertion of poetic self-confidence which can just be surpassed by one other Augustan poet, the only one whose most canonical work had not yet been written when Horace published his didactic treatise (Citroni 2009: 22): Ovid, "the poster boy of Augustan generic hybridization" (Hinds 2000: 224), who enjoys asserting prescriptive generic rules while at the same time transgressing and blurring them subversively as no other. He embraces the "contamination that epic undergoes when mingling with other genres", which, aptly enough for the Augustan *enfant terrible*, "implies in some sense the abandonment of its totalizing pretenses, and of the character of absolute 'truth' that epic innately possesses" (Rosati 2002: 281). It is, hence, logical, that Ovid's oeuvre is central to many investigations on Augustan genre transgression and metatextual monstrosity. In their tellingly superscripted chapter "The *Met.*: A Literary *Monstrum*", Gildenhard & Zissos summarize the discussion:

> the heated and ultimately inconclusive debate that has flared up around the question of whether the Metamorphoses is an epic, an erotization of epic, a parody of epic, a conglomeration of genres granted equal rights, an epic sui generis or simply a poem sui generis might seem to indicate that Ovid has achieved a total breakdown of generic conventions, voiding the validity of generic analysis altogether" (2016: 15).

Traditional approaches to the *Metamorphoses*' generic affiliation either sought to highlight their essentially epic traits while minimizing all deviant elements, as Richard Heinze (1919) famously did in his study of the differences between Ovid's two Persephone-accounts in the hexametric *Met*. and the elegiac *Fasti*, followed by Brooks Otis, who also asserts the consistent epic unity of Ovid's major work (1970: 83-9), or, like Kroll, to state the opposite, "the poem's impurity as an epic" (Hinds 2000: 221). Newer Ovid-scholarship in the wake of Conte and Hinds rather synthesizes these contrary positions, as "generic inconsistency in a piece of poetry" (Hinds 1987: 115) does not automatically prove a lack of generic awareness on the poet's part, but a continuation of the Alexandrian playfulness towards tradition and innovation of literary forms (Hinds 1987: 116; Jouteur 2001: 209-11). Instead of playing down the "gap between prescription and practice, which is so fundamental to the construction of genre in a classical Roman poem," Hinds acknowledges the "continuing and active dialectic between the genres so mixed, for author and readers alike, 'staged' within the text of the poem concerned" (2000: 222). Poetic *recusationes* – apologetic explanations why authors apply certain genres or topics and not others – become the meta-reflective locus for such generic explorations of the Augustan poets: here, the genre "stages itself", the text becomes a "spectacle of literary genres" (Conte 1994 [1991]: 123-4). This ludic enterprise, however, also extends across Alexandrian poetics themselves: in announcing an epic *carmen perpetuum* (*Met*. 1.4)[16], Ovid seems to digress from his Hellenistic idol Callimachus' poetic principles, but he confirms them yet again oxymoronically when he connects his single continuous poem with the imperative *deducite* (1.4), the Callimachean term for writing refined, playful Hellenistic poetry (Rosati 2002: 277; Jouteur 2001: 192). Performative in

16 Ovid's proem (*Met*. 1.1-4) has been interpreted almost *ad nauseam*, which is why I refrain from summarizing the existing discussions of its concise brevity, its programmatic annunciation of a topic quite unusual for epic, Ovid's self-conscious thematization of a shift in style from erotic elegy to hexametric epic, ingeniously mirrored in the second verse, when the readers' expectations are metrically thwarted exactly after the word "mutastis", thus encapsulating the author's project of a metamorphic poetic in a metareferential nutshell, the self-positioning between traditional Homeric or Virgilian epic and Callimachean poetic principles, and the political and religious implications of Ovid's worldview of instability and change. For overviews of the most prominent aspects, cf. Myers 1994: 2-5 and Fantham 2004: 5; for more detailed analyses, see, e.g., Kenney 1976; Hinds 1987: 19-22; 121; Gildenhard & Zissos 2000: 68-70 or Feldherr 2010: 1-4.

its self-awareness, the concept of genre transgression thus transcends that of generic hybridization in a deconstructionist manner which recalls *avant la lettre* Jacques Derrida's inherently subversive *Loi du Genre*: "The law and the counter-law serve each other citations summoning each other to appear, and each recites the other in this proceeding"[17] (1980: 58), or as Braund puts it more concisely: "if a system has 'rules', then that is an invitation to break them" (2001: 140). When Horace, Ovid, and their contemporaries seem to re-establish prescriptive generic categories, the citation of blue-print genres already entails deviance. Although Derrida does not take meter into account – an essential genre marker for ancient literature (Hinds 2000: 234) –, his relativistic model of intergeneric citation that allows for subversive resistance against and awareness of systemic norms appears to be less problematic than Kroll's cross-bred hybrids. Far from producing decadent and degenerate mixtures, Augustan poets show "a healthy tendency […] to treat literary form dynamically" (Hinds 2000: 235), for example through the integration of "unepic" topics into hexametric epics that demonstrates the flexibility of this allegedly heroic and "masculine" genre[18], or vice versa, by treating subjects of epic grandeur in stereotypically light-hearted elegiac distichs, as Ovid, for instance, in the *Fasti* (Hinds 1987: 115-6). If Derrida's *Law of Genre* already entails its potential breach, the act of transgression also involves and reproduces the limit it diverges from. This reverse figure has been prominently discussed by Michel Foucault in his "Preface to Transgression" (1963), an essay with immense impact on philosophy, humanities and social sciences[19]: "The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely

17 The original French phrasing appears, at least to me, to be less complicated than Ronell's translation into English: La loi et la contre-loi se citent à comparaître et se récitent l'une l'autre en ce procès."

18 This is a point already expressed by Myers, who sees epic as "the one genre that can accommodate and indeed even aims for such [generic] diversity (1994: 12-3). The argument is further developed by Hinds in his discussion of generic essentialism and dynamic dialectic: Although often stated as extraneous to epics, the presence of women, love, and passion is always considered and restated in the very genre. This "institutionalized otherness within epic of the genre's female and erotic elements" (Hinds 2000: 232) is thereby transformed into an integral characteristic of epic itself (cf. esp. 223-31 and 241-4).

19 In the decades following Foucault, transgression has gained tremendous popularity among scholars, a fact that has been perceived not only positively: "Transgression has become a safe topic for the progressive intellectual", states Ashley Tauchert in *Against Transgression* (2008: 10). Her arguments center around the well-established polemics against literary theory and poststructuralist philosophy in general. It might be stated that her very enterprise confirms Derrida's and Foucault's very findings on a metatextual level: if the study of transgression is considered a new norm, the governing standards require a backlash such as Tauchert's.

uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows" (Foucault 1977: 34). Accordingly, transgression in Augustan poetry in general and in Ovid particularly does not reveal a lack of interest in traditional forms, but rather a keen awareness of the poetic tradition the playful transgressors depend on. Appreciation for such transgressive poetic undertakings requires a familiarity with the existing frameworks, both in the author and the attentive readers. Consequently, it becomes possible to read Ovid's *Heroides*, for instance, as "an elegy that seeks to *coopt* and subsume all other generic systems to its own narrow but all-encompassing worldview" (Hinds 2000: 222, reporting Conte). When Ovid switches between narrative modes, stylistic registers, and genre-specific markers, he expects his audience to recognize the matrices he cites, synthesizes, and converts (cf. Hinds 1987: 117). Interestingly, Barkan traces an analogous move in Ovid's main topic:

> Metamorphosis depends on our prior assumption that human beings, animals, and plants, or land, sea, and air are rigid distinctions. Ovid assumes we believe in those distinctions, and he reinforces that belief. […] The categories exist in all their clarity so that fictions can be made about spectacular transformations among them (1986: 58).

Once more, material and form confirm each other. Contradictions and inconsistencies are to be noticed and appreciated as "'effects of alienation', exposing and reflecting upon the genre's own preconditions, constitutive elements, and grounding premises" (Gildenhard & Zissos 2000: 75-6). Insofar Ovid intends his *Metamorphoses* to be a polyphonic and multi-layered "*dialogue* of genres" (Farrell 1992: 235) or "kaléidoscope générique" (Jouteur 2001: 89), the text is anachronistically reminiscent of the "novelistic discourse" as described by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin who defines the genre of the modern novel as intrinsically "hybrid" and "dialogic". Although Bakhtin's language bears traces of their physical, organic, or carnal origins, his understanding of "hybrids" is less biological than Kroll's "cross-breeding". Bakhtin's metaphorical hybridization is "a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance between two different linguistic consciousnesses" (1981: 358). The modern novel might be the most obvious genre featuring different linguistic systems, direct speeches and internal narrations, naturalistically depicted differences in the characters' individual expression and dialect, or narratological intricacies such as a conflict between a narrator's and a character's voice. Ovid's *Met.*, however, meet Bakhtin's definition of a "novelistic hybrid" – "an artistically

organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another" (361) – quite accurately.[20] Just like the novel, Ovid's elegiac epic is also

> pregnant with an endless multitude of dialogic confrontations, which do not and cannot resolve it, and which, as it were, only locally (as one out of many possible dialogues) illustrate this endless, deep-lying dialogue of languages […]. A dialogue of languages is a dialogue of social forces perceived not only in their static co-existence, but also as a dialogue of different times, epochs and days, a dialogue that is forever dying, living, being born: co-existence and becoming are here fused into an indissoluble concrete unity that is contradictory, multi-speeched and heterogeneous (Bakhtin 1981: 365).

But Ovid rejoices not only in literary hybridity, but also in the transgression and confusion of categories, genders,[21] bodies, and species, as he programmatically embraces the most unnatural phenomenon of artistic hubris – transformation. "Fascinated by distortions of all kinds", Ovid is attracted to monstrous figures "since they symbolize the rejection of received wisdom, including aesthetic, political, or moral strictures" (Lowe 2015: 7). Consequently,

> le monstre hybride perd chez Ovide ses connotations négatives pour devenir un symbole de l'imagination créatrice, autorisant les possibles, libérant l'imaginaire, repoussant les frontières de l'invention, héritant par là-même d'un programme authentiquement original et même inédit dans le paysage conceptuel de la *phantasia* (Jouteur 2009: 44).

Ovid's hybridity can be read against the backdrop of a tradition that Ovid evokes and rejects at the same time, fashioning himself as a poetic *enfant terrible*. His persona's aspirations are revealed candidly: he knows about a poet's power to create fabulous beings that are otherwise impossible or scorned as objectionable, as he openly states in *Am*. 3.12.21-2, and presents his monsters qua poetic fabrications (Jouteur 2009: 47). He exploits their hybridity "comme emblème de la fécondité de l'imagination créatrice" (Jouteur 2009: 58). Both these aspects of Ovid's monstrosity – generic hybridization as well as hybrid and shapeshifting creatures – have been discussed extensively, yet mostly separately.[22] In the following, I venture to merge both concepts of hybridity and transgression, as has been done, for instance, with the concept of metamorphosis, now commonly acknowledged

20 Although Bakhtin, curiously enough given his classicist background and the strikingly analogous interests, never explicitly applied his theories on the grotesque body and its relation to nature and landscape, abysses of human sexuality, carnivalesque laughter, travesty, excess, the dialogic principle, the chrono-topos, polyphony and hetero-glossia to Ovid, I am at least not alone in doing so: Cf. Farrell 1992: 235-68; Segal 1998: 11-2; Edwards 2002: 27; Bracht Branham 2002: xiii-xv; Nikolopoulos 2004: 24-27; and O'Hara 2007: 120-1. Yet, an extensive comparative analysis of Bakhtin and Ovid has unfortunately not been published so far.

21 According to Rimell, this holds true for gender roles in Ovid's entire work: "While elegy, traditionally, has room 'for one voice only', tending to reduce everything to the persona of the poet-lover, Ovid's image-conscious poetry is often focused on *dialogue over monologue*, moving at the borders of known worlds, both real and imaginary" (2006: 4; my emphasis).

22 Exceptions are, as noted above, Lowe's monograph (2015), and Casanova-Robin's edited volume (2009).

not only as Ovid's main topic, but also as a guiding principle for his shapeshifting poetics. Does the narration of monstrous creatures also demand a special, "monstrous", narrative mode? Does the textual depiction of composite hybrids require generic multiplicity? Are such extraordinary creatures even imaginable in a non-hybrid form? Are intra-textual hybrid creatures responsible for Ovid's polyphonic collage of voices and genres, paving the way for a discourse of alterity comparable to Cixous' *écriture féminine* or Bakhtin's dialogic principle? To what degree do monsters challenge the traditionally masculinist epic genre? If patriarchal thinking links human to male, is the non-human automatically feminine? Is there anything we can label "pure" or "normal", or are the concepts of normativity and purity inherently hybrid and subversive? Questions of this kind are central to my approach towards the extraordinary, unruly creatures Ovid features in his works.

Since the 1980s and 1990s, much valuable work has been done on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. I do not hubristically strive to offer a new conclusive narratological analysis, an all-encompassing model to interpret the *Met.*, or a complete commentary on monstrous beings in Ovid's work. My reading of Ovid's hybrid creatures and their narrative habitats rather focuses on the dialogical interplay of genres and species in episodes in which Ovid explicitly addresses anatomical hybrids (Medusa, Minotaur, Centaurs, Scylla) while at the same time self-consciously travestying expectations of generic purity by adopting and adapting elements from literary traditions beyond epic.

2. Slaying the Epic Beast or Canonizing the Female Artist? Medusa (*Met*. 4.772-803[23])

One of the many models to grasp the *Metamorphoses*' internal structure involves the loosely chronological division of the fifteen books into three pentads, whereof the first is associated with the mythical deeds of deities, the second with those of heroes, and the third with Roman history and, hence, the deeds of humans (e.g. Holzberg 2002 [1998]: 115). By "invoking not only Homer and Virgil but also Hesiod, Ennius, and Lucretius", the first pentad signals "that the *Metamorphoses* will combine the traditions of heroic and didactic epos in a comprehensive culmination of genre" (Keith 2001: 239). While Ovid never lets us forget his elegiac background, which is visible early on, e. g. in Apollo's and Jupiter's amorous pursuits, the first pentad involves many conventional topics of high epics: cosmogony, assembly of the gods, cultivation of land, founding of cities, early civilization, and epic adventures of heroes (Keith 2001: 239-40; Gildenhard & Zissos 2016: 14-6). This last issue, the "quintessentially epic hero whose *uirtus* is tested in a series of trials" (Keith 2001: 240) is of interest here: at the end of Book 4, Ovid offers an analeptic micro-epic account of Perseus, the son of Jupiter[24] and Danae (*Met*. 4.610-5.251). In this "Perseid", the young male hero travels, encounters various marvels, fights against villains, rescues the beautiful Andromeda, overcomes an amorous rival, and succeeds in killing the monstrous snaky-haired Medusa who petrifies everyone looking at her.[25] These plot elements, alongside verbatim allusions (Hardie 2002: 179), can each be assigned to epic predecessors: as a strategist and favorite of Minerva, Perseus resembles the cunning Odysseus, as a fighter, he reminds us of Hercules, the battle-scenes, adventures and encounters with aggressors and monstrous creatures recall both *Iliad* and *Aeneid*, and the pursuit of Andromeda against her first fiancé Phineus recalls Odysseus' combat with Penelope's suitors and Aeneas' fight against Turnus,

23 Latin text quotations follow Tarrant's OCT. For longer passages from Ovid, I use (unless otherwise specified) Miller's prose translation, revised by Goold (LCL 42), with rare occasional changes. Translations of shorter passages and paraphrases are mine.

24 Perseus has to defend his divine ancestry repeatedly against disbelievers, a fact that Feldherr interprets in a specifically Roman context as a parallel to Augustus' acclaimed divine descent which the emperor used strategically during the civil war (Feldherr 2010: 315).

25 Enterline analyzes in detail that it is not Medusa's gaze, head or hair, but her *os* – the term for face and/or mouth Ovid iterates exceptionally often in this passage – that freezes her contestants (2000: 16-17; 39-90).

Lavinia's former fiancé (Keith 2001: 240-5; Feldherr 2010: 330-1). Thus condensing epic models, "Ovid neither parodies nor burlesques high epic, but rather reinterprets the form, intensifying both the brutality of Homer and the sentimentality of Virgil by limiting his war narrative to 250 lines" (Keith 2001: 245).

But Ovid only takes up such well-known epic plots if they provide him with "a chance for novelty" (Fantham 2004: 90). Consequently, Perseus is "no ordinary hero of brute force […]. Rather, his exceptional qualities are versatility, mobility, and canniness, making him precisely apt to wield the powers of metamorphosis" (Barkan 1986: 52). Prequels being postponed, the reader encounters Jupiter's son for the first time mid-flight and already carrying Medusa's severed head (*Met*. 4.615: *uiperei referens spolium memorabile monstri*). The blood dripping from her throat fertilizes the dry, porous Libyan earth, spawning the region's many serpents (4.617-620: *cumque super Libycas uictor penderet harenas*, / *Gorgonei capitis guttae cecidere cruentae*; / *quas humus exceptas uarios animauit in angues*, / *unde frequens illa est infestaque terra colubris*). Ovid juxtaposes realistic etiology and wondrous fictitious elements: the image of a flying hero holding his enemy's snake-haired head and a well-known geographical fact – the variety of snakes in Libya (Klein 2009: 199). Perseus is depicted as an embodiment of stereotypically male mobility and activity. As he travels, unnaturally quickly through his magical winged sandals, he throws into contrast the feminized landscapes and female bodies he encounters. All the "female characters embody immobile fixity" (Keith 2009: 262). Liberating and revitalizing the chained, thus immobile and, effectively, statue-like (4.675: *marmoreum ratus esset opus*) Andromeda, "reveals the hero's worthiness to free her from her stony condition" (Barkan 1986: 53). After a short instance of paralyzing astonishment on his part (4.676-7),[26] he overcomes the sea-monster, which threatens the maiden, through mastery of the surrounding landscape and strategic usage of rocks, heights (Keith 2009: 268), and his "special ability with shadow and reflection" (Barkan 1986: 53) which allows him to deceive and attack the beast from different angles. Perseus' victory is rewarded with his marriage to the princess

26 As Liveley remarks: "At the first sight of her statue-like beauty Perseus falls in love, and with a brilliant flash of Ovidian humour, almost out of the sky as – dumbstruck by this vision of helpless, modest, loveliness – he forgets to flap his wings" (2011: 61). On his stupefaction as a reaction to art, cf. Enterline 2000: 29.

and the dowry of her native land (*Met*. 4.697-705). At the wedding banquet, he is asked to tell of his pursuit of Medusa (770-1: *fare, precor, Cepheus* [*dixit*], *quanta uirtute quibusque* / *artibus abstuleris crinite draconibus ora*). In length and detail, however, Perseus' narration is nowhere near Odysseus' or Aeneas' retrospective accounts in *Od*. 9-12 and *Aen*. 2-3, respectively, but rather reflects on and parodies "the conventions of Hellenistic narrative, a Hecale-like interest in novelty, intricacy, and setting the most frequently treated subjects in unexpected frames" (Feldherr 2010: 313). The "perfunctoriness and brevity" of Perseus' summary are particularly emphasized by the use of the indirect discourse (Wheeler 1999: 115):

> Gorgoneas tetigisse domos passimque per agros
> perque uias uidisse hominum simulacra ferarumque
> in silicem ex ipsis uisa conuersa Medusa.
> se tamen horrendae clipei, quem laeua gerebat,
> aere repercusso formam adspexisse Medusae,
> dumque grauis somnus colubrasque ipsamque tenebat,
> eripuisse caput collo […]
> (*Met*. 4.779-85)
>
> [He told] how he came at last to where the Gorgons lived. On all sides through the fields and along the ways he saw the forms of men and beasts changed into stone by one look at Medusa's face. But he himself had looked upon the image of that dread face reflected from the bright bronze shield his left hand bore; and while deep sleep held fast both the snakes and her who wore them, he smote her head clean from her neck […].

While Perseus is hardly ever short of words to praise his heroic deeds vis-à-vis his adversaries, in this account of his main quest he appears far less glamorous. First, he tells of his deception of the Graeae, the Gorgons' aged sisters, – three hags who share a single eye, which Perseus steals in order to blackmail them (4.772-7). Not through fight and strength, but through trickery and theft (4.776), he succeeds in his investigation of the three Gorgons' dwelling place. It is the act of stealing their organ of sight that proves his "mastery of the gaze" which his "heroic masculinity" depends on (Keith 2009: 262). This capacity to deal with the gaze – shadow, perspective, reflection – is crucial in his pursuit of Medusa, the only mortal Gorgon:

> When he approaches the Gorgons, he sees the images (*simulacra*) of the men and beasts who have been turned into stone by one look into Medusa's face. From this he learns a lesson: to look at the Gorgon's face only via its reflected image on his shield. In this way Perseus outwits the monster by using the power of reflection against her. That Perseus's shield becomes a mirror is particularly significant: here is a warrior who can use mirror reflection as his own protection. Gazing into the mirror is still, at least by implication, a dangerous act – it is in a sense Medusa's weapon, since she freezes the image of every beholder – but the hero never gazes into his own reflection, instead wielding the mirror and turning it against others (Barkan 1986: 54).

In former quests, the hero eagerly emphasized that he only resorted to special tools and instruments after he had already proven his physical powers (e.g. 4.653-4). Here, he prides himself upon technically enhancing himself and using tricks where others have failed with strength and open aggression. Only with his direct gaze averted and prostheticised by his mirror-shield can Perseus

approach his victim who, in fact, does not fight or threaten anyone right now, but sleeps (4.784: *dumque grauis somnus colubrasque ipsamque tenebat*). Attacking indirectly, he acts as a hero who has understood the "lesson of culture" and civilization (Rimell 2006: 36, reporting Clair). Barkan interprets Ovid's "Perseid" as a narrative of victory: Perseus successfully breaks away from a pattern established in the preceding episodes of the Thebans Tiresias, Cadmus, Actaeon, and Narcissus, all of whom encounter serpents and/or mirror-images and eventually succumb to their inability – a disability? – to integrate reflections of themselves consciously into their lives (1986: 41-52). These "Theban failures to tackle the serpent or understand the mirror" all result in pitiful metamorphoses, but "in Perseus at last we have a figure who is master of both serpent and mirror" (52). We might add that he is also a master of sexual difference, in contrast especially to Tiresias and Narcissus, having understood only too well that he has to confront the chthonic Other indirectly and in her most inactive, immobile, and least defensive state: sleep. His heroism follows a masculine agenda of taming, silencing, killing, and exploiting the unruly femininity Medusa represents with her stupefying, freezing, transformative and castrating gaze and the "phallic-vulvic" (Rimell 2006: 16) snakes around her head – given to her by his protector Minerva[27], as told in another etiological[28] analepsis:

> […] clarissima forma
> multorumque fuit spes inuidiosa procorum
> illa, neque in tota conspectior ulla capillis
> pars fuit ; inueni, qui se uidisse referret.
> hanc pelagi rector templo uitiasse Mineruae
> dicitur ; auersa est et castos aegide uultus
> nata Iouis texit, neue hoc impune fuisset,
> Gorgoneum crinem turpes mutauit in hydros.
> nunc quoque, ut attonitus formidine terreat hostes,
> pectore in aduerse, quos fecit, sustinet angues.
> (*Met*. 4.794-803)
>
> She was once most beautiful in form, and the jealous hope of many suitors. Of all her beauties, her hair was the most beautiful – for so I learned from one who said had seen her. 'Tis said that in Minerva's temple Neptune, lord of the Ocean, ravished her. Jove's daughter turned away and hid her chaste eyes behind her aegis. And, that the deed might be punished as was due, she changed the Gorgon's locks to ugly snakes. And now to frighten her fear-numbed foes, she still wears upon her breast the snakes which she has made.

The goddess, "quasi-masculine and eternal virgin, protector of cities, helper of male heroes, a child without a mother" (Rimell 2006: 37), is a code for masculine rationality, patriarchal culture and androcentric civilization. A declared enemy of primordial matriarchy or chthonic femininity

27 In other myth versions, it is not Perseus, but Athena who plans or even conducts Medusa's murder (e.g. Euripides' *Ion*). Phinney provides an overview of ancient variants in literature and fine arts (1971: 445-63).

28 Etiology, as Perseus provides it here with his explanation, is also a common means to tame and subdue extraordinary beings, as it "explains and normalizes the Other, indeed assimilates it" (Rosati 2009: 278).

(Loraux 1993 [1984]: 134-5),[29] she turned Medusa's beautiful hair, once an object of admiration and desire by men and gods alike, into snakes – in some versions out of jealousy (e.g. Ps.-Apollodorus, *Bib*. 2.46), in Ovid, however, to punish Medusa for *her* erotic transgression when *being raped* by Neptune in Minerva's temple. To most modern commentators (e.g. Feldherr 2010: 332-3), the blatant "victim-blaming" injustice of Athena's patriarchal understanding of divine law is striking. Enterline, however, points out that "the narrative remains deliberately vague about who is being punished; we should note, for instance, that Medusa's victims are all men" (2000: 28). It might also be argued that the transformation of beauty into horror[30] also protects Medusa from further sexual assault by ravishing men or gods, as will be seen later in the episode of Caenis/Caeneus (*Met*. 12.168-209), but Medusa pays her price for this (ultimately ineffective) safety: she is banned into the abyss of inapproachability and fear, molested, and killed. Her support system – protection through her sisters, the Graeae, and her supernatural powers – eventually fails. Both Minerva and Perseus subsequently use her head or its image, respectively (4.802-3), as an apotropaic shield, thus eternally fixating her in a domesticated position as an "emblem of the inevitable punishment of female power" (Rimell 2006: 17).

A decisive difference between Minerva and Medusa is reproductivity. Apart from the Libyan snakes (4.617-20), Medusa's posthumous fertility also produces two other mythical creatures, allegedly offspring of her intercourse with Neptune: Chrysaor and the winged horse Pegasus are born from her blood (4.785-6: *pennisque fugacem* / *Pegason et fratrem matris de sanguine natos*), the latter being crucial for the etiology of poetry, as his hoofprints open the Muses' spring of inspiration. Rimell observes that we encounter even more of Medusa's conceptual heirs throughout the *Metamorphoses* and Ovid's entire oeuvre: she is a model for other figures of alterity or monstrosity, such as Salmacis, Argus, Envy, Diana or Medea (2006: 27). They inspire awe, fascination, arousal, and horror; they

29 This opposition is perhaps most explicit in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, when Athena in her famous misogynistic speech outdoes the chthonic Furies who fight for matriarchal rights. Nicole Loraux discusses Athena's significance for the Athenian *polis* in rich detail in her book *The Children of Athena* (1993 [1984]).

30 Ovid presents the change in the reversed order when he introduces Medusa as a hideous creature and attributes her extraordinary female beauty only later in the etiological flashback – the monster is, thus, retroactively "maidenized" (Lowe 2015: 100-102). Lowe argues convincingly that Hellenistic and Augustan poetry are fascinated by the tension between beauty and ugliness in feminized monsters (98-113).

reflect gazes and stupefy their viewers or aggressors, or just imitate the Gorgon's hairstyle, as Ovid has his elegiac *puella* Corinna do (Rimell 2006: 22-4). Andromeda offers a first reflection of this kind: "another maiden subject to violation by a creature of the sea […], being punished for something for which she bears no particular culpability" (Feldherr 2010: 333) and whose spectator almost freezes. As Ovid creates imaginative repercussions, lookalikes and soulmates of Medusa, re-citing certain phrases and motifs, he recalls the Gorgo as a theme with variations and alludes to "the experience of seeing Medusa, [that] is the most shocking and wondrous sight of all in Ovidian poetry (not only in the *Met*.), and as such becomes an important paradigm, often shadowing similar encounters" (Rimell 2006: 29). On a literal level, Medusan snakes are core inhabitants of Ovid's books – and especially his bookends. Barchiesi explains that the snake often represents "the end, the conclusion of a text. For ancient readers, whose books were rolls, the sign of the conclusion is a line curved at each end: ƨ" (1997: 190). Ovid eagerly exploits the emerging possibilities a playful re-transformation of the metaphorical "snake" or *coronis* icon into the actual animal[31] entails for a poet so passionate about the thresholds[32] between truth and fiction, realism and phantasy, and arts and nature. Not only does he frequently[33] insert serpentine metamorphoses at the ends of books or pentads, but he tellingly concludes *Met*. 4 with the word "snake" (4.803: *angues*) and thereby explicates the diacritical sign verbally.

Medusa, in life as well as when decapitated, is not only procreative and reproductive, thus confirming feminine gender stereotypes. More than a mother of serpents and hybrids, Medusa is an artist, and thus creative and productive in a stereotypically masculine manner.[34] The entire

31 However, he is not the first one to do so, but joins a Hellenist poetic topos: A first literal interpretation of the diacritical icon of the *coronis* as a snake appears, as Peter Bing observes, at the end of the Hellenistic epigram about the *Garland of Meleager* (*A.P.* XII 25; Gow-Page 129), when Coronis – the mythical lover of Apollo and mother of Asclepius, whose snake-entwined staff is still the symbol of medicine and pharmacy – speaks for herself as a guardian of bookends and thematizes her liminal position at the end of a scroll (Bing 1988: 33-5).

32 According to Rimell, the fact that ancient thinking interprets snakes as liminal beings and locates them at thresholds and twilight zones explains why the winding *coronis* ƨ is used to signal the end of a papyrus roll: "as the snake recoils, so we wind up the papyrus" (2006: 17).

33 Also, for example, in *Met*. 15, featuring Asclepius' arrival in Rome (Barchiesi 1997: 187-90), and in *Fasti* 6 (Barchiesi 1997: 200-202).

34 So masculine, in fact, that Hardie confuses authorship and appropriation and tellingly speaks of "Perseus' statue gallery" (2002: 178) when a feminist reader might infer that he means Medusa's collected works.

narrative "dwells upon creativity, since Medusa's generative potency lived on in the head that became Perseus' weapon and Athena's tool", as Lowe puts it (2015: 99; cf. 107-9). Returning the intrusive gaze of whoever approaches her, she consumes her viewers and transforms them into works of art, while she becomes the creatrix of life-like marble statues. She exceeds Narcissus' voyeuristic and ultimately futile *ekplexis* and acts as a reverse Pygmalion – her statues do not gain but lose their vitality (Rimell 2006: 16). The objectified "looked-at woman" becomes an "ultra-powerful viewer" who still "turns her audience on, and is compulsive viewing, yet her audience is 'castrated' even as it is permanently fixed in the state of open-mouthed arousal" (Rimell 2006: 7). Medusa captures her spectators and exhibits their attempted violence in stone, just as Arachne, also a challenger of Minerva's power, and Philomela do with fabric – a behavioral parallel outlined by Hardie (2002: 175-6) and by Enterline in her analysis of female voice and agency through silent-yet-telling artistic representations in Ovid (2000: 17; 33-5). As a sculptress, Medusa is a perfect illusionist: her marble statues are mistaken for the living men they were only a moment before (e.g. *Met*. 5.192-4). Ovid, thereby, presents a negative of Zeuxis' deceptive cherries – the "inverse of the normal experience of a viewer of a work of art, who is amazed that what he knows to be marble seems flesh" (Hardie 2002: 180).

Once killed and mutilated, Medusa becomes very useful to Perseus: he instrumentalizes her severed head not only as a proof of his deeds, but also as a wondrous tool, a "rhetorical prosthesis, enforcing the compliance that his 'soothing words' cannot" (Enterline 2000: 39).[35] Exploiting Medusa's petrifying powers, he turns his contestants, none of whom believes in this "secret weapon" (Fantham 2004: 90) of his, into stone statues. As Perseus appropriates Medusa's sculpting skill, their identities "overlap and collide" (Rimell 2006: 18), a paradox pointedly captured by Perseus himself: *auxilium* […] *ab hoste petam* (*Met*. 5.1278-9). Thus, after having wakened the stupefied Andromeda and after having surpassed all petrified predecessors, the "master of motion" (Barkan 1986: 53) inflicts immobility on his enemies who doubt the truth of his stories. The tension

35 Lowe also explores orality, speech, and sound as means of exchange between Perseus and Medusa as well as Perseus and his other challengers against whom he uses Medusa's *ora* instead of detailed words (2015: 106-7).

between wondrous and plausible elements remains throughout the whole passage: credibility of miracles and disbelief in supernatural phenomena are leitmotifs of Perseus' encounters with Atlas (4.650-6), Thescelus (5.181), and Eryx (5.195-7), rendering the episode a cautionary tale for critics of arts and literature on how to approach the literary marvellous. Ovid enjoys toying with ekphrastic conventions: "we are both stimulated to 'see' the events, and asked to believe in the reality of what we see. Seeing is believing; pictorial illusionism and verbal fictionality are forced into an unusually close symbiosis" (Hardie 2002: 174). This holds especially true for Medusa, whose spectators must immediately believe in her artistry. The story "allegorizes the reader's self-conscious suspension of disbelief towards the marvel, his 'knowing complicity' involved in the act of reading the poet's mythical fictions" (Klein 2009: 209). Similar metatextual implications and historical backgrounds have been suggested by Feldherr (2010: 324) and Wheeler:

> Thus, Perseus turns from the telling of miraculous stories to performing them, transforming his disbelieving audience into stupefied statuary – monuments of wonder, frozen forever as an object lesson in incredulity. […] By dramatizing and demonizing dissent, Ovid forces his audience to examine its own skepticism about the myths that are being told and to make a choice (1999: 185).

Ovid, hence, thematizes Medusa's textuality within his micro-epic. He presents two modes of perceiving stories, and gives intradiegetic preference to the one that believes in the powers of the demonized female. This can be interpreted in two diametrically different ways, either as a phallocentric stance for male superiority (Keith 2009) or as a proto-feminist imperative not to underestimate the transformative powers of the female.[36] This latter perspective draws heavily on Hélène Cixous' seminal essay *Le rire de la Méduse* (1975), a manifesto for female empowerment through writing. Cixous connects ancient gender expectations, Cartesian mind-body dualism, and modern sexism, when she draws attention to the limitations of femininity in patriarchal thinking: the female other, emblematically symbolized by Medusa, "has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty (guilty of everything, guilty at every turn, for having desires, for not having any; for being frigid, for being 'too hot'; for not being both at once; for being too motherly and not

36 Such oppositions are symptomatic of scholarship on Ovid's representations of gender and power structures. Cf. Rimell's astute summary of discussions in her introduction to *Ovid's Lovers* (2006: esp. 3-4).

enough […])" (Cixous 1976 [1975]: 880). While the early psychoanalysts Freud[37] and Lacan interpreted the myth of Medusa's petrifying gaze as a metaphor for the fear of castration when boys discover women's "lack", Cixous re-appropriates Medusa not as a figure of guilt, shame, and horror, but as an icon for female expressivity:

> You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing. Men say that there are two unrepresentable things: death and the feminine sex. That's because they need femininity to be associated with death […]. They need to be afraid of us. Look at the trembling Perseuses moving backward toward us, clad in apotropes (885).

Cixous, thus, reveals Perseus' heroism as a need for masculine self-assertion on the backs of women. Considering that the hero feels repeatedly obliged to legitimize (e.g. *Met*. 4.640-1) and to identify himself as "the conqueror of the snaky-haired Gorgon" (4.699: *Gorgonis anguicomae Perseus superator*), one can hardly refrain from agreeing with Cixous. Whether intended by Ovid or not, Medusa is this episode's iconic heroine: her transformative powers are described in detail while the accounts of Perseus' deeds either remain abbreviated and superficial or demonstrate their dependence on Medusa's potency – it is her head that kills two hundred men, not Perseus himself (5.209). Ironically, "the possession of so powerful an advantage as the Gorgon's head casts doubt on the very heroism Perseus so desperately wants to prove" (Feldherr 2010: 317). When facing the question whether to attribute the victory over sceptics and the marble statues to Medusa or to Perseus, we can refer to Cixous' plea for a self-conscious *écriture féminine*, a mode of expression independent from patriarchal canonizing standards. Perseus addresses the alleged eternity of "his" marble monuments when he predicts his rival's future as a decorative statue in the palace (5.227-9). But the ever-threatening, thus phallic monumentality Perseus wishes for is frail, as Feldherr observes, "the impression that these perfect monuments engender finality because they leave nothing left to be said is itself undercut by the apparently infinite repeatability of the act" (2010: 317). According to Cixous, however, infinite repeatability is characteristic of feminine[38] art, which is continuously

37 *The Medusa Reader* (2003), ed. by M. Garber and N. J. Vickers, provides an excellent interdisciplinary compilation of influential literary and theoretical texts on Medusa, including Freud's essay "Medusa's head" from 1922 and feminist responses to it.

38 Cixous writes in accordance with the 1970s' feminism's goal of a positive revaluation of femininity, but *écriture féminine* is for her by no means restricted to female authors/artists. Rather, she advocates for transcending patriarchal, thus "masculine" default settings in arts and literature, and also praises male authors such as James Joyce, Jean Genet and Heinrich von Kleist for overcoming body-hostile, totalizing principles.

collective and collaborative: "we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end" (878). This is what Medusa does, even after her decapitation, and we see that she shares this trait with Ovid who collaborates with her, the monstrous female, and her doppelgängers, to demonstrate ways of re-thinking epic heroism and wondrous adventures after Homer and Virgil. Cixous' powerful vision almost reads as an appreciation of Ovid's poetic project in the *Metamorphoses*:

> A process of different subjects knowing one another and beginning one another anew only from the living boundaries of the other: a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations of the same into the other and into the in-between, from which woman takes her forms (1976 [1975]: 883).

The snake-like, self-reflective, winding and twisting narrative which distorts chronology, spares prerequisites, and constantly shifts perspectives, aptly meets its subject in Ovid's Medusa-episode. While on an intradiegetic level a transformative prosthesis for Perseus, Medusa's feminine monstrosity is also a metatextual means to represent the Other in literature, be it through enabling women to write their female body (Cixous), or through setting fluidity, change and transformation against patriarchal stability and linearity (Ovid).

3. Monstrous Men, Human Bulls, and Artificial Nature (*Met*. 8.152-235)

Placed in an intricate labyrinth of desire, deception, and destruction, Ovid presents another "two-shaped monster" (*Met*. 8.156): the Minotaur. The Theban tales' plethora of snakes is now exchanged for bulls when we reach the island of Crete in Book 8 – quite suitably, as the bull is a central object of both cultic worship in Cretan-Minoan culture (Rice 1998: 198-219; MacGillivray 2000: 55) and of many myths involving Crete.[39] Stressing different strains of the myth prominently throughout his entire oeuvre (*Met*. 8 and 9, *Ars* 1 and 2, *Her.* 4 and 10, *Fasti* 3 and 6), Ovid joins a rich intertextual network mapped out by Callimachus, Apollonius, Catullus, Horace, Propertius, and Virgil.[40] His contribution to the Minoan myth cycle is all but homogeneous: he consciously provokes comparison of his own retellings and those of his predecessors when he showcases different, even contradicting, versions of the same stories. Always alert to the conventions prescribed by the respective generic frame and context, he playfully switches between genres and angles, and makes sure his readers understand his learned reference game by flagging his Alexandrian footnotes with metapoetic puns and allusions.

In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid has his readers enter the Cretan realms in a military invasion, but the initial war theme is soon replaced by the amorous battles of unrequited love and passion. This typically Ovidian[41] *Verschiebung* forecasts the dialogue of genres present in this passage: epic and elegiac voices are to be conceived as inextricably intertwined, since Ovid's variations on the Cretan theme reverberate through his epic *and* elegiac oeuvre and all his numerous bulls, Ariadnes, Phaedras, and Pasiphaes communicate with each other. The princess Scylla[42] betrays her

39 The bull's omnipresence in Cretan myths reaches from Europa, raped by Jupiter in his bovine shape and a great-granddaughter of Io who was once (*Met*. 1.587-621) transformed into a heifer, to Hippolytus whose premature death is caused by a wild bull – a story Ovid unfolds in *Fasti* 6.733-762 (cf. Armstrong 2006: 71-2).

40 For a comparative reading of all these versions, cf. Rebecca Armstrong's monograph *Cretan Women* (2006).

41 Cf. the programmatic juxtaposition of epic/war and elegy/love in *Am*. 1.1.1-4 and 26-30.

42 This is not the hybrid monster Scylla we will encounter in *Met*. 13. Although it is "something of a learned in-joke" (Armstrong 2006: 117) or a "locus classicus" (Hinds 2016: 271; cf. Clauss 2004) to conflate both mythical Scyllas (e.g. in Propertius, Virgil's Sixth *Eclogue*, and Ovid's own *Ars* and *Fasti*), the *Met*. keep the homonymous women separated. Oliensis notes, however, that "the one Scylla cannot but take on board some of the other's distinctive traits" (2009: 96) – equally furious, she pointedly omits her namesake when she mentions Charybdis (*Met*. 8.120-1) in her address to Minos (Oliensis 2009: 104). On Ovid's play with the confusion around the two Scyllas in the *Fasti*, cf. Hinds 1984: 79 and Hinds 2016: 271 and 278, with bibliography. Tsitsiou-Chelidoni (2003) and Pavlock (2019) provide detailed close-readings of the Megarian princess Scylla in *Met*. 8.

fatherland because of her impious love for her father's aggressor, the married, Cretan king Minos (*Met*. 8.17-151).[43] He rejects her and calls her a "monster" of a kind he would not have it on Crete (8.99-100: *certe ego non patiar Iouis incunabula, Creten*, / *qui meus est orbis, tantum contingere monstrum*). This reproach inaugurates a discussion about the essence of monstrosity: the question 'who is the most savage beast?' becomes an overarching pattern that connects the different conflicts between the Cretan protagonists beyond the bookends. This is, as Lowe observes, quite a Roman take on the bovine-human hybrid: compared to Greek accounts and depictions, "Roman poets of the first century BC are more nuanced in their portrayals of the Minotaur […]. They use the monster to challenge conventional divisions between human and inhuman, especially through linking it with human characters via 'feminine' emotional states" (Lowe 2015: 183). It has been argued that Minos undermines his own statement through the telling parapraxis of juxtaposing "cradle", "Crete", and "monster": his unconscious message alludes to the Minotaur, the infamous Cretan baby monster par excellence (Boyd 2006: 185), whose suppressed presence already taints "the Crete Minos is determined to keep pure" (Oliensis 2009: 104). Moreover, Ovid delights in the irony that Minos' own daughter Ariadne will act precisely like Scylla, when she helps Theseus conquer her father's regime and flees with him. Scylla, accordingly, complains about *his* cruel, inhumane character and reminds him, as well as the reader, of the monstrous traits in his family. She presents a counternarrative to Jupiter's bovine rape of Europa, which led to Minos' conception (told in *Met*. 2.846-75): ungratefully as he behaves towards her, the girl who is responsible for his victory, his lineage must be less divine than monstrous – his father must have been an unattractive wild bull, not Jupiter in disguise (*Met*. 8.122-5), otherwise he would be milder towards her.[44] Scylla's accusatory speech reproduces a topos well known from rejected Cretan women – that even the wildest beasts are gentler than the man who abandons his helper, lover, and companion. Initially uttered by Catullus' Ariadne (64.154-7: *quaenam te genuit sola sub rupe leaena*, / *quod mare conceptum spumantibus exspuit undis,* / *quae Scylla rapax, quae uasta Carybdis,* / *talia qui reddis pro dulci praemia uita?*),

43 Oliensis provides a brilliant psychoanalytic reading of Scylla's phallic-oedipal inner conflicts (2009: 95-110).

44 Minos' character, reign and morals are full of contradictions and ambiguities in most literary accounts (Armstrong 2006: 119).

Ovid multiplies her lament over ferocious ingratitude in his *Heroides* and assigns variations of it both to Ariadne (*Her*. 10.1-2: *mitius inueni quam te genus omne ferarum*; / *credita non ulli quam tibi peius eram*) and to her sister Phaedra in her unrequited passion for Theseus' son Hippolytus, her own stepson (*Her*. 4.165-6: *potuit corrumpere taurum* / *mater; eris tauro saeuior ipse truci?*). In the *Met*., Ovid skips Ariadne's lamentation, but gives this part to Scylla (Armstrong 2006: 51).

Fully exploiting the various associations of the bull – as a sexual symbol (Barkan 1986: 13), an emblem of ferocity, and as an object of cultic worship on Crete –, Ovid makes Scylla move from Minos' bovine father to his amorous rival in his marriage to Pasiphae, also a bull:

> […] te uere coniuge digna est,
> quae toruum ligno decepit adultera taurum
> discordemque utero fetum tulit. […]
> iam iam Pasiphaen non est mirabile taurum
> praeposuisse tibi: tu plus feritatis habebas.
> (*Met*. 8.131-7)
>
> She is a true mate for you who with unnatural passion deceived the savage bull by that shape of wood and bore a hybrid offspring in her womb. […] Now, now I do not wonder that Pasiphaë preferred the bull to you, for you were a more savage beast than he.

The allusions' prerequisites are suspended to Book 9, when Iphis mourns about her own allegedly impossible desire and compares herself to other Cretan women with unnatural passions. She recounts Pasiphae's mating with the bull which her husband refused to sacrifice:

> […] ne non tamen omnia Crete
> monstra ferat, taurum dilexit filia Solis,
> femina nempe marem. meus est furiosior illo,
> si uerum profitemur, amor. tamen illa secuta est
> spem Veneris; tamen illa dolis et imagine uaccae
> passa bouem est, et erat, qui deciperetur, adulter.
> huc licet ex toto sollertia confluat orbe,
> ipse licet reuolet ceratis Daedalus alis,
> quid faciet? […]
> (*Met*. 9.735-43)
>
> Nevertheless, that Crete might produce all monstrous things, the daughter of the Sun loved a bull—a female to be sure, and male; my passion is more mad than that, if the truth be told. Yet she had some hope of her love's fulfilment; yet she enjoyed her bull by a trick and the disguise of the heifer, and it was the lover who was deceived. Though all the ingenuity in the world should be collected here, though Daedalus himself should fly back on waxen wings, what could he do?

These remarks on Pasiphae's bestial union with the bull negotiate questions of humanity and monstrosity and of nature and culture. The episodes lend themselves to poetic explorations from different angles: in retellings from Apollonius to Seneca, "the bull becomes humanized, Pasiphae bestialized, and their union presented now as bucolic love, now a rather urban affair, now as an illustration of the wild nature of passion common to all living creatures" (Armstrong 2006: 19). Ovid's metamorphic world is stratified into three realms: divine, humane, and animal (Barkan 1986: 28-9, 74-5). Most of the transformations told conflate these layers and the categories assigned to them: deities interfere in the human sphere or take on animal shape; humans strive for divine status; hubristic aspirations are punished through metamorphoses into animals, while deifications

represent a reward for knowing one's place and not disturbing the natural order (Barkan 1986: 56-78). Scylla and Minos accuse each other of transgressing boundaries – she by abandoning her father and homeland, he by his arrogant ungratefulness. Scylla's argumentation centers around the strata of existence when she denies him first his hybrid half-divine status, then his human status, and finally reduces him and his manners to the subhuman sphere. Pasiphae's mating with the bull – a bestial sexual act resulting in the creation of a hybrid creature – is considered unnatural and clearly blurs any distinction between human and animal sphere, but Scylla evaluates Pasiphae's zoophilic passion as more humane and forgivable than Minos' hardness. Iphis finds justification for Pasiphae's passion in the sexual union's viability through Daedalus' construction of a life-like wooden cow Pasiphae could hide in which the bull mistakes for an adequate mate. The dynamics of deception and betrayal can be read against the backdrop of the clichéd Cretan deceitfulness (Armstrong 2006: 166) – in the *Ars*, Ovid consciously plays with the proverbial proneness to mendacity, when he refers to Pasiphae's adultery which not even Crete could conceal behind lies (1.298: *quamuis sit mendax, Creta negare potest*). Daedalus' trompe l'oeil imagery proves to be a way to connect the cosmic spheres plausibly without resorting to divine, supernatural processes: Daedalus' ingenious artistry deceives nature and animates lifeless wood. Thus, he achieves "a power that is directly parallel to metamorphosis" (Barkan 1986: 73). Though not a god, he becomes a quasi-divine agent of metamorphosis who "manipulate[s] the natural environment and flout[s] its normal laws" (Aston 2011: 333).[45] Aston outlines aspects of Daedalus' multi-layered conjunction of nature and technique:

> [He is] able to fit together animal and human, elements incompatible in nature, and allow for their combination. The first such combination is that of Pasiphae and the artificial cow; the second is that of Pasiphae and the bull she is thus able to mate with. The third combination is the result of this mating: the minotaur, bull-headed, human-bodied, a monstrous mixanthrope. Daidalos does not manufacture the minotaur; this being is produced by a travesty of the natural processes of reproduction. […] The Pasiphae/cow confection is a case of combination in layers, cow without, woman within (2011: 327).

Hence, the Minotaur may be a product of technical creation and biological coupling, thus "the only 'designed' monster in classical myth" and thereby "signifying poetic experimentation" (Lowe 2015: 183), but he is also the fruit of a woman's exceptional desire. The Cretan queen clearly has the means

45 He ultimately pays the prize for his metamorphotic hubris when he creates wings for himself and his son: By imitating bird flight, he intrudes into the divine aether – a transgression of his human realm which is punished by his son's death (*Met*. 8.183-235). Barkan analyzes this confusion of natural order in detail (1986: 73-5).

to actively pursue her amorous goals – in stark difference to Scylla and to Pasiphae's daughters Ariadne and Phaedra, all of whom grieve for their beloved's inaccessibility. Although frequently, as in Ovid's *Ars*, set against the backdrop of elegiac love (cf. Armstrong 2006: 80-5), Pasiphae's lust in the *Metamorphoses'* is hardly idealized or explained: Ovid represses the background of Minos' irreverence towards Poseidon which in other versions provokes the punishment through his wife's shameful adultery. Here, her bizarre passion is a

> reminder that the effect of transgression is not simply to cross boundaries, but by crossing them to call them into question, to show they are not as rigidly set as they seem. Yet Pasiphae's story can even put in doubt exactly which boundaries have been crossed: those between civilized and uncivilized, between human and animal, between sanity and madness, or between legitimate passion and overweening lust (Armstrong 2006: 112).

Bestiality in ancient myth is often a metaphor for female sexuality, as girls between childhood and married womanhood were often compared to wild animals to be tamed (Robson 1997: 72-4). Most accounts of interspecies intercourse involve a god's temporary transformation into an animal in order to sexually initiate a virgin, often resulting in semi-divine, heroic offspring (Robson 1997: 74-8). Yet compared to Pasiphae, who is already a married woman and mother and deliberately seeks the unholy union with "a real animal," those other theriomorphic rapes "start to seem much more civilized" (Armstrong 2006: 72). Ovid indulges in the absurdity of Pasiphae's love for the bull in his eroto-didactic *Ars* (1.289-326),[46] where he mocks her raging lust and attempts to impress the animal with her cosmetically enhanced appearance, making her a deterrent epitome of rampant female sexuality threatening Minos' patriarchal tyranny as well as the moral and social order in contemporary Augustan Rome.

Thus herself a monstrous Other, Pasiphae gives birth to an even more bewildering creature. Unlike other children sprung from bestial unions, the Minotaur is neither heroic nor humane, but a "new form of a hybrid monster" (8.156: *monstri nouitate biformis*). While in appearance a "twin-shape between bull and man" (8.169: *geminam tauri iuuenisque figuram*), he does not retain other human traits from his mother, but "all the savagery of his father. The combination in him of the human and the animal seems only to make him more gruesome and terrifying" (Armstrong 2006:

46 Armstrong offers a detailed examination of this "longest surviving account [of Pasiphae] in Latin poetry" (2006: 178-86).

73). Moreover, he feeds on human flesh and demands new blood every ninth year (8.170-1), thus meeting the monstrous criterion of hostility towards humans. In contrast to other mythical hybrids, the Minotaur is mute (Lowe 2015: 182). "The family's disgrace" (8.155: *obprobrium generis*), he is a living evidence of Pasiphae's adultery. He crystallizes the emotions and passions which occupy the women around Minos (Pasiphae; Scylla; Ariadne; Phaedra) – unrequited love, rage, sadness, regrets, (self-)pity, abandonment, loneliness, etc. "In this way, the Minotaur […] metaphorizes the messiness of human emotion" (Lowe 2015: 188). Subsequently, Minos wants to hide and remove his stepson (*Met*. 8.157: *destinat hunc Minos thalamo remouere pudorem*), not without capitalizing from his ferocity by obliging his enemy, Athens, to regularly send youths as victims for the monster's hunger. In word-choice and judgment, calling the Minotaur *obprobrium* and *pudorem*, the narrator mimics Minos' perspective. "To his immediate family, though, the Minotaur is something far more problematic – a son and a brother" (Armstrong 2006: 86).[47] This other side of the coin is dominant in *Heroides* 4 and 10, the letters of Phaedra and Ariadne, respectively – their familial sympathy humanizes the Minotaur. The sisters "surmount the barrier of the Minotaur's muteness and complicate the distinction between man and beast" (Lowe 2015: 183). Especially Ariadne demonstrates sisterly affection when she refers to him twice as her brother (10.77 and 115), and wishes to have died the same cruel death through Theseus: *me quoque, qua fratrem, mactasses, inprobe, claua* (77). Instead, she even participated in his murder which provided her with an opportunity to help her fancied hero – an act she now regrets, since Theseus has turned out to be more evil than the monster was:

> [utinam] nec tua mactasset nodoso stipites, Theseu,
> ardua parte uirum dextera, parte bouem;
> nec tibi, quae reditus monstrarent, fila dedissem,
> fila per adductas saepe recepta manus.
> non equidem mirror, si stat uictoria tecum,
> strataque Cretaeam belua planxit humum.
> non poterant figi praecordia ferrea cornu;
> ut te non tegeres, pectore tutus eras.
> illic tu silices, illic adamanta tulisti,
> illic, qui silices, Thesea, uincat, habes.
> (*Her*. 10.101-10).
>
> [If only] your right hand hadn't been raised on high, Theseus, to kill the Minotaur with that knotty club, and I hadn't given you the thread to show you your way back, the thread that your hands often took up again and tugged! Personally, I'm not surprised that the victory was yours and the beast was brought crashing down to the ground. Your heart of iron couldn't have been pierced by his horn, your chest was safe, even if unprotected: you had flint there, you had adamant there, there you have a Theseus harder than flint
> (Trans. Murgatroyd/Reeves/Parker)

47 For attitudes of sympathy and understanding for the monstrous Minotaur in Ovid's Ariadne-letter and other accounts (Catullus, Seneca), cf. Armstrong 2006: 87-93.

Phaedra, too, eventually sides with the Minotaur, although she initially calls him the *crimen onusque* of Pasiphae's uterus (*Her*. 4.58). Being married to Theseus, but in love with his son, Phaedra focuses on her husband's cruelty in order to make her conjugal dissatisfaction understandable: *ossa mei fratris claua perfracta trinodi* / *sparsit humi* (115-6). Both sisters stress Theseus' dependency on Ariadne when fulfilling his heroic task of slaying the beast (4.60; 10.102-3). In the *Metamorphoses*, however, Ovid occludes the details of the fatal collaboration between Theseus and Ariadne. Comparable to the brief version of Perseus' pursuit of Medusa, one densely packed hypotaxis (8.171-9) summarizes the onset of the adventure, Ariadne's thread – a crucial tool for Theseus' victory –, the couple's flight, Theseus' abandonment of his partner in love and crime, Ariadne's grief as well as her bright future first as Bacchus' bride, whose crown is finally transformed into a constellation. Ovid denies Theseus the heroism well known from other accounts of the episode. The slaying of the monster is not, as *docti lectores* might expect, the story's climax (Boyd 2006: 185-6), but rapidly told alongside Ariadne's involvement, first as a helper, then as a lover, and finally a stellified heroine. Her part, however, is also reduced, compared to her appearances in *Cat*. 64 and *Her*. 10: in the *Met*., Ovid suppresses her famous lament, robs her of any direct speech, but alludes to it in a concise Alexandrian footnote in *multa querenti* (176) – a heroine whose clichéd accusations have already been heard multiple times (Armstrong 2006: 51), and, in this version, from Scylla before.[48]

Significantly more attention is given to the Minotaur's prison and dwelling place – the labyrinth, a multifold house full of dead ends (158: *multiplicique domo caecisque* […] *tectis*), a Daedalian construction on demand, this time not for Pasiphae, but Minos. Its primary intradiegetic function is that of a prison, "a private lunatic asylum commissioned by a cuckolded king to prevent personal embarrassment" (Doob 1990: 35), yet a highly aesthetic one:

48 Yet another variation can be found in *Fasti* 3.459-516: Ariadne complains about being abandoned by her husband despite solemn oaths and promises – but here, it is not Theseus, but Bacchus whose betrayal she fears. Her worries are superfluous, since Bacchus returns soon, sets her crown into the sky, and promises ever-lasting fame at his side. Ariadne receives the name Libera as a new cult epiclesis. The most recent detailed analysis of this passage is given by Armstrong (2006: 251-60); see too on Ariadne's intertextual memory Conte's inaugural observations (1985: 38-45) and Hinds' remarks on the Alexandrian footnote-character of Ariadne's lament (1998: 3-4).

Daedalus ingenio fabrae celeberrimus artis
ponit opus turbatque notas et lumina flexum
ducit in errorem uariarum ambage uiarum.
non secus ac liquidus Phrygiis Maeandros in aruis
ludit et ambiguo lapsu refluitque fluitque
occurrensque sibi venturas aspicit undas
et nunc ad fontes, nunc ad mare uersus apertum
incertas exercet aquas: ita Daedalus implet
innumeras errore uias uixque ipse reuerti
ad limen potuit: tanta est fallacia tecti.
(*Met*. 8.159-68)

Daedalus, a man famous for his skill in the builder's art, planned and performed the work. He confused the usual passages and deceived the eye by a conflicting maze of diverse winding paths. Just as the watery Maeander plays in the Phrygian fields, flows back and forth in doubtful course and, turning back on itself, beholds its own waves coming on their way, and sends its uncertain waters now towards their source and now towards the open sea: so Daedalus made those innumerable winding passages, and was himself scarce able to find his way back to the place of entry, so deceptive was the enclosure he had built.

In her fundamental monograph on ancient and medieval labyrinths, Penelope Reed Doob lists the standard qualities of labyrinths that can be found in this passage: "the complex artistry of the building, its ability to entrap, its multicursal winding ways, its deceptive nature, its darkness […], and the need for a guide" (Doob 1990: 36). While Homer (*Il*. 18.590-2), Catullus (64.112-7), and Virgil (6.24-30) all include the Cretan labyrinth in an ecphrasis, Ovid choses to focus on the object itself, Daedalus' mimetic masterpiece. Though man-made[49], the architectural construction resembles nature, as the eye-confusing twists and turns of the winding paths are compared to the river Maeander's course. The river is "quite literally contained within the labyrinth", which mimics its "shape and movement" (Boyd 2006: 180). We have already seen that Daedalus' mastery lies in imitation and even deception of nature – his cow-shaped automaton resembles a real cow; his wings are modelled exactly after birds' wings. The fact that Daedalus himself is almost trapped in his own creation (8.166-8) hints at the inherent paradox of the labyrinth: "its ability to signify both complex artistic order and chaotic confusion, depending on whether it is viewed from without as a static artifact, a magnificent product of human ingenuity, or experienced from within as a bewildering process, a dynamic prison" (Doob 1990: 38). The artist's entrapment proves his illusionist skills and anticipates his eventual failure – the loss of his son – through his copying of nature (Barkan 1986: 73-4). Ovid, in turn, imitates Daedalus' imitation of nature in his preferred medium: language. The many voiced labio-velar approximants (/w/ as in *uariarum*, *uiarum*, *liquidus*, *aruis*, *refluitque fluitque*, *uenturas*, *uersus*, *aquas*, *uias uixque ipse reuerti*) stress the water analogy on a phonetic-onomatopoeic level: the

49 In *Les carrefours du labyrinthe*, 20th century philosopher Cornelis Castoriadis sees a crucial aspect of labyrinths in their status as products of human instead of divine beings (1998 [1975]: 5-6). This explains why labyrinths are so frequently used as metaphors for the human condition, for the possibilities of knowledge and self-knowledge, and for deep contemplation. The labyrinth's potential for ancient and modern philosophy, political and critical theory is compellingly mapped out in Hudson's essay *Centaurs, Rioting in Thessaly* (2018: 35-45).

sound combinations evoke the river's flowing waves and form an audible contrast to the pure vowels and plosives in the subsequent *tanta est fallacia tecti*, which take us back to the outside, the descriptive level, looking at the labyrinth as an artistic yet static masterpiece. Pointing out parallels between Ovid and his ingenious artist figures has almost become a truism.[50] Daedalus and Ovid are, of course, both creators of a highly intricate, multicursal, twisting and winding *opus magnum* that bridges naturalistic mimesis and technical skills, tradition and originality, self-doubting fear of losing control over one's project and self-conscious meta-reflexivity. The labyrinth's river-like paths form an evident model of Ovid's "epic undertaking which sparkles, plays, flows back on itself" (Armstrong 2006: 137). Barbara Weiden Boyd shifts attention from the artist to the reader, partaking in Daedalus' labyrinthine experience, "who has begun the reading process on the outside of the poem, so to speak, but who has gradually and inexorably been compelled to enter the poem, and so has become lost within it, not knowing how to move outwards again" (2006: 178). Pivotally positioned in the middle of the *Met.*,[51] the passage helps readers – at this stage simultaneously confused maze-walkers and privileged onlookers (179) – navigating through the poem:

> The Meander simile is "inside" the labyrinth as a textual fragment, offering a vision of a marvelous but natural phenomenon to help the reader comprehend the engineered building. […] Each of the three central lines of the simile describes the essentially binary appearance of the water's course: it seems to be two-directional (*ambiguo lapsu*, 162), it appears to flow backwards and forwards (*refluitque fluitque*, 162), it seemingly runs into itself (*occurrensque sibi uenturas aspicit undas*, 163), and it appears able to go to one of two places (*nunc ad fontes, nunc ad mare uersus apertum*, 164). It emerges from this pattern that the "thread" or "clue" to negotiating this labyrinth lies within the labyrinth itself. […] The simile thus serves as a form of "contained" reassurance for the persistent and aware reader – there is indeed an end, though it may not be in sight yet (2006: 180-1).

Walking through his own textual labyrinth, Ovid deliberately chooses side paths and digressions over well-trodden main roads of epic poetry, thus following in Callimachus' footsteps.[52] He focuses on

50 Medusa and Daedalus are by far not the only artists with their works prominently displayed in ecphrases throughout the *Met*. Other artist figures, poets, or storytellers include Pygmalion, Arachne, Orpheus, Philomela, the Pieridian sisters, the Muses, or the daughters of Minyas. Their artworks often mirror or resemble the *Metamorphoses* as a whole, which is why their creators have been understood as *personae* of Ovid's. Cf., e.g., Leach's inaugural article on Ovid's ecphrases and the theme of artistic failure (1974: 102-42), Barkan's chapter "Tapestry Figures" (1986: 1-18), and Spahlinger's monograph *Ars late arte sua*. *Untersuchungen zur Poetologie der* Metamorphosen *Ovids* (1996). Fantham provides a concise bibliography on Ovid's artists (2004: 60).

51 Boyd refers to Crabbe's observation that Book 8 is the focus of symmetry and continuity in the *Met*.: "We are far from the cosmogonic (re)organization of divine and human affairs with which the poem had (repeatedly) opened; we are also far from the verge of history upon which the poem closes. Looking both forward and backward is central to the experience of being in the middle: Where has this story (as well as the reader) come from? Where is it (as well as she) going? This book suggests by its placement a set of answers that allow the reader to make meaning from the juxtaposition of episodes Ovid presents" (2006: 173).

52 The image of a river for poetry could also, as often, be Callimachean (Armstrong 2006: 137).

Scylla (instead of Ariadne), on the enslaved[53] artist Daedalus (instead of King Minos), on the prison (labyrinth) instead of the prisoner (Minotaur). The epic hero never moves into spotlight – "Theseus no sooner materializes, so to speak, in the narrative than he disappears yet again, to be replaced by other characters and stories" (Boyd 2006: 193). Preference is given to language experiments and playful references to predecessors. Bestiality, adultery, shame and disgrace provide but grounds for supreme architecture and artistic self-expression.

With a wink Ovid unveils the risks and side-effects of artists so absorbed in their art that a way back into reality becomes difficult. An anecdote from Seneca the Elder's *Controversiae* demonstrates this self-awareness of Ovid's also at a biographical level:

> When [Ovid] was asked by some friends of his to remove three verses [to be specified after he agreed], he asked that he be allowed to except three verses over which his friends would have no rights. That seemed a fair condition. Privately, then, the friends wrote down the three verses they wanted to remove and Ovid wrote the three he wanted untouched. When the two tablets were compared, the same three verses appeared in both.[54]

One of the verses Ovid asked to keep is the Minotaur's description in the *Ars*: *semibouemque uirum semiuirumque bouem* (2.24).[55] The pentametric verse captures the creature's conflicting components: the grammatical permutation mirrors its dimorphous hybridity, but violates the rules of good taste in Ovid's time and contradicts stylistic criteria as established, for example, in Horace's *Ars Poetica*. According to Sharrock, this "delightfully ridiculous pentameter", together with the preceding "very serious and awe-inspiring" (1994: 130) hexameter *Daedalus, ut clausit conceptum crimine matris* (*Ars* 2.23: "Daedalus, when he has shut up the thing conceived by the crime of his mother"), captures the poetic enterprise of the *Ars*:

> Neither subjective elegy nor didactic epos, at times it uses the most comic and low-level aspects of elegy and the most elevated aspects of didactic, not serious, and yet somehow serious, neither quite straight satire yet forever undermining everything, including itself, and always very conscious of itself and its mixed parentage (Sharrock 1994: 128).

53 Feldherr examines the depiction of social status and hierarchies in the *Met*. in general, and in this passage, as Daedalus' artistry always strives to climb upwards or fall downwards, literally and figuratively (2010: 106-122).

54 This is W. S. Anderson's translation of Seneca's *Contr*. 2.2.12 (1995: 2-3). J. J. Clauss brought to my attention, *per litteras*, that the independent choice of wording or passages might be a folktale motif that can also be found in the marvellous tale about the translation of the *Septuagint*: the 70 or 72 translators of the Hebrew Bible, although being sequestered first, miraculously produced identical translations.

55 According to J. Rusten, the idea of capturing the Minotaur's hybridity in such a wording is not originally Ovidian, but an imitation of a line from Empedocles' *On Nature*, a reference Ovid's friends might not have recognized (1982: 332). This allusion to a didactic epic is "appropriate to the wide-ranging didactic background to [Ovid's] poem" (Sharrock 1994: 130).

Hence, the couplet encloses one hybrid *conceptum* – the Minotaur –, while itself being a metric (Sharrock 1994: 130) and generic mix-up, a new poetic *concept* contrived by an ingenious inventor who joins together the unequal "parents" elegy and didactic, just as Daedalus, the couplet's agent, joins the bull and Pasiphae and encloses (*clausit*) the monstrous product into a cunning artifact[56]: a labyrinth in the *Met*., a stylistically composite couplet in the *Ars*.

Seneca the Elder's conclusion almost seems to anticipate Cixous' encouragement to *écriture féminine*: "The story shows that this man of supreme talent did not lack the judgment to control the exuberance of his poetry, but the will. He used to say from time to time that a face was more attractive which had some tiny spot" (3).[57] Ovid embraces his own flaws and imperfections openly, and he does so at the convergence of poetry and monstrosity, language and hybridity, clear style and exuberant polymorphism.

We might see even more Medusan reflections in the digressions in Book 8: both hybrid creatures we have encountered so far are products of nefarious intercourse. Neptune's rape of Medusa in Minerva's temple offends the goddess who punishes the victim with her seductively beautiful hair. Minos offends Neptune who punishes him by maddening his wife. Pasiphae's lust for the bull transgresses boundaries between human and animal. The deception of nature, conducted by her and Daedalus, is per se a hubristic act, so the emergence of a hybrid creature is perfectly logical. At the same time, it becomes clear that men are the real monsters: brutality and cold-heartedness define first and foremost the heroes, not their hybrid victims. Ovid, thus, questions the grand master narratives of epic poetry in a deconstructionist manner: in neither of the two episodes is there space for epic heroism, brute beast-slaying, and masculinist demonstration of physical strength. Victory

56 For this line of thought, I am gratefully indebted to Stephen Hinds who pointed out to me *per litteras* that one possible connotation of *claudere* is 'to frame in a (metrical) form' – a level of meaning Ovid might have been aware of, since his pentameter "is in its own way a criminal 'conception'".

57 This is a preference Ovid seems to share with the Pasiphae of his *Ars*: The bull she falls for is almost entirely white, but has a single aesthetic blemish – a black spot between the horns (*Ars* 1.291-2: *signatus tenui media inter cornua nigro*; / *una fuit labes, cetera lactis errant*). The same idea of heightened attractiveness through imperfections shows up in the *Fasti* (3.495: *uitio tibi gratior ipso est*), when Ariadne imagines that Bacchus has left her for a darker-skinned woman whose "flaw" in complexion might render her even more desirable for Bacchus, and in Ovid's *Amores* 3.1, when the poet praises the personified Elegia for her uneven (verse-)feet (10: *et pedibus uitium causa decoris erat*).

over monsters, the two narratives seem to suggest, depends on the cunning use of tools – technical enhancements of male bodies, provided by women (Medusa's severed head; Ariadne's thread). Yet the exploits do not seem particularly glorious for the heroes: rapidly, indirectly, elliptically told, Perseus' and Theseus' pursuits of the beasts leave the readers in doubt whether the murderous acts were really necessary on the level of the plot.

Ovid presents us with alternatives to the masculinist epic genre: he speaks the language of the Other, and shifts the focus from the well-established center to the lesser known peripheries, adding elegiac notes to his epic and blurring the boundaries between his works and characters. On Ovid's Crete, the very idea of conclusive categories becomes obsolete, since species, genres, gender roles, or moral attributes are nothing but transient stages in an essentially hybrid continuum. Synthesizing culture/nature and truth/fiction, Ovid's Cretan episodes advocate for labyrinthine artefacts with the potency to thwart expectations and subvert hierarchies. Just as Medusa's artistic creations – sculptures – stand out for their illusionist likeness to living nature, Daedalus' constructions imitate cows, birds, and rivers. The postmodernist virtuoso[58] Ovid transcends this stage of mimicking natural phenomena: he imitates art that imitates nature, thus calling nature's 'naturalness' into question.

58 Cf. Rimell's article on Ovid and 20th century postmodernist narratives (2019: 446-69).

4. Centaurs and Super-Humans

The Centaurs differ from other hybrids in Ovid's *Met.* as they are firstly not one extraordinary individual, but a heterogeneous group,[59] and secondly not entirely monstrous and hostile to gods, heroes, or humans. By treating them extensively, Ovid takes a stance against the philosophical rationalism represented by Socrates/Plato (*Phaedr*. 229d-e) and Lucretius (*DRN* 4.739-47; 5.878-924) who demand to eliminate or explain away hybrid creatures and explicitly mention Centaurs (Fantham 2004: 106-9; Nelis 2009: 258-60). With their human torso and head and their equine back, waist, and legs,[60] the Centaurs are clearly liminal beings at the thresholds human/animal and culture/nature, yet their appearance is depicted[61] and described not solely as bestial, horrible, or ugly, but as strong and noble (Padgett 2003: 4-5) – an ambiguity also reflected in their behavior. Often characterized as a wild hunting tribe living in forests and mountains and shunning human civilization, they appear more beastly than human. Centaurs are not only exclusively male (until the Late Republic),[62] but epitomes of primordial phallic hyper-masculinity: "bestial and drunken, incapable of controlling themselves" (DuBois 1991: 28), sexually aggressive (31), irreverent towards civilized society, marriage, and the laws of proper hospitality, hence "anti-culture personified" (29), but at the same time courageous and loyal team-players and relics of a romanticized state of raw nature (Padgett 2003: 5; Lowe 2015: 166-7). When interacting with humans, they repeatedly violate

59 So are also the Sirens – hybrids of birds and women. Many Greek authors, most prominently Homer, have treated their attempts to attempts to confuse and destroy sailors through their singing and seduction. Ovid, however, includes only their transformation from girls to monsters in his *Met*. (5.552-63), not their later, monstrous, history, which is why my thesis does not cover this group of metamorphosed, female, hybrid beings. Lowe treats the Sirens extensively alongside the other monstrous and hybrid beings in Ovid and Virgil (2015: 84-96).

60 The Centaurs' origins are not as thoroughly accounted for as those of other monsters: their mythical parents are Ixion, the impious offender of the gods, and Nephele, the latter either a raped nymph (Diod. Sic.), a cloud (νεφέλη) in the shape of Hera (Pind. *Pyth*. 2; Ps.-Apollodorus, Ps.-Hyginus), or merely a cloud (Cic. *DND* 3, Ov. *Met*. 12.211: *nubigenas feros*). Theories as to how the Centaurs got their equine elements vary widely; most accounts assume that one of the sexual partners took on a horse's shape during or after intercourse. Fantham also mentions legends about an in-between generation: the offspring of Ixion and the cloud was a humanoid man with the name Centaurus, who later mated with mares and spawned the eponymous species (2004: 108).

61 Two volumes examine Centaurs in ancient literature and visual arts thoroughly: Page DuBois' monograph *Centaurs and Amazons* (1991), with a focus on the counter-civilization the Centaurs (and the Amazons) represent in ancient Greek thinking, and the exhibition catalogue *The Centaur's Smile: The Human Animal in Early Greek Art* (2003), ed. Michael Padgett, featuring a wide range of pictures of various hybrids and essays especially on the two groups of horse-human hybrids, Centaurs and Satyrs.

62 The first Centauresses appear in Rome during the Late Republic and the Early Empire (Létoublon 2009: 29).

social codes, overstep boundaries, and disrupt order (Padgett 2003: 23). Roman poets connect the Centaurs' raw hyper-virility to "an unattainably grand form of poetry" (Lowe 2015: 166), i.e. martial epic. While it has been argued that the generic primal scene for epic grandeur is the Gigantomachy (Innes 1979: 166-8; Hardie 1986: 22-5; Lowe 2015: 189-216), and perhaps even a pre-Homeric topos at that, Lowe notices a similarly sublime battlefield archetype in the Centauromachy as it is depicted in Augustan literature (Lowe 2015: 167-70). Exceptions, however, had been inscribed in the discourse on Centaurs early on: not all Centaurs fit into the stereotypical image of a virile bunch of drunkards and bullies. Vase paintings often show philanthropic Centaurs dressed, contrasting the wild, animally naked ones (Létoublon 2009: 29). Roman accounts provide a differentiated wide range of Centaurs, from morally exemplary teachers to pre-civilized brawlers (Lowe 2015: 168-9). Ovid, consciously playing out different aspects of their hybridity, presents humanely civilized Centaurs and even a female alongside the notorious aggressors.

4.1. Chiron and Ocyroe (*Met.* 2.633-97)

The first outstanding Centaur, both in Greek literature (e.g. *Il*. 4 and 11) and within Ovid's *Met*., is Chiron (2.633-79), "arguably the most humane figure in classical myth" (Lowe 2015: 4). A skilled healer, he holds close connections to humans, and is, like Medusa and the Minotaur, linked to well-known epic heroes – not as a monster to be conquered, but as a foster-parent and tutor for Hercules, Jason, and Achilles. His exceptionality among the Centaurs is equivalent to that of his pupil Achilles, "the best of the Achaeans" (Létoublon 2009: 27). In Ovid, Chiron also raises the infant Aesculapius and has a daughter himself, Ocyroe.[63] She is the scene's actual protagonist, since Ovid focuses on

63 Pindar's *Pyth*. 3 and 4 provide the first references of Chiron's family; his daughter's shape is not specified here either. Visual depictions in geometric art, however, reveal that the Centaur's daughters were considered human, perhaps because hybrid beings were in general thought to be infertile in the sense that their hybridity could not be passed on to offspring (Létoublon 2009: 28). Heath explains Ovid's unusual name for Chiron's daughter with recourse to her counterpart and model in the *Iliad*, Achilles' talking horse Xanthus. He suggests that Ovid chooses Ocyroe – *swift-flowing* – over her more common names Hippe/o or Melanippe, to demonstrate his familiarity with the *Iliad*: Since Xanthus is another name for the Trojan river Scamander, Ovid chooses also a fluvial name for his prophetess (1994: 343-4). Keith emphasizes the episode's assonant wordplay: Ovid connects O*cyro*e to her father *Chiro*n and to the preceding stories about raven (*corvus*), crow (*cornix*), Coroneus and Coronis through syllabic association (1992: 66). But Ovid alludes to her other, more horse-like, names when he mentions a name change in

her metamorphosis. In a prophetic frenzy (640-1), she reveals both Chiron's and Aesculapius' fate and, as a punishment for her bluntness, turns into a mare – a process she comments upon herself in a cinematic live-coverage:

> iam mihi subduci facies humana uidetur,
> iam cibus herba placet, iam latis currere campis
> impetus est: in equam cognataque corpora uertor.
> tota tamen quare? pater est mihi nempe biformis
> (*Met*. 2.661-4)
>
> Now my human shape seems to be passing. Now grass pleases as food; now I am eager to race around the broad pastures. I am turning into a mare, my kindred shape. But why completely? Surely my father is half human.

Ovid remains remarkably ambiguous about the prophet's initial shape – was Ocyroe a human or, like her father, a Centaur before she became a horse? Her *facies humana* (661) could either refer to her entire appearance or only her face, and that horses are *cognata corpora* (663) to her is clearly an acknowledgement of her paternal heritage, but it is unclear whether or not that was visible in her form.[64] Despite the "horse-blood in her veins, […] she is alarmed to find her metamorphosis slipping past the half-way point represented by her father" (Heath 1994: 346). Exceeding Chiron's hybrid form, however, is perfectly logical a punishment for her initial aspiration to surpass her father in skills and arts (638-9: *non haec artes contenta paternas* / *edidicisse fuit*). Whether or not she was a Centaur before, Ovid presents Ocyroe as a hybrid in the very moment of her metamorphosis[65]: the "comic grotesquerie" of her transformation arises from the neat "combination of congruity and incongruity" between previous and new identity:

> Her furious prophetic loquacity and her whinnying are all too similar. The size of her mouth and neck enlarges during her metamorphosis; but anyone who has so insistently paid attention to other people's business and talked about it so much has clearly had a figuratively large mouth and neck all along. Within this comic framework, Ovid creates a tale of dissociation. He begins with a composite creature, the centaur, and uses his narrative to demonstrate the distinct identities of the two components, the human and the beastly. At the

2.675: *nomen quoque monstra dedere*. Gildenhard & Zissos explain Ocyroe's name with the Callimachean image of poetry as a flowing stream (1999a: 45-6), interpreting her as a "poet figure, and thus as an emblem of the poetic process itself" (46).

64 Modern commentators are not sure about her initial shape either: only Barkan seems to be convinced that she "has all along been a centaur, so that she is half beastly to begin with" (1986: 24), while Aston concludes from her evaluation of textual and visual material that Ocyroe is human at first (2011: 271-2). Heath also perceives her as a human turned into an animal (1994: 340-2). Although his detailed evaluation of existing scholarship on Ocyroe (esp. 340, footnote 1) includes Barkan, he does not comment on Barkan's view of Ocyroe as Centaur. As Fantham observes, the aporia must have been intended by Ovid: "The unanswered question momentarily preoccupies the reader; what was she before?" (2004: 126). Given the detailed description of her fingers turning into hoofs and her dress into a tail (2.670-3), her initial humanity appears more likely to me: as a Centaur, she would have already had hooves and a tail.

65 Giulia Sissa argues in a recent article that all of Ovid's metamorphoses are partial and incomplete, thus producing hybrids: "not quite the same as they were before, but not completely different either" (2019: 159). Létoublon also speaks of her "interrupted metamorphosis" as a mode of hybridity (2009: 33).

> moment when Ocyroe wants to eat grass but also has the mental awareness to speculate on that desire, she is in effect contrasting the human and the beastly by distinguishing consciousness from form. […] The comedy of Ocyroe's little soliloquy arises from just this dissociation: the beastly component satisfies its appetite while the human helplessly speculates upon it (Barkan 1986: 24).

Ovid positions Ocyroe's "illicit revelation and subsequent silencing" strategically in the middle of other *indicium* tales (Heath 1994: 341; cf. Keith 1992: 92-3), between the tell-tale birds crow and raven, undergoing color change and social exclusion (2.549-95), and Battus, whose betrayal of confidence turns him into a stone (2.676-707). But Ocyroe does not, like the birds, tell bad news, nor, like Battus, snitch a secret in hope of being recompensed: her hubristic transgression consists in the inappropriate and extensive revelation of divine secrets concerning the future (639: *fatorum arcana*). She predicts that Aesculapius – now an infant, but later a healer and patron of medicine – will find means to defeat mortality and rise again from death[66] himself before his eventual apotheosis (2.643-8), and that the immortal Chiron will one day long for death to escape painful suffering (649-54). That her speech is too long on the one hand, rendering the speaker loquacious, and thematizes immortality, on the other, connects Ocyroe to the ancient topoi of poets who, possessed by divine insight and thus themselves prophetic *uates*, strive to pursue immortality through eternal fame, like Ovid himself in the epilogue of the *Met*. That the time frame she covers in her proleptic narration reaches from Ovid's Book 2 (Aesculapius' infancy) to his final Book 15 (his transferral to Rome) emphasizes that Ocyroe "embodies the teleological drive of Ovid's poem" (Gildenhard & Zissos 1999a: 46). Ovid is aware of the metapoetic potential of inappropriately long prophecies, famously utilized by his Hellenistic models Callimachus[67] and Apollonius[68] in their programmatic abandonment of tiresome long epics in favor of refined, concise poetic *Kleinformen*. Ocyroe's "song" (639: *canebat*) bears Virgilian traces: her solemn address to Aesculapius as the "bringer of salvation to the entire world" (642-3: *toto* […] *salutifer orbi* […] *puer*) recalls the salvatory boychild of *Eclogue* 4 (Ziogas 2013: 127, reporting Barchiesi), while the ubiquity of *fata* (639, 648,

66 Aesculapius' life-saving medical skills are also described in *Met*. 15.622-744 and *Fasti* 6.737-52, his death after having challenged the gods' patience once too much when he resuscitates Hippolytus, in *Fasti* 6.753-62. The connections between Aesculapius and Hippolytus are examined in Keith 1992: 67-71.

67 Hecale tells the cautionary tale of crow and raven in *Hec*. Frg. 70-77 Hollis.

68 The seer Phineus is punished for his un-Hellenistic loquacity in *Arg*. 2.178-497. Brian McPhee analyzes this passage and Ovid's condensed Phineus-account in *Met*. 7.2-4 in rich detail and briefly mentions the similarities between Phineus and Ocyroe (2013: 63).

655, 657[69]) in the passage echoes Aeneas' insistence on his fates. Unlike Virgil, however, Ocyroe is not allowed to reveal *fata* in length: her speech is not complete yet (655: *restabat fatis aliquid*) when she interrupts herself at the mentioning of her father's suffering when being injured by a poisoned arrow and his death (654), leaving the rest of the story – Chiron's eventual stellification – for her poet to tell elsewhere (*Fasti* 5.379-414[70]). Ocyroe realizes that she has misused[71] her prophetic gifts and hence must lose her human voice (657-8: *praeuertunt* […] *me fata uetorque* / *plura loqui uocisque meae praecluditur usus*). She considers the price she now pays for her presaging skills as disproportionally high: she would rather not have known the future (659-60: *non fuerant artes tanti, quae numinis iram* / *contraxere mihi; mallem nescisse futura*) than be 'converted' (663: *uertor*)[72] into a horse. Her last words are hardly understandable (2.666), as her language is replaced first by the sounds of "someone who imitates a horse" (668: *simulantis equam*) – almost like a mimetic artist (Barchiesi 2005: 292) – and soon by realistic neighs (668-9: *certos edidit hinnitus*). But albeit incomplete at first sight, Ocyroe's utterance is not futile:

> Although Ocyroe loses her voice (*vox*) in the process of her transformation into a mare, her words (*voces*) survive the loss of her voice, for the substance of her prophecies is fulfilled in passages in both the Metamorphoses and the *Fasti* that echo her words. Thus despite Ocyroe's own denial of the power of her *vox*, Ovid attests to her prophetic ability through the subsequent reuse of his internal narrator's diction in both poems. He thereby implicitly denies that Ocyroe uttered her prophecies in vain (Keith 1992: 84).

The beginning and the end of Ocyroe's prophecy are reminiscent of another female *uates*: the Sibyl in *Met*. 14 (Keith 1994: 83-4; cf. Barchiesi 2005: 289). The onset of her vision is marked by erotic language (Ziogas 2013: 128): Apollo occupies her body and mind, heating her up from the inside of her breast (2.641: *incaluitque deo quem clausum pectore habebat*), thus inspiring her to frantic revelations. Thereby she evokes "another girl loved by the Delphic god" (Ziogas 2013: 128) – the Sibyl's prophetic skills were a compensation for the loss of her virginity (*Met*. 14.133-41). At the sight of the baby Aesculapius, the fruit of yet another affair of Apollo, Ocyroe seems to reenact a symbolical sexual union with the god – thus suggesting a strong link between divine inspiration

69 On the (pseudo-)etymological wordplay between *fata*, *fari*, and *vaticinari*, cf. Keith 1992: 87-91.
70 Keith treats Chiron's death in the *Fasti* extensively (1992: 78-80).
71 On misuse of language as reason for Ocyroe's punishment, cf. Keith 1992: 81, esp. footnote 38.
72 Keith (1992: 81) refers to a remark by Stephen Hinds' that an intentional wordplay between *praeuertunt* (657) and *uertor* (663) is possible. This idea is also taken up by Barchiesi 2005: 291.

and intercourse with Apollo (Ziogas 2013: 128). The Sibyl predicts that she will be outlived by her *uox* (14.152-3), even after her mortal body will diminish due to old age (14.147-9*: cum de tanto me corpore paruam* / *longa dies faciet, consumptaque membra senecta* / *ad minimum redigentur onus*). What Ocyroe experiences at the end of her career as a prophet represents the direct opposite: her body is not reduced to mere voice, but transformed into mere appetite without voice.

Chiron grieves for his daughter, and it is in his epithet *Philyreius heros* (676) that Ovid adds another element to the melting pot of animal and human forms: although previously assigned with the common words for hybrids – "half-beast" (633: *semifer*[73]) and "two-shaped" (664: *biformis*) – his lineage is different from that of other Centaurs, the offspring of Ixion and Nephele. Chiron's parents are the gods' progenitor Kronos and Philyra, a nymph who undergoes an equine metamorphosis when Kronos' wife Rhea interrupts their mating act (Aston 2011: 271[74]). Because of his divine father, Chiron is immortal – thus a *heros*, just like his foster-children, the epic heroes who usually fight hybrids of his kind.

4.2. A *Pharmakon* against Heroism: Nessus, Deianira, and Hercules (*Met*. 9.98-233)

Such a hostile, thus more stereotypical, relationship between hero and Centaur, however, is told in Book 9, when Hercules – a hybrid half-god, as Ovid emphasizes (251-3) – encounters Nessus, an embodiment of the clichéd monstrous violence, savagery, and opposition against civilization, hospitality, and marriage. Ovid takes the plot from the *Women of Trachis*, Sophocles' tragedy on Herakles' death through his wife's hands. Jealous of her younger amorous rival, Deianeira applies a *pharmakon* she once received from Nessus as a mighty love potion which is allegedly capable of assuring her husband's eternal love. Her inner conflict whether to trust the Centaur's advice

73 Contrasted by the complementary *semiuir* in *Fasti* 5.380. We have encountered Ovid's proneness to wordplay with the prefix *semi*- also in the notorious Minotaur-verse from *Ars* 2.24. Cf. Keith 1992: 79. Létoublon notes, however, that *semifer* – half-beast – conveys a more humane idea of the Centaur than the Homeric φήρ: a *semifer* is only half beastly, not entirely (2009: 30).

74 For different versions of this half-bestial love act, mentioned e. g. by Virgil (*Georg*. 3.92-4), Apollonius (*Arg*. 2.1232-42) and Ps.-Hyginus (*Fab*. 138), cf. Aston 2011: 271-2, and Robson 1997: 87-8 with their bibliographies.

represents a major component of Sophocles' play. In an extensive monologue, which Ovid imitates both in *Met*. 9.143-51 and in the entire *Her*. 9, she recalls how Nessus entrusted her with a phial of his blood and instructions on how to use it should her husband ever stop loving her. She overcomes her initial doubt, sends Herakles a potion-soaked cloak, and bitterly regrets her deed once she learns that Nessus' charm kills the hero, instead of binding him closer to her. In Sophocles' tragedy, the Centaur is an "absent yet significant character" (DuBois 1991: 96), since it is, in effect, he who causes Herakles' death and thus takes revenge for Herakles' fatal arrow. Ovid, however, chooses to focus on this episode from the couple' early days of marriage, dwelling on the scene Sophocles' heroine only summarizes in retrospect. That Nessus receives much more attention in the *Met*. than in the *Women of Trachis*, and significantly more than Ovid's Hercules, fits well in the *Metamorphoses'* antiheroic attitude, as Holzberg observes:

> Here, the only story we are told about Hercules while he is still among the living concerns his marriage with Deianira: he first wins her in combat with Achelous (9.1-88)[75], then prevents the centaur Nessus from taking her from him (98-133). […] None of this casts Hercules in a very heroic light, and, indeed, nothing more is said about him for his own sake in the rest of the Hercules section of the *Metamorphoses*. For the main order of business in the next part of the poem, an account of Hercules' apotheosis (239-272), is to pave the way for the series of apotheoses described in the Roman section of the history of the world. […] The remainder of the 'Herculeid' deals only with members of the hero's family; it is the women who figure most prominently here (273-401). […] Rarely in the *Metamorphoses* is it as obvious as it is here how much the narrator's interest in what men and women feel outweighs his interest in the feats supposedly performed by the heroes of yore (2002 [1998]: 132-3).

Although Ovid's narrator addresses Nessus as *ferox* (9.101), a judgment echoed first by Deinira's fear (111), then in Hercules' speech (121: *uiolente* […] *biformis*), the Centaur is at first introduced as a victim: *te* […] *eiusdem uirginis ardor* / *perdiderat uolucri traiectum terga sagitta* (101-2: "a passion for the same maiden utterly destroyed you, pierced through the body by a flying arrow"). This is not simply proleptic, as Kenney suggests (2011: 405), but Ovid's reader is to understand that Nessus is actually hit by two consecutive arrows of which Hercules' deadly trajectory is only the second. Before the hero realizes the Centaur's intended betrayal (119-20: *paranti fallere*) and shoots in order to rescue his screaming bride, Ovid's notorious shooter of baneful arrows – the *ferox* Amor – has wounded the Centaur and turned his mind to bride-theft. His double destruction, thus, is inevitable, cleverly

75 A passage which for conciseness' sake must be omitted here, although Achelous' shape-shifting abilities and his various animal disguises also present the categories human, beast, and god as fluid and subject to change. Isabelle Jouteur analyzes all Hercules-related passages in the *Met*. in rich detail and notices that Ovid does not lose any opportunity to degrade and mock the hero (2001: 329-40).

highlighted with an almost verbatim repetition of line 102 in 127-8 (*et missa fugientia terga sagitta* / *traicit*). Piercing through the Centaur's human body from back to chest, Hercules' poisoned arrow hurts Nessus with a double wound in itself, (128-30: *exstabat ferrum de pectore aduncum*. / *quod simul euulsum est, sanguis per utrumque foramen* / *emicuit mixtus Lernaei tabe ueneni*). The scene is charged with sexual double-entendres: Nessus is about to ravage the beautiful maiden precisely when Hercules has temporarily abandoned his arms (114: *nam clauam et curuos trans ripam miserat arcus*), that is, in a metaphorical sense, his manhood and potency: the phallic symbolism of both the club (*clauam*), his iconic attribute, and especially the bow (*arcus*), emphatically placed at the end of the line, is obvious.[76] The Centaur, thus, does not only threaten the ordered system of patriarchal society, which is organized by homosocial exchange of women through marriage (DuBois 1991: 102-4), but also, aptly for an epitome of hypermasculinity, Hercules' virility, his physical and sexual strength. Taking up his bow again (118: *missos cum tolleret arcus*), he realizes the necessity to defend and prove his masculinity against Nessus. Himself almost a man-beast hybrid when wearing his lion skin,[77] he cannot accept the offence Nessus' abduction of Deianira implies, and must undermine his rival verbally and physically, as he states in his insulting speech: *haud tamen effugies, quamuis ope fidis equina;* / *uulnere, non pedibus te consequar* (125-6: "You shall not escape, however much you trust in your horse's fleetness. With my deadly wound, if not with my feet, I shall overtake you"). Hercules pointedly sets his own superhuman power and speed against Nessus' inborn advantage – his equine half. Moreover, inflicting a wound (126: *uulnere*) in his erotic rival can be seen as an attempt to emasculate him, as *uulnus* also bears the connotation of female genitalia (Adams 1982: 152).[78]

76 Adams comments on the erotic connotations of arcus in his *Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (1982: 20-1). Another passage where Ovid famously plays with the association of bow and phallus is Penelope's archery competition among the suitors in *Am*. 1.8.47-8: *Penelope iuuenum uires temptabat in arcu* / *qui latus argueret, corneus arcus erat* ("Penelope was testing the young men's powers with the bow; he who proved the strength of his loins had a bow made of horn"). Cf. McKeown 1989: 226-7.

77 Especially in Augustan poetry, Hercules is portrayed as "violent, hairy, appetitive, overbearing, and hypermasculine, very unlike the Olympian gods and closely aligned with the monsters whom he defeats" (Lowe 2015: 177).

78 The prevalence of gendered, especially castrating, violence in this scene is also visible in Sophocles' tragedy, when Herakles, facing death, summarizes his manly heroic conquests and complains about the bitter irony of dying by the hands of a feeble female, and in Ovid's *Heroides*, when Deianira expresses her disdain for her husband's effeminizing service to Omphale and his recent yielding to another woman, Iole (*Her*. 9.55-118). Seminal on Herakles' complicated gender – hypermasculinity tied to feminine traits – is Loraux' essay "Herakles: The Supermale and the Feminine", first published in the collective volume *Before Sexuality* (1990), but then included in Loraux 1995: 116-39.

The mixing of liquids following the penetration[79] of the Centaur's body by Hercules' poisoned arrow (129-30: *sanguis* […] *mixtus Lernaei tabe ueneni*) evokes further innuendos: although opinions on the possibility of ancient awareness of the etymological connection between the poison, *uenenum* (venom) and *Venus*/*uenustas* (erotic desire, pleasure, love) vary, there are passages in poetry (Lucretius, Virgil, Varro, Ovid) that playfully exploit the creative spectrum of love potion, poisonous desire, or erotic charm.[80] Albeit hostile to human civilization, Nessus seems to utilize this etymological link before he dies: as a final act of revenge (131: *neque enim moriemur*[81] *inulti*), he tricks Deianira to take his blood-soaked tunic as a love-charm should her husband ever abandon her for another woman (132-3: *calido uelamina tincta cruore* / *dat munus raptae uelut inritamen amoris*). In her analysis of the scene in Sophocles' tragedy, DuBois briefly mentions (1991: 100) that the Centaur's potion corresponds to the semantic range of the Greek word *pharmakon* that Derrida observed in his examination of Plato's dialogues in his major work *Dissémination* (1981 [1972]). This train of thought can be developed further and connected to Ovid's passage:[82] simultaneously bearing the notions remedy/medicine and drug/poison, the *pharmakon* is inherently ambiguous (Derrida 1981: 70-71). Although clues whether the beneficent medicine or the maleficent poison is meant are in most cases given by the context, the diametrically opposite meaning is, albeit absent, still present in the sign: "When a word inscribes itself as the citation of another sense of the same word, when the textual center-stage of the word *pharmakon*, even while it means *remedy*, cites, re-cites, and makes legible that which *in the same word* signifies, in another spot and on a different level on the stage, *poison*" (1981: 98). According to Derrida, a *pharmakon* unfolds its effect over

79 On wounding as penetration and thus emasculation, if the bodies in pain are male, in Greek thinking in general and in epic in particular, cf. Loraux 1995: 97-9.

80 The etymological dictionaries by Ernout-Meillet and Walde-Hofmann are repeatedly referred to as sources for a linguistic relation between Venus and *uenenum*. The discussion is summarized, alongside the respective poets' puns, in Snyder (1980: 106-7), O'Hara (1996a: 128), and Hinds (2006).

81 The poetic plural is particularly accurate here, since Hercules, too, will die of the very same poison. Sophocles also has him wish for revenge and rejoice when he learns that Deineira has already died, thus adding a possible third death to the cycle of revenge.

82 Sharrock connects Derrida's *pharmakon* to love-charms and seductive *carmina* in the *Ars Amatoria* (1994: 50-86) and mentions Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* briefly as an early example of the tradition of erotic magic (54-5). Rimell mentions the *pharmakon*'s ambiguity in the context of cosmetic beauty-enhancement in Ovid's *Medicamina* (2006: 64-5).

spatial or temporal distance: it is, therefore, indirect in effect, signifying the absence of a presence. Writing, as opposed to speaking, does not require a speaker's presence either, which is why Socrates in Plato's *Phaedrus* calls the written speech a *pharmakon*.[83] As such, writing might seem to be a cure, an aide-memoire, but Plato's discussants point out the negative, poisonous, side-effects: writing diminishes and harms memory and is, therefore, a maleficent drug (1981: 71-5). Hercules, Nessus, and Deianira – in Ovid even more as in Sophocles – are entangled in a dynamic of absent presences; they exchange *pharmaka* of different kinds. Hercules overcomes the distance between him and Nessus with a poisoned arrow, thus wounding him from afar with two weapons at once: trajectory and poison, both of which do not require his immediate presence. Nessus' revenge entails poison, words, and a text – the instructions to Deianira and his woven *uelamina tincta cruore* (131). He presents his *munus* as a potent *inritamen amoris* (132) – a *pharmakon* in the sense of remedy. Deianira later sends the cloak to her absent husband (153-4: *praetulit imbutam Nesseo sanguine uestem* / *mittere, quae uires defecto reddat amori*). Nessus, already deceased and absent, acts indirectly, through her, to destroy Hercules. The present-giver Deianira is absent when Hercules receives the present, which summons both her and Nessus' absent presences. Sophocles' tragic irony consists in the fact that the potion achieves its goal, though not in the sense Deianeira had expected: slowly dying away, Herakles cannot love anymore, neither Iole nor any other woman. Ovid complicates the situation: in the *Met*., Hercules has never been unfaithful in the first place – only false rumors (137-8: *Fama loquax* […] *mendacia*) persuade Deianira to believe that her husband cheats on her, although it is not the truth in this version.[84] The Centaur's *pharmakon* operates upon her – "its traces invade the soul" (Derrida 1981: 118) – until her truth is penetrated by his words (which Ovid omits to cite). Hercules is absent when suspicions get hold of Deianira; he cannot correct her impressions. Derrida quotes Socrates from Plato's *Laws*, who negates the possibility of a "drug (*pharmakon*) to produce fear" (1981: 120). But Nessus' vengeance in the *Met*. is exactly such a *pharmakon*. Nessus instills

83 Love-poetry is, as Sharrock discusses in detail with recourse to Derrida (1994: 50-86), particularly susceptible to the ambiguously pharmacological effects of writing, as love is conceived as an illness to be cured: "For the lover, consummation is the cure of his passion (suffering), but […] it serves only to aggravate the disease" (57).

84 Though it clearly is true in the *Heroides* where Deianira reflects upon her trust in rumors and concludes that, given all the evidence, it must be true that her husband has a younger mistress (*Her*. 9.119-24).

in Deianira, whose main characteristic is her anxiety, a new kind of fear not grounded in previous experience. The Centaur, hence, hits her weakest point when he mentions the future possibility of unfaithfulness on Hercules' side. The poison-stained cloak now enwraps Hercules (*Met*. 9.155-210), who first suspects the messenger Lichas who conveyed it as the "author of his death" (213: *tune meae necis auctor eris?*). Before Lichas has a chance to speak and declare, Hercules hurls him "like a missile from a catapult" (218: *tormento*) into the sea, where he becomes a lifeless rock. The violence is, of course, misplaced, since Lichas is only accidentally present and not the *auctor*, but Hercules has not yet read the subtext of the received textile which hints at the absent Deianira and the even more absent Centaur who was wounded by another Herculean missile.

In the middle of this web of indirectly exchanged *pharmaka*, poisonous misunderstandings, and citations of absent *auctores*, the question of genre reenters the discussion. The *Metamorphoses* tellingly exclude – or, in Derrida's terms, cite and recite – two modes of indirect communication which, given the episode's plot and dynamics, could have been expected here: the letter and the report by a messenger. Lingering in the inter- and intratextual subtexts,[85] both tragedy and elegy – the standard generic frames for messenger-speeches and, since Ovid's *Heroides*, [86] the standard Ovidian frame for letters – are present in the *Met*., as though the means of epic could not sufficiently represent the conflicts arising from the indirect exchange of *pharmaka*, wounds, words, and textiles.

In his hybrid epic, Ovid stages what Sophocles' tragic characters report in analeptic speeches (Curley 2013: 116-7): Deianira's abduction, Nessus' death and revenge, and Hercules' painful end. Ovid makes his reading audience watch these events as if they were performed on a tragic stage. Nessus' revenge plan, for example, is revealed in a whispered aside to himself, inaudible for Deianira, although she is in his arms at that time (9.131: *secum ait*). In visualizing Hercules' death (9.166-74), Ovid almost exceeds his tragic source's theatricality: not only is the crude presentation of wounded

85 Dan Curley's monograph *Tragedy in Ovid* (2013) provides a most elaborate examination of tragic features in *Met*. and *Her*. and their models from Athenian tragedy. Instead of summarizing all his detailed findings, I will only extract some of his arguments here, but he offers much more on Hercules, Deianira, and Nessus (esp. pp. 200-16), and gives a very instructive account of research on tragic moments in Ovid in his introduction (1-7).

86 Except for Prop. 4.3, Ovid's *Heroides* were inaugural for the emergence and popularity of epistolary elegies. I am grateful to Stephen Hinds for pointing that out to me *per litteras*.

bodies inherently tragic (Gildenhard & Zissos 1999b: 177), but Ovid's reader becomes a witness of "violence almost amphitheatrical in its excess" (Curley 2013: 117). Raging with pain, Hercules heads into the mountains and uproots trees[87] with which he pathetically constructs and mounts his pyre himself (*Met*. 9. 229-38), while the pernicious textile is slowly burning away his skin – a gory process Sophocles only reports in a messenger speech. Fascinated with feminine psychology, Ovid enjoys the staging of typically tragic motives of action in his epic framework: vengeance, delusion, and miscalculation are driving forces (Gildenhard & Zissos 1999b: 172-3) over which the characters reflect and ponder in dramatic monologues (e.g. Deianira in *Met*. 9. 143-51). The emotional drama also establishes the strongest link between Ovid's two Deianiras in *Met*. 9 and *Her*. 9: these two versions of the same episode are "implicated in a single super-text, an alliance between epic and elegy held together by the tragic "(Curley 2013: 206). The epistolary Deianira writes her elegiac letter to the ever-absent Hercules (33: *uir mihi semper abest*) after she had already sent the prepared cloak, as we learn in the middle of her text. Like other letters of the collection (Curley 2013: 5), Deianira's epistle is evocative of the dramatic soliloquies of tragic heroines in emotional turmoil, but it contains a curious metatheatrical twist which reflects on its artificiality more than the other letters do: while she is writing, Deianira learns that Hercules has just died of the poison, a fact that renders her act of writing pointless. Her letter suddenly lacks an addressee and becomes truly monologic, as it turns into a pre-suicidal farewell-testimony. The same elegiac tone with rhetorical questions and topoi like self-deprecation, indecisiveness about future actions, and grief over her abandonment, is compactly preserved in the *Metamorphoses*, although Deianira's directly quoted soliloquy is set before she sends the fatal textile and spans only eight lines (*Met*. 9.143-51). Ovid uses elegiac signal words to describe her distress: *lacrimis*, *flendo*, *dolorem* (142). She briefly toys with the idea of killing her amorous rival (149-51: *quid si me, Meleagre, tuam memor esse sororem* / *forte paro facinus* […] *iugulata paelice testor?*), thus proving herself worthy of her brother Meleager, whose murder of their uncles had been

87 The Centaurs in Book 12 will behave quite similarly when their inebriated blood lust incites them to deforestation of whole areas (Lowe 2015: 179).

told in *Met*. 8.[88] But "preparing a wicked deed, proving the vast extent of perjury and female pain" (150-1: *quantumque iniuria possit* / *femineusque dolor*) recalls another heroine who is ready to kill a rival for the sake of her own intertextual mythic past (Curley 2013: 82 and 206) and also sends a deadly textile: Medea, whose tragic Euripidean role Ovid adapted multiple times (in *Met*. 7, *Her*. 6 and 12, and in his own lost *Medea* tragedy). That she imagines slitting Iole's throat (151: *iugulata paelice*) brings us back to the tragic scene, since the throat is a heroine's classical "weak point" in tragedy (Loraux 1987 [1985]: 50-1). What she – or rather the Centaur through her – will do instead, exceeds what she ponders in her soliloquy and will eventually lead to Hercules' death and her own suicide, whereas Iole remains unharmed and is married off to Hercules' and Deianira's son Hyllus.[89]

Nessus' vengeance is, as has been shown, complex: it includes dissimulation, persuasion, indirect communication, abstract thinking, psychological manipulation, and long-term planning. It takes epic, tragic, and elegiac means to grasp the extent of his revenge. His attack against Hercules is a pointed missile, yet the consequences of his last wish unfold only over the course of years. His *inritamen* works on Deianira until she becomes eventually his instrument and victim. In the *Met*. more than in the *Women of Trachis*, Nessus manages a slowly dripping, gradual poisoning of a couple's relationship. Is he an uncivilized, brutal force of nature, foreign to human culture? No, Ovid portrays him as an erudite and all-too-human strategist who knows how to use rhetoric ambiguities to achieve his goals – he understands the implications of the *pharmakon*. Hercules' actions, by contrast, are narrated cursorily and without any elaborate cognitive reflection on his part. Nessus, it seems, would almost be a more suitable match for Deianira, whose extensive considerations and analyses of situations Ovid quotes directly in both *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides*. In fact, as the hero approaches his painful death, "Hercules begins to behave like a Centaur" (Lowe 2015: 178). Again, Ovid's hybrid creature appears less savage than his killer, the stereotypical hero in his hypermasculine simplicity.

88 Stephen Hinds notes *per litteras* the irony in Deianira's comparison to her brother since "the death she will unintentionally inflict on Hercules is not unlike the death suffered in *Met*. 8 by Meleager himself: consumption by fire inflicted by an absent agent."

89 DuBois analyzes the young bride's succession from Heracles to Hyllos from an anthropological perspective: with the death of Herakles and Deianeira, the beginning of a new era for the *polis* is marked with a new homosocial exchange of a woman (in this case, Iole) from a father to a son (1991: 102-5).

4.3. Transcending Epic Battles and Human Bodies: Nestor's Centauromachy (*Met*. 12.182-535)

After two single, exceptional Centaurs, the third and longest passage featuring equine *biformes* presents an almost ridiculously hypermasculine (Keith 2000: 84-5) collective. Ubiquitous in artistic representations, the Centauromachy – the battle between Lapiths and Centaurs – has contributed much to the stereotypic image of centaurs as a drunken mob hubristically irreverent towards human civilization, society, and institutions such as marriage and hospitality (DuBois 1991: 29-34; Hudson 2018: 20-34 and 67-73). Though invited guests at the wedding of Hippodamia[90] and the Lapith king Pirithous, the Centaurs get drunk, run riot, and attempt to abduct the bride and other maidens present. The incident is briefly mentioned in *Il*. 1 in an internal narration of Nestor's, but elaborated in *Od*. 21: the boldest among Penelope's suitors, Antinoos, compares Odysseus in his shabby disguise to the annoying Centaur who disturbed Pirithous' wedding, thus styling himself, the actual intruder feasting and drinking at another's court, as the lawful king and husband (Létoublon 2009: 24-7). Albeit quite Homeric, as Létoublon (2009: 30-3) demonstrates in her analysis of parallels in setting (Nestor; catalogue of deaths) and wording (names; epithets; etymologies), Ovid's version (*Met*. 12.210-535) is often labelled a mock-heroic *Iliad*-parody: "Ovid uses it to bring his 'Iliad' into conflict with its epic predecessors and to suggest the possibility of other versions of epic narrative besides the canonical texts" (Musgrove 1998a: 230; cf. Ellsworth 1969: 23-5; Jouteur 2001: 349-54). In the middle of Ovid's Troy-related books (*Met*. 11-13), the Greek heroes have a feast after Achilles' pursuit of the invulnerable Trojan Cycnus, on which occasion Nestor entertains his comrades with a detailed narration of the fight he participated in some two hundred years ago. Ovid's take on the mythical "conflict between males and hyper-males" (Lowe 2015: 171) confounds notions of stability and categorization decisively:

> The distinction between Centaurs and Lapiths in this scene is weak, following Augustan trends, but the clash between genres is unusually stark. The mismatched contexts of conviviality and conflict represent elegy and

90 This is not Hippodamia, the daughter of Oinomaos and mother of Atreus and Thyestes, whom Pelops wooed and won in the chariot race against her father. Nevertheless, the association with horses and Centaurs is inscribed in both Hippodamias' or Hippodames' name: "she who masters horses" or "she who is won through horses" (Létoublon 2009: 27).

> epic as perhaps do the members of man and beast. These hybrid bodies are ideal material for a self-consciously unorthodox epic battle scene, whose generic character is both exaggerated and compromised (Lowe 2015: 173).

The graphic violence committed by both Lapiths and Centaurs casts an unfavorable light on the Trojan war during which the episode is told – while listening to Nestor's tale, the Greeks also fight a sanguinary battle over a wife abducted by an immoderate, ungrateful guest.[91] As an internal narrator, Nestor undermines his own authority when he mentions the unreliability of long-ago memories and later reveals himself to have altered the story according to his preferences, thus not unlike a skillful epic poet.[92] The inebriated escalation at the wedding feast in Nestor's inset tale substitutes for the combats at Troy Ovid refuses to re-tell after Homer and Virgil:

> But how could he [Ovid] skip over the entire Trojan War without some sort of battle-narrative? […] What is needed is an episode that is both appropriately violent, to satisfy the audience's expectations of Iliadic battles, and appropriately lengthy, to give the illusion of the passage of nine years' time. Ovid's choice is the Centauromachy: it provides numerous opportunities for creative gore, and, with Nestor as narrator, can be made to seem to take the place of several years of fighting (Musgrove 1998a: 225).

In this respect, Ovid shifts the focus from the famous combats between Greeks and Trojans, especially that between Achilles and Hector,[93] to Achilles' unheroic victory over Cycnus, an otherwise unknown adversary whom he cannot conquer in an Iliadic manner, but has to resort to strangulation, a stereotypically "unmanly" killing mode (Zumwalt 1977: 213; Keith 1999: 232-3; Keith 2000: 83-5). This achievement is further downplayed through Nestor's association of Cycnus with the invulnerable Caeneus, a strong and brave Lapith warrior who, initially a beautiful girl named Caenis, was changed into an impenetrable man after having been raped by Neptune, and could only be brought down through suffocation by several centaurs in concert (12.168-209; 499-541).[94] Nestor insinuates, thus, that Achilles is to be compared to the centaurs (O'Bryhim 1988: 51; Papaioannou 2002: 225-7). The portrayal of Achilles and the Greeks has unanimously been interpreted as unflattering (Zumwalt 1977: 212-3; Papaioannou 2002: 232-3; Murgatroyd 2008:

91 The passage also mirrors the earlier-discussed wedding of Perseus and Andromeda: both feasts turn into battle-fields because of an amorous rival who does not accept the new match (Jouteur 2001: 211-3).

92 Nestor's poetic memory as a medium for an internal micro-epic and his thematic selection are central to Musgrove (1998a: 223-31), Papaioannou (2002: 213-34), and Galasso (2004: 86-8).

93 Ovid's humoristic replacement of Hector with Cycnus has been discussed in detail by Ellsworth (1969: 27-9), Murgatroyd (2008: 931-9), Keith (1999: 231-4), Papaioannou (2002: 223-7).

94 Caenis' transition to masculinity and the gender-role implications of their sex-change are treated extensively by Gärtner (2007: 891-9, with special emphasis on predecessors in Hellenistic literature), Freas (2018: 60-84), Keith (1999: 236-9, and 2000: 84-5).

931-9), thus conveying either a preference for the Roman/Trojan side over the Greeks on Ovid's part (O'Bryhim 1988: 49-53), or a decidedly anti-Augustan refusal to glorify the Trojan war as the natal hour of Rome (Ellsworth 1969: 28-9; Zumwalt 1977: 209-22; Keith 1999: 231-9; Galasso 2004: 83-98).

But there is more to Ovid's *Iliad*-travesty in this episode if we consider the main element of Nestor's flashback: the battle scene itself, which is, in Lowe's words, "a catalogue of epic failures, producing a botched and scurrilous version of epic heroism" (2015: 175). For want of swords and spears at the wedding reception, the combatants amusingly resort to tableware, chandeliers, torches, trees, tables, and altars. The centaurs' half-human/half-equine nature emphasizes the comic grotesquerie even more. But the explicitly represented killings and injuries could hardly be bloodier in a clash of solely human warriors and with real weapons. Rather, the creatively equipped and anatomically composite bodies in conflict negotiate ideas of hybridity beyond the creaturely. Superhuman strength (centaurs) and invulnerability (Caeneus) call for extraordinary props, instruments, tools, and tricks – that is, for technical enhancement, prostheses, and defense augmentation. Artificial means being involved, the distinctions between the strata animal-human-deity blur.

Contemporary theorists have noticed the *Metamorphoses*' potential for post- and transhumanist ideas *ante litteram* (Sheehan 2015: 246-7; Lauri-Lucente 2016: 102-7).[95] Although labels and definitions overlap, post-humanism can be considered the umbrella-term for newer, critical attitudes towards the Humanistic, anthropocentric, tradition (Chesi & Spiegel 2020: 2-5). Critical posthumanism refers to the philosophical skepticism towards the man (human) as the measure

95 Two recent collective volumes, ed. by Chesi & Spiegel (2020) and by Bianchi, Brill & Holmes (2019) take up posthumanist theories in and for classics and demonstrate brilliantly how classical texts can and should partake in contemporary theoretical discussions within the broader humanities and cultural studies. Both collections focus on human-animal and human-machine interrelations in ancient literature and philosophical and cultural attitudes towards human exceptionalism which have been influential for the emergence of the modern human subject. Ovid's alleged status as the first proto-transhumanist appears to be established also in recent public scholarship, as can be inferred, for instance, from blogposts such as "The Revenge of the Pagans: Ovid as Prophet of the Posthuman" (Nov. 2015) on philosopher R. Searle's blog https://utopiaordystopia.com/tag/transhumanism-and-christianity/. S. B. Levin, however, provides a counterpoint from a classical perspective, as the author shows that transhumanists often misread or deliberately bend classical sources (Plato and Aristotle alongside myth) to "increase the desirability and plausibility of their own accounts" (2017: 283). B. Ross seconds Levin in his recent *The Philosophy of Transhumanism* (2020: 43-8).

of all things, and is thus compatible with and intensifies the critical theories (deconstruction, feminism, gender and disability studies) predominantly applied in this thesis, as well as with activist movements promoting social justice, equality, animal rights, or environmental protection. Transhumanism shares the post-humanist conviction of humanity's imperfection, but understands human enhancement and elevation through technological progress as the ultimate goal of humanity.[96] Leading thinkers like Nick Bostrom, James Hughes, and Ray Kurzweil insist on the necessity of control over the physical, moral, emotional, and cognitive aspects of human life.[97] Invulnerability, longevity, and heightened autonomy from emotions, needs, or genetic dispositions are no longer considered impossible superpowers, but realistic and desirable research goals. "Transhumanists believe that we are finally on the brink of making the ancient dream of transcending the human condition come true" (Hauskeller 2016: 3). If nature is rejected as a limiting force, it is logical that the defeat of pain, aging, and even death – ever-evocative of distasteful corporeality and responsible for physical and emotional suffering – are among the chief research goals. Areas of common ground between Ovid's world of change and the recent trend of tech-positive transhumanism are the interest in strategies of coming to terms with adverse conditions, the resentment towards limitation and dependency, and the desire to overcome any natural insufficiency. Hubristic creators, ingenious artists, and skillful inventors such as Prometheus, Daedalus, or Pygmalion fittingly serve as poster-boys for the ambitious objectives transhumanists strive to achieve through technology and science (Hauskeller 2016: 165-6; Levin 2017: 279-80; Lauri-Lucente 2016: 110-1).

Nestor's Centauromachy acts out questions of humanity and hybridity which correspond to the central concerns of posthumanism, and, moreover, are strikingly similar to ideas advanced by advocates of transhumanist enhancement. At the core of the passage lies the defeat of evils such as bodily weakness, vulnerability, mortality, and emotions. Ovid turns the oft-depicted battle between "savage" Centaurs and "cultured" Lapiths into a clash of hybridized, enhanced bodies and powerful

96 On further nuances and distinctions between different post-humanist "schools", cf. Roden 2015: 9-33.

97 Hauskeller explains these enhancement attempts to cure "the disease of being human" in detail (2016: 121-41) and notes that critical post- and transhumanism radically diverge in their attitudes towards alterity and disability: while critical posthumanists embrace diversity and individuality, transhumanist thinkers desire super-ability as the new normal condition, thus rejecting even normal-ableness as insufficient and defective (124-5).

instruments. The agents on *both* sides are represented as beyond human: the Centaurs are obviously inhabitants of the liminal twilight zone between man and beast, thus paradigmatic representatives of the posthumanist "hum*an*imal" – a conceptual state of being that enables us to recognize "the animal in a human body", acknowledging the Other within and, thus, challenging the humanist conviction of man's exceptionality (Chesi & Spiegel 2020: 11-3). The Lapiths, however, excel through their half-divine fighters and their transsexual cyborg-hero Caeneus, a "killing machine" (Mader 2013: 110). Consequently, the Lapiths, too, can be considered hybridized. The "weapons", shields, instruments, and tools all the participants use can be regarded as prosthetic extensions of their bodies, and, as such, as technical enhancements of their very virility which is at stake in the business of war. Lapiths and Centaurs alike operate, hence, as "huma(n)chines" – synergic entanglements of bodies and weapons at the interface of organism and machine (Chesi & Spiegel 2020: 13-7). Three ways of transcending the human condition through enhancement are at play in the battle: enhancement through hybridization, through transformation, and through technical augmentation.

Ovid deploys the Centaurs' hybridity effectively as a superpower in warfare. Against Lucretius' banishment of Centaurs and other composite creatures from his world of rational-scientific discourse (*DRN* 5.878-80: *sed neque Centauri fuerant nec tempore in ullo* / *esse queunt duplici natura et corpore bino* / *ex alienigenis membris compacta*), Ovid provides a conscious counterpoint[98] when he emphasizes their double strength with the even-handedly distributed terms *bimembres* (240; 494), *biformis* (456), *semiferos* (406), and *semihomines* (436). The Centaurs attending the wedding are extraordinarily strong and brutal, thus calling to mind the monstrous forces in accounts of another superhuman clash, the Gigantomachy.[99] They lift up tables and altars (254-5; 259-61), uproot forests (506-11), and resort to mere violence whenever they are short on words (232-3). Far from being an impediment, the combination of human and equine parts doubles their courage: their ferocity results from their hybridity. Hence, in an exhortation, the centaur Monychus calls upon his fellows' mixed heritage. He reminds them that their shape renders them not less, but more than men: *quid membra*

98 DeBrohun analyzes Ovid's engagement with Lucretius' impossible Centaurs in this scene in rich detail and with regard to verbal allusions and Lucretian phrases in Ovid (2004: 420-33).

99 Lowe analyzes parallels between the Centaurs and the Giants (2015: 167 and 207-9).

inmania prosunt / *quid geminae uires et quod fortissima rerum* / *in nobis duplex natura animalia iunxit?* (501-3). Hyper-virility being a sure means to superiority in any patriarchal context, and especially in warfare, their built-in advantage should provide them with the means to succeed over their solely-human or even less-than-male adversaries. That doubling and duplicity are *the* crucial factors in this battle, is further highlighted on the textual level, as Keith (1999) observes:

> Ovid plays extensively on the centaurs' double nature. Eurytus, the centaur who ravishes Pirithous' bride, is excited by the twofold passions of lust and drunkenness (*ebrietas geminate libidine regnat* […], 12.221). In the battle itself the centaurs' strokes and wounds are often doubled: thus the centaur Amycus is killed 'by a twin wound' (*uulnere geminato*, 12.257), while the centaur Demoleon dies from 'a single blow piercing both breasts through the shoulder' (*perque armos uno duo pectora perforat ictu*, 12.377), i.e. the point at which equine and male parts met. Another centaur, Gryneus, kills two Lapiths at one stroke (*depressitque duos, Brotean et Orion* […], 12.262) but loses both eyes when they are pierced by a stag's double-branching antlers (*figitur hinc duplici Gryneus in lumina ramo* […], 12.268) (236n81).

Humanity, it becomes clear, is nothing exceptional or desirable to them, but rather a condition that deserves contempt and mockery, however not as much contempt and mockery as femininity and emasculation. But the exaggerated toxic masculinity most Centaurs deploy is countered in a light-hearted "elegiac" (Mader 2013: 107-8; Létoublon 2009: 32) digression in the middle of the close combats (12.393-428). Among the rioting Centaurs, Nestor introduces two exceptionally beautiful individuals: Cyllarus and Hylonome, the latter being the only female Centaur in Ovid's cabinet of curiosities. Unlike mayhem and slaughter, their story fits the context of a wedding feast – the intermezzo resembles a wedding song (Fantham 2004: 109; DeBrohun 2004: 448). As a couple, Hylonome and Cyllarus are ideally matched and mutually in love (416: *par amor est illis*), one never leaving the other. "The charm of the tale lies in its closeness to human romance" (Fantham 2004: 110). Due to his natural beauty (393-4: *forma*), Cyllarus is a perfect "specimen of Lucretius' impossible creature" (DeBrohun 2004: 427): both his equine and human parts are exemplary and in exact harmony, which is why he exemplifies "une icone du texte, parce que la beauté de la créature réside dans sa dualité intrinsèque, dans l'association de sa puissance chevaline et de la grâce de son visage" (Jouteur 2001: 191). Although anatomically accurate, his perfect shape could be manufactured by a great artist rather than by nature herself:

barba erat incipiens, barbae color aureus, aurea
ex umeris medios coma dependebat in armos.
gratus in ore uigor; ceruix umerique manusque
pectoraque artificum laudatis proxima signis,
et quacumque uir est; nec equi mendosa sub illo
deteriorque uiro facies; da colla caputque,
Castore dignus erit: sic tergum sessile, sic sunt
pectora celsa toris. totus pice nigrior atra,
candida cauda tamen; color est quoque cruribus albus
(*Met.* 12.395-403).

His beard was in its first growth, a golden beard, and golden locks fell down from his shoulders halfway down his flanks. He had a pleasing sprightliness of face; and his neck, shoulders, breast, and hands, and all his human parts you would praise as equal to an artist's perfect work. His equine part, too, was without blemish, no way less perfect than his human part. Give him but neck and head, and he will be worthy of Castor's use: so shaped for the seat his back, so bold stood out the muscles on his deep chest. All blacker than pitch he was; yet his tail was white; his legs also were snowy white.

Hylonome's appearance is equally impressive – and equally un-natural, since Ovid humorously draws our attention to her beauty tricks and adornments (408: *cultus*). Her active wooing of Cyllarus is so cultured, civilized and urban that she seems to have read Book 3 of Ovid's *Ars* (DeBrohun 2004: 433-40) and absorbed the manual's instructions for women in love:

haec et blanditiis et amando et amare fatendo
Cyllaron una tenet, cultu quoque, quantus in illis
esse potest membris, ut sit coma pectine leuis,
ut modo rore maris, modo se uiolaue rosaue
implicet, interdum candentia lilia gestet,
bisque die lapsis Pagasaeae uertice siluae
fontibus ora lauet, bis flumine corpora tingat,
nec nisi quae deceant electarumque ferarum
aut umero aut lateri praetendat uellera laeuo
(*Met*. 12.407-15).

She, by her coaxing ways, by loving and confessing love, alone possessed Cyllarus; and by her toilet, too, so far as such a thing was possible to such a form; for now she smoothed her long locks with a comb, now twined rosemary, now violets or roses in her hair, and sometimes she wore white lilies. Twice each day she bathed her face in the brook that fell down from a wooded height by Pagasa, and twice dipped her body in the stream. Nor would she wear on shoulder or left side anything but becoming garments, skins of well-chosen beasts.

Extensively playing on the juxtaposition of binary opposites such as "*natura* and *cultus*, human and animal, male and female, love and war, and the values of lyric-elegy and epic" (DeBrohun 2004: 418) and of "savagery and sophistication, amorphousness and beauty, […] order and chaos (Mader 2013: 108), Ovid resolves all contradictions in Hylonome's and Cyllarus' idyllic world: cosmetically enhanced and akin to mimetic art-works, the couple surpasses equine and human perfection. Ovid distinguishes their civilized, peaceful behavior and their relationship's extraordinary gender-equality from their conspecifics' "hypersexuality and drunkenness", attributes that correspond "to the most extreme ancient notions of uncontrolled masculinity" and the "animal element in their nature" (DeBrohun 2004: 437). Cyllarus and Hylonome embody perfect hum*an*imals, as both their equine and human parts are groomed and adorned, their manners refined; they are courageous and loyal to their cognates, but not aggressive of their own accord. But Ovid's talkative narrator Nestor does not let us forget that we are still in an epic flashback narration of a battle: the "pastoral idyll is abruptly shattered" (Mader 2013: 108)

when Cyllarus is struck and Hylonome throws herself upon the same arrow and dies, embracing him one last time (12.426-8).

In contrast to the Centaurs' intensification of the human and the equine condition through their hybrid doubling of power, strength, and beauty, the Lapith hero Caeneus' superhuman exceptionality is deliberately crafted: his body has been enhanced through voluntary transformation. Nestor introduces him as "one who could bear a thousand strokes with body unharmed (12.171-2: *patientem uulnere mille* / *corpore non laeso*) and adds that "he had been born a woman" (175: *femina natus erat*). What strikes Nestor's audience most, is the marvellous and unheard combination (175: *monstri nouitate*) of several exceptional elements: sex-change (179: *cur in contraria uersus*), invulnerability, and the possibility of invincibility (180: *si uictus ab ullo est*). Caeneus' body, as Nestor explains, became extraordinary through deliberate change: according to the maiden Caenis' own wish (202: *tale pati iam posse nihil. da femina ne sim*), a divine 'upgrade', offered after she had been raped by Neptune, renders her both male and immune against sexual penetration and other assaults (206-7: *ne saucius ullis* / *uulneribus fieri ferroue occumbere posset*). Although it is not specified what Caenis wishes to become (Freas 2018: 64-5), the transformation into an avid warrior instantly pleases them.[100] The new virility – or phallicity, in the words of translator Charles Martin – is suggested to be better than the former female, assailable body which was open to attack. From less-than-human (female, passive), Caenis has been transformed first to human (male) and super-human (invulnerable). Caeneus rejoices "in manly pursuits" (208: *studiis uirilibus*) in the *Peneian* (209) fields – a geographical epithet that, through its phonetic vicinity to *penis* (Freas 2018: 71), affirms his new masculinity. Caeneus' involvement in the battle at Pirithous' and Hippodamia's wedding exceeds a classical *aristeia*: when Nestor's narrative returns to him, the initial protagonist, he has already killed five Centaurs (12.495: *quinque neci Caeneus dederat*). He continues to "wreak bloody havoc among the Centaurs, one man against a whole army" (Mader 2013: 110) until Nestor – otherwise a most diligent war-reporter – loses track of all the wounds and details (12.461: *uulnera*

100 They-pronouns are used here when the very doubleness of Caenis/Caeneus is concerned – the transition between sexes, and later the hybrid assemblage of 'masculine' and 'feminine' codes. When Caeneus' masculinity is concerned, e.g. in the battle-scenes, I – and Caeneus possibly too – prefer to use the masculine he/him-pronouns.

non memini, numerum nomenque notaui).[101] The Centaurs repeatedly challenge Caeneus' virility and test his "'rape-proof' body by desperately attempting to penetrate him while taunting him for his female past, making several references to the rape (Freas 2018: 72). Their attacks are "sexually charged" and offend Caeneus' gender identity (Freas 2018: 72), but for a long time they remain futile and unsuccessful – which inspires Mader to label their efforts "raging against the machine" (2013: 110). The stereotypically male, violent Centaurs with their innate, 'natural' hybridity and superhuman strength are unwilling to acknowledge an 'artificially' upgraded superhuman body. "Like the biform centaurs, Caeneus is a biform monstrosity […]. Yet if the centaurs' equine virility characterizes them as hyper-male, Caeneus' female natal origin threatens to render him less than male" (Keith 1999: 236). The two concepts of masculinity – 'natural' or acquired – at odds are expressed openly in the macho Centaurs Latreus' and Monychus' assaults: *nam tu mihi femina semper*, / *tu mihi Caenis eris* (470-1); *bella relinque uiris!* (476); *heu dedecus ingens!* […] *populus superamur ab uno* / *uixque uiro; quamquam ille uir est, nos segnibus actis* / *quod fuit ille, sumus* (498-501). "Ignoring the fact that the centaurs themselves are only 'half-human' (Keith 1999: 237), they insinuate that his "very presence in the battle is an affront to the masculine ideal embodied in the Centaurs" (Mader 2013: 111). "Impugning an opponent's masculinity" is an established bully-boy-tactic on epic battlefields, but these standard elements are even more jarring when pointed at a former woman and spoken by a bunch of half-men (Keith 1999: 237; cf. Freas 2018: 73). In turn, Caeneus reacts properly for a male hero: he wounds his aggressors' bodies, phallically demonstrating that he is not only no passive rape victim anymore, but able to penetrate others actively himself. His bloody revenge almost reaches Lucanian dimensions (493: *uulnus in uulnere fecit*) while the wording (*uulnus*) stresses what menaces the Centaurs: feminization, impotence, and "sexual failure" (Freas 2018: 73-4). Hence, it is logical that their final collective attack involves multiplied phallicity: they quickly uproot all forests of Thessaly (512-3; cf. Mader 2013: 112), and bury Caeneus under the trees until he suffocates. Suffocation being a classical way of killing

101 Musgrove notes mordantly that "Nestor implies that he is referring to some sort of official record of the battle, and sounds ridiculously like a war-correspondent with his notebook or portable tape-recorder, who might say, 'My notes contain no mention of the exact wounds which killed these people'"(1998a: 227).

women, not men (Keith 1999: 238), Nestor's narration might suggest that the warrior is re-feminized in death and that the 'natural' gender hierarchy is ultimately re-established: "Caeneus again suffers a type of male violence as the Centaurs overwhelm him with trees – obvious phallic symbols" (Freas 2018: 72; cf. Keith 1999: 238-9; Mader 2013: 112). Yet Nestor does not affirm that Caeneus really dies: an *auis unica* (12.531) emerges in his place, suggesting a post-mortem transformation into a bird. While this metamorphosis obviously mirrors that of Cycnus, the grammatical gender of *auis* is remarkable here: it re-feminizes Caeneus (Freas 2018: 72; Keith 1999: 238).[102] Is there no place in Latin epic for masculinity as a self-chosen role (Keith 1999: 238-9)? Or does the avian metamorphosis debase the Centaurs' joint attack just as Achilles' victory over the avian Cycnus contributed to his emasculation (O'Bryhim 1988: 51-2; Sharrock 2002: 97n8; Mader 2013: 90-1), leaving Nestor's internal and Ovid's external audience to wonder about the empty "conventions of the male dominated epic tradition" (Freas 2018: 78) and warfare?[103] There is, as Freas observes, "no way to neatly reconcile the complex gender dynamics at play in this scene" (2018: 78). Nevertheless, Ovid again refuses to attribute power and glory to the representatives of hyper-sexual aggression and toxic masculinity, despite their own half-male hybridity.

The third way of enhancing allegedly 'natural' bodies – technical augmentation – is deployed by both Lapiths and Centaurs, as can be derived from the significance attributed to their weaponry, means of defense, and tools. These being more in the spotlight than the perpetrators themselves, Ovid's Centauromachy is rather a hyperbolical accumulation of bizarre infringing acts than an epic catalogue of heroic exploits.[104] "For more than a hundred lines Ovid draws his humor from the improvised weapons […] hurled by the combatants" (Fantham 2004: 109). The creative utilization of arbitrary

102 Virgil (*Aen*. 6.448-9) has Caeneus return to the former, female, form after being conquered, but does not mention the avian transformation (Keith 1999: 238; Freas 2018: 79).

103 The fact that Nestor refuses to mention another epitome of epic masculinity in his battle-tale could be read along the same lines: he deliberately occludes Hercules' involvement in the Centauromachy because of his personal enmity towards the brutal hero (cf. Zumwalt 1977: 216-7).

104 The most detailed close-reading and metaliterary interpretation of the battle sequences I have found is Mader's article (2013). Many of his observations are relevant to my own reading which focuses on the appliances instrumentalized rather than the actual battle-sequences.

objects as javelins and shields adds a comedic note to the scene's splatter.[105] The "cyborgization" of a warrior's body through mechanical augmentation is nothing unusual in martial epic: weapons (javelins, swords, shields, etc.) are always accorded a high degree of significance in combat scenes. Ovid's Centauromachy, however, borders on the absurd: the combatants already being physically defamiliarized or denatured, their bizarre battle-hardware is closer to improv comedy props[106] than to divine-sublime smithery. The picturesque grotto with its festively arranged tables (12.211: *positis ex ordine mensis*) turns into a gladiatorial arena, with Nestor as the fights' fascinated spectator (Mader 2013: 87; 91-2), when Theseus grasps a huge *crater* (236) and thrusts it against the Centaur Eurytus. Having thus repurposed the wine mixing bowl for undoing the wedding guests' joint commensality (Mader 2013: 96), Theseus succeeds over the Centaur who used nothing but his bare, unruly hands (233-4: *uindicis ora proteruis* / *insequitur manibus generosaque pectora pulsat*). Subsequently, both teams equip themselves for the "hypertrophic bar fight" (Mader 2013: 91):

> […] ardescunt germani caede bimembres
> certatimque omnes uno ore 'arma, arma' loquuntur.
> uina dabant animos, et prima pocula pugna
> missa uolant fragilesque cadi curuique lebetes,
> res epulis quondam, tum bello et caedibus aptae.
> (*Met*. 12.240-4)
>
> [Eurytus'] dual-formed brothers, inflamed with passion at his death, cried all with one accord, 'To arms! to arms!' vying with one another. Wine gave them courage, and in the first onslaught wine-cups and brittle flasks went flying through the air, and deep rounded basins, utensils once meant for use of feasting, but now for war and slaughter.

O'Bryhim notes a difference in the objects used by the different parties: "The Lapiths fight with whatever is near at hand, but the Centaurs utilize sacred objects exclusively" (1977: 50), a fact that emphasizes their disrespect for all sacred institutions. With a chandelier (247: *funale*) from the shrine, a Lapith's face is crushed past recognition until the eyes leap from their sockets and all facial bones are broken or deformed (245-53). In turn, the perpetrating Centaur is killed with a table-leg (254-7). An entire altar is thrown next (258-62: *proximus ut steterat spectans altaria*

105 Due to the juxtaposition of violent and satirical elements, the combat-scene could anachronistically be described as "Tarantinoesque", as suggested, for example, by Stephen Hinds *per litteras*. In his article "Defamiliarizing Latin literature: from Petrarch to Pulp Fiction", Hinds analyzes a contemporary take on the bizarre splatter scene – Alex Shakar's short-story "Maximum Carnage" in which the Centaurs turn into an army of mutant half-men and half-motorcycles (2005: 70).

106 Ovid enjoys the utilization of comedy props whenever phallic self-assertion is being mocked, e.g. in the last amatory tale in Book 14: the fertility god Vertumnus uses props and weapons with phallic symbolism when he disguises himself in order to win Pomona's love (Fantham 1993: 34-5). Virility being at stake in the Centauromachy as well, stressing the combatants' proximity to the ridiculous male protagonists of comedy adds a typically Ovidian humorous note to the battle's grandeur.

uultu / *fumida terribili 'cur non' ait 'utimur istis?'* / *cumque suis Gryneus inmanem sustulit aram* / *ignibus et medium Lapitharum iecit in agmen* / *depressitque duos*), followed by a pair of antlers which are perfectly apt for piercing a Centaur's eyes (266-70). Further projectiles are stones (281; 341), blazing torches (287-98), logs and trees (272-3; 328; 356-61; 432), most of which lead to disfigurement, mutilation, deformations, and other kinds of macabre, gory deaths. While the attention is given to the instruments and the outcomes of the excessively cruel acts, many perpetrators are only mentioned via name-dropping at the moment they die (Létoublon 2009: 33) rather than glorified through their deeds.[107] Ovid, we see, has Nestor depersonalize the spiral of violence: men and Centaurs are reduced to their qualities to inflict and suffer pain: "wounds and injuries are correspondingly horrendous, producing a distinctive rhetoric of maiming and disfigurement that also connotes the process of literary deconstruction at work in the narrative" (Mader 2013: 106). The battle dismantles the Homeric pretext as it represents epic heroism "as mindless violence in a grotesque menagerie of horse-men and superheroes" (Mader 2013: 91; cf. Lowe 2015: 172-6). The fighters' bodies, equipped with technical paraphernalia, act like machines programmed to respond to violence with new acts of violence. Francesca Spiegel, co-editor of the volume *Classical Literature and Posthumanism* (2020), argues that the masculine body in Greek thought is by default always that of a trained and armed, thus enhanced, warrior since "weapons and wearable artifacts such as armour" are considered to be an "extension of masculine human agency and therefore also to have a part in the male inner subjectivity" (267). The "strong-bodied, strong-minded ideal of manhood" (267) goes hand in hand with the idea of man's "perfectibility by training, and conversely man's lack of perfection in the absence of such training", resulting in an "implicit devaluation of the human as 'bare' human material" (268). Ovid's Centauromachy stages a combat between non- and even superhuman bodies which almost exclusively are artificially augmented, suggesting that even a Centaur's body would be insufficient bare material: their protective armament consists in trophies of former pursuits and demonstrates their superiority over non-hybrid, 'lower', species: Dorylas

107 Nonetheless, the Centaurs' names are descriptive and evocative of nature, bestiality, and brute force (Mader 2013: 106). Moreover, Nestor is eager to emphasize his own important contributions to the fight (12.439-47; cf. Mader 2013: 109-10).

wears "a cap of wolf's hide on his head and, in place of deadly spear, a notable pair of curving bulls' horns" (12.380-2: *tempora tecta gerebat* / *pelle lupi saeuique uicem praestantia teli cornua uara bouum*), his companion Phaeocomes protects his human and equine parts with "six lion-hides bound together" (429-31: *qui sena leonum uinxerat inter se conexis uellera nodis, Phaeocomes, hominemque simul protectus equumque*), thus surpassing the classical lion-slayer Hercules who is the tellingly absent hero in Nestor's story. Ruthless death awaits those who are not capable of enhancing their bodies with appliances – the Lapith who chooses a stone as a javelin that is too heavy for him to throw at the enemy (282-4) and hits an ally instead, the teenage boy whose beard scarcely covers his bare cheeks (291-3), or the Centaur who fails at uprooting an oak tree as a weapon (327-31).[108] As in the transhumanist utopia (Hauskeller 2016: 124-5), the normally abled apparently yield in the clash between the superhuman fighters with their diverse enhancements – anatomically hybridized, artificially transformed, and technically armed.

Ovid's Centaurs are unruly, yet not unanimously malign, beings: Ocyroe oversteps a boundary of decency, Nessus reneges on his promise and ultimately disrupts a marriage, and the Centaur-fighters notoriously rampage against a multitude of societal norms including commensality, hospitality, marriage, and moderation. But the brutish beast in Ovid's Centaur-tales is, as has become clear, no Centaur, but the notorious Centaur-killer Hercules: the extinction of the Centaurs is closely bound to the elevation of the superhuman-yet-animalistically-uncivilized hero – his responsibility for Nessus' death is obvious, but, albeit unintentionally, he also causes Chiron's death (Lowe 2015: 180-2), and, although Nestor tries to suppress that detail, he destroys many Centaurs in the Centauromachy. After exposing Perseus and Theseus in their pursuits of hybrid beings, Ovid again deprives an epic hero of his glory.

With Centaurs being present, also poetic rules are broken: Ocyroe's lengthy prophecy violates Callimachean aesthetics, and Nestor's account of the Centauromachy, though Homeric in length

108 Mader connects these instances of hubristically exaggerated opinion of one's own physical powers to their metaliterary implications: frenzied overreaching parodies the epic conventions in that it "resonates with the well-known trope of the ambitious poet straining under an excessive and inappropriate generic load and then collapsing beneath its weight" (2013: 100).

and subject, differs decisively from the epic heroism expected at Troy. Cross-references to Ovid's own elegiac oeuvre and literary models of all genres are numerous, though always spiced with his signature irony. Ovid seems to embrace an un-Homeric quirkiness as he chooses prostheses over proper weaponry, exaggeration over realism, and black comedy with elegiac and spectacular elements over high epic: "lesser fighters make way for celebrity figures, weaponry becomes exponentially more outlandish, the action more frenzied, and injuries more grotesque" (Mader 2013: 112). Centaurs pose philosophical problems to Lucretius as well as to contemporary thinkers: "who could separate the equine and the human in the being of the Centaur – where is the seam between them? How do we separate the human as a product and self-product of nature and her social being?" (Hudson 2018: 31). Are we talking of "hommes en train de devenir des chevaux", like Ocyroe and, analogously, other transformed creatures, or, to the contrary, of "chevaux complets en train d'évoluer vers une forme humaine", anthropomorphic as Ovid designs some of his Centaurs? (Létoublon 2009: 34). A nexus of conceptions about human potential (hum*an*imal / huma(n)chine), the Centaur challenges ideas about humanity's relation to nature, culture, and corporeality. Ovid's equine-human hybrids negotiate features often claimed to be unique to humans: language (Ocyroe), healing arts (Chiron), the cultured *pharmaka* ambiguity and deception (Nessus), or the use of tools and weapons (Centauromachy). If pharmacological, pharmaceutical, and artistic enhancements – prostheses in a broad sense – are intrinsic even to the rawest and least civilized representatives of brute nature, the posthumanist claim to overcome the belief in human exceptionality and superiority over non-human beings – animals or objects – does not seem extraneous to ancient literature.

5. Bitches and Witches: Scylla's Grotesque Sexuality (*Met*. 13.730-14.74)

As the *Metamorphoses* approach the onset of Roman history, Ovid, having deprived the monster-slayers Perseus, Theseus, Hercules, and Achilles of their epic glory, enjoys privileging another hybrid creature, Scylla, over a legendary hero who happens to be considered very important in Rome: Aeneas. In his "little *Aeneid*", as *Met*. 13.623-14.608 is commonly referred to, Ovid again refuses to reprise what his grand predecessors have already told, but demonstrates his predilection for poetic novelty. Aeneas is remarkably absent[109] for over 300 lines although his voyage from Troy to Italy (*Aen*. 3-6) provides the framework for Ovid's series of metamorphic entanglements, "grotesque love affairs and pathetic heroines" (Lowe 2011: 263; cf. Myers 1994: 99).[110] The marvellous, amorous, and monstrous elements that do exist in Virgil, yet in a "fragmented, scattered, unresolved" form, become Ovid's raw material:

> wherever Virgil is elaborate, Ovid is brief, and wherever Virgil is brief, Ovid elaborates… and generally elaborates in such a way as to develop the characteristic themes of his own epic, not those of Virgil's. […] Rather than construct himself as an epigonal reader of the *Aeneid*, Ovid is constructing Virgil as a hesitant precursor of the *Metamorphoses*. There is a *Metamorphoses* latent in the *Aeneid*, Ovid's treatment tells us: in Circe and in the biform Scylla […] (Hinds 1998: 106).

In a Callimachean manner, he exchanges well-known episodes for variants taken from other authors, traditions, and genres (Myers 1994: 99-102; Fantham 2004: 128-30). The hybrid is again embedded in an extensive etiological digression with multiple internal narrators, self-referential vignettes, and etiological explanations. The episode's structure has been compared to a set of nested "Chinese" boxes (Tissol 1997: 113; Hopman 2012: 241) and to the "brackets of an algebraic formula" (Griffin 1983: 191): a geographical remark about the fleet passing Sicily with its notorious local hazards, the narrow strait between Scylla and Charybdis (13.728-31), introduces Scylla and explains her story which in turn contains two inset tales and various reported speeches.

109 Musgrove suggests that Ovid, by leaving Aeneas aside, emphasizes the detachment from the world that also characterizes the Virgilian hero (1998b: 102).

110 Ellsworth (1986: 27) cites several judgments from the 1960s and 1970s scholarship that criticize Ovid's insertion of frivolous elements into the sublime *Aeneid*-plot, and shows subsequently that Ovid's allusions and creative reinterpretations, far from being indecent, represent a clever reworking of the standard motifs of the post-Trojan war period.

The parenthetical insertion *si non omnia uates* / *ficta reliquerunt* (13.733-4) pays tribute to poetic authorities on the subject matter while simultaneously questioning their reliability in a playful, Hellenistic manner. The conditional phrase, addressed to an abstract internal audience or the actual reader, "concedes that some or even a great deal of poetry is unquestionably *ficta*, while leaving open the possibility that at least some may not be" (Nagle 1988: 90). Yet this feigned "pretense of skepticism" (Galinsky 1975: 176; cf. Nagle 1988: 78n8) is not just a typically Ovidian sacrilegious introduction of "inappropriate wit into our memory of Vergil" (Tissol 1997: 112), but a reference to Scylla's topical status as an emblem of fictionality and creative imagination in Augustan poetry. "[B]y the time of the *Metamorphoses* she had become a touchstone for poetic fictiveness" (Hardie 2009b: 63). Ovid himself contributed decisively to the consolidation of this semantic process: in the wake of the poet's complaints in *Am*. 3.12 about the "naïve *credulitas* of his readers who believe in the literal truth of what he has written about his *puella*" (Hardie 2009b: 61), Scylla is the first example of fantastic creations which only poets can create (3.12.21-2: *per nos Scylla patri caros furata capillos* / *pube premit rabidos inguinibusque canes*). Not only are the two Scyllas explicitly conflated here, but the two-line biography almost suggests a causal relation of daughterly betrayal and canine genitals that is extrinsic to the *Met*. What is elliptically left out is the princess Scylla's motive, the erotic desire for Minos which might have pressured her genitals no less than the dogs do later. That Scylla inaugurates the list might hint at the "*especial* unreliability of poetic data" (Hinds *per litteras*) in her case that is triggered by the Augustan tendency to confuse the two eponymous characters: not only one tale about a Scylla needs to be justified and explained, but two separate incredible stories. By presenting various hybrid monsters "comme fabriqués par les poètes" (Jouteur 2009: 47), the elegy is both a satire on gullibility and a case for poetic license (41: *fecunda licentia uatum*). In *Trist*. 4.7.11-20, Ovid uses the unbelievability of monsters in a rhetorical adynaton that "denotes the impossibility of an action or fact by comparing it to a natural absurdity" (Hopman 2012: 225): he would sooner believe in Medusa, Scylla (4.7.14), or other composite creatures than that his addressee had abandoned him. Hence, the hybrids "exemplify the very idea of fiction" (Hopman 2012: 226). In the *Metamorphoses*, the issue of believability (*credulitas*), is also staged

within the metamorphic world itself: text-internal characters (Scylla and Glaucus, but also Actaeon and Io in the earlier books) reflect upon the probability of supernatural events (Hardie 2009b: 62-3).

Like Medusa and the Sirens, Scylla is also a monster that had become "maidenized" (Lowe 2015: 70-2) in Hellenistic and Augustan poetry: the archaic Scylla, by contrast, was scarcely feminine, but either an abstract menace or a sea-monster with six heads, dogs' *protomai*, and a fish- or snake-tail.[111] Homer does not give any explanations for Scylla's hostility towards men (Tissol 1997: 209). Rationalizing interpretations equate Scylla to a dangerous cliff that poetic imagination took for a petrified monster (Lowe 2015: 78-80). Etymologically, Scylla is connected to σκύλαξ, the Greek word for puppy, and to the verbs σκυλεύω/σκυλάω and σκύλλω, all signifying acts of rapacious spoliation (Michalopoulos 2001: 157-8). In her detailed study of Scylla throughout times and genres, Hopman states that Scylla comprises symbolically the concepts sea, dog, and femininity – three seemingly calm, docile, and amicable forces which can unpredictably turn into doom and peril for men (2012: 8-14).[112] Successively understood as an embodiment of misogynist cultural fantasies, Scylla has been associated with an immoderately voracious, oversexualized, untamed *femme fatale.* Consequently, Heraclitus refers to Scylla in his allegorizing Homer exegesis as "polymorphous shamelessness" (*Alleg. Hom*. 70.11: πολύμορφον ἀναίδειαν), symbolizing "rapacity, recklessness, and greediness" (Hopman 2012: 186).[113] Roman authors are first to attach the dogs' body parts explicitly to her pelvic and inguinal area while preserving her erotically alluring face and torso. With a multi-jawed canine crotch, she becomes a personified *vagina dentata*, the cross-cultural and cross-epochal concept of a female genital equipped with sharp teeth that represents male anxieties about castration and deprivation of patriarchal power through female sexuality (Hopman 2012: 113 and 131-41; Lowe 2015: 74-5; Miller 2012: 316-9 and 326-8).

111 On iconographical representations of Scylla, see Hopman 2012: 56-65 and 96-107, and Aguirre Castro 2002.

112 Lowe points out that marine and canine femininity were standardized metaphors for "feminine duplicity" already by the 6th century BC: Semonides for example, in his misogynist iamb on unpleasant stereotypes of women, mentions both the dog-woman and the sea-woman as undesirable, aggressive females (2015: 76).

113 The personified Sin in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) resembles this Scylla-image and shows its pervasiveness throughout times. Miller outlines parallels between Scylla and Christian allegories of female excess (2012: 319-24).

Ovid, however, portrays Scylla in a sympathetic way that might have been inspired by the iambic poet Aeschrion of Samos and the poetess Hedyle of Attica who composed an elegiac poem *Scylla* in the 3rd century BC of which only one fragment remains (Lowe 2011: 261-3). Both these Greek sources for Scylla the nymph reflect the "Hellenistic taste for humanizing and sentimentalizing fearsome monsters" (Lowe 2011: 263) that Ovid must have been fond of. While the heroic combat motif is central to Homer's and Virgil's accounts of Scylla, Ovid departs from the epic pattern "in favor of a maiden story" (Hopman 2012: 234). He is the first to make Scylla a vulnerable "Andromeda-like damsel in distress" (Lowe 2015: 81) by combining extreme emotional states and feminine beauty. Her actions become understandable and evoke "a glimmer of fellow-feeling with [one] of the worst monsters of traditional mythology" (Tissol 1997: 209; cf. Jouteur 2009: 51). Before she acquired her monstrous form – her "uncanny waist girt with ravening dogs" (732: *feris atram canibus succingitur aluum*), she was a coy and beautiful girl (733-4) at home in a world of female experience, care, and solidarity: annoyed by a multitude of unwanted suitors (735: *hanc multi petiere proci, quibus illa repulsis*), Scylla seeks refuge with her friends, the sea-nymphs; while combing each other's hair, the girls talk about their experiences with men (737: *elusos iuuenum narrabat amores*). The thematic shift from Aeneas' heroic adventures to the gossiping girlfriends seems incoherent only *prima facie*: in fact, Ovid seizes the opportunity to elaborate on his favorite theme from the *Aeneid* – the disruptive forces of unrequited love and rejected advances, the core concern of Virgil's Dido-books (*Aen*. 1 and 4). Carving out what has been labelled a "thematic affinity" (Galinsky 1975: 221), Ovid uses the episode "to anticipate and reflect the situation of Aeneas" (Ellsworth 1986: 31). In addition, the ensuing "trio of love-triangles"[114] conjures not only the Virgilian triangle between Aeneas-Lavinia-Turnus (Nagle 1988: 93), but also two iconic episodes

114 Such is the title of B. R. Nagle's article on the intertwining love stories in *Met*. 13 and 14 (Galatea-Acis-Polyphemus; Glaucus-Scylla-Circe; and Circe-Picus-Canens). Underlying these intradiegetic triangles, Nagle sees a metaliterary triangle pattern: Ovid's trio of erotic triangles in *Met*. 13 and 14 substitutes for *Od*. and *Aen*. In the competition for readers' attention and approbation, Ovid thus positions his epic besides the already canonized giants (1988: 95). The placement of the three love-triangles at the point of arrival in Italy and the narrative shift from Greek to Roman materials is therefore very appropriately chosen: the latest epicist who treats Polyphemus, Circe, and Scylla makes a self-conscious statement about the emulatory nature of Roman poetry confronting the Greek tradition (96).

from Homer's *Odyssey* – the intertextual model of Virgil's *Aen*. 1-6 (Nagle 1988: 83).[115] Relics of a Homeric past, the one-eyed giant Polyphemus (*Od*. 9) and the sorceress Circe (*Od*. 10) haunt Ovid's "*Aeneid*" (or "*Odyssey*", respectively) as they actively interfere in the Ovidian nymphs' (love) lives and provide a contextual background for Scylla's monstrous identity.

In the course of the "intimate scene of a women's toilette" (Tissol 1997: 113), Galatea, distressed and close to tears, envies Scylla for her human suitors (13.740-5). When Scylla asks for details out of genuine interest for her friend's feelings, the nymph reveals that she has been vexed by a brute and monstrous lover's advances, since the hideous Cyclops Polyphemus has fallen for her and jealously killed her boyfriend Acis (750-896). The inset tale is "the story of an unsightly giant, terrifying and ugly but not nearly as abject as Ovid's female monsters" (Pietropaolo 2018: 194). Whereas Galatea's personal involvement renders her a biased and interested party rather than a neutral narrator (Farrell 1992: 266; cf. Nagle 1988: 89-90), she demonstrates advanced narrative skills (Pietropaolo 2018: 198) in her creative adaptation of the "comic tradition of Cyclopean representation" that often ridicules a hideous giant's disharmonious affection for a slender nymph (Tissol 1990: 49). The gap between nymph and Cyclops already being large when the object of his love is an unresponsive *dura puella*, the background story about Acis' death pushes the inherent drop in height from pathos to bathos, from romance to violence, to extreme levels (Griffin 1983: 193-5). Grotesque aesthetics, with their predilection for monstrosity, giantism, "the violation of natural boundaries and the disruption of the logic of proportions" (Pietropaolo 2018: 194) are at work in Galatea's tale: she visualizes the Cyclops in the least empathetic way and relentlessly mocks his clumsy wooing attempts until his emotional suffering becomes a "spectacle" for her internal and Ovid's external audience (Griffin 1983: 195-6). Although rejecting him with derision, the nymph amusedly "lingers on his effort to cross the boundary that separates them, simultaneously admitting him into her world and turning him away from it" (Pietropaolo 2018: 195). In her narration, several poetic traditions communicate with

115 In two articles, J. D. Ellsworth (1986; 1988) notes that Ovid also takes up many elements from Homer's *Odyssey* itself in this passage, not only from Virgil's adaptation in his Odyssean books (*Aen*. 1-6), and that "Ovid's *Odyssey*" would be an equally suitable label for *Met*. 13.623-14.608.

each other in a polyphonic "dialogue of genres", namely epic, elegy, and bucolic-pastoral poetry (Farrell 1992: 240-1). Polyphemus' Homeric characteristics (*Od*. 9) – enormous size, physical strength (Farrell 1992: 250n42), menacing appearance, disrespect for the gods, and inclination towards violence – merge with those of Hellenistic accounts that focus on his impossible love for a beautiful nymph (Theocr. *Id*. 6 and 11; Virg. *Ecl*. 2 and *Geo*. 1.404-9). Elegiac lovesickness smites the epic giant in a bucolic setting. The genres, topoi, and allusions, however, "do not retain their discrete, univocal identity, but work in dialogue to produce a generically innovative rendition of the story" (Farrell 1992: 245). Although placed in a new, amatory context, we recognize the Homeric Cyclops through numerous references which "retell a considerable part of the meeting of Odysseus with the Cyclops" (Ellsworth 1986: 28). In love, Polyphemus seems to forget his Homeric role: he neglects his herds (736: *oblitus pecorum antrorumque suorum*; 781: *lanigerae pecudes nullo ducente secutae*) and is surprisingly indifferent towards sailors passing by (769: *tutae ueniuntque abeuntque carinae*). "Ovid emphasizes the Cyclops' harmlessness here in order to prepare a more shocking intrusion of violence later" (Tissol 1990: 52). Moreover, he suddenly cares for his appearance as if he had read Ovid's eroto-didactic beauty recommendations. By expatiating on the Cyclops' unsuccessful attempts of *cultus,* consisting of combing his abundant hair with a rake and shaving his beard with a scythe (764-7: *iamque tibi formae, iamque est tibi cura placendi*, / *iam rigidos pectis rastris, Polypheme, capillos*, / *iam libet hirsutam tibi falce recidere barbam* / *et spectare feros in aqua et componere uultus*) while herself participating in a hair-styling session, Galatea brutally mocks his inhuman appearance: she derides him "for performing human actions that are discordant with his enormity and shagginess, and incongruous with the pieces of farming equipment that he uses as personal grooming tools" (Pietropaolo 2018: 199). Addressing him directly (*tibi*), she conjures his presence in a rhetorically elaborate *phantasia* that calls her audience's attention to the "aestheticism of visualization" (Pietropaolo 2018: 198[116]). Nonetheless, Polyphemus is familiar with courteous rhetoric: the love-song he performs outside

116 On visualization as a means of conjuring up presences in ancient rhetoric in general, and Ovidian poetics in particular, see Hardie 2002: 3-7.

Galatea's cave resembles an elegiac *paraklausithyron* (Farrell 1992: 247; Pietropaolo 2018: 201), praising his beloved's beauty and mourning her rejection. It also displays characteristics of pastoral poetry: "at 81 lines, the lovesong of Polyphemus is exactly (and intentionally, I suspect) as long as the entire Theocritean text that serves as its main model, *Id*. 11" (Barchiesi 2007: 416). His instrument, though, is a giant panpipe with a hundred reeds (784: *harundinibus compacta est fistula centum*) that reminds us that he is still an epic rhapsode, or at least, a rhapsode within a hexametric epic: for bucolic *Kleinformen*, seven or nine reeds would suffice, whereas his "Wurlitzer-scale" syrinx (Nagle 1988: 80) is closer to the "hundred mouths typically required for high epic" (Barchiesi 2007: 416; cf. Pietropaolo 2018: 210).[117] Referring to Kenney's labelling of the episode as "hyper-pastoral", Farrell notes that "most of the pastoral motifs that Ovid employs here undergo a process of *auxesis*" (1992: 246). Polyphemus' rhetoric of hyperbole and fixation on size and quantity, abundance and excess, reveal an aspiration to surpass and intensify generic conventions and previous poetic appearances (Farrell 1992: 251-2; cf. Nagle 1988: 79-80; Fantham 2004: 129), while reflecting the pastoral convention of competitive *amoebaea* before a jury (Barchiesi 2007: 421). His extraordinarily long list of flattering compliments for Galatea and poetic comparisons of her beauty (e. g. *splendidior uitro, tenero lasciuior haedo*[118]*,* "more sparkling than crystal, more frolicsome than a tender kid") outnumbers those of Theocritus and Virgil by far and goes beyond good taste. Polyphemus even intensifies Galatea's name: for Ovid's Cyclops, she is not simply "milk-white", as her name suggests, but "whiter than the snow-white privet leaves" (789: *candidior folio niuei* […] *ligustri*). That the nymph listens to his song while lying in her boyfriend's arms in a cave, as pastoral shepherds usually do (Farrell 1992: 244), adds a cruel note to Galatea's self-portrait. The melancholy that prevailed in Theocritus' pastoral love-song is, suitably, exchanged for grotesque amplifications and extreme violence (Jouteur 2001: 309). Theocritus' Cyclops concluded his song with the melancholic-philosophical insight that

117 Creese (2009) analyzes potential sexual double-entendres of Polyphemus' enormous panpipe and connects its hundred reeds to the hundred eyes of Argus, put to sleep by Mercury's song in *Met*. 1.

118 I am grateful to Stephen Hinds who pointed out to me *per litteras* that this line corresponds to Horace's Ode to the Spring of Bandusium (3.13.1: *O fons Bandusiae splendidior uitro*).

poetry is the φάρμακον (*Id*. 11.1) for unrequited love; his Ovidian version, by contrast, is far from accepting Galatea's rejection: he hurls a part of a mountain at Galatea's lover when he finds the couple *in flagrante*. With such an epic killing mode par excellence that recalls his Odyssean behavior towards the Greeks, "his reformed character disintegrates" (Griffin 1983: 195; cf. Farrell 1992: 240-1 and 259) as if his attempts to become elegiac had failed (Lowe 2015: 220).[119] There are hints, however, that he never really knew the rules of elegiac courtship: he prides himself in being an acceptable *uir* (13.850) and a *diues amator* who has more sheep than he can count (13.824) although an elegiac lover is per definition not the husband (*uir*) and notoriously *pauper* (Barchiesi 2007: 419; Pietropaolo 2018: 206). His shagginess and size, although attractive to his own judgment (13.839-45) contradict the *puella*'s beauty ideals: Galatea's lover Acis is young, beardless, and slim. Suitably enough, Acis is changed into a river god[120] at the moment he dies, an epitome of fluidity and changeability that contrasts with both the missile's and Polyphemus' solidity and mass (Barkan 1986: 80). Polyphemus' hirsuteness (13.766; 844-50) conveys a meta-literary comment on the genres and traditions at work in Galatea's inset narration, being a metaphor for the "old-fashioned, primitive, unrefined" style which Ovid usually opposes in his poetic program of *urbanitas* (Barchiesi 2007: 417; cf. Pietropaolo 2018: 200). Galatea repeatedly thematizes the contrast between beauty and repulsiveness that is at the heart of aesthetic discussions on the integration of ugliness into arts and aesthetics: when the Cyclops sees his reflection in the water (840-1: *certe ego me noui liquidaeque in imagine uidi* / *nuper aquae, placuitque mihi mea forma uidenti*), his boastful self-descriptions operate via superlatives and in part hubristic exaggerations. He concedes, for example, that his single eye might be considered a blemish, but compares it to a giant artistic shield (851-2) or the sun itself (852-3). His enormous

119 When Polyphemus reappears in *Met*. 14, he is again the rock-hurling giant raging against the Greeks that we know from *Od*. 9 and *Aen*. 3 (Lowe 2015: 219-20). A detailed analysis of the Cyclops' role in all his appearances in the *Metamorphoses*, including his love for Galatea as well as Achaemenides' flashback tale (*Met*. 14.158-201), can be found in Jouteur 2001: 263-71.

120 Ovid does not disclose whether Galatea and Acis continue their relationship after his transformation. They could be an even more ideal match now that he is a river god – she is, after all, is a sea-nymph – but Galatea seems upset rather than happily in love when she thinks of his metamorphic fate. On Ovid's ambiguity on this matter, cf. Kenney 2008: 453.

body height, although feared and scorned by most, renders him, in his own judgment, more attractive than Jupiter (842-4). He perceives his reflected image as a work of grotesque art:

> Ugliness mediated by a well-crafted image does not generate a sense of repulsion but a sense of gratification, though the feeling of repugnance generated by unmediated perception may still be present in the viewer's imagination and memory. […] His [Polyphemus'] mistake is that he considers that mirrored reflection as if it were an artistic image inviting him to the appreciation of and reflection on what it represents (Pietropaolo 2018: 204-5).

Visualizing Polyphemus' self-admiration, Galatea fashions him as a successor of Narcissus who falls prey to an erroneous assessment of real and imaginary.[121] But unlike Narcissus, the Cyclops does know that he sees himself (840: *certe ego me noui*); rather, his misjudgment is rooted in a philosophical discourse on the relativity of beauty and aestheticism (Pietropaolo 2018: 205). But also the nymphs are subject to misjudgments:

> The reader's experience of the scene is dominated by dramatic irony, for, unlike Scylla herself, who has no premonition of her future transformation, and Galatea, who does not know that her gentle companion will soon cross the boundary of her natural form to enter that of a grotesque being, Ovid's readers are familiar with the myth […], and that awareness infuses their reading experience with an inevitable feeling of foreboding (Pietropaolo 2018: 196).

If Galatea and her unwanted suitor Polyphemus are at two ends of the scale, Galatea's listener Scylla is to become a "piquant blend of the abhorrent and the alluring" (Lowe 2015: 81) soon. The grotesque, "oxymoronic" (Hopman 2012: 227), juxtaposition of maidenly beauty and monstrous repulsiveness split up between the two characters converges in one body once Scylla undergoes a metamorphosis. After listening to Galatea's story, Scylla rushes off to a secluded pool, avoiding the more frequented bathing places where she could encounter unwanted suitors (13.900-1). But Glaucus sees her and immediately falls in love with her. Scylla now behaves exactly the way Polyphemus had accused Galatea of: she quickly runs away (908-9). From her previous role as Galatea's internal audience, she has now moved towards a new narrative role: she becomes the content of Ovid's narration (Nagle 1988: 79-81). Glaucus, however, tries to attract her attention by narrating. He is now the self-interested narrator who tries to "seduce"[122] his audience into believing a wondrous tale (935: *res similis fictae, sed quid mihi fingere prodest?*), just as Ovid himself did at

121 Parallels between Narcissus and Polyphemus, including allusive wording in Polyphemus' speech, are outlined in Pietropaolo 2018: 201-6.

122 Drawing on Roland Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975), B. R. Nagle analyzes the entire episode with the overlapping love-triangles as a sequence of narrative seduction and erotic seduction through narrative (1988: 75-6).

the onset of Scylla's story when he pretended to question the "validity of poetic tradition" (Nagle 1988: 90). Once more shedding her role, Scylla now becomes the addressee of a male's wooing speech that Galatea was before (Nagle 1988: 81). She takes refuge to a sheltered rock and wonders silently whether the blue-haired and fish-tailed young man (913-5) might be *monstrumne deusne* (912). As if reading her mind, Glaucus recounts his recent transformation into a sea-god due to the consumption of strange herbs in the following fifty lines (916-56).[123] His half-way metamorphosis anticipates Scylla's fate (Hardie 2009b: 60; Hopman 2012: 241): half of her body will also be changed to animal limbs through the magical power of strange herbs. Although the nymph has just heard about the risks of rejecting suitors, she does not take Galatea's "cautionary tale" (Pietropaolo 2018: 196) to her heart: in the vein of an elegiac *puella dura* (Jouteur 2009: 54), she rejects Glaucus outright, seeing neither the similarities between herself and Galatea (nymphs sprinting away), nor those between Polyphemus and Glaucus: unwanted suitors with extraordinary bodily features and verbose wooing attempts, both ending with the peroration that their efforts are futile if/since the courted nymph still resists (13.869: *nec tu* […] *moueris*; 13.965: *si tu non tangeris*).

Disappointed Glaucus, however, intends to alter the situation through magical help: he asks Circe for a love-potion. The powerful sorceress now becomes an iconic "unifying figure" between *Met*. 13 and 14, quite suitably so given that Circe is a "goddess of metamorphosis" (Segal 1968: 441). Not only does she dominate the second half of the "little *Aeneid*" (Otis 1970: 288), but she "enables Roman legend and history to be accommodated to the account of natural causes through metamorphosis, all brought about by the arbitrary exercise of divine power" (Tissol 1997: 214). Her rampant sexuality renders her even more paradigmatic for the *Metamorphoses*' pairing of violence and eroticism as narrative drives. As a "highly eroticized figure, susceptible to love at first sight" (Segal 2002: 22), she immediately falls in love with the young sea-god herself (14.25-7) and tries to persuade him into accepting her instead of Scylla. To that end, she utilizes the stereotype of the

123 Glaucus' transformation is already mentioned in *Met*. 7, when Medea – Circe's niece – roams about in the same area, looking for herbs to help Jason. The narrative pattern of a young man asking for magical help with the result of an unhappy amorous entanglement is reiterated in the love-triangle Scylla-Glaucus-Circe in Book 13. On parallels between Medea and Circe in Ovid, see Segal 2002: 19-20.

unsuccessful lover who loves what flees from him, but unlike Polyphemus or the standard *poeta amator*, she expresses the pointlessness of this elegiac constellation: *melius sequerere uolentem / optantemque eadem parilique cupidine captam* (28-9: "Much better would you follow one whose strong desire and prayer was even as your own, whose heart burned with an equal flame"). From the "unsuccessful suitor", Glaucus now turns into the "unresponsive beloved" (Nagle 1988: 82), while Scylla, albeit against her will and in her complete ignorance, becomes Circe's erotic rival in the new love-triangle (Papaioannou 2005: 399), thus re-enacting the role of Acis from Galatea's story: she, too, is to be the victim of a passionate brute's indirect revenge.[124] Yet Glaucus and Circe also happen to re-enact the unhappy love story of Aeneas and Dido: Glaucus' journey from Greece over Messina to Aeaea (14.1-9) mirrors Aeneas' route (Tissol 1997: 210), and his marvellous aquatic deification "anticipates the apotheosis of Aeneas" (Ellsworth 1986: 31). Both Glaucus and Aeneas are "strangers come by sea asking the ruler of the place, a woman, for help; they are offered love […]; they ultimately reject the woman and leave because of their dedication to another purpose; and the woman […] turns her hostility, in one case, against another women, in the other, against herself" (1986: 30). Unwilling and unable to afflict any magic on Glaucus, a fellow deity (14.40-1), Circe reacts to his rejection by preparing a trap for Scylla. Ovid's sorceress, like her Odyssean model, embodies "the malignant and wildly destructive side of female passion" (Segal 1968: 439). Her "inner irrationality finds outward form in magic, which, after all, is the arbitrary, topsy-turvy reversal of nature's processes for private aims" (Segal 1968: 439). Being a "transparent window on the emotions", Circe's magic enables her to directly translate her jealousy into action (Segal 2002: 23). As a site for her act of revenge, she chooses the maritime *locus amoenus*[125] that Scylla loves for its tranquility (14.52: *grata quies Scyllae*). With noxious herbs, spells, and rituals, she poisons

124 Nagle lists numerous parallels in wording and behavior between Scylla and Acis (1988: 83n11). For Hopman, however, Scylla and Acis *contrast* with each other as Acis' story ends positively for him, bringing him closer to his true self, while Scylla's eventual metamorphosis alienates her from her body (2012: 250). Hopman links this complementarity to an asymmetry between genders (women being more vulnerable) that is thematized in this episode.

125 Such variations of the typical *locus amoenus*, the beautiful shaded inland grove, become more frequent towards the Roman parts of the *Met*. since Aeneas' sea voyage from Troy to Italy naturally calls for maritime settings (Hinds 2002: 140n43).

Scylla's cove and violates the peaceful landscape (Hopman 2012: 243).[126] Her magic, "working as it does through the body's appetites" (Segal 2002: 1), takes effect when Scylla is about to cool her body. As with Narcissus in Book 3, the "surface of a body of water is the plane of self-division" (Hardie 2009b: 65). When Scylla immerses herself in the calm water, the lower part of her body is transformed into a horrible canine monster:

> hunc dea praeuitiat portentificisque uenenis
> inquinat, hic pressos latices radice nocenti
> spargit et obscurum uerborum ambage nouorum
> ter nouiens carmen magico demurmurat ore.
> Scylla uenit mediaque tenus descenderat aluo,
> cum sua foedari latrantibus inguina monstris
> adspicit; ac primo, credens non corporis illas
> esse sui partes, refugitque abigitque timetque
> ora proterua canum. sed quos fugit, attrahit una,
> et corpus quaerens femorum crurumque pedumque
> Cerbereos rictus pro partibus inuenit illis;
> statque canum rabie subiectaque terga ferarum
> inguinibus truncis uteroque exstante coercet.
> (*Met*. 14.55-67)
>
> This pool, before the maiden's coming, the goddess befouls and contaminates with poisons potent in generating deformity. Hereupon she sprinkles liquors brewed from noxious roots, and a charm, dark with its maze of uncanny words, thrice nine times she murmurs over with lips well skilled in magic. Then Scylla comes and wades waist-deep into the water; when all at once she sees her loins disfigured with barking monster-shapes. And at the first, not believing that these are parts of her own body, she flees in fear and tries to drive away the boisterous, barking things. But what she flees she takes along with her; and, feeling for her thighs, her legs, her feet, she finds in place of these only gaping dogs' heads, such as a Cerberus might have. She stands on ravening dogs, and her docked loins and her womb are enclosed in a circle of beastly forms.

In the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, it is Circe's magic that directly threatens masculine authority (Segal 2002: 1). She does, however, warn Odysseus about the danger of Scylla (*Od*. 12.99-104). But Ovid's Circe is first and foremost concerned with the "sexual degradation of her rival" (Segal 2002: 23) which subsequently leads to Scylla being a challenge for patriarchal heroism. In modelling the girl into a dangerous *vagina dentata*, Circe attains her Homeric and Virgilian role indirectly – she turns the nymph into an instrument for her anger over amorous rejection and sexual frustration. Like most of Ovid's metamorphoses of humans or deities, the transformation is, as we see, erotically motivated (Jouteur 2009: 54). But here, the metamorphosis itself is sexual: what Circe seeks to destroy is essentially Scylla's sex appeal: her "sexual parts become particularly ugly and fearful" (Segal 2002: 23). Her genitals and uterus being mutilated and exposed (67: *inguinibus truncis uteroque exstante*) through the transformation into wild beasts, the sexually reluctant nymph suddenly has to face a horridly contorted defloration: "the body parts that precisely define her virginity are conflated with their opposite, the heads of raging and promiscuous dogs" (Hopman 2012: 231). Her identity is now overtly sexualized, just like that of Circe before. A product of the

126 Landscape in Ovid's *Met*. often mirrors the violence that happens to women being raped (Hinds 2002: 130-6).

witch's magic, the new Scylla has taken on some of Circe's emotions and characteristics (Hopman 2012: 243). Since Scylla is now condemned to an "excessive sexuality" (Hardie 2009b: 65) similar to Circe's, the initial description with which Ovid started her etiology appears in a new light: *aliquo quoque tempore uirgo* (13.734: "in a distant time, she was a virgin"). The phrase "refers not just to her previous physical shape, but also to her formerly intact virginity, now compromised by descent into a monstrous and metamorphic sexuality" (Hardie 2009b: 65). The readers gaze at Scylla's "corps en devenir" (Jouteur 2009: 53) from top to bottom, almost voyeuristically, at the very same time as she herself scrutinizes her thighs, legs, and feet (14.64). Suddenly being both, a chaste virgin and a rabid monster, at the same time, Scylla's body becomes the surface onto which the male gaze inscribes the virgin/whore dichotomy[127]: she combines the two patriarchal concepts of femininity – maidenly virtue and excessive lust. Moreover, she now embodies the two contradictory roles in one body that have previously been split between herself, the fleeing nymph, and Glaucus, the lover chasing her: *refugitque abigitque timetque* / *ora proterua canum. sed quos fugit, attrahit una* (62-3). This "contagious transfer" (Hopman 2012: 242) of words, behavior, experience, or even shape from rapist to maiden is a form of appropriating interpenetration that can be compared to other unrequited sexual advances in the *Met*. in which the persecutor succeeds in gaining influence and power, albeit not sexually in the strict sense, over an object of desire (e.g. Apollo and Daphne). Glaucus afflicts Scylla with his own half-way transformation – through his intervention, her waist is transformed through herbs, just as his waist was before.[128] Scylla's new canine lower body is a crude inversion of her previous rejection of sexuality:

127 "The figure of the fair and foul Scylla expresses a male anxiety about female sexuality, the attraction and disgust felt for the women perceived as both angel and whore" (Hardie 2009b: 66). Freud was the first to describe this misogynist dichotomy that, according to his article "The most prevalent form of degradation in erotic life" (1912), led to psychosomatic impotence in some of his male patients who articulated that they were unable to feel sexually aroused by a woman whom they love and respect: "where such men love they have no desire, and where they desire they cannot love". Freud saw the contrariness in patriarchal approaches towards femininity which conceive "degraded" or "fallen" women ("whores") as seductive, and a respected partner ("Madonna", "angel") as sexually unattractive. While some of Freud's theories are clearly, and fortunately so, obsolete today, the conceptual dissociation of women as either "virgins" or "whores" can still be observed in arts, media, and popular culture (cf. Mulvey 1975; Oliver 2017). From a 21st century feminist perspective, I am inclined to agree with Freud that the prevalence of such a misogynist split is indeed pathological.

128 Interestingly, archaic depictions of Scylla show her with a fish tail as well. In Ovid's *Met*., this hybridized body part is externalized and attributed to her suitor instead.

> where previously she had successfully fended off her suitors […], she now unsuccessfully tries to flee from the barking dogs that inhabit her groin, and which pursue her like the proverbial lover who seeks that which flees […]. That which she had tried to repel now, by a kind of poetic justice, becomes repellent to her. Erotic *fastidium* is punished by a far more visceral form of disgust, *fastidium* (Hardie 2009b: 64).

As a result, Scylla experiences a deep and unsettling alienation from her own body: like Actaeon, Io, or Ocyroe, she "likewise loses familiarity with her body as it is transformed, and tries to flee, initially in disbelief, from the monstrous appendages that are now part of herself" (Tissol 1997: 60; cf. Hopman 2012: 240). Ovid's humorous stance on the fictionality of the subject and Glaucus' autobiographic narration already anticipated someone in- or outside the narrative who would doubt the metamorphoses' realism. Now we see that the incredulous skepticism about supernatural transformations has been "transferred from the poet's readers to the subject of metamorphosis herself" (Hardie 2009b: 62). Scylla both questions and abhors her transformation: in conformity with the stereotypical patriarchal anxiety over female sexuality, she experiences "repulsion from her own voracious sexuality" (Hardie 2009b: 66) which she cannot deny and hide, not even from herself, anymore. Not strangers and sailors are the dogs' first victims, but Scylla herself: the new animal part is separate from and even hostile towards the remaining human part. Her self-laceration, hence, comes before her notorious aggression against others, which is why Hardie speaks of a self-division that "Scylla shares with the personification of *Inuidia* [Envy] in book two, who tortures herself at the same time as she attacks others" – a fitting comparand as "the dog is a standard symbol of *inuidia*" (Hardie 2009b: 70). Horace, for instance, links envy and "doggishness" in the portray of the "canine" witch Canidia in his *Epod*. 5 (Oliensis 1991: 117-8).[129] Scylla is most conspicuously added to the equation in Medieval and Renaissance Literature, when the monster is understood as an allegory of the deadliest of sins, jealousy and envy (Hardie 2009b: 67-8). But already Ovid is aware of Envy's canine potential: especially the voraciousness that she shares with Scylla is prominent in all of his portrays of Inuidia. In *Am*. 1.15, the *sphragis* of Book 1, the poet defends himself against *Liuor edax* (1), a personification of Envy that is, since Callimachus (e. g. *Hymn* 2 to Apollo),

129 Ellen Oliensis analyzes Horace's latent misogynism in his haunting witch Canidia in rich detail. Canidia is etymologically connected to the "doggishness" of Scylla (1991: 107-13) and the celestial dog Sirius/Canicula (1991: 120-5) as well as to song and poetry (*canere*). Canidia represents, according to Oliensis, the detested monstrous force in Horace's clear and well-ordered poetry, a dark muse he tries to ban from his writing, but who emerges subtly between the lines (1991: 109-11 and 134-5).

imagined to bite, gnaw, and devour talented poets on the rise (McKeown 1989: 389-90). In *Met*. 2, Ovid visualizes Inuidia in her hermetically hidden cave when Minerva incites her to befoul a pair of sisters with envy. We see the repellent (776-7: *liuent rubigine dentes,* / *pectora felle uirent, lingua est suffosa ueneno*; "her teeth are foul with mould; green, poisonous gall overflows her breast, and venom drips down from her tongue") female embodiment of grudge and *Schadenfreude* with her characteristic sidelong glance as she is eating venomous vipers to nourish her vice (761-82). As Inuidia "gnaws and is gnawed, herself her own punishment" (*Met*. 2.781-2: *carpitque et carpitur una* / *suppliciumque suum est*), she literally wastes away as one does with envy. Inuidia being infamously *edax*, Scylla, on the other hand, is infamously *rapax* and *uorax*: her epic role is that of an ever-hungry man-eater. In the *Metamorphoses*, however, Scylla's canine half first assaults her human half before she takes on the cannibalistic tendencies she had in the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*.

The rest of the story is told quickly: Glaucus mourns over Scylla and continues to dislike Circe (14.68-9); Scylla stays where she is (70: *loco mansit*) and seizes the first opportunity to retaliate herself against Circe: *cumque est data copia primum*, / *in Circes odium sociis spoliauit Vlixem* (70-1: "when first a chance was given her to vent her hate on Circe, she robbed Ulysses of his companions"). Again, a main concern of Homer's *Od*. 12 – Odysseus' encounter with Scylla whose six heads eat six comrades – is reinterpreted as a personal act of revenge between women. Scylla has obviously learned from Circe the art of indirect punishment: in order to hurt her, she attacks her lover. She has apparently overcome the self-division that tortured her after her transformation: now, she is clearly capable of using her monstrous parts for her own purposes and, hence, of fulfilling her Homeric role. Ovid, in turn, might be using her monstrous parts for his own purposes, as Stephen Hinds notes *per litteras*: when Scylla attacks Odysseus' crew, "could she be applying the bite of literary invidiousness to the *Odyssey* or the *Aeneid*?"

The canine metamorphosis, however, is not the last transformation Scylla undergoes. After the long etiological digression, Ovid brings us back to Aeneas' voyage and mentions briefly that the Trojans can pass Scylla safely because she no longer is the man-eating monster, but has become petrified in the meantime: *mox eadem Teucras fuerat mersura carinas*, / *ni prius in scopulum,*

qui nunc quoque saxeus exstat, / transformata foret; scopulum quoque nauita uitat (72-4: "She also would have wrecked the Trojan ships had she not before their coming been changed into a rock which stands there to this day. Sailors avoid also the rock"). Scylla's petrification is Ovid's idea, yet perhaps inspired by her earlier epithet πετραίη that refers to her preference for rocky dwelling places rather than her own rockiness (Papaioannou 2005: 395-6). We do not learn any details about Scylla's second transformation into a cliff, except that she must have changed her shape at some point between Odysseus' and Aeneas' journey. Musgrove, in her attempt to grasp the episode's internal chronology, suggests that Ovid could have been inclined to leave the exact temporal sequence vague in order to call "attention to the time which has passed both for the reader and for Aeneas, who has been on 'hold' for over three hundred lines" (1998b: 99). But the inexactitude set aside, Scylla's petrification serves a poetic function apart from that of a plausible itemized breakdown: it differs from Virgil's account. While Aeneas' Virgilian crew has to use oars and muscles to escape the sea-monster (*Aen*. 3.558-60; cf. Helenus' warning at 3.420-32), salvation in Ovid's *Met*., by contrast, "does not come from human abilities […] but from chance. Simply put, [Ovid's] Aeneas would not have escaped had it not been for Scylla's petrification. Thus, heroic skills are replaced with the power of the metamorphic world [which] leaves little space for heroes and their helpers" (Hopman 2012: 238). The Scylla that Aeneas encounters in the *Met.* is a harmless, motionless stone – a geographical landmark "which bridges myth and reality" (Lowe 2015: 80) and designates "the crossing to a new world, a snapshot that captures a representative part of a life one leaves behind permanently, or even a memory in which one may nostalgically indulge in peace" (Papaioannou 2005: 396). While the threatening monster did need assertions of credibility and metaliterary comments on fictionality and poetic license, a geological formation satisfies even the Hellenistic taste for myth rationalizations (Hardie 2009b: 61; Lowe 2015: 78-80). For Ovid, who clearly has no problem with supernatural elements in his narrative, Scylla's second transformation provides stability in a world of constant flux: the petrification is final, a "definite, irreversible departure from the Homeric world and its monsters" (Papaioannou 2005: 403). "As if to acknowledge that [her first half-way transformation from maiden to half-maiden/half-monster]

is an unstable compound, this is not the end of her story in Ovid, for she is finally transformed into the most stable of end-products of metamorphosis, a rock" (Hardie 2009b: 59). Petrifications in Ovid are numerous – many versatile, perishable bodies are turned into marble statues, fossils and mountains for various reasons. Signifying "a kind of death" (Barolsky 2005: 152), they revert the process of emergence and birth: humankind is, as Ovid explains in Book 1, born of stone; and the stoniness of petrified individuals throughout the *Met*. "gives proof of our origins in stone" (Barolsky 2005: 153). Scylla the cliff has, hence, become a permanent emblem of poetic fiction: her past as a fleeing nymph and an ever-shifting hybrid are preserved in the stone statue that the "obsessive visualiser" (Hardie 2002: 6) Ovid erects for her – her stone monument still dreaded by sailors, and Ovid's textual label with etiological and historical summary.

Scylla's metamorphic appearance in three different shapes – maiden, monster, and rock – can prompt associations with a tripartite coming-of-age scenario of the kind that French ethnologist Arnold van Gennep described in detail: in the course of a *rite of passage*, the initiand is separated from their original society through certain tasks ("rites de séparation") which initiate a first, *preliminary phase*, that is followed by a transitional *liminal phase* with threshold rites ("rites de marge"), until the process is concluded through incorporation rites ("rites d'agrégation") and the initiand enters a final, *postliminal phase* (van Gennep 1969 [1909]: 14; 27). The observant reader of all the "nymph and suitor" tales in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* already knows this structure of initiation rites from Europa (girl – rape victim in a new country – ancestress of a new tribe) or Proserpina (girl – rape victim – honored goddess in a new cult). Scylla's development is likewise sexual, as has become clear, but unlike that of other maidens, the separation rites pushing her into the alienating liminal phase – monstrosity – do not involve being raped by a male aggressor: instead, another woman deflowers the coy nymph violently, out of envy and jealousy, and separates her not only from her previous social surrounding, but even from herself. Scylla subsequently learns how to use her new role: she appropriates the monstrosity projected upon her and comes to utilize the grotesque corporeality she owes to Circe's interference. At first scared of her genitals herself, she soon incorporates the lesson she learns from the sexually liberated witch: when Scylla takes

what she wants, she lives up to the expectations patriarchy associates with a monstrous female. Her hybrid body, a vast assemblage of seductive femininity and menacing bitches' jaws, teeth, front legs, and claws (*protomai*), becomes her shield against the heroes of patriarchy, the male conquerors and oppressors whose objectifying male gaze and subordinating assaults are celebrated and glorified in the epic tradition Ovid at once exemplifies and seeks to distinguish himself from. For Odysseus and his crew, Scylla – in Homer, Virgil, and Ovid's brief flashback (*Met*. 14.70-1) – acts precisely as they expect: she is a dangerous, immoderate, voracious vamp, a merciless *vagina dentata*. As Aeneas encounters her in Ovid's Book 14, Scylla has shed this role and entered into a new phase that is – if we are willing to suspend skeptical disbelief and follow the work's internal logic – considered final, postliminal, and stable. Her second transformation is not as spectacular as her first, brutally conducted, one. As a rock, a motionless monument, Scylla appears to rest in herself as though she had come to terms with her extraordinary physicality. Her femininity is no longer the passive object of patriarchal "scopophilia", the male gaze that subjugates women to spectacles "to be looked at", in Laura Mulvey's words. Defying this voyeuristic gaze (or σκοπή) of intradiegetic heroes and extradiegetic readers looking at her (σκοπέω), Scylla the cliff (*scopulus*) is now a triumphal icon in her own right: not only protruding, visible, and thus avoidable for sailors (14.74: *nauita uitat*), but also a "look-out rock", a high place with a wide view, as the etymology of *scopulus* or σκόπελος (cliff) suggests (Maltby 1991: 551). Tracing an etymologizing pun in *scopulus* is not too far-fetched, since Ovid enjoys etymologizing wordplay (O'Hara 1996a; 1996b; Hinds 2006) and has used the *scopulus*/σκόπελος relation before (*Met*. 4.731: *conspexit scopulum*), in Perseus' battle against the sea-monster (Michalopoulos 2001: 155-6). No less than Perseus, Andromeda, and Medusa, the protagonists in Book 13 and 14, Scylla, Galatea, Polyphemus, and Circe, negotiate issues of seeing, hiding, being seen or poetically visualized, and believing things seen or heard. Her transformation into a cliff thus allows Scylla to gaze out from her crag upon the passing sailors. Now that men are fleeing her, the initial situation is reversed completely. The half-line concluding Scylla's story captures this aspect quite accurately: *scopulum quoque nauita uitat* (14.74). No longer a spectacle or an arena for heroic feats, Scylla eventually represents the

memorial of her own biography of empowerment: her final state, the *scopulus*, preserves her entire life, the *uita* that is evoked, phonetically, persistently, in the seamen (*nauita*) and in the anxieties they project upon her (*uitat*).The Scylla that Ovid portrays in his account of recent Roman history, however, resists erotic advances (Glaucus), the evil eye of jealousy (Circe), the objectifying male gaze, self-destructive dissociation (dogs), heroes' violent attacks (Odysseus, Aeneas), readers' incredulous skepticism, and epic poets' demonizing projections (Homer, Virgil).

6. Concluding Thoughts

Hybrids – and Ovid's hybrids in particular – disrupt allegedly stable categories, rules, and conventions. They question the concepts normativity and purity, they expose the unnaturalness of what is perceived as nature, and reveal the artificial constructedness of identity. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a textual monster and multi-generic hybrid, embrace transgression, alterity, and deviance. As paradigmatic emblems of fantasy and imagination, creative freedom and poetic license, Medusa, the Minotaur, the Centaurs, and Scylla preside over Ovid's playful engagement with traditional aesthetic, poetic, moral, and societal values and ideals.

Hybridity – of literary genres as well as of bodies and species – can be tackled from different angles: Horace, Vitruvius, and Plato elaborate on the risks and dangers of mixing and cross-breeding; the vast prevalence of hybrids in arts and literature, however, demonstrates monstrosities' unbroken appeal. With the Enlightenment in Western thought, criminalization and medicalization became standard ways of dealing with the impure, imperfect, and unruly Other. Literary theory and philosophy since the 1970s paved the way for a more positive reading of extraordinary features: demonization, fixation, stigmatization, and abandonment were replaced with the empowering embrace of otherness and individuality. The compatibility of these critical perspectives and Ovid's metamorphic poetics has become a commonplace by now; Ovid and postmodern theory have become "natural twins" in the 1990s and 2000s:

> If digesting post-1970s 'theory' means appreciating that so many of the notions we might regard as basic 'givens' of our existence (gender identity, selfhood, what literature is, what theory is, etc.) are actually fluid and unstable rather than fixed and reliable essences, that there is no such thing as disinterested inquiry or a 'non-theoretical' interpretation of a text or aspect of culture, that meaning is produced at the point of reception, and that politics is pervasive, then Ovidian poetry – in all its performative thematization of self-consciousness, self-reflection, fictionality, duplicity, ambiguity and contingency – has helped teach us that, as well as offering a laboratory to test out the political-poetic potential of such ideas (Rimell 2019: 447).

Yet Rimell urges us to think further: stating similarities between poststructuralist theory and Ovidian poetics does not suffice anymore "in a context in which technology is rapidly locking us into dopamine-boosting/cortisol-fueling feedback loops, to the detriment of impulse control, concentration, intellectual life and artistic process". If Ovid is to survive as a popular artist rather than "just the poet most often used to introduce students to Latin verse", we need to excavate the

postmodern Ovid who "prompts us to pose and respond to questions that are gaining momentum" now: about the role of literature and criticism in contemporary culture and society, about interdependency, intimacy, sexuality, empathy, and interconnectedness, about nature, environment, technology, arts, excess, or temporality (Rimell 2019: 468-9). Monsters, hybrids, and extraordinary textual bodies offer us a chance to follow Rimell's call for contemporary Ovidian studies: the four kinds of hybrid beings in Ovid's hybrid epic that occupy the center of this thesis negotiate humans' relation to, dependence on, and responsibility for the world they inhabit. Ovid's world of constant flux and flexibility opposes the alleged exceptionality of humans, subverts hierarchies between genders and species, and teaches respect towards others, be they human, animal, or inanimate. Also 'theory' has undergone several changes over the past decades: critical studies of cultural representations have been supplemented by newer trends, including 3rd and 4th wave gender and queer studies, disability studies, critical posthumanisms, or the inter-disciplinary monster studies. Although their canonization as research methods for the study of classical literature is yet to come, these theories cast new light on Ovidian hybridity in our times.

In his monograph, Dunstan Lowe observes two recurrent themes that grant unity in the inherently diverse and confusing discourse on monstrosity: "first, many [monsters] embody gender stereotypes, whether female or male; secondly, all of them represent established norms in conflict with new thinking", such as "reason versus excessive emotion, fantasy versus rationalization, and convention versus novelty" (2015: 1). Lowe's book is undisputedly the "first full-length study of monsters in Augustan poetry", as he states himself (1), and has proven to be an immensely valuable source for me. But my own engagement with Augustan monsters, hybrids, and extraordinary corporeality cannot confirm his two principles of unity: in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, hybrid creatures do not *embody* gender stereotypes, but challenge and undermine them. The monstrosity of Medusa and Scylla might arguably *draw upon* essentialist gender roles: vulnerability and virginity are components of their maidenly past, extraordinary beauty and sexual appeal to men establish a background for their hideous transformations, their alluring appearance contributes to their hazardousness, and they oppose and challenge male heroism (should we choose to include this

last point into an essentialist catalogue of "stereotypically feminine" traits). But Medusa is also an ingenious artist and a self-empowered rape survivor who manages to transform her molesters into a sculpture garden of life-like marble statues or to make them dependent on her (Perseus); her creative and procreative energy does not even dry out after her death – her transformative powers remain unaltered although the Ovidian cosmos is subject to constant change. Scylla incorporates several misogynistic stereotypes ("doggishness", *puella dura*, self-laceration, *vagina dentata*), but she eventually escapes the objectifying male gaze and finds rest in a stable, permanent shape that is no longer the feminine-gendered battlefield for male heroes. The two iconic female hybrids Medusa and Scylla clearly oppose essentialist gender categorizations. Likewise with the Minotaur and the Centaurs: due to the combination of male human and strong animal bodies, they have often been depicted as epitomes of masculinity, but Ovid's representations are more complex than that. The Minotaur remains remarkably pale, passive, fraternal, and even infantile. His monstrosity is by no means monolithic: rather, the passages show that monstrosity, savagery, brute force, and shamelessness are dynamic labels applicable to humans, and especially men, in a disparaging way. Humanness and masculinity, the Minotaur shows, are frail and porous concepts. The diversity of Ovid's Centaurs ridicules the very idea of gender stereotypes: there are females and males; benevolent and hostile ones, highly cultivated individuals and notorious brawlers. Their infamous hypervirility is insufficient in itself and must be supported by stereotypically "feminine" traits – indirectness and guile (Nessus), collaboration and community (Centauromachy) – or technically augmented and artificially enhanced. Ovid's hybrid monsters, it becomes clear, are counter-concepts rather than embodiments of gender stereotypes. Lowe's second observation needs to be dissected in more detail: namely that all monsters represent established norms in conflict with new thinking. We have seen that a system with rules calls for disobedience. Ovid's hybrids – and his generic hybrid epic, the *Metamorphoses* – represent the *subversion* of normative rules *within* the system, the integration of unruly elements into an allegedly stable, yet always already hybridized and permeable dialogic discourse. The monsters establish conflict *as* the norm – they release the creative potential of grotesque juxtapositions of seemingly heterogeneous elements within one

body. Ovid, a deconstructionist avant la lettre, does not operate along binary oppositions such as reason versus emotion or convention versus novelty: the *Metamorphoses* rather cite, synthesize, thwart, adapt, and exceed structures of closure and duality, including those mentioned by Lowe. In conformity with Augustan literature's healthy tendency "to treat literary form dynamically" (Hinds 2000: 235), Ovid acknowledges categories such as genre, species, or gender with their respective stereotypical characteristics as useful raw material, but his multi-generic works, transgressive figures, and metamorphically hybrid protagonists are beyond binary oppositions.

Accordingly, the chauvinist hero cannot simply slay the Ovidian monsters, as he could in other epic accounts. The heroes (Perseus, Theseus, Hercules, Achilles, Odysseus, Aeneas) are exposed in their dependence on tricks, women, *pharmaka*, tools, and machines. Their exploits are far from illustrious and do not grant eternal fame – the actual driving force for their deeds. Eternity, stability and fame are, however, not entirely absent from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: although everything is subject to constant change (*Met*. 15.165: *omnia mutantur*; 178: *cuncta fluunt*), poetic creation provides duration and steadiness, as Ovid reveals in propria persona in his concluding sphragis:

> Iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iouis ira nec ignis
> nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere uetustas.
> cum uolet, illa dies, quae nil nisi corporis huius
> ius habet, incerti spatium mihi finiat aeui;
> parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis
> astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum;
> quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris
> ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama
> (siquid habent ueri uatum praesagia) uiuam
> (*Met*. 15.871-9).
>
> And now my work is done, which neither the wrath of Jove, nor fire, nor sword, nor the gnawing tooth of time shall ever be able to undo. When it will, let that day come which has no power save over this mortal frame, and end the span of my uncertain years. Still in my better part I shall be borne immortal far beyond the lofty stars and I shall have an undying name. Wherever Rome's power extends over the conquered world, I shall have mention on peoples' lips, and, if the prophecies of bards have any truth, through all the ages shall I live in fame.

Towards the final books of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid moves towards a new poetic program that is no longer a manifesto for ever-lasting fluidity – instead, the "change from which there is no further change is a new doctrine of metamorphosis" (Barkan 1986: 81). Irreversible transformations into natural elements – landmarks, rivers, stone formations – have happened before, too. But from Book 14 onwards, when recent Roman history exchanges the turbulent civil wars for an era of eternity, order, and stability (Barkan 1986: 84-5), such final, eternal metamorphoses (petrifications, apotheoses, immortalizations) gradually prevail. In his valediction, Ovid attributes everlasting fame throughout ages, duration, invulnerability, and immortality not to the famous epic heroes, but to his

own poetic persona: his "better part" (15.875), the *opus* that is the *Metamorphoses,* will live on and attain substantiality and permanence (Barkan 1986: 88; cf. Farrell 1999: 129-33), *siquid habent ueri uatum praesagia.* This clause, in wording and content quite similar to that which introduced Scylla's story in 13.733-4 *si non omnia uates* / *ficta reliquerunt*, once again refers to the credibility of words, stories, and divinely inspired poetry that accompanied all the hybrid beings in the *Metamorphoses*. His work's immortalization is, therefore, placed on the same footing as the astounding hybridity of Scylla, Medusa, the Centaurs, and the Minotaur: the dialogic, genre-transgressive, labyrinthine "literary monstrum" survives and remains in all its grotesque heterogeneity as a monument for fantasy and imagination.

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