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Epic Recall and the Finale of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

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Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is, to a great extent, characterized by the feature of reference to previous texts that Giorgio Pasquali called the 'arte allusiva'¹, particularly in regard to Virgil. One thinks immediately of Ovid's well-known abridgement of the *Aeneid* in Books 13 and 14, and epic resonances extend, of course, well beyond the 'Little Aeneid'. The *concilium deorum* in book one is an obvious example, harking back to Ennius². While the *Metamorphoses*' epilogue contains prominent allusions both to the lyric tradition of Horace's *Odes* (3.30) and to Ennius, whose *volito vivos per ora virum* is the model for the final two lines of Ovid's poem³, the wider context of the poem's finale⁴ involves a sequence of allusions to the *Aeneid* occurring just before the epilogue⁵. In this sequence, the dialogue of Jupiter and Venus evokes images from the *Aeneid* and brings a conflict of mythical vs. historical and modern vs. ancient epic⁶ into the text. The manner in which Ovid's use of "epic recall" creates such a conflict will be the subject of this brief discussion.

When the subject matter of the *Metamorphoses* comes into Ovid's own time, Venus is distraught over the fate of Julius Caesar and thus decides to plead with Jove on his behalf. Near the outset of her speech, she reminds him that she had once been wounded by Diomedes' spear:

*'adspice' dicebat, 'quanta mihi mole parentur
insidiae quantaque caput cum fraude petatur,*

- 1 Giorgio Pasquali, «Arte Allusiva», *L'Italia che Scrive* 25 (Nov./Dec. 1942) 185–187, reprinted in *Stravaganze quarte e supreme* (Venice 1951) 11–20. More recently, Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, edited by Charles Segal (Ithaca 1986).
- 2 Brooks Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge 1970) 96–99.
- 3 For an apt discussion of the final line of the *Metamorphoses* and the general impact of Ennius on Ovid, see Heinz Hofmann, «Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Carmen Perpetuum, Carmen Deductum», *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar* 5 (1985) 223–241.
- 4 In this paper the term finale will refer to *Met.* 15.745–879, which includes the epilogue (871–879).
- 5 D. C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic* (Oxford 1991) 213ff. has recently discussed this passage, pointing out that Venus makes what had been properties of the *populus Romanus* in *Aen.* 1 obtain only for the *gens Julia* in *Met.* 15. Cf. also S. Döpp, «Vergilrezeption in der Ovidischen 'Aeneis'», *RhM* 134 (1991) 327–345, esp. p. 328.
- 6 On the problem of generic distinctions cf. Gian Biagio Conte, *Empirical and Theoretical Approaches to Literary Genre*, in: *The Interpretation of Roman Poetry: Empiricism or Hermeneutics?* ed. Karl Galinsky (Frankfurt/New York 1992) 104–123, esp. 107 where Conte shows how a single word, *virga*, can shift in tone from 'epic' to 'bucolic'.

*quod de Dardanio solum mihi restat Iulo.
solane semper ero iustis exercita curis?
quam modo Tydidæ Calydonia vulneret hasta,
nunc male defensæ confundant moenia Troiæ ...*

Met. 15.765–770

It is worth considering the time frame within which the goddess is speaking here. Venus directs Jove's attention to her former exploits with a powerful immediacy, for she recalls them as though they had only recently happened, as lines 768–770 suggest. But from both the narrator's standpoint (one will recall the *ad mea ... tempora* of Ovid's prologue, *Met.* 1.4) and from that of this story's chronology (44 B.C.), much time has elapsed since the bronze age of the *Iliad*, when Aphrodite had been wounded. Yet Venus' poetic recollection of epic allows her to remember an event in the *Iliad* as if it happened only recently.

This memory, which Conte has called poetic memory is, of course, in the mind of the poet, who enlivens his character here. The passage to which Ovid directs us is a well-known battle scene from Homeric epic (*Iliad* 5.334–337):

ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ ῥ' ἐκίχανε πολὺν καθ' ὄμιλον ὀπάζων,
ἔνθ' ἐπορεξάμενος μεγαθύμου Τυδέος υἱὸς
ἄκρην οὐτάσε χεῖρα μετάλμενος ὄξει δουρὶ
ἀβληχρὴν· εἶϑαρ δὲ δόρυ χροὸς ἀντετόρησεν ...

This passage, so clearly embedded in Venus' memory, is also to be within the memory of the reader who will recall the incident, if not Homer's words, quoted here. With this allusion to Homer, Ovid sets an "epic" stage that informs the way Venus is to be viewed in this passage of the *Metamorphoses*.

Thus, after jogging Jove's (and the reader's) memory of her in Homer's "old" epic, she also reminds him of that more recent epic that focuses on her son:

*... quae videam natum longis erroribus actum
iactarique freto sedesque intrare silentum
bellaque cum Turno gerere, aut, si vera fatemur,
cum Iunone magis! quid nunc antiqua recordor
damna mei generis? timor hic meminisse priorum
non sinit: en acui sceleratos cernitis enses?*

Met. 15.771–776

Commentators have rightly noted that Venus' words evoke the prologue of the *Aeneid*⁷. Indeed, the goddess virtually summarizes the entire epic here, reveal-

⁷ Moritz Haupt, Otto Korn, Rudolf Ehwald, Michael von Albrecht, *P. Ovidius Naso: Metamorphosen* (Zürich, 6th edition, 1970) Bd. 2, ad loc., p. 482; Franz Bömer, ed., *P. Ovidius Naso: Metamorphosen, Kommentar, Buch XIV–XV*, Bd. 7 (Heidelberg 1986) ad loc., p. 460.

ing that she herself is still mindful (*recordor*, 774; *meminisse*, 775) of savage Juno's mindful wrath (*saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram*, *Aen.* 1.8). Venus remembers the experiences of her son within the context of the epic tradition, which was molded by Homer in reference to the wound and by Virgil in reference to Aeneas; the immediacy of her present worry is contrasted with these former epic woes. Thus, in linking Caesar with herself and with Aeneas she is not only stressing family ties, but creating epic ones: the goddess herself had been a victim in the first great martial epic, Aeneas in a second, now Caesar in a third⁸.

When Venus fails to receive assistance from the other gods whom she has petitioned, she seeks to intervene on her own:

*non tamen insidias venturaque vincere fata
praemonitus potuere deum, strictique feruntur
in templum gladii; neque enim locus ullus in urbe
ad facinus diramque placet nisi curia caedem.
tum vero Cytherea manu percussit utraque
pectus et Aeneaden molitur condere nube,
qua prius infesto Paris est ereptus Atridae
et Diomedeos Aeneas fugerat enses.*

Met. 15.799–806

The reference to the senate house (*curia*, 802) shifts the focus from Olympus to Rome and to the murder itself. Moreover, by having Venus attempt to hide Caesar in a cloud, Ovid connects Venus not only with the occasions in the *Iliad* when she had made a similar gesture, but more so with the episode in *Aeneid* 1 when Aeneas and Achates enter Carthage (*Aen.* 1.411–414). As in the case of the 'epic' dialogue discussed above, Venus' action here creates an epic association⁹. It also casts Caesar's historical situation in terms of the epic tradition, thus bringing to bear the weight of that tradition going back to Homer on recent history; Ennius had done something similar in casting recent Roman history in an epic format in his *Annales*. Yet in the *Metamorphoses*, the imperial family is becoming a part of the epic tradition, not by future prophecy, as in the underworld sequence in *Aen.* 6 or the ecphrasis of the shield in *Aen.* 8, but by historical recollection. The association is both fitting, since Caesar is, after all, descended from Venus, and at the same time troubling, since his death lies not within poetic memory, but within the historical memory of Ovid's audience: Caesar's son Augustus, who is also glorified in this finale, is now the living, reigning emperor.

The epic association is sustained in the lines following, for Jupiter, too, is

⁸ Feeney (above n. 5) 213.

⁹ Joseph Solodow, *The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Chapel Hill 1988) 98, has suggested that Venus' action establishes an incongruous relationship with that text.

a character molded by the tradition. The role he once played in the first book of the *Aeneid* is reactivated when he comforts his daughter:

*talibus hanc genitor: 'sola insuperabile fatum,
nata, movere paras? intres licet ipsa sororum
tectata trium! cernes illic molimine vasto
ex aere et solido rerum tabularia ferro,
quae neque concussum caeli neque fulminis iram
nec metuunt ullas tuta atque aeterna ruinas:
invenies illic incisa adamante perenni
fata tui generis.'*

Met. 15.807–814

When he calms Venus' worries about her descendant's death, Jupiter assures her that the end of Caesar's earthly life has been decreed by fate and a destiny awaits him consonant with his divine ancestry, an ancestry with which the reader is very familiar from the *Aeneid*:

*olli subridens hominum sator atque deorum
vultu, quo caelum tempestatesque serenat,
oscula libavit natae, dehinc talia fatur:
'parce metu, Cytherea, manent immota tuorum
fata tibi; cernes urbem et promissa Lavini
moenia, sublimemque feres ad sidera caeli
magnanimum Aenean; neque me sententia vertit.'*

Aen. 1.254–260

While Norden compared the political dimension of *Met.* 15.807–814 and *Aen.* 1.254–260, the standard commentaries touch only briefly on the parallelism between them. It was Brooks Otis who first discussed the imitative aspect of Ovid's passage at any length, yet he narrowly concluded that the text of the *Metamorphoses* evidences "a crushing demonstration that Ovid can parody but not imitate Virgil"¹⁰. Yet perhaps there is more than parody going on here.

When, in the first line of Ovid's passage, Jove specifically refers to the immutable nature of fate (*sola insuperabile fatum, / nata, movere paras*, 807–808), he refers us to the words he had once said in the *Aeneid*¹¹. There are several specific verbal correspondences between this speech and the one he had spoken in the *Aeneid*, as the words underlined above suggest (*Aen.* 1.256–258; *Met.* 15.807–808). What might be called the Virgilian "plane" of the poetic tradition intersects the Ovidian, which itself is at least partly defined in terms of that tradition. Yet the very closeness of these texts, in content and vocabulary, only calls attention to their thematic differences. When Jupiter recalls the

10 Otis (above n. 2) 337.

11 Cf. Conte (above n. 1) 61.

words of Virgil's text by asking Venus if she is preparing to move "unconquerable fate", he is, in effect, asking her if she plans to wreak havoc with the epic tradition as it is presented in the *Aeneid*.

We also have a conflict at another level here, for the tablets of the Fates referred to are, as Solodow has shown, a reflection of records housed in the Roman tabularium, a building with which, as we saw in the case of the *curia* (15.802), the Augustan reader would have been very familiar¹². Beyond this, however, the words of Jupiter also indicate that these tablets are the same as those "housed in" the *Aeneid*, to which Jupiter's allusion directs the reader, whether Augustan or modern. The conflict of the old epic concept of the tablets of the fates and the new, Romanized reference to the tabularium gives ground to Jupiter's allusion to his own words in the *Aeneid*, words which in their new form are thematically, if not chronologically, appropriate to this new context. Synthesis and conflict co-exist here as the plane of myth enters that of history: what had been a future prophecy in the mythical, but "believable" first book of the *Aeneid*, has become a present reality in this finale of the *Metamorphoses*, the language of which at some points is so grandiose that it perhaps seems "unbelievable"¹³.

This synthesis of conflicting elements is developed in the words of Jupiter that follow. He goes on to foretell that his daughter will soon receive her progeny, Caesar, into heaven and that he will be worshipped on earth in temples:

*ut deus accedat caelo templisque colatur,
tu facies natusque suus, qui nominis heres
inpositum feret unus onus caesique parentis
nos in bella suos fortissimus ultor habebit.*

Met. 15.818–821

With these words Jupiter recalls the promise he made in the same speech of the *Aeneid* where he had explained to Venus that she would one day receive into heaven her descendant, there called Julius, who would likewise be supplicated in prayer:

*nascetur pulchra Troianus origine Caesar,
imperium Oceano, famam qui terminet astris,
Iulius, a magno demissum nomen Iulo.
hunc tu olim caelo spoliis Orientis onustum
accipies secura; vocabitur hic quoque votis.
aspera tum positis mitescent saecula bellis ...*

Aen. 1.286–291

¹² Solodow (above n. 9) 82.

¹³ Cf. Feeney (above n. 5) 217; cf. also F. Graf, *Ovide, les Métamorphoses, et la véracité du mythe*, in: Cl. Calame (éd.), *Métamorphoses du mythe en Grèce antique* (Genève 1988) 57–70.

While the verbal correspondence of these texts is clear, it is perhaps less clear where the resonance of the two passages is leading. One will notice that the portrait of Caesar¹⁴ as *spoliis onustum* (289) and, in the following sentence, the ablative absolute *positis ... bellis* (291) are resumed in Ovid's portrait of Augustus *inpositum ... onus ... in bella* (15.820–821). In the *Metamorphoses*, Jupiter has, it seems, stepped a generation ahead. Whereas it is Caesar, in the *Aeneid*, who is worshipped, Caesar who will return laden with the spoils of the Orient, in Ovid Jupiter assures Venus not only about Caesar's destiny, but even about the destiny of his son, Augustus, who will have the gods as his allies in war. While Jupiter's words contrast the Caesarian and the Augustan, they nevertheless are clearly bound to the tradition, specifically the Virgilian tradition. Yet in modifying the Virgilian tradition here, Ovid updates the epic situation, metamorphosing its characters and contents. He thus reshapes and modernizes the tradition that he inherits, most recently, from Virgil¹⁵.

There is one further aspect of the relationship of these passages that should be considered. When Jove speaks to Venus about his knowledge of the future, as we have seen, he relies on what he has read in the *rerum tabularia*, which, as we also saw, are thoroughly "Romanized" tablets of the Fates:

*legi ipse animoque notavi
et referam, ne sis etiamnum ignara futuri.
hic sua conplevit, pro quo, Cytherea, laboras,
tempora, perfectis, quos terrae debuit, annis.*

Met. 15.814–817

Romanization is related to another important Roman feature of the text here. Here Jupiter explicitly states that he "read, memorized (*animoque notavi*¹⁶) and now will recall" the fates so that Venus may know the future. The progression outlined by Jupiter here is suggestive of Roman education, for such a

14 Cf. Eduard Norden, *Vergils Aeneis im Lichte ihrer Zeit*, in: (B. Kytzler, ed.) *Kleine Schriften zum klassischen Altertum* (Berlin 1966) 386–387. Norden suggests that lines *Aen.* 1.286–290 refer to Augustus, not Caesar, basing this assumption on the fact that in *Met.* 15 Ovid composes lines 822–839 about Augustus; so Gordon Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford 1968) 427, who expressly states that "the Caesar is Augustus". E. J. Kenney, *CR* 18 (1968) 105–107 reviews Norden's piece, refuting the notion that the lines *Aen.* 1 refer to Augustus. He points out that it is Julius Caesar's apotheosis that forms the "Schwerpunkt" of the *Metamorphoses* and connects the lines with both Augustus and Julius Caesar. Austin's note (ad 286ff.) offers arguments for both Caesar and Augustus and, with Kenney, comes down in favor of deliberate ambiguity. I obviously concur rather with his reasons for identification with Caesar. In his list of arguments for Julius Caesar, Austin offers the most obvious reason why Caesar might be preferred: Julius, not Augustus, is explicitly named in the passage (l. 288). Still, the passage admittedly does have an ambiguous tone; see further James O'Hara, *Death and the Optimistic Prophecy in Vergil's Aeneid* (Princeton 1990) 159–160.

15 Virgil had himself inherited the scene of Jupiter speaking with Venus from Naevius. Cf. Feeney (above n. 5) 315.

16 For *animus* as 'memory', see *ThLL* 2.95 n. 5.

prescription of reading, memorizing, and recalling follows the pattern which Quintilian recommends for oratorical training (*Inst. orat.* 10.1.19):

Repetamus autem et tractemus et, ut cibos mansos ac prope liquefactos demittimus quo facilius digerantur, ita lectio non cruda sed multa iteratione mollita et uelut [ut] confecta memoriae imitationique tradatur.

Quintilian considers reading only the first step in the educational process; the process of rereading (*lectio ... iteratione mollita*) leads to memorization, and memorization to recall and imitation (*confecta memoriae imitationique tradatur*).

Conte has observed a similar instance of allusion in a passage from *Metamorphoses* 14, where Mars refers to Ennius' *Annales*¹⁷:

*tu mihi concilio quondam praesente deorum
(nam memoro memorique animo pia verba notavi)
'unus erit, quem tu tolles in caerula caeli'
dixisti: rata sit verborum summa tuorum!*

Met. 14.812–815

Here the god of war recalls the promise that Jove had made in the first book of the *Annales*: Conte argues that his line, by virtue of being Ennian, possessed an *auctoritas* engendered by the poetic tradition¹⁸: *unus erit, quem tu tolles in caerula caeli / templa* (*Annales* 54, Skutsch). Mars, like other characters in the *Metamorphoses*, is a character who lives within the poetic tradition and is therefore able to recall his words from the text he had appeared in earlier. He is no longer subject to that text's temporal chronology, but exists both as a character in Ovid's story and as a character in literature. As a literary character, he can point to lines which he formerly said or heard, for the current context is subordinate to the literary tradition.

Mars' words in *Metamorphoses* 14 have further bearing on our discussion of Jupiter's in *Metamorphoses* 15. One will notice the striking similarity of Mars' statement *nam memoro memorique animo pia verba notavi* (14.813) with these words of Jove in the passage from *Metamorphoses* 15 (*legi ipse animoque notavi / et referam*, 814–815)¹⁹. The force is the same: in both instances Ovid's character is referring to the *auctoritas* of the tradition, one time to Ennius, the other to Virgil.

Let us now return to the dialogue of Jupiter and Venus in Book 15. As we saw in the case of Venus' recollection of the content of the *Aeneid* (*Met.*

¹⁷ Conte (above n. 1) 57–59.

¹⁸ Ibid. 58–59.

¹⁹ The similarity of the line numbers of the passages in *Met.* 14 and 15 is surely coincidental; cf., however, my note «Ov. *Met.* 10.475: an Instance of 'Meta-allusion'», *Gymnasium* 97 (1990) 458–460.

15.771–776), it seems that Ovid is portraying Jupiter as having “read”, “memorized”, and as now “recalling” his own words in *Aeneid* 1 and, in passing on his “imitation” of them, Jupiter alludes to the educational process by which Roman boys were taught rhetoric and with which the reader of Ovid’s day would have been very familiar. Poetry was, of course, the juvenile palaestra for rhetorical training in Ovid’s own childhood and, by his adulthood, Virgil was the core of the poetic educational curriculum.

The Ovidian Jupiter has “received an education” in the time since the *Aeneid* had been published and, just as in Book 14 Mars revealed that he had been studying the *Annales*, Jove now shows us that he recalls his lines from the first book of Virgil’s poem – indeed he has been schooled on the lines which he had once said there. The planes of the epic tradition come into conflict, not disjointedly but synthetically, despite the different situation of the two scenes – the first Jupiter–Venus dialogue near the opening of Virgil’s epic and its counterpart at the finale of Ovid’s, as we saw in the case of Venus’ protective cloud in the same two books. The result is a frame that, in spite of the obvious differences between Ovid’s and Virgil’s presentation of the Jupiter–Venus dialogue, extends beyond the *Metamorphoses* itself, going back to the futurity of the *Aeneid*, embracing and inextricably linking the two poems: distant prophecy in *Aen.* 1 has now become present reality in *Met.* 15²⁰. And the Romanization that occurs abets the synthesis of the two planes of the tradition, tangibly connecting a rather remote epic past with the political, and poetical, realities of the Augustan present.

Let us now summarize our conclusions. We have seen that Venus, by specifically referring to her previous poetic situations in Homer and in Virgil, binds herself closely to the epic tradition that has molded her: for Venus, there is an immediacy of this past event, an immediacy afforded by her and our recollection of her former epic appearances. On the one hand, she “pre-existed” in the distant past of her former poetic loci while, on the other hand, in her new Ovidian context she speaks with an awareness of their poetic proximity.

The intersection of these two planes – the mythical with the historical – only reflects the intertextual connection between the epic planes. Virgil had adopted from Homer the milieu of the bronze age for his epic, one that for all its prophetic glimpses of the age to come, remains confined to that period. The *Metamorphoses*, however, have been declared as coming down to Ovid’s own time (*Met.* 1.4). From the outset, then, the temporal conflict had been planned,

20 Gregson Davis, «The Problem of Closure in a Carmen Perpetuum: Aspects of thematic recapitulation in Ovid *Met.* 15», *Grazer Beiträge* 9 (1980) 129, points out that in *Met.* 15 “Venus appears as the celestial projection of the terrestrial concern [for the Roman civilization on earth] expressed in the first book ...”. While such structure may obtain for the poem itself, I would suggest that Ovid’s use of poetic allusion suggests a wider frame that incorporates the characters of Virgilian epic.

and when we find Venus wanting to cloak Caesar in a Homeric/Virgilian cloud, we see clearly Virgil's bronze age epic situation colliding with a "neo-epic" situation in the *Metamorphoses*. Similarly, when he has Jupiter allude to his previous poetic locus only to update his language so as to embrace Augustus as Caesar's successor and to accommodate the realities of every Roman boy's education, Ovid is widening the epic code to the point of no return. Ovid has concurrently updated and revitalized the epic tradition that he inherits from the *Aeneid*, but more importantly he has presented us with a series of differences between his own and Virgil's epic. These differences are between new and old, epic and other genres, Caesarean and Augustan and, ultimately, between the Ovidian and Virgilian. It is through these that he gives us metamorphosis²¹.

21 I would like to thank Professor Lowell Edmunds for his comments and suggestions.