

THE ESSENTIAL SERIOUSNESS OF *HEROIDES* 4*)

One of the most distinctive features of Ovid's poetry is its wit. The poet's sense of humor pervades his work, and he is especially adept at pointing out the humorous aspects of love and lovers. One poem that has been singled out for its humorous depiction of a lover's foolishness is *Heroides* 4, Phaedra's declaration of love to Hippolytus, who is an unattainable object inasmuch as he is obstinately celibate and her husband's son. While instances of impossible love are found throughout the *Heroides*, Phaedra's letter has been seen as an unusually frivolous treatment of this idea. H. Jacobson argues that Ovid realized that he could not hope to compete with the famous portrayal of Phaedra's dilemma in Euripides' second *Hippolytus* and so chose to stress the ridiculous in his treatment of the Phaedra story¹). F. Verducci concurs, proclaiming Phaedra "far more witty than pathetic"²).

It is not surprising that Ovid's Phaedra has been termed a

*) The following works are referred to by the author's or editor's name alone or by the short title indicated: W. S. Barrett, *Euripides Hippolytus* (Oxford 1964); T. Birt, *Animadversiones ad Ovidi Heroidum Epistulas*, *RhM* 32 (1877) 386-432; P. Grimal, *L'originalité de Sénèque dans la Tragédie de Phèdre*, *REL* 41 (1963) 297-314, cited as Grimal, *L'originalité*; P. Grimal, *Sénèque Phèdre* (Paris 1965), cited as Grimal, *Phèdre*; H. Herter, *Theseus und Hippolytos*, *RhM* 89 (1940) 273-92; H. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides* (Princeton 1974); A. Kalkmann, *De Hippolyti Euripideis quaestiones novae* (Bonn 1882); F. Leo, *L. Annaei Senecae Tragoediae*, vol. 1 (observationes criticae continens) (Berlin 1878); A. Palmer, ed., *P. Ovidi Nasonis Heroides* (Oxford 1898, repr. 1967); E. Paratore, *Sulla Phaedra di Seneca*, *Dioniso* 15 (1953) 199-234, cited as Paratore, *Sulla Phaedra di Seneca*; E. Paratore, *Lo 'Ippólitos Kaluptómenos di Euripide e la Phaedra di Seneca*, *Studi Classici in onore di Quintino Cataudella I* (Catania 1972) 303-46, cited as Paratore, *Lo 'Ipp. Kal.*; C. S. Pearson, *Simile and Imagery in Ovid Heroides 4 and 5*, *ICS* 5 (1980) 110-29; F. Verducci, *Ovid's Toyshop of the Heart: Epistulae Heroidum* (Princeton 1985); U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Analecta Euripidea* (Berlin 1875), cited as Wilamowitz, *AE*.

1) Jacobson 157: "The whole tale is transformed into a joke with Phaedra as the butt". Although only Euripides' second *Hippolytus* survives in its entirety, Ovid would also have known Euripides' first version of *Hippolytus* and Sophocles' *Phaedra*. For a succinct account of these fragmentary plays see Barrett 10-45.

2) Verducci 192. See also L. P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled* (Cambridge 1955) 105: "If we cannot be moved, we may perhaps be amused."

parody of her Euripidean predecessor, for her letter is that of a woman desperate to persuade an uninterested lover, and many of the things she says in her attempt to win Hippolytus' favor are so far from the truth that they seem utterly ridiculous. Nevertheless, these absurd exaggerations and falsehoods, which include Phaedra's characterization of herself as a virgin, her rejection of her role as Theseus' wife and the mother of his children, and her fantasy that she and Hippolytus might indulge in incest without reproach, should be examined within the context of Phaedra's letter. On such an examination it becomes apparent that Ovid has placed these falsehoods within a carefully constructed pattern of denial and self-deception that falls apart suddenly at the poem's close to reveal Phaedra's subjection to, and horror of, the *amor* that has driven her to write her outrageous *suasoria*. Seneca seems to have recognized this, for the presence of a cluster of echoes of *Heroides* 4 in one crucial scene in Seneca's *Phaedra* indicates that Seneca could not have perceived Ovid's poem as a parody. I hope to demonstrate that it was not Ovid's primary intent to make Phaedra the object of ridicule for her transparent lies. Rather he wished to show, via Phaedra's attempts to deceive and persuade herself as well as Hippolytus and her despair at the letter's end when those attempts have failed, the power of love to make an otherwise respectable woman engage in scandalous behavior.

Phaedra's denial of reality is evident from the very beginning of her letter to Hippolytus. The opening greeting, *salutem / mittit Amazonio Cressa puella viro* (*Her.* 4.1-2), effectively veils the complications inherent in Phaedra's relationship with Hippolytus³). Mention of the fact that they are stepmother and stepson is avoided entirely, with the name of Hippolytus' mother rather than his father distinguishing the youth. Phaedra refers to herself as *puella*, which is not so much an attempt to deny her age as it is to cast herself in the role of an unmarried maiden⁴). The letter that follows is a bold declaration of an illicit love; Phaedra, however, insists that she makes this declaration with great reluctance. She writes that on the three occasions that she tried to speak with Hippolytus, her sense of decency caused her voice to fail⁵). Yet

3) Jacobson 147.

4) See Jacobson 147 and 147 n. 13 on the erotic connotations of *puella*.

5) The three unsuccessful attempts to speak recall the "thrice-failed" motif familiar from Homer (*Od.* 11.206-08) and Vergil (*Aen.* 2.792-94, 6.700-02). Apollonius anticipated Ovid in using the motif to describe a lover's hesitation at *Arg.* 3.654: τρίς μὲν ἐπειρήθη, τρίς δ' ἔσχετο. I do not agree with Jacobson that Ovid's

pudor est miscendus amori (Her. 4.9), and Phaedra is now expressing her love in a letter. She stresses that this is only done at Amor's command, declaring that at first she was hesitant (*primo dubitanti*, Her. 4.13), despite her conviction that *quidquid Amor iussit, non est contemnere tutum* (Her. 4.11). Thus Phaedra very carefully represents herself as Amor's servant rather than a brazen woman acting independently to fulfill her desires; such careful rhetoric is characteristic of the beginning of Phaedra's *suasoria*.

Phaedra hastens to assure her correspondent that she does not customarily engage in wooing young men, that she is a woman of excellent reputation: *fama, velim quaeras, crimine nostra vacat* (Her. 4.18). Her claim recalls Euripides' second Phaedra, who set great store by her good name⁶). Yet the way in which Ovid's Phaedra asserts her spotless reputation is unusual and disturbing. Her. 4.17–34 presents a very odd picture of Phaedra's situation as she attempts to make a case for breaking her marriage vows. She asserts that she has maintained a good reputation but that now she has been worn down by love, a love that is all the greater because it has come to her late in life (Her. 4.19). The implication of such a claim is, of course, that she never loved in her youth and that she felt no such passion for her husband Theseus. Indeed, she goes on to speak in such a way as to give the impression that she has never had sex with Theseus. Comparing herself to a bullock who is new to the yoke and to an unbroken colt who chafes at the unaccustomed bit (Her. 4.21–24), Phaedra indulges in virginal imagery to describe her discomfiture in the face of what she terms her first love (*sic male vixque subit primos rude pectus amores*, 23) – this despite the fact that she is undeniably a *matrona* and the mother of Theseus' children⁷). Virginal imagery is used again at lines 29–30, *est aliquid plenae pomaria carpere ramis / et tenui primam delegere ungue rosam*⁸).

Phaedra's use of virginal imagery seems preposterous, and Jacobson has argued that Ovid is here ridiculing Phaedra by presenting her as an older woman who because of her infatuation with

use of the motif is parodic in a way that Apollonius' is not (Jacobson 148 n. 16). In any case, in light of the popularity of this motif Birt's speculation that Phaedra's three attempts hark back to Hipp. 392 ff., where Phaedra tells the women the three steps in her denial of love, appears misguided (Birt 405 n. 2).

6) Aphrodite herself acknowledges the queen's εὐκλεία (Hipp. 47–48).

7) On the virginal imagery in the poem, see Jacobson 148.

8) Compare Sappho 105a, where the virgin is compared to a fruit waiting to be plucked, and Catullus 62.43, *idem cum tenui captus defloruit ungui*.

a boy deludes herself about her age and desirability⁹). Yet Phaedra's use of virginal imagery is more complex than Jacobson realizes. The unbroken colt simile follows closely on Phaedra's defence of her *fama* in line 18, and more references to Phaedra's good name appear in the midst of the virginal imagery. In fact, Phaedra is using virginal imagery to refer to her *fama*. At line 27, when Phaedra asserts the soundness of her reputation a second time, she tells Hippolytus *tu nova servatae capies libamina famae*. This is a peculiar phrase, since one does not commonly make to one's beloved an offering of one's intact reputation. Rather, at least according to the romantic ideal, it is her preserved maidenhood which a woman offers her lover, and it is just such an offer which the erotic connotations of lines 27–30 suggest. While speaking of her spotless reputation, *servata fama*, Phaedra is suggesting that she is chaste. Purity of reputation is confused with sexual purity. The confusion is evident again at lines 31–34, where Phaedra speaks of her *prior candor*, a purity which in fact must refer to her spotless reputation, but which also suggests chastity.

The concepts of good reputation and virginity both suggest purity unmarked by stain, and indeed, Phaedra's good name consists of sexual purity inasmuch as it depends upon abstention from extramarital sex. Still, a *matrona* is not a virgin and cannot be described in the erotic terms which men have traditionally used to describe young women without sexual experience. In equating her status as a respectable woman with that of a maiden, Phaedra attempts to satisfy her wish to be young and inexperienced – a perfect match for her beloved – and unencumbered by marriage to Theseus, who as her husband and Hippolytus' father presents a twofold obstacle to her love affair with Hippolytus.

Phaedra's representation of herself as a virgin is, of course, absurd, yet I would argue against the view that Ovid is here simply mocking a woman who is vainly trying to reclaim the virginity she lost long ago. The confusion of *fama* and virginity at Her. 4.17–34 introduces an idea that goes beyond simple parody of this sort, since it shows that Phaedra's fantasy of virginity has its basis in her real concern for her reputation. Unable to offer her beloved the sexual purity of a virgin, Phaedra offers the purity of her good name. Moreover, it appears that Seneca did not consider the confusion of *fama* and virginity in *Heroides* 4 to be a joke. At one point in Seneca's play Phaedra speaks of her purity in a way that is very

9) Jacobson 147–50, 157.

reminiscent of Ovid's heroine. At the end of her declaration of love Phaedra offers herself to Hippolytus as a suppliant, *respersa nulla labe et intacta, innocens / tibi mutor uni* (Seneca Ph. 668–69)¹⁰. *Respersa nulla labe* could refer to the queen's immaculate reputation, but with the words *intacta, innocens / tibi mutor uni* Seneca's Phaedra crosses the same line that Ovid's Phaedra crossed in *Heroides* 4 and confuses a spotless reputation with sexual purity. The affinity of Ph. 668–69 to lines 31–34 of Ovid's poem is evident, and the absence of parodic intent should be noted. It would be prudent, then, to not simply laugh at the silliness of Phaedra's virginal pretensions, but to consider the nature of her fantasy: this is wishful thinking that bespeaks Phaedra's erstwhile virtue as well as her desire, a perversion of the truth that indicates the extent of her subjection to *amor*.

While Phaedra begins by pretending that she has never slept with Theseus, she cannot long avoid acknowledging his existence. When she first refers to him at line 59 ff., however, it is with a certain sort of detachment. Although Phaedra's epithet for Theseus at line 59, *perfidus Aegides*, is emotional, she mentions him here only with reference to his treachery against her sister, Ariadne. This detachment continues a few lines later when Phaedra, remarking upon the attraction which Theseus and his son hold for the women in her family, names Theseus as Ariadne's lover, not as her own husband. As at lines 19 ff., Phaedra speaks as though she is conscious only of her love for Hippolytus and as though she had never felt any attraction to her husband, his father: *me tua forma capit, capta parente soror* (Her. 4.64). By avoiding mention of the fact that Theseus is her husband, Phaedra attempts to deny the marriage bond that she wishes did not exist.

This detachment from her husband continues even when Phaedra voices her active resentment of Theseus later in her letter. As in every other account of the Phaedra story, Theseus is absent when Phaedra's love is revealed to Hippolytus. In *Heroides* 4 Theseus seems to be in Thessaly visiting his friend Pirithous (Her. 4.109–10)¹¹ – whom, Phaedra points out, Theseus prefers to both herself and Hippolytus (Her. 4.112). If line 112 is a reference to a

10) Note the similarity to Her. 4.32, *candor ab insolita labe notandus erat*.

11) *Pirithoi ora* probably refers to Pirithous' homeland Thessaly, although it has been interpreted as a reference to Hades by those who want to believe that Phaedra is speaking of Theseus' trip to the underworld to aid his friend in carrying off Persephone (Thessaly: Barrett 32 n. 3; Grimal, *L'originalité* 306; Jacobson 144; Hades: Leo 179; Herter 282 n. 18).

homosexual relationship between Theseus and his friend¹²), Phaedra does not pursue the topic; the list of grievances that follows is free of sexual jealousy and in fact free of any references to wrongs done to a wife by her husband. The first two items after Pirithous, the killing of the Minotaur and the desertion of Ariadne, concern Phaedra, but they are offenses against Phaedra's family, not against her as a wife. The rest of the list consists of the wrongs done by Theseus to Hippolytus (Her. 4.117–28). Phaedra tells how Theseus killed Hippolytus' Amazon mother, remarking with bitter sarcasm, *si quaeras ubi sit, Theseus latus ense peregit* (Her. 4.119). According to Phaedra, Theseus refused to marry the lady's mother in order to bar Hippolytus from any claim to his father's realm. Another obstacle to Hippolytus' acquisition of his birthright is posed by Phaedra's own children. The children are evidence of Phaedra's liaison with Theseus, but even as she admits the union Phaedra argues that the children were conceived against her will: *quos tamen omnis / non ego tollendi causa, sed ille fuit* (123–24). This denial of her children is followed immediately by the monstrous wish that her womb had ruptured in labor: *O utinam nocitura tibi, pulcherrime rerum, / in medio nisu viscera rupta forent!* (125–26)

Phaedra's concern for Hippolytus' status at the expense of her own children's in *Heroides* 4 is extraordinary, assailing most readers' ideas of maternal devotion and violently contradicting the portraits of Phaedra as a devoted mother in Euripides' second *Hippolytus* and Sophocles' *Phaedra*¹³). As Paratore observed, the unstated cause of Phaedra's antipathy towards her children is the fact that they separate Phaedra from Hippolytus by providing incontrovertible proof of her status as Theseus' wife¹⁴). Earlier in her letter Phaedra seemed almost to imagine herself a virgin, con-

12) As some have suggested (Grimal, *L'originalité* 306; Jacobson 155). The bond between the two men is certainly a bone of contention for Seneca's Phaedra, who mocks their journey to the underworld in lines 91–98 of Seneca's play and implies that the *Pirithoi comes* could not care less whether his wife seduces his son (Seneca Ph. 244). While it is conceivable that both Ovid and Seneca borrowed Phaedra's grudge against Pirithous from Euripides' first *Hippolytus* (Grimal, *L'originalité* 306), there is no evidence to support this.

13) It is partly for the sake of her children's good name that the Phaedra of *Hippolytus* II resolves to die rather than indulge her shameful passion (Hipp. 420–21), and later, after the Nurse betrays her trust, Phaedra does not hesitate to besmirch Hippolytus' name so that her children might remain untouched by shame (Hipp. 716–18). Sophocles' Phaedra felt a similar devotion to her children, as frg. 685 Radt (Pearson) shows: ἄλλ' εἶσι μὴτ' ἰ παῖδες ἄγκυρα βίου.

14) Paratore, *Sulla Phaedra di Seneca* 226.

fusing her good reputation with the purity of maidenhood (Her. 4.18–34). The existence of her children disrupts this fantasy, providing evidence that she is Theseus' wife, that her love for Hippolytus is in fact adulterous. Unable to deny the fact of her children's conception, Phaedra attempts to relieve herself of the responsibility for that act, claiming that Theseus alone was to blame. In lines 123–24, Phaedra is not only excusing herself from the deed of producing heirs which block Hippolytus' access to the throne, she is trying to claim that the sexual union which resulted in the birth of the heirs took place against her will. The denial of reality noted earlier in Phaedra's tendency to represent herself as a maiden and in her reluctance to acknowledge Theseus as her husband is again apparent in her denial of responsibility for the birth of her children.

As her letter progresses, Phaedra becomes even more outrageous. The flimsy defence of Phaedra's fantasy of virginity has failed her – as the existence of her children attests, she is no virgin, but Theseus' wife. Phaedra must confront the fact that her love for her husband's son borders on incest¹⁵). However, Phaedra avoids thinking about the real problems of such a relationship. The fantasy of virginity is replaced by a fantasy of safe incest, incest sanctioned by the gods and easily concealed under the guise of familial affection.

Phaedra's fantasy of safe incest in lines 129–46 is built upon a series of facile arguments. The titles of stepson and stepmother are but *nomina vana*; besides, the age of Saturn with its outdated notions of *pietas* has passed and the new god Juppiter has taken his own sister to wife. *Iuppiter esse pium statuit, quodcumque iuaret*, says Phaedra at line 133, negating Greek and Roman standards of morality with specious argument. Even the Nurse of Euripides' second *Hippolytus*, who tried to convince Phaedra that she should yield to love as the gods do (Hipp. 451–58), never indulged in such a blatant defense of relativism. The sophistry does not stop here – Phaedra goes on to claim that incest actually promotes family

15) Since the relationship between stepmother and stepson is not a blood relationship, a sexual liaison between Phaedra and Hippolytus would not be incestuous in the strict sense of the word; nevertheless, such a relationship would offend propriety, not only because of the grave indignity of a son betraying his own father, but because the stepparent and stepchild may be close enough in social terms that their relationship is subject to the taboo against sex between members of the same family. Ovid's Phaedra thinks of the relationship as incestuous: her fantasies at lines 137 ff. presuppose a familial closeness, and she cites the incestuous relationship of the gods as justification for her relationship with Hippolytus (Her. 4.134).

solidarity: *illa coit firma generis iunctura catena, / imposuit nodos cui Venus ipsa suos* (Her. 4.135–36).

Having disposed of antiquated moral objections to incest, Phaedra incongruously proceeds to assure Hippolytus that no one need ever know of their love-affair. It is almost as if the queen senses that her arguments would fail to convince anyone to abandon conventional morality. In this, the most shameless passage of her letter, Phaedra proposes using common expressions of familial affection to mask reprehensible lust. Their closeness will bring them praise: *tutus eris mecum laudemque merebere culpa, / tu licet in lecto conspiciare meo* (Her. 4.145–46).

Phaedra's invention of a new morality which sanctions incest and her dream of gaining admiration by the very fact of her close and loving relationship to Hippolytus are shocking. Her suggestions are far too impudent to gain the sympathy of any rational man, let alone an obsessively virtuous youth like Hippolytus. By this point, this *suasoria* has lost its power to persuade – instead it tells the reader about the person who is trying to do the persuading. Ovid is portraying a woman who is either so mad with passion or so desperate to attain her goal that she is driven to defend her illicit desire with absurd arguments, a woman who knows Amor's ravages so well that she prays that her beloved might be spared its onslaught: *qui mihi nunc saevit, sic tibi parcat Amor* (Her. 4.148).

With this line, Phaedra's letter enters a new phase, moving away from her series of audacious schemes to an abrupt declaration of humility: *non ego dedignor supplex humilisque precari* (Her. 4.149). Phaedra begins to realize the depths to which she has sunk and with an exclamation recalls her former resolve to combat the passion which now rules her:

*heu! ubi nunc fastus altaque verba? iacent.
et pugnare diu nec me submittere culpae
certa fui, certi siquid haberet amor:
victa precor genibusque tuis regalia tendo
bracchia; quid deceat, non videt ullus amans.*
(Her. 4.150–54)

Here Phaedra tells how she responded when she first felt desire for Hippolytus, saying that she was determined to struggle against her passion – much like the resolute Phaedra of Euripides' second *Hippolytus*. Ovid's Phaedra, however, has succumbed to her desire and has become a slave to passion, someone who sees clearly that what she wants is wrong, but pursues it all the same.

Lines 150 ff. mark the turning point of the poem. Earlier, Phaedra's attempts to persuade Hippolytus had been outlandish, but marked by a mastery of rhetoric as Phaedra demonstrated a remarkable flair for utilizing the lesser argument to her advantage. From this point on, however, rhetorical persuasion is replaced by pleas of the most pathetic sort. A weary Phaedra begs Hippolytus to have pity on her, or at least her ancestors (*da veniam fassae, 156, miserere priorum / et mihi si non vis parcere, parce meis, 161-62*)¹⁶). Sophistic rhetoric appears to be missing from the prayer that ends Phaedra's letter (Her. 4. 167 ff.). Included in this prayer are the simple wishes that Hippolytus might be granted the pleasures he enjoys most, companionship with Artemis and success in the hunt (Her. 4.169-72). The other requests in Phaedra's prayer, however, are of greater interest. She opens her prayer with the plea that Hippolytus "spare" her, followed by the wish that Hippolytus might never have to endure the pain of unrequited love (Her. 4.167-68). Line 168, *sic numquam, quae te spernere possit, ames*, recalls the plea Phaedra made earlier in her letter, *qui mihi nunc saevit, sic tibi parcat Amor* (Her. 4.148). It is significant that at line 167 Phaedra says to Hippolytus not *ames, oro*, but *parcas, oro*, repeating the verb *parcere* that was already used twice in line 162. She is not asking for love so much as for an end to the torment of unrequited passion, a torment so fierce that she is moved to pray repeatedly that Hippolytus not be subject to it.

This plea for relief may underlie Phaedra's puzzling last wish, in which she finally, albeit parenthetically, acknowledges Hippolytus' famous misogyny: *sic tibi dent nymphae, quamvis odisse puellas / diceris, arentem quae levet unda sitim* (Her. 4.173-74). The wish that Hippolytus may never suffer thirst seems out of place and trivial¹⁷). Yet if one recalls the common association of quenched thirst with sexual satisfaction one can see that Phaedra is restating her wish that Hippolytus might never suffer the pain of unsatisfied passion. This erotic association of thirst with desire appeared in Euripides' second *Hippolytus* at lines 208-09, where Phaedra lamented, *πῶς ἂν δροσερᾶς ἀπὸ κρηνίδος / καθαρῶν ὑδάτων πῶμ' ἀρυσάμην*. This is the beginning of the mad scene at Hipp. 207 ff., in which a delirious Phaedra speaks of hunting in the

16) Phaedra's promise of Crete at lines 163-64 interrupts her abject pleas for mercy, and Palmer may be right to suspect the couplet's authenticity (Palmer *ad loc.*).

17) Jacobson thinks this may be a cruelly comic reference to Hippolytus' watery death (Jacobson 155).

mountains, secretly wishing that she could join Hippolytus in his favorite activity. This section of Euripides' play is followed very closely by Ovid at Her. 4.37-52, where Phaedra describes her fits of madness; Birt has set the corresponding lines side by side to show the high degree of correlation¹⁸). At Her. 4.37-52 Ovid included all of the wishes of Euripides' Phaedra in his own heroine's account of her delusion except one: the wish for water to quench her thirst. Ovid finally includes this wish at the end of Phaedra's letter as she prays that Hippolytus may find the relief she lacks.

There can be no denying that much of Phaedra's letter to Hippolytus seems ridiculous and shameless. Yet Phaedra's early claim that *fama . . . crimine nostra vacat* (Her. 4.18) should not be doubted in light of her evident remorse at lines 150 ff., remorse that is thrown into relief by her pathetic acknowledgement of love's hold over her and her prayers that Hippolytus be spared love's assault. These prayers deserve special attention, for while other elements in lines 150 ff. could conceivably be seen as part of an emotional *peroratio* artfully designed by Phaedra to elicit Hippolytus' pity, the pleas that he be spared her pain cannot be construed as such. Instead, these pleas illustrate Phaedra's concern for her beloved, as well as her awareness of her own loss. She is conquered, worn down, a queen become suppliant (Her. 4.149, 153-54, 156), a woman utterly subject to a desire that she knows she has no hope of satisfying.

In *Heroides* 4 Ovid shows love's power to make a woman do what she normally would not as she eschews all thoughts of propriety: *quid deceat, non videt ullus amans* (Her. 4.154). This is an idea that can be treated comically, as it is when Ovid ridicules Pasiphaë's love for the bull at *Ars Am.* 1.289-326, taking full ad-

18) Birt 404. The corresponding pairs noted by Birt are: Hipp. 215-16, *πέμπετε μ' εἰς ὄρος: εἰμι πρὸς ἕλαν / καὶ παρὰ πεύκας* and Her. 4.41-42, *in nemus ire libet . . . per iuga summa*; Hipp. 216-19, *ἴνα θηροφόνοι / στείβουσι κύνες / βαλκίαις ἐλάφοις ἐγχεμπτόμενοι. / . . . κυσὶ θούξαι. . .* and Her. 4.41-42, *pressique in retia cervis / hortari celeris . . . canes*; Hipp. 219-22, *ἔραμαι. . . / καὶ παρὰ χαίταν ξανθὴν ὄψαι / Θεσσαλὸν δροπακ', ἐπίλογγον ἔχουσι' / ἐν χειρὶ βέλος* and Her. 4.43, *aut tremulum excesso iaculum vibrare lacerto*; Hipp. 228-31, *δέσποινα' ἄλιος Ἄρτεμι Λίμνας / καὶ γυμνασίων τῶν ἵπποκρότων. / εἶθε γενοίμαν ἐν σοῖς δαπέδοις / πῶλους Ἐνετὰς δαμαλιζόμενα* and Her. 4.45-46, *saepe iuvat versare leves in pulvere curtus / torquentem frenis ora fugacis equi* (for the Greek equivalent of *in pulvere* cf. the Nurse's comment on Phaedra's desire to ride at Hipp. 234-35: ψαμάθοις). Seneca also recreates Euripides' mad scene at lines 387-403 of his *Phaedra*, although not as faithfully.

vantage of the absurdity inherent in the situation of a woman in love with a beast. The ending of *Heroides* 4, however, stresses the sorrowful consequences of subjection to love's power, consequences that Ovid explored in two other accounts of forbidden love, both in the *Metamorphoses*: the stories of Byblis' love for her brother and Myrrha's incestuous relationship with her father (Met. 9.450–665, 10.298–502). Like Phaedra's story, the stories of Byblis and Myrrha have to do with incest¹⁹), but this is only the most obvious similarity between the three accounts. More important is the prominence given to love's power to make a woman do what she knows is wrong, for all three women, conscious of the impropriety of their passion, struggle unsuccessfully against love.

It has long been recognized that there are a number of elements in the stories of Byblis and Myrrha in the *Metamorphoses* that recall *Heroides* 4. Byblis, like Phaedra, writes a letter to declare her love, a letter that begins with a couplet that is clearly based on the opening of *Heroides* 4 (cf. Met. 9.530–31, *quam nisi tu dederis, non est habitura salutem, / hanc tibi mittit amans; pudet, a, pudet edere nomen, with Her. 4.1–2, qua, nisi tu dederis, caritura est ipsa, salutem / mittit Amazonio Cressa puella viro*)²⁰). When Byblis and Myrrha attempt to defend the idea of incest, they use the same sort of sophistic arguments that Phaedra used in *Heroides* 4. Myrrha questions the classification of incest as a sin by citing the lack of an incest taboo among animals and among certain races (Met. 10.324–35), pointing out at lines 331–33 that familial love is strengthened by sexual relationships within the family, an argument reminiscent of Phaedra's at Her. 4.135–36. Byblis similarly refers to the incestuous practices of other people, i. e., the Aeolidae (Met. 9.507), and, like Phaedra in *Heroides* 4, takes her argument to a higher plane by citing the brother-sister marriage of Jove and Juno (Met. 9.497–501, cf. Her. 4.133–34). Byblis expands on this in her letter to her brother Caunus, where she urges him to follow the example of the gods rather than the laws of old men who do not know what right conduct is (Met. 9.551–55). Again

19) Ovid wrote another poem about an incest myth, *Heroides* 11, which tells the story of Canace and her brother Macareus. *Heroides* 11 differs from Ovid's accounts of Phaedra, Byblis and Myrrha in that it does not deal with the inception, but rather the aftermath of an incestuous affair – thus the focus and themes of *Heroides* 11 are different from those of the other incest stories. Verducci overlooks this difference in focus when she claims that in *Heroides* 11 Ovid offers a mocking treatment of a banal sort of incest (Verducci 190–234).

20) The many similarities between the two love letters are outlined by Kalkmann 62–63.

like Phaedra in *Heroides* 4, Byblis incongruously follows her defense of incest with the observation that it is a vice that is easily hidden under the guise of familial affection (Met. 9.556–60; cf. Her. 4.143–46). Yet as assured as Byblis and Myrrha might seem in the midst of their elaborately rational defenses of incest, the confused cries that punctuate their inner monologues demonstrate that both young women realize from the start that the love they contemplate is wrong. Some of these cries recall the laments that the penitent Phaedra utters at the end of *Heroides* 4. Byblis, like Phaedra, asserts that she struggled for a long time against passion before deciding to write her letter (*pugnativique diu violenta Cupidinis arma / effugere*, Met. 9.543–44; cf. *pugnare diu nec me submittere culpa / certa fui*, Her. 4.151–52), and both women beg for mercy under love's onslaught (Her. 4.156, 161–62, 167; Met. 9.561).

Yet despite the similarities between *Heroides* 4 and the incest stories in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid's Byblis and Myrrha have met with much more sympathy than has his Phaedra. The reason for this is readily evident. In the stories of Byblis and Myrrha Ovid gives a very full picture of each young woman's struggle against passion. Both Byblis and Myrrha have long inner monologues in which they repeatedly express both their horror at the incest they are contemplating and their sense of helplessness, and these monologues clearly illustrate each young woman's dilemma as she goes back and forth in her resolve²¹). In addition, the first-person accounts of Byblis and Myrrha are supplemented by the testimony of a narrator who confirms each young woman's struggle. By providing background, the narrator's voice furnishes something of a corrective for the occasionally outlandish outbursts that occur in each young woman's soliloquies and in Byblis' letter. The narrator also apprizes the reader of each young woman's unhappy end, thereby generating a good deal of sympathy even for the foolishly headstrong Byblis. Consequently, although Ovid does not deny the enormity of incest in his treatment of Byblis and Myrrha – the moralistic tone found in both stories distinguishes them from lighter stories in the *Metamorphoses* – and does not shrink from

21) *Quo mente feror? quid molior?* cries Myrrha, when she first finds herself entertaining thoughts of incest (Met. 10.320); later, when she finds herself again arguing for incest she breaks off in astonishment: *quid in ista revolvor?* (Met. 10.335). Byblis bewails the fire of passion that rules her mind: *quo labor? quem mens mea concipit ignem?* (Met. 9.520), and the same fire plagues Myrrha: *igni / carpitur indomito* (Met. 10.369–70).

presenting the young women's sometimes ridiculous justifications of incest, he succeeds in eliciting sympathy for both women by clearly demonstrating the supreme difficulty, in fact the impossibility, of doing the right thing in the face of the passion that assails them²²).

In *Heroides* 4, on the other hand, there is no narrator to paint a picture of Phaedra struggling with the decision to approach Hippolytus or to describe in pathetic detail the letter's tragic aftermath. The reader hears only Phaedra's voice. Such is the nature of the epistolary mode, where everything must be filtered through the sensibility of the fictional letter-writer, an approach which offers readers the privileged intimacy of reading private correspondence, but which places restrictions on the author's expression. In an epistolary poem the letter-writer's words must express not only the character's own feelings, but also, obliquely, the poet's viewpoint²³). In a case where the letter-writer is hiding the truth from her addressee – or from herself – the poet must portray both the character's real and pretended situation through her own words, without benefit of guiding narration. Consequently, as Verducci observes, the truth of the matter may not be clear to the reader²⁴). Nevertheless, as I have argued above, Ovid does give sufficient indication in *Heroides* 4 that Phaedra's story parallels those of Byblis and Myrrha by illustrating the power of love to subvert a woman's best intentions – the absence of explicit commentary to this effect should be attributed to the nature of the epistolary genre, not to Ovid's wish to parody the Euripidean Phaedra.

Because the poet does not interrupt Phaedra's letter with narration, the reader is left with some unanswered questions: it is difficult to determine precisely, for example, whether Phaedra is

22) Even Myrrha, who goes to the extent of attempting suicide, yields to passion in the end.

23) D. F. Kennedy notes that Ovid could play against his audience's knowledge of mythic and literary exempla, thus encouraging the audience to supply the information and attitudes that the letter-writer would choose not to include in her letter (Kennedy, *The Epistolary Mode and the First of Ovid's Heroides*, CQ 34 [1984] 421). Although this is an intriguing idea, it cannot be applied to *Heroides* 4 since it seems likely that the audience would have known of both a virtuous and a brazen Phaedra.

24) Verducci 16. Verducci notes that epistolary fiction offers the reader a mixture of persuasion directed by the letter-writer to the addressee and the often unconscious revelation of the letter-writer's fears, hopes, and ulterior motives (Verducci 15–16).

trying to deceive Hippolytus or herself with her exaggerations. Given Phaedra's rhetorical skill, it is possible to contend that she is intent on using her wiles in a doomed attempt to persuade Hippolytus, but the unbelievable perversion of the truth found in her exaggerations indicates a sort of wishful thinking that is the mark of self-deception²⁵). There must be something of both here. The purpose of Phaedra's letter cannot be forgotten, and as *Heroides* 4 opens this purpose seems foremost – consequently, Phaedra's representation of herself as Amor's servant at lines 11–14 might well be intended as a conventional ploy used by a clever woman to excuse her actions. Nevertheless, in the course of the poem Phaedra's desperate progression through a series of ever more incredible fantasies reveals that Phaedra is not in control of her *suasoria* at all²⁶). Here the intimacy of the epistolary mode serves Ovid well, for the reader discovers Phaedra's weaknesses and fears even as she discovers them, watching Phaedra's thoughts unfold as her initial assurance progressively erodes. Thus, ironically, by the end of the poem the truth of *Heroides* 4. 11 – *quidquid Amor iussit, non est contemnere tutum* – is evident to the reader and, with new vividness, to Phaedra herself: Phaedra is in fact love's abject slave. The reader and Phaedra are left with the realization of the impossibility of fighting love and the tragic consequences of trying to do so.

At lines 151–52 Phaedra says that she originally was certain to battle against love and keep herself from shame – certain, that is, if there were anything certain in love (*certa fui, certi siquid haberet amor*). Unfortunately, one cannot count on or control love. Venus now dominates Phaedra (*per Venerem . . . quae plurima mecum est*, Her. 4. 167)²⁷), and Amor is proved to be the master whose orders one disobeys at one's peril (Her. 4.11). These references to love's power are reminiscent of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, where Phaedra

25) C. S. Pearson finds indication of Phaedra's self-deception in the imagery of the simile at *Heroides* 4. 21–24, with its conflation of virginal imagery and the yoke of marriage (Pearson 112–14). E. Opper also contends that Phaedra is deceiving herself throughout the poem (Opper, *Ovid's Heroides: Studien zur inneren Form und zur Motivation* [Diss. Erlangen-Nürnberg 1968] 89, 93).

26) Pearson observes that Phaedra's lack of control is evident in the image of the runaway horse at Her. 4.46 and in the simile where Phaedra compares herself to women possessed by frenzy at Her. 4.47–50 (Pearson 116–17).

27) As Palmer observes, the phrase *per Venerem . . . quae plurima mecum est* is reminiscent of the all-powerful Aphrodite depicted in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (cf. Hipp. 1, πολλή μὲν ἐν βροτοῖσι κοῦκ ἀνώνυμος, Hipp. 443, Κύπρις γὰρ οὐ φορητὸν ἦν πολλὴ ἄνῃ. Palmer *ad* 167).

was at the mercy of Aphrodite²⁸). Ovid's Phaedra is often likened to the heroine of Euripides' first *Hippolytus*, who appears to have been drawn as a lustful woman who brazenly solicited Hippolytus' favors²⁹). Nevertheless, one should keep in mind that the Phaedra of Euripides' second *Hippolytus* is not entirely immune to temptation³⁰). It is worthwhile to recall Wilamowitz' observation that Phaedra's struggle against ἔρωσ, not her unbending virtue, is at the heart of her drama in Euripides' play³¹). Even though it must be conceded that Ovid's Phaedra does not fight against *amor* as valiantly as did Euripides' second Phaedra, the struggle between ἔρωσ and αἰδώς, or *amor* and *pudor*, is evident in *Heroides* 4 as it is in the stories of Byblis and Myrrha. This clearly was an idea that fascinated Ovid.

While insisting on the essential seriousness of Ovid's portrayal of the struggle between Phaedra's love and her better judgment, it is impossible to deny the poem all touches of levity. Ovid's wit is apt to appear even in unlikely places, and even if one acknowledges Phaedra's plight, it must be admitted that her situation, her family history, and Hippolytus' peculiarly ascetic character all provide opportunities for Ovidian jabs. Sexual innuendo in the use of *salus*

28) Palmer compares Her. 4.11 to Hipp. 6, Aphrodite's warning that she will destroy anyone who crosses her (σφάλλω δ' ὅσοι φρονοῦσιν εἰς ἡμᾶς μέγα. Palmer *ad loc.*).

29) The evidence for the scandalous portrayal of Phaedra in Euripides' first *Hippolytus* is laid out in Barrett's introduction to the *Hippolytus*, pp. 11–12, 26, 30–31. Although it is almost universally believed that Phaedra's brazenness was the element in Euripides' first play that Aristophanes of Byzantium termed ἀπρεπὴς καὶ κατηγορίας ἄξιον, Paratore argues that Phaedra never revealed her love directly to Hippolytus in any of the Athenian plays, including *Hippolytus I*, and that Ovid provided Seneca with his only model for such a revelation (Paratore, *Suba Phaedra di Seneca* 201–214 and *Lo 'Ipp. Καλ.* 303–46). Paratore's argument has not met with much acceptance (hence the subtitle of his second article: *Discorso a sordi*). W. B. Stanford, however, has argued that scholars should not place too much weight on Aristophanes the comic poet's reference to whorish Phaedras in Euripides at *Frogs* 1043 and 1052–53, pointing out that it is unwise to rely on Aristophanes when he is taking jabs at the tragedian he loved to hate (Stanford, *Aristophanes: The Frogs* [St. Martin's 1958] *ad* 1043 ff.).

30) Despite Phaedra's resolution to die rather than succumb to passion in the second *Hippolytus*, her wish to maintain her respectability and do the right thing is continually assailed by the force of her desire to be with Hippolytus. Phaedra's observations at Hipp. 380–87 on the difficulty of doing the right thing should be remembered at lines 507–24, when there is some indication that Phaedra's sense of αἰδώς may be weakening under the pressure of her Nurse's pleas to yield to ἔρωσ and accept her offer of a love charm. See Barrett for a review of the debate over this scene, whose ambiguity may be intentional (Barrett *ad* 507–24, 516–21).

31) Wilamowitz, *AE* 210–12.

has been detected in the first two lines by Jacobson, who also notes that Ovid takes advantage of Hippolytus' exclusive devotio to Diana to introduce a sly *double-entendre* at lines 91–92: *arcus, arma tuae tibi sunt imitanda Dianae, / si numquam cesses tendere, mollis erit*³²). Phaedra's observation that a forest without Venus is simply "rustic" also seems to be a comic indication that Phaedra is out of touch with the values Hippolytus holds dear³³).

What can be the purpose of these comic touches? Verducci claims that in the *Heroides* Ovid's wit is intended to undercut the reader's sympathy for the letter-writer in her plight³⁴). This is not an unreasonable conclusion; still, it is wrong (if you will forgive the pun) to place too much weight on Ovid's levity. The presence of humor in the poem does not cancel out its seriousness, and the structure of *Heroides* 4, which ends with Phaedra's compassionate pleas that Hippolytus be spared her anguish, places more emphasis on the theme of love's power than on parody. W. S. Anderson has commented on Ovid's penchant for mixing a variety of tones in any one episode³⁵). This is evident in Ovid's treatment of Byblis in the *Metamorphoses*, where Byblis ends her proclamation that she must overcome her passion or die trying by imagining her brother planting kisses on her corpse (*Met.* 9.502–04). Byblis is, if anything, sillier than Phaedra, yet her story is, in the end, tragic. Both seriousness and comedy are present in *Heroides* 4 – but the question is, which predominates?

Deciding whether *Heroides* 4 is primarily comic or tragic is, unavoidably, a subjective call. We may be able, however, to see how another Roman poet perceived *Heroides* 4. It appears that Seneca took Phaedra's pleas for mercy at the end of *Heroides* 4 seriously, for he has his own Phaedra make her case to Hippolytus using similar phrases and ideas. Earlier in this paper I noted that Seneca, like Ovid, had his heroine speak of her spotless reputation in terms that suggested virginity (*Seneca Ph.* 668–69, *Ovid Her.* 4.17, 27, 31–33). There are a number of other close correspondences between Seneca's *Phaedra* and Ovid's *Heroides* 4³⁶).

32) Jacobson 146–47, 150.

33) Jacobson 154; on this point Jacobson also cites Her. 4.131–32.

34) Verducci 21.

35) W. S. Anderson's review of E. J. Bernbeck's *Beobachtungen zur Darstellung in Ovids Metamorphosen*, *AJP* 90 (1969) 354; cf. J.-M. Frécaut, *L'esprit et l'humour chez Ovide* (Grenoble 1972) 201–202.

36) The correspondences are so numerous that M. Coffey and R. Mayer include the text of *Heroides* 4 in an appendix to their edition of *Phaedra* (M. Coffey and R. Mayer, eds., *Seneca: Phaedra* [Cambridge 1990]).

Seneca's Phaedra describes Hippolytus' modest blushing in words that echo those of Ovid's Phaedra: cf. Ph. 652 *et ora flavus teneris tinguebat pudor* with Her. 4.72 *flava verecundus tinxerat ora rubor*³⁷). In Seneca as in Ovid, Hippolytus' beauty is of a manly sort, unadorned: *in te magis refulget incomptus decor . . . in ore Graio Scythicus apparet rigor*, Phaedra tells Hippolytus at Ph. 657–60; cf. Her. 4.77–78: *te tuus iste rigor positique sine arte capilli / et levis egregio pulvis in ore decet* and Her. 4.73–74: *quemque vocant aliae vultum rigidumque truce[m]que, / pro rigido Phaedra iudice fortis erat*³⁸). The verbal echoes are especially striking when in both works Phaedra observes that the men in Hippolytus' family attract the women in Phaedra's, allotting Hippolytus to Phaedra and Theseus to Ariadne (Her. 4.63–64: *placuit domus una duabus: / me tua forma capit, capta parente soror*; Ph. 665–66, in an apostrophe to Ariadne: *domus sorores una corripuit duas / te genitor, at me gnatus*). Seneca's Phaedra ends her confession of love to Hippolytus with the lament that the once proud queen is now a suppliant, in words reminiscent of those at the close of Phaedra's letter (cf. Ph. 666–67: *en supplex iacet / adlapsa genibus regis proles domus* with Her. 4.153–54: *victa precor genibusque tuis te galia tendo / brachia* and Her. 4.161: *nobilitas sub amore iacet*). And, like Ovid's Phaedra – and Byblis and Myrrha, also beset by passion – Seneca's Phaedra pleads for mercy: *miserere amantis* (Ph. 671, cf. Her. 4.156, 161–62, 167)³⁹).

The existence of similarities between Seneca's play and *Heroides* 4 does not in itself constitute proof that Ovid's poem ought to be taken seriously⁴⁰). Yet it should be noted that all of the parallels cited above are concentrated in one very important sec-

37) All of the correspondences between Seneca's work and Ovid's cited in this paragraph are noted by Grimal (Grimal, *Phèdre* pp. 107–11). As Grimal observes, the scribe of manuscript A of *Phaedra* managed to strengthen the resemblance by writing *rubor* in place of *pudor*, resulting in an odd expression (Grimal, *Phèdre ad* 652).

38) Seneca's chorus of elders also finds Hippolytus' stern expression and uncombed hair appealing: *aequam grata est facies torva viriliter / et pondus terribile triste supercili . . . te frons hirta decet, te brevior coma / nulla lege iacens* (Seneca, *Phaedra* 798–804). All this praise of unadorned beauty is reminiscent of *Ars Am.* 1.525ff. where, incidentally, Theseus and Hippolytus serve as models of virile good looks.

39) Grimal notes that Ph. 671 constitutes Phaedra's third, and most specific, plea for mercy; the others occur at lines 623 and 636 (Grimal, *Phèdre ad* 671). See also Paratore, *Sulla Phaedra di Seneca* 219–20.

40) In fact, Grimal and Paratore have argued that Seneca has transformed Ovid's brazen Phaedra into a more sympathetic model (Grimal, *L'originalité de Phèdre* 224–27; Paratore, *Sulla Phaedra di Seneca* 224–27).

tion of Seneca's play, Phaedra's confession of love to Hippolytus (Ph. 646–71). It may have been that Ovid and Seneca both derived these passages from a common source; in fact, Leo, citing these parallels and others between *Heroides* 4 and Seneca's *Phaedra*, argued long ago that the common source was Euripides' first *Hippolytus*⁴¹). Nevertheless, the fact that the above parallels are concentrated in one scene in Seneca's play gives weight to the possibility that Seneca patterned Phaedra's address to Hippolytus directly on Ovid's *Heroides* 4⁴²). Given the fragmentary nature of the Greek models, it is impossible to know whether Seneca is indebted to Ovid alone for Phaedra's speech. Yet even if Seneca looked back to the same Greek model that Ovid had copied, it seems unlikely that he would use in a crucial part of his play words that are so close to a poem deemed to be a parody of Euripides; and if Seneca did pattern Phaedra's confession of love on Ovid alone, it would be almost impossible to believe that he considered *Heroides* 4 to be anything other than a poem showing just what he wished to show in his play, the tragedy of a woman's subjugation to love's power.

In *Heroides* 4 Ovid does much more than present a comic picture of a lovelorn woman. Rather, Ovid uses Phaedra's highly rhetorical but ultimately pathetic letter to demonstrate how passion can thwart one's resolve, alter one's habits, twist one's mind. Compelled by Amor to write to her beloved, Phaedra presents herself as a virgin; reminded of her children, she denies complicity

41) Leo 176–79. A number of scholars share Leo's view that the boldness of Ovid's and/or Seneca's Phaedras was inspired by Euripides' first *Hippolytus* (Leo 281; Kalkmann 27; Wilamowitz, *AE* 154, 209–10; Wilamowitz, *Euripides Hippolytos* [Berlin 1891] 45; C. Zintzen, *Analytisches Hypomnema zu Senecas Phaedra* [Meisenheim/Glan 1960] 4–5). Other scholars, however, have suggested that not only is our knowledge of the lost plays too poor to determine any one as Ovid's or Seneca's model (Jacobson 145–46), but that the Roman poets may have been both more eclectic in their use of Greek sources and more innovative than previously assumed (Birt 403–05; L. Castiglione, *Intorno alle Eroidi di Ovidio*, *Studi e Roma* 6 [1903] 245–47; Grimal, *L'originalité* 300–14; Paratore, *Sulla Phaedra di Seneca* 210–13 and Paratore, *Lo 'Ππ. Καλ.* 320–25). R. Jakobi feels that Ovid and Seneca shared a common source, but does not deny the possibility of Senecan innovation (Jakobi, *Der Einfluß Ovids auf den Tragiker Seneca* [Berlin/New York 1988] 63–64, 63 n. 107).

42) Grimal considers this possibility but does not commit himself to it (Grimal, *Phèdre ad* 646). The suggestion that Seneca may have modeled part of his Phaedra directly on *Heroides* 4 gives rise to speculation that certain elements of *Heroides* 4 are Ovidian innovations. I would venture to say that the *fama*/virginity motif, which fits so well into Phaedra's web of deception, falls into this category. Jacobson notes, "This whole play on motifs and imagery is pure Ovid" (Jacobson 148).

in their conception; faced with incest she envisions an idyllic life with her stepson. Each realization prompts a new fantasy until her store depleted, Phaedra can only gasp at her shamelessness and recall with remorse her former resolve. Three times at the close of her letter Phaedra prays that Hippolytus be spared the torment of unrequited love (Her. 4.148, 168, 173–74), a prayer which indicates not only the depth of Phaedra's feeling for Hippolytus, but her realization of the terrible toll passion exacts. The theme of love's power is one that Ovid inherited from Euripides, went on to treat in the stories of Byblis and Myrrha, and handed on to Seneca. The humorous touches that grace *Heroides* 4 cannot be denied, but neither should the pathos of Ovid's depiction of Phaedra's lost struggle against love⁴³).

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NOTIZEN ZU SENECAS MEDEA

I

- Mihi peius aliquid, quod precer sponso, malum:* (19)
vivat! Per urbes erret ignotas egens,
exul, pavens, invisus, incerti laris
me coniugem optet; limen alienum expetat (22)
iam notus hospes, quoque non aliud queam
peius precari: liberos similes patri (25)
similesque matri. Parta iam parta ultio est:
peperi...

Nachdem sie Ehe- und Unterweltsgötter zur Vernichtung ihrer Feinde Kreon und Kreusa aufgerufen hat (v. 1–18), malt sich Medea im vorliegenden Abschnitt ihres furiosen Eingangsmonologs die Strafe aus, die sie (wiederum) von den Göttern gegen den

Ehebrecher Jason erbitten könnte (v. 19: *precer*, v. 24: *precari*). Obwohl die Exegese des Medea hier vorschwebenden Szenarios (ist ausnahmslos Gronovius' und Leos¹) Prämissen folgt, findet der letzte Kommentator²) die Verse noch immer „obscure“ und der letzte Herausgeber den Passus nur in konjunktural veränderter Fassung mit diesen Prämissen vereinbar³): eine kritische Überprüfung des bisher unangefochtenen Deutungsansatzes erscheint somit dringlich.

Seit Gronovius gilt als ausgemacht, daß Medeas Gatte Jason v. 22 dazu verurteilt wird, eben dieselbe Medea zur Gattin zu begehren, daß der zweifache Vater Jason v. 24/25 ausgerechnet am gestillten Wunsch nach Kindern leiden soll. Da solche Rachephantasien selbst im Munde der hocherregten Kolcherin zu grotesk wirken, setzt die vorherrschende Exegese mit Gronovius ferner eine prägnante Bedeutung des Wortlauts dieser beiden Verse voraus: mit *me* v. 22 meine Medea „eine so widerwärtige Frau, wie ich es bin“⁴), mit der *similitudo* zwischen *liberi* und Eltern ziele sie auf beider Mißbratenheit⁵), die ja erbbedingt sowohl auf die Kinder des treulosen Jason und der verbrecherischen Medea übergegangen sein als auch (s. Anm. 6) für etwaigen Nachwuchs des Ehebrechers Jason und der Buhlerin Kreusa prognostiziert werden müsse. Aufgrund der Identifizierung des gemeinten Elternpaares mit Jason und Medea vermutet die Mehrheit der Interpreten, das v. 24/25 fehlen-

- 1) J. F. Gronovius, *Ad L. & M. Annaeos Senecas notae*, Leiden 1649; F. Leo, *Annaei Senecae tragoediae*, Berlin 1879, II 103.
 2) C. D. N. Costa, *Seneca: Medea*, Oxford 1973, 65.
 3) O. Zwierlein, *L. Annaei Senecae tragoediae*, Oxford 1986, 125; id., *Kritischer Kommentar zu den Tragödien Senecas*, Wiesbaden/Stuttgart 1986, 132–4.
 4) Zwierlein, *Kommentar* 133: „Jason eine solche Gattin zu wünschen, war der Tat ein schlimmer Fluch...“
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