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Chain(ed) Mail: Hypermestra and the Dual Readership of *Heroides* 14

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SUMMARY: Through a detailed analysis of key passages in *Heroides* 14, this article seeks to show that Hypermestra's letter, generally considered to be peculiar and rhetorically ineffective, is in fact cleverly designed to elicit distinct responses from its two potential readers. Either the letter will be read by Lynceus, its addressee, who will return to save Hypermestra from her father, Danaus, or (more likely) the letter will be intercepted by Danaus, who will find in it information written to convince him that he has mistakenly imprisoned his daughter. Hypermestra's hitherto unnoticed sophistication in epistolography prefigures her larger success: she survives to found a royal line at Argos.

HEROIDES 14, THE LETTER FROM HYPERMESTRA TO HER HUSBAND LYNCEUS, is generally considered genuine,[1] but has suffered from a curious lack of critical attention. No interpretation has been offered that makes sense of the poem as a whole, partly because, as most commentators agree, it displays a disconcerting lack of unity.[2] Other scholars have objected to the letter because it lacks all mention of love (a key concept in other *Heroides*), or because of the long "digression" on Io.[3] Each of these features will be shown to be an integral part of the letter.

[1] Lachmann early on asserted that *Heroides* that did not appear in *Am.* 2.18 were non-Ovidian and attacked in particular lines 62 and 113 of this letter. See Palmer xxxi for a defense of those lines, and Ehwald, who, after a brief discussion, pronounces the letter "gut ovidisch" (1). Reeson (the most recent commentary) obviates the difficulty by omitting 62 and 113, replacing the former with 114. Knox revives (esp. 5–12) Lachmann's claim; see too Casali's discussion (1997) of Knox's arguments.

[2] Palmer feels (411) that it presents "many marks of want of finish," and suggests a lack of editing on Ovid's part.

[3] Fränkel claims (191 n. 9) that Hypermestra is "too bashful to betray her love." Cf. Jacobson, who too hastily assumes (125) that because Hypermestra does not express love she does not feel it. Jäkel notes (245) that the lack of love surprises critics, who expect it to be Hypermestra's primary motive. See too Ehwald, who notes (2) that the love is transformed into *pietas*. See further notes 39–40 below.

This article argues that the "disunity" of *Heroides* 14 in fact relates directly to the aims of the poem. Rather than being poorly organized, the letter is explicitly double: Hypermestra has only one letter to accomplish two discrete and contradictory objectives.[4] The first is to persuade her husband to return and save her life; the second, more devious, is to persuade her father (a potential reader) that she is innocent of all wrongdoing. Composing for an implicit as well as an explicit addressee forces Hypermestra to write ambiguously.

1. MYTHOLOGICAL BACKGROUND AND SYNOPSIS OF *HEROIDES* 14

The Danaids' story is at first glance a simple tale: fifty sisters (the Danaids) are supposed to kill the fifty men to whom they are about to be married (the Aegyptids); one of them (Hypermestra) refuses to commit the murder that is accomplished by the other forty-nine.[5] Yet as soon as the story is expanded beyond this bare outline to include the motive or even the outcome of the murders, it becomes immeasurably more complicated. Sometimes the story concentrates on the Danaids, explicating their punishment; sometimes the focus remains on the single disobedient daughter, either validating her choice or exploring her process of making it. It is not clear why the marriage was proposed, nor by whom,[6] nor why it was originally rejected, nor, again, by whom.[7]

[4] Jacobson too notes (127 #10) that Hypermestra's letter is double, but sees the duplicity as deriving from her relationship to Lynceus (wife and cousin). This is certainly the case, but the doubleness of *Heroides* 14 originates in physical rather than psychological factors.

[5] Hetzner 54 lists mythological parallels for the murder from a variety of cultures.

[6] On the origins of the quarrel between the brothers in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* see Croiset 49 and Garvie 164, who believe it originated in a dispute over kingship; Hermann dated it to the marriage proposal (330). Apollodorus, whose version generally agrees with that of Hyginus and disagrees with much in Aeschylus, says Danaus lived in Libya and Aegyptus in Arabia and Egypt. Eustathius says that the dispute of the brothers was over sovereignty in Egypt (ad *Il.* 1.42), and Serv. ad *Aen.* 10.497 and Hyginus *Fab.* 168 claim that Danaus was the injured party. In any case, Danaus and the Danaids fled to Argos and the Aegyptids declared war. The marriage seems to have been designed to cement an alliance between the brothers, but it is not clear if it was ever intended in good faith. In Hyginus, Aegyptus wants Danaus and his progeny dead so that he alone can rule. In order to expedite his plan, he seeks the Danaids as daughters-in-law. Danaus, knowing his intent, flees to Argos from Africa. Aegyptus, when he discovers that Danaus and the Danaids are gone, sends his sons in pursuit, ordering them either to kill Danaus or never to return. In most versions Aegyptus is thought to remain in Egypt, but Euripides wrote a play in which Aegyptus arrived in Argos (Ar. *Ra.* 1206).

[7] The *Suppliants* provides little help on this issue: the play simply states that the Danaids are unwilling to marry their cousins and that their father supports them. If there was a

Ovid's *Heroides* are generally based on one major literary source each but also incorporate others; I offer here a brief account of the previous literary treatments of the Danaid myth, indicating the variants relevant to the interpretation of *Heroides* 14, in particular, Hypermestra's motives for sparing Lynceus' life.[8]

Much of the story's difficulty arises from the fragmentary state of our nevertheless abundant sources: the most complete surviving treatment of the myth, Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, is the sole extant play of a trilogy comprising itself, the *Aegyptoi*, and the *Danaids*, and even this first play is something of a mystery on its own.[9] The third play, of which ten lines survive, is sorely missed because it would probably have resolved the issues raised in the first and (entirely lost) second plays, as well as provided the information needed to resolve the longstanding scholarly dispute about whether Hypermestra or rather her sisters were of primary interest to the poet (Garvie 204).[10]

The events subsequent to the murders are also unclear. In some versions Lynceus kills Danaus (and sometimes the murderous Danaids).[11] In other versions Lynceus and Danaus are reconciled. But in all tellings of the myth Hypermestra and Lynceus remain married and found a royal line at Argos that leads ultimately to Heracles.[12] In one version the other Danaids live long

quarrel between the brothers, a lack of trust may be presumed. A variety of auxiliary explanations (of varying degrees of persuasiveness) have been suggested: they are first cousins (the "official" reason for their refusal; Winnington-Ingram 60 and Zeitlin 207), the barbarous foreignness of the Aegyptids, the Danaids' excessive masculinity (Winnington-Ingram 60–61), or feminine aversion to marriage (Zeitlin 205 and 217). See von Fritz *passim* for a cogent analysis of the issues and Zeitlin 240 n. 5 for bibliography.

[8] See Wecklein 411–15, Ehwald 2–7, and Jäkel (*passim*) on Ovid's reliance on Aeschylus in *Heroides* 14.

[9] For a plausible reconstruction of the trilogy see Friis Johansen and Whittle 40–55.

[10] Von Fritz suggests that the wedding took place in the second play, and Garvie finds it probable that the last play focused on Hypermestra, since she is one of the few common elements in all versions of the story (206). The fragments admit of a trial scene; this is surely a plausible but perhaps dangerous assumption given the trial scene in the end of the *Oresteia*. See Zeitlin 215 and Winnington-Ingram 58 and 66–69 on the trial; the latter suggests rather that the Danaids are persuaded by Aphrodite to accept marriage. Zeitlin believes the end may have discussed the *aition* of the Thesmophoria (234–38 and n. 112).

[11] Serv. ad *Aen.* 10.497, Σ Eur. *Hec.* 886 (see Schwartz). Paus. 2.25.4 notes that Lynceus shone a beacon to let Hypermestra know he was safe, and she responded in kind.

[12] Fragment 1 of Phrynichus' *Aegyptoi* claims that Lynceus resolved the differences of the brothers through arbitrators. For the genealogy leading to Heracles see Aeschylus *Pr.* 851–76.

enough to be married again (Apollod. 2.1.4.3),[13] and some versions ascribe to them the bringing of the Thesmophoria to Egypt.[14]

Horace's *Carmen* 3.11 is worthy of special mention, as it is clear that *Heroides* 14 draws heavily on it, both in the depiction of Hypermestra on the wedding night and by various verbal echoes.[15] Other sources tell other parts of the story; most are either so fragmentary as to be essentially useless or add no significant details.[16]

[13] The Danaids often feature in poetic descriptions of the underworld, which would contradict the tradition of their remarriage. Their punishment there, to fill a sieve with water, seems to have been a Roman invention (Vürtheim 24–27, Keuls *passim*).

[14] Herodotus 2.171, who may have gathered this information from the Danaid trilogy (Zeitlin 324–38). There are further, less important variants: Eustathius lists Bebryke as the Danaid who spares her husband Hippolytus (*ad* Dion. Per. 805; see Bernhardy); Hecateus claims that there are fewer than 20 Aegyptoi (*FGrHist* 1F19); Σ Eur. *Or.* 872 says Danaus was warned by an oracle that the marriages would cause his death; Eustathius says that the murder took place in Egypt (ad *Il.* 1.42); Σ Eur. *Hec.* 886 claims that Danaus and Aegyptus were sons of Io living in Argos. The former drove his brother and nephews to Egypt, and when they later returned to Argos, he had his daughters kill them. In revenge, Lynceus killed Danaus and the Danaids except Hypermestra. This version could be dismissed altogether, but that many critics of *Heroides* see lines 117–18 as a reference to this story. See Casali 1998: 111 on the lines; he suggests that they are part of a larger series of puzzles for the reader, challenging her to determine which variant Ovid uses.

[15] Casali outlines these (1998: 102–11); his article obviates the need for a detailed exploration of the conjunctions between the two here. My reading suggests that Ovid's Hypermestra is in fact much like Horace's but is, at the moment of writing *Heroides* 14, unable to show it. The bibliography on *Carm.* 3.11 is large and much of it is not pertinent to *Heroides* 14; of the standard discussions Syndikus 123–24 is the most useful for Ovid's poem. See Zingerle (part 3) 17–18 and Lowrie 288 n. 60 on echoes of Horace in Hypermestra's letter. A brief summary follows: each poet's Hypermestra is stunned by the savage crime of her sisters (*Carm.* 3.11.39–44; *Her.* 14.15), each is anxious to make it known that she is too feminine to kill (*Carm.* 3.11.42–43; *Her.* 14.63–66), each will suffer the chains of her father (*Carm.* 3.11.45; *Her.* 14.3, 131–32), each rouses her husband in the same way (*Carm.* 3.11.38; *Her.* 14.73), each demands an epitaph (*Carm.* 3.11.51; *Her.* 14.127–30), and each (with varying degrees of subtlety) displays her piety (*Carm.* 3.11.46–52; *Her.* 14.4–6 and *passim*). See too Carubba 115 on the irony of Horace's Hypermestra.

[16] Of the epic *Danaids* only one fragment survives, from which little can be inferred: καὶ τότ' ἄρ' ὡπλίζοντο θοῶς Δαναοῖο θύγατρες / πρόσθεν ἐυρρεῖος ποταμοῦ Νείλοιο ἄνακτος (fr. 1 Bernabé). Croiset posits (48) a tragedy about the Danaids between the epic and Aeschylean versions. Other treatments include: three later tragedies, one by Phrynichus (frr. 1 and 4 Nauck, see too Σ Eur. *Or.* 872), and two by Timesitheos; three comedies, one by Aristophanes, one by Nicochares, and one by Diphilus, and a fifth-century dithyramb by Melanippides (*Ath.* 14.651), all entitled *Danaids.* Pindar's *Pythian* 9 details the footrace by which the Danaids found new husbands. Finally, the story is mentioned

From this brief account it is clear that the story of the Danaids was a popular one; as often, it is Ovid's alterations to the received myth that prove most instructive.

The motives for Hypermestra's act of mercy are in Ovid as elsewhere difficult to determine, but they are vital to an understanding of *Heroides* 14. Most versions follow Aeschylus in the *Prometheus Vinctus* in suggesting that Hypermestra spared Lynceus because she was in love with him.[17] The other principal story line claims that she saved him because he spared her virginity. Ovid's Hypermestra articulates neither of these attested motives. Her silence raises questions: Does she love Lynceus? Does she refuse to kill him because he is a relative? If so, does his status as husband, or as cousin, hold more weight with her? Does she simply think murder is impious? There is no mention of love in *Heroides* 14; Hypermestra says merely that she tried her best to obey her father but *could* not (49).[18] Critics tend to believe her, but the presence of unreliable narrators elsewhere in the *Heroides* compels us to look further.

A brief synopsis of *Heroides* 14 is now in order. Hypermestra, enchained by her father Danaus for sparing her husband Lynceus, fears for her life. Forty-nine Aegyptids have been murdered; she is in prison because of her *pietas* (1–14). She is shocked and horrified by the events of the previous night but will nevertheless tell her story (15–21). As the wedding ended, the Danaids went into the bridal chambers to the accompaniment of evil omens (21–28). The

at Hdt. 2.171; Strabo 8.371; Paus. 2.16.1 and 10.10.5. Hypermestra and the Danaids also appear in Latin poetry: Hypermestra is called *sine fraude marita* at Prop. 4.7.63. Vergil, by contrast, depicts the murderous Danaids in a group (*Aen.* 12.945, cf. 10.497–98). The story is mentioned with some frequency in the Augustans: Prop. 2.31.4, Tib. 1.3.79, Ovid *Ars* 1.73–74, *Tr.* 3.1.60–62, and *Culex* 245–46. The Danaids may well have been seen as an especially appropriate subject for Augustan poetry because of the Danaid portico of Apollo on the Palatine completed in 28 B.C.E. Of the (numerous) discussions of the portico see especially Putnam 198–201 (with a useful summary of previous scholarship). Ovid mentions the portico in *Am.* 2.2.3, *Ars* 1.73–74, *Tr.* 1.1 and 3.1, Propertius in 2.31; on Ovid's treatment see Newlands 68–69. On Ovid's and Augustus' similar coopting of the Danaid myth see O'Gorman *passim.*

[17] Aeschylus *Pr.* 865–66 μίαν δὲ παίδων ἵμερος θέλξει τὸ μὴ / κτεῖναι σύνευνον. The phrase has been deemed ambiguous, the genitive either partitive with μίαν (one of the children) or objective with ἵμερος (a desire for children); cf. Murray 67 and Winnington-Ingram 65. Francis Cairns points out to me that the *caesura* after παίδων all but eliminates the latter option. Of *Heroides* 14, critics think either that "Das Motiv der Liebe kommt erst" (Oppel 73) or that Hypermestra is too cowardly to kill (Jacobson 131–32). See Ehwald on the nuances of ἵμερος: it is not necessarily erotic (7).

[18] See below for a discussion of her *timor* and *pietas.*

drunken Aegyptoi entered their rooms, and all was quiet until Hypermestra heard them dying around her (29–36). Terrified, she lay in bed until her father's remembered orders roused her to action (37–43). Three times she tried to kill Lynceus, but fear and piety prevented her (44–51). She delivered a monologue to herself about how cruel her father was, stressing that she was but a girl and not suited for murder (52–66). She then realized that it was nearly dawn and woke Lynceus, telling him that his brothers had been killed and urging him to flee, which he did (67–78). In the morning, Danaus, having discovered that Hypermestra alone failed to kill her husband, had her placed in chains (79–84). She discusses the misfortunes of her ancestor Io, but abruptly comes back to the present, reminding herself that she has her own problems (85–117). Reminding Lynceus that he is responsible for her sufferings, she asks him to help her, or at least to see that she is properly buried. Should burial be necessary, she suggests her own epitaph (118–30). The letter ends abruptly—she'd like to write more but the chains weigh upon her arms (131–32).

2. WRITING FOR TWO

Although Hypermestra writes a letter to her husband Lynceus begging for rescue, she writes from the prison in which she has been kept since her father's discovery of her betrayal (84 *carcer habet*).[19] While many have decried Ovid's failure to offer plausible scenarios for the composition and delivery of the *Heroides*, this letter at least shows itself acutely aware of the problems of transmission.

If Hypermestra is imprisoned, how are we to imagine her letter reaching the outside world, especially as she does not give us the kind of details beloved of eighteenth-century epistolary novelists? Her options are presumably limited: either she has bribed someone to deliver the letter to Lynceus, or she expects to place it somewhere for him to find. Her letter gives no suggestion of escape; she relies on Lynceus to free her once he has read her letter and understood the danger.[20] Neither option is in any way foolproof; in each case

[19] As Casali notes (1998: 104), this is evidently a standard feature of the myth: Hypermestra is imprisoned in Apollod. 2.1.5.10 and in Horace fears imprisonment. Reader "B" for this journal draws my attention also to line 3: *clausa domo teneor gravibusque coercita vinclis* ("I am held, trapped, in my home, and beset with heavy chains"); s/he suggests that this is an early "hint" to both Lynceus and the external reader that they should not expect her to express herself openly.

[20] On the kinds of danger that accrue to elegiac women who write letters see Farrell's excellent discussion of the *Heroides* and *Ars amatoria*.

the letter is far more likely to fall into Danaus' hands than to reach Lynceus.[21] Hypermestra, fully aware of the likelihood of her letter being intercepted by Danaus, composes it for the interceptor as much as, or more than, for its actual addressee.[22]

The recognition that this letter, while addressed to Lynceus, may also be read by Danaus, drastically alters the interpretation of its contents. Hypermestra's peculiar refusal to talk about love in connection with Lynceus can be viewed not as undermining her rhetorical effectiveness, as it may at first seem to do, but rather as a clever solution to a difficult situation. Should this letter reach Lynceus, there is a small (but unmistakable—see notes 39–40) hint that Hypermestra is affectionately disposed towards him, but if (as is more probable) the letter is instead read by Danaus, he will find in it no evidence that his daughter has transferred her affection and loyalty to her new husband. That is why, to take one example, Lynceus is not mentioned by name until line 123, only ten lines before the end of the poem (Jacobson 128), while Danaus appears early.[23] Hypermestra has, in my view, not only foreseen the possibility that she may have a reader other than her addressee; she has structured her letter to appeal to *both* readers.[24] The letter has long been read as an address to Lynceus, with the lukewarm critical response already mentioned; I will focus on Danaus as reader of his daughter's letter, to see what is gained thereby. Discussion of Lynceus' probable interpretation of certain passages is relegated to the notes.

3. READING AS DANAUS (1)

Heroides 14 only sometimes makes sense if we read as Lynceus. The first 40 lines of Hypermestra's letter, in fact, seem to be directed to Danaus; the first

[21] As Schmitz-Cronenbröck astutely notes (15), "zu 'mittet' ist hier Objekt der ganze Brief." See Ehwald 10 and Palmer 411 on the lack of a direct object for *mittere*.

[22] Thanks to Reader "A" of this journal for a more concise formulation of this point.

[23] Schmitz-Cronenbröck thinks lines 121–32 are interpolated and that the poem should end at line 120. It is clear, however, that his opinion is based on an aesthetic judgment, never a reliable indicator for Ovid.

[24] The confusion of addressee and recipient is a device that, as some suggest, also occurs in *Heroides* 11, in which parts of Canace's letter are addressed to Macareus, her brother, but meant for Aeolus, her father (Jacobson 167–68, Williams 1992, Casali 1995). *Heroides* 8, written by Hermione to Orestes, features a long excursus on Hermione's mother Helen (including direct address) that has been persuasively analyzed by Williams 1997 as showing Hermione's composition for her mother. Where for the other heroines this focus on parents seems part of a psychological portrait, in Hypermestra's case, as I shall argue, it fills a more tangible need.

appearance of a second person singular that unambiguously refers to Lynceus (*ipse iacebas*) comes only in line 41.[25] The fact that Danaus appears in line 7, while Lynceus is not even referred to until line 12, suggests that the former is at the forefront of Hypermestra's mind: she is concerned to seem a good daughter even as she acknowledges that this is impossible under the circumstances (7 *esse ream praestat, quam sic placuisse parenti* "it is preferable to be a criminal than thus [i.e., by murder] to have pleased my father"). Further, there is no direct address to Lynceus until Hypermestra describes her wedding night (37–50):

Sanguis abit, mentemque calor corpusque relinquit,
  Inque novo iacui frigida facta toro.
Vt leni Zephyro graciles vibrantur aristae,
  Frigida populeas ut quatit aura comas,
Aut sic, aut etiam tremui magis; ipse iacebas,
  Quaeque tibi dederam, causa soporis erant.
Excussere metum violenti iussa parentis:
  Erigor et capio tela tremente manu;
Non ego falsa loquar: ter acutum sustulit ensem,
  Ter male sublato reccidit ense manus;
Admovi iugulo—sine me tibi vera fateri—
  Admovi iugulo tela paterna tuo.
Sed timor et pietas crudelibus obstitit ausis,
  Castaque mandatum dextra refugit opus.[26]

42 causa ϛ, *Damsté* : vina FPGVω : *plena* Palmer

The blood disappears, and warmth leaves my mind and body, and, made cold, I lay in my new bed. As the slender stalks of grain are shaken with a gentle wind, as a chill breeze disturbs the leaves of poplars, either like that, or even more, I quivered. You yourself were lying down, and what I had given you caused sleep. The commands of my violent father banished fear: I get up and I seize a weapon in my trembling hand. I will not tell lies: three times my hand raised the sharp blade, three times it fell back with the wrongly raised sword. I moved it to your throat—allow me to confess the truth to you—I moved my father's sword to your throat. But fear and piety prevented the cruel undertaking, and my chaste right hand recoiled from the ordered deed.

Moreover, despite the ostensible address to Lynceus here, Hypermestra's description of her wedding night with her husband (38 *iacui*; 41 *ipse iacebas*)

[25] The ambiguous second person of line 19 will be discussed in section 4 below.

[26] The text throughout is Showerman / Goold, altered where necessary (as at line 42).

seems designed to reassure her father of her filial loyalty, which has not been superseded by sexual loyalty to her husband. Nothing happened: she lay in bed, *frigida* (38; cf. 50 *casta*). Like its English cognate, *frigida* can mean "uninterested in sex."[27] In the first fifty lines of the poem, then, Hypermestra moves between direct address and statement, and from second person to third, which suggests that, although Lynceus is her nominal addressee, she views her story as potentially accessible to others.[28] Two further details of the scene confirm the point as they heighten the ambiguity.

The first concerns the circumstances surrounding Lynceus' sleep. The meaning of the vexed line 42 has proven nearly impossible to resolve.[29] Is Lynceus asleep because he is drunk[30] or because, as Palmer suggests, he has just consummated his marriage?[31] When Lynceus lost consciousness is of great importance to the question of Hypermestra's motivation, but *Heroides* 14 here (teasingly) refuses to give the information.[32] The ambiguity of line 42 (which has led to endless speculation and emendation) is in fact a strength, not a drawback: rather than resolving the issue, Ovid's Hypermestra makes it possible for every reader (internal and external) to find her opinions confirmed. Here as elsewhere we are aligned with Danaus, the "ignorant" reader; the statement is presumably unambiguous to Lynceus, who will know what happened on his wedding night.

Furthermore, Hypermestra's assertion in line 45 that she is not lying, reinforced by her plea to be allowed to speak the truth (47), is peculiar, given that in a letter she is not likely to be interrupted. That is, Hypermestra shows a consciousness of herself as storyteller, repeatedly asserting the truth of her

[27] Cf. *OLD* s.v. 8d. This issue is treated at greater length in the Appendix.

[28] Jacobson suggests (127) that "the sporadic and therefore striking introduction of the addressee as the object of the writer's thought rather than as the recipient of her communication becomes the normal state of affairs."

[29] I adopt, as do Casali 1998 and Reeson (the latter apparently unaware of the former), Damsté's *causa*. Casali's suggestion (1998: 107) that an explanatory *vina* was written above *causa* in the manuscript and eventually replaced it is also a plausible explanation.

[30] The Aegyptids are *mero dubii* (29); this suggests that they have either consumed a great deal of wine indeed or that the wine has been drugged. Either scenario is likely to preclude intercourse but neither makes it impossible. For further discussion see the Appendix.

[31] Palmer suggested *plena*, believing that "de sopore qui coitu efficitur loquitur Hypermnestra." Housman objected strenuously to Palmer's emendation, arguing (175) that it is "pure unadulterated nonsense" (while conceding that *vina* is only somewhat better).

[32] I am persuaded by Casali 1998 that the ambiguity of the statement is, in part, a comment on the confusion found in earlier versions.

tale, a practice that aligns her with the poem's author (see section 8 below). Each writes for more than one reader.[33]

4. WRITING AS DAUGHTER

In the bedroom scene Hypermestra describes herself as struggling with a momentous decision, yet her writing conveys far less conflict than it might.[34] No sooner does she lift the sword than it is characterized as *male sublato*, "wrongly raised." Although this happens three times, there is little sense that she ever intended to use the weapon, despite her claim of having attempted murder (46–47). By line 50 her conclusion is (provisionally) reached: although she fears her father, she is unable to do the deed; she is simply too decent a person (as she makes clear by the emphasis on her *pietas* and *casta manus*). Or so the standard interpretation goes: Hypermestra's *timor* and *pietas* are generally interpreted as two separate and contradictory motivators (she is simultaneously frightened of her father and unwilling to commit murder and is therefore unable to act). But it is also possible, and indeed closer to the sense of the text's *obstitit ausis* "prevented the ... undertaking," that they refer to the same feeling and that Hypermestra is both reverent and fearful of divine wrath and therefore refrains from murdering her husband.[35] The imputation of cowardice (*timor*), however defined, is striking, particularly in combination with the ethically-based self-justification in *pietas*. Addressed to Danaus, it makes sense: in charging herself with cowardice she deflects attention both from the crime ordered by her father and from her own disobedience.

[33] Ehwald has well outlined the role rhetoric plays in this letter (2–3 and *passim*). For a different reading of Hypermestra (which also takes her rhetorical abilities into account) see Casali 1998. He views Hypermestra's stress on telling the truth as an indication that she will tell the whole truth, "anche quello che Orazio non ha detto" (105).

[34] How will Lynceus react to this passage? Before reading her letter, he will know that his brothers are dead and that Hypermestra has spared him; this passage gives as her motive the impiety of killing. Lynceus will naturally be delighted to be alive no matter the reason, but it may be somewhat disappointing to find that Hypermestra would have spared any one of his brothers in the same situation; he simply got lucky. For the elegiac reader this passage comes as a shock, since whereas the other *Heroides* concern themselves with longing and desire Hypermestra merely asserts that she does not approve of murder.

[35] Jäkel finds the difference between the *metus* of 43 and the *timor* of 49 to be significant and suggests (244) that *metus* is "the general fear" while *timor* is "the subjective reaction of a person who disregards—whatever the reason may be—*pietas*" (246). Ehwald thinks they are synonyms, used for *variatio* (17). Jacobson has a nice discussion of the slippage between *pietas* and *timor* (129 and *passim*). He concludes that Hypermestra sees herself as a "heroic martyr" and "glories in her piety" (*ibid.*). Ehwald usefully views it as a "Konflikte zwischen äuβerer und innerer Pflicht" and notes (10) the declamatory tone that ensues. See too lines 4–6 with Casali's discussion (1998: 103).

The larger point is that Hypermestra leaves the terms without specific referents. *Timor* could be fear of her father or fear of Lynceus or fear of divine wrath. *Pietas* could be filial or spousal dutifulness or general moral scrupulousness. In order to appeal to her father, she needs to claim both cowardice and piety as her motivators: the first excuses her failings as a daughter, the second asserts her moral worth as a person.

The focus on justifying herself to Danaus is also evident earlier in the scene, in her odd comment that "you" might think "I" could kill "a husband" (17–21):[36]

Cor pavet admonitu temeratae sanguine noctis,
    Et subitus dextrae praepedit ossa tremor.
Quam tu caede putes fungi potuisse mariti,
    Scribere de facta non sibi caede timet.
Sed tamen experiar.

My heart is frightened at the recollection of the night desecrated with blood, and a sudden tremor impedes the bones of my right hand. She whom you might think was able to effect the slaughter of her husband is afraid to write about the slaughter done to her disadvantage. But nevertheless I will try.

Like much of *Heroides* 14, this passage is inappropriate in a letter to Lynceus. Lynceus has not had the opportunity to think about the likelihood of being murdered by his wife; he was awakened only after the issue was resolved in his favor.[37] The address is better read as directed to her father, the one who (mistakenly) thought she *was* capable of murder. The lines that follow, too, are designed to tell Danaus what happened on the fateful night, explaining Hypermestra's side of the story.

After her first abortive attempt to kill Lynceus, Hypermestra again tries to steel herself to the deed (53–68):

"Saevus, Hypermestra, pater est tibi; iussa parentis
    Effice; germanis sit comes iste suis.
Femina sum et virgo, natura mitis et annis;
    Non faciunt molles ad fera tela manus.

[36] Jacobson too finds this line problematic, noting that it "seems not to have troubled many commentators, but, I think, should have" (128). He suggests that "*tu* is vaguely general" but expresses a desire rather to emend, and does not like Ehwald's alteration of *mariti* to *marito*, hesitantly preferring *ne* for *tu* (*ibid.*).

[37] Hypermestra may, of course, seek to preclude the possibility of Lynceus thinking back on the fateful night and becoming retrospectively angry at her vacillation.

Quin age, dumque iacet, fortis imitare sorores.
Credibile est caesos omnibus esse viros!
Si manus haec aliquam posset committere caedem,
Morte foret dominae sanguinolenta suae.
Hanc meruere necem patruelia regna tenendo;
Cum sene nos inopi turba vagamur inops.
Finge viros meruisse mori; quid fecimus ipsae?
Quo mihi commisso non licet esse piae?
Quid mihi cum ferro? Quo bellica tela puellae?
Aptior est digitis lana colusque meis."
Haec ego; dumque queror, lacrimae sua verba sequuntur
Deque meis oculis in tua membra cadunt.

"Hypermestra, your father is savage. Obey the commands of your parent. Let this one be a companion to his brothers. (But) I am a woman and a girl, gentle by nature and years; my soft hands do not take to fierce weapons. But come along, while he is lying down, imitate your brave sisters. I can believe that the husbands are slain by all! If this hand were able to commit any slaughter, it would be bloody with the death of its own mistress. They deserve this death for holding their uncle's kingdom while we, a troop without resources, wander with a resourceless old man. Suppose the husbands deserved to die—what have we ourselves done? What crime have I committed, that I may not be moral? What has steel to do with me? Why warlike weapons for a girl? Wool and the distaff are more suited to my fingers." That's what I said, and while I complain, tears follow their words and fall from my eyes onto your limbs.

This passage offers Hypermestra's version of the tragic heroine's monologue: faced with a difficult choice, she outlines her options in an attempt to make up her mind.[38] But the letter writer's decision has already been taken, and what this passage provides instead of a monologue is an exculpatory account of her struggle. Thus the conflict is resolved in her first word, *saevus*, and her pretense of giving equal thought to each side of her so-called dilemma only emphasizes the prevalence of Danaus in her thoughts. Although she pretends to consider the issue, her sole argument for killing Lynceus is an exhortation to herself to obey her father. The reader, particularly the contemporary Roman reader, may supply the missing arguments (that it is always pious to obey a parent, etc.), but Hypermestra herself does not make them.[39] Yet she shows

[38] Oppel sees (73) the entirety of this letter as a "Konfliktsmonolog." I agree that there is a conflict, but suggest that it is far from a monologue.

[39] On the opposite side of the debate, another heroine (Horace's Hypermestra, for instance) might argue that Danaus' proposal is inherently evil and not worthy of consid-

herself willing to condone the slaughter of the Aegyptids, provided that she does not have to effect it, an argument that may hold some weight with her father: his expectations of her—female, young, cowardly, innocent—were unreasonable. The careful picture of Hypermestra as a frightened girl simply trying to do her filial duty provides her with her best option of obtaining her father's forgiveness for her failure to act.[40]

Hypermestra next tells of rousing Lynceus. Here too she is all business (71–78):

Iamque patrem famulosque patris lucemque timebam;
    Expulerunt somnos haec mea dicta tuos:
"Surge age, Belide, de tot modo fratribus unus.
    Nox tibi, ni properas, ista perennis erit."
Territus exsurgis; fugit omnis inertia somni;
    Adspicis in timida fortia tela manu.
Quaerenti causam "dum nox sinit, effuge," dixi;
    Dum nox atra sinit, tu fugis, ipsa moror.

And then I was beginning to fear my father and his servants and the light. These words of mine dispelled your sleep: "Hurry and get up, son of Belus, now the only one left of so many brothers. This night, unless you hurry, will last forever for you." Terrified, you rise up; all the laziness of sleep flees; you see the strong

eration. Still others (many of Ovid's) might assert a preference for suicide over killing the man they love. This is a sentiment Hypermestra never articulates: in her phrasing (59–60), suicide would simply be more palatable than murder (but she cannot bring herself to do either). Jäkel interprets Hypermestra's statement to mean that she would find it necessary to commit suicide only if she had killed Lynceus, which is also a possible (if less plausible) translation. This cowardly and calculating Hypermestra may not prove wholly satisfactory to Lynceus, particularly if he reads this letter with the knowledge that those who write elegiac couplets are often in love (see *Am.* 1.1.1–2, 3.1.37–42, 3.9.3, 3.15.19, *Rem.* 757–66, and especially *F.* 2.3–6 and 2.155–56 on the ways Ovid figures elegy as the meter of erotic content). In the exilic corpus elegy is of course reappropriated as the mode for mourning; not coincidentally, most women of the *Heroides* write both erotic poetry and *querellae*: see especially *Heroides* 15.5–8. Hypermestra may also be seen as obeying the (later) strictures of Ovid himself, the *magister amoris*, when he suggests that women write love letters in code to deceive prying eyes (*Ars* 3.485–98; see too Farrell *passim*).

[40] Yet the fact that she is so close to Lynceus that her tears fall on his body (a subtle but significant point) gives Lynceus a chance to posit some interest on her part; perhaps her physical proximity to him bespeaks emotional proximity? This suggestion is strengthened by Lynceus' unconscious groping for her, which suggests a certain intimacy (69–70). See too Casali 1998: 110, who notes that the statement that she lies on the bed next to her husband provokes the question "ripetizione, o prima volta?"

> weapons in the fearful hand. To you wondering why, I said, "while the night permits, run away," and while the dark night permits, you run away, but I stay.

In these lines Hypermestra asserts that she remained while Lynceus left (78); this is perhaps meant to reassure her father of her continued loyalty to him.[41] While she could presumably have run away with Lynceus, she does not entertain that possibility anywhere in her letter, nor does she express regret at having stayed with her father. Her statement therefore suggests that *she* is really the good daughter: when she could have abandoned her father, she threw herself on his mercy. Unlike her sisters, who simply did what they were told, Hypermestra has thought through the options and chosen to remain with her father. The verbatim repetition of her speech to Lynceus serves the double purpose of reminding Lynceus of her bravery and reconfirming to Danaus her loyalty, even as she details her explicit disobedience of his orders.

5. WHY IO?

Hypermestra's long discussion of Io is another element of the poem that has drawn critical fire.[42] It will repay attention here. While a familial relationship connects the two women, and Io's story seems to be a regular feature in tales of the Danaids (and *vice versa*),[43] the significant parallels between the two stories as presented here suggest that it serves a rhetorical purpose for Hypermestra.[44]

[41] These lines will also, of course, make sense to Lynceus: Hypermestra is afraid that her father may catch her husband before his escape. She was the only one of the sisters brave enough to disobey their father; Lynceus is reminded of how much she has done for him and that her situation is still fraught with peril.

[42] See Ehwald (7 and 21) on the disputed authenticity of these lines.

[43] Jacobson notes (134) that the Aeschylean *Prometheus Vinctus* and *Supplices* both connect the stories of the Danaids and Io. Murray argues (15) that the story can be taken as an allegory that explains the character and motives of the Danaids. Wecklein suggests (410) that an earlier version of the *Danaids* included the story of Io, which would explain why the two were so frequently linked. See too Zeitlin 221–23. For a persuasive reading of the Io episode in *Heroides* 14 in light of Calvus' epyllion see Casali 1998: 94–95 and 101 and *passim* for the relationship established between Hypermestra and Io.

[44] In *Heroides* 14 Io exemplifies successful transition to adulthood and thus acts as a model. More specifically, Hypermestra refers to Io as *Inachi* (perhaps suggesting that daughters in some sense belong with their fathers), and also refers to herself and her sisters as *Inachides* (23). Both women are confused and terrified at their new surroundings, Io because she is a heifer, Hypermestra because she is in prison. Each woman is described as *exul*, an exile, and each must come to terms with unfamiliar weapons—horns for Io and *tela* for Hypermestra (Jacobson 135). Finally, both women were said to be priestesses of Hera at Argos.

One feature of Io's story that was particularly useful to Hypermestra was her clear status as victim. Hypermestra's self-portrayal as an Io-like tragic victim reinforces the message to her father: she insists that she is just as innocent as Io, and that she needs her father's continued help to protect her safety (and virginity). By invoking the story of Io—every father's nightmare, as Inachus' behavior in *Met.* 1.651–63 makes clear—Hypermestra strives to ensure that her father will think not of attributing any guilt to her but rather of his duty to protect her. In recounting Io's story Hypermestra notes that Io remained with her father when she could have been the lover of a god (89 *adstitit in ripa liquidi nova vacca parentis* "she, newly a cow, stood in the wave of her liquid father"). This is both a parallel for her own decision to remain with Danaus and an indication of her tacit approval for both decisions. On the other hand, Hypermestra knows well how Io's story ends. The move to an adult life was not voluntary for Io (or for Hypermestra), but it is nonetheless necessary. More importantly, Inachus was powerless to prevent Io's loss of virginity and subsequent motherhood. That is, this portion of *Heroides* 14 may be designed to encourage Danaus to think that, like Io, who travels far from her father and acquires freedom, ultimately becoming a goddess, Hypermestra must assume a new role. By suggesting the inevitability and repetitiveness of the situation, Hypermestra prefigures its ending (Casali 1998: 96): she *will* escape from her father. Hypermestra thus integrates the traditional story of Io into her letter, utilizing it for her own purposes.[45]

6. READING AS DANAUS (2)

Many of the *Heroides* are love letters; being primarily concerned about her safety, Hypermestra does not write about love. If she disobeyed her father out of love for Lynceus, as is the case in many versions of the myth, she certainly does not want her father to suspect this even more significant betrayal. Should this letter fall into her father's hands, as is likely, it will contain nothing to be used against her. Danaus may punish Hypermestra if he discovers her sending a letter, but with the evidence of this letter, he cannot punish her for fall-

[45] Hypermestra carefully deflects attention from the aspects of the story that might upset her father (Jacobson notes (135) Hypermestra's avoidance of "the perverse sexuality of the Io-Zeus-Hera relationship"). By characterizing Io as "that concubine, a source of fear for the sister of great Jupiter" (95 *illa Iovis magni paelex metuenda sorori*), Hypermestra may suggest that she sees sexual liaisons as inherently violent and coercive. Perhaps she wants her father to think that she finds sex frightening and dangerous. Yet Hypermestra's knowledge that Danaus may have concerns for her sexual activity bespeaks a lack of innocence on her part; the affirmation of one's virginity presupposes an audience who might wonder about it.

ing in love with his enemy, even given Hypermestra's repeated characterization of her father as harsh and cruel (43 *violenti*, 53 *saevus*, 82 *queritur facti sanguinis esse parum*).[46] Moreover, as we have seen, she claims to be a coward rather than a disobedient daughter.[47]

As has become clear, much of Hypermestra's letter, although addressed nominally to her husband, does not seem directed to him at all.[48] Whatever her feelings for Lynceus, it would have been smart to engage his affections on as many levels as possible in a letter designed to move him to come to her rescue. Yet she does not attempt this, eschewing love entirely (and alluding only rarely to the fact that she and Lynceus are blood relatives). For readers of the *Heroides*, the neglect of these seemingly useful aspects of Hypermestra's relationship to Lynceus is perhaps not surprising: many of the women of the corpus write poorly organized and rhetorically ineffective letters. The present interpretation, with its emphasis on Danaus' probable view of the letter, offers an explanation for both the letter's apparent ineffectiveness (vis-à-vis Lynceus) and its potential persuasiveness (vis-à-vis Danaus). It is my contention that Hypermestra's letter is in fact not only rhetorically effective, but also skillfully executed within the limits of her situation: it is continuously and diligently structured to be thoroughly ambiguous, in order to appeal to each of its two potential readers.

7. MARRIED DAUGHTERS

Since Hypermestra's relationships with both her father and her husband are the basis of the interpretation of *Heroides* 14 offered here, let us briefly examine another piece of cultural evidence about the family relationships detailed in this letter. We have seen how *Heroides* 14 is structured to be intelligible to two potential recipients. This is certainly a matter of necessity, since Hypermestra fears for her life and therefore resorts to any source of safety. Yet the question of loyalty divided between husband and father also forms the subject of one of the elder Seneca's *Controversiae*, suggesting that the theme would have had resonance for a Roman audience.

[46] Note too her insistence that the sword is *tela paterna* (48) and that it was inappropriate for her father to ask this of his daughter (65 *quid mihi cum ferro? quid bellica tela puellae?*).

[47] We do not know whether the strategy worked: the silence in our other extant sources about how the final outcome of Hypermestra's story comes about (does her father relent and spare her or does her husband rescue her?) is also present in *Heroides* 14.

[48] See too Ehwald, who notes (9) that Lynceus is all but external to the letter.

In *Controversia* 10.3 a woman chooses her husband's side in preference to her father's in the civil wars. When her husband is killed, she returns to her father and asks him how she can make amends; he tells her to kill herself (*morere*). She does so, and her brother charges their father with madness. Among the arguments for the son is that of Clodius Turrinus *pater*, who states, "the girl would have hung herself for her husband if she hadn't been saving herself for her father" (10.3.2 *inpendisset se puella viro nisi servasset patri*).[49] The *controversiae* are full of familial conflict of this kind (often intergenerational); there are many cases like Hypermestra's, wherein a son does something in direct disobedience of his father that is nevertheless a pious act. Given the intended audience of the *controversiae* (young men in *patria potestas*) it is not surprising that domineering fathers play a role, but the preponderance of imaginary disputes of this nature (and indeed of anecdotal tales from Roman history about family members who consider patriotic duty more important than family duty) suggests that they respond to a genuine perception on the part of Romans that filial piety might conflict with other values.[50]

The issue of filial obedience seems to have resonated with special force after the civil wars, in which loyalty to one's family was weighed against loyalty to a larger cause; indeed, the civil wars were often figured as father-son strife. The exercise taken from Seneca, like Hypermestra's story, is set during a civil war; it is (only?) in cases of war that daughters enter into the equation.[51] Like the woman in Seneca, Ovid's Hypermestra is in a difficult situation because of the enmity of two parties with legitimate claims on her loyalty. It is perhaps the recognition of this kind of engagement with issues both ethical and rhetorical in the *Heroides* that led earlier critics to classify them as *controversiae*.[52]

If, as was suggested above, Hypermestra wants to communicate with both father and husband, why does she choose to write to her husband? I have suggested that *Heroides* 14 is designed to accomplish two things. Either the letter will reach its addressee, who will (Hypermestra hopes) be moved to rescue her, or Danaus will read it and realize that his daughter is not, in fact, deserving of punishment. Hypermestra was immediately shackled and never

[49] Some opinions in the *controversia* say that politics is a male world from which women are exempt, the very argument that Hypermestra offers in her own defense at 62–64.

[50] Compare V. Max. 5.8, *De severitate patrum in liberos.*

[51] See too Putnam's connection of the Danaids on Pallas' baldrick with civil war (192).

[52] It is, of course, likely that Ovid developed the basic theme from rhetorical exercises. Ehwald outlined (3 and 18) the ways in which the letter uses rhetorical themes. Cf. Oppel 68–76 on this letter as a *controversia* and 37–40 on Ovid and the rhetorical schools.

had a chance to explain her side of the story (83–84 *abstrahor a patriis pedibus, raptamque capillis … carcer habet*, "I am dragged from the feet of my father, and ... a prison holds me, seized by the hair"); the letter may thus be her last opportunity to persuade her father. Since Danaus refused to listen to her the morning after she failed to kill Lynceus, she can reasonably assume that a letter addressed to him will be similarly ignored. But she gambles that Danaus might be interested in what she has to say to Lynceus, and so writes a letter to her husband with the intent that her father (also) read it. By writing to Lynceus, she ensures too that her father will believe what is written. Although she has proven an untrustworthy daughter, she has no reason to lie to Lynceus, so her text will be verified as "true" by virtue of its addressee. Danaus will certainly be interested in an intercepted letter from his estranged daughter;[53] it might explain why she betrayed him. If her letter slips past Danaus and somehow reaches Lynceus, the latter will read it and (she hopes) save her.

Hypermestra claims to have attempted the murder of Lynceus, but her story is so strangely told that it is difficult for the reader to know what to believe. She says that her hand picked up the sword three times (45 *ter acutum sustulit ensem*) and tried to bring it to his throat, but was unable to do so. Hypermestra tries to kill Lynceus, showing that she is an obedient daughter, but cannot, suggesting that she is a loving wife. Her ambiguous relations to both men are encapsulated in this vignette. Ideally, she could have amicable relationships with father and husband, but her father's insistence on the death of her husband precludes this solution. She claims to write to her husband as a last resort because her father has turned against her. Yet her husband, as she knows, owes her his life, and may be able to read between the lines to discern marital affection. For Danaus there is the assurance that Hypermestra was simply not brave enough to obey her father; she remains with him despite the opportunity to leave with her husband.

8. CONCLUSION

Ovid's poem, then, is not a tale of true love or noble piety but a tale of a daughter with loyalties divided by her circumstances. Throughout the poem, it is unclear to whom Hypermestra writes, her husband or her father. Yet there are glimpses of an adult Hypermestra, one intrigued by the possibility of her own sexuality. In its exploration of this key psychological moment *Heroides* 14 avoids easily understandable explanations. Ovid's Hypermestra gives neither of the two reasons commonly attributed to her (love of Lynceus and

[53] Cf. Henderson on the purloined letter. This technique was exploited by later epistolary characters, notably Lovelace in his forged letters from Anna to Clarissa.

gratitude for his respect of her chastity). She appeals to both of the two people who are likely to save her and must therefore leave her reasons opaque since each will look for opposing information in her text.[54]

An interpretation of this poem would be incomplete if it failed to assess Hypermestra's success in her dual endeavor. Hypermestra plays a dangerous game because her insecurities about her own safety lead her to try anything. Her situation is significantly complicated by the fact that she chooses to convey both of her messages in a single letter; she must therefore speak cryptically, deliberately leaving herself open to misunderstanding. Her justification of her actions is illogical, and parts of her letter do not hang together, but she masks the inconsistencies so well that her story makes sense on the surface. As was noted above, she describes herself as being *unable* to kill Lynceus, much as she tried to (49), saying that she only saved him at the last minute, as it was getting light (71). Her claim to have been unable to kill Lynceus may well be true, but not killing him is a far cry from saving his life. A truly dutiful daughter could lack the courage to kill but summon her father, or his servants, to do the job. Hypermestra has done no such thing. Far from being a coward, she has performed a brave—and deliberately defiant—act. Her skill in presenting her case is such that the reader may not even notice that her words contradict themselves. To her father she claims that she did the best she could, and that she is still his daughter, even if she is not as brave as her sisters. To her husband she says that she saved his life and that he owes her the return favor.

Hypermestra, following Ovid's usual practice, draws attention to her status as storyteller four times in the poem, twice explicitly discussing truth and falsehood: 20–21 *Scribere de facta non sibi caede timet. / Sed tamen experiar*, "She is afraid to write about slaughter not done by herself. But nevertheless I will try"; 45 *Non ego falsa loquar*, "I will not tell lies"; 47 *Sine me tibi vera fateri*, "allow me to admit to you the truth"; 109 *Vltima quid referam?* "why should I describe things long ago?" Aware of her role as a maker of "truth," she creates a tale simultaneously for two men with very different expectations.

Hypermestra, then, is Ovidian in her poetic persona. Each writes so as to keep the reader off-balance, insofar as their texts constantly question the

[54] See, as a final example, Hypermestra's discussion of whether the Aegyptids deserved to die: she either claims that they did for trying to arrogate a kingdom that did not belong to them, or questions whether they did (61–62, above). Without the modern punctuation the sentence is ambiguous. Immediately following, however is the verb *finge*, "imagine" that they deserved it (63). Did they deserve to die (as Danaus thinks) or is the justification for their death so specious that she can only "pretend" that they should have died (as Lynceus believes)? Both of Hypermestra's readers will find the sentence to their liking.

"truth" of the story. Each creates a convincing reality through words, offering a text that seems "smooth" on the surface. Only after a closer look do ambiguities appear, and the reader is left to wonder if the text represents any "reality." Both Hypermestra and Ovid are unreliable, manipulating the reader into subject positions later shown to be problematic.[55] Each probes the ambiguous relationship between truth and falsehood, between poetry, psychology, and real life, and each shows the acute awareness of audience usually deemed characteristic of post-modern texts. It is precisely her similarities to Ovid that hint at Hypermestra's ultimate success in her writing endeavor.

APPENDIX: DID SHE OR DIDN'T SHE?

Scholars of *Heroides* 14 irresistibly find themselves speculating on Hypermestra's virginity. Line 55, *femina sum et virgo*, often (explicitly or implicitly) enters into the discussion. Commentators generally find the poem unambiguous about Hypermestra's virginity (but differ): Diggle, for example, concludes "[t]here have been no favours" (35), as does Bornecque (*ad loc.*).[56] Palmer, on the other hand, assumes that there is no question but that Hypermestra is no longer a virgin. The question is not unique to Ovid's Hypermestra: Horace's Hypermestra also claims to be a *virgo* (3.11.35), but here too there is a complicating mention of *Venus* at line 50 (Jacobson 140). Keuls suggests (5 and 54) that all of the (Aeschylean) Danaids consummated their marriages.[57] Zeitlin encapsulates the ambiguity of the issue, noting that the Aeschylean Danaids avenge themselves "for the loss of (or before the loss of) their virginity" (208); her refusal to determine which is significant. Casali's speculations (1998: 106–9) are perhaps the most thorough; after an exhaustive review of the question, he determines that Hypermestra has lost her virginity to Lynceus.

Yet, as many have noted, the phrase *femina sum et virgo* is explained by the rest of line 55, *natura mitis et annis*: the line signifies primarily "I am a woman (therefore timid by nature) and young (therefore even less likely to kill a man)" (Watson 127–28).[58] Although the line is thus not most usefully read as an indicator of Hypermestra's sexual status, given the context of the question about the Danaids' virginity, the use of *virgo* cannot but be provocative. More interestingly, once the specter of virginity has been raised, the answer to this non-question assumes some importance as an indicator of loyalty. Hypermestra

[55] I think particularly of the *Metamorphoses*, but Ovid can be shown to have created unstable subject positions throughout his work.

[56] See too Watson, who (correctly) notes that *virgo* in this poem signifies not sexual status but rather "an unmarried girl of respectable morals" (122 and, before her, Ehwald 15).

[57] See Lowrie 288 nn. 58–59 on differing ancient views of Hypermestra's virginity (and Lucr. 3.1008).

[58] Watson also (133) suggestively connects *virgo* here to its use in Calvus' *Io*.

may seek to reassure Danaus without resolving the issue, but few of her readers have been willing to leave it at that.[59]

The letter contains other, teasing hints about Hypermestra's virginity (or lack thereof). If lines 29–30 and 42 indicate that the Aegyptids were drugged, it is possible to assume that neither Hypermestra nor her sisters consummated their marriages before the killing began. On the other hand, the phrase *circum me gemitus morientum audire videbar* (35 "I seemed to hear the groans of the dying about me") can easily be understood sexually. *Gemitus* in Ovid most often refer to misery or physical pain, but also occur in connection with love and sex.[60] In any case, if the Aegyptids were indeed unconscious from wine or drugs, they would not be likely to groan as they were killed, so the phrase is a peculiar one. Perhaps here Hypermestra seeks to cast aspersions on her sisters' chastity while simultaneously drawing attention to her own innocence; she may not have killed but at least she did not have sex without her father's permission. She has phrased her words to appeal to each of her readers: while her sexual status is not primarily at issue, her loyalty assuredly is, and she forces the one to stand in for the other.[61] The interest the question holds for modern scholars perhaps confirms Hypermestra's cleverness in obfuscating the issue; like Danaus, we seek to know whose side Hypermestra is *really* on.

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[59] In this context, see Fowler, who persuasively argues (185) that the conjunction of blood and virgins in Latin poetry raises the overwhelming suggestion of defloration. In line 17 Hypermestra describes her memory of blood, which may refer to the murder she was supposed to commit, but may also, as Jacobson suggests (140 #44), refer to the defloration of the Danaids or of herself.

[60] The former: *Her*. 11.30, 16.229–30; the latter: *Ars* 2.724.

[61] Reader "B" of this article reminds me that, ironically, those who would affirm Hypermestra's virginity read precisely the way Hypermestra wants her father Danaus to read, while those who insist that there has been intercourse may read like Lynceus.

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