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"THE LABYRINTH AND THE MIRROR": INCEST AND INFLUENCE IN *METAMORPHOSES* 9

MICAELA JANAN

The story of Caunus and Byblis is one of two major narratives centered upon incest in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Critical discussion has so far disproportionately favored the tale of Cinyras and Myrrha in book 10. The Caunus/Byblis episode has by contrast received scant attention. Critics generally find it much less attractive and accessible than the Cinyras/Myrrha episode. Ethically, Myrrha has the moral high ground in relation to Byblis: Myrrha fights against her passion, Byblis does not, and consequently is often perceived as a less sympathetic character.[1] Moreover, the pattern of the Cinyras/Myrrha story and its surrounding narratives obviously reflects the concerns of their narrator, Orpheus; the tale is thus easier to interpret both individually and contextually.

By contrast, the peculiarities of the Caunus/Byblis episode have been assessed in an unsatisfactory piecemeal fashion. Critics note that: Byblis' erotic narrative (and that of her mirror in perverse passion, Iphis) oddly jostles against a seemingly unrelated heroic narrative organized about Hercules;[2] Byblis is the granddaughter of a river that

1 "Byblis' retreat into fantasy and Myrrha's honest confrontation with reality in each case cause the reader to sense a discrepancy between the character and the narrator's attitude toward her. Byblis does not seem to deserve the sympathy Ovid shows her, except at the very beginning, before her dream." Nagle 1983.309-10.

2 Otis 1970.166-67.

constantly reverts upon itself; she is the first character of the *Metamorphoses* seen to produce a written document;[3] she uses a genre invented by Ovid — the elegiac epistle — to do so;[4] her letter is meant to seduce her brother (whom Ovid, using Nicander's minority variant of the myth,[5] makes her twin); and her name obviously puns on the Greek word for "book."[6] These facts are remarked *en passant*, in an ever-lengthening tabulation of mysteries. But no one has yet asked, "what does the collocation of *all* these facts mean?"

In answering this question, I wish to give the Byblis/Caunus episode its due, and to show that it crowns a thematically organized pattern of narratives as intricate and subtle as the tales of book 10. Moreover, the significance of its incest theme is neither purely ethical nor voyeuristic; rather, it makes a complex statement about the paired antinomies of repetition and difference, limit and transgression, as they govern culture in general, and art in particular.

TRAPPED IN THE LABYRINTH

The Byblis/Caunus episode and its surrounding stories are elements deployed in the *Metamorphoses'* ongoing meditation upon the twin themes of repetition and difference. Repetition is an element crucial to all poetics: the reader would be lost without the orientation that concepts of genre and of literary tradition lend to a work. Moreover, the elements of storytelling are finite, whereas the human need to tell them is unquenchable.[7] Logically, therefore, every narrative must to some degree repeat what has been said and done before. Yet

3 Ahl 1985.211.

4 Ehwald 1916 *ad* 9.523 and 530.

5 According to the summary of the *Heteroioumena* version given in Antoninus Liberalis, *Met. Syn.* 30.

6 Ahl 1985.211.

7 Roy Schafter analyzes storytelling as a response to the need to "create" both ourselves and those around us (1981.31):

> We are forever telling stories about ourselves . . . the self is a telling. . . . Additionally, we are forever telling stories about others. These others, too, may be viewed as figures or other selves constituted by narrative actions. Other people are constructed in the telling about them; more exactly, we narrate others just as we narrate selves.

repetition and difference in poetry articulate the poles of an anxiety particularly acute for the Romans. Roman literature has been described by Leo Curran as one long search for a national identity, by a people painfully aware of its own belatedness in relation to the Greeks' authoritative definition of forms and proprieties.[8]

The *Metamorphoses* as a whole urges the reader to consider why and when old alternates with new, both in the cosmos and in the text. As a narrative, the poem focuses upon new physical shapes replacing old — i.e., upon new transgressions redefining old limits.[9] Formally, a new meter (hexameter) and new generic category (epic) supplant Ovid's earlier efforts in elegy and tragedy. Yet the world of the *Metamorphoses* is also the realm of repetition. Pythagoras tells us so in book 15: in his cosmology, though the external forms may change, a finite number of souls transmigrate among them, in an eschatological version of musical chairs. Poetically, individual characters may change, but the same story patterns and themes occur and recur to control their destinies.[10]

Ovid, more than any other Roman writer, signals his awareness of the particular constraints brought to bear upon an artist by a literary tradition that determines — and overdetermines — the significance of his every poetic gesture. Ovid constantly borrows and twists material from his illustrious Greek and Roman predecessors. His refusal to respect the boundaries of propriety determined by the literary past is usually seen as pure irresponsible irreverence. It has earned him a reputation as the "bad boy" of Latin letters.[11] More accurately, Ovid

8 Curran 1972.75.

9 A shape changed is a boundary transgressed, as previously established defining limits give way before transformation. See the discussion of limit and transgression in my article on Ovid's Orpheus (Janan 1988.122).

10 For example, the "god-rapes-nymph" story is repeated so often in book 1 that its third recapitulation puts its audience, Argos, to sleep; similarly, the "challenger-to-the gods" tale has been worked out enough by book 6 that Ovid does not even bother with the details of Marsyas' transgression against Apollo, just the specifics of his punishment. G. Davis has analyzed the cross-referential repetition of such plots as, in itself, key to understanding both individual instances and the collective defined by shared narrative patterns. See Davis 1969 and 1983.

11 Critical discomfort with Ovid is not a new phenomenon; consider the opinions expressed by his contemporaries and near contemporaries. Seneca the Elder faults him for lack of control (*Controv.* 2.2.8) and unwillingness to rein in his poetic license (*Controv.* 2.2.12). Seneca the Younger regrets Ovid's lapses, occasions when

treats the authority of the literary past as prematurely arrogated. He refuses to foreclose his own possibilities by accepting without question standards and procedures determined by his poetic predecessors.[12]

Book 9 looks at the issue of repetition vs. difference at different symbolic levels — poetic, erotic and visual. Repetition is represented as a dogged, and gradually refined, preference for the old, the known, the Same over the new, unknown, and Other. Such premature limitation leads to an entrapping repetition. The Byblis/Caunus episode and the stories surrounding it set up a correlation between erotic and poetic self-referentiality that governs their development. Not only do narrative motifs occur and recur, but personal boundaries begin to blur as one character replicates another by tracing elements of the other's characteristic myth pattern. A hierarchy of narrative aesthetics develops that privileges Same over Other. The postscript tale that closes book 9, of Iphis and Ianthe, shows two young women in love: their erotic choice is for Same over Other with respect to gender. The centerpiece — the story of Byblis' incestuous passion for her twin brother, Caunus — matches erotic choice of *genetic* Same over Other with poetic recurrence. The poem replicates itself (and, through a complex pattern of allusion, its author Ovid's poetic career), limiting creative options to the already known — the literary realization of incest.

(in Seneca's opinion) Ovid turns his talent to "childish nonsense" (*QNat.* 3.27.13). Quintilian upbraids him for being "excessively enamored of his own genius" (*Inst.* 10.1.88), and thinks the (now lost) *Medea* shows what Ovid might have accomplished "had he preferred to restrain his genius, not indulge it" (*Inst.* 10.1.98).

Within living memory, Ovid's reception has been hardly less chilly, and for substantially the same reasons. "Fine as he is, he could have been much finer, if he had chosen to be" (Flower Smith 1920.73); "Often we have to regret his lack of restraint, discipline, and poise" (Fraenkel 1945.3); "One of the troubles is that Ovid could rarely refrain from sowing with the sack instead of the hand, a fault which one at least of his own contemporaries noted" (Wilkinson 1955.73, referring to Sen. *Controv.* 9.5.17: "he [Ovid] cannot let well done." Cf. Heftberger 1972.138, n. 11: "Vielleicht lag gerade in der haeufigen Verwendung derselben Bilder die Ursache fuer die Kritik Quintilians an Ovid: *Inst. or.* XI, 88: 'nimium amator ingenii sui' "): ". . . the problem of Ovid is really why a good poet could write such an unconscionable amount of bad poetry. It has been heretofore thought, so far as I can make out, that this was simply a consequence of his own careless and prodigal genius" (Otis 1970.xii).

12 For a judicious and sensitive discussion of this aspect of Ovid's art, see Johnson 1970. A more recent, and even more delicately shaded appraisal may be found in Verducci 1985.

The visual emblem of this poetic and erotic self-referentiality is the river Maeander, which occupies approximately the center of the book — an organizing *omphalos*, to which all the sexual and poetic patterns of book 9 bear resemblance. Maeander is the grandfather of book 9's incestuous heroine, Byblis. As Maeander turns back upon himself, so his granddaughter Byblis "turns back" erotically. She rejects exogamy, recurring to her genetic origins (her family), to the companion and reflection of her beginnings — her twin brother.

But within the *Metamorphoses*, Maeander is an artistic paradigm as well as a sexual one. His significance as an organizational pattern for book 9 is ominous. In book 8, Ovid mentions that Daedalus' Cretan labyrinth reproduces Maeander's pattern. In so doing, Daedalus creates a work of art that once again verifies his reputation for "genius as an artisan" (*Daedalus ingenio fabrae celeberrimus artis*, 8.159).[13] It also nearly kills Daedalus, as the labyrinth's ever-repeating windings deceive even their maker; he barely manages to escape (. . . *vixque ipse reverti / ad limen potuit: tanta est fallacia tecti*, 8.167-68). Maeander's double significance indicates that book 9 plays out a nightmare of artistic self-referentiality, in which every possible choice leads to what has *already* been done. Most horrific of all, the victims themselves create this fatally limited realm of choice.

In book 9, the seduction along this path of self-referentiality is gradual. The stories leading up to Caunus and Byblis unmistakably set up a pattern of preference for Same over Other. For example, the book opens with the story of Achelous' and Hercules' rivalry for the hand of Deianeira. I will rehearse the story's details in brief, and draw the pattern explicitly.

Repetition first helps Hercules win a bride, then proves his key to godhood. Hercules won Deianeira from the river god Achelous by taking advantage of his own past accomplishments. While wrestling with the hero, Achelous transforms himself into a snake, which immediately fits him into a mytheme from Hercules' heroic saga, and places him at Hercules' mercy. "I strangled snakes in my cradle," remarks Hercules, "whatever could have possessed you to change yourself into one?" (*Met.* 9.67-76).

13 All quotations from the *Metamorphoses* are taken from Anderson 1982.

Eventually Hercules becomes a god — first, because of the recurrence of the snake motif (Deianeira replicates Achelous' misjudgement about snakes, thinking blood poisoned with snake venom to be a love potion); second, because his father Jove refines the repetition of himself in his son. Jove privileges Same, and rejects what is Other, by purging his son of all his mortal mother's traces on the funeral pyre (9.251-55). Only Jove's genetic contribution to Hercules remains: an immortal nature (9.264-65). Repetition thus becomes Hercules' key to godhood — and his saving transformation is accomplished, the text observes wryly, "as a snake sloughs its skin" (9.266-70).

Even apparent divagations into other themes within book 9 contribute to the overall pattern. After Hercules' apotheosis, his mother Alcmene converses with his widow, Iole: each regales the other with the story of a loved one's metamorphosis. This exchange of tales functionally repeats Jove's intervention in Hercules' apotheosis by contributing to a hierarchy of narrative aesthetics based on privileging Same over Other. Alcmene tells of one of her maids transformed into a weasel at Juno's hands, but Iole counters with the story of her sister Dryope's change into a tree. Iole insists that her tale is more moving because it concerns a blood relative, not just an unrelated servant. Thus, to Iole, a story about the (genetically) Same is more effective than a story about the Other, because it promises to touch the audience more deeply.

The tales of Iolaus' rejuvenation and the super-rapid aging of Callirhoe's sons (9.397-417) also embellish the theme of repetition. We have seen that Maeander's pattern organizes these tales, as the river who "constantly turns back upon himself" (. . . *Maeandri totiens redeuntis eodem*, 9.451). Iolaus' transformation is a temporal version of Maeander's spatial disposition: Iolaus returns to the same place *in time* he has already passed, to the threshold of manhood. The conversion of Callirhoe's sons, on the other hand, repeats and reverses Iolaus' temporal trope. They advance in time rather than regress, but Themis herself designates their change a repetition of Iolaus' rejuvenation. When Hebe, who magically manipulated time for Iolaus, is about to swear, "I won't do *that* again," Themis intervenes. She says, in effect, "Oh, yes, you *will* repeat the deed — for Callirhoe's sons" (9.401-17).

BYBLIS: THE MASTER'S MIRROR

Erotic bonds redoubling familial bonds in the Caunus and Byblis story increase the sense of choice narrowing until only Self/Same remains. That pattern informs the *poetic* development of the Caunus/Byblis tale as well: it repeats works from Ovid's previous career. Byblis' monologues and amorous ploys are modeled upon an analecta of very specific passages from Ovid's amatory verse.

These works are reflected not only in the details of Byblis' life, but in the words from her pen and tongue. She becomes an *altera* Ovid — the poet as he *might be* were he entirely self-referential. In a satiric *reductio ad absurdam* of *imitatio*, Ovid allegorically depicts the plight of the artist who sacralizes her/his *own* work, and cannot move beyond reverence for what s/he has *already* done.

Byblis' first inklings of love pattern themselves after Ovid's collection of short elegies, the *Amores*. She loves without, at first, realizing that she is in love (9.457-60) — just like Ovid's *Amores* persona (*Amores* 1.2.1-8), but unlike the other Latin elegists, Propertius or Tibullus.[14] Night reveals the truth to Byblis, as it does to the *Amores* poet. Love disturbs her sleep, just as it harried the wakeful *Amores* poet. Byblis sleeps, but dreams vividly of the one she loves. Both she and the *Amores* poet question what has disturbed their sleep, and each comes to the conclusion that love is at the base of it.[15]

That Ovidian elegy should shape her experience underlines the sexual and literary self-love of the whole episode. Byblis has chosen the person most like herself to love — her *twin*, i.e., her fraternal mirror. Like the affair sketched in the *Amores*, Byblis' love affair with her brother is largely a matter of isolated fantasy. The *Amores* lover does not bring his beloved Corinna onstage until he has devoted two elegies to talking to himself and his poetic stage prop, Cupid. We do not even know her name until *Amores* 1.5.[16] Apparently the lover enjoys his own

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14 Tibullus and Propertius are the *extant* elegiac poets against whose work we can best assess his innovation. Gallus' work, unfortunately, is a near total mystery. But if Vergil's portrayal of the tone of Gallus' work in *Eclogue* 10 is accurate, it seems unlikely that a fatal devotion to Lycoris would have revealed itself as anything parallel to Ovid's detached and analytic insomnia of *Amores* 1.2.

15 *Metamorphoses* 9.469-515; *Amores* 1.2.7-8.

16 By contrast, Propertius make Cynthia's name the first word of the first elegy in his

company too much to share the conversation or the spotlight. Byblis sets up the same pattern of narcissistic isolation with her vivid dream of making love to her brother (*Met.* 9.469-72) and her reaction to it. Obviously the dream is an illusion — the only person she has been with all night is herself — but she conducts her love affair as though she were determined to keep it an illusion. She does not speak to her brother face to face until all the possibilities of fantasy coupled with composition have been exhausted. In the meantime, Ovid has her mirror his own works as the pattern and the vehicle for her love. The cumulative effect of her story is thus one of sexual narcissism paralleling literary narcissism.

For example, when Byblis decides she must test her brother's feelings towards her, she chooses to express her love in a poetic letter — just as Ovid's heroines and heroes do in the *Heroides*. She specifically copies a salutation formula standard to these elegiac epistles.[17] Furthermore, she repeats the *Heroides'* arguments in favor of incest, drawn from Phaedra's letter to Hippolytus (*Heroides* 4).[18] In a further reference to Ovid's previous works, she assumes the role of *praeceptor amoris* in her letter, as Ovid had developed the role in the *Ars Amatoria*.[19] She feels she must teach Caunus the symptoms of love, since he appears not to have noticed her feelings. Similarly, Ovid outlines the physical attributes of love to his pupils in the *Ars* — so that they can emulate (rather than recognize) them.[20]

Monobiblos. Delia enters Tibullus' elegies somewhat more tardily — but still in the very first poem (indirectly at 1.55 [possibly even earlier, if 1.45-46 are to be interpreted as a statement of Tibullus' own experience], by name at 1.57)

17
quam, nisi tu dederis, non est habitura salutem,
hanc tibi mittit amans . . . (9.530-31)

Ehwald 1916 notes the specific parallels in his commentary *ad* 9.530. (All quotations from the *Heroides* are based upon Palmer 1898.)

18 Like Phaedra, Byblis argues that 1) "the gods, by their example, condone brother-sister love" (cf. *Heroides* 4.133-4) and 2) "none need know, they would think our closeness just familial affection" (cf. *Heroides* 4.137-146). (Ehwald notes the latter parallel, but, inexplicably, not the former, referring his reader instead to the Rape of Persephone in *Metamorphoses* 5.498 ff. [Ehwald 1916 *ad* 9.555 and 558].)

19 See in particular the programmatic statement of purpose that opens the *Ars* (*A.A.* 1.1-34).

20
esse quidem laesi poterat tibi pectoris index
et color et macies et vultus et umida saepe
lumina nec causa suspiria mota patenti . . . (9.535-37)

Byblis thus shares with the pupil of the *Ars* a willingness to use erotic symptoms to maximum rhetorical effect. That allies her to the calculation behind the entire didactic poem. The *Ars Amatoria* presents love as the detached manipulation of surfaces to elicit desired responses from one's object.[21] Accordingly, Byblis paints her misery vividly in her letter to her brother in order to have it excuse her confession and to plead for love in return. Byblis is not quite so cool as the *Ars* lover, but what control she has she uses to maximum effect.

The formulae, the content, and the spirit of Ovid's *oeuvre* mold Byblis' letter. The *coup de grace* is that Ovid's *ingenium* itself inspires her pen — leading her into one of his favorite literary tropes, expansion (another transgression of boundaries). Byblis extends her epistle to the point where it cannot fit comfortably on the wax tablets (9.565-65). We will return to this point later.

Just as the *Ars Amatoria* counsels, Byblis tries out her beloved brother's feelings first with overtures written on tablets. Her efforts provoke only her brother's rage. She has treated her brother like some coy *puella* who can be won if the pursuer is just persistent enough (*Met.* 9.616-17, 630-32). She thus gives the *Ars'* conventions ascendancy over the stark reality of her situation: the *Ars* advises the lover to persist in spite of all his object's objections, cynically insisting that *anybody* can be had if one is persistent enough (*A.A.* 1.269-82, 341-46, 467-78).

Byblis pursues her brother nearly to the ends of the earth, until she is caught in the smallest possible repetitive circle. Outside reality essentially falls away. She communicates only to herself a round of reflections that provoke endless tears. Her passion lacks its object: her brother disappears. She thus achieves the logical extension of self-referentiality: sterile self-absorption. She is completely closed off to all outsiders, mute and deaf. Eventually the nymphs, in despair of breaking through her isolation, change her into a fountain (9.652-58, 663-65).

Surely my color and thinness and my expression and often moist eyes and sighs, appearing without any obvious cause, could have indicated to you my wounded heart . . .

Cf. the *Ars'* advice to the lover to emulate: tears (*A.A.* 1.659-60); paleness (1.729-30); thinness (1.733-34); sighs (3.675-76).

21 See Wilkinson 1955.121; Durling 1958.161, 163, 165-66; Otis 1970.18; Romano 1972.818-19; Blodgett 1973.322; Solodow 1977.117-26; Quinn 1979.191; Myerowitz 1985.

Byblis, figure of erotic and artistic self-absorption, eventually loses herself in herself, in her thoughts and tears. She is "consumed by her own tears" (9.663) until all that remains is her name, borne by the fountain. Appropriately, her doom is worked out as an aesthetic defeat as well as a physical metamorphosis. After being changed into a fountain, her story finds little audience beyond the borders of her own land. She is as easily forgotten as a repetitious author (9.666-68):

> Fama novi centum Cretaeas forsitan urbes
> inplesset monstri, si non miracula nuper
> Iphide mutata Crete propiora tulisset.
>
> Perhaps the rumor of the new wonder would have
> taken the hundred cities of Crete by storm —
> that is, if the fresh homegrown miracle of
> Iphis' transformation had not done so instead.

THE LETTER OF THE LAW

We have traced a pronounced pattern of repetition and preference for Self/Same throughout the episodes of book 9, as well as a leitmotif of limit and transgression. But what drives the thematic coherence of book 9 — to what purpose has Ovid drawn together its tales under these odd implied rubrics? The answer lies — as in so many romances, family or otherwise — in a letter: Byblis' letter to her brother.

Byblis' letter is quite long, as we remarked earlier — so long, in fact, that she has to finish her message in the margins. Byblis is an expansive writer — as is her creator, Ovid. Her repetition of one of his prominent authorial traits urges us to consider what expansion means to Ovid, and how this reflects upon its appearance in book 9.

Ovid often explores the possibilities of expansion as a literary trope. When a catalogue is called for, he is likely to double or triple its size over comparable versions of the same story.[22] Gordon Williams

22 E.g., the naming of 37 warrior's names in Meleager's hunting party (*Met.* 8.299-317) (Apollodorus [1.8.2] names only 20); the use of 26 comparisons to describe Galatea in Polyphemus' speech to her (*Met.* 13.789-807) (Theokritos [*Idyll* 11] uses only 4).

calls Ovid the inventor of "the list" as an important feature of Roman literature, and goes on to cite examples from the *Metamorphoses*.[23] But Ovid's expansionist tendency is already apparent in the elegiacs. Consider the multiplication of exempla, the leisurely divagations into barely germane myths, the metaphors piled on metaphors, that characterize the *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria*, *Remedia Amoris* and *Heroides*.[24]

Ovid's garrulousness fits our initial discussion of repetition and difference as organizing Roman authors' relation to the literary past. Expansion, as Williams notes,[25] is one way of drawing a difference between the latecomer's version of traditional topoi and preceding redactions. (Williams points to Vergil's mere 8 lines to describe one man's stand against an army, as against Lucan's proliferation of details into 23 lines;[26] to the *Aeneid*'s single vision of the Underworld, as opposed to the *Thebaid*'s two[27] — and so on.) Though not the only possible trope, expansion holds a particular interest for Ovid. Expansion is a response to the necessity of deploying finite poetic resources of form and content over infinite time (or if not infinite, well long enough to exhaust invention completely — unless one resorts to repetition). Expansion under this set of parameters points to its logical conclusion, the using up of all new possibilities. Its trajectory therefore intersects the very problem it is deployed to solve: exhaustion — in particular, the exhaustion of the Roman literary tradition, struggling with its own sense of belatedness.

That Ovid is, willy-nilly, in the posture of wringing blood from stone is evident already from such poems as *Amores* 1.9., which begins *and* ends the opening distich by repeating the same phrase(1-2):

23 Williams 1978.215.

24 For examples of: multiplication of *exempla*, see *Amores* 1.10.1-8; 2.8.11-14; 2.5.35-42; the development of incongruous mythical parallels, see *Ars Amatoria* 1.283-342, 3.687-746; *Heroides* 14.85-108; multiplication of metaphors, see *Remedia Amoris* 79-134.

25 See Williams 1978.193-232, 254-71, 293.

26 *Aeneid* 9.806-14 (Turnus against the Trojans) with *Bellum Civile* 6.192-206, 214-19, 224-25 (Scaeva against Pompey's army), quoted and discussed by Williams 1978.199-201.

27 *Aeneid* 6, *Thebaid* 7.771-823 and 8.1-126, cited and discussed by Williams 1978.197-98.

Militat omnis amans, et habet sua castra Cupido;
Attice, crede mihi, militat omnis amans.

Every lover is a soldier, and Cupid has his own camp;
Believe me, Atticus, every lover is a soldier.

The precise repetition of the same words to open and close, ring-fashion, the poem's programmatic couplet;[28] the unmotivated apostrophe ("Attice, crede mihi") tossed in as filler; the metrical pattern exactly repeated in *both* halves of the pentameter[29] — these details point to an aporia of exhaustion. The topoi of elegy, such as this worn analogy between martial and amorous arts, have nothing left to yield. Yet Ovid goes on to ring the changes on the exhausted simile through every possible permutation for another 44 lines.

Byblis' epistolary loquacity is a reflection of her author's self-parody, of his Daedalian entrapment within a set of constraints that continually draw his steps over too familiar ground. Adding to the irony is the fact that Ovid, like Daedalus, helped create his own dilemma. As William Levitan has observed:[30]

> . . . as the tradition developed, the sociology of Roman literary language placed increasingly severe restrictions on the stock of linguistic resources available to its poets, a process in which the poets themselves collaborated. The greatest practitioners of Roman verse — Ovid, Horace, Virgil, Catullus, Terence — were also the great refiners, the great limiters of vocabulary, syntax, meter, theme, defining the imposing set of prohibitions that constituted literary decorum.

28 Such circularity is used elsewhere in Ovid's elegiac work (*Amores* 1.4.13-14, for example) — but *not* in the uniquely important opening distich, where Ovid characteristically sets the program for all the lines to follow (see Luck 1959.151). Repetition in this distich suggests that repetition is itself part of the elegy's thematic focus.

29 Noted by Barsby 1973.107.

30 Levitan 1985.268. For another, more sociologically based formulation of this refining process, see Auerbach 1965.248-52 and 334.

Thus the Roman versifiers conspired to construct their own labyrinth of verbal art.

This explains the images of labyrinthine entrapment and the narrowing of choice to Self/Same that govern book 9, as allegorical corollaries to the gradual delimitation of the field of creative possibility.[31] But we need to refine our enquiry further, and to consider the conceptual background behind Levitan's discussion of Roman literary history; it ultimately rests (as he himself acknowledges)[32] upon Harold Bloom's concept of the "anxiety of influence."[33] Bloom maps Freud's delineation of the Oedipal conflict onto the relationship between poets. But neither Bloom's concepts nor Levitan's refinement of them can explain the prominence of the incest theme in book 9. We need to draw upon the work of *another* interpreter of Freud, Jacques Lacan, to explicate fully the incest theme's significance, and to fit it into the problematic defined by "anxious influence."

Lacan's analysis of the Oedipal conflict differs from Freud's in two ways: first, he places the conflict in a much earlier phase of childhood development (between 6 and 18 months, rather than 5 years of age); second, he considers the conflict a more comprehensive determinant of the child's humanity. For Lacan, the Oedipal conflict articulates the connection between the formation of identity, the acquisition of language, and the entry into culture. In Lacan's view of development, the initial relationship between mother and child is unlimited, i.e., the infant recognizes no division between itself and its

31 An allegory with an impeccable pedigree: Callimachus' response to the same dilemma of being a "latecomer" in relation to the earlier *Greek* tradition — especially Homer — was to narrow the scope of his poetic ambition. He laid emphasis upon selection and discrimination in his poetry, eschewing epic values such as "grand scale" and comprehensive treatment of a storyline. He thus effectively took himself out of competition with Homer entirely. Accordingly, figures of narrow boundaries and exiguous limits govern his pronouncements on aesthetics: he depicts Apollo instructing him to follow the "narrow way" and avoid the "wide path" trodden by every common wagon (*Aetia* 1.22-28).

Callimachean aesthetics are, of course, a key conceptual thread to much of Roman poetry under the Republic, and almost all Roman literature under the Empire. See Clausen 1964.188-96, for a brief recapitulation of Callimachus' influence on Roman literature; greater detail and an in-depth analysis may be found in Wimmel 1960.

32 Levitan 1985.267 and n. 38.

33 Explicated in Bloom 1973.

mother. The two are effectively one organism. The father precipitates the infant's entry into identity, culture and language by breaking up the dyadic relationship between mother and child: father competes with child for the mother's love. The consequent separation (however temporary and sporadic) between mother and infant introduces the latter to concepts of difference and division — and thus to a concept of Self as opposed to (m)Other. Moreover, to compensate for the sense of loss consequent upon this separation, the infant begins to use language to fill the gap and to master the objects within its universe. The father, therefore, is the infant's introduction to the concept of limit: limit as defining the Self, its spatial and psychic boundaries; limit imposed on desire — Law; limit as the foundation of language — the conceptual boundary that distinguishes one signifier from the other, making meaning possible by drawing differences between members of the linguistic system. This multifarious function is comprehended under Lacan's term the "Name-of-the-Father."[34]

And it is this function, according to Lacan, that conditions the incest taboo. The taboo metonymically rehearses the whole code of boundaries imposed upon each entrant into human culture and its basis in language. No sign exists in the body whereby one sibling may recognize another as a close blood relative, thus interdicted from desire. Sister knows brother only through the function of language — through naming, and primarily through the relation of each to the Name-of-the-Father. To observe the taboo is to acquiesce to the symbolic function of the Father as drawer of limits — exactly parallel to the function of Ovid's literary predecessors as those who have narrowed the boundaries of creative endeavor.[35]

How appropriate, then, that Byblis, being the repository of Ovid's thoughts on his own belatedness in relation to all his literary "fathers," and on all the restrictions imposed by his entry into the most

[34] The ideas I have summarized in these paragraphs form recurrent motives throughout Lacan's work. However, the texts I regard as central to understanding his thinking on the infant's steps toward definition of Self and the acquisition of language, as well as the interrelation of law, language, and incest, all appear in the bibliography at the end of this essay. In addition, the reader should refer to J.-B. Pontalis' summary of the otherwise unpublished "Les formations de l'inconscient" (Pontalis 1958). Lacan 1949 and 1956 have been collected in Lacan 1966.93-100 and 237-322, and translated in Sheridan 1977.1-7 and 30-113.

[35] See Lacan 1966.277-78 and Sheridan 1977.66-67.

highly refined arena of language, poetry, should attempt to transgress the incest taboo that ratifies the Father's power. Appropriate, too, that her use of language in her poetic letter should transgress limits: spatial limits defined by her wax tablets, and ethical limits defined by the sexual code.[36]

Byblis is the projected possibility of getting lost in the necessity to repeat. Ovid exploits the pun implicit in her name: she becomes a *biblos* indeed, a "book" that is a chrestomathy of her creator's *oeuvre*.[37] Byblis' control over her life story eventually dwindles to nothing, as she becomes more and more manifestly a puppet whose strings are jerked by intertextuality.

Ultimately (unlike Byblis) Ovid is *not* lost in the narrowing labyrinth of art — but it has taken centuries of nice adjustment of critical faculties to see him as more than a Vergil *manqué*. In T. F. Higham's words:[38]

> Ovid died, for at least the third time, in the nineteenth century, and was buried deep under mountains of disparaging argument to make a throne for Virgil.

Set against the history of Ovid's critical reception, Byblis' tragedy and the intricately repetitive patterns of book 9 speak to the *reader's* position within a labyrinth of assumed proprieties, as well as the poet's. Critics have often been guilty of expecting Ovid to replicate faithfully the successes of his illustrious predecessors — and have been baffled by his refusal to do so. Though happily this critical trend has been reversed, to some extent, in recent years, book 9 reads as a useful admonition of the imprisoning power of a frame of reference. As readers, we cannot function without one — and yet (as Ovid makes us see) our responsibility is continually to push against the limits it places on our imaginations.

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[36] The sequel to her initial transgression in the letter is explicitly phrased as the crossing of a boundary in 9.631-32: in repeatedly petitioning Caunus, she *modumque exit* "she passes the limit, exceeds the bounds."

[37] While Ahl 1985.211 notes the pun, he draws different conclusions from it.

[38] Higham 1934.105.

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THE DILEMMA OF WRITING: AUGUSTINE, *CONFESSIONS* 4.6 AND HORACE, *ODES* 1.3[1]

JOSEPH PUCCI

Mirabar enim ceteros mortales vivere, quia ille, quem quasi non moriturum dilexeram, mortuus erat, et me magis quia ille alter eram, vivere illo mortuo mirabar. Bene quidam dixit de amico suo: dimidium animae meae.[2]

(*Conf.* 4.6.27-28)

For I wondered that other mortals were living, because he whom I had loved as if he would not ever die had indeed died, and I wondered more that I was living rather than he, because I was his other self. Well Horace put it of Virgil: "the other half of my soul."

Sic te diva potens Cypri,
sic fratres Helenae, lucida sidera,
ventorumque regat pater

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2 My edition of the *Confessions* is Skutella, Solignac, Trehorel, Boussou 1962.