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VERSIONS OF EPIC MASCULINITY IN OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES*

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From Homer to Claudian, classical epic was a privileged site for negotiating questions of masculine identity. Taking their cue from Homer, who recounts the 'famous deeds of men' (κλέα ἀνδρῶν, *Il.* 9.186, *Od.* 8.73),[1] the ancient epic poets subject to scrutiny the privileges and protocols of manhood (ἀνδρεία, *uirtus*) and military prowess (ἀριστεία, *uirtus*). Thus Apollonius of Rhodes restricts membership among the Argonauts to men in his *Argonautica* (1.769–73), an epic which has been shown to centre on the initiation of a group of Greek ephebes into adult manhood.[2] Additional pressure on gender may be felt in Latin epic, given the centrality of *uir-tus* in all its senses to the genre at Rome. Critics have recently argued that the earliest Roman epicists – Livius Andronicus, Naevius and Ennius – self-consciously emulated Homer in order to establish a native Roman 'poetry that trains *men*'.[3] Although we cannot be certain that the lost republican epics of Hostius, the Furii, and others, followed their lead, both Lucretius' *De rerum natura* and Virgil's *Aeneid* conform to this generic standard in celebrating 'the creation of a certain kind of self'.[4] As Georgia Nugent has trenchantly observed, the self that is the subject of classical epic is always male.

This paper examines some versions of epic masculinity in the *Metamorphoses* in the context of the traditional focus of classical epic and its readers on manhood and 'the man' (ἄνδρα, *Od.* 1.1; *uirum*, *Aen.* 1.1). In particular, I consider Ovid's construction of male subjectivity through contrast with the female in connection both with heroes who appear in earlier epic (in the Trojan war and the battle of Centaurs and Lapiths) and with characters who are implicitly contrasted with the heroes of the epic tradition (Caeneus and Theseus, implicitly measured against Achilles, Perseus and Hermaphroditus against Odysseus). Although female characters are notably absent from the heroic contests of extant Greek epic, they are frequently featured in prominent roles in Latin epic from Virgil's *Aeneid* to Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae*.[5] In this study I argue that Ovid makes comparison with the female an important standard against which he scrutinizes heroic masculinity in epicizing episodes of the *Metamorphoses*.

Recent feminist criticism has demonstrated that theorists of narrative have employed the term 'subject' to define one of two positions available to characters within a narrative, namely active subject or passive object. Feminist critics have articulated a vigorous critique of this essentializing tradition of western narrative and theory.[6] Teresa de Lauretis, whose work in cinema studies and semiotics has contributed to a feminist theory of subjectivity, has argued that 'subjectivity is engaged in the cogs of narrative and indeed constituted in the relation of narrative, meaning and desire; so that the very work of narrativity is the engagement of the subject in certain positionalities of meaning and desire'.[7] De Lauretis makes gender a central critical tool in her theory of subjectivity and argues that sexual difference lies at the heart of narrative: '[t]he work of narrative ... is a mapping of differences, and specifically, first and foremost, of sexual difference into each text.'[8] Although de Lauretis works principally on twentieth-century cinematic narrative, she draws on the literature of psychoanalysis and semiotics to develop a theory of the gendered subject in western narrative and of the process by which subjectivity is engendered in that tradition. Noting the critical consensus that the fundamental form narrative takes 'seems to be that of a passage, a transformation predicated on the figure of a hero, a mythical subject', de Lauretis demonstrates that 'this view of myth and narrative rests on a specific assumption about sexual difference'.[9] Her formulaion of this view, developed in a discussion of the classical myths of Oedipus and Perseus (popularized in the writings of Freud), is highly relevant to an examination of classical epic:

> The hero, the mythical subject, is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter.[10]

Classicists have often treated the epic hero as the founder and guarantor of culture, but our studies of epic heroism have commonly been framed in terms of the threefold oppositions generated by the sequence 'god–man–beast'.[11] Less frequently investigated in

[1] Cf. παλαιγενέων κλέα φωτῶν ('famous deeds of men of long ago', Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 1.1); *maxima facta patrum* ('greatest deeds of our forefathers', Enn. *Epigr.* fr. 45.2 Courtney); *arma uirumque cano*

[5] On women in Latin epic see Nugent (1990), (1994), and (forthcoming); Oliensis (1997); and Keith (2000). The present study reworks some material from chapters three and four of Keith (2000) which consider the association of women in Latin epic with earth and war respectively.

[6] See e.g. de Lauretis (1984) and (1987); Mulvey (1990).

[7] de Lauretis (1984) 106.

this connection is the opposition between male and female inherent in the middle term 'man'.[12] I shall argue, however, that Ovid not only retains the focus of earlier Greek and Latin epic on measuring man against the standards of god and beast but that he explicitly develops the scrutiny of gender difference implicit in classical epic as early as Homer and Hesiod.

An important corollary to de Lauretis' theory of the gendered subject is the concept of the gendered look. The 'male gaze', a critical term I borrow from film theory, describes a congruence between the active gaze of the camera, the active gaze of the spectator, and the active gaze of male characters, all three converging upon the passive female within the filmic narrative who 'can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*'.[13] While the camera objectifies both male and female characters in the construction of the filmic narrative, female characters are doubly objectified, first by the gaze of the camera in the construction of the film and then by the gaze of the male characters within the film. The concept of the male gaze is a useful heuristic device for the interpretation of non-cinematic narrative as well, since it is analogous to narrative focalization. Many critics have demonstrated that the narrative perspective of classical epic is largely androcentric: Bakhtin, for example, identifies the focus of the genre as 'firsts, founders and fathers', and draws attention to the way in which classical epic provides a myth of origins that explains and legitimates a social order that we define as patriarchal.[14] Moreover, male narrators tend to control the narrative within classical epic. Male control over epic narrative extends from the male poet to the plot as the fulfilment or celebration of the will of Zeus (in Homeric and Hesiodic epic respectively) and the Virgilian identification of destiny with the speech of Jupiter in the *Aeneid*.[15] While there is no comparable congruence between the plot of Ovid's poem and a plot of Jupiter within the poem, one of the features of the *Metamorphoses* which I investigate in this paper is the extent to which such gendered narrative focalization may be identified in the poem.[16]

Ovid explores the interconnections linking control of the gaze with subjectivity in the tale of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis (4.285–388),[17] narrated by the Minyad Alcithoe to her sisters as they spin and weave among their maidservants. The episode is not usually scrutinized for epic themes before Salmacis' address to Hermaphroditus, in which Ovid reworks Odysseus' speech of supplication to Nausicaa in the sixth book of the *Odyssey*, but analysis reveals several points of contact between Hermaphroditus and the epic heroes Odysseus and Aeneas.[18] Hermaphroditus, the son of Mercury and

[12] But see the exemplary discussions of Holmberg (1995) on the *Odyssey*; and Loraux (1995) 75–139, mostly on the *Iliad*.
[13] Mulvey (1990) 33–8, quote at 33.
[14] Bakhtin (1981) 13–15, quote at 13.
[15] See Holmberg (1995) on Homer; Commager (1981) on the *Aeneid*, and cf. Feeney (1991) 129–87.
[16] Cf. A. Barchiesi, in this volume.
[17] Nugent (1990) 165–74 theorizes the link between the gaze and masculine erotics in this passage by reference to psychoanalytic and film criticism.
[18] I cite the *Metamorphoses* from the text of Miller (1977); all translations are my own.

Venus, is reared by the nymphs of Ida (4.288–9), in just the way that Venus wanted another son, Aeneas, to be raised (*h.Hom.* 5.256–8).[19] Like Aeneas, Hermaphroditus leaves his home in the Troad to undertake a journey, but his travels have still more in common with those of Odysseus, for like the Greek hero Hermaphroditus leaves the Troad to visit unfamiliar cities and places (4.292–5).[20] His wanderings (cf. *errare*, 4.294) are thus analogous to those of Odysseus on his return from Troy, during which he sees the cities of many men (*Od.* 1.3). While visiting Lycia and Caria, Hermaphroditus comes upon a spring in which dwells the nymph Salmacis (4.297–315). His arrival in her landscape is reminiscent of Odysseus' arrival at the isolated island homes of the nymphs Calypso and Circe, but rehearses still more closely the Homeric hero's approach to Nausicaa and her companions who, after washing clothing in the river, bathe and anoint themselves before enjoying a picnic lunch and playing ball (*Od.* 6.93–100). Salmacis similarly besports herself by the banks of her spring, although the Ovidian narrator emphasizes the nymph's interest in primping, preening, and plucking flowers (4.310–16), an activity (like ball-playing) that carries a strong suggestion of eroticism in classical literature and frequently presages a rape.[21]

Until the moment when Salmacis sees Hermaphroditus, then, the Ovidian narrative proceeds on a gendered narrative trajectory that distinguishes the male epic hero from the feminized site of his labours: Hermaphroditus, a mobile male hero (like Odysseus or Aeneas) arrives in the course of his voyage of (self-)discovery at the home of Salmacis, an immobile female obstacle (like Nausicaa or Dido). The very framework of the tale encodes the gendered dichotomy of 'male–hero–human, on the side of the subject; and female–obstacle–boundary-space, on the other' identified by de Lauretis as intrinsic to western narrative.[22] But Salmacis is, if anything, even more closely associated with plot-space than her counterparts in earlier epic, for as the eponymous nymph of her spring she quite literally embodies the landscape through which Hermaphroditus travels.[23]

Introduced 'as a feature of the natural landscape',[24] Salmacis is a clear Lycian spring 'of shining water' (*lucentis ... lymphae*, 4.297–8), home to an indigenous nymph (*nympha*, 4.302) of the same name; a pun on *Lycia* in *lucentis* grounds Salmacis still more firmly to the place.[25] Throughout the episode, Salmacis is described in diction applicable to both spring and nymph; even the syntax constructs a neat parallelism

[19] τὸν μέν, ἐπὴν δὴ πρῶτον ἴδῃ φάος ἠελίοιο, | Νύμφαι μιν θρέψουσιν ὀρεσκῷοι, βαθύκολποι, | αἳ τόδε ναιετάουσιν ὄρος μέγα τε ζάθεόν τε ('as for the boy, as soon as he sees the light of the sun, the deep-girdled mountain Nymphs who dwell on this great and holy mountain will bring him up', *h.Hom.* 5.256–8).
[20] Cf. Labate (1993) 53–4: 'Ermafrodito si lascia trascinare da una odissiaca smania di conoscenza che lo porta lontano dai rassicuranti luoghi dell'infanzia, di terra in terra, di città in città ...'
[21] Cf. the account of Persephone's rape in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. On the motif in the *Metamorphoses*, see Parry (1964) and Segal (1969).
[22] de Lauretis (1984) 121.
[23] The following discussion reproduces part of the argument of Keith (2000), chapter three.
[24] Nugent (1990) 166.
[25] My thanks to Philip Hardie for this formulation.

between them.[26] The interplay is particularly well developed in the overlap between the attributes lacking to both pool and nymph. Just as the spring Salmacis lacks the Ovidian pool's customary accessories of reeds, sedge, and rushes with sharp points (*non illic canna palustris | nec steriles uluae nec acuta cuspide iunci*, 'there were no marsh-reeds there, nor barren sedge, nor sharp-pointed rushes', 4.298–9), so the nymph Salmacis foregoes the nymphs' customary activities of hunting and foot-racing (*nec uenatibus apta nec arcus | flectere quae soleat nec quae contendere cursu*, 'nor was she suited to the hunt, nor was she in the habit of flexing a bow or competing in a race', 4.302–3). Since rushes with sharp points characteristically supply the material for hunter's arrows with their own sharp points in the poem (e.g. 1.468–71), their omission from the landscape in which the spring is set coheres with the nymph's lack of hunting paraphernalia. And perhaps her lack of an *arcus* (4.302), 'hunting bow', is related to her spring's lack of an *arcus*, natural 'arch', such as defines the setting in which Diana bathes earlier in the poem (3.160). The nymph's 'transparent clothing' (*perlucenti ... amictu*, 4.313), reflects the lucidity of her waters (*lucentis ... lymphae*, 4.297–8; cf. *perspicuus liquor*, 'clear water', 4.300). Even Salmacis' use of the clear waters of her spring as a mirror in which to check her appearance (*spectatas consulit undas*, 'she looked at the water and consulted', 4.312), is paralleled by the poet's description of her eyes blazing like the reflected image of the sun (*flagrant quoque lumina nymphae, | non aliter, quam cum puro nitidissimus orbe | opposita speculi referitur imagine Phoebus*, 'in which the nymph's eyes blazed just as the sun-god at his most radiant in a bright orb is reflected in a mirror's surface held opposite', 4.347–9), as though her person itself exhibited the catoptric properties of a mirror.

When Hermaphroditus arrives in this feminized landscape, however, Ovid's female narrator disrupts the normative sexual hierarchy of epic by reversing the focalization of the narrative implicit in the control of the gaze. As Hermaphroditus admiringly surveys Salmacis' spring (*uidet hic stagnum lucentis ad imum | usque solum lymphae*, 'he saw here a pool of water clear all the way to the very bottom', 4.297–8), the narrative focalization switches to Salmacis, whose preferences in dress and activities are set out at some length (4.302–15). Hermaphroditus then returns to the narrative not as the subject of the gaze but as the object of the nymph's (*et tum quoque forte legebat, | cum puerum uidit uisumque optauit habere*, 'and then too she happened to be picking flowers, when she saw the boy and no sooner saw him than desired to have him', 4.315–16). Indeed, in wholesale inversion of the normative gender roles of epic, the nymph proceeds to proposition Hermaphroditus (4.320–8), on the model of Odysseus' smooth-tongued supplication of Nausicaa in the *Odyssey* (6.149–59). Salmacis thus wrests control of both gaze and epic model from Hermaphroditus: here, if anywhere in Latin narrative, a female character aspires to the role of the (mobile, male) hero of epic.[27]

[27] ...tion (though one compatible with my own) ... to how she

Salmacis, however, like Hermaphroditus before her, proves unable to sustain the demands of the Odyssean role. Her assertion of epic subjectivity is hindered by two features of the narrative: as a female, she is finally unable to usurp control of the gaze from the male; and as a toponym, she is reduced in the end to nothing more than a place, plot-space. Seeing and desiring Hermaphroditus, Salmacis' first action is to offer herself to his gaze: *nec tamen ante adiit, etsi properabat adire, | quam se conposuit, quam circumspexit amictus | et finxit uultum et meruit formosa uideri* ('nor nevertheless did she approach him, even though she hastened to approach, before she had composed herself, looked over her clothing, made up her face and was fit to appear beautiful', 4.317–19). At the conclusion of the tale neither nymph nor boy can be seen in the new creature fused from them, though it resembles both (*nec femina dici | nec puer ut possit, neutrumque et utrumque uidentur*, 'so that it could be called neither woman nor boy, and seemed to be both and neither', 4.378–9). When he sees his 'softened' limbs (*ergo, ubi se liquidas, quo uir descenderat, undas | semimarem fecisse uidet mollitaque in illis | membra, manus tendens, sed iam non uoce uirili, | Hermaphroditus ait*, 'and so, when he saw that the clear waters, into which he had descended a man, had made him a hermaphrodite and his limbs had been softened in them, he raised his hands and said in a voice no longer manly', 4.380–3), Hermaphroditus attempts to reassert his control over the gaze and concomitant mastery over the narrative trajectory by praying that all men who enter the spring be emasculated in its waters (4.383–6). His prayer, ratified by the gods (4.387–8), explains and justifies the ill repute of the spring with which the tale opens (4.285–6).

The story supplies an aetiology for the enervating effect of the spring Salmacis on those who bathe in it, and the internal narrator, Alcithoe, identifies Hermaphroditus as the original emasculated bather. From the outset of the tale then, she represents contact with the spring as emasculating (4.285–7, 370–88; cf. 15.319–20) – but for whom? Georgia Nugent has pointed out that 'both in appearance and in name [Hermaphroditus] already unites masculine and feminine aspects, before he even encounters Salmacis'.[28] There is indeed an intriguing slippage here, for the conclusion of the story is so structured as to suggest a symbolic (re)birth, with Hermaphroditus – named only at 4.383 – emerging new-born, or at least new-formed, from Salmacis' pool (4.380–2).[29] Although the 'softening' effect that the spring has on Hermaphroditus recalls not only the feminine softness of Salmacis' body and life,[30] but also the tender leaves and grasses surrounding the spring and on which the nymph reclined (*mollibus aut foliis aut mollibus incubat herbis*, 'she lies down on the soft leaves or the soft grass', 4.314). Hermaphroditus' appearance, *persona*, voice and name remain recognizably his – and his alone – at the end of the episode (4.383–6).

[28] Nugent (1990) 163; cf. 176–7.
[29] Cf. Nugent (1990) 170.
[30] Varro (*apud* Lact. Opif. 12.17) ...

Thus the episode can be read (and indeed has been)[31] as paradigmatic of the erasure of female subjectivity in the single-minded assertion of masculinity that is commonly agreed to characterize the epic genre. Alcithoe's tale is nonetheless open to other interpretations. For if Salmacis is finally unable to sustain the role of masculine subject in the Minyad's tale, Hermaphroditus signally fails to differentiate himself from the female and so cannot himself be said to have achieved full masculine subjectivity. After all, Alcithoe shows how fully Salmacis achieves her desire at the price of Hermaphroditus': although the youth's final wish is realized at the conclusion of the tale, the narrator emphasizes that a permanent union with Salmacis was never remotely his intention. Alcithoe thus grants to Salmacis her heart's desire while denying to Hermaphroditus all but his final wish. Moreover we should consider the congruence between Hermaphroditus' final prayer (*'quisquis in hos fontes uir uenerit, exeat inde | semiuir et tactis subito mollescat in undis!'*, 'whoever should enter this spring a man, let him leave it a hermaphrodite and let him be softened suddenly in the silent waters', 4.385–6) and Alcithoe's introductory formulation of her plot (*'unde sit infamis, quare male fortibus undis | Salmacis eneruet tactosque remolliat artus, | discite'*, 'learn whence comes the spring's ill repute, why Salmacis enervates with her wickedly strong waters and softens the limbs she touches', 4.285–7) from the perspective of the (female) narrator rather than her (male) character: the conclusion of the tale is her design, not his.

Gender difference, which the narrator both emphasizes and blurs, is further complicated when we consider the markedly feminine context in which the tale is embedded. The last of the three Minyads to entertain the women spinning and weaving within the house, Alcithoe narrates the origin of the transsexual hermaphrodite as she and her sisters spurn the rites of Bacchus, a god who presides over gender confusion (3.531–58) and in whose appearance gender categories are confused (3.607, 4.17–20). Alcithoe prefaces her tale with a *praeteritio* in which she adumbrates several narrative possibilities she will not pursue (4.276–84): the death of the shepherd Daphnis, transformed into a rock by a nymph out of anger over a rival; the shifting gender of Sithon, sometimes man and sometimes woman; the transformation of Celmus, loyal to the infant Jupiter, into adamant; the birth of the Curetes from rain-showers; and the metamorphosis of Crocus and Smilax into small flowers. It is significant that the tales which Alcithoe adumbrates here take youths and even children as their central characters, for with these tales, which she explicitly forgoes as too well known for her audience, she implicitly rejects the epic hero (*uir*) and his exploits of valour (*uirtus*) as subjects of interest to her and her (exclusively female) audience. Her treatment of 'Salmacis and Hermaphroditus' is consistent with this implied rejection of *uirtus*. Throughout the tale she characterizes Hermaphroditus as an inexperienced boy (*puer*, 4.288, 316, 320, 329, 379), and she applies the term 'man' (*uir*) to Hermaphroditus only at the moment of his irrevocable loss of masculinity (4.380–2, quoted above).

Alcithoe thus disrupts the conventional sexual hierarchy of epic by reducing a potential epic *uir* to the status of *semiuir* ('half-man', 4.386) in the form of a hermaphrodite. If, then, the tale of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus at first seems to lend itself to de Lauretian investigation, it ultimately resists schematic binary analysis of male and female to set in play a far more complex and fluid account of gender. The gynocentric context in which 'Salmacis and Hermaphroditus' is narrated offers Ovid the opportunity both to acknowledge and to deconstruct the traditional epic hierarchy of gender.

The heroic masculinity (*uirtus*) Alcithoe denies to Hermaphroditus is fully realized by Perseus in the 'Perseis' which the poet narrates *in propria persona* towards the end of book four. Like Hermaphroditus, Perseus is a solitary voyager who travels through a series of feminized landscapes: the well-fortified dwelling of the Graeae, the twin daughters of Phorcys and Ceto (4.773–5); the house of the Gorgons (4.778–9); Libya, a figuratively maternal landscape which bears snakes after being fertilized by the blood that drips from the head of the Medusa (4.618–20); the garden of the Hesperides over which Atlas presides (4.628); and the rocky crag on which a 'marble' Andromeda, whom Perseus almost mistakes for a statue, is exposed to the sea-monster (4.672–5). Andromeda's chains expose the figurative immobility in this narrative sequence of the female characters who represent the fixed positions to and from which the mobile male hero travels. Moving from one feminized landscape to another, Perseus finds his heroic mettle tested in a series of trials (*labor*, 'toil', 4.739; *factum*, 'deed', 4.757; *pericula*, 'dangers', 4.787), in the course of which he bests representatives of the divine, human and bestial realms.

Throughout this sequence, the poet compares Perseus to Hercules, who has been identified as the epic hero *par excellence* (despite the fact that there is no extant epic on his exploits).[32] Ovid alludes to Hercules' theft of the apples of the Hesperides in the course of his treatment of Perseus' encounter with Atlas (4.644–5) and applies the noun *labor* ('labour, toil, exertion') to Perseus' conquest of the sea-monster (4.739; cf. Virgil's Herculean Aeneas, *Aen.* 1.10). Just as the golden apples of the Hesperides' garden will be despoiled by Hercules,[33] so Medusa's head is the spoil, won by heroic valour (*'fare, precor, Perseu, quanta uirtute quibusque | artibus abstuleris crinita draconibus ora!'*, 'tell us Perseus, please, by what great prowess and with what arts you stole the snaky-haired head', 4.770), which confers on Perseus the lasting renown of the epic hero (*spolium memorabile*, 'the remarkable spoil', 4.615). Another prize worthy of the hero is Andromeda herself, both the reason for and the reward of Perseus' battle with the sea-monster (*pretiumque et causa laboris*, 'price and cause of his labour', 4.739; *tanti praemia facti*, 'the reward of so great a deed', 4.757; cf. *praemia*, 'the reward' 5.25). If his Herculean deliverance of the helpless maiden from

[32] Hardie (1993) 66; cf. Loraux (1995) 116–18, 138.

[33] Cf. *Met.* 9.188–90, where Hercules reminds himself of this labour: *uestra uirtute relatus | Thermodontiaco caelatus balteus auro, | pomaque ab insomni concustodita dracone* ('by your valour was won the Amazon's engraved sword-belt of gold from the river Thermodon, and the fruit guarded by the sleepless snake').

the monster[34] constitutes proof of his heroic masculinity in book four (*ut mea sit seruata mea uirtute, paciscor*, 'I stipulate that, saved by my valour, she be mine', 4.703), his Odyssean defence of his bride against Phineus and his retainers provides confirmation of it in book five (cf. 5.177).

Ovid documents in the Perseus narrative the correlation between the male gaze and masculine subjectivity, which come together in the visual objectification of women (Medusa, Andromeda) and landscape (Libya) to confirm the superiority of male over female. Perseus' success in winning the Gorgon's head is preceded by and predicated on his theft of the single eye shared by the Graeae, the guardians of Medusa (*geminas habitasse sorores | Phorcidas unius partitas luminis usum; | id se sollerti furtim, dum traditur, astu | supposita cepisse manu*, 'twin sisters lived there, the daughters of Phorcys, who shared the use of one eye; he stole it with cunning guile, as it was being passed from one to the other, sticking his hand out for it', 4.774–7).[35] Thereafter Perseus focalizes both the landscapes over which he flies (4.624, 669, 731, 780, 788), and the two female objects of his heroic labours, Andromeda (4.673) and Medusa (4.783). Andromeda's beauty attracts Perseus' prolonged gaze (4.672–7; cf. Phineus', 5.22), much as the petrifying sight of Medusa's snaky head compels the eternal gaze of those who look directly upon her (4.780–1; cf. 5.177–209). The compulsion to gaze forever bequeathed by Medusa's snaky head extends the effect of Medusa's striking looks already observable, according to Perseus, before her hair was transformed into snakes. Once considered the most beautiful of her sisters, Medusa possessed no attribute that attracted more attention – literally, 'was more worth looking at' – than her hair: *nec in tota conspectior ulla capillis | pars fuit* ('nor was there any part more worth looking at in the whole than her hair', 4.796–7). Both Medusa and Andromeda, as mesmerizing objects of the gaze, endanger the men who look at them.[36] Indeed the episode invites interpretation as an exploration of the risks entailed by the male in his control of the gaze.[37] Perseus' stupefaction at the sight of the chained Andromeda is almost his undoing (*et stupet et uisae correptus imagine formae | paene suas quatere est oblitus in aere pennas*, 'he was stunned and, carried away by the picture of beauty he saw, he almost forgot to beat his wings in the air', 4.676–7), and anticipates the permanent immobilization of Phineus' men upon viewing Medusa's head (*bis centum restabant corpora pugnae, | Gorgone bis centum riguerunt corpora uisa*, 'two hundred bodies survived the battle, but at the sight of the Gorgon two hunderd bodies grew stiff', 5.208–9). The danger is exemplified in the transformation of Astyages into a statue which faithfully preserves his awestruck gaze: *dum stupet Astyages, naturam traxit eandem, | marmoreoque manet uultus mirantis in ore* ('while Astyages was stunned, he took on the same quality and a look of amazement remained on his marble face', 4.205–6).

[34] Cf. Hercules' rescue of Hesione from the sea-monster sent by Neptune because of Laomedon's perjury, known already to Homer (*Il.* 20.145–8) and treated by Ovid later in the *Metamorphoses* (11.194–217). Valerius Flaccus narrates the exploit at length in a passage that extensively reworks Ovid's 'Perseus and Andromeda' (*Arg.* 2.445–578): see Poortvliet (1991) 239–43.

Ovid sketches Perseus as an exemplary Herculean–Odyssean hero and an exponent of the epic virility to which Hermaphroditus aspires but which he never finally achieves.[38] Perseus' successful challenges to representatives of the divine, the bestial, and the human exemplify the singularity of the epic hero's achievement and his alienation from his peers, which Philip Hardie has identified as the epic hero's ambition for 'a lonely pre-eminence'.[39] In his complete isolation from his fellows, however, Perseus constitutes a paradigm of epic masculinity of little interest to Ovid, who treats Hercules' singular heroic labours only briefly and in retrospective summary (*Met.* 9.182–99),[40] and similarly subordinates the narrative of Theseus' individual exploits (8.169–76, 262–9) to his participation in the Calydonian boar hunt (8.270–444). In the *Metamorphoses* Ovid prefers to explore the construction of masculinity within groups of men, the epic hero's competition for pre-eminence among his fellows rather than in isolation from them. This focus on competition between men offers a challenge to the reductive binarism implicit in the theory of subjectivity critiqued by de Lauretis, and opens an array of masculine (and feminine) positionalities in Ovidian epic.

In this context we may consider the Calydonian boar hunt, a subject of primitive (i.e. pre-Homeric) epic.[41] The episode belongs ostensibly to the sequence of Theseus' exploits (8.172–9.94), since the fame that accrues to Theseus as the slayer of the Minotaur (*Thesea laude*, 'praise belonging to Theseus', 8.263) results in an invitation from Meleager to join the hunt against the boar sent by Diana to wreak havoc on the Calydonians (8.267–72). But Theseus in no way dominates the boar hunt: one among many, he is by no means the most distinguished hero in the hunt. Ovid includes a catalogue of heroes whom Meleager invites to the hunt (8.301–23), a quintessentially epic feature of the episode.[42] The Iliadic catalogue of ships (*Il.* 2.484–760) sets the standard for such catalogues but an even more prominent model here is Apollonius' catalogue of Argonauts (*Arg.* 1.23–233), since many of the hunters are also Argonauts.[43] The youths join the hunt out of their desire for praise (*coiere cupidine laudis*, 'they assembled from a desire for praise', 8.300), the characteristic motivation of heroic action in the *Iliad*, as it is enunciated in the 'heroic code' explained by

[38] Perseus constitutes one of the two exemplary paradigms of male subjectivity in de Lauretis' critique of psychoanalytic and narratological theories of subjectivity: see de Lauretis (1984) 103–57, especially 109–11, 118–19, 132–6.

[39] Hardie (1993) 3–11, quote at 3.

[40] Ovid treats Hercules as the paradigm of apotheosis in the poem: see Feeney (1991) 206–24, who notes that the hero's apotheosis is 'so dominating that the deeds which justify it are crowded out' (206).

[41] Hom. *Il.* 9.529–99, Hes. *fr.* 26 M–W: see Kakridis (1949) 11–18.

Sarpedon to Glaucus (*Il.* 12.310–28, especially 325–8). Thirty-five of the thirty-seven male heroes in the Ovidian catalogue are identified by name and/or patronymic; almost a third receive either an epithet or a brief phrase (of no more than one line in length) marking geographic provenance or a conventional heroic attribute such as speed, bellicosity, skill with weapons, energy, or keen perception. Patronymics and geographic epithets fix the hunters in the temporal and spacial matrix of heroic mythology, while the other attributes adumbrate the qualities traditionally valued in an epic hero:[44] with the swift Idas and Echion (*uelox Idas*, 'swift Idas', 8.305; *cursu inuictus Echion*, 'Echion, unbeaten in the race', 8.311), for example, we may compare swift-footed Achilles (πόδας ὠκύς, 'swift on his feet', *Il.* 1.58, 84, 148, etc.).

But Iliadic heroes do not furnish the only models for the boar hunters; the boar himself shares a number of attributes with the young heroes who hunt him. The boar's armoury, for example, is matched by that of the heroes: his bristles, which Ovid compares to spears (8.285–6),[45] correspond to the hunters' spears (*hastae*, 8.366, 375, 415); his speed (8.338–40) mirrors that of *uelox Idas* (8.305) and *cursu inuictus Echion* (8.311); while his ferocity (*ferox*, 8.369) reflects that of *Leucippus ... ferox* ('fierce Leucippus', 8.306) and *ferox ... | Hippasus* ('fierce Hippasus', 8.312–13). Moreover the boar's anger (*ira feri mota est*, 'the beast's anger was provoked', 8.355; cf. 8.418), a reflection of the divine anger of Diana (*tangit et ira deos*, 'anger touches even the gods', 8.279), anticipates that of both Ancaeus (*furens*, 'raging', 8.391) and Meleager (*tumida frendens ... ira*, 'gnashing his teeth with rage', 8.437). Ovid identifies the hunters as the boar's *hostes* ('enemy', 8.338), and twice calls the boar *hostis* ('enemy', 8.368, 403), once in a confrontation with Pirithous that mimics the confrontation of warriors in battle: *ibat in aduersum proles Ixionis hostem | Pirithous ualida quatiens uenabula dextra* ('Pirithous, the son of Ixion, advanced against the foe opposite, brandishing a hunting-spear in his strong right hand', 8.403–4).

The male heroes occupy a total of sixteen lines altogether (8.301–17), giving each an average of less than half a line apiece. By contrast, the final position in the catalogue goes to the Arcadian Atalanta who receives six and a half lines (8.317–23). Ovid's female huntress is modelled on the figure of Virgil's Camilla, who stands last in the catalogue of Italians in the *Aeneid* (7.803–17). Atalanta is introduced in a learned periphrasis that takes the pleonastic form of geographic epithet and circumlocution: *nemorisque decus Tegeaea Lycaei* ('an Arcadian girl, the glory of Mt. Lycaeus' glade', 8.317). The geographic references, however, are the only way in which her introduction conforms to the poet's practice with the male heroes of the catalogue. Ovid follows it with six lines devoted to a description of Atalanta's looks and hunting-gear that emphasizes not her skill in the hunt but her beauty:

rasilis huic summam mordebat fibula uestem,
crinis erat simplex, nodum conlectus in unum;
ex umero pendens resonabat eburnea laeuo
telorum custos, arcum quoque laeua tenebat.
talis erat cultu, facies, quam dicere uere
uirgineam in puero, puerilem in uirgine possis. (8.317–23)

A polished clasp pinned her cloak at the top; her hair was simple, gathered into a single knot; hanging from her left shoulder an ivory quiver, guardian of her weapons, clanged, and her left hand held a bow. Such was she in appearance, and such was her face that you could truly call it girlish in a boy and boyish in a girl.

Like her Virgilian model Camilla, who is introduced as unfeminine in her pursuits (*bellatrix, non illa colo calathisue Mineruae | femineas adsueta manus, sed proelia uirgo | dura pati*, 'a warrior-maiden, not used to putting her woman's hands to the distaff or Minerva's wool-baskets, but a girl accustomed to endure harsh battles', *Aen.* 7.805–7), the Ovidian Atalanta is characterized as ambiguously gendered (8.323), displaying a transsexual aspect reminiscent of Hermaphroditus as (s)he emerges from the spring of Salmacis. But as the subject of only one verb in the passage (the copulative *erat*, 8.322), Atalanta is presented less as a heroic boar hunter than as the object of Meleager's admiring gaze: *hanc pariter uidit, pariter Calydonius heros | optauit renuente deo flammasque latentes | hausit et 'o felix, siquem dignabitur' inquit | 'ista uirum!'* ('as soon as he saw her the Calydonian hero desired her, though the god denied him; he inhaled the secret flame and said 'O happy the man if ever she deems any worthy of her', 8.324–7). The narrative focus on her appearance constructs her as the object of the collective gaze of Meleager (and, perhaps, the other male heroes), the poet, and his readers (*possis*, 8.323).

Although the participation of Atalanta in the Calydonian boar hunt was traditional,[46] Ovid's introduction of the love motif at this juncture seems designed to bear out the good judgment of Apollonius of Rhodes' Jason, who refused to allow her to join the company of the Argonauts 'because he feared terrible conflicts for the sake of love' (Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 1.773).[47] With the introduction of an erotic motif to the hunt through the inclusion of Atalanta in the group, the poet simultaneously anticipates the traditional outcome of the hunt, *viz.* Meleager's killing of the Thestiadae when they challenge his gift of the prime spoils to Atalanta (a detail suppressed by Homer, *Il.* 9.543–9), and

46 Bömer (1977) 109.

47 δεξιτερῇ δ' ἕλεν ἔγχος ἑκηβόλον, ὅ ῥ' Ἀταλάντη | Μαινάλῳ ἔν ποτέ οἱ ξεινήιον ἐγγυάλιξε, | πρόφρων ἀντομένη, πέρι γὰρ μενέαινεν ἕπεσθαι | τὴν ὁδόν· ἀλλ', ὅσον αὐτὸς ἑκών, ἀπερήτυε κούρην, | δεῖσε γὰρ ἀργαλέας ἔριδας φιλότητος ἕκητι ('In his right hand he took the far-shooting spear which Atalanta once put into his hand as a guest-gift on Maenalon, graciously greeting him, for

echoes the programmatically-charged language of the second proem of Virgil's *Aeneid* (with *maius opus magni certaminis urguet*, 'the greater task of a great contest presses him to action', *Met.* 8.328, we may compare *maius opus moueo*, 'I begin a greater task', *Aen.* 7.45). Ovid thereby constitutes the boar hunt as an epic set-piece comparable to the war-narrative of *Aeneid* 7–12 in its inclusion of an amatory sub-plot.[48]

The importance of differentiating male from female in the construction of epic masculinity emerges especially clearly in this episode from the interplay of *femina* and its cognates, the 'marked' category, with *uir* and its cognates, the 'unmarked' subject and norm of the epic genre in general (and the *Aeneid* in particular). The youths, implicitly male, who make up Meleager's select band are identified as *iuuenes* ('youths', 8.300, 341, 359, 393), *uiri* ('men', 8.331, 388), and *socii* ('allies', 8.361, 386, 420) in the course of the hunt. At the start of the operations, the men (*uiri*, 8.331) work as a team (*lecta manus*, 'the chosen band', 8.300; *uenere uiri, pars ... pars ... pars*, 'the men arrived, some ... some ... some', 8.331–2; *exclamant iuuenes*, 'the youths cried out', 8.341) to flush the boar from his cover. When the wild pig emerges, however, the heroes step forward individually to make their casts at him: Echion, Jason, Mopsus, Hippalmon and Pelagon, Enaesimus, Nestor, Hippasus, Castor and Pollux, and Telamon challenge the boar without success. Their collective failure, and its subversion of epic grandeur, have been well discussed by Nicholas Horsfall as an instance of epic 'burlesque'.[49]

The boar receives his first wound from Atalanta: *celerem Tegeaea sagittam | inposuit neruo sinuatoque expulit arcu: | fixa sub aure feri summum destrinxit harundo | corpus et exiguo rubefecit sanguine saetas* ('the Arcadian girl placed a swift arrow on the cord and sent it from her curved bow; the arrow grazed the boar's back and stuck under the beast's ear, reddening his bristles with a little blood', 8.380–3). Her conspicuous success, after the burlesque ineptitude of the other hunters, is ambiguously represented in this passage. Although she strings the bow and shoots the arrow, the arrow itself seems to take the initiative in wounding the boar. Certainly Meleager credits her with the stroke, but it is odd that Atalanta remains silent both here and at the conclusion of the episode: *nec tamen illa sui successu laetior ictus | quam Meleagros erat: primus uidisse putatur | et primus sociis uisum ostendisse cruorem | et 'meritum' dixisse 'feres uirtutis honorem'* ('nor, nonetheless, was she happier at the success of her blow than Meleager was; he is thought to have been the first to see the gore and to show his companions what he saw, and to say, "You will win the honour due your prowess"', 8.384–7). We view her accomplishment through the eyes of Meleager, who directs his comrades' attention (and ours) to the boar's wound and Atalanta's heroic valour. There is considerable irony in Meleager's praise of Atalanta's *uirtus*, the pre-eminent achievement of the epic *uir*.[50] Predictably, this development shames the other heroes

[48] On Ovid's use of Virgilian motifs in this episode see Horsfall (1979).

[49] Horsfall (1979) 321–8.

[50] The Romans were familiar with the etymology of *uirtus*, and its derivation from *uir*: *uirtus ut uiritus a uirilitate* ('*uirtus*, "manliness", like *uiritus* is derived from *uirilitas*, "manhood"', Varro, *Ling.* 5.73); *appellata est ... ex uiro uirtus* ('*uirtus*, "manliness" is derived from *uir*, "man"', Cic. *Tusc.* 2.43); cf. *Aen.*

(*erubuere uiri*, 'they reddened with shame', 8.388), for it impugns their masculinity; indeed the assignment of masculine *uirtus* to Atalanta leaves to the heroes only feminine *rubor* ('shamefacedness'), in a reversal of the gendered values of honour and shame.[51] With this passage we may compare Hermaphroditus' maidenly blush, *rubor*, in response to Salmacis' appropriation of the active role of erotic pursuit, coded as masculine in ancient epic (4.329–30).[52]

At this juncture, the Arcadian hero Ancaeus steps to the forefront of the group in hyper-epic style and admonishes his comrades with the traditional vaunt of the epic hero:

> ecce furens contra sua fata bipennifer Arcas
> 'discite, femineis quid tela uirilia praestent,
> o iuuenes, operique meo concedite!' dixit;
> 'ipsa suis licet hunc Latonia protegat armis,
> inuita tamen hunc perimet mea dextra Diana.'
> talia magniloquo tumidus memorauerat ore
> ancipitemque manu tollens utraque securim
> institerat digitis pronos suspensus in artus. (8.391–8)

> Look, raging to meet his fate Arcadian Ancaeus, armed with a two-headed axe, said 'Learn how much a man's weapons outdo a woman's, youths, and yield to my labour! Though Latona's daughter, the goddess Diana herself should protect this boar with her own arms, nonetheless my right hand will destroy him in spite of her.' Swelling with big talk he related such boasts, and picking up his two-edged axe in both hands he drew himself up on the tips of his toes.

In a pointed oxymoron (8.392), Ancaeus opposes the weapons wielded by real men to those mishandled by the female. The double contrast denigrates both the woman and her weapon, for the bow, shot from a distance rather than handled in close combat, is conventionally the weapon favoured by warriors of dubious masculinity in epic.[53] Ironically, however, Ancaeus' own weapon of choice, the two-edged axe (*bipennifer*, 8.391; *ancipitem ... securim*, 8.397), is associated particularly closely with the Amazons.[54] Moreover Ancaeus comes, like Atalanta herself, from Arcadia (8.391; cf.

[51] Bömer (1977) 134; Horsfall (1979) 327. For the feminine norm cf. *Met.* 7.78, of Medea's maidenly confusion upon meeting Jason. For *rubor* in the sense of 'shame, modesty', see *OLD* s.v. 2.

[52] Cf. Labate (1993) 54 n.16.

[53] Paris is the exemplar: see Horsfall (1979) 327–8 n. 44.

[54] Cf. Virg. *Aen.* 11.651, *nunc ualidam dextra rapit indefessa bipennem* ('now she snatched up her sturdy two-edged axe in her indefatigable right hand'), of the Amazonian Camilla; Ov. *Met.* 12.610–11, *at si femineo fuerat tibi Marte cadendum, | Thermodontiaca malles cecidisse bipenni* ('but if you had to fall in feminine

8.317), a place which in epic is conventionally home to girlish youths who enter battle before they are ready.[55]

Ancaeus' didactic tone echoes that of Aeneas to Ascanius on the occasion of the climactic duel with Turnus (*disce, puer, uirtutem ex me uerumque laborem, | fortunam ex aliis*, 'learn valour and true toil from me, son, luck from others', *Aen.* 12.435–6), and implicitly reduces his comrades (*iuuenes*, 'youths', 8.393) to the sidelines like the stripling Ascanius. 'The battle which ensues', as Hugh Parry has observed, 'takes on the character of a test of virility.'[56] Ancaeus' big talk (8.396) characterizes him as an exponent of full-blown epic masculinity, but both his misogyny and his impiety are ill-considered. As he demands that his comrades yield to him (*operique meo concedite*, 8.393), so he falls to Diana's boar (*concidit*, 8.401). Ancaeus is perhaps further unmanned in the mode of his death, the result of a wound to the groin (8.400).[57] Despite his arrogance, impiety and manner of death, however, his masculinity, *uirtus*, is not called into question by his colleagues. Theseus, whose own *uirtus* was established with the slaughter of the Minotaur, warns Pirithous not to emulate Ancaeus' 'rash valour' (*Ancaeo nocuit temeraria uirtus*, 'his rash valour harmed Ancaeus', 8.407) by attacking the boar at close quarters; he advises his friend that even brave heroes may keep their distance from the boar (*licet eminus esse | fortibus*, 'it is permitted the brave to be at a distance', 8.406–7) and follows up his recommendation with a (vain) spear cast at the beast (8.408–10).

It is Meleager who finally ends the hunt, first wounding and then killing the boar (8.414–19). His comrades, vociferous in their congratulations, hasten to clasp his right hand in theirs, in what Virgil in the *Aeneid* had made the quintessential gesture of (male) heroic friendship (*amicitia*): *gaudia testantur socii clamore secundo | uictricemque petunt dextrae coniungere dextram* ('his comrades testify to their joy with shouts of applause and seek to join his victorious right hand to theirs', 8.420–1).[58] Although they can scarcely believe it safe to touch the boar, the hunters dip their spears in the beast's blood (*mirantes spectant neque adhuc contingere tutum | esse putant, sed tela tamen sua quisque cruentat*, 'they gaze awestruck at the beast, nor do they think it yet safe to touch him, but nevertheless each bloodies his weapon', 8.423–4), symbolically assuming the boar's potent fighting strength and renewing their manly vigour. Meleager destroys the harmony of this moment of male bonding, however, by breaking

[55] Philip Hardie, to whom I owe this observation, compares (*per litteras*) Pallas and Parthenopaeus.

[56] Parry (1964) 271.

[57] As Horsfall (1979) 330 comments: 'he is now deservedly *e-uir-atus* and dead.' The connotation of effeminacy in this mode of death is implicit in the death of Adonis who also dies from a boar-wound in the groin (*Met.* 10.715–16).

[58] Serv. *ad Aen.* 1.408, *CUR DEXTRAE IVNGERE DEXTRAM maiorum enim haec fuerat salutatio, cuius rei* τὸ αἴτιον *id est, causam Varro, Callimachum secutus, exposuit, adserens 'omnem eorum honorem dexterarum constitisse uirtute', ob quam rem hac se uenerabantur corporis parte* ('Why [is] to join right hand to right hand [not permitted?]: this was the greeting of our ancestors. Varro, following Callimachus, explained the reason for it, maintaining that "they determined every honour of theirs by the prowess of their right hands". For that reason they do homage to themselves with this part of the body'.). See Monti (1981) 5–6.

ranks with his fellows to announce that he wishes to share the glory of the kill not with his fellow male heroes but with Atalanta, and he assigns to her the back and tusks of the boar, the most prized portions (8.426–9). Although his generosity gratifies both Meleager and Atalanta, it meets with hostility from the rest of the (male) group (8.431).

The heroes interpret Meleager's action as a violation of the hierarchy of gender, and raise a general challenge to his decision. Meleager's uncles, the Thestiadae, articulate the group's discontent in a dismissal of Atalanta's claim to heroic stature (and to the subjectivity concomitant with heroic agency) with the reassertion of her status as an object of erotic desire:

> e quibus ingenti tendentes bracchia uoce
> 'pone age nec titulos intercipe, femina, nostros'
> Thestiadae clamant 'nec te fiducia formae
> decipiat, ne sit longe tibi captus amore
> auctor', et huic adimunt munus, ius muneris illi. (8.432–6)
>
> Among them the sons of Thestius, stretching out their arms, cried out in a loud voice, 'Come, put them down, woman, and don't take away the honours intended for us; don't let confidence in your beauty deceive you, lest the author of this award, enslaved by love, should be far away', and they stripped her of the prize, him of the giving.

Refusing to a woman (*femina*, 8.433) the honour due to men (*titulos ... nostros*, 8.433),[59] the Thestiads discredit her participation in the boar hunt and deny her the glory (*gloria*, 8.427) attendant upon heroic success. They would thus strip her not only of Meleager's gift, but also of heroic subjectivity.

The only successful hunting with which the Thestiadae credit Atalanta is the amatory capture of Meleager (8.435). In constructing Atalanta as an erotic figure rather than a heroic agent, they may be said to follow Meleager's lead; for their nephew's interactions with Atalanta consistently cast her as the object of his desirous gaze in an erotic hunt (8.324–7, 385–7, 425–9). Meleager's amatory pursuit of Atalanta parallels the hunters' heroic pursuit of the boar and brings to the surface of the narrative the erotic connotations implicit in the hunt in Greco-Roman thought.[60] As an object – like the Calydonian boar – of male desire, Atalanta has an affinity with the boar that may account for the full descriptions which beast and maiden alone garner in the narrative (8.282–9, 317–23). Viewed by Meleager as a prize to be won (like the boar), Atalanta inspires a general assertion of masculine valour against her (again like the boar), and is finally stripped of the tokens of heroic agency which the boar's relics constitute

[59] For the gendered connotation of *nostros* here see Hollis (1970) 88.

[60] On this topos in the *Metamorphoses* see Parry (1964), and Davis (1983).

(8.436). If the myth of the Calydonian boar hunt pits human against beast, then, in Ovid's hands the contest also pits male against female. In their assertion of masculine subjectivity, the boar hunters strive to reduce female identity to objecthood.

Ovid confronts Homeric epic and its ethos of heroic masculinity most directly when he comes to narrate the Trojan war in *Metamorphoses* 12. The Latin poet here explicitly thematizes *uirtus* and the prestige men win from their exploits on the battlefield, the twin focus of Homeric epic implied in the phrase κλέα ἀνδρῶν ('famous deeds of men'). As in the Calydonian boar hunt, the ultimate prize for which the heroes contend before Troy is prestige: Ovid strikingly omits Helen from the stakes of war.[61] The poet follows Homeric precedent in effecting a close link between 'prestige' (*fama*) and 'heroic valour' (*uirtus*), by prefacing his Trojan war narrative with an ecphrasis describing the home of *Fama*, both 'reputation' and 'rumour'. Located in the centre of the world, her dwelling commands a vantage-point from which all that happens can be seen and heard: *orbe locus medio est inter terrasque fretumque | caelestesque plagas, triplicis confinia mundi; | unde quod est usquam, quamuis regionibus absit, | inspicitur, penetratque cauas uox omnis ad aures* ('there is a place in the middle of the world between lands and seas and heaven's regions, the common boundary of the tri-form world; from there anything that is anywhere, though it be lands apart, is visible, and every sound reaches these hollow ears', 12.39–42). Her palace is constructed in such a way as to capitalize on this location, for a great number of apertures facilitates the easy entry and departure of rumours (*Fama tenet summaque domum sibi legit in arce, | innumerosque aditus ac mille foramina tectis | addidit et nullis inclusit limina portis; | nocte dieque patet*, 'Fame lives here and chose a house for herself on the highest citadel; she added innumerable entrances and a thousand doors to her palace, and closed the thresholds with no doors; day and night her house stands open', 12.43–6). The Ovidian *Fama* is a more sedentary creature than her Virgilian model, who actively spreads trouble by flying through the world (4.173–7, 4.184, 7.392, 8.554, 9.473–4, 11.139). Ovid's *Fama*, by contrast, watches from her home as events unfold on earth and in heaven (*ipsa, quid in caelo rerum pelagoque geratur | et tellure, uidet*, 'she herself sees whatever is done in heaven, on sea, and on land', 12.62–3; cf. 12.39–42, quoted above), waiting for news to reach her hollow ears (12.42), and apparently leaving it to the crowd in her halls to circulate confused reports of events (12.53–61). The identification of *Fama* with her open, echoing palace is an Ovidian innovation in the iconography of *Fama*, and recalls the recurrent association of woman with place in the *Metamorphoses*.[62] The poet even hints at a physical identification

[61] Ovid does not connect the return of Helen with the conclusion of the war in *Met.* 12, and omits Helen altogether from his account of the destruction of Troy in *Met.* 13. Only once does he link her return to the goals of the war, when Ulysses includes in his speech about his right to Achilles' arms a brief reference to his embassy to Troy (*praedamque Helenamque reposco*, 'I demand back booty and Helen', 13.200). On Helen's role in the outbreak of the war see Keith (2000) chapter four.

[62] The innovation signals Ovid's divergence from the Virgilian portrait of *Fama* (*Aen.* 4.173–97), his primary model: see Zumwalt (1977); Bömer (1982) ad loc.; and Dippel (1990) 27–9. On the association of woman with place in the *Metamorphoses* see Barchiesi in this volume, and Keith (2000) chapter three.

between *Fama* and her dwelling, of the kind we saw in the 'Salmacis and Hermaphroditus' and the 'Perseis', for the many openings in the dwelling of *Fama* evoke the perceived penetrability of the female body in ancient thought.[63]

The ecphrasis initiates the focus in book twelve on *uirtus* and the ethos of epic heroism, since *fama* means not only 'rumour, hearsay, news' but also the 'reputation, fame, glory, renown' that the epic hero gains from the display of his *uirtus*.[64] Ovid exploits the semantic range of *fama* throughout the battle narratives in the book: the account of the Trojan war resumes after the ecphrasis with the circulation of rumours of the Greek fleet's arrival (*fecerat haec notum, Graias cum milite forti | aduentare rates, neque inexspectatus in armis | hostis adest*, 'she had made it known that Greek ships with a strong force were approaching, nor was the arrival of the enemy under arms unexpected', 12.64–6) and summary references to the fame of Hector (*fortis ... animae nece cognitus Hector*, 'Hector's brave spirit was known from the carnage', 12.69) and Achilles, whose renown frames the Iliadic narrative (*fama*, 12.86; *gloria*, 12.617). In the course of the book, the poet also refers to the glory won by Caeneus (*factis inclitus*, 'renowned for his exploits', 12.173) and Hercules (*Herculeae laudis*, 'Hercules' praise', 12.539) for their exploits.

As an example of the martial valour that confers prestige on the victor, Ovid narrates the duel of Achilles and (the unHomeric) Cycnus in place of the Iliadic confrontation of Achilles and Hector (*Achilles ... perque acies aut Cycnum aut Hectora quaerens | congreditur Cycno (decimum dilatus in annum | Hector erat)*, 'Achilles was seeking either Cycnus or Hector in the ranks, when he came upon Cycnus (Hector had been postponed to the tenth year)', 12.73–7).[65] The poet presents the two heroes – the one a son of the Nereid Thetis (12.93), the other a son of Neptune (12.72, 94) – as pre-eminent warriors on the battlefield before Troy, evenly matched with one another: *iam leto proles Neptunia, Cycnus, | mille uiros dederat, iam curru instabat Achilles | totaque Peliacae sternebat cuspidis ictu | agmina* ('already Cycnus, the offspring of Neptune, had given a thousand men to death; already Achilles pressed on in his chariot and laid low whole battalions with a stroke of his spear from Mt. Pelion', 12.72–5). Yet their duel is strangely unheroic, for neither succeeds in wounding his opponent with spear or sword, the weapons of the battlefield.[66] Cycnus openly boasts that he wears armour only for decoration since as Neptune's son he is invulnerable to iron (12.87–94). When he offers his unprotected body to Achilles' spear, he remains unharmed (*nec tertia cuspis apertum | et se praebentem ualuit destringere Cycnum*, 'nor did the third spear succeed in scratching Cycnus though he offered himself', 12.100–1), repelling Achilles' weapons from his body as a wall or a cliff repels enemy missiles (*nec fraxinus errat | inque umero sonuit non euitata sinistro, | inde uelut muro solidaque a caute repulsa est*, 'nor did the ash spear deviate from its course; unevaded, it sounded on his

[63] Carson (1990) *passim*, especially 153–8; Hanson (1990) 324–30; Loraux (1995) 103–9.

[64] Zumwalt (1977).

[65] Cf. Segal (1998) 23–4.

[66] On the significance of spear and sword see Loraux (1987) 11–13.

left shoulder and glanced off again as though from a wall or solid rock', 12.122–4). Despite repeated attempts to kill Cycnus, Achilles is unable to wound him with spear or sword;[67] rather, his arms are themselves blunted by the hardness of his opponent's body (*utque hebeti pectus tantummodo contudit ictu*, 'the spear only bruised his breast as with a weak stroke', 12.85; *at in duro laedi quoque corpore ferrum*, 'but on that hard body the iron was blunted', 12.131). In the end Achilles must abandon his weapons and resort to brute strength in order to overpower his opponent. He pursues Cycnus in a rage, pinning him to the ground and beating him about the face with shield and sword-belt until he finally kills his invincible opponent by strangling him with his helmet straps (*tum clipeo genibusque premens praecordia duris | uincla trahit galeae, quae presso subdita mento | elidunt fauces et respiramen iterque | eripiunt animae*, 'then pressing his midriff with his shield and hard knees, he pulled on the helmet laces; pressing them beneath the other's chin, he squeezed his air-passage and cut off the path of his breath', 12.140–3).[68]

The death of Cycnus both resembles and modifies that of Hector in the *Iliad*. The Homeric Achilles kills Hector by piercing his neck with a spear,[69] but the Ovidian Achilles, unable to open up Cycnus' body by iron, succeeds in defeating his opponent only by closing off a natural aperture of the body, the throat. Zumwalt has drawn attention to the 'non-heroic mode of fighting, hand-to-neck combat',[70] by which Achilles ingloriously triumphs over his opponent, and we can extend her insight by considering the gendered connotations of the mode of death which Cycnus suffers. In Greco-Roman myth and history, death by sword or spear is heroic and the prerogative of men, while strangulation is a typically feminine and shameful mode of death.[71] Such a death calls into question the masculinity of the warrior who suffers it, but apparently does not impugn that of the hero who inflicts it, for Achilles is explicitly characterized as victor in the duel (*Cycni uictor Achilles*, 'Cycnus' conqueror, Achilles', 12.150; cf. *uictum*, 'conquered', of Cycnus, 12.143, *domito uictoria Cycno*, 'victory over the fallen Cycnus', 12.164).

During the truce that follows the death of Cycnus, the Greek chieftains celebrate a feast at which the conversation turns to the subject of virility (*uirtus ... loquendi | materia est*, 'valour was the subject of their conversation', 12.159–60). Their talk centres on their exploits in battle, the very stuff of epic: *pugnas referunt hostisque suasque, | inque uices adita atque exhausta pericula saepe | commemorare iuuat* ('they mention their enemy's contests and their own, and it pleases them one after another to recall often the dangers encountered and endured', 12.160–2). Of particular interest to the Greek heroes is the recent death of Cycnus, and especially the astonishing fact that Cycnus' body could not be opened up to death by the gash of spear or sword: *uisum mirabile cunctis, | quod iuueni corpus nullo penetrabile telo | inuictumque a uulnere erat ferrumque terebat* ('it seemed amazing to all, that the youth's body could be penetrated by no weapon, that it was unconquered by a wound, and that it blunted iron', 12.165–7). In their fascination with Cycnus' inviolable body, not merely impervious to weapons designed to puncture the body's integrity but harder than metal itself, they implicitly distinguish male bodily integrity from the porous openness that characterizes the female body in the ancient imagination; the impenetrability of Cycnus' body (*corpus nullo penetrabile telo*, 12.166) recalls as it reverses the description of the penetrability of *Fama*'s house (*penetratque cauas uox omnis ad aures*, 12.42). The hero's invulnerability depends on a definition of masculinity in which the male body is neither open to nor openable by the sword and the spear: hence Cycnus' contempt for weapons of iron (*contemptor ferri nulloque forabilis ictu | Cycnus*, 'Cycnus despised iron and was open to no blow', 12.170–1). Achilles kills Cycnus, however, by discovering an opening, a feminine porousness, already immanent in his opponent's body.

The absolute distance between male and female to which the Greek heroes appeal, already implicitly undermined by the poet in the manner of Cycnus' death, is further diminished in the narration that follows. For the only similarly invincible hero any of the assembled warriors can recall is Nestor's old friend from the Calydonian boar hunt, Caeneus (8.305).[72] Nestor engages the attention of Achilles himself[73] by likening Cycnus' uncanny physical invulnerability to that of the exemplary hero of an earlier generation – who was born a woman:

> sic Nestor ait: 'uestro fuit unicus aeuo
> contemptor ferri nulloque forabilis ictu
> Cycnus. at ipse olim patientem uulnera mille
> corpore non laeso Perrhaebum Caenea uidi,
> Caenea Perrhaebum, qui factis inclitus Othryn
> incoluit, quoque id mirum magis esset in illo,
> femina natus erat.' (12.169–75)

67 *nil tamen emissi profecit acumine ferri* ('nonetheless he accomplished nothing with the sharp point of the spear he threw', 12.84); *rursus sine uulnere corpus | sincerumque fuit; nec tertia cuspis apertum | et se praebentem ualuit destringere Cycnum* ('again his body was without a wound and whole; nor did the third spear succeed in scratching Cycnus, although he offered himself', 12.99–101); *uulnus erat nullum* ('there was no wound', 12.127); *et nitido securum comminus hostem | ense petens parmam gladio galeamque cauari | cernit* ('and seeking his unblemished foe at close quarters with his brilliant sword, he saw Cycnus' shield and helmet were pierced by his blade', 12.129–30).

68 Philip Hardie notes (*per litteras*) that the Ovidian Achilles imitates Virgil's Hercules who finally kills Cacus by choking him: *hic Cacum in tenebris, incendia uana uomentem, | corripit, in nodum complexus, et angit inhaerens | elisos oculos, et siccum sanguine guttur* ('here in the shadows he seized Cacus vainly belching flames; grasping him in a knot and clinging to him, he choked him until his eyes were knocked out and his throat was dry of blood', *Aen.* 8.259–61). It perhaps redounds to Hercules' greater heroism that he kills Cacus with his bare hands, while Achilles simply draws tight the helmet straps of his opponent.

69 ἀντικρὺ δ' ἁπαλοῖο δι' αὐχένος ἦλυθ' ἀκωκή ('the point went right through the soft part of the neck', *Il.* 22.327).

70 Zumwalt (1977) 213.

71 Loraux (1987) 7–30; Loraux (1995) 88–115. On the shame of hanging cf. *Od.* 22.462–4.

72 Segal (1998) 24–5 discusses thematic links between Cycnus and Caeneus.

73 Rosati (1994a) 27 n. 35 offers the stimulating suggestion that the story of Caeneus is particularly appealing to Achilles because his mother disguised him as a woman on Scyros, and Alessandro Barchiesi compares (*per litteras*) Stat. *Ach.* 1.264, where Thetis attempts to allay her son's qualms about cross-dressing with the example of Caeneus: *nec magnum ambigui fregerunt Caenea sexus* ('nor did the ambiguity of his gender diminish great Caeneus'). On Statius' gender-bending Achilles, and his Ovidian models, see Rosati (1994b) and Hinds (1998) 135–41.

> So Nestor said: 'In your age, Cycnus was the sole despiser of iron and open to no stroke. But I myself once saw Thessalian Caeneus suffering a thousand wounds though his body was unharmed – Thessalian Caeneus, renowned for his exploits, who lived on Mt. Othrys; and what is all the more amazing in his case, is that he had been born a woman.'

An antithetical relationship of (masculine) bodily integrity to (feminine) penetrable vulnerability underpins Nestor's introduction of Caeneus: if Cycnus' exemplary heroic (male) body was open to no weapon (12.166, 170), how could Caeneus, born with a woman's violable body, remain unhurt after suffering a thousand wounds?

Implicit in the military vocabulary Nestor employs is a 'natural' hierarchy of gender that constructs the female body as vulnerable to penetration by the male,[74] a stereotype implicit throughout Nestor's narrative. The beautiful Caenis is the object of numerous suitors' determined but unsuccessful courtship (12.189–96), until Neptune rapes her. Nestor moves from the warrior Caeneus who suffers a thousand wounds (*patientem uulnera mille*, 12.171), to the maiden Caenis who suffers Neptune's violence (*aequorei uim passa dei est*, 'she suffered the violence of the sea-god', 12.197) and requests a sex change so as never to suffer such an outrage again (*'magnum' Caenis ait 'facit haec iniuria uotum, | tale pati iam posse nihil; da, femina ne sim'*, '"This injury", Caenis said, "prompts a great prayer – to be able to suffer no such thing again; grant that I not be a woman"', 12.201–2). Caeneus' masculine invulnerability is contrasted with, and yet constructed upon, Caenis' feminine vulnerability to violence. Nestor, and Caenis, use the verb *pati* to describe the rape (12.197, 202), as Nestor uses it to describe Caeneus' battle endurance (12.171).[75] In addition to the sex change, Neptune bestows imperviousness to the sword on Caeneus (*nam iam uoto deus aequoris alti | adnuerat dederatque super, nec saucius ullis | uulneribus fieri ferroue occumbere posset*, 'for already the god of the deep sea had granted the prayer and had given, in addition, that he could not be harmed by any wounds or fall by the sword', 12.205–7), a final gift that fits out the newly-male Caeneus for 'manly pursuits' (*studiisque uirilibus*, 12.208) such as the battle of Centaurs and Lapiths.

This battle (12.210–537) belongs, like the Calydonian boar hunt, to the stock of pre-Homeric epic.[76] In the *Metamorphoses* the battle of Centaurs and Lapiths functions as a narrative doublet of the Trojan war (12.64–145, 580–628), which it displaces from the centre to the margins of book twelve and overshadows in length. Like the Trojan war (12.5), the battle of Lapiths and Centaurs begins with bride-theft, when the centaur Eurytus snatches Hippodamia from her new husband Pirithous at the wedding feast (12.219–23) and the other centaurs ravish her bridal attendants (12.224–6). The centaurs' rampage thematically parallels Paris' rape of Helen, just as the centaurs' abuse of the generous hospitality of their hosts, Pirithous and the Lapiths, echoes Paris'

disregard for the courtesy owed to his hospitable host, Menelaus.[77] Both battles also feature a seemingly invulnerable hero ultimately defeated in combat and transformed into a bird (Cycnus, 12.70–146, and Caeneus, 12.459–535), and are further connected by narrative setting. During the truce that follows Achilles' killing of Cycnus, Nestor narrates the battle of Centaurs and Lapiths as an eyewitness[78] and sole surviving participant in the old conflict, which appeals to his audience, paradoxically, as a new and sensational tale.[79]

Ovid stages the battle of Lapiths and Centaurs as a confrontation between culture and nature, man and beast. Yet the bestial centaurs are not lacking in masculine attributes. Nestor even-handedly notes that the centaurs are 'half-beast' (*semiferos*, 12.406) but also 'half-human' (*semihomines Centauros*, 12.536), and at several points in the narrative he draws attention specifically to the masculinity of the horse–men. He commends the centaur Cyllarus for beauty both manly and equine (*gratus in ore uigor; ceruix umerique manusque | pectoraque artificum laudatis proxima signis, | et quacumque uir est; nec equi mendosa sub illo | deteriorque uiro facies*, 'the liveliness in his face was pleasing; his neck, shoulders, hands, chest, and wherever he was a man, just like the famous statues of skilled workers; nor was his equine aspect blemished beneath that or worse than the man', 12.397–400); he notes the six-lion-hide tunic of the centaur Phaeocomes who thus protects both his human and horse parts (*Phaeocomes, hominemque simul protectus equumque*, 'Phaeocomes protected at the same time man and horse', 12.431); and he records the death of the centaur Latreus at Caeneus' hands, with a spear-blow to the side just where man was joined to horse (*qua uir equo commissus erat*, 'where man had been joined to horse', 12.478). Nestor also credits the centaurs with the fighting 'strength' (*uires*, 12.373, 502, 510), from which the word for man, *uir*, was traditionally derived in etymological discussion.[80] Ovid evokes this etymology twice in Nestor's recital of the battle of Centaurs and Lapiths: first when Nestor narrates the response of the centaur Demoleon to Pirithous' attack (*ipse dolor uires animo dabat: aeger in hostem | erigitur pedibusque uirum [sc. Pirithoum] proculcat equinis*, 'grief itself lent his spirit strength; suffering he directs himself against the enemy and tramples the man beneath his equine feet', 12.373–4);

[77] On this theme in Greek myths concerning the centaurs see duBois (1982) 28–9.

[78] The congruence between the narrative perspective and the narrator's gaze is visible in Nestor's tale when he asserts that one of the combatants in the battle of the centaurs and Lapiths 'stands before his eyes' (*ante oculos stat et ille meos*, 12.429), and that he saw Caeneus' metamorphosis into a bird (*uidit auem pennis liquidas exire sub auras, | quam mihi tum primum, tunc est conspecta supremum*, 'he saw a bird, which I saw for myself then for the first and last time, fly off on wings in the clear air', 12.525–6).

[79] Ovid plays on his heroes' interest in the novelty of the old tale (e.g., 12.175, 198, 203–4, 498), perhaps a gloss on the Greek name of Caeneus (Καινεύς), 'recent one'. Alessandro Barchiesi, to whom I owe this suggestion, compares (*per litteras*) Virgil's etymologizing gloss of the name from its opposite: *iuuenis quondam, nunc femina, Caeneus, | rursus et in ueterem fato reuoluta figuram* ('and the once youth, Caeneus, now a woman again and returned by fate to the old form', *Aen.* 6.449).

[80] *uir nuncupatus est, quod maior in eo uis est quam in femina* ('*uir*, "man" is so-called, because there is

and again when he reports the centaur Monychus' disgust at the failure of the centaurs' assault on Caeneus (*populus superamur ab uno | uixque uiro; quamquam ille uir est, nos segnibus actis, | quod fuit ille, sumus. quid membra inmania prosunt? | quid geminae uires et quod fortissima rerum | in nobis natura duplex animalia iunxit?*, 'we, a people, are overcome by one and hardly a man at that; although he is a man, we with our sluggish actions are what he was. What do our huge limbs avail? Or our twin strength and the fact that a double nature has joined the strongest creatures of the world in us?,' 12.499–503).

Part man, the centaurs are also part horse,[81] and throughout the episode, the centaurs exhibit an elemental bestiality. In Nestor's narrative, the 'biform' creatures (*bimembres*, 12.240, 494; *biformis*, 12.456) are monstrous forces of nature, capable of tearing boulders from mountains (12.341–2; cf. 12.281–2), wrenching tree-trunks from the ground (12.327–31; cf. 12.507) or deforesting Othrys and Pelion (12.510–13). Ovid thus defines the masculinity of the Lapith heroes in complex counterpoint with the centaurs to whose bestial nature is superadded a hyper-masculinity[82] that threatens to feminize their opponents. This twofold strategy in the construction of masculine subjectivity in the episode is particularly visible in the case of Caeneus who, though he fights against the centaurs as a man, has affinities with both centaurs and women. Like the biform centaurs, Caeneus is a biform monstrosity (*'femina natus erat.' monstri nouitate mouentur | quisquis adest, narretque rogant*, '"He had been born a woman." Whoever was present was moved by the strangeness of the portent, and they ask him to explain', 12.175–6). Yet if the centaurs' equine virility characterizes them as hyper-male, Caeneus' female natal origin threatens to render him less than male.

Caeneus comes to prominence in the battle with the centaurs towards the end of Nestor's catalogue of Lapith heroes, after he has already slain five of the horse–men (12.459–60). This record does not prevent his sixth opponent, the centaur Latreus, from taunting him with a woman's weakness and advising him to leave the fighting to men (imitating Turnus, *Aen.* 7.444, echoing Hector, *Il.* 6.492–3):

> 'et te, Caeni, feram? nam tu mihi femina semper,
> tu mihi Caenis eris. nec te natalis origo
> commonuit, mentemque subit, quo praemia facto
> quaque uiri falsam speciem mercede pararis?
> quid sis nata, uide, uel quid sis passa, columque,
> i, cape cum calathis et stamina pollice torque;
> bella relinque uiris.' (12.470–6)
>
> Must I endure you too, Caenis? For you will always be a woman to me, you will always be Caenis to me. Has your original birth not warned you, hasn't it occurred to you, by what deed you gained your reward, by what price you gained the false appearance of a man? Look at what you were born, or at what you suffered, and go take up the distaff along with the wool-baskets, and twist the threads with your thumb; leave wars to men.

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

[82] Cf. duBois (1982) 31–2.

The conventional battlefield taunt impugning an opponent's masculinity is jarring in the mouth of a centaur. Nonetheless, the conventional epic response of the insulted warrior to such a taunt is the immediate vindication of his battle-prowess, and Caeneus too overcomes his opponent in combat while remaining unscathed himself (12.476–93). The outcome attracts the attention of the entire group of centaurs and provokes them to concentrate their assault on him in another version of the 'one vs. many' theme (*telaque in hunc omnes unum mittuntque feruntque*, 'and they all send and bear their weapons against this man alone', 12.495).[83]

Caeneus, however, like Cycnus under the onslaught of Achilles (12.99–101, 131), remains unpierced and unbloodied as his body blunts the centaurs' weapons (12.496–7; cf. 12.165–7). The centaurs react to Caeneus' superhuman endurance in battle with the same astonishment (*fecerat attonitos noua res*, 'the strange affair astonished them', 12.498) that the Greek heroes displayed in the face of Nestor's startling assertions about Caeneus' birth as a woman (12.175–6, quoted above) and that gripped Achilles when he failed to kill Cycnus (12.105–21; cf. 12.165). Nestor presents Caeneus' ambiguous gender as the focus of the centaurs' hostility: *'heu dedecus ingens!' | Monychus exclamat ... | ... | ... nos semimari superamur ab hoste!'* ('"What a huge disgrace!" Monychus cried ... "We are overwhelmed by an enemy who's half a man!"', 12.498–9, 506; cf. 12.499–503, quoted above). Ignoring the fact that the centaurs themselves are only 'half-human', Monychus interprets Caeneus' invulnerability as both a reproach and a challenge to their hyper-masculinity. He calls upon his fellows to unite against Caeneus and, by heaping stones and trees on him, to smother him beneath their mass (12.516–17), just as Achilles suffocates Cycnus (12.140–3). The horse–men's united action to overcome Caeneus, however, allows the Lapiths to regroup and return with renewed purpose against the centaurs: *dolor addidit iram, | oppressumque aegre tulimus tot ab hostibus unum; | nec prius abstitimus ferro exercere dolorem, | quam data pars leto, partem fuga noxque remouit* ('grief added anger, and we took it badly

[83] Cf. *populus superamur ab uno*, 12.499; *oppressumque aegre tulimus tot ab hostibus unum*, 12.533. On the epic hero's 'singular pre-eminence' see Hardie (1993) 3–11, discussed above in connection with Perseus and the Calydonian boar hunters.

that one was overpowered by so many foes; nor did we cease to follow up our grief with the sword before some had been given to death, and escape and cover of night took care of the rest', 12.532–5). In Ovid's formulation, the 'singular pre-eminence' of Caeneus against the centaurs enables the Lapiths to rout the centaurs.[84]

The fluidity of Caeneus' gender identity is the structural fulcrum of Nestor's lengthy account of the battle of the Centaurs and Lapiths, the framing device of the battle-narrative and the focus of both the internal and the external audiences' attention. A 'natural' hierarchy of gender thus underlies Nestor's narrative. The Lapith heroes, among whom Caeneus stands out, close ranks to defeat the bestial foe, neither dismissing Caeneus from their number nor disdaining his contribution because of his natal origin. Rather it is the hyper-masculine centaurs who incur dishonour and disgrace from a woman–man's battle prowess. Yet Caeneus' death – if indeed he dies; it is uncertain whether he was driven into Tartarus (12.522–3), or was transformed into a 'unique bird' (*auis unica*, 12.531) – retains a shadow of the feminine about it, for not only should real men die by the sword (or spear or even arrow) in epic warfare rather than by suffocation, but suffocation itself is a form of death reserved, as we have seen, for the female in the classical imagination. Even the final avian transformation that Nestor claims to have seen (12.525–6) may retain a trace of the feminine: Nicole Loraux has recently argued that in Greek myth the suffocated woman 'is like a bird'.[85] Despite the ostensible transformation of Caenis into Caeneus, female into male, then, Nestor's narrative implicitly denies the possibility of the metamorphosis of gender. Virgil offers a precedent for this when he sets Caeneus, returned to female form, in the Mourning Fields of the Underworld in the company of women who perished through love: *et iuuenis quondam, nunc femina, Caeneus | rursus et in ueterem fato reuoluta figuram* ('and the youth once Caeneus, now a woman again and returned by fate to the old form', *Aen.* 6.448–9). In Latin epic it would seem that Caeneus, unable to maintain a masculine role, must suffer a reversion to the feminine Caenis in the end.[86]

One of the most striking features of the *Metamorphoses* is the range of literary models it invokes. Engaging both Iliadic and Odyssean models, as well as the Apollonian and Virgilian epics they inspired, Ovid takes up questions the classical epic tradition raises about masculinity and explores them with different nuances. In contrast to Homer and Apollonius, whose heroes may be disdainfully compared to women (*Il.* 2.235) but never actually encounter a woman on the field of battle, fighting alongside and against men, gods and beasts, Ovid, like Virgil, repeatedly juxtaposes male heroic

[84] Cf. Palinurus, the one sacrificed for many (*Aen.* 5.814–15), on whom see Hardie (1993) 4. Ovid comments archly on this theme: *maxime uir quondam sed nunc auis unica, Caeneu* ('doughtiest hero once, but now an unparalleled bird', 12.531).

[85] Loraux (1995) 110 discusses comparisons of hanged women to birds in Greek epic and tragedy (Hom. *Od.* 22.486–72; Eur. *Hippol.* 758–63, 828–9). Philip Hardie compares (*per litteras*) 'the Euripidean female prayer for escape on wings (Barrett on *Hippol.* 732–4), literalized in the case of the daughters of Anius' (*Met.* 13.667–74). For the correlation between hanging and suffocation see Loraux (1995) 106.

[86] Philip Hardie notes (*per litteras*) that 'Virgil's Caeneus comments on Dido's inability to succeed in a male role.' On Ovid's allusions to the Virgilian passage, see now Smith (1997) 75–8.

endeavour with female incursion into the realm of epic masculinity. Encounter with the female, however, inevitably results in the unmanning of the Ovidian epic hero: Salmacis (and Alcithoe) prevent Hermaphroditus from achieving full manhood, condemning him instead to a perpetual youth construed as transsexuality; Atalanta's presence at the Calydonian boar hunt provokes a contest of virility that leads directly to the deaths of several of the (male) combatants – Ancaeus, the Thestiadae, and Meleager himself; the excessive virility of the centaurs founders when confronted with Caeneus, a warrior whom they scorn as effeminate; and even Achilles, whose victory over Cycnus seems comprehensive, is drawn into this fatal pattern at the end of book twelve when he falls 'in feminine warfare' (*femineo Marte*, 12.610) to one of Paris' arrows. Only Perseus realizes the full measure of heroic masculinity, and his achievement is linked to his success in objectifying both Andromeda and Medusa in the Iliadic role of female prizes awarded in recognition of epic valour. In a world marked by divine caprice, in which the boundaries separating men from gods and beasts are constantly redefined 'through the literal transformation of men into gods and animals',[87] masculine subjectivity is particularly threatened by contact with the female.

Yet just as traffic with the female threatens to unman the epic hero in the tales of Hermaphroditus, Perseus and Ancaeus, so encounter with the male may 'unwoman' the female as in the cases of Salmacis, Atalanta and Caenis. A recurrent figure in the epicizing episodes examined in this study is the transsexual, whose person unites both masculinity and femininity: Hermaphroditus, Atalanta, Caenis–Caeneus. All three transsexual figures destabilize the gender stereotypes of classical epic by the challenge they pose to the generic conventions of epic narrative. Hermaphroditus' masculine quest for (self-)knowledge is radically realized in his union with Salmacis. Atalanta's skill in the hunt calls into question not only her fellow-hunters' virility (*uirtus*) but also their heroic prowess (*uirtus*) in the field. Caeneus, like Atalanta the pivotal figure in a climactic confrontation between man and beast, and the catalyst who inaugurates the rout of the bestial foe, disappears from the narrative altogether, neither dead nor even human at its close. In a poem about transformation, it is perhaps not surprising that transsexual figures should enjoy a special thematic prominence.[88] But these figures also point the way out of the two mutually-opposed critical orthodoxies that have bedevilled gender studies of Ovidian poetry for the last two decades, in which the poet is interpreted either as promoting gender 'subversion' and sexual 'liberation' or as reconfirming a repressive heterosexuality. Rather, this study has suggested that the transsexual characters in epicizing episodes of the *Metamorphoses* simultaneously undermine gender and its hierarchies and transcend them.[89]

[87] Hardie (1993) 68.

[88] Labate (1993) 51–2; Hinds (1998) 136–40; Segal (1998).

[89] I am grateful to Alessandro Barchiesi, Philip Hardie, Stephen Hinds, and Stephen Rupp for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

For Dan,
Best wishes,
Alison Keith

CAMBRIDGE PHILOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Supplementary Volume no. 23

OVIDIAN TRANSFORMATIONS

ESSAYS ON OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES* AND ITS RECEPTION