mean that Lesbius was unable to find three acquaintances to indulge him with *fellatio*.

That such is indeed the implication of the line may be supported by the epigram which immediately follows poem 79 in the corpus. Poem 80, while dealing with Gellius and Victor, unmistakably refers to *fellatio* in graphic terms. It even picks up the theme of *fama* in its fifth line ; in fact, the word *fama* appears in the Catullan epigrams only in poems 78b and 80.

It seems possible, perhaps even probable, then, that the juxtaposition of poems 78b, 79, and 80 was intentional on the part of the poet, and that poem 79, while still comprehensible on one level by itself, nevertheless gains an added dimension when viewed in relation to its poetic surroundings.

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Some Observations on Ovid's Lost *Medea*

Although what has been preserved from Ovid's lost tragedy is only two lines, and these not particularly brilliant (1), the predominant view among scholars seems to be that his *Medea* was a dramatic masterpiece and, therefore, its loss a very deplorable one (2). This view rests, of course, upon the double testimony of Tacitus and Quintilian, two of the most reliable critics of Latin literature, of whom the former bears witness to the popularity of the play (3) and the latter to its intrinsic qualities (4). Yet, there are also some other indications, which make me suspect that, had Ovid's *Medea* been preserved, we could hardly agree with Quintilian's opinion, based on the merits of the play, that Ovid would have been a much better poet, if he had preferred to govern his genius instead of indulging in it (5).

In the first place, the fact that *Medea*, albeit the poet's only play, was lost, whereas his other poetry has in the main been preserved, may not be quite

(1) Cf. QUINT., *Inst. orat.*, 8, 5, 6 : *seruare potui ; perdere an possim rogas ?* (Cf. *Heroid.*, 12, 75f, *Metam.*, 9, 547). SENECA, *Suasoriae*, 3, 7 ; *Feror huc illuc uae, plena deo.* (Cf. *Heroid.*, 12, 209, 211). The *plena deo* of the second fragment is supposed to come from a Virgilian verse (*ib.*, 3, 5), which has been lost to us ; more on this in F. DELLA CORTE's article in *Maia*, 23 (1971), p. 102. For a third fragment "discovered" by P. FAIDER in Seneca's *De ira* 1.1.4 (*magnasque irae minas agens*, in *Musée Belge*, 27 [1923], p. 131) the evidence is not sufficient.

(2) Cf. M. SCHANZ-C. HOSIUS-G. KRÜGER, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur*, München, 1935³, vol. 2, p. 252 : "Am meisten haben wir den Verlust der Tragödie *Medea* ... zu beklagen" ; D. RAVEN in *Greek and Latin Literature* (ed. John HIGGINBOTHAM) – hence *GLL* –, London, 1969, p. 292 : "It is probable enough that in Ovid's *Medea* we have lost a literary masterpiece" ; Brooks OTIS, *Ovid as an Epic Poet*, Cambridge UP, 1970², p. 18 ; H. JACOBSON, *Ovid's Heroides*, Princeton UP, 1974, p. 109.

(3) Cf. TACITUS, *Dialogus* 12 : *Nec ullus Asinii aut Messalae liber tam illustris est quam Medea Ouidii aut Varii Thyestes*. Yet, Varius's *Thyestes*, comparable to any Greek play according to Quintilian (10, 1, 98), was a scenic performance (cf. SCHANZ-HOSIUS-KRÜGER, *op. cit.*, p. 163), whereas Ovid's *Medea* was only a rhetorical *tour de force* for recitation in a narrow circle. (Cf. note 12 below).

(4) *Inst. orat.*, 10, 1, 98 : *Ouidii Medea uidetur mihi ostendere quantum ille uir praestare potuerit, si ingenio suo imperare quam indulgere maluisset.*

(5) See previous note and cf. also earlier *ib.*, 10, 1, 88, where Quintilian says that Ovid was *nimium amator ingenii sui*. As the elder Seneca also testifies, Ovid *non ignorauit uitia sua, sed amauit* (*Controu.*, 2, 2, 12). See also his rather arrogant self-confidence in *Amores*, 2, 18, 14 (*et huic operi* -i.e. tragedy – *quamlibet aptus eram*) and cf. *ibid.*, 1, 15, 41-2 and *Metam.*, 15, 871ff.

accidental, but have some connection with its general merit in comparison with the rest of his poems (6). At this point we should not forget that *Medea* was one of Ovid's earliest works (7) and consequently it must have been fraught to a greater extent with the faults that we usually find with his poetry, such as his rhetorical style and diction (8), excessive mannerism (9), artificial sentimentality (10), undue sophistication and diffuseness (11). And the more so, since all these features were particularly peculiar to the closet-dramas, as Seneca's extant plays show (12). Quintilian, however, being a rhetor himself, naturally had a different opinion about the use of rhetoric, mannerism, artificiality and prolixity in tragedy.

Secondly, we have the important evidence in *Amores* 3.1, where Ovid appears to waver between erotic elegy, which he has been already cultivating with success, and tragedy, which seeks to divert his interests and attract him to its own service. *Prima facie* the poem seems to reflect some kind of irresolution on Ovid's part, as to which genre he should finally give himself to, but the dilemma is a

(6) Besides *Medea*, Ovid's lost works include an unfinished *Gigantomachia*, an epithalamium for the consul Fabius Maximus, a number of satiric epigrams, a parody against bad poets, a poem commemorating the death of his patron Messalla, another on the apotheosis of Augustus and a third one celebrating Tiberius's triumph against the Dalmatians, two didactic poems, one on astronomy and another on fishing and, finally, a eulogy of the dead Augustus in the Getic idiom. For the evidence of all these see any of the standard histories of Latin literature (SCHANZ etc., DUFF, ROSE). Noone seems to regret the loss of any of the above works, save the Getic poem, and this for philological reasons, of course ; for noone believes that they would have any bearing on our evaluation of Ovid's poetry.

(7) According to most scholars the *Medea* was written some time between the two editions of the *Amores* and before the *Heroides*. See the brief summary of standard views on the matter in JACOBSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 312-3.

(8) For a recent brief and sensible defense of Ovid against the charge of being rhetorical, or rather for his justification for employing rhetorical techniques, see JACOBSON, 323f. and note 12 *ibid.*, for further bibliography. Cf. also T. F. HIGHAM, *Ovid and Rhetoric* in *Ovidiana, Recherches sur Ovide*, ed. I. N. HERESCU, Paris, 1958, p. 32.

(9) But as J. F. BELL has rightly said (*GLL*, 95-96), Ovid is a mannerist "because he had the misfortune of some geniuses to arrive late on the scene when what could be said had been said and only fresh opportunities for treatment existed. This is perhaps why most critics have not called him great".

(10) Cf. M. GRANT, *Roman Literature*, London, 1958² (1954), p. 207ff., and H. J. ROSE, *A Handbook of Latin Literature*, London 1954³ (1936), p. 327.

(11) Cf. SENECA, *Controu.*, 9, 5, 17 : *Nam et Ouidius nescit quod bene cessit relinquere*. See also J. W. DUFF, *A Literary History of Rome*, London, 1953² (1909), vol. I, p. 438.

(12) Cf. GRANT, p. 221 : "Seneca ... illustrates above all other writers ... the invasion of literature by rhetoric. These plays contain every possible antithesis, word-play, point and mannerism of Silver Latin". See also RAVEN in *GLL*, p. 292-3 and C. D. N. COSTA, *Seneca, Medea*, Oxford, 1973, p. 4f. That Ovid's *Medea* was not intended for the stage, but was a piece of rhetorical closet-drama like those of Seneca, we learn from the poet himself ; cf. *Tristia*, 5, 7, 27 : *nil equidem feci ... theatris*.

sham one and, as a matter of fact, nothing more than a simple poetical device. The whole of Ovid's poetry and the character of Ovid himself, as shown in it, vociferate against the likelihood that Ovid had ever been seriously faced with such a dilemma, or that he had ever seriously thought of the possibility of dedicating himself to play-writing (13). So, what is more likely to have happened is that, as soon as his talent in elegy was recognized, Ovid was urged by various quarters to try tragedy too, and that in Euripides's *Medea* he found the suitable material for composing a serious literary *controuersia*. After all, Augustus himself greatly encouraged the cultivation of tragedy, which had almost vanished by that time, wishing and hoping, like Horace perhaps, for a renascence of the genre (14). Ovid's attempt, a rhetorical *tour de force* in the region of drama (15), was certainly crowned with success. For, besides Quintilian and Tacitus, we also have the poet himself boasting in the *Amores* that his own occupation with tragedy had increased the reputation of the genre and shown his excellence even in that province of literature (16). And several years later, when Ovid apologizes to Augustus in *Tristia* II for his notorious *Ars amatoria*, he does not omit reminding the emperor that his poetical work includes serious compositions as well, like the *Metamorphoses*, the *Fasti* and one royal poem (*scriptum regale*) belonging to the tragic Muse and as such having the appropriate diction (17).

Yet, despite his success, Ovid's ministering to tragedy was neither bound nor possible to have any sequel ; for Ovid's temperament, inspiration and fancy could hardly be accommodated within the strict limitations of this genre. His natural bent and unrivalled dexterity in handling amorous themes, his ingenious and bold imagination, his light and polished verse, his facile and neat language and his smooth and vivid narrative, i.e. the main positive features of his poetry, were practically incompatible with the rigid form and solemn contents of tragedy. Consequently, it is highly improbable, despite Quintilian's view, that the tragic Ovid, composing in a literary province alien to his personal likings and natural aptitude (18), would be for posterity so attractive a poet as Ovid the elegist (19). If

(13) Cf. I. M. Le M. DU QUESNAY, *The Amores*, in *Ovid*, ed. J. W. BINNS, London, 1973, p. 27.

(14) See HORACE, *Epist.*, 2, 1, 210-13, and cf. DUFF, p. 389.

(15) Cf. RAVEN, p. 292 : "*Medea* may well have been like his *Heroides* a brilliant *tour de force* of rhetorical display, owing much to the popularity of recitatio".

(16) See *Amores*, 2, 18, 13 : *scepira tamen sumpsi, curaque tragoedia nostra/creuit, et huic operi quamlibet aptus eram*. For a discussion of the other possible-albeit most unlikely-translation of *tragoedia nostra creuit* here ("my tragedy was coming forward"), see JACOBSON, p. 308.

(17) Cf. *Tristia*, 2, 547-556 and especially, 553f. : *et dedimus tragicis scriptum regale cothurnis,/quaeque grauis debet uerba cothurnus habet*.

(18) Although Ovid boasts that he is as competent as anyone in writing tragedies (see note 16), immediately afterwards in the same poem he also admits, albeit somewhat indirectly, that tragedy does not suit his nature ; cf. *Amores*, 2, 18, 15 : *risit Amor*

the loss of the Ovidian *Medea* is to be regretted, this is not because we may have lost a literary masterpiece, but rather because we would really be curious to know how and to what extent Ovid managed to repress his temperament, spontaneity and natural propensities – and so successfully at that, as we are told – in order to serve a literary genre with strict and quite different demands from those to which he was naturally most fitted.

As to the way with which Ovid treated Medea in his play, almost nothing essential can be said with certainty [20], although many scholars confirm, even by adducing no or little evidence, that Ovid's *Medea* was largely imitated by Seneca's tragedy of the same title [21]. In any case the openly pro-Iason chorus in the Senecan play [22] cannot have been modelled on Ovid [23]. Contrarily, taking into account Medea's letter in the *Heroides*, one could perhaps suggest that Ovid must have treated Medea in his play with the furtive sympathy of Euripides, at least

pallamque meam pictosque cothurnos/sceptraque priuata tam cito sumpto manu. The keywords here are *priuata...manu*.

(19) GRANT also (*op. cit.*, p. 221), referring to Seneca's plays, greatly influenced by Ovid's *Medea*, as he believes, rightly holds that, despite their some merits "the taste of today is likely to find them mechanical and tiring". Cf. also BELL.'s remarks in note 9 above.

(20) Cf. JACOBSON, p. 109 : "Ovid's willingness, nay tendency to repeat legends and to reintroduce heroes and heroines in his poetry in completely different, even contradictory, fashions, makes it foolhardy to attempt an evaluation of his lost *Medea* on the basis of his handling of the myth elsewhere". See also COSTA, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

(21) So A. PALMER, *Heroides*, Oxford, 1898, p. 386. See also RAVEN, p. 292 ("Both in manner and in detail Ovid's influence on the Senecan tragedies is considerable"), GRANT (note 19 above) and SCHANZ-HOSIUS-KRÜGER, vol. II, p. 462. DUFF, however (*op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 204), commenting on the divergences of the Senecan *Medea* from that of Euripides, is more cautius : "How far these and other changes either in plot-management or in expression are due to Seneca himself is past finding out." But he also presumes that "Seneca's admiring imitations of Ovid, demonstrable elsewhere in his writing, render it likely that here too he owed him much." This is a more plausible suggestion. Perhaps, one can hardly deny the influence of Ovid's treatment of Medea in general upon Seneca's tragedy ; (see e.g. lines 56ff., 236f. and cf. *Heroides* 6 and 12, *Metam.*, 7, *Ars amat.*, 2, 373ff., 579ff.) ; but this is different from asserting that Seneca's play was basically influenced by Ovid's play.

(22) See for instance *Medea*, 102ff., 362, 596. And more generally, Medea in Seneca is "too little a woman and too much a sorceress" (DUFF, p. 208). In Seneca "the wide Euripidean humanity to win full sympathy for the outraged wifewood of Medea" (DUFF, p. 202) is desperately absent.

(23) On the contrary, the scene substituting Medea displaying her magic powers for the chance visit of king Aegeus may well have been fashioned after Ovid's *Metam.*, 7, 149ff. and *Heroid.*, 6, 85ff. For the Ovidian loans in Seneca's *Medea* see C. K. KAPNUKAYAS, *Die Nachahmungstechnik Senecas in den Chorliedern des Hercules Furens und der Medea*, Leipzig, 1930.

insofar as the motives of her horrible revenge are concerned [24]. This view could be further corroborated by two more indications. First, in the matter of a woman's resentfulness caused by her desertion, Ovid appears to share completely Euripides's understanding, as his own description of the deserted woman in *Ars amatoria* 2, 373ff shows [25]. Secondly, in *Amores*, 2, 14, 29ff, rebuking women who kill their unborn babies in order to interrupt their pregnancy, Ovid will say that, however savage and condemnable Medea and Procne [26] may be, at least they had serious reasons (*tristibus utraque causis*) for their appalling deeds ; they wanted to punish their unfaithful husbands by shedding the blood of their children [27]. Yet, apart from the concealed understanding and sympathy towards Medea's situation, as implied in the *Heroides* and the two aforesaid passages, there is no other evidence that could possibly help us to determine more fully or more concretely Ovid's standpoint in his *Medea*.

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(24) Jacobson's analysis of *Heroides* 12 (*op. cit.*, p. 109ff.), where he sees Medea – or rather claims that Ovid presents Medea – only as a criminal, unscrupulous and contemptible personality, goes against this suggestion. I have tried to refute his arguments elsewhere. In any case my own reading of *Heroides* 12 yields a quite different impression. Schanz-Hosius-Krüger also believe (*op. cit.*, p. 252) that the treatment of Medea in the play must have been very similar to that of *Heroides* 12, which was written almost simultaneously with it. Cf. also J. TOLKIEHN, *Quaestionum ad Heroides ovidianas spectantium capita VII*, Leipzig, 1888, p. 107. (Furthermore Tolkiehn maintains that Medea's letter in the *Heroides* is a summary of the play *Medea*.).

(25) Note especially lines 381-82 : *coniugis admissum uiolataque iura marita est/barbara per natos Phasias ulta suos*. As a matter of fact, Ovid's description of the deserted woman in the *Ars amatoria*, (imitated, incidentally, also by Seneca in his *Medea*, 579ff.) is an extension of Euripides's *Medea*, 265-66 : ὅταν δ' ἐς εὐνὴν ἠδικημένη κυφῇ, / οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλη φρὴν μιαιφονωτέρα.

(26) Upon discovering that her husband Tereus had raped her sister out of mere profligacy, Procne killed their son Itys and served him up to his father.

(27) Cf. *Amores*, 2, 14, 31 : *utraque saeua parens, sed tristibus utraque causis/iactura socii sanguinis ulta uirum*."