V ⊙ ORDINARY INCEST: *HEROIDES* 11

Canace to Macareus

If any of the words I write should be blurred by dark stains,
the blood of its mistress shall have blotted this small letter of mine.
My right hand holds the pen, the other an unsheathed blade,
and in my lap the scroll lies unrolled.
This is the image of Aeolus' daughter, writing to her brother;
in this posture, it seems, I can sweeten a cruel Father's heart.
I wish he were here himself, an onlooker at my death,
and that the work were done in his sight, and what he commanded, he saw.

Savage as he is, and so much fiercer than his own East Winds,
he could look upon my wounds without a tear.
No doubt it has its effect, a life led among raging winds:
his temper is perfectly suited to the nation he rules.
It is Notus and Zephyrus and Sithonian Aquilo he governs,
and even your wings, wanton Eurus, obey his command.
He governs the winds, yes, but not his own swollen rage.
Compared to his dominions, the realm of his imperfections is unconfined.

What good is it then that I, through the names of my ancestors, have ties with the sky,
and I can, among my relations, number great Jove?
Does that make this knife—this funeral offering—less lethal,
this weapon so strange to me that I, a woman, hold in my woman's hand?
O Macareus, I wish that the hour that made us one
had come after my death!

Why, brother, did you ever love me more than a brother
and why was I more than what a sister should be to you?
I was enkindled too; I recognized the warmth of my heart, the presence of some god,
one who was everything I used to be told he was.
The color had fled from my face; my body wasted, grew thin;
what little food I took was forced on me.
My sleep was troubled; a night was a year for me,
I sighed, but no wound caused my pain.
And I couldn't understand why I did all this,
and I didn't know what "in love" meant, but I was.

With an old woman's understanding, my nurse was the first to guess my trouble;
she was the first to say to me: You, Aeolus' child, are in love!

HEROIDES 11

SIQUA tamen caecis errabunt scripta lituris,
oblitus a dominae caede libellus erit.
dextra tenet calamum, strictum tenet altera ferrum,
et iacet in gremio charta soluta meo.
haec est Aeolidos fratri scribentis imago;
sic videor duro posse placere patri.
ipse necis cuperem nostrae spectator adesset,
auctorisque oculis exigeretur opus!

Ut ferus est multoque suis truculentior Euris,
spectasset siccis vulnera nostra genis.
scilicet est aliquid, cum saevis vivere ventis;
ingenio populi convenit ille sui.
ille Noto Zephyroque et Sithonio Aquiloni
imperat et pinnis, Eure proterve, tuis.
imperat heu! ventis, tumidae non imperat irae,
possidet et vitiis regna minora suis.

Quid iuvat admotam per avorum nomina caelo
inter cognatos posse referre Iovem?
num minus infestum, funebria munera, ferrum
feminea teneo, non mea tela, manu?
O utinam, Macareu, quae nos commisit in unum,
venisset leto serior hora meo!

Cur umquam plus me, frater, quam frater amasti,
et tibi, non debet quod soror esse, fui?
ipsa quoque incalui, qualemque audire solebam,
nescio quem sensi corde tepente deum.
fugerat ore color; macies adduxerat artus;
sumebant minimos ora coacta cibos;
nec somni faciles et nox erat annua nobis,
et gemitum nullo laesa dolore dabam.
nec, cur haec facerem, poteram mihi reddere causam
nec noram, quid amans esset; at illud eram.

Prima malum nutrix animo praesensit anili;
prima mihi nutrix "Aeoli," dixit, "amas!"

I blushed, and modestly looked down at my lap:
even in someone silent, this was sufficient sign of confession.
And then the freight of my violated womb began to swell,
and the secret burden made my weakened body heavy.
What herbs and what remedies did my nurse not bring to me
and apply to me with her own daring hand
so that deep inside me—this was the one thing I concealed from you—
the burden that was increasing there might be dislodged.
Ah, all too alive, the baby resisted the stratagems we used
and remained safe from its hidden enemy.

And now the most lovely sister of Phoebus had risen for the eighth time
and the moon, for the tenth time, was driving on the stallions of light.
Ignorant of what caused the sudden pains,
I was untried, a fresh recruit to birth,
and so did not remain quiet. "Why" said she, knowing my secret,
"should you betray your crime?" and pressed her hand over my mouth.
What, in my misfortune, could I do? The pain summoned cries of pain from me
but fear and my nurse, and modesty itself, said no.
I repress my groans and try to take back the sounds that have escaped
and force myself to drink down my own tears.
I saw death before my eyes, and Lucina still refused to help me—
and death too, if I were to die, would be a heavy crime—
when, hurling yourself upon me, tearing away my robe and my hair, you brought
warmth back to my breast by pressing your breast on mine,
and you said to me: "Sister, O my dearest sister, live
and do not, by your own death, be the death of two!
Let good hope lend strength to you: for you shall be your brother's bride:
he who made you a mother shall make you a wife as well."
Believe me, I was dead, but at your words I came to life
and delivered my womb's cargo, its crime.

But why rejoice? Aeolus sits in the heart of the palace;
our crime must, in secret, be removed from his sight.
Carefully, the old woman covers the child with fruits,
and with boughs of whitening olive, and with delicate ribbons,
making the pretense of a holy rite and speaking words of prayer.
The assembled crowd parts for the ritual, my father himself gives way to let her pass.
She was already near the threshold . . . the sound of the baby's crying reaches
my father's ears; he is betrayed, and by his own sign.

erubui, gremioque pudor deiecit ocellos;
haec satis in tacita signa fatentis erant.
iamque tumescebant vitiati pondera ventris,
aegraque furtivum membra gravabat onus.
quas mihi non herbas, quae non medicamina nutrix
attulit audaci supposuitque manu,
ut penitus nostris—hoc te celavimus unum—
visceribus crescens excuteretur onus!
a, nimium vivax admotis restitit infans
artibus et tecto tutus ab hoste fuit!

Iam noviens erat orta soror pulcherrima Phoebi,
denaque luciferos Luna movebat equos.
nescia, quae faceret subitos mihi causa dolores,
et rudis ad partus et nova miles eram.
nec tenui vocem. "quid," ait, "tua crimina prodis?"
oraque clamantis conscia pressit anus.
quid faciam infelix? gemitus dolor edere cogit,
sed timor et nutrix et pudor ipse vetant.
contineo gemitus elapsaque verba reprendo
et cogor lacrimas conbibere ipsa meas.
mors erat ante oculos, et opem Lucina negabat—
et grave, si morerer, mors quoque crimen erat—
cum super incumbens scissa tunicaque comaque
pressa refovisti pectora nostra tuis,
et mihi "vive, soror, soro o carissima," aisti;
"vive nec unius corpore perde duos!
spes bona det vires; fratri nam nupta futura es.
illius, de quo mater, et uxor eris."
mortua, crede mihi, tamen ad tua verba revixi:
et positum est uteri crimen onusque mei.

Quid tibi grataris? media sedet Aeolus aula;
crimina sunt oculis subripienda patris.
frugibus infantem ramisque albentis olivae
et levibus vittis sedula celat anus,
fictaque sacra facit dicitque precantia verba;
dat populus sacris, dat pater ipse viam.
iam prope limen erat—patrias vagitus ad auris
venit, et indicio proditur ille suo!

Aeolus snatches up the child, uncovers the false sacrifice,
the whole palace echoes to his maddened cry.

Just as the sea is made to tremble, when it is ruffled by a faint breeze,
just as an ashen bough is shaken by the warm wind from the South,
so you might have seen my body, ashen-white, trembling:
the bed on which I lay shook from its tremors.
He rushes into my room and with his shouts publishes my shame to all,
scarcely able to keep himself from beating my face with his hands.
I, in my humiliation and shame, did nothing but sob.
Speech froze upon my lips, checked by glazed terror.

Already he had commanded that his tiny grandson be given
to the dogs and the birds, left in some abandoned place.
The poor thing began to wail—you would have thought he understood—
and with what sounds he could, he began to beg for his grandfather's pity.
How do you think I felt then, brother—
you can judge my feeling from your own—
when before my eyes the enemy took the child of my body
to the deep forest, there to be eaten by wolves.

My father had now left my room; now at last it was possible
to beat my breasts, and to tear my cheeks with my nails.
Meanwhile one of my father's attendants appeared, with a look of grief,
and even then pronounced these disgraceful words:
"This sword Aeolus sends to you"—he handed me the sword—"and he instructs you
to judge from your own conduct what it may mean."

I know what it means, and I shall use the cruel sword bravely,
burying deep in my breast my father's present to me.
With gifts like this, father, do you give me away in marriage?
With this dowry, father, shall your daughter be rich?
Deluded Hymen, take your wedding torches far away
and be quick to escape these sacrilegious halls!
Raven-black Furies, bring me those glowing brands you carry
and ignite my funeral pyre with your smouldering light.
My sisters, marry under a better fate than mine, and be happy,
but remember me, even though I am lost to you.

What crime did the little boy commit in the few brief hours of his life?
He was scarcely born: how could he have harmed his grandfather?

eripit infantem mentitaque sacra revelat
Aeolus; insana regia voce sonat.

Ut mare fit tremulum, tenui cum stringitur aura,
ut quatitur tepido fraxina virga Noto,
sic mea vibrari pallentia membra videres;
quassus ab inposito corpore lectus erat.
inruit et nostrum vulgat clamore pudorem,
et vix a misero continet ore manus.
ipsa nihil praeter lacrimas pudibunda profudi;
torpuerat gelido lingua retenta metu.

Iamque dari parvum canibusque avibusque nepotem
iusserat, in solis destituique locis.
vagitus dedit ille miser—sensisse putares—
quaque suum poterat voce rogabat avum.
quid mihi tunc animi credis, germane, fuisse—
nam potes ex animo colligere ipse tuo—
cum mea me coram silvas inimicus in altas
viscera montanis ferret edenda lupis?

Exierat thalamo; tunc demum pectora plangi
contigit inque meas unguibus ire genas.
interea patrius vultu maerente satelles
venit et indignos edidit ore sonos:
"Aeolus hunc ensem mittit tibi"—tradidit ensem—
"et iubet ex merito scire, quid iste velit."

Scimus, et utemur violento fortiter ense;
pectoribus condam dona paterna meis.
his mea muneribus, genitor, conubia donas?
hac tua dote, pater, filia dives erit?
tolle procul, decepte, faces, Hymenaee, maritas
et fuge turbato tecta nefanda pede!
ferte faces in me quas fertis, Erinyes atrae,
et meus ex isto luceat igne rogus!
nubite felices Parca meliore sorores,
amissae memores sed tamen este mei!

Quid puer admisit tam paucis editus horis?
quo laesit facto vix bene natus avum?

If it is possible that he deserved to die, then let him be judged deserving of death—
ah, poor thing, he is punished for the guilt that is mine.
Oh my son, your mother's sorrow, now the prey of by wild beasts,
torn to pieces on the very day of your birth,
son, pitiful pledge of an ill-fated love,
today was your first day on earth, today your last.
I was not allowed to shed for you the tears that were your due,
nor to carry to your tomb the lock cut from my hair.
I did not bend over you, did not tear cold kisses from your mouth:
ravening beasts are tearing apart the child of my flesh.

I too, bearing my own wound, shall follow after my baby's shade,
and only briefly shall I have been called either a mother, or childless mother.
But you, nevertheless, whom hope promised to me in sorrow, and in vain,
gather up, I beg you, the scattered limbs of your son,
and bring them back to their mother, and place them with her in her tomb,
and let one urn, however cramped, carry the ashes of two.
Live, remembering me, and pour your tears into my wounds, and do not
recoil from the body of one you love, one who loves you.
Of you I ask this: that you carry out the last desires of the sister you loved
too well. I shall execute the will of my father *myself*, alone.

si potuit meruisse necem, meruisse putetur—
a, miser admisso plectitur ille meo!
nate, dolor matris, rapidarum praeda ferarum.
ei mihi! natali dilacerate tuo;
nate, parum fausti miserabile pignus amoris—
haec tibi prima dies, haec tibi summa fuit.
non mihi te licuit lacrimis perfundere iustis,
in tua non tonsas ferre sepulchra comas;
non super incubui, non oscula frigida carpsi.
diripiunt avidae viscera nostra ferae.

Ipsa quoque infantis cum vulnere prosequar umbras
nec mater fuero dicta nec orba diu.
tu tamen, o frustra miserae sperate sorori,
sparsa, precor, nati collige membra tui,
et refer ad matrem socioque inpone sepulcro,
urnaque nos habeat quamlibet arta duos!
vive memor nostri, lacrimasque in vulnera funde,
neve reformida corpus amantis amans.
tu, rogo, dilectae nimium mandata sororis
perfer; mandatum persequar ipsa patris!

IT WAS the Marquis de Sade who once asked, "What better place to find love than in the bosom of one's own family?" Few writers have had the temerity, or the affectation, to dismiss so unblushingly that universal cultural negative: the prohibition against incest. Still fewer have had the wit to smother it in the capacious blanket of a rival, if less urgent, cultural imperative: family solidarity. Yet it comes as no great surprise to us that Ovid's Myrrha flaunts her illicit desires after first cloaking them, rather transparently, in the Augustan hairshirt of *pietas*:

> humana malignas
> cura dedit leges, et, quod natura remittit
> invida iura negant. gentes tamen esse feruntur,
> in quibus et nato genetrix et nata parenti
> iungitur, et pietas geminato crescit amore. (*Met.* 10.329–33)
>
> Human care
> has made spiteful laws, and what nature permits,
> jealous laws forbid. Still, there are said to be races
> in which a mother mates with her son, a daughter
> with her father, so that piety is increased by a doubled love.

That the plea of *pietas* to dignify and excuse incest is not unexpected is perhaps surprising in itself. Yet Myrrha's irregular defense of her incestuous passion for her father is no haphazard quiddity, no accident of Ovidian prodigality. It is, rather, one of a discrete number of Ovid's *topoi* of incestuous love.

Ovid, like Catullus before him, characteristically explored aberrant aspects of human personality and action. Like Catullus, he exploited obsessive, erotic human drives exacerbated by contact with ethical and social norms as a medium for poetry. In Catullus such an interest manifests itself often in an evocation of mood accomplished by a method which seems unprecedented in Latin poetry; he extends the boundaries of lyric expression to meet the boundaries of personality:

> What appealed to the Romantics about Catullus was the widening of the area of poetry, the liberation of sensibility and emotion from the conventional persona, the search for the unique, the personal involvement in an experience so individual that the glow and colour is still upon it, the exploration of a terrifying vision of desolation

> such as that of Ariadne on the shores of Dia or of nightmare images like those of Attis.[1]

Given their postulated similarity of interest and subject matter, Catullus' method could not be more different from Ovid's. It would be mistaken—and an injustice to Catullus—to invoke here the sometimes helpful but more often misleading antithesis between *Erlebnisdichtung* and *Kunstdichtung*. For Ovid, especially in his treatment of characters driven by *inconcessi ignes*, the boundaries of personality *seem* narrower because his method of depicting forbidden love usually takes the form of a vacillation between fixed, and hence predictable, moral and rhetorical parameters. Only within those fixed and arbitrary limits does Ovid resemble his Ulysses who, forced to tell the insatiate Calypso each night the story of the fall of Troy, would often repeat the same tale but in different words: *aliter [ille] referre aliter, saepe solebat idem* (*Ars. Am.* 2.128). While Ovidian nuance and the degree of his poetic sympathy are never predictable, the *topoi* of incestuous love seem almost regular, so regular indeed that if we examine three treatments of the incest theme in Ovid—Phaedra's epistle (*Her.* 4) and the stories of Byblis (*Met.* 9) and Myrrha (*Met.* 10)—it will not be difficult to establish a "canon" of the predominant devices and motifs governing his treatment of incestuous love.

Such a canon will perforce be artificial. It will, by definition, obliterate distinctions in treatment, tempo, and characterization. It will obscure, as well, those differences in innuendo which are the stamp of Ovid's "polytonality," of his irony, his virtuosity, and, in short, his genius. Nor will it take into account the very great divergence in generic motive (i.e., heroic epistle and epic narrative) which these examples embrace. And it will not do justice to the devices which most vividly bring to life each woman's inimitable vivacity, tenacity, and desperation: Byblis' irresistible dream; Phaedra's mastery of the sophists' unwritten manual on how to make the lesser cause the greater excuse; Myrrha's suicide attempt, her first hesitant, nocturnal tryst with her deceived father, her later courageous self-knowledge and repentance, and finally her stunning and compassionate transformation. Yet this canon of Ovid's incest *topoi* will throw into bolder relief some unexpected and even extraordinary characteristics of a fourth Ovidian treatment of incest, the letter of Canace to her brother Macareus, and

[1] R. D. Williams, "Changing Attitudes to Virgil," in *Virgil*, ed. D. R. Dudley (New York: Basic Books, 1969), p. 132.

it will isolate the poetic motives informing this epistle's dramatic atypicality.

(1) Each of the three examples of incestuous love operates poetically, structurally, and conceptually upon a familiar series of related modal antitheses: *ratio* and *furor, pietas* and *scelus, pudor* and *amor, timor* and *audacia*.[2] Except in the case of Phaedra, who is a calculated perversion of her Euripidean prototype or perhaps a throwback to the discarded heroine of the *Hippolytus Calyptomenus*, these antitheses embody, on one level, the Latin equivalents of that ambivalence of volition which Phaedra had called the two kinds of *aidos*: διοσαὶ δ' εἰσίν, ἡ μὲν οὐ κακή, / ἡ δ' ἄχθος οἴκων (There are two kinds of shame: the one is not a bad thing, but the other is a burden on the house, *Hipp.* 385–86). For Byblis and Myrrha, *ratio, pudor*, and *pietas* each have that same fatal ambivalence; that is, each can seem in the eyes of the deluded heroine to remain somehow intact in the very process of its undetected conversion into its opposite. Barrett explains the mechanism as a kind of double inhibition: the *aidos*

> which inhibits a man from self-assertion in the face of the claims of others is properly a virtue; but it can easily turn into a diffidence or indecisiveness which prevents him from taking a firm line at all, and that done it becomes a vice—he *aideitai*, cannot bring himself to do even what he knows to be right.[3]

Thus Byblis and Myrrha seem at times helpless to resist because their resistance is a *via negationis*, and is thus helpless. On another level, however, beyond ethical niceties, the antitheses represent a conflict between strong libidinal drives and crippled social imperatives. It is a conflict in the process of resolution in Byblis and Myrrha, but a conflict *ex post facto* and only vestigial in Phaedra, whose intellectual *audacia* betrays more *ratio* than *furor* and who is, for that reason, far more witty than pathetic. For Phaedra, *pietas, pudor*, and *timor* are the postulated values of her audience (Hippolytus) and thus become the enemy defences of the fortress her rhetoric will storm.

(2) Within the vacillation between these antithetical extremes, there is usually a discernible narrative development from the initial uncertain stages of incestuous infatuation to abandoned commitment, *discordia*

[2] A good example is Myrrha, *Met.* 10.319–24; see also *Met.* 9.509–15, 526–27, 460–61, 540–45, 556–57; *Met.* 10.369–72, 351–55, 366–67, 410–14; *Her.* 4.9–10, 51–53, 131–34, 150–56.

[3] W. S. Barrett, *Euripides Hippolytos* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 230.

mentis.[4] The point of inception is unconscious in Byblis,[5] conscious in Myrrha and Phaedra.[6] While in Phaedra's case the exigencies of her particular rhetorical aim naturally limit a narrative development such as is available to the more expansive epic treatment, Phaedra herself does objectify to some extent the stages of her infatuation. Moreover, the tone of her epistle exhibits a correlative development in rhetorical stance from reserve, *timor* (manifested first in her euphemistic prescript and then in her subsequent self-justification),[7] to abandoned temerity, *audacia*.[8]

(3) In each case, despite the presence of some narrative development, there is a distinct subordination of the narrative dimension to the ethical interest. Such a subordination is manifested in the emphasis on the interior debate of the afflicted woman or, in Phaedra's epistle and in Byblis' letter, in a transference of that debate to the realm of the poeticized *suasoria*.

(4) In each case, at those moments in which the narrative element does dominate, Ovid nevertheless emphasizes the ethical content of the action, focusing on the preliminary awakening of incestuous desires or on the preliminary communication, either by way of a letter or an encounter mediated by a go-between. The narrative will thus serve as a frame; it is of secondary importance to the evocation of complex psychological tensions.

(5) The result is that the narrative description of action, no less than the interior debate (whether monologue or poetic *suasoria*), emphasizes the moment most relevant to the ethical bias of each treatment of incest: the moment of decision.

(6) Each of the incestuous lovers employs specious argument to persuade either herself or the object of her desires that the illicit is somehow licit, that the projected *scelus* is a form of *pietas*, the *nefas* not absolute but rather *nomina vana* (empty words).[9]

(7) Such reasoning often takes the form of the argument from ethical relativism. As such, it invokes generic or geographic exceptions to the incest prohibition. Examples of divine, human, and even animal behavior are offered in support of the claim that incest is no violation of a larger "natural" scheme of things.[10]

(8) Each lover, in different ways, addresses the question of the

[4] For example, *Met.* 9.635–38; *Met.* 10.445; *Her.* 4.47–52.

[5] *Met.* 9.457–67.

[6] *Met.* 10.319; *Her.* 4.69–72.

[7] Her. 4.11–14, 17–34.

[8] *Her.* 4.154–55.

[9] *Met.* 9.497–501, 551–55, 10.329–30, 334–35; *Her.* 4.111–26, 129–30.

[10] For examples of divine behavior, see *Her.* 4.131–36 and *Met.* 9.498–501; for human, see *Met.* 9.507 and 10.331–33; and for animal, *Met.* 324–29.

dignity or the social status of her lover. In a manner axiomatic for ethical subjectivism, the notion of individual worth is seen to eclipse the value of communal standards and thus override shared cultural imperatives or prohibitions.[11]

(9) Nevertheless, each lover admits—whether indirectly, inadvertently, or wholly unwittingly—to the power and the permanence of the values against which she reacts. Most frequently she advocates the dissolution of such values only in her own case, while she exploits related cultural or ethical norms for her own expediency.

(10) Each lover alludes to the facility of concealment: the public will easily misconstrue the unnatural behavior of the incestuous couple as a natural manifestation of filial or sibling love.[12]

(11) Each treatment of the incest motif either anticipates or describes the repugnance of the male: he sees the incestuous drive not as *amor* but as an unhappy expression of naked *libido*.[13]

(12) There is an attempt in each case, sometimes independent of the motive of persuasion, to make some rational sense of an admittedly irrational situation. The attempt is usually punctuated by emotional parentheses and by questions (unanswered and unanswerable) as to why such a baffling condition should have arisen.[14]

(13) Each lover's obsession is so extreme that she sees the choice between incest and abstinence as no choice at all. That is, it is not for her a decision between two modes of action but between her own continued existence and her death: the one imagined alternative to incest is suicide.[15]

Each element within this "canon" of the Ovidian *topoi* of incestuous infatuation, whether emphasized or merely glanced at in passing, whether subordinated to each woman's very distinct personality bias or exaggerated by that same bias, contributes to an artificial yet, for our purposes, useful picture of Ovid's incestuous women. They are usually women who are responsive to social and cultural norms but who now find themselves at the mercy of other, more commanding forces from within. As a result, they are neither tepid nor submissive creatures. They are, instead, volatile and passionate women violently buffeted by their desires—strongly obsessive, intensely driven, and yet, in varying degrees and at different times, resistant to the impulse to which

[11] *Met.* 9.475–78; 10.336–37; *Her.* 4.18, 31–34.
[12] *Met.* 9.535–39, 556–60; 10.356–67, 467–68; *Her.* 4.10, 138–46.
[13] *Met.* 9.505–6, 574–77, 474–75; 10.354–55, 472–75; *Her.* 4.129–30.
[14] *Met.* 10.346–55; *Her.* 4.150–52.
[15] *Met.* 9.502–5; 10.377–81, 428; *Her.* 4.1–2.

they ultimately succumb.[16] They are, moreover, represented as intelligent women. They are sufficiently articulate not only to objectify and describe their own feelings but to react to them critically in their attempts to subdue or justify them. Finally, however, their intelligence is at the mercy of their desires. Their minds are resourceful, but their thought, in the last analysis, willful. Their knowledge, the application of reason to experience, is not suspended or selectively obliterated but perverted to serve the ends of passion.[17] They are, thus, living examples of what Socrates calls the view of *hoi polloi*, the many:

> δοκεῖ δὲ τοῖς πολλοῖς περὶ ἐπιστήμης τοιοῦτόν τι, οὐκ ἰσχυρὸν οὐδ' ἡγεμονικὸν οὐδ' ἀρχικὸν εἶναι· οὐδὲ ὡς περὶ τοιούτου αὐτοῦ ὄντος διανοοῦνται, ἀλλ' ἐνούσης πολλάκις ἀνθρώπῳ ἐπιστήμης οὐ τὴν ἐπιστήμην αὐτοῦ ἄρχειν ἀλλ' ἄλλο τι, τοτὲ μὲν θυμόν, τοτὲ δὲ ἡδονήν, τοτὲ δὲ λύπην, ἐνίοτε δὲ ἔρωτα, πολλάκις δὲ φόβον, ἀτεχνῶς διανοούμενοι περὶ τῆς ἐπιστήμης ὥσπερ περὶ ἀνδραπόδου, περιελκομένης ὑπὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἁπάντων. (*Prot.* 352b)

> Most people think, in general terms, that it [knowledge] is nothing strong, no leading or ruling element. They don't see it like that. They hold that it is not the knowledge that a man possesses which governs him, but something else—now passion, now pleasure, now pain, sometimes love, and frequently fear. They just think of knowledge as a slave, buffeted by all the other affections.

Byblis, Myrrha, and especially Phaedra are all subjected to some degree of Ovidian mockery. But where we find such mockery, we find that it occurs without cruelty, without Tacitean viciousness or Juvenalian disgust. Indeed, especially in the *Metamorphoses*, it is delivered with a restraint that borders on what one might venture to call charity.[18] I shall cite only one example. When Byblis prays that she may die before she yields to her passion for Caunus, she says:

> aut nostro vetitus de corde fugabitur ardor
> aut, hoc si nequeo, peream, precor, ante toroque

[16] Myrrha is most resistant, and most consistently so. She is never, like Byblis, *palam demens*. Her moral tension is sustained and gradually intensified so that her final condition is not madness, but true *discordia mentis*.
[17] *Ovid's Metamorphoses, Books 6–10*, ed. W. S. Anderson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), p. 456.
[18] Compare Byblis' transformation (533–34) with Myrrha's (497–98 and 501–2).

mortua componar, *positaeque det oscula frater*!
et tamen arbitrium quaerit res ista duorum:
finge placere mihi: scelus esse videbitur illi. (*Met.* 9.502–6)

Either my passion, forbidden, will flee from my heart
or if I cannot do this, I pray I may die first, and be laid out dead
on my couch,
and as I lie there may my brother kiss my lips.
And yet that act requires the will of two!
Suppose it pleases me: to him it will seem a crime.

Byblis exhibits here the characteristically ambivalent death fantasy of the thwarted adolescent. But her scenario undergoes an abrupt change in tone, a shift from the histrionic-pathetic to the erotic. W. S. Anderson has managed to capture, quite faithfully, the elusive comic note:

> Byblis has momentarily recovered her sense of right and so she proposes for herself either of two courses of action, to thrust the passion from her heart or to die. But the first has a future verb, the second only a present subjunctive. The uncertainty which that indicates quickly becomes obvious. Byblis imagines herself dead, stretched out on her bed (*toro*) and Caunus coming to kiss her. Immediately she ceases wanting to be dead.[19]

Yet Ovid's jest is at once created and delicately qualified within the last couplet: if the decision for suicide requires the *arbitrium duorum*, Byblis' incestuous desires require it no less. And in the last line, in which Byblis (unlike her mythological prototypes) renounces suicide, her thought applies more nearly, if less grammatically, to incest than to suicide: *Finge placere mihi: scelus esse videbitur illi.* In choosing to live, Byblis unwittingly pronounces the sentence of death upon herself which will be fulfilled in the ensuing narrative.

It is in this verbal irony that the generosity of Ovid's mockery lies. Byblis resembles Claudio in *Measure for Measure.* Although condemned to die for his sensuality, Claudio is so incorrigibly and sensually alive that in the very moment of his greatest resignation, he still cannot distinguish death from sensuality: "I will encounter darkness as a bride / And hug it in my arms." Ovid's Byblis, like his Phaedra and Myrrha too, is *nimium vivax*. Her vivacity is, while not beyond ethical judgments, still not convincingly deplorable. Ovid ultimately

[19] Anderson, *Metamorphoses 6–10*, p. 454.

leaves his heroines of *inconcessi ignes* to heaven. For these women, despite the brilliance of their rebellious gamble, are doomed from the beginning to lose: life has held, all along, the high cards.

In sum, each element of Ovid's canon of incestuous love points to a strong moral and ethical bias. Within that bias, however, Myrrha, Byblis, and even Phaedra are depicted critically, but with enormous sympathy. What must be stressed here is that both the critical and the sympathic qualities of Ovid's treatment emerge chiefly from the subordination of narrative interest to the depiction of complex, anxiety-ridden states. The narration of events is at frequent intervals superseded by extended interior monologues which focus not on action at all but on the quality of action and on the decisions ensuing from or leading to action. Thus we cannot dismiss Ovid's heroines with any comfortable or facile opprobrium. On the contrary, even the reader who is in search of pure entertainment will be required to linger reflectively—and, in the last analysis, sympathetically—upon these depictions of conventionally criminal, immoral, and perhaps repellent passion.

Among the great portraits of human aberration, guilt, and obsessive passion in the *Metamorphoses* there are not a few studies in character and pathology unsurpassed in Augustan literature. These are studies framed by superbly entertaining, engrossing narratives, stories whose often strangely compelling force derives from that residuum of mystery and brilliant unreality untouched by the enameled poetic surface of the text. But when Ovid's interest becomes predominantly moral or ethical, or when he requires a moral or ethical emphasis as a backdrop for creating convincing amoral and irrational passion, his reliance upon narration diminishes correspondingly. In fact, both in the *Heroides* and in the *Metamorphoses*, an emphasis upon the narrative dimension of an event becomes one index of Ovid's detachment from his subject, an instrument of an Ovidian alternative to poetic sympathy: comic dissonance. In *Heroides* 11, as elsewhere in Ovid, the presence of a seemingly dominant narrative interest is, like any other aspect of style, not merely an end in itself but a vehicle for poetic value, its ends inseparable from poetic meaning.

If we turn now to *Heroides* 11, we face a task beset with obstacles. The largest and most formidable of these is virtually insuperable. It will, I think, be fairly simple to establish Ovid's divergence from what I have, for convenience, termed his "canon" of incestuous love. Yet the greatest single asset we have for an examination of the wit and counter-rhetoric pervading the *Heroides* is the availability of the Greek or Latin prototypes upon which Ovid drew. The epistles of Briseis,

Penelope, Phaedra, Medea, Ariadne, Sappho, and Dido are built upon a sometimes slight and at other times massive fabric of allusion, a fabric which inevitably encourages a comparison between the prototype and the new Ovidian design. We may most accurately appreciate Ovid's intention by measuring, as we were no doubt intended to do, the degree and quality of his deviation from the tradition he inherited, or the selective preferences and emphases he exhibits vis-à-vis the variations available within the tradition. Yet Canace's epistle baffles such an approach. It is almost certain that it derives from the *Aeolus* of Euripides, but that play, except for a few scattered fragments and summary remarks by ancient authors, is lost to us.

Palmer's conjectural summary of the plot of the *Aeolus* relies on Plutarch,[20] Stobaeus,[21] the scholiast on Aristophanes' *Clouds*,[22] Dionysius Halicarnassus,[23] and on Ovid's *Heroides* 11. Palmer writes:

> Euripides dramatized the story in his "Aeolus," a play which greatly scandalized the Athenians. This play was probably the only source of Ovid's epistle, and we may guess accurately enough at its plot from the remarks of Dionysius and Stobaeus. Macareus, having seduced Canace, and fearing the wrath of Aeolus for himself and for her, tells Canace that he will persuade their father to allow him to marry her. He gains his father's consent after a specious argument: but meantime Canace's child is born. Aeolus, ignorant of its paternity, dooms her to die, and sends a sword to her. Macareus, hearing of this, goes again to Aeolus, confesses all, and implores his pardon for her and himself. He succeeds, and rushes to Canace's chamber with the news, but only to find her dying of a self-inflicted wound,

[20] Plutarch, *Moralia* 312C (Daniel): Αἴολος, τῶν κατὰ Τυρρηνίαν βασιλεύς, ἔσχεν ἐξ Ἀμφιθέας θυγατέρας ἓξ καὶ ἴσους ἄρρενας. Μακαρεὺς δὲ ὁ νεώτατος ἔρωτι ἔφθειρε μίαν, ἡ δὲ παιδίον ἐκύησεν· ἐμπεσοῦσα (l. τεκοῦσα Wytt.) δὲ καὶ ξίφους πεμφθέντος ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρός, ἄνομον κρίνασα ἑαυτὴν διεργάσατο· ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ὁ Μακαρεύς· ὡς Σώστρατος ἐν δευτέρᾳ Τυρρηνικῶν.

[21] Stobaeus, *Florilegium* 4.20.72 (Wachsmuth): Σωστράτου ἐν δευτέρῳ Τυραννικῶν (l. Τυρρηνικῶν)· Αἴολος τῶν κατὰ Τυρρηνίαν βασιλεὺς τόπων ἔσχεν ἐξ Ἀμφιθέας θυγατέρας ἓξ καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν ἀριθμὸν ἀρρένων παίδων, ὧν ὁ πρεσβύτατος Μακαρεὺς Κανάκης τῆς ἀδελφῆς ἐρασθεὶς ἐβιάσατο τὴν προειρημένην. Αἴολος δὲ περὶ τούτων μαθὼν τῇ θυγατρὶ ξίφος ἔπεμψεν· ἡ δὲ ὡς νόμον (l. ἄνομον) δεξαμένη τὸν σίδηρον αὐτὴν ἀνεῖλε. Μακαρεὺς δὲ τὸν γεννήσαντα προεξιλεωσάμενος ἔδραμεν εἰς τὸν θάλαμον· εὑρὼν δὲ τὴν ἀγαπωμένην αἱμορραγοῦσαν τῷ αὐτῷ ξίφει τὸν βίον περιέγραψε.

[22] Aristophanes, *Nubes* 1371: ὁ δ' εὐθὺς ᾗσ' Εὐριπίδου ῥῆσίν τιν' ὡς ἐβίνει / ἀδελφός, ὠλεξίκακε, τὴν ὁμομητρίαν ἀδελφήν. On which the scholiast comments: γέγραπται Εὐριπίδου Αἴολος δρᾶμα οὕτως καλούμενον ἐν ᾧ παρήγαγε Μακαρέα τὸν παῖδα τοῦ Αἰόλου φθείροντα Κανάχην τὴν ἀδελφήν.

[23] Dionysius Halicarnassensis, *Ars Rhetorica* c.9.11: ἐν τῷ Αἰόλῳ ὁ Μακαρεύς ἐστιν ὁμιλήσας τῇ ἀδελφῇ καὶ λανθάνων καὶ συμβουλεύων τῷ πατρὶ τὰς ἀδελφὰς τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς συνοικίσαι ἵνα τὸ οἰκεῖον διοικήσηται.

> on which he slays himself with the same sword. The play must have been painfully tragical.[24]

The publication in 1961 of an ancient hypothesis of Euripides' play (*POxy.* 2457) sheds new light on the plot of the play.[25] It supports Palmer's contention (against the doubts of Rohde and Wilamowitz)[26] that *Heroides* 11 was based on the lost Euripidean play, and it lends some support to Palmer's guess (disputed by Robert)[27] that Aeolus was somehow persuaded to sanction the intermarriage of his progeny. It also provides evidence of another twist in the plot: the marriages were to be decided by the casting of lots, and Macareus, successful in convincing his father to allow the incestuous marriages, failed to draw the lot which would have made Canace his wife, thus losing her to one of his own brothers. The papyrus is specific in yet another area where other hypotheses are not. Canace concealed her indiscretion νοσειν προ[σποιη]τως (by pretending to be sick). That within this context no mention is made of any attempted abortion seems to offer reason to conclude that Canace's effort to abort her child is an Ovidian invention. Furthermore, there is no evidence that any author prior to Ovid depicted a Canace who reciprocated the sexual love of her brother, a Canace who was "in love" with Macareus. Finally, there is every

[24] Palmer, *Heroides*, p. 381.

[25] H. Lloyd-Jones, "The Oxyrhynchus Papyri 27," in *Gnomon* 35 (1963), p. 443:

Αιολος ου [αρ]χη
η δεινα και δυσγνωστα βουλ[ευει θεος
ἡ δε υποθεσις
Αιολος παρα θεων εχων την των ανεμων δ[ιοικησιν
ανωκησεν εν ταις κατα Τυρρηνιαν νησο[ις υιους εξ
και θυγατερας τας ισας γεγεννηκως τ[ουτων δ ο
νεωτατος Μακαρευς μιας των αδελ[φων ε-
ρασθεις διεφθειρεν η εγκυος γενη[θεισα
τον τοκον εκρυπτεν τω νοσειν προ[σποιη-
τως ο δε νεανισκος επεισε τον πατερα [τας θυ-
γατερας συνοικισαι τοις υιοις ο δε συνκ.[
μενος κληρον του γαμου πασιν εξεφα[ινετο
πταισας δε περι τον παλον ο ταυτα μ[ηχα-
νησαμενος ητυχει την γαρ υπο τουτου [διεφθαρ-
μενην κληρος προς αλλου συμβιωσ[ιν ενυμ-
φαγωι[γ]ει συνδραμοντες δ εις το αυτ[ο
κουτ. [ ]οι το μεν γεννηθεν η τροφος σ[

[26] What I hope to demonstrate in this chapter is that the doubts of Rohde and Wilamovitz were justified: *Heroides* 11 is not a straightforward adaptation either of the tone or of the plot of the *Aeolus*. Ovid goes to some lengths sometimes to alter and sometimes to suppress events crucial to the action of the play. See E. Rohde, *Der Griechische Roman* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Hartel, 1914), p. 108, n. 2; and and U. von Wilamowitz, *Kleine Schriften* 5 (Berlin 1937), p. 57, n. 3.

[27] L. Robert, *Die Griechische Heldensage* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881), p. 383.

indication that in Euripides' play Canace died because the birth of her child had been detected by Aeolus, the birth, that is, of an illegitimate child—but, in particular, a child who was the offspring of an incestuous union. Aeolus did not condemn his daughter as a result of her incest, it would seem, but simply because she was an "unwed mother." Indeed, we have little reason to believe that Aeolus even knew that Canace's son was Macareus' son as well. Nevertheless, it is likely that the *issue* of incest, not the fact of this particular liaison, was the focus of Euripides' play.

The ancient hypotheses identify and elucidate the situation in which Ovid's Canace finds herself, but the fragments bear no concrete or significant relationship to anything Canace says or does in Ovid's epistle. Ordinarily, we would dismiss the fragments as in themselves interesting for the light they shed upon Euripides' play but, regrettably, of insufficient value in the assessment of Ovid's treatment of the tradition. Yet given these fragments, and armed by what little we know from other sources of the events of the play and of the contemporary public reaction to it, we unearth a perhaps predictable but still crucial fact: the play was Euripidean, Euripidean in precisely the way that Ovid is Euripidean (despite clear divergences) in his Medea and Phaedra epistles and in his treatment of Byblis and Myrrha. Most important, the *Aeolus* was Euripidean in precisely the way Ovid's epistle is not: in its ethical bias, its predominant emphasis on incest as an ethical and moral issue.

The most notorious of the fragments of Euripides' *Aeolus* introduces us at once to the ethical climate of the play. It is, presumably, an example of what Palmer calls Macareus' "specious argument": τί δ' αἰσχρὸν ἦν μὴ τοῖσι χρωμένοις δοκῇ (What is shameful, if it does not seem so to those who do it?).[28] Dodds writes; "The line understandably created a scandal. It shows just where ethical relativism lands you."[29] In fact, it provoked two famous rebukes. Aristophanes parodied it in the *Frogs* 1475: τί δ' αἰσχρόν, ἦν μὴ τοῖς θεωμένοις δοκῇ (What is shameful, if it does not seem so to those who view it?), and, according to Serenus in *Stobaeus* 5.82, Plato undertook to challenge the sentiment personally:

> Εὐριπίδης εὐδοκίμησεν ἐν θεάτρῳ εἰπών "τί δ' αἰσχρὸν ἂν μὴ τοῖς γε χρωμένοις δοκῇ;" καὶ ὁ Πλάτων ἐντυχὼν αὐτῷ "ὦ Εὐριπίδη"

[28] A. Nauck, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, fr. 19.
[29] E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951), p. 187.

> ἔφη, "αἰσχρὸν τό γ' αἰσχρόν, κἂν δοκῇ κἂν μὴ δοκῇ."

> Euripides gained applause in the theatre when he said, "What is shameful, if it does not seem so to those who do it?" Then Plato met him and said, "Euripides, what is shameful is shameful, whether it seems so or not."

Certainly Macareus' argument exemplifies the erosion by subjectivism of what C. D. Broad would call "deontological" criteria of ethical behavior:

> Deontological theories hold that there are ethical propositions of the form: Such and such kind of action would always be right (or wrong) in such and such circumstances, no matter what its consequences might be.[30]

Other fragments of the *Aeolus* suggest that the play was wholly pervaded by ethical propositions and arguments of a similar nature. Not all of them attack the incest prohibition, but instead assert the relativity of other conventional values. The boldest is an assertion of the arbitrary nature of "nobility":

> τὴν δ' εὐγένειαν πρὸς θεῶν μή μοι λέγε,
> ἐν χρήμασιν τόδ' ἐστί, μὴ γαυροῦ, πάτερ·
> κύκλῳ γὰρ ἕρπει· τῷ μὲν ἔσθ', ὁ δ' οὐκ ἔχει·
> κοινοῖσι δ' αὐτοῖς χρώμεθ'· ᾧ δ' ἂν ἐν δόμοις
> χρόνον συνοικῇ πλεῖστον, οὗτος εὐγενής.[31]

> Don't talk to me about god-given nobility. This kind of thing depends on money. Don't pride yourself, father, for it goes in cycles—one man has it, another does not. We all use money, but the house where it stays the longest, there's your nobleman.

Another proclaims the interdependence and interreliance of what men take to be separable and absolute values and properties:

> δοκεῖτ' ἂν οἰκεῖν γαῖαν, εἰ πένης ἅπας
> λαὸς πολιτεύοιτο πλουσίων ἄτερ;

[30] C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 206.
[31] Nauck, *TGF*, fr. 22.

οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο χωρὶς ἐσθλὰ καὶ κακά,
ἀλλ' ἔστι τις σύγκρασις, ὥστ' ἔχειν καλῶς.
ἃ μὴ γὰρ ἔστι τῷ πένητι πλούσιος
δίδωσ'· ἃ δ' οἱ πλουτοῦντες οὐ κεκτήμεθα,
τοῖσιν πένησι χρώμενοι τιμώμεθα.[32]

Do you think you could manage the land, if the entire poor population should conduct the government without the help of the wealthy? Noble and base cannot exist apart, but a kind of blending takes place so that all is well. What the poor man lacks, the rich man gives; and what we rich men do not possess, we get in compensation by using the poor.

A third fragment affirms the subordination of values to the accidents, ambiguities, and vagaries of time: αἰεὶ μὲν ζῇ, τὸ δὲ μεθίσταται κακόν, / τὸ δ' αὖ πέφηνεν αὖθις ἐξ ἀρχῆς νέον (Some evils exist forever, some change, others spring forth utterly new from the start).[33] A fourth dispenses with wealth as a positive value, descrying its validity as a measure of success and, presumably, championing subjective experience at the expense of accepted standards of value: μὴ πλοῦτον εἴπῃς· οὐχὶ θαυμάζω θεόν, /ὃν χὠ κάκιστος ῥᾳδίως ἐκτήσατο (Don't speak of wealth. I do not honor a god whom the basest of men acquires with ease).[34]

Other fragments in the play further reinforce the climate of ethical controversy. There is a choral pronouncement on *poikilia prapidon* which may reflect in a general way upon Macareus' particular exhibition of intellectual audacity:

ἦ βραχύ τοι σθένος ἀνέρος· ἀλλὰ
ποικιλίᾳ πραπίδων
δεινὰ μὲν φῦλα πόντου
χθονίων τ' ἀερίων τε
δάμναται παιδεύματα.[35]

Puny is the strength of man; but by his subtle wits he tames the dreadful tribes of the sea and the creatures of earth and sky.

There is a solemn warning against intellectual arrogance and moral iconoclasm:

[32] Nauck, *TGF*, fr. 21.
[33] Nauck, *TGF*, fr. 35.
[34] Nauck, *TGF*, fr. 20.
[35] Nauck, *TGF*, fr. 27.

σιγᾶν φρονοῦντα κρείσσον' εἰς ὁμιλίαν
πεσόντα· τούτῳ δ' ἀνδρὶ μήτ' εἶην φίλος
μήτε ξυνείην, ὅστις αὐτάρκη φρονεῖν
πέποιθε δούλους τοὺς φίλους ἡγούμενος.[36]

The man who falls in with company is better off if he is prudent and keeps quiet. I don't want to be friends with nor associate with a man who dares to think independently, and takes his friends for slaves.

There is, further, a commonplace about the undesirability of young women marrying young men. They are too close to each other in age:

κακὸν γυναῖκα πρὸς νέαν ζεῦξαι νέον·
μακρὰ γὰρ ἰσχὺς μᾶλλον ἀρσένων μένει,
θήλεια δ' ἥβη θᾶσσον ἐκλείπει δέμας.[37]

It is not good to marry a young man to a young woman; for the great strength of men is more lasting, while a woman's bloom more quickly abandons her body.

If this argument were applied to brother-sister incest, as it might well have been, it would be what Broad would call "teleological" ethical argument:

Teleological theories hold that the rightness or wrongness of an action is always determined by its tendency to produce certain consequences which are intrinsically good or bad.[38]

And if this "teleological" counterargument were invoked in the play, it would seem almost as specious as Macareus' own. Yet it would not be inappropriate to the debate of the play. It is well to remember that Socrates himself, the exemplar of deontological extremism, was not above using, if at times playfully, a similar if more sophisticated defense of the prohibition against parent-child incest. Xenophon reports that Socrates, challenged by the Sophist Hippias to show that the incest prohibition was more than mere convention, since not universally

[36] Nauck, *TGF*, fr. 29.
[37] Nauck, *TGF*, fr. 24.
[38] Broad, *Ethical Theory*, p. 207. I mention the "teleological" argument reported as Socrates' by Xenophon only because unless it is understood that it can be and was used in defense of "conservative ethics" it will perhaps appear that both sides in the *Aeolus* are exponents of ethical relativism.

observed, replied with an appeal to Hippias' own banner, *physis* (*Mem.* 4.4.20). He argued that nature herself obviously discourages incest by guaranteeing that incestuous partners will not make decent parents, since one of them will be too old to carry out adequately, over a period of many years, the full obligations of child-rearing.

Still other fragments from the *Aeolus* further enlarge the play's context of outraged convention. One, addressed to "maidens" (perhaps a preface to the report of Aeolus' decision to sanction the marriages of his children), employs aporia in the face of the unspeakable: δοξάσαι ἔστι, κόραι· τὸ δ' ἐτήτυμον οὐκ ἔχω εἰπεῖν (I can express an opinion, girls, but I cannot speak the truth).[39] Another strikes a note of shocked incredulity: ἆρ' ἔτυμον φάτιν ἔγνων, / Αἴολε, σ' εὐνάζειν τέκνα φίλτατα; (Surely the report I have heard is not true, Aeolus, that you are having your own children marry one another?)[40] None of the fragments I have singled out do much to support Palmer's conjecture about the play's "painful tragicality." Nor do they refute it. What they do suggest is that the play, much like Ovid's treatment of his heroines of *inconcessi amores*, was pervaded to a marked degree by subjective argument and by a climate of ethical dispute hinging upon the conventional *gradus* of all ethical discussion: persuasion, conversion, decision. By what means would Macareus attempt to win his father over to his point of view? Would Aeolus be convinced? Would his conviction result in decision, and decision in the kind of action naturally consequent upon it?

The particular quality of the play's "painful tragicality" is probably to be sought in the conjunction of the intellectual unorthodoxy and subjectivism of such sentiments as those above, with the arbitrary, accidental, yet acid logic of its action. It may have even pointed to a "moral" which, *mutatis mutandis*, became the commonplace of a later age: *non in dialectica complacuit Deo salvum facere populum suum.*

We cannot tell, either from the fragments of the *Aeolus* or from the ancient hypotheses, what manner of creature Euripides' Canace was. Common sense and familiarity with Euripides' techniques combine to suggest that if Canace was assigned a major or even a large role in the play (something we cannot really assume), then she may have been in some respects a foil for the articulate, sophisticated, manipulative, and desperate Macareus. Had she been such a foil—demure (relatively speaking), bewildered, suppressed, inarticulate, or pathetically long-suffering—and if we knew with some assurance that she had been, then the portrait of Canace which emerges from Ovid's *Heroides* 11

[39] Nauck, *TGF*, fr. 18.

[40] Nauck, *TGF*, fr. 17.

would emerge with sharper definition and thus yield more readily an appreciation of the poetic intention of the piece. As it is, however, Ovid's Canace is a bewildering figure. She is unreflective. She cannot be said ever, really, to think. She is neither rebellious, energetic, nor passionate. Yet we have good reason to be surprised at the absense of those characteristics, especially when we consider Ovid's other portraits of incestuous heroines. And we have further reason to expect some volition from her, some vehemence, when we consider that Ovid alone in antiquity depicted a Canace who was not a victim either of her brother's rape or of his masterful seduction, but a girl voluntarily responsive to her brother's attentions and thus a partner in whatever responsibility or even guilt should result from their liaison. What she did was done knowingly, intentionally, and amorously.

Sociologists and comparative anthropologists agree that incest is the only universal cultural prohibition, despite the many variations in the definition of the kinship relationship which must remain free of sexual interaction.[41] Psychologists, on the other hand, argue that incest is the most powerful preconscious libidinal imperative.[42] It would seem to follow that those who voluntarily indulge in its dubious pleasures and knowingly take upon themselves its culturally assigned pollution are intrepid, willful, assertive people. One does not lightly fall into bed with one's mother, father, sister, or brother. (Coercion of the very young is, of course, a special matter which does not obtain here.) The further assumption that aberrant volition is of necessity conscious, when not god-inflicted, has, in the ancient world, all the force of convention. When Hippolytus is told of Phaedra's incestuous infatuation with him he cries out in anger:

> ῥᾷστον δ' ὅτῳ τὸ μηδέν, ἀλλ' ἀνωφελὴς
> εὐηθία κατ' οἶκον ἵδρυται γυνή.
> σοφὴν δὲ μισῶ· μὴ γὰρ ἔν γ' ἐμοῖς δόμοις
> εἴη φρονοῦσα πλεῖον ἢ γυναῖκα χρή.
> τὸ γὰρ πανοῦργον μᾶλλον ἐντίκτει Κύπρις
> ἐν ταῖς σοφαῖσιν· ἡ δ' ἀμήχανος γυνὴ
> γνώμῃ βραχείᾳ μωρίαν ἀφῃρέθη. (*Hipp.* 638–44)

He who wins a cipher is happiest, he in whose halls
a mindless thing is throned in uselessness.

[41] Cf. Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), especially pp. 9–10 and 24.

[42] Levi-Strauss, *Elementary Structures*, pp. 17, 491.

But I hate the keen-witted woman: in my house
may no woman live who is more subtle than is woman's due;
for Cypris brings her mischief to birth better
in clever women: the resourceless one escapes
that folly by the short weight of her wit.

Hippolytus prefers, he says, a woman who has not the intelligence to be a fool. What he says isolates that aspect of Canace's character which is the more surprising to us to the degree that we share Hippolytus' prejudices and expectations; that aspect is her lack of assertiveness. Hippolytus' premise, τὸ γὰρ πανοῦργον μᾶλλον ἐντίκτει Κύπρις / ἐν ταῖς σοφαῖσιν (for Cypris brings her mischief to birth better in clever women), is, after all, the foundation upon which the Ovidian canon of incestuous love rests.

The Canace of the *Heroides* is unlike any of Ovid's other heroines of *inconcessi ignes*. In fact, her epistle is the companion piece, in reverse, of Phaedra's, *Heroides* 4.[43] Unlike Phaedra, Canace is immature, fundamentally unrebellious, quiet, even sedated. She is not passionate, and she is certainly not strident. Nor is she, it seems, very much in love. She has no decision to make, nothing to persuade. She neither resists nor enquires. Her incest is not (for her) an issue: it is a given. Therefore, her portrait does not draw on the "canon" of Ovid's motifs of incestuous love. It does not exploit the milieu of ethical controversy, retrograde subjectivism, and cultural nihilism common to the *Aeolus* and to Ovid's depiction of Byblis, Myrrha, and Phaedra. The result is that Ovid's *Heroides* 11 is at once more superficial and more ambitiously understated than any other Ovidian treatment of incestuous love and than any other epistle in the collection. It stands alone among the *Heroides* for another reason: in the almost universal critical approbation lavished upon it, an approval which has resisted any imprint of the changing critical standards and values which mark the Ovidian controversy of the past three hundred years.

Howard Jacobson's estimation of Canace and her epistle is an articulate distillation of the traditional mode of appreciation the poem has elicited. He opens his chapter on Canace with a summary of past laudations, and then adds his own:

Who could be heartless enough not to commiserate with, even shed

[43] See Heinrich Dörrie, "Untersuchungen zur Uberlieferungsgeschichte von Ovids *Epistulae Heroidum*," in *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* (1960), p. 72.

a tear for, the wretched girl? Ovid does not lose the advantage inherent in such a tale, but it is especially to his credit that the obvious pathos never degenerates into nauseating mawkishness. The poem is testimony to Ovid's ability, which he did not often exploit, to profit from tact, restraint, and self-control.[44]

Jacobson concludes this analysis by remarking on the conspicuous absence of traces of the incest "canon" in this poem:

Nowhere the slightest attempt to justify her deed. This heroine is too young, too naïve, too modest, or perhaps simply too upright [*sic*] to question the criminality of her incest. . . . she will not attempt extenuation of her actions, defense of herself. What other letter in the *Heroides* can make this claim?[45]

He ends his chapter by remarking on the characteristics of this poem which exalt it within the collection:

Undoubtedly, the absence of those pleas, cries and claims which abound elsewhere must, if for no other reason than the temporary relief from grating and carping women, be among the factors, if a minor one, that make this letter so appealing.[46]

Ovid's *Heroides* 11 does stand alone in the collection, and for the reason Jacobson and so many others have approved: its ambitious understatement. But the ensuing effect of that understatement is not, I think, a poem of high and delicate pathos. It is, instead, Ovid's richest venture in the fascination of the banal.

Canace opens her epistle on a note of operatic rigidity. And if the surprisingly childish irony she directs against her father at the end of her prescript mitigates the operatic but unintentional self-parody, it is only because that irony transforms her efficiently from the aspiring Callas to an infant diva too long confined to the chorus:

Siqua tamen caecis errabunt scripta lituris,
  oblitus a dominae caede libellus erit.
dextra tenet calamum, strictum tenet altera ferrum,
  et iacet in gremio charta soluta meo.

[44] Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, p. 159.
[45] Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, pp. 174–75.
[46] Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, p. 175.

haec est Aeolidos fratri scribentis imago;
sic videor duro posse placere patri. (1–6)

If any of the words I write should be blurred by dark stains
the blood of its mistress shall have blotted this small letter of mine.
My right hand holds the pen, the other an unsheathed blade,
and in my lap the scroll lies unrolled.
This is the image of Aeolus' daughter, writing to her brother;
in this posture, it seems, I can sweeten a cruel Father's heart.

Canace's prescript bears a decided relationship to that of Propertius' prototype of the *femina amans et scribens*. A comparison of the two passages will illustrate their nonetheless decisive, remarkably pointed differences. Arethusa begins:

Haec Arethusa suo mittit mandata Lycotae,
cum totiens absis, si potes esse meus.
siqua tamen tibi lecturo pars oblita derit,
haec erit e lacrimis facta litura meis:
aut si qua incerto fallet te littera tractu,
signa meae dextrae iam morientis erunt. (Prop. 4.3.1–6)

This charge Arethusa sends to her Lycotas,
if I may call you mine, when you are so often apart from me.
If as you read this, any part is lost and obscured,
that blot will have been made by my tears.
Or if any letter confuses you by its uncertain outlines
it will be the mark of my right hand, the hand of one dying even now.

Even though Canace's prescript does finally relax into a near-comic and certainly surprising approximation of a preadolescent version of scathing irony, she does not elicit the sympathy available for Propertius' emotional, mobile Arethusa. Each of Arethusa's three hexameters contains a reference to her lover, *suo Lycotae, tibi, te*. Arethusa reaches out, and reaches toward someone. She questions the quality of her relationship to Lycotas. But Canace creates herself, in contrast, as a static *imago scribentis*. Her brother, who is not named, is an incidental dative construct adduced to complete the picture, while the picture of Canace which finally emerges effectively banishes erotic love from her epistle. Canace is not Macareus' sister and lover as much as she is a

child, a daughter, Aeolus' daughter. Arethusa says that her letters may be smudged by her tears and the characters indistinct through the hesitation of her dying hand. But Canace, with prim schoolgirl compunction, blots her characters carefully: it is not tears or a faint hand that will obscure her words, not emotion and suffering, but *caedes*, the bright jet of blood from the dutifully inevitable wound. Canace's prescript is at once more pictorial and less pathetic than Arethusa's. We learn immediately and graphically who she is, where she is, how she sits, and what she holds. What we do not discover is what she hopes for or how she feels. She is an *imago scribentis*, an artifact, in a context not of impending subjective pain but of impending externality and severe factuality.

When Canace's letter does shift to the level of *querela*, incorporating the strands of complaint and exhortation which we expect of Ovid's letter-writing heroines, she unleashes her bitterness in an unexpected way against an unexpected target: her father. It is all his fault. He should be required to witness in person the disastrous consequences of his command: *Ipse necis cuperem nostrae spectator adesset, / auctorisque oculis exigeretur opus* (I wish that he were here himself, an onlooker at my death, and that the deed were done to his satisfaction, in the sight of the one who commands it, 7–8). Her tone is that of outraged innocence and moral superiority. Her father, she says, has taken on the moral nature of his realm, the swollen violence of his own winds: *imperat heu! ventis, tumidae non imperat irae, / possidet et vitiis regna minora suis* (He governs the winds, yes, but not his own swollen rage. Compared to his dominions, the realm of his imperfections is unconfined, 15–16). Of what avail, she asks, is her divine ancestry if it cannot cancel the lethal authority of the blade (17–20)? The rhetorical force of Canace's *querela* is this: her father's treatment of her is unnatural; the sword he has sent her an inappropriate *funebre munus* (funeral gift); her required suicide a cruel violation of her feminine identity. Her father, the moral incarnation of all unrestrained force in nature, is alike insensitive to the civilities of culture, the decorum of death, the decorum of sexual distinctions. Propriety and protocol alike are lost on him.

The force of Canace's pedantic evaluation of her father's turbulence is blunted by her transparent shift of responsibility from herself to her father. The moral implications of Canace's own past are ignored, ignored despite the fact that the Canace of this epistle is an heroine who, in what seems an unexampled Ovidian permutation of the tradition, was herself complicitous in the act of incest. Instead, it is her father's moral character which is exclusively and aggressively at issue.

Canace's prescript, which somewhat jars our expectations for a heroine afflicted with *inconcessi ignes*, is the proem to a lengthy narrative exposition, one so lengthy that it is interrupted only in the final twelve couplets of the poem. The poem itself is one of the briefest of Ovid's *Heroides*; it thus contains the strongest narrative emphasis, and for sheer violence of content it is unrivaled in the collection. It unfolds a story of incest, unsuccessful abortion, difficult childbirth, discovery, child exposure, and involuntary suicide. But in exquisite tension against this violence is the conventional, childish, naive, prim, and at times even stolid voice of the protagonist, Canace. Always obedient to the letter of her father's command—*iubet ex merito scire, quid iste [ensis] velit* (he instructs you to judge from your own conduct what it may mean, 96)—Canace is never obedient to its spirit. Although she acts, she never seems to act on a judgment that *she* has made, and even when her death is imminent she responds only to compulsion.

Canace's almost placid description of the first stages of her love for Macareus comes as something of a shock following the righteous indignation with which she excoriates her father's violent impulsiveness. But her confession is disturbing for another reason: the fact (as stated earlier) that she confesses, however vaguely and euphemistically, her own love for Macareus (21–32). Canace prefaces her narrative with two highly conventional and rhetorically polished sentiments, one a wish, the other a question:

> O utinam, Macareu, quae nos commisit in unum,
> venisset leto serior hora meo!
>
> Cur umquam plus me, frater, quam frater amasti
> et tibi, non debet quod soror esse, fui? (21–24)

> O Macareus, I wish that the hour that made us one
> had come after my death!
>
> Why, brother, did you ever love me more than a brother
> and why was I more than what a sister should be to you?

In Ovid's other treatments of incestuous women, such sentiments are usually prefatory to lavish amplification and appraisal.[47] With Canace they open and close the subject of incest with epigrammatic yet euphemistic brevity. They seem merely *de rigueur*. What concerns her

[47] Canace's formulation resembles in its detachment the narrator's assertion which opens the Byblis episode: *non soror ut fratrem, nec qua debebat, amabat* (*Met.* 9.456).

is not her own incestuous motivation but the consequences of it: *leto meo*. When she does describe her infatuation, she neglects what is obviously unusual in it and fastens on what is conspicuously normal. She recites a catalogue of the elegiac lover's symptoms: the pallor, the emaciation, the sleeplessness. Her catalogue is framed by protestations of naiveté:

> ipsa quoque incalui, qualemque audire solebam,
> nescio quem sensi corde tepente deum. (25–26)

> I was enkindled too; I recognized the warmth of my heart, the
> presence of some god,
> one who was everything I used to be told he was

and

> nec, cur haec facerem, poteram mihi reddere causam
> nec noram, quid amans esset; at illud eram. (31–32)

> And I couldn't understand why I did all this,
> and I didn't know what "in love" meant, but I was.

The usual *ratio-furor, pudor-amor, timor-audacia* antitheses are conspicuous only by their absence. But because *ratio, pudor*, and *timor* are absent, the other extremes are diminished in intensity. Canace is passive, not daring; submissive, not frightened. Love exists less in her subjective feeling than in the objective symptoms which should, but do not, convincingly represent the condition of passion. As a result, her love seems to be the function of a commonplace sensibility. It scarcely achieves the first rung of Prodicus' *klimax*, "Desire doubled is love, love doubled is madness."[48] Without thought, shame, and fear to irritate and exacerbate her condition, Canace does not arrive at that *discordia mentis* whose absence clearly separates her from Ovid's other incestuous heroines. She is, as she protests, unconscious. Love is something she has heard about: *qualemque audire solebam*. Incest steals upon her unawares.

The effect of Canace's confession, and of her subsequent treatment of her subject, is a strange banality, entirely comic but for the shadow of violence and death which haunts Canace's simplicity and childish

[48] Prodicus in *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, ed. Kathleen Freeman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 140 (84.7).

speech. W. H. Auden's definition of the banal applies quite closely to the Canace of *Heroides* 11:

> The human person is a unique singular, analogous to all other persons but identical with none. Banality is an illusion of identity, for, when people describe their experiences in clichés, it is impossible to distinguish the experience of one from the experience of another. The cliché user is comic because the illusion of being identical with others is created by his personal act. He is the megalomaniac in reverse. Both have fantastic conceptions of themselves but, whereas the megalomaniac thinks of himself as being somebody else—Julius Caesar, Napoleon, Michael Angelo, etc.—the banal man thinks of himself as being everybody else, that is, nobody in particular.[49]

Ovid's heroines are all women of legendary and momentous stature, incarnations of intense and often tragic literary moments of the past. Hence it is, admittedly, part of the humor of the *Heroides* when these same women conceive of themselves as *quaevis amans*. But elsewhere in the *Heroides* the banal intrudes itself upon our perspective at random and unpredictable moments; here it pervades the voice, if decidedly not the narrative content, of an entire poem. And the more preposterous the illusion of normalcy becomes as its tension against the narration increases, the more singular the effect of Canace's banal simplicity. Canace's is a reverse megalomania.

Canace's disinclination for self-examination has occasioned some benevolent critical regard. Palmer writes, "The poem is the most finished of the whole series. The subject was one of those in which the soft genius of Ovid luxuriated. And there is nothing forced or unnatural in it."[50] *Heroides* 11 has also been admired for its tact: Ovid does not "dwell" on the actual incestuous encounter of brother and sister. But an examination of the passage in which Canace describes her nurse's discovery of her condition will, I trust, show that Ovid's treatment of Canace aims not at soft and luxuriant pathos but at the wit of understatement supplying the glaring deficit of pathos, a lurid wit of undertones and suppressed implications with a strong undercurrent of the grotesque.

When Canace's nurse *anili animo* (in her old woman's way, 33), perceives the girl's condition, she says, quite bluntly, *Aeoli, amas* (34). Canace blushes (*erubui*), and shame makes her look down at her lap: *gremioque pudor deiecit ocellos* (35). For the nurse, this is sufficient

[49] W. H. Auden, "Notes on the Comic," in *Thought* 27(Spring 1952), p. 64.
[50] Palmer, *Heroides*, p. 381.

confession that Canace is in love: *haec satis in tacita signa fatentis erant* (36). Yet, because Canace has not named her lover, we do not expect the scene to have closed. There are certainly strong precedents for its continuation, the most notorious of which is the long scene in Euripides' *Hippolytus* in which the nurse persistently and doggedly exacts from Phaedra what for her is almost unspeakable: the naming of Hippolytus. What we expect of Canace's narrative of the nurse's discovery is that the scene will develop with Canace sitting looking at her lap, the nurse beginning to interrogate her, drawing the information as yet undivulged that the man she loves is her brother, and with Canace then offering justification, perhaps defending, perhaps lamenting her incestuous union.[51] Instead, Canace's account of the situation remains on a narrative level of strict, strictly abbreviated factuality. And (almost as though Canace is still looking down at her lap, so strong is the graphic bias) we discover that *iamque tumescebant vitiati pondera ventris / aegraque furtivum membra gravabat onus* (And then the freight of my violated womb began to swell, and the secret burden made my weakened body heavy, 37–38). Time, we find, has passed, and the passing time has been suppressed by the poet, not in the interest of tact but for the purpose of surprise and rapidity, that "dissolution of continuity" which Bergson calls "the parent of the comic."[52] And that we may not lose the odd impression of Canace, modestly blushing while looking at her swelling lap, the nurse is still present, employing the conventional Euripidean *pharmaka* but to a very different end:

> quas mihi non herbas, quae non medicamina nutrix
> attulit audaci supposuitque manu,
> ut penitus nostris—hoc te celavimus unum—
> visceribus crescens excuteretur onus!
> a, nimium vivax admotis restitit infans
> artibus et tecto tutus ab hoste fuit! (39–44)

> What herbs and what remedies did my nurse not bring to me
> and apply to me with her own daring hand
> so that deep inside me—this was the one thing I concealed from you—
> the burden that was increasing there might be dislodged.

[51] As the scene develops, for example, in the Myrrha episode, *Metamorphoses* 10.393–430.
[52] Henri Bergson, "Laughter," in *The Comic in Theory and Practice*, ed. John Enck (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960), p. 50.

Ah, all too alive, the baby resisted the stratagems we used
and remained safe from its hidden enemy.

Canace's attempt to abort her unborn child has been virtually ignored out of existence by critics who lavish their praise on this poem, some even going so far as to compare it to Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. But that attempt is perhaps the clearest clue yet to Ovid's reservation of full sympathy from the "feign'd person" of Canace. As far as we know, no such abortion attempt occurred in the *Aeolus*. Furthermore, Canace's remark to Macareus, *hoc te celavimus unum* (41), a parenthesis which lends intensity to her already suspicious detachment from her lover-brother, is probably an acknowledgment of the poet's already radical departure from his sources. The abortion attempt is also a departure for Ovid in another sense. It is the only reference to abortion in the collection, and even given the different generic and contextual aims, its treatment is remarkably dissimilar to the treatment of the same subject in *Amores* 2.13 and 2.14. What prompted Ovid's special treatment here, what the differences are, and what different meanings they elicit, an examination of the texts will show.

Amores 2.13 is an exercise in hypocritical compassion. The elegiac poet-lover, whose mistress has endangered her life by an abortion attempt, indulges in a witty variation on the conventional prayer for a pregnant woman: *et in una parce duobus* (and by sparing the life of one, spare two, 15). In this case, the second life to be spared is not the child's life but the poet's own: *nam vitam dominae tu dabis, illa mihi* (for you will give life to my mistress, and she will give life to me, 16). *Amores* 2.14 is more ambitious. Here the lover adds another dimension to the *militat omnis amans* theme, for his mistress makes war against her own body. The imagery is drawn from battle and employed with surpassing, if seemingly pacifistic, virulence: *Quae prima instituit teneros convellere fetus / militia fuerat digna perire sua* (She who first took it upon herself to tear loose her tender young deserved to die in her own warfare, 5–6). The topic offers the libertine poet the opportunity to pursue with Augustan moral rectitude his mistress' violation of the *mos maiorum: Si mos antiquis placuisset matribus idem, / gens hominum vitio deperitura fuit* (If this same habit had been sanctioned by mothers of old, the race of men would have perished by this vice, 9–10). It is a topic he pursued to the brink of Augustan exhaustion. If mothers of eld had done what Corinna tried to do, the ship of state, perish the thought, might have foundered on a barren shore. No Achilles. No Romulus. No Aeneas. And worse still, no

Augustus. *Si Venus Aenean gravida temerasset in alvo, / Caesaribus tellus orba futura fuit* (If Venus, when pregnant, had defiled Aeneas in the womb, the earth would have been orphaned of its Caesars, 17–18). Yet the catalogue of consequences does not conclude here. What should be the climax becomes something of a somersault. There might also have been no Corinna. Worst of all, there might have been no poet, the Ovidius Naso who was fortunately preserved by his mother's restraint for happier forms of carnal extinction: *Ipse ego, cum fuerim melius periturus amando / vidissem nullos matre necante dies* (I myself, although destined to a better death through love, would never have seen the day had my mother killed me, 21–22).

Most important, in neither of these two poems, despite the fact that both pretend to assume the criminality of abortion, does the poet employ the one device by which he might shadow his argument with pathos and with seriousness. In neither case, that is, does he endow Corinna's fetus with personality. Yet that is just what Ovid does with Canace's infant. Her child is a will, a volition resisting extinction. It is, rather unlike its mother, *a nimium vivax*. Furthermore, the description of Canace's abortion attempt is designed to elicit our sympathy—not for Canace, for the child—by a curious and masterful inversion of poetic perspective. In *Amores* 2.13 the fetus is the conventional "hidden burden": *quarum tarda latens corpora tendit onus* (20). But in *Heroides* 11 Canace, not the child, is a *hidden* enemy: *a, nimium vivax admotis restitit infans / artibus et tecto tutus ab hoste fuit* (Ah, all too alive, the baby resisted the stratagems we used and remained safe from its hidden enemy, 43–44). We are invited here to imagine not the child from Canace's point of view but Canace from the child's. The description of Canace as the child's hidden enemy provokes sympathy for the infant and, by its unconventionality, enlarges the impact of the abortion motif. Moreover, the mannered artificiality of the conceit (*tecto hoste*) seems doubly artificial, doubly excessive, when voiced by so naive and simple a speaker as Canace.

Canace begins the narrative description of her infant's birth with a delicate circumlocution: *Iam noviens erat orta soror pulcherrima Phoebi / denaque luciferos Luna movebat equos* (And now the most lovely sister of Phoebus had risen for the eighth time and the moon, for the tenth time, was driving onward the stallions of light, 45–46). The liquid elegance and heightened tone of her periphrasis distance us from the momentary vagrant sympathy aroused toward Canace's unborn but stubbornly alive child. The tone of the ensuing narrative is somewhat elusive, somewhat fluctuating. Ovid mocks Canace, to be sure, and in the same vein in which she has been mocked throughout. She

is *nescia* (47), and the word is emphasized by the early caesura and by the contrast with *conscia* (50). She is ignorant both about what is happening to her body and about how she ought to behave. She is in pain, *gemitus dolor edere cogit* (53), but has not the self-control to groan less vocally. She wants to cry out, *sed timor et nutrix et pudor ipse vetant* (but fear and my nurse, and modesty itself, said no, 52). Here *timor* and *pudor* make their belated entrance into the poem in the guise of a zeugma which distances us from Canace's plight. Yet this zeugma does not function simply to produce verbal wit for its own sake. It reminds us of the girl's naiveté, her inability to reflect upon those values which, by her behavior, she has violated. These are values of which the nurse is an objective reminder. Even her own imminent death is for Canace not a matter of feeling. It will be a too revealing event, an externalization of her guilt: *et grave, si morerer, mors quoque crimen erat* (and death too, if I were to die, would be a heavy crime, 56). In the same way, Canace's child is for her merely a too revealing fact: *crimina sunt oculis subripienda patris* (our crime must, in secret, be removed from his sight, 66).

In this sequence, as earlier in the poem, Canace's situation is treated lightly, her persona diminished. When her brother assures her that *illius, de quo mater, et uxor eris* (he who made you a mother shall make you a wife as well, 62), she comes back to life and produces her infant with astonishing dactylic rapidity: *Mortua, crede mihi, tamen ad tua verba revixi: / et positum est uteri crimen onusque mei* (Believe me, I was dead, but at your words I came to life and delivered my womb's cargo, its crime, 63–64). Canace describes her relief at Macareus' promise as a physical, not a psychological, fact. Her response, so swift as to seem automatic (as though Macareus had pressed a hidden button or wound up a hidden key), is amusing because it is, as Bergson would say, "something mechanical encrusted upon the living."[53] Similarly, when Canace responds so mechanically to the pressures of her nurse rather than to the perceived significance of her situation, she is again treated comically, for "any situation is comic that calls our attention to the physical in a person when it is the moral side that is concerned."[54] But Ovid's comedy is neither facile nor unadulterated. It relies on complicated shadings, transient shiftings into another key.

Ovid's imposition of a comic perspective on a situation traditionally tragic or pathetic occasions a freedom that is unavailable within the confines of a strictly comic genre. Louis Kronenberger writes, "Comedy is much more reasonably associated with pessimism—with at any rate a belief in the smallness that survives as against the greatness that is scarred or destroyed."[55] Ovid, who escapes the limitations of the comic genre, can, when he chooses, include the tragic or pathetic within his comic perspective. By introducing some pity for Canace's situation, if not for her persona, and by introducing Macareus (who will in fact be "scarred and destroyed") as an intense and living presence within the poem, Ovid creates a tension which heightens the effect of Canace's banality and at the same time delicately softens it. If Canace is an instance of "the smallness that survives" for as long as her speaking voice survives in the poem, at some points in the epistle that surviving smallness is created against and enlivened by an unexpectedly deepened and varied background of possibilities. She is created comically within the poem, against a tragic backdrop.

[53] Bergson, "Laughter," p. 49.

[54] Bergson, "Laughter," p. 51.

In the childbirth sequence Canace speaks with the young, immature, and unreflecting voice established earlier in the poem, and at times that voice does occasion a vivid or subdued irony. But elsewhere in the passage Canace's situation speaks more vehemently than she does, and at those times we objectify her as much as she objectifies herself. The result is that instability of tone characteristic within the *Heroides*. She is, we perceive, terribly inept, terribly young to enlist in the war game of life and love: "*et rudis ad partus et nova miles eram*" (I was untried, a fresh recruit to birth, 48). If earlier she did not even try to think, now she genuinely does not know what to do: *quid faciam infelix* (51). She cannot afford even pain's own natural mitigation: *et cogor lacrimas conbibere ipsa meas* (I force myself to drink down my own tears, 54). In each of these instances Ovid somewhat enlarges our perspective of her smallness by allowing the entrance of a minimal, brief, yet telling note of pathos. The intrusion of Macareus into her chamber operates in a similar way and is even more important. We discover that if Canace is not particularly loving, she is still an occasion for a passion of a grand sort. Macareus tears his hair, tears open his robe, leans over her in an abandoned posture (one which, the situation reminds us, might less than facilitate the result he so vehemently desires), and he commands her to live:

cum super incumbens scissa tunicaque comaque
  pressa refovisti pectora nostra tuis,
et mihi "vive soror, soror o carissima" aisti;
  "vive nec unius corpore perde duos!

[55] Louis Kronenberger, *The Thread of Laughter* (New York: Knopf, 1952), p. 27.

spes bona det vires; fratri nam nupta futura es.
illuis, de quo mater, et uxor eris." (57–62)

when, hurling yourself upon me, tearing away my robe and my hair, you brought
warmth back to my breast by pressing your breast on mine,
and you said to me: "Sister, O my dearest sister, live
and do not, by your own death, be the death of two!
Let good hope lend strength to you: for you shall be your brother's bride:
he who made you a mother shall make you a wife as well."

Macareus' command hazards and belies the triviality of the elegiac lover's injunction to his mistress (*Am.* 2.13). It is both superficial and deep, for, as we know, he will later kill himsef when he discovers his sister's dead body, his *spes bona* shattered by the inopportune malice of time. The warm pressure of his body restores Canace. The pressures of life, of Aeolus' power and anger, will destroy them both. Macareus' useless consolation thus strengthens the tensions within Ovid's particular kind of comic pessimism. It reminds us of that larger world of stronger feeling, the world to which Canace does not aspire, a world which nevertheless creates and includes her. And it reminds us that, this time at least, not even smallness will survive. Smallness, banality, and the illusion of normalcy have like other illusions, their own dangerous frailties.

The passage in which Aeolus discovers his daughter's indiscretion is another instance of Ovid's contrived mixture of modes and tones. The scene, one of the most dramatically vivid in the *Heroides*, is comic, even farcical, lurid, and yet pathetic. Again, Canace's persona recedes somewhat, and the situation dominates. Canace, as remarked earlier, when told that her relationship with Macareus will be normalized and legitimized, delivers her child with alacrity, and the account of the child's discovery is undertaken with a rapidity no less impressive: *quid tibi grataris? media sedet Aeolus aula; / crimina sunt oculis subripienda patris* (But why rejoice? Aeolus sits in the heart of the palace; our crime must, in secret, be removed from his sight, 65–66). The description of the setting, *media sedet Aeolus aula*, interrupts the distich at the hexameter caesura and dominates it while Canace continues, in the pentameter, to enlarge upon the consequences of her delivery—as usual, omitting what is felt and limiting her narrative to what happens. The subsequent action is reminiscent of New Comic farce. Everything turns on timing and logistics. The father sits in state,

presiding over a sacrifice. The nurse, carrying Canace's concealed child and muttering fictive suppliant prayers, tiptoes past him. The crowd parts; even the king steps aside. She is at the threshold, almost out the door. Will she make it? It's all over; the game is up, the child wailing. The while passage contrives comic apprehension. Our attention is less directed to the actors than to the action for its own sake. There is a succession of five short clauses resembling each other structurally with but minimal variation. Each clause is distinctly severed from the next, either by the caesura or the verse break. But at the discovery *concinnitas* gives way to confusion, and profusion asserts itself in the emphatic enjambment of *venit* (72), in the hyperbaton of *patrias auris* (71), in the early caesura after *venit*, and in the sonorous finality of *indicio proditur ille suo* (72).

The New Comedy elements in the discovery scene serve the impression of Canace's banality and exert a tension against the incest theme of the poem. For Canace's is not an ordinarily illicit amour which must be concealed from a parent who has another more financially advantageous or politically strategic alliance in mind. The fact of the child's existence is not nearly so important, in the framework Ovid creates, as the fact of the child's incestuous parentage. But Canace's description of the scene sacrifices its import. Here, as elsewhere in the poem, she might well be any young girl whose previously undetected affair is, in the eyes of the world and especially of her father, a *crimen* but not *nefas* or *sacrilegium*. Yet the passage does not unqualifiedly trivialize Canace's dilemma. There are clues in the scene that our perspective must transcend hers. That Aeolus is conducting a religious sacrifice with great solemnity in the discovery scene acts as an irritant, a delicate corrective to Canace's standardization or normalization of her position. The camouflaging of the child in the basket is a similar corrective device: *frugibus infantem ramisque albentis olivae / et levibus vittis sedula celat anus* (Carefully, the old woman covers the child with fruits, and with boughs of whitening olive, and with delicate ribbons, 67–68). The effect of this distich somewhat mars the shallow veneer of the scene. The nurse's manipulative energy is overshadowed by the lingering detail of fruits, whitening olive, and delicate fillets—things bespeaking both fertility and sacrifice, suggesting the child's destiny.

For Canace, the discovery results in a curious permutation of the childbirth scene. The description of her delivery and the description of her father's reaction to it employ not only the same words but the same motifs—to a particular end, I think. Canace had been warned earlier to suppress her cries, to drink her tears. *Pudor*, and her *nutrix*,

hold her in check: "*quid tua crimina prodis?*" ("Why should you betray your crime?" 49). Three verbs—*contineo, reprendo,* and *cogor*—amplify her coercion, repression, and duress, but now the irrepressible cries of the child break the hush, and the verb is once again *proditur: et indicio proditur ille suo* (he is betrayed, and by his own sign, 72). At that point, Aeolus' cries drown the child's—*insana regia voce sonat* (the whole palace echoes to his maddened cry, 74)—and then *inruit et nostrum vulgat clamore pudorem* (He rushed into my room and with his shouts publishes my shame to all, 79). Once again, Canace can only cry, cannot speak, is cold: *ipsa nihil praeter lacrimas pudibunda profudi. / torpuerat gelido lingua retenta metu* (I, in my humiliation and shame, did nothing but sob. Speech froze upon my lips, checked by glazed terror, 81–82).

If the childbirth and the discovery passages are similar in their account of the effects of the situation upon Canace, the tone is harsher in the second sequence. In the first, some pathos touches Canace; in the second, it is efficiently dispelled. Canace rises to her rhetorical occasion frigidly, with rigidity. Rather too appropriately (as daughter of Aeolus), she compares her trembling limbs to a sea ruffled by winds and to brances agitated in the breeze. This is her second attempt at sustained metaphor in the poem, and it is drawn from the same natural sphere as the first attempt: the winds. Fecundity, whether literary or biological, is not her forte. And even the limited success of her simile is undercut, in the final pentameter, by her lethal factuality. What concerns her always is evidence: *quassus ab inposito corpore lectus erat* (the bed on which I lay shook from its tremors, 78). Once again, that "encrustation of the mechanical upon the natural" at the root of comedy diminishes Canace's human stature, makes her, like her bed, a trembling thing.

Despite the varied shadings of Ovid's treatment of Canace, that is, despite his quiet evocation and retardation of sympathy for her, it seems clear that the whole narrative embracing childbirth and discovery is based on a pattern of repetition and controlled by a chiastic ordering of motifs:

(A) Canace, in childbirth, cannot cry out and can only weep.
(B) Macareus enters and takes away her shame, warming (*refovisti*) her
(C) The child wails and is discovered
(C) Aeolus shouts
(B) He then, like Macareus, enters Canace's chamber and also cannot refrain from touching her; but unlike Macareus, he exposes her shame and chills her by his presence
(A) She, once again, cannot speak or cry out but can only weep

The comic speed of the narrative, strengthened by the economy and control of the chiastic arrangement, imposes a sense of rigor and natural inevitability on what, in the *Aeolus*, must have seemed an unusually chaotic, accidental, and arbitrary order of events. There, time and chance fail to stamp Macareus' unorthodox logic with their necessary imprimatur. But the rapidity and chiastic order of Ovid's narrative serve another related purpose. The narrative is remarkable for several reasons, for what it suppresses. First, there is no strong suggestion that Aeolus ever sanctioned the incestuous marriages of his children. Macareus' consolation seems to be what in fact he calls it, a *spes bona*, a desperate expediency, not a justifiable or convincing guarantee. Moreover, there is no mention of the plan (which may have backfired in the *Aeolus*) that the brothers and sisters draw lots for their respective partners. And there is no suggestion that the occasion for Aeolus' rage is not incest but rather, as in the play, his daughter's clandestine intercourse. The chiastic order, in which Aeolus' scene of abandoned rage parallels Macareus' earlier scene of abandoned ardor, contrasts the high emotion of her father and brother with Canace's understated estimation of her guilt and her love. But as I have explained it also serves a more crucial function. It suppresses and disguises a fundamental violation of the Euripidean prototype.

The suppression of Aeolus' motivation, of the drawing of lots, and of the other consanguineous marriages is essential to Ovid's portrait of Canace. *Heroides* 11 is an incest poem. It would substantially diminish the effect of Canace's comic banality to elaborate on or even openly acknowledge those aspects of the *Aeolus* suggesting a permissive context, a context of less than rigorous values. From the very beginning of the poem, we are encouraged to believe that the sword sent to Canace is a direct retaliation for her incestuous union: *cur umquam plus me, frater, quam frater amasti, / et tibi, non debet quod soror esse, fui*? (Why, brother, did you ever love me more than a brother and why was I more than what a sister should be to you? 23–24).

When suggestions to the contrary are included, they are veiled in intentional obscurity. Macareus does tell Canace he will marry her, yet he does not tell her Aeolus approves and ambiguously calls his assurance a *spes bona*. When Canace refers to the marriages of her

sisters (103–4), she does so, it seems, merely to heighten the pathos of her own situation. The imagery of the cheated hymeneal (99–102) is too conventional to ring true. There is no suggestion of rancor that her sisters, unlike herself, will be allowed to marry their brothers, or even that their marriages are decided, much less imminent. Canace merely enjoins them to marry, ambiguously, *Parca meliore* (105). And when Aeolus sends Canace the sword, he only ambiguously names her crime: *iubet ex merito scire, quid iste velit* (he instructs you to judge from your own conduct what it may mean, 96). While we do not know what interpretation Euripides' Canace placed upon the same order, Ovid's Canace seems to take *ex merito* to mean incestuous love.

Ovid is unwilling to blunt the force of Canace's simplicity by including her in a banal world, a world where there are no exceptions that cannot be included in the rule. The illusion of normalcy which dominates her rhetoric never seems anything less than illusory. For the poet, then, whose poetic intention requires him to suppress Aeolus' motivation, the most dangerous territory will naturally be the scene in which the king discovers his daughter's illegitimate progeny. To what, precisely, will he react? To his daughter's sexual indiscretion? Or to incest? Ovid, as I have shown, skirts the danger by the clever exploitation of two devices: the rapid economy of the narrative and the chiastic order embracing the whole section of childbirth and discovery, an order in which Macareus' incestuous ardor is the structural counterpart to Aeolus' uninhibited rage and thereby seems to be its efficient cause. Ovid thus sidesteps the hazard to his poetic intention. Neatly, he blurs the issue with a patina of precision.

When the infant is discovered, Canace is silenced. She cannot even commence to bewail her situation until relieved of her father's intimidating presence. Her child, however, is not silenced: *vagitus dedit ille miser—sensisse putares— / quaque suum poterat voce rogabat avum* (The poor thing began to wail—you would have thought he understood—and with what sounds he could, he began to beg for his grandfather's pity 85–86). The contrast between Canace and the child is pointed and suggestive. Most of Ovid's heroines lament, resist, and debate the decisions of the men whose power designs their fate, often despite their own open acknowledgement of the futility of resistance and debate. Canace neither resists nor questions. Once given her father's command, she responds with unquestioning promptitude to his *patria potestas: scimus, et utemur violento fortiter ense* (I know what it means, and I shall use the cruel sword bravely, 97). She maligns her father guardedly and always on the same oblique grounds: he doesn't treat her as befits a daughter, a marriageable daughter, a woman, a

woman of noble lineage. She never throws herself on his tenderer mercies. And she concludes her epistle with the resentful irony of adolescent *nolens volens: mandatum persequar ipsa patris* (I shall myself execute the will of my father, 128). Because Canace accepts without question the imperative of obedience, that is, because she never resists when resistance alone offers the rhetorical opportunity of self-revelation, one can never say of her what she said of her child—either *sensisse putares* (you would have thought she understood) or *a nimium vivax* (all too alive).

For these reasons, most of the pathos attending Canace's position is attached at the end of the poem not to herself but to her child. For Canace, it is the justice of the child's death, rather than her own, that is, however slenderly, at issue. Yet because such pathos as is occasioned by the child's exposure is necessarily qualified by what we know of Canace's behavior (which has been unorthodox, to say the least) and her perspective (which is banal), it is consistently a pathos adjusted and even undermined by irony.

In the last sections of the poem, Canace brings her narrative full circle. She tells of her father's cruel exposure of her infant and of the *indignos sonos* (94) delivered by the *patrius vultu maerente satelles* (93), the injunction that the sword be put to good use. Her rhetoric too comes full circle with its echoes of her opening attack on her father: *his mea muneribus, genitor, conubia donas? / hac tua dote, pater, filia dives erit*? (With gifts like this, father, do you give me away in marriage? With this dowry, father, shall your daughter be rich? 99–100) Once again, Aeolus does not escape whipping, and Canace does. But the poem's diminuendo is not without its surprises. Canace's banality takes on a new dimension. Whereas earlier in the poem she was *quaevis amans*, an inexperienced creature caught off guard in the toils of a conventional passion, now she is *quaevis mater*, newly bereaved of her newborn infant. And whereas earlier in the poem the foil for her banality was our knowledge of her incest, now the foil for her protestations of grief is her attempt, without known precedent in the *Aeolus*, to abort her infant.

Canace first formulates her reaction to her infant's exposure as a question:

> quid mihi tunc animi credis, germane, fuisse—
> nam potes ex animo colligere ipse tuo—
> cum mea me coram silvas inimicus in altas
> viscera montanis ferret edenda lupis? (87–90)

How do you think I felt then, brother—
you can judge my feeling from your own—
when before my eyes the enemy took the child of my body
to the deep forest, there to be eaten by wolves.

Her hypothesized details of the child's death, thrown into a lurid relief by the "silver" pentameter, are a rhetorical escalation of the more conventional and hence less vivid *dari canibusque avibusque* (to be given [as carrion] to the dogs and the birds, 83). Her question is, for her, a characteristic evasion, feeling sacrificed to sensational fact. Her question merely aspires to aporia. It aspires equivocally and unsuccessfully. This is not to suggest that Canace does not feel for her infant. She must. But the implied identification of her feeling with Macareus' includes a built-in suspicion.

Macareus' *animus* is tuned to a higher pitch and intensity than his sister's. And it was, presumably, her own suspicion of their differences that led her in the first place to conceal her abortion from him: *hoc te celavimus unum* (41). Thus for the reader (if not for her brother) to whose imagination she appeals (87), her credibility is tarnished, her *fides* perceptibly flawed. Her question, then, raises another. It raises a question central to the comic design of the poem. Is the correlation between fact and sensibility, between experience and perception, as straightforward as one might be inclined to assume? Canace, who has taken a giant step toward libertinism, unorthodoxy, and iniquity, a step that seems to lead past play into tragic experience, still plays at playing a grownup game. Her smallness dwarfs the magnitude of her fate. When her father leaves her chamber, her feelings are left to Macareus' superior (we expect) imagination. For her part, she plays her part: *exierat thalamo; tunc demum pectora plangi / contigit inque meas unguibus ire genas* (My father had now left my room; now at last it was possible to beat my breasts, and to tear my cheeks with my nails, 91–92). Yet what Canace does not reveal is what she *is*, even if she does do the conventional "right" thing. Neither born nor yet become sensitive, Canace cannot have sensitivity thrust upon her. She is, as Dörrie says, "unreif." And, usually, ripeness is a special premise for moral authenticity.

Canace's final apostrophe to her infant is memorable. Palmer, who only rarely lets down his philological guard, singles these lines out as "pathetic in a high degree."[56] For Wilkinson, they are more than

[56] Palmer, *Heroides*, p. 381. He also quotes Loers quoting Amar, p. 385: "Hi versus et qui sequuntur ad usque v. 124 *ex animo vere materno* effluunt, nullo apparatu, ambitione nulla infucati; et quod apud Nasonem rarius nullius hic poetae locus; *totum mater occupat*" (my emphasis).

pathetic. They are the cool spring for which the thirsty critic searches (mostly in vain) in the "desert of debating points" that is Ovid's *Heroides*:

nate, dolor matris, rapidarum praeda ferarum.
ei mihi! natali dilacerate tuo;
nate, parum fausti miserabile pignus amoris—
haec tibi prima dies, haec tibi summa fuit.
non mihi te licuit lacrimis perfundere iustis,
in tua non tonsas ferre supulcra comas;
non super incubui, non oscula frigida carpsi.
diripiunt avidae viscera nostra ferae. (111–18)

Oh my son, your mother's sorrow, now the prey of wild beasts,
torn to pieces on the very day of your birth,
son, pitiful pledge of an ill-fated love,
today was your first day on earth, today your last.
I was not allowed to shed for you the tears that were your due,
nor to carry to your tomb the lock cut from my hair.
I did not bend over you, did not tear cold kisses from your mouth:
ravening beasts are tearing apart the child of my flesh.

Wilkinson's remarks on this passage should be quoted in full:

> Here and there amid the desert of debating points we do come across cases of what seems genuine feeling or pathos, when the poet forgets himself and his audience. Canace, doomed to die herself for her incest with her brother Macareus, laments for their newborn child *as many an innocent mother must have lamented in times when this barbarity was the normal form of birth control.*[57] (My emphasis)

I do not think that Wilkinson's spring is mere mirage. The lines are beautiful, and they are emotional. They are Latin poetry at its near best: evocative, sensuous, a lament for lost possibilities, for the uselessness of love, for the remote consolation of ancient traditions—all sheltered in the uncharitable embrace of unbeautiful realities and algid

[57] L. P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Surveyed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 39.

brutalities. Latin *dolor* was scarcely ever more Latinate than this, or more painful. Still, I would suggest that if Ovid has, as Wilkinson says, forgotten himself and his audience, he has not forgotten Canace. It would be preposterous to call lines so beautiful banal. And perhaps that is not necessary. But if the poetry is not banal, it nontheless issues from Canace's "reverse megalomania."

These lines are not simple prosopopoeia. They are in an understated tension against their context—an example of the fine irony whereby Ovid does not imply the opposite of what his character intends but merely does not intend exactly what his character says. For Canace laments, exactly as Wilkinson says, "as many an innocent mother must have lamented," even though she is not innocent, and even though she herself has only recently attempted a less effective if, to many, less barbaric form of birth control. Her lines are not only what any mother or "many an innocent mother" would say. They are dramatically consistent, dramatically authentic. They are what Canace says when she is being (or claiming to be or playing at being) "any mother," as well as any lover whose *amor* has been, at the height of periphrasis, *parum faustus* (not exactly fortunate). Although her child is but minutes old, Canace grieves as eloquently as we would expect Andromache to grieve for Astyanax or Euryalus' mother to grieve in the Trojan camp at Latium—except for that in the last case, of course, the mother's grief is so overwhelming as to render her insensible. There is, then, almost an excessive propriety in Canace's lament. And this note of excess is underscored by the antithesis (*haec tibi prima dies, haec tibi summa fuit*) axiomatic or, less generously, automatic in Ovid, an antithesis which does not heighten but scarifies the nostalgia, and one which, in its context, calls Canace's hyperdecorous decorum into question.

Canace ends her epistle with two modest proposals. In the first, Canace as *mater* speaks:

> tu tamen, o frustra miserae sperate sorori,
> sparsa, percor, nati collige membra tui,
> et refer ad matrem socioque impone sepulchro,
> urnaque nos habeat quamlibet arta duos! (121–24)

> But you, nevertheless, whom hope promised to me in sorrow, and in vain,
> gather up, I beg you, the scattered limbs of your son,

> and bring them back to their mother, and place them with her in her tomb,
> and let one urn, however cramped, carry the ashes of two.

Her plea is pathetic, to be sure, and the pathos is enlivened by the apostrophe, in which *frustra miserae sperate sorori* glances delicately at their incestuous love. *Speratus*, less assertive than *sponsus* but synonymous, is in this context suggestive of tensions between desire and legitimacy. The pentameter, however, which completes and particularizes *socioque impone sepulchro* and seems to aim at pathos, dispels it with a touch of gross specificity: the *urna quamlibet arta* is too concrete for comfort, too close for the elegiac obliquity the convention (*una duobus urna*) requires. It hazards a vision, rather too accurate, of big bones crowding little ones in an overcrowded jar. But if the line disturbs the sentiment, it restores the Emily Post persona. Canace is, throughout, thoroughly sensitive to the etiquette of logistics, if not of love.

In her second request to Macareus, Canace asks as little as in the first: *vive memor nostri, lacrimasque in vulnera funde, / neve reformida corpus amantis amans* (Live, remembering me, and pour your tears into my wounds, / and do not recoil from the body of one you love, one who loves you, 125–126). The modesty and restraint of what Canace requests are, however, offset by the rather grim specificity of her formulation, a specificity so at odds with the pathos of Canace's earlier address to her child that Heinsius rejected these lines as spurious.[58] Palmer, who had once concurred with Heinsius, when confronted with the manuscript authorities unequivocally reversed his opinion: *non sunt spurii ut Heinsio mihique visum*. And in his new edition Dörrie follows Palmer. The authenticity of Canace's request is further confirmed by her characterization throughout the epistle. The lines do not derive from a tasteless or weary slackening of poetic vision. On the contrary, they deliver a final pointed and vigilant *coup de grâce*.

The expression *lacrimas in vulnera fundere*,[59] although a favorite

[58] The lines are included in P (*Codex Parisinus* 8242) of the eleventh century, as well as in Planudes' translation, which is itself often an authority as good as or better than P. P. is in several places superior to G (*Codex Guelferbytanus M.S. Extrav.* 260 of the twelfth century), which also includes these lines and which is generally regarded as better than the plethora of thirteenth-century manuscripts.

[59] The expression is used in *Metamorphoses* 4.40 and 13.490, and in *Epistulae ex Ponto* 4.11.4. Despite the fact that the best manuscript (P) has *lacrimas in vulnera funde*, as well as that numerous others have either that or *lacrimas in vulnere funde*,

with Ovid, gains abnormal pungency from the fact that it is a recommendation of the dying to the living, and from the fact that her *vulnera* are not general but specific: we are all too familiar with the sword and its destined locale. But the expression is preface to an anticipation which subtracts from the mercy of its already qualified vagueness: "do not let the natural repulsion of the living for the dead get the better of you." Canace concludes her epistle with a couplet that one again defines incest as the reason for her punishment: *tu, rogo, dilectae nimium mandata sororis / perfer; mandatum persequar ipsa patris* (Of you I ask this: that you carry out the last desires of the sister you loved too well. I shall myself execute the will of my father, 127–128). She ends on a note of obedient martyrdom, as if to say, "I'll obey my father and die. You, who may live, can at least obey my minimal demands." The poem closes with the heroine's ironic misunderstanding of the motivation of her lover, which is common in the *Heroides*. Canace's *mandata* will not in the end be performed—in this instance, however, not because her lover loves her too little but because he loves her too much.

The irony of the ending is specifically appropriate to Canace's persona as it has been developed throughout the poem. She fears that Macareus will be afflicted by a normal repugnance for her corpse and thus deterred from a normal lover's obsequies. Her fear is touching. She is, after all, too young to die, and she transfers her natural fear of death to his presumed fear of her inanimate body. Thus her command mitigates, beautifully, the stoic rigidity of her suicide. But there is more to it than that. Canace doesn't ask or expect much—not because of reserve, humility, or charity, but because her vision is limited by its childish simplicity. Her brother, who loves her more than she knows, who *is* more than she understands, will do more than she could ever think to ask.

I have dwelled at length on *Heroides* 11 because the poem represents a radical departure not only from the poetic aims of the other *Heroides* but from Ovid's treatment of the incest motif in the *Metamorphoses*. In the other *Heroides* Ovid's usual technique is to grant his heroines at the outset the pathos of an intense emotional condition, sometimes verging on hysteria, and deriving from the conflict between their feminine aspirations and the unkind realities of a masculine world. This framework offers him license to develop the personalities, the idiosyncrasies, the special character of each heroine. Each of his women

Dörrie in his 1971 edition has emended the *lacrimas in fulnere funde* of a single manuscript (G) to *lacrimas in funere funde*, thereby emptying the line of its (repugnant?) specificity. Yet *lacrimas in vulnera funde* is entirely in character, if not *difficilior*.

will struggle in her own way to persuade her lover of the claims of her own values, to subdue her feelings by reason and, when that fails, color her emotions with the hues of rationality. Thus love in the *Heroides* takes on the moral dimension with which Ovid endows love in the *Metamorphoses*.

It is only within the psychological moral-erotic framework that Ovid's comic treatment arises. By employing various devices of innuendo, exaggeration, trivialization, verbal point, and his heroine's own hyperrhetorical atrocities, he undercuts the pathos granted at the outset, exposing his heroine's delusions, obsessions, misapprehensions, follies—and frequently their banality. His women, however, rarely forfeit his sympathy entirely: they are too alive, too demanding, too sensitive, too desperate. They are too full of feeling to be dismissed as fools or hysterics. They are too close to the one truth about the human heart, what both Vergil and Horace reveal, but what Ovid more than any other Augustan can be said to explore: that the heart exists, that it makes, for good or ill, strong claims upon us, that it is indulged at our peril but denied, often, at our equal peril. If Ovid's comic cynicism is not ubiquitous but sporadic, it is nontheless real. His is not cynicism of the rigorous kind that cuts out pain, leaving only the embroidered surface.

Given these claims for Ovid's occasional moral seriousness (the Myrrha episode is perhaps the best example), claims increasingly acknowledged by modern Ovidian scholarship,[60] the Canace epistle would seem to be an extreme exception. Ovid goes to some lengths (by means of verbal and structural ambiguities that do not entirely obliterate his Euripidean source) to suppress the fact that in the *Aeolus* Canace's crime was not, in her father's eyes, incest. He also makes it clear that Macareus' love for her was that sort of passionate fixation which alone might lead a man to challenge the strongest taboo of civilized man, as well as to prefer death to life were the object of his love unattainable. In these respects, it is Macareus who resembles Byblis, Myrrha, and Phaedra. He is, however, vastly different from his sister Canace, whose condition is emptied of its moral dimension, who does not display exorbitant passion for her brother, and who alludes to her

[60] See W. S. Anderson, *AJPhil.* 11, no. 35 (July 1969), p. 354: "If it can be demonstrated as he [Bernbeck, *Beobachtungen zur Darstellungsart in Ovids Metamorphosen* (Munich, 1967)] has done, that the essential quality of Ovidian style is unevenness, then it should follow that Ovid will occasionally alternate the playful with the serious. That is the virtue of flexibility. . . . Variety and effective unevenness do constitute basic elements of Ovidian style; playfulness may derive from unevenness . . . but does not necessarily define *all* stories. . . . Even single stories may be composed in a variety of tones, mixing the playful and serious and leaving the audience in a state of ambivalence.

incest only sufficiently to tell us that it did occur. She shows neither extreme feeling nor extreme volition but is, throughout, passive and unreflective. Most disconcerting of all, she is always ordinary.

If Ovid's near-caricature of Canace is a departure from his usual treatment of incestuous love, Canace's particular kind of comic banality represents a stylistic departure as well. Banality, it must be admitted, is one of Ovid's specialties. But when he employs it elsewhere in the *Heroides* or in the *Metamorphoses* it is frequently a literary banality of a different order from Canace's and is employed toward a different end. It occurs quite often in the form of the literary cliché, and signals a dwindling of authorial sympathy or increase of authorial distance at the expense of a character, speaker, or situation. In the *Metamorphoses* the poet-narrator himself will sometimes employ it, and the result will be the usually abrupt redirection of a narrative mood into an alternative perspective, usually one of comedy or irony. In other cases it is used by a persona who intends to heighten or enliven, rather than normalize, the characterization of his special situation. In such instances the speaker will succeed, contrary to his expectations, in sounding suddenly hollow or, worse, in seeming foolish, as one inevitably seems foolish who, in a moment of apparently ungovernable passion, pauses to check his ravaged visage in the mirror. For example, in the middle section of the Byblis episode (after Caunus' outraged response) Byblis, now *male sana*, forfeits the sympahty which will be restored to her only much later, in her final phase of suffering and transformation. Byblis here resorts to the cliché of "testing the winds" in the "ship of love":

> Et merito! quid enim temeraria vulneris huius
> indicium feci? quid, quae celanda fuerunt,
> tam cito commisi properatis verba tabellis?
> ante erat ambiguis animi sententia dictis
> praetemptanda mihi. ne non sequeretur euntem,
> parte aliqua veli, qualis foret aura, notare
> debueram tutoque mari decurrere, quae nunc
> non exploratis inplevi lintea ventis!
> auferor in scopulos igitur subversaque toto
> obruor oceano, neque habent mea vela recursus.
>
> (*Met.* 9. 585–94)

> I deserve this suffering! For why was I so rash as to tell him
> of this wound? Why did I so quickly entrust those words
> I should have concealed to a hasty letter?

> I should first have explored the attitude of his mind
> with veiled speech. So that it would have favored my course,
> I should have tested the breeze with a reefed sail
> and so have traversed the sea in safety, I who now
> have filled my sails with unexpected winds.
> And therefore I am borne upon the rocks, overturned and
> overwhelmed
> by the whole ocean, and my ship has no hope of return.

The elaboration of the image, directed toward an unreal refuge in an argument by fraudulent analogy, discloses how far Byblis is from risking a genuine appraisal of her situation. The cliché, which she elaborates, as it were, by rote, distances the reader from her authentic pain, awakens the reader to her guilt, and brings into closer focus what is willful in her nature, that essentially arbitrary volition confirmed by the fraudulent conclusion she draws from her analogy: *Nonne vel illa dies fuerat, vel tota voluntas, / Sed potius mutanda dies* (Should not that day—or rather my intention—or rather that day—have been changed? 598–99). Byblis' cliché ultimately backfires. It is so much a cliché that she ignores its real import. That is, she decides to set sail against Caunus again—*vincetur! repetendus erit* (He will be conquered! I will go to him again, 616)—forgetting that she is already shipwrecked on the rocks of a too irresistable passion.

Byblis' use of the conventional *topos* of "testing the winds" closely resembles Cicero's use of what was no less a cliché in prose, a *topos* he invokes equally to defend and to obscure his *volte face* vis-à-vis the Triumvirate:

> Numquam enim in praestantibus in re publica gubernanda viris laudata est in una sententia perpetua permansio, sed, ut in navigando tempestati obsequi artis est, etiam si portum tenere non queas, cum vero id possis mutata velificatione adsequi, stultum est eum tenere cum periculo cursum quem coeperis, potius quam eo commutato quo velis tamen pervenire sic, cum omnibus nobis in administranda re publica propositum debeat esse, id quod a me saepissime dictum est, cum dignitate otium, non idem semper dicere, sed idem semper spectare debemus. (*Fam.* 1.9.21)

> For never has an undeviating persistence in one opinion been reckoned as a merit in those distinguished men who have steered the ship of state. But just as in sailing it shows nautical skill to run before the wind in a gale, even if you fail thereby to make your

> port; whereas when you can get there just as well by slanting your yards, it is sheer folly to court disaster by keeping your original course, rather than change it and still reach your desired destination; on the same principle in the conduct of state affairs, while we should all have as our one aim and object what I have so repeatedly preached—the maintenance of peace with honour—it does not follow that we ought always to express ourselves in the same way, though we ought always to have in view the same goal.

It is only fair to note that Cicero found cold comfort in his own algid rhetoric. Unlike his correspondent Lentulus Spinther (and unlike Byblis, for that matter), he was at heart disabused of the banalities he professed. For Canace, however, banality is not a literary expedient. It is occasioned not by her self-deceived artifice but by her self-deluded identity. It derives not from miscalculated literary cunning but from psychological necessity. For her, it is a way not only of *seeing* the world but of *being* in the world, and in this sense Canace's banality is a departure for Ovid. The literary device transcends itself. Style becomes a fictive sensibility.

In his "Notes on the Comic," W. H. Auden writes:

> There is not only a moral norm but also a normal way of transgressing it. At the moment of yielding to temptation, the normal human being has to exercise self-deception and rationalization, he requires the illusion of acting with a good conscience; after the immoral act, when desire is satisfied or absent, he realizes the nature of his act. He who feels no guilt after transgressing the moral law is mad, and he who, at the moment he is transgressing it, is completely conscious of what he is doing, is demonic.[61]

Auden's description of "the normal way of transgressing" the moral norm isolates what is "normal" in Byblis and Myrrha before the communication of, or indulgence in, their incestuous desires. The exercise of self-deception and rationalization described by Auden accounts for much of Ovid's "canon" of incestuous love, especially since in his treatment of Byblis and Myrrha, Ovid's narrative emphasis is not on the aftermath of incestuous passion but on the moments of decision and conversion which transform his heroines before their literal transformation. This is not to say that Ovid neglects the aftermath. Byblis does not "feel guilty" or repent, because she is no longer even *male sana* but *palam demens* (openly mad). Myrrha, on the other

[61] Auden, "Notes on the Comic," p. 66.

hand, who never—to her credit—achieved the full "illusion of acting with a good conscience," repents tragically and designs her own purgation: her life, not her *mens*, is her pollution.

Auden's further remarks not only elucidate the difference between Phaedra and Myrrha and Byblis but also the difference between Canace and Phaedra. Auden writes that the "two commonest satirical devices" are

1. to present the object of satire as if he or she were mad, i.e. unaware of the nature of his act and
2. to present the object of satire as if he or she were demonic, i.e. completely conscious.[62]

The epistle of Phaedra, *Heroides* 4, is of the second sort. *Pudor, timor,* and *pietas* are externalized and objectified in Phaedra's epistle; they are the province of Hippolytus' resistance. They exist only to be overcome by *ratio* and *audacia*, both of which are enlisted in the service of Phaedra's illicit *amor*. The poem's considerable comic power derives from the gradual revelation that whatever its intellectual garb, this *amor* is unequivocally *furor*. Phaedra's epistle is the most intellectual of Ovid's *Heroides* because Phaedra is throughout presented as conscious and deliberate in her intention. Unlike Byblis and Myrrha, and unlike her Euripidean prototype, she is beyond indulging in doubts and hesitation: her object is persuasion.

Canace, on the other hand, transgresses abnormally and reacts abnormally after the fact. Yet what Auden would call her "madness" is not the normal *discordia mentis* but the reverse: the absence of mental conflict. She is neither inquisitive about her own motivation, nor dedicated to her infatuation, nor curious as to its meaning or her own responsibility. Her unconsciousness is the calculated reverse of Phaedra's "demonic" consciousness. Hence it requires a greater departure from that "canon" of incestuous love which rests largely on motifs suggesting great passion and especially on patterns of subjective ratiocination.

What, then, is Ovid's achievement in this poem? I think the poem stands alone in the *Heroides* as a comic revision of literary and psychological expectations. The comedy is, however, only seldom achieved (as it is elsewhere in the *Heroides*) by means of excessive but revealing conceits, by extravagant rhetorical display, innuendo, or inopportune verbal point. Nor is pathos undermined through occasional incongruous wit. Instead, the reverse occurs: Canace's *banality* is occasionally adjusted by *pathos*. The comedy, which dominates, is the comedy

[62] Auden, "Notes on the Comic," p. 70.

of an uncomprehending voice consistently maintained. Canace describes urgent emotion, an aberrant liaison, and violent action in the flat tones of an upper-class *puella* complaining that she must—it's unfair but she'll do it—card a little more than her usual quota of wool.

The singular persona of Canace is achieved by two means in the epistle. The first is a reliance upon strict narrative unparalleled in the *Heroides*. Otis has noticed quite correctly that the Canace epistle seems to transcend the limits of elegiac discontinuity. He writes:

> But though the limits of elegy might be stretched, they remain a barrier to both effective continuity of narrative and serious treatment of major themes. It is true that some short elegies do express grief or passion, but these are not usually narrative in any strict sense. Ovid perhaps came nearest to such narrative in a letter like that of Canace to Macareus or in such episodes of the *Fasti* as the Ceres-Demeter legend.[63]

In *Heroides* 11 the effect of the narrative emphasis is not the "serious" expression of "grief or passion," but just the reverse. The narrative interest supersedes and suppresses introspection, reflection, moral evaluation, rhetorical justification, and emotional reaction—in short, all that we expect of an ambiguous heroine of incestuous love. The narrative bias of the epistle keeps us at a distance from Canace. Her soul is no arena of moral conflict or moral turbulence. She is, primarily, what she does, and what she does is not very much. She is at best a passive accomplice in the action, at worst an uncomprehending victim of it.

Ovid's second instrument in the creation of Canace's strange simplicity is closely allied to the first. It is the quality of the action she narrates. As the catalogue of horrors which is her story unfolds, her normality and unreflecting acquiescence seem more and more at odds with their context, more and more the humorously audacious "reverse megalomania" of which Auden speaks. To a Roman audience, and even to our more libertine, or liberated, sensibilities, she must have seemed, and now seems, oddly paradoxical: an unmotivated rebel, an inconsequential sinner, an uninspired lover and mother, an unattractive victim. She is most distinguished by what is least distinguished in her: her inflexible lack of moral tension. She is *minime vivax. Non putares eam sensisse.*

[63] Brooks Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 38.

VI ◉ ARIADNE *IN EXTREMIS: HEROIDES* 10

OVID'S TOYSHOP OF THE HEART:

Epistulae Heroidum

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