

Ovid's 'Hecale': Deconstructing Athens in the *Metamorphoses*

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Note: this paper is part of a collaborative study on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* with Ingo Gildenhard.

Metamorphoses 2 Narrative Sequence

- The Raven, Apollo & Coronis I (533-49)
- The Crow, Cecropides & Nyctimene (549-95)
- The Raven, Apollo & Coronis II (596-632)
- Ocythoe (633-75)
- Mercury & Battus (676-707)
- Mercury, Herse and Aglauros (707-832)

#1a-c *Hecale*

'Ἀκταίη τις ἔβαιε'ν Ἐρεχθίδεος ἐν ποτὲ γυναικί.
Once on a hill of Erechtheus, there lived an Attic woman.
(fr. 1 Hollis)

... μέγα τρυφός Ἵψιλόπου ...

... [carrying] a great chunk of Mr. Hypsizorus ...

(fr. 71.1 Hollis)

εὔτε κόραξ, ὅς γ' ὦν γέ καὶ δὺ κικκωοῖαι ἐπίλοι
καὶ γὰράκι χροίην καὶ κυματός ἀκρωαὶ ἀόττα,
κὺδρεον φῆ πῖστον ἐπὶ πτέρων οὐρανὸν ἔξει ...

... when the raven, who now at least could rival swans and
milk in complexion, and the foam on the crest of a wave,
will have on him a thick, pitch-black plumage ...
(fr. 74.15-7 Hollis)

#2

Arneiasagoras the Athenian, who wrote the *Arctis*, says
that the crow does not fly up to the Acropolis, nor could
he say that he had seen one there; and he gives the reason
in a story. For he says that Athena was given in marriage
to Hephaestus, but when she had lain with him she
disappeared and Iliphaestus, falling to the ground,
ejaculated his seed. Later the earth gave birth in that place
to Erichthonius, whom Athena took into her keeping; she
shut him in a chest, entrusted it to the daughters of
Cecrops - Aglauros, Pandrosos, and Herse - and instructed
them not to open it until she returned. And, upon
reaching Pellene, Athena carried off a mountain in order to
set up a bulwark for the Acropolis; but two of the
daughters of Cecrops, Aglauros and Pandrosos, unfastened
the chest and saw two serpents around Erichthonius. He
says that a crow met Athena carrying the mountain, which
is now called Lykabettos, and told her that Erichthonius
had been revealed. Upon hearing this, Athena threw down
the mountain where it now stands and for reporting bad
news she told the crow that it would no longer be lawful
for it to approach the Acropolis.
(Antigonus Carystus, *Hist. mirab.* 12; tr. Keith)

#3

pulchrior in tota quam Larissesa Coronis
non fuit Ilaemonia: placuit tibi, Delphice, certe,
dum vel casta fuit vel inobservata, sed ales
sensit adulterium Phoebeius, utque latentem
degeret culpam, non exorabilis index,
ad dominum tendebat iter; quem garrula motis
consequitur pennis, scietur ut omnia, cornix ...
(Ov. *Met.* 2.542-8)

In all the land of Thessaly no girl
was lovelier than Coronis of Larissa.
She certainly was Phoebus' favorite,
so long as she was chaste - or not found out.
But Phoebus' bird had found her faithlessness
and hastened to his master to reveal the
The guilt she hid, ruthless to tell his tale.
To learn the latest news a garrulous crow
flapped quickly after him ...
(tr. Melville)

#4

"quid fuerim quid simque, vide meritumque require:
invenies nocuisse fidem, nam tempore quodam
Pallas Erichonium, prolem sine matre creatam,
clauserat Actaeo texta de vimine cista
virginibusque tribus gemino de Cecrope natis
et legem decerat, sua ne secreta viderent."
(Ov. *Met.* 2.551-6)

"See what I was, what I am now, and ask
Did I deserve it. Frank good faith you'll find
Was my undoing. Once upon a time
A baby, Erichthonius, was born
Without a mother. Pallas hid the child
Safe in a box of Attic wickerwork and gave
The box to Cecrops' three daughters,
With strict instructions not to pry inside."
(tr. Melville)

#5

"abditā fronte levi densa speculabar ab ulmo,
quid facerent: commissa duae sine fraude fuerunt
Pandrosos atque Herse: timidas vocat una sorores
Aglauros nodosque manu diducit, et intus
infantemque vident adportectumque draconem.
acta deae refero; pro quo mihi gratia talis
redditur, ut dicar iute la pulsa Minervae
(Ov. *Met.* 2.557-64)

"I hid among the delicate foliage
Of a large leafy elm and watched to see
What they would do. Two, Pandrosos and Herse,
Impeccably observed their trust; but one,
Aglauros, called them cowards and untied
The fastenings, and there inside they saw
The baby, and beside him stretched a snake."
(tr. Melville)

"nam me Phocaica clarus tellure Coroneus
(nota loquor) genui fueramque ego regia virgo
divitibusque proci (ne me contemere) petebar;
forma mihi nocuit ..."
(Ov. *Met.* 2.569-72)

"My father was the famous king of Phocis,
Coroneus, as the world knows well enough,
And I was a princess, and I was wooed
(You must not laugh) by many a wealthy man.
My beauty doomed me ..."
(tr. Melville)

"quid tamen hoc prodest, si dico facta volucris
crime Nyctimene nostro successit honor?
an quae per totam res est notissima Lesbos,
non audita tibi est, patrum temerasse cubile
Nyctimenen? avis illa quidem, sed conscia culpam
conspicuum lucemque fugit tenentisque pudorem
celat et a cunctis expellitur aethere toto."
(Ov. *Met.* 2.589-95)

"But what good was it, if Nyctimene,
She who was made a bird for her foul sin,
Supplants me in my place of privilege?
Or have you never heard the tale, renowned
All over Lesbos, how Nyctimene
Outraged her father's bed. Bird she may be,
But shuns the daylight and the watching eye,
Guilt-cursed, her shame shut in the dark unseen,
An utter outcast from the sky's bright sheen."
(tr. Melville)

ergo ubi vaticinos concepit mente furores
incaluitque deo, quem clausum pectore habebat,
adspicit infanem totoque salutarior orbi
cresce, puer! dixit; tibi se mortalia saepe
corpora debebunt, animas tibi reddere ademptas
fas erit, idque semel dis indignantibus ausus
posse dare hoc iterum haec prohibebere avia,
equae deo corpus fles exsangue desuque,
qui modo corpus eras, et bis tua fata novabis.
(Ov. *Met.* 2.640-8)

When, enclosed within her breast,
The heavenly fire glowed, she fixed her eyes
Upon the child. "Grow strong, dear boy," she said,
"Haler of all the world! Often to you
Men shall owe health and life, and yours shall be
The right to win again departed souls,
And though you dare this once in heaven's despite,
Love's bolt will thwart that gift a second time.
You, now a god, will become a lifeless corpse,
And from a corpse will become divine again,
And twice you shall renew your destiny."
(tr. Melville)

nam fuit haec quondam niveis argenta pennis
ales, ut aequaret totas sine labe columbas
cederet anseribus nec amant flumina cygno.
(Ov. *Met.* 2.536-9)

The raven had once been a silvery bird,
With snow-white wings, pure as the spotless doves,
His whiteness rivaling the wakeful geese,
Whose voice would one day save the Capitol,
And the river-loving swans.
(tr. Melville; italics mine)

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